

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK
Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom
Band: - (1955)
Heft: 1256

Artikel: In Swizerland with a Car [To be continued]
Autor: Ernst, H. O.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-693077>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 03.02.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

IN SWITZERLAND WITH A CAR.

By H. O. Ernst.

Anyone looking at a map of Europe can hardly fail to notice the central position Switzerland occupies. This geographical feature has always been and still is, of great political, economic and cultural significance to the Country and its people. Beyond the Rhine in the North lies Germany. Further East Austria has a short common frontier with us. Looking South over the Alpine Wall we find Italy and towards the West, roughly along the Jura mountains between Geneva and Bâle, Switzerland shares her frontier with France. Switzerland is completely landlocked, that is to say, the Country has no direct access to any Seaboard. On the other hand it lies astride the Great European road and rail traffic arteries from North to South and, to a lesser degree, from East to West. Switzerland has aptly been called the turn-table of Europe. The Country's territory of 15,940 square miles shows a remarkable topographical and geological variety which gives it its picturesque appearance. The central plain which stretches in a crescent between Lakes Constance and Geneva, lies at an average altitude of 800 feet a.s.l. Less than 150 miles away to the South stands Monte Rosa, the highest Swiss mountain, at 15,217 feet. The eastern, southern and western fringes of this green and fertile plain gradually rise to the pre-alpine region with its many lakes, rivers and waterfalls. Here, on the shores of the lakes as well as higher up, are situated most of the well-known Holiday Resorts and Spas.

It is hardly surprising that in a Country where there are so many topographical variations, climatic conditions cannot be uniform. By the time the snow recedes from the higher alpine pastures and gives way to the spring flowers, the farmer in the plains gathers his first crop of hay. Although summer brings generally long periods of fine, warm weather everywhere, it is well to be, sartorially speaking, prepared for cold nights, especially at higher resorts. The mean temperature at Lugano is around 56°F., at Geneva it is 49½°F. and on top of the Great St. Bernard only 30°F.

There is no doubt that a knowledge, even if rudimentary, of a Country's history, its political institutions and the activities of the population, contributes to the enjoyment of a holiday. Like most other countries in Europe, our ancestors the Helvetii knew a long period of peace and security under Roman rule. After the collapse of the Empire in the 5th century A.D. the Country was overrun by foreign hordes, Celts, Allemanni, Burgundians, Goths and others. The Lepontis from the South, who spoke a Latin dialect, occupied the present Tessin or Ticino, the French speaking Burgundians, the Lake of Geneva district and parts of the Valais. The German speaking tribes settled north of the Alps in the Swiss plain. The well-known tri-lingual aspect of Switzerland originates from these ancient times. Today roughly 5/8 of the population write good German but speak a dialect called "Schweizerdeutsch" or "Swiss German", 2/8 speak French and 1/8 Italian. About 900 A.D. the Swiss came under the rule of the Franks and enjoyed three and a half centuries of comparative peace under the Holy Roman Empire.

In the 13th century the Imperial Crown passed on to the Habsburgs whose bailiffs were inclined to forget the liberty hitherto granted by the Emperor to the Swiss and imposed their own rule. This drove the Swiss Cantons to form a defensive alliance against their oppressors. This pact of 1291 was renewed in 1315 after a rebellion by the Swiss and the defeat of the Austrian army. Other Cantons joined the Federation, including Berne, and from 1450 to 1515 the Swiss became for the first, and probably the last time, a military power in Europe. In 1648 the Treaty of Westphalia made Switzerland independent from the Holy Roman Empire. Much later, after the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo the Congress of Vienna in 1815 recognised the Swiss Federation of 22 Cantons and guaranteed Switzerland perpetual neutrality in the interest of European peace.

Since 1848, when the loose Federation of small States or Cantons was welded together by the new Constitution, Switzerland is a Confederation or a Federal State similar to the U.S.A.

