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Switzerland's Underground - Part 3

After the Cold War....

All of the world's underground mushroom cultivations, as well as wine and cheese cellars, would snugly fit into Switzerland's underground spaces originally established for military purposes. At the end of the Cold War in 1989, around 13,000 underground military constructions were no longer required and were closed down - but many were sold for private use. Today they serve only peaceful purposes - such as for wine or cheese cellars! But three particularly prestigious bunker facilities - Amsteg (Uri), Attinghausen (Uri), and Gstaad (Bern) - were sold to private undertakings and all have become business success stories. However these bunkers don't grow mushrooms - instead they have become 'goldmines'.

Swiss Fort Knox

The old military bunker (called Bridlistollen by locals), by Amsteg (Uri), for example, today belongs to Swiss Gold Safe Ltd. They provide safe custody services for documents, as well as valuables such as art works, gold bars, and cash - obviously for an appropriate fee! The emphasis is on safe custody outside the 'constraints of banks' - meaning customers needn't bother with the inconvenience of completing declarations and conforming to financial controls. People are able to deposit their valuables with Swiss Gold Safe without worrying about any sanctions, applicable for whatever reason, in their home countries - with guaranteed storage free from any possible expropriation. In reality, it is banking secrecy in its purest form. And in the extremely improbable case of the bunker being swallowed up by the mountain - it is actually covered by Lloyds Insurance!

The former highly secret Swiss Army Commando Headquarters, Werk K7, was situated in a mountain at Attinghausen (Uri), until 2005. The once sinfully costly facility was then sold for a pittance and now belongs to a firm called Deltalis Ltd. Customers include Banks, Technology firms and other businesses. Werk K7 has 15,000m² of useable space over three floors situated deep within the mountain. It basically functions as a discrete hiding place, particularly as a secure data centre with a connection to the international fibre-optic network. And with its own power generation and an underground water system for cooling the extensive computer facility, Werk K7 is able to

maintain a certain independence from the outside world and could maintain a self-sufficient technical operation for several days.

At Gstaad (Bern) the firm SIAG, and a subsidiary company, Mount 10, both specialists in the secure use of digital information, have taken over a massive vacant bunker facility. Mount 10 is situated right beside Saanen's former Reduit airport with its intact 1400m asphalt landing strip where well-heeled clients can comfortably land in their private jets. A twin facility built into the rock face at nearby Zweisimmen runs parallel to the underground data facility at Gstaad - both are electronically connected and are portrayed to clients as the 'Swiss Fort Knox I and II'.

Research and Development

But there are also thousands of people working 'underground' in Switzerland who have nothing to hide; on the contrary, they are in the business of discovery. Most famous for this is CERN (European Organisation for Nuclear Research), by Geneva. 3000 people work on this underground installation - the world's biggest particle accelerator situated in a circular gallery over 26km long. A small segment also crosses beneath France.

Less well known than CERN is the Grimsel research centre NAGRA (National Co-operative for the Storage of Radioactive Waste). The behaviour patterns between radiant substances and stone are being researched at 1700m above sea level in the thick rock of the Aar-massif, solidified over 300 million years. The research area, in a 1km long gallery, has become a sort of Summer University since it was established in 1983. Specialists from 13 nations conduct their research here annually to gain new knowledge.

The biggest of Europe's private underground research facilities, established in 1970 by Rudolf Amberg, is at Seetstal, between Sargans and Walenstadt (St Gallen) - the 6 km long Hagerbach Tunnel. Engineer Amberg had worked at a Swiss ore mine until its closure in 1966, so he was very familiar both in the explosives industry, as well as in drilling machine manufacturing, and also knew the geology of the region. He chose the rock formation of Hagerbach as it was dominated by silicic limestone, which is as hard as granite, but less brittle and much tougher.

The clients of the research tunnel of Hagerbach are many and varied. Fire brigades from Holland, Taiwan and Spain have practised their fire-fighting skills in the tunnel; and new fire detection systems have been tested. It has been used by the once secret Swiss underground army, 'P26', to train new recruits; and by the building industry to test new materials - for example, by applying extreme heat to concrete mixes. Police do pistol target practice at the underground shooting range; and newly developed drilling machines attempt to chew through the extremely tough limestone. A railway company even created an exact replica of one of their own rail tunnels to test which firm would be best to hire for a regular tunnel maintenance contract. Even the prototypes for several hundred security doors for the new Gotthard Tunnel were artificially aged inside the Hagerbach Tunnel. But within the large caverns of the diverse underground spaces within Hagerbach there are also many social events - concerts and private functions; tuition rooms; and even weddings. Switzerland's underground facilities devoted to research and development together measure a total of approx. 50 km.



