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Rubrik: Carolyn Lane

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My temptation is to just fill this page with photos! They say a picture is worth a thousand words ... and I've had my camera working overtime for the last 5000 kilometres, snapping lakes and mountains and dry landscapes and irrigation schemes and birds and ..and...and...

Feierabend has faithfully carried us through the South Island, under Mani's skilled guidance, and we've both been amazed all over again at the varied beauties of the place. And we're not the only Swiss-connected ones travelling. It has become easier to count the number of places we've NOT bumped into Swiss travellers! They're all ages and stages. There were the five young men crammed into a campervan on the first night of their great OE, having just finished their education and off to see this part of the world before "settling down". There were young couples, some with children. There was the older couple from Bern; he introduced himself with the joke question about why Emmentaler has so many holes. (Of course you know the answer... it's to make room for the bread!)

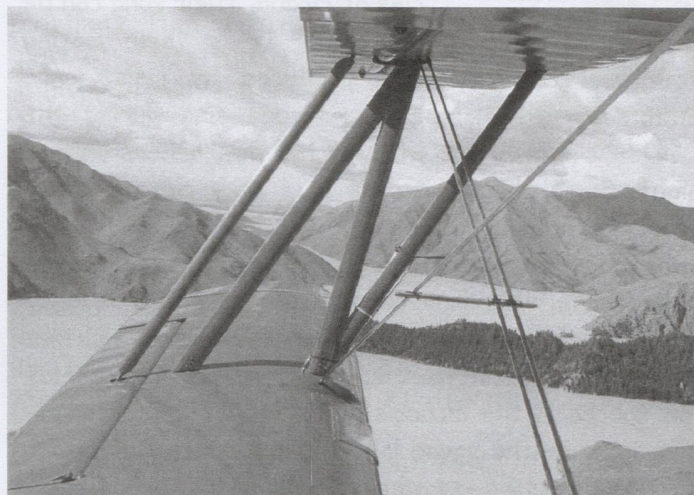
Who would imagine having a Swiss couple pull up next to you in the Amberley Beach community camping ground - or the DoC ground at Marble Hill by Maruia Springs - or a young woman stroll by when we were "free camping", parked up in a river-side reserve in the two-horse town of Waiau?

Anyone who still has stereotypes about "Swissies" as being conservative would have them really shaken by these folk. They're also smart enough to have saved up enough time and money to spend a good few weeks (and sometimes a few months) to be able to really relax and enjoy what they're seeing. It's so sad to talk to people who've "got two weeks to see the South Island and then we'll have a week in the North"!

So - for those of you who might be travelling in the South Island or are lucky enough to live there - we met a couple of Helvetia readers who do - my personal "don't miss" picks:

- The Vanished World Centre in Duntroon and associated Trails. The fossil history of North Otago is amazing - you should see the shark-toothed dolphin! There's this little centre in tiny Duntroon where the local community and the University of Otago have collaborated to bring home fossils that had been found around the area, and the farmers have opened up access to sites around the place.
- The Eastern Southland Art Gallery in Gore. Another smallish community that's had the vision and the connections to land an extraordinary collection of art and artefacts donated by sexologist John Money, and a wonderful collection of Ralph Hotere works.
- Te Ana Ngai Tahu Rock Art Centre in Timaru. It's an amazing fusion of ancient art and modern interactive technology that lets you get really engaged with the work - both original and re-created. You can go touring to the rock-art sites too.

- Mt John Observatory. *Feierabend* puffed up the hill above Tekapo to give us a stunning view. Next time, we'll do it at night for the star-gazing.
- Bi-plane trip over the Benmore Dam.



Bi-plane over Benmore

I mentioned meeting a couple of Helvetia readers. Imagine our delight on wandering into the Amberley Farmers Market and seeing Eierzopf and Bürli! We had hoped to call on the Frickers who bake and sell them, and invited us to call - but time caught us out. We did call in on Patric Niederer in Roxburgh. We'd been talking about schnapps-making with this Berliner in Kaitangata (as you do!) who said "you must meet this guy who's making schnapps in Roxburgh". Well, we shared a beer with Patric and his partner. He's no longer making schnapps - but you would absolutely know he was Swiss by the way he stacks his firewood!

Our schnapps-report: the barrel of cherries we put down in Blenheim before Christmas has fermented nicely during its holiday at son Daniel's place out of Nelson, and has now travelled back to Kapiti in the back of the bus, ready for distilling. There was a more immediate-drinking pleasure too - at Hamner Springs we were parked under a wild cherry tree, with super-ripe fruit, some already dehydrating on the branch. Those went quickly into a pot to make super-intense cherry syrup, and with the addition of a bottle of brandy, we had an instant cherry brandy. The Berner joker at Kaiteriteri really enjoyed it!

I can't finish without sharing some stream and river names - especially from the West Coast where they have so many! One day, someone must count the number of "Stoney Creeks" in NZ. But if the repetition of that name shows a lack of imagination, others are wonderful. Consider the three-in-a-row of Dismal Creek, Dizzy Creek and Dancing Creek. What a story you could make of those. Then there's moving from the glory of Hope River to the dejection of Little Hope Creek. Or the stories behind Glasseye Stream and Thirsty Creek. Or the uplifting nature of the person who named Content Stream and nearby Frolic Creek. Such fun!