The Federal Parliament consists of a Cabinet, an Upper and a Lower House. They meet in Berne, the capital. Its powers are however limited to matters which concern the Nation as a whole, for instance military defence, treaties and diplomatic relations with other countries, Customs, postal and railway services and other matters which affect the whole Country and which cannot be left to the cantons. The Upper House or, as it is called the "Council of States" is composed of 44 members, two from each Canton, regardless of its size. The "National Council" or Lower House represents the electorate more

SWISS WINES

Bottled in Switzerland

WHITE WINES

| | | |
|-----------------------|---|--------------|
| ARBALETTE (Dezaley) - | - | ler Choix |
| L'ETOILE DU VALAIS - | - | A. Orsat |
| (Fendant Pétillant) | | |
| CLOS DE MONTIBEX - | - | A. Orsat |
| (Fendant) | | |
| JOHANNISBERG - | - | A. Orsat |
| NEUCHATEL L'AURE - | - | Cornu Grisel |

RED WINE

| | | |
|-------------------|---|----------|
| DOLE DE RAVANEY - | - | A. Orsat |
|-------------------|---|----------|

*Shipped by:***J. B. REYNIER LIMITED****16/18, TACHBROOK STREET****LONDON, S.W.1**

VICtoria 2917/18

Also a full range of Fine French Wines.

directly. It consists of one representative for every 22,000 voters. The Cabinet is elected by a joint session of the two Houses. These seven chosen men constitute the Federal Government and are elected for a period of four years.

The Cantons have kept a large measure of self-government, Education, taxation and anything else which is not under the constitution delegated to the central Government in Berne is legislated for by the cantonal authorities. Each Canton has therefore a parliament of its own. Both for federal and cantonal legislation all men of 20 and over vote. On the other hand, women do not.

Personal democracy, in other words, the right of citizens to participate directly in the Government of the Confederation or their Canton, is a distinct feature of the Swiss political conception. This takes the form of two popular rights. Under the right of "Initiative" any citizen who has a support of 50,000 voters may propose an amendment to the Constitution or a law. His proposal must be submitted to the vote of the whole electorate. The other right is called "Referendum". Here a petition signed by 30,000 citizens can force the legislator, that is to say the federal or cantonal Government, to cause a law which they have already introduced to be withdrawn and submitted to the voters for approval or disapproval.

It is perhaps pertinent to say something about the Army. Conscription existed in the Cantons even before the Constitution of 1848, which made military matters the prerogative of the central Government. Today every able-bodied Swiss male is a potential soldier between the age of 20 and 48. Soon after his 20th birthday he is called-up for his initial training, which lasts 118 days in the Infantry. After this he participates in a repetition course of 20 days each year with his Unit up to the age of 36. From 37 to 48 he is transferred to the "Landwehr" which corresponds more or less to the Territorials. From 49 to 60 he is relegated to the "Landsturm", a sort of Homeguard. During the period when the Swiss is not soldiering, he keeps his uniform and rifle at home. To maintain a high standard of "marksmanship" the Infantryman must do a certain amount of target practice each year. For this purpose he usually joins one of the Rifle Clubs which are to be found in almost every village. Ammunition is supplied free by the Government. The Swiss Army, fully mobilised,

can put on foot about 400,000 men out of the total population of 4.5 million. Its purpose is, of course, purely defensive and it is equipped accordingly. For instance the Swiss Air Force has fighter aircraft, but no bombers. The Constitution of 1848 expressly forbids any Swiss to accept military service in Foreign Armies. This is not an accident. In former times, under the cantonal regime, the Swiss sold their manpower as soldiers to foreign Kings. Napoleon had a large Swiss contingent in his Armies.

Louis XVI of France had a Swiss guard whose members died to a man defending him during the French Revolution, when the mob invaded the Palais des Tuileries in Paris. There is a famous monument in Lucerne commemorating the last stand of these Swiss mercenaries. Today there is only one Swiss military Unit in foreign services: the Swiss Guard to the Vatican in Rome. Officers and men are recruited from the Catholic Cantons.

As already mentioned the population of Switzerland is now about 4.5 million. A striking feature, which the visitor from abroad finds very attractive, is its great diversity in racial characteristics, outlook, temperament and religion. Perhaps even more remarkable is the fact that the various sections seem to live very happily together. There is no minority problem. For instance, the Catholic and Italian speaking Ticinesi, who number only 6% of the total Helvetic population, are quite as good Swiss and appreciated as such as their Protestant French or

THE ANGLO-SWISS INSURANCE AND RE-INSURANCE AGENCY LTD.

of 29-30, HIGH HOLBORN, LONDON, W.C.1.