Captions to Photos:

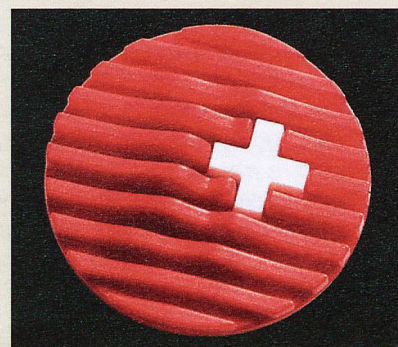
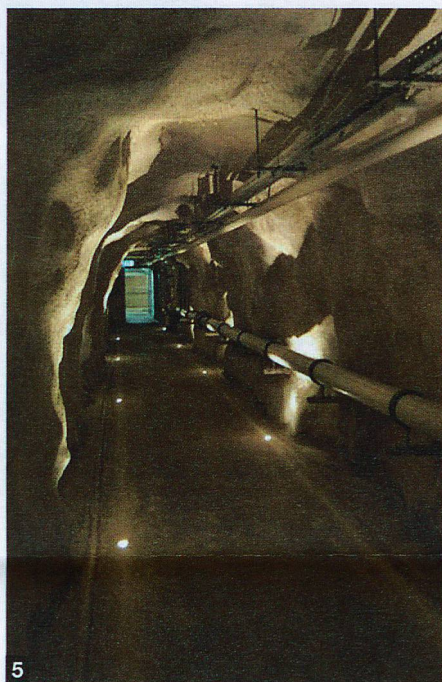
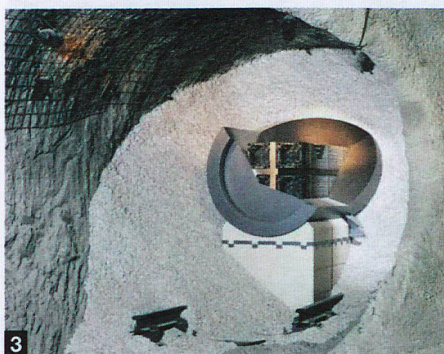
1. Underground data storage system at Deltalis, Attinghausen
2. Former map room used for air surveillance at Deltalis, Attinghausen
3. NAGRA underground storage space for radioactive waste
4. Entrance to Hagerbach Tunnel for research and development projects
5. Hagerbach Tunnel - silicic limestone cavern
6. Hagerbach Tunnel underground tutorial room
7. Hagerbach Tunnel underground catering room

Information translated from *Schweizer Familie* Magazine

Pictures were all located online from the subjects' respective websites

Switzerland's Underground - Part 3

Pro Patria



Pro Patria - a charitable work of the Swiss population

The Pro Patria Foundation was founded in 1909 by the Swiss Federal Parliament. The collection results in around CHF 3 million a year from the proceeds of the tradition-rich 1st August badge and from the sale of the coveted Pro Patria stamps. Thousands of volunteer employees are engaged in the collections in all parts of the country. The collection revenue is mainly used for the promotion of cultural and social projects. Pro Patria is not subsidized by the public authorities, but is a charitable work of the Swiss population.

Project promotion - quality and solidarity

Pro Patria supports projects in the area of cultural, historical, landscape and monument preservation. It also has a fund for targeted social assistance. Pro Patria Foundation grants contributions according to precisely defined criteria. Every application is checked for its quality. If necessary, clarifications are made with the relevant specialist departments of the cantons or the Confederation. The selection of subsidized projects will ensure that they are of general interest and are intended for broad population groups. Contributions which exclusively serve the interests of individuals are not granted.

Special offer - Switzerland pure

Whether it is a museum, a cultural centre, a castle or a shop - all the places where people meet for a variety of activities can be used as sales points for 1st August badges as well as stamps. With everyone's help in the sale of products, a sign for the preservation of Swiss cultural goods and the promotion of charitable works is set.

This year's 1st August badge symbolises the Cultural Alpine Landscape. The 2017 national celebration badge was designed and manufactured by Unisto AG in Thurgau, Horn. The assembly was carried out by handicapped workshops in Eastern Switzerland.

Badges are available from your local Swiss Club in New Zealand. These are offered to clubs each year via the Embassy in Wellington. Source: propatria.ch