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HELVETIA



MAGAZINE OF THE SWISS SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND

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YEAR 81

Treasures along the Swiss-French Border

Highlights

- Hidden treasures in French speaking Switzerland
- 1st August message from Ambassador
- Japan - from the eyes of a Swiss
- Fun facts of Switzerland

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plus poems, Chuderwälsch and Consigli della Nonna



Switzerland shares its borders with quite a number of countries: typically, these are cross-border regions with a common history, language and trade. In this Helvetia issue, we explore a couple of very special places along the Swiss-French border: Champéry and Romainmôtier.

Champéry is a small village located at the top of the Val d'Illeiez in the lower canton of Valais, some 20 km south of Lake Geneva as the crow flies. It is tucked away at 1050m in the Chablais Alps, at the foot of the towering limestone "teeth" of the Dents-du-Midi (3,257 m) and the Dents Blanches massives (2,759 m) in the south. The French border swings around it as close as 4 km away.

Much like St. Moritz which we presented in the last issue of the Helvetia, Champéry is one of Switzerland's oldest tourist destinations, with the Grand Hotel Dent-du-Midi dating to 1857. Surely one of Champéry's greatest attractions are the beautiful, traditional chalets that remain the main building form of the village, with more modern development carefully integrated and adapted. Champéry even has one of the last remaining bell foundries in Switzerland.

The village is one of the gateways to the "Ports

de Soleil" – a vast skiing area encompassing an area of about 1036 square km between the Mont Blanc in France and Lake Geneva in Switzerland. With more than 650 km of marked pistes and 200 lifts in total, this is one of the largest skiing areas of the world. In summer, the village provides access to an amazing local alpine world, with over 800 km of walks to choose from across the Ports de Soleil. Of particular note is the 40 km long circuit around the Dents-du-Midi which takes three to four days to complete, well away from all roads and villages. There is also a bike park with over 300 km of marked tracks to suit all abilities. The via ferrata, a fixed cable climb between Champéry and the village of Val d'Illeiez further down the valley provides an exciting but secure climb up from the wild River Tière via iron rungs and rickety foot bridges. All in all, Champéry has something on offer for anyone, and all levels of activity and interest.

Susie Wood