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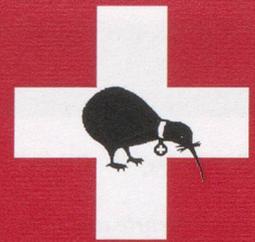
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HELVETIA



MAGAZINE OF THE SWISS SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND

AUGUST / SEPTEMBER 2016

YEAR 82

Highlights

- Introducing new Swiss Society Team
- 1st August message from Ambassador
- Staheli Lifestory
- Swiss World Records
- Inventions

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Swiss National Day

Since 1891, the first of August has been celebrated as Swiss National Day. The date refers to an historic alliance concluded in 1291 by the three cantons of Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden. This alliance was to become the focal point around which the Switzerland of today was built over the next 500 years. Men from these three cantons "at the beginning of the month of August 1291" swore eternal allegiance to one another, promising mutual help and assistance. The alliance was mainly formed against the Habsburgs, who were striving to strengthen their position in the strategic region leading to the Gotthard Pass at the time.



Photo Rheinfall celebrations courtesy Schaffhausen Tourism

Today August 1st is celebrated exclusively within the communities; a radio or television broadcast by the President of the Swiss Confederation is the only exception to this esteemed federal principle. Communal celebrations comprise of solemn words spoken by a prominent public figure from political or cultural life. There is also a concert, choir or gymnastic presentations and the community singing the national anthem. Wealthy communities or tourist offices may also sponsor a display of fireworks.

In the fourteenth century, the expulsion of foreign bailiffs was signaled to neighbouring communities by fires lit mainly on hills and other elevated spots. Today, bonfires are lit in commemoration of those days. Children carrying lighted paper lanterns roam the

streets at night. Public and private buildings are decorated with national, cantonal, and community flags, and the bakers produce special bread rolls with a small Swiss flag on top.

A special kind of celebration takes place at the Rhine Falls near Schaffhausen. The first illumination of the Rhine Falls took place in 1857 on the occasion of the inauguration of the Rhine Falls train from Winterthur to Schaffhausen. Since 1920, it has been illuminated regularly on August 1, and since 1966 exclusively so.

Rütli oath re-enactment takes place annually on the Rütli meadow by Lake Luzern in Uri, this brings to life the historic alliance of 1291.

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