Tel. : CHAncery 8 5 5 4 (5 Lines)

are at the disposal of Members of the
Swiss Colony to advise about any
insurance matters.

two words
in season...



MAGGI SEASONING

is *always* kept handy by professional cooks. See how it brings out the natural flavour of soups, stews, gravies, pies, salad dressings and similar dishes. Maggi's Seasoning is a 'must' in every good cook's kitchen.

4 OZ. BOTTLE
2/6

The Nestlé Company Limited, Hayes, Middlesex

German speaking citizens. The same applies of course in the reverse sense.

How does the Country live? It is evident that a people's activities are to a great extent governed by geographical and climatic conditions. About one fifth of Switzerland consists of rock, perennial snow and ice, where nothing grows. In pre-alpine districts the productivity of the soil diminishes with the altitude and the longer Winters. Even in the lowlands the soil is by no means rich and needs careful and constant tilling. Another factor, even in peace time is a great handicap: there is no mineral wealth whatsoever; even coal has to be imported.

As mentioned earlier, Switzerland has no direct access to the sea, except by small craft to the far away North Sea via the Rhine. The Country was, until less than 100 years ago, mainly agricultural, whilst today only about 20% of the population are engaged in this branch. Home produce feeds about one third of the population. The rest has to be imported, as well as practically all raw-materials. A number of light and heavy industries have during the last 60 years developed rapidly. Today locomotives, Diesel engines, electrical equipment, watches, fine instruments, textiles manufactured in Switzerland are known the world over. External trade has taken a tremendous step forward. Export is an absolute necessity. Without it the Swiss cannot live and cannot even pay for the food which they have to import. An important and helpful feature in the Country's

Balance of Payments is the revenue from invisible export. This includes investments abroad, insurance, and above all tourist traffic. Although Switzerland did not start building railways until 1847, and good roads are also fairly new, great strides have been made. Today a highly developed transport system serves both transit and local traffic. Steam traction has almost disappeared. Nearly all lines are run by electricity derived from water power. With the influx of holiday makers from abroad, which began during the latter half of the last century, and has since reached enormous proportions, Tourist Hotels have sprung up all over the pre-alpine and alpine regions. Today there is hardly a valley or a view point which cannot be reached by railway or a good motor road, a funicular or a chairlift.

It has been said that Switzerland has never given any outstanding authors, musicians or painters to the world. Although the Country has produced many eminent artists of international repute there is indeed no Swiss Shakespeare, Goethe, Dante, Wagner, no Rembrandt nor Molière. The reasons are not far to seek. They are partly due to the fluid and unsettled conditions during most of the Country's political and cultural life until the middle of the last century, but mainly to another factor. Today, as in the past, three distinct European cultures surround the narrow confines of Switzerland and overlap: French, German and Italian. In every period of Swiss history the Country has had a direct share in the cultural life of her neighbours. The German classics are part of the curriculum of all German-Swiss schools, so are Dante and Boccaccio in the Italian speaking part of the Country. France shares Voltaire and Corneille and many others with the French speaking West of Switzerland. Many of these giants in the field of the arts have lived and worked in Switzerland. Wagner produced some of his best music at Tribschen, near Lucerne. Gibbon wrote his "Decline and Fall" on the shores of Lake Geneva. The brush of Turner and the pen of Ruskin gained inspiration from the Swiss scene. This ready acceptance and absorption by the Swiss of culture and art from beyond the frontier is not a one-way phenomenon. The German-Swiss authors Gottfried Keller and Jeremias Gotthelf, and many others, are read in Germany. The books of French-Swiss writers are on every bookstall in France. Similarly Swiss painting, music and architecture are shared with neighbouring Countries. Honegger's music is as well known and appreciated abroad as in his own Country. The famous Swiss architect of the "Cité Universitaire" in Paris, Le Corbusier, has created a style of building which has long been accepted abroad.

