

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: - (1984)
Heft: 1814

Artikel: Swiss seek a nuclear resting place
Autor: Farmer, Colin
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-688654>

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: 11.12.2025

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

TEST boring is under way to find a final resting place for Switzerland's nuclear waste – in granite chambers up to one mile underground.

The chambers, in granite 300 million years old, are due to be ready by the year 2020 to take first deliveries of the most toxic wastes produced by this country's atomic power stations.

These contain alpha rays, a type of radiation which lasts almost for ever and is so toxic it could cause a biological catastrophe if it ever got into the chain of life.

Political sensitivities are running high as the National Co-operative for the Storage of Radioactive Wastes (NAGRA) casts around for suitable spots for its nuclear dustbins.

Nearly every community near the sites chosen for test bores has raised an outcry. But the Co-operative is confident it can meet an end-of-1985 deadline set by the government to show that its plans for final disposal of nuclear wastes are feasible.

If not, a legal amendment of 1979 could oblige the government to withdraw operating permits for the four existing atomic power stations and ban any new ones.

Like many other countries, Switzerland has been disposing of its low-level radioactive waste – mostly medical isotopes and luminous watch dials – by dumping it in the Atlantic some 400 miles off the Spanish coast.

The more toxic alpha-radiation substances result from the re-processing of spent fuel from nuclear power stations. The Swiss have this done in France and Britain but both countries insist that Switzerland eventually take the refuse back.

The most obvious place to store it would seem to be the Swiss Alps. But NAGRA president Rudolf Rometsch says the mountains are too young and turbulent. Only 12 million years old, they still shift around by the odd fraction of an inch each year.

Instead NAGRA is boring in the northern lowlands to find granite bedrock which has lain still for the past 200 million years or more.

Mr Rometsch speaks enviously of the one billion year-old layer of granite which lies under the topsoil of Canada and of similar rock nearly 500 million years old in Sweden. But Swiss granite can still be considered as the world's third best repository, he says.

NAGRA, in which the government and power companies participate, plan a total of 12 test bores in Northern Switzerland.

A final decision on the site is still several

Swiss seek a nuclear resting place

years off and construction of the underground galleries is planned only for 1995-2000. In the early 1990s the high-level radioactive wastes will start coming back from France and Britain but they will have to cool off for 30 years before being buried for ever.

NAGRA is building a rock laboratory in the Grimsel region of the Alps where the granite is the same as that lying under the northern lowlands. The tests are to ensure that the wastes, fixed in solidified glass enclosed in steel containers, could not seep through the rocks into ground waters.

It also plans to build three large storages in the mountains for low-level radioactive rubbish. Although this waste is less dangerous the government believes it cannot be dumped in the ocean for ever.

In these areas too, environment groups have said they plan opposition. But with firm decisions on sites not imminent, NAGRA has not yet been seriously disturbed by the protests.

A fifth nuclear power station is due to start operating in Switzerland this year but the government is still hesitating whether to go ahead with a sixth, which has been fiercely opposed by the local population.

Mr Rometsch hopes that one day nations will jointly develop international nuclear dumping depositories under the seabed, but says:

"This is technically more difficult. And meanwhile the psychological barriers to finding an international solution to the disposal problem even on land are too great".

According to Austrian sources the Soviet Union has offered to provide permanent storage for Western nuclear wastes, as it does

for its East European allies.

But since one side-product of spent atomic power station fuel is plutonium, which can be used to make nuclear warheads, there may be reservations about this offer. So NAGRA feels that for the time being, the best course is to push ahead with the programme to store the waste in Switzerland itself.

OLDER generation Swiss in particular sometimes complain that their country isn't what it used to be.

But for John Davis Lodge, at 80 an older generation American who is United States Ambassador in Berne, Switzerland is still "a happy and blessed land; a shangri-la in a distraught world".

Ambassador Lodge told members of the Swiss-American Society in Basle that a look at the current world map "will give you the shivers". Many people, he said, are living in "unfortunate enslaved countries".

