

**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:** - (1976)  
**Heft:** 1723  
  
**Artikel:** Swiss forests  
**Autor:** [s.n.]  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-690671>

### **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:** 15.02.2026

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

# Features

romantic passion («Penthesilea»). In the Alpine valleys the ancient natural yodel and the use of original instruments have been kept up; and in these days a well-cared for musical life flourishes in the whole Canton: choirs and amateur orchestras. There have been strong beginnings, too, of amateur theatricals.

Neither poets, musicians, nor painters and sculptors have an easy life on such poor soil, trying to break through to recognition and to keep it. The almost anonymous witnesses of arts and crafts of former centuries (inlays, decorative furniture, goldsmith's work etc.) make one guess that not all creative forces have as yet been awakened. The painter Hans *Schilter* at Goldau, the painter Lisbeth *Schwander* at Brunnen, Maria-Luisa *Wiget* in Schwyz, Joseph *Rickenbacher* at Steinen

and Joseph *Nauer* at Freienbach shall be mentioned here, representing a number of other artists still searching.

## Customs

As everywhere else where wide planes or woods and mountains keep human settlements isolated one from the other, many an old wild custom has been preserved in the Schwyz Alps, customs which can only be explained by the soul's close relation with nature and magic world perception. Today, one is no longer conscious of the roots of such customs, and especially with the people of Schwyz, they are often covered with rational coolness. Now the customs simply appear in the annual calendar; they belong to the seasons and serve as a loosening and self-portrayal of the individual and his position, be he townsman or

peasant. It is not the tourist with his camera who provokes it, but the delight in noise, movement and high-spirited fun.

The exorcisms of early winter and early spring are particularly noisy manifestations. Just a few shall be mentioned here: the grandiose «Klausjagen» at Küssnacht when, on St. Nicholas Day (6th December), figures in white shirts, wearing man-high lit-up bishop's mitres dance around and create an orgy of rhythmic noise with bells, horns and whips. At new year, the farmers' lads compete in whip lashing with sounds like the crackling of rifles across meadows and in village lanes. Both the inner and outer parts of Schwyz, above all Einsiedeln, are obsessed by hilarious masquerades at carnival time.

*Paul Kamer*

*in cooperation with Pro Helvetia*

## Swiss Forests

Forestry and with it the various branches of forestry science started as more or less independent fields of knowledge not much more than some 200 years ago. The cause was a very extensive lack of wood: what used to be originally an inexhaustible reserve

of wood disappeared very suddenly with the advent of the technical era; consequences of many kinds did not fail to appear. The prophetic utterance by Chateaubriand: «*Les forêts précèdent les peuples, les déserts les suivent*», has been proved right all too often unfortunately also in the recent past. At first, the young forestry quite understandably modelled itself on the experiences made by the ancient agriculture.

An important and outstanding feature of Swiss forestry is the demand for continuity – called the principle of permanence – which has been anchored in the Federal Forestry Law since 1902. Whatever yield of the forest, be it timber or other forest produce, be it protection and welfare measures, in other words services, is tied to the «Infra-structure Forest».

## First Federal Forestry Law

Around the middle of the last

century, our country suffered a number of natural catastrophes which caused immense damage and quite often brought with them loss of life. Whilst Alpine valleys suffered avalanches, landslides and high-water, the lower regions were afflicted by floods.

Experts on forestry and afforestation suspected a connection between the state of the mountain forests and flooding, and the Swiss Society of Foresters sent a request to the Federal Council in 1856 that it should ask for a report on the state of high-mountain woods from all Cantons which had their own forestry administration.

The experts who investigated the state of the woods established the following facts:

– There is a direct connection between the clearing of woodland in the mountains and the waterflow of rivers, avalanches and landslides.



# Features

- As a result of the uncontrolled cutting down of woods, the upper timber line has been lowered and the yield of alpine pastures reduced.
  - By abusive exploitation of the forests, they have lost their power of resistance against avalanches and falling stones.
  - The woods are neglected.
  - The beauty of the landscape is spoilt by deforestation sites and the consequences of cutting down trees.
  - The condition of mountain forests not only affects the highland Cantons, but the whole country; for it is on that state that the water distribution of the lowlands largely depends.
  - The supply of firewood and an even water distribution in the rivers must be secured in the interest of trade and industry.
- But with these findings, nature's equilibrium was by no means re-established. In the days from 27th September to 5th October 1868, cloudburst-like rains caused devastating damage in the Cantons of Uri, St. Gall, the Grisons, Valais and Ticino; boulderstone masses, stone avalanches and rocks inundated valleys and destroyed whole villages. 50 dead persons were



Fr. –.20

**100 Years of Federal Forest Laws.** The first federal forest law regulating the utilization and cultivation of forests at federal level entered into force in 1876. The special postage stamp designed by André Rosselet, Auvèrner, and depicting a well-tended piece of woodland, calls attention to this important enactment and to the vital ecological role played by our forests.

## Hiking Paths

Switzerland offers a large selection of rambles to hiking tourists, which will satisfy even the most demanding. Amongst the 40000 hiking paths, largely marked uniformly by voluntary idealists, the hiker can find plenty on which he may, according to his preference, roam the Jura, the Midlands or the Alps. Far removed from noise and the pressure of every-day life, he discovers a varied landscape and many astonishing climates.

Information may be had from the Office of SAW, Elsässerstrasse 40, 4056 Basle, Switzerland.

mourned, 41 in the Canton of Ticino alone.

The tragic events and the report by experts made it clear that the interdependence of the regions and the significance of the forest for the whole country were undeniable. Since the interest of the whole country was at stake, the Confederation had to be given the powers to intervene. A relevant Constitutional Article which had been missing in the Constitution of 1848, was accepted in a federal plebiscite on 19th April 1874. On 24th December of the same year, the Federal Chief Inspectorate of Forestry was created. In co-operation with the Swiss Society of Foresters, various drafts for a Federal Forestry Law were worked out. On 24th March 1876, the Federal Assembly accepted the «Federal Law relating to federal supervision of the Forestry Police in the high mountains».

## Under the Protection of the Forest

The relationship between men and forest have changed fundamentally in the course of Switzerland's history of colonisation. Originally, virgin forests covered the whole country, right up to the treeline conditional on the climate. Agriculturally useful land had to be wrested laboriously from the virgin forest. At the same time, this introduced our cultural development. For a long time, the settlers in our country may have looked upon the forest as a hostile natural element. The realisation however that the forest, too, had to be protected for the protection of man, gained ground only very gradually.

Since then, the importance of the protective powers of the woods has been acknowledged more and more strongly, especially with regard to the increase in population and the development of industrialisation and tourism, as well as to the density of traffic and communications. The forest stabilises the steep mountain sides and protects them against erosion, landslides and falling stones. It prevents the formation of avalanches, regulates water distribution and protects against high-water.

## Forest Preserves

Natural wood preserves are woodlands which are perennially deprived of any human treatment: no gathering of timber including dead wood, no tending and no planting. For this research, the Institute of Afforestation of the ETH in Zurich has at present over 30 such preserves at its disposal, a total area of over 700 hectares. They, together with preserves which are still to be created, have been selected in such a way that one day they will be representative of the most important types of forest in the varied parts of our country. Apart from some woodlands which have been protected for a long time, such as the Aletsch Forest, the preserves of Derborence and Scatlé, most of the preserves used to be utilized economically. These virgin forests of tomorrow are open-air laboratories which are already valuable today, but which will in future be of inestimable value not only to foresters, but to all students of natural history.