

Salt mine in Bex : who knew Switzerland had a salt mine? = Salzabbau in Bex

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*"If you have two pennies,
spend one on some bread, the other on
a flower. The bread will give you life,
the flower a reason for living".
Hans Christian Andersen.*

Spring has definitely sprung

We have enjoyed beautiful displays of hyacinths, freesias, daffodils and tulips to say nothing of the perfumes that these bulbs give off. They will begin to die down soon – do not be tempted to cut off the dying leaves as they contribute to the health of the bulb. Also please don't forget to dust them with some bulb manure as they are dying away. This helps to feed them during their dormant stage, allowing them to flower strongly again next Spring.

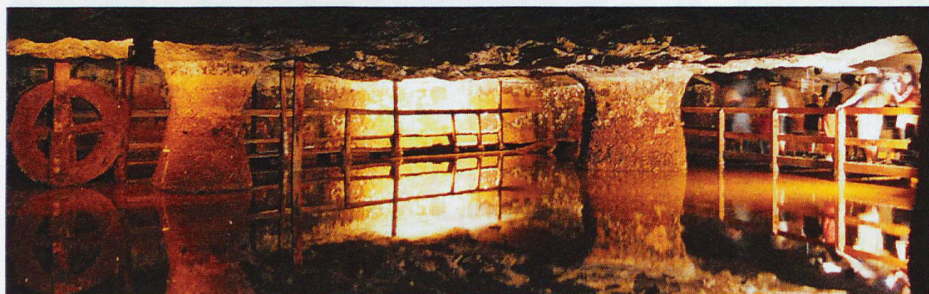
This is a busy time for the home gardener – vegetable planting, potatoes in readiness for Christmas dinner, early tomatoes, annual seedlings for a summer show, dahlia tubers to be divided and planted, roses to be fed and sprayed (preferably with an organic mix to protect the bees) and of course there are always weeds! If you are lucky enough to have access to some coffee grounds, mix them with

a bag of compost and apply to any part of the garden. Not only are they great food for the soil, but also act as a deterrent for bugs such as slugs and snails etc who do not like the smell and find sliding through the dry material difficult. Tea bags are also a good source of soil food.

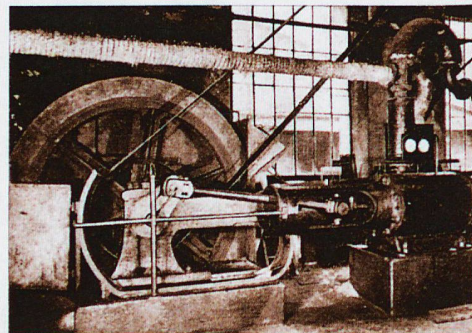
A garden is often a place of memories. Pictured this month, are some bright alpine rock buttercups. This little ground hugging plant comes up each Spring to grace the garden. Many years ago a neighbour of ours developed a small scale nursery, propagating and selling old fashioned and rare species of cottage garden plants and seeds. Because of John's Swiss heritage she gave me a tiny root of this which I have nurtured and it has rewarded me with a wonderful display each year, reminding me of Peggy's dedication to nature and her thoughtfulness and kindness. This is what a garden is all about – sharing and bringing enjoyment.

Margie Bishop

Salt mine in Bex | Salzabbau in Bex



Sel des Alpes, Bex | At right, a piston compressor, installed 1878 was still in operation in 1943.



Who knew Switzerland had a salt mine?

At the recent Swiss Society AGM the Embassy of Switzerland gave out little bags with a few goodies. Among them was a bag of "Sel des Alpes" (alpine salt). Little did I know that they have salt mines in Switzerland! These famous mines are located in Bex, in the district of Aigle in the canton of Vaud, along the Avançon River.

There are several famous Swiss and French ski resorts nearby and it is also well-known for its vineyards. Bex's south-facing vineyards produce chasselas, gamay and pinot noir grapes, and the region boasts many wine trails. Now, the salt mines...

Millions of years ago the present Rhone Valley was a shallow sea, and this is where

the salt has come from. The history of these mines goes back over 450 years (Swiss Saltworks AG), and, as the legend goes, goats led people to a saline spring in Bex with the first Swiss salt mine being established in 1554. Salt extraction laid the foundations for today's chemical and pharmaceutical companies, as well as saltwater baths attracting their first tourists both from Switzerland and abroad.

Swiss Saltworks provides a reliable supply of salt to Switzerland, and the country has never had to rely on salt from abroad (although this doesn't mean that salt isn't exported or imported), producing up to 600,000 tonnes of salt a year. The company

is the property of all 26 Swiss cantons and the Principality of Liechtenstein. The salt has been protected in the mountains for over 200 million years and is extracted with glacial water, then goes through a salt evaporation process ready for consumption.

The salt mines are accessible to visitors and there is also a museum illustrating the mining of salt from 1684 to the present day. Visitors can take a small train to the underground mines and restaurant (at a depth of 400 metres), and then explore further on foot. Plain and herbal salt from Bex can be purchased under the brand name "Sel des Alpes". Amazing what one can find out after receiving a small bag of salt!