The Ambassador continued: "These obscene hellholes of oppression with stagnant economies and sad subjugated citizens, constitute eloquent examples of the effect of brutal regimentation on helpless people; helpless and forlorn and essentially abandoned; in dramatic contrast to the happy blessed land of Switzerland".

Mr Lodge said the six and a half million people living in Switzerland had forged "a most civilised part of Western civilisation. They have created an oasis of liberty, health and comfort in an area about three times the size of my state of Connecticut – 15,000 square miles.

"As in Connecticut, their high per capita

...reporting from Berne



Keep Switzerland clean – but what about nuclear waste? (Courtesy Tribune de Genève)

income is due not to raw materials, but to their skills as a working people”.

During the Second World War, said Ambassador Lodge, the Swiss created “a bastion of freedom which Hitler dared not attack. Even the Russians, with their aggressive

posture and their repressive society, respect the Swiss.

“They have achieved admirable unity in a country where four languages and countless dialects are spoken. And they have remained neutral in a jungle world”.

“Their streets are clean. There is no litter. They have only one per cent unemployment; they have a very low crime rate and there is virtually no poverty. There are no slums.

“Their inflation rate and their interest rates are incomparably low. They can mobilise an army of 735,000 men and women in 24 hours – the second largest army in Europe – on the second day of mobilisation”.

★ ★ ★

A SWISS who once worked for former Gestapo chief Klaus Barbie has died in a St. Gallen hospital.

Eighty-year-old Gottlieb Fuchs was being considered as a possible key witness in the forthcoming trial in France of Barbie, the so-called “Butcher of Lyons”. He is accused of complicity in the murder of thousands of Jews in Nazi concentration camps and faces charges of crimes against humanity.

Fuchs worked for Barbie as a translator and said he was present when French Resistance leader Jean Moulin was tortured to death by Barbie. Fuchs further claimed to have warned the Resistance about Gestapo activities, and said he saved the lives of up to 2,000 people.

The Nazis arrested him for spying in 1943, condemned him to death but then commuted his sentence to life imprisonment.

He was freed by the British from a concentration camp at the end of the war – and was then imprisoned briefly in his native Switzerland on charges of having collaborated with the Germans.

Football League tables up to and including May 15

'A' Division							'B' Division									
PI	W	D	L	Gls	Pts		PI	W	D	L	Gls	Pts				
Zurich Grasshoppers	26	17	5	4	54	28	39	Winterthur	24	12	9	3	45	35	33	
Geneva Servette	26	16	5	5	61	29	37	Lugano	24	10	11	3	49	28	31	
Sion	26	16	5	5	62	32	37	Zug	24	11	8	5	48	30	30	
St. Gallen	26	15	7	4	51	33	37	Martigny	24	11	5	8	39	27	27	
Neuchatel Xamax	26	14	8	4	51	24	36	Mendrisio	24	9	9	6	37	27	27	
Wettingen	26	12	6	8	41	33	30	Biel	24	7	10	7	41	38	24	
Lausanne	26	11	6	9	41	33	28	Baden	24	9	6	9	49	50	24	
Chaux-de-Fds.	26	10	7	9	45	42	27	Granges	24	7	10	7	35	36	24	
Basel	26	9	6	11	45	50	24	Locarno	24	8	8	8	35	38	24	
Berne YB	26	7	8	11	34	33	22	Bulle	24	8	7	9	40	40	23	
Zurich	26	8	6	12	34	47	22	Monthey	24	7	9	8	28	29	23	
Aarau	26	6	9	11	36	38	21	Chênois	24	7	9	8	28	34	23	
Lucerne	26	8	3	15	27	44	19	Laufen	24	5	10	9	27	40	20	
Vevey	26	7	5	14	37	55	19									
Bellinzona	26	3	4	19	22	68	10	Nordstern	24	6	7	11	28	45	19	
Chiasso	26	4	0	22	18	70	8	Red Star	24	7	2	15	39	54	16	
								Fribourg	24	5	6	13	30	47	16	

Lines separate championship leader, relegation and promotion zones