

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 76 (2010)
Heft: [6]

Artikel: Salt mined in Schweizerhalle
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-944203>

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Salt mined in Schweizerhalle

Up until the 1830s Switzerland had to import all its salt, mainly from southern France. The long trip up the river Rhone took up to eight weeks and made the commodity 16 times more expensive in Switzerland.

It was a German mining expert, Carl Christian Friedrich Glenck, who first found salt by the River Rhine near Basel. The first saltworks, dubbed Schweizerhalle, were inaugurated in 1837.

Canton Basel-Land could not have survived financially without the discovery of huge salt resources on the Rhine plain near Pratteln. With these finds, Switzerland became independent of foreign salt imports. The old drilling towers of the first Rhine salt works still stand.

The Rhine salt mines have now an annual production output of up to 500,000 tons, a third of which is used during the winter season to keep Swiss roads clear of ice and snow. Hard winters put a heavy burden on stocks and could see temporary short-

ages of salt for several days. United Swiss Saltworks was formed in 1909, bringing together four private operators. The shares were bought by all cantons except Vaud, as the canton of Vaud has its own salt mines in Bex.

An agreement signed by the cantons in 1973 regulated the sale of salt and guaranteed supply to all regions at fair and uniform prices. Up to 1973, salt could theoretically be smuggled from one canton to the other. *swissinfo*

I went to school in Aarau, and we had students from the part of Erlinsbach that belonged to the canton of Solothurn. I remember well that a teacher told us it would be against the law for Erika to buy cheap salt in Aarau (the canton of Aargau has its own salt mines) and take it home to Erlinsbach SO. I don't know whether Erika ever bought salt in Aarau, but I'm glad it's not against the law any longer. tb

Weaving silk ribbons

As recently as one hundred years ago, Switzerland enjoyed a leading position in the world in the weaving and trading of silk. Weaving silk began in the Middle Ages and developed into an actual industry in the 16th century. Thanks to the silk industry and its trade, Basel grew from a small town into a city of significance. And thanks to the technical revolution and the invention of the weaving loom in the 19th century, the silk industry grew to cover the entire country. Within the textile industry, its significance was paramount. Around 1880, one third of all the 180,000 persons employed in the textile industry worked in the silk industry. The rapid growth of Swiss silk manufacturers was only stopped by the 1929 stock market crash. World War II further diminished this once flourishing industry. *from internet*

Many small farmers in the Baselbieter Jura supplemented their income with Heimarbeit, weaving silk ribbons for Basel merchants, and while the income from their weaving was a most welcome and in many cases necessary addition to their finances, it was somebody else who became rich with their labour... tb

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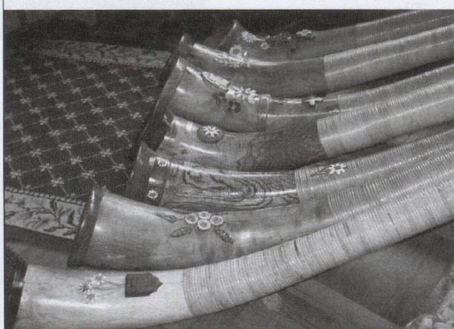
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RECIPE

Maispizza

If you have unexpected guests who look as if they wanted to stay for a meal, try this:

Prepare a polenta (boil corn grits in salt water), spread the polenta onto a sheet of baking paper, in a baking tray, make sure the edges are slightly raised, then fill the middle with whatever you can find in the fridge: ham, bacon, salami, mushrooms, a tin of peeled tomatoes, some tomato paste or a jar of ready-made tomato sauce, plenty of grated cheese, any leftovers will do, a few olives, a tin of sardines, capsicums, zucchini - whatever. Sprinkle with coarsely ground pepper and oregano or other herbs and bake in a preheated oven at 230°C for about 20 minutes. Serve with a green salad - and a glass of red wine.

En quete!