Switzerland is rich in art treasures of every kind, from classical examples to peasant art. Many towns have one or several Museums. Even the Countryside very often springs a delightful surprise on the visitor. Old patrician houses, farmsteads in a variety of styles, historic castles, some in ruins, some still occupied, abound. In the Tessin there are a large number of exquisite Churches in the Romanesque style. There is hardly a time of the year when the larger towns, such as Zurich, Berne, Lucerne, Lausanne, Lugano, and many others, do not provide classical concerts and light music. Art in its broader sense should perhaps also include the many Costume Festivals which take



SWISS KNIGHT CHEESE

Distributed by NESTLÉ'S

Obtainable from all good class grocers in 6 oz., 4 oz. and 2 oz. boxes.

place in the summer and especially in the autumn during the grape harvest. These processions of flower-decked vehicles and groups of happy crowds in local costumes are a delight to the eye.

As the sporting instinct is perhaps nearer the surface in the motorist than in most other tourists, it may be useful to devote a few lines to the various types of sports which may be enjoyed in Switzerland. The sports car enthusiast has, during the summer season, a number of opportunities to take part in various events, both on the flat and in the mountains. However, previous notice of participation is, as a rule, necessary. The average motorist will, on the other hand, be content to take part in more mundane sports and the first which comes to mind is, of course, mountain climbing and walking. Most holiday centres or rather their Official Inquiry Offices, provide excellent maps for this purpose and, of course, trustworthy guides for the more difficult excursions into the world of rock, ice and snow. A word of warning, which does not only apply to Mountain Craft, but also to any other sport which requires considerable physical effort. Most tourists from Great Britain, especially those of middle age and older should, upon arrival take 24 to 48 hours rest before indulging in violent exertion. The difference in altitude from practically sea level to 3,000ft. or more needs a short period of adjustment and acclimatisation. Tennis is very popular and the Swiss Lawn Tennis Association arranges many local and international matches. Most holiday resorts provide public courts and the larger Hotels have their private ones, mostly of the "hard" variety. Swimming is another pastime which is very popular. Holiday places situated on the many lakes have, as a rule, open sandy beaches and there are artificial pools at practically all altitudes, some heated. River bathing requires a certain caution. Most of these water-courses are very fast flowing and it is not advisable to use them except where there are established Lidos. Yachting, rowing and canoeing are to be had wherever there is a lake or a suitable river. The motorist who brings his own canoe can obtain, at the frontier, a Provisional Entry Permit, valid one month.

Golf has become since the end of the First World War a great favourite with the Swiss, and there are now some 20 courses, six of them 18 hole. Many Tournaments take place during the year. Some Golf courses are situated in the mountains and provide a happy combination of good sport and fine scenery.

FREIGHT EXPRESS LIMITED

SHIPOWNERS, BROKERS,
CHARTERING AGENTS,
FORWARDING, WHARFAGE

11/12, FENCHURCH STREET, LONDON, E.C.3

Phone: MANsion House 7561/7
Telegrams: "Telcoport, Telex, London

Express Wharf, 38, Westferry Road, London, E.14

Phone EASt 2422 3

Whether the motorist ever goes back to what was probably his first love, the bicycle, is a moot point. However, cycling is a popular if somewhat strenuous pastime in Switzerland. Cycles can now be hired from most of the larger Stations of the Swiss Federal Railways at a low rental charge.

Last, but by no means least, we must mention that placid, nerve-soothing sport, fishing, so "full of pleasure, void of strife". Swiss lakes and rivers are rich with a variety of fish and the cantonal authorities re-stock many of them regularly with trout, rainbow-trout, grayling and pike. Fishing regulations vary from Canton to Canton. In some cases Permits are required. The prospective angler should therefore make inquiries at his Hotel or the local Inquiry Office. He will probably be most interested in fly or spin-fishing. In spring and autumn the best places are in the Rhone Valley, the Jura and the Tessin. Summer provides good sport everywhere, especially in mountain lakes and streams up to 6,000ft. a.s.l.

Both as regards artistic manifestations, exhibitions, etc., and sporting events, it is, of course, useful for the Motorist to know where and when they take place. A complete list of such events is published every year by the Swiss National Tourist Office, 458/9, Strand, London, W.C.2., where you can obtain it free of charge. A guide on Angling is also obtainable from the same source.

(To be continued.)

there's always time for

NESCAFÉ



pure coffee made right in the cup
ANOTHER OF NESTLÉ'S GOOD THINGS