

Switzerland from above : of satellites, astronauts and flying carpets

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Switzerland from above

Of satellites, astronauts and flying carpets



At first sight Switzerland with its many mountains looks both miniature and monotonous from very high up. But that changes when you look more closely. Let's try to come down from the heights.

Claude Nicollier, the astronaut who works for America's space administration NASA, is so far the only Swiss who has seen his homeland from space. We can now show readers what our country looks like from a height of about 800 kilometres. They have before their eyes the first satellite pictures of Switzerland in real colour.

Landsat takes photographs...

America's observation satellite Landsat 5 circles the earth daily and provides an unceasing photographic record of our planet. Each image covers an area 180 kilometres square, and you can see details of objects down to a length of 30 metres. The photos are stored on com-

pact discs (CDs) and used mainly for scientific purposes: harvest assessment, map-making, determining the extent of environmental pollution and damage to forests, etc.

...and human beings fly

The millions upon millions of pieces of information which Landsat collects in this way can be converted by human hand into a feast for the eyes. Staff at the Geneva firm, Imsat, labour at their computer screens to process this information. They can produce, for example,

the photograph of the whole of Switzerland which you may admire on a double page in this issue and which we bring to you in exclusivity (see page 8). It took hundreds of hours to piece together the eight single images required to cover the whole of Switzerland and to match them in terms of earth curvature and colour. What is absolutely new and particularly attractive about these satellite pictures is the true colours, which were impossible to obtain before Landsat.

If it is possible to assemble all of Switzerland into one harmonious and

realistic whole, the same is obviously true for individual regions, such as "the cradle of Switzerland" which you can see on the front page, or the Lake Geneva area. We are also offering you on page 8 six particularly attractive regional photographs of Switzerland in the form of posters. Discover Switzerland and its regions from a new perspective!

On the flying carpet

And now let's descend on a flying carpet and imagine what we are able to

learn from the ever-increasing scale of the maps which we see in quick succession. Journalist Gil Stauffer has tried it out and describes his impressions on page 7.

But back for a moment to Claude Nicollier. Although he has worked in the United States for the last fifteen years, he still maintains close links with his homeland. From the optic of the space shuttle he has looked down at much more than Switzerland. On page 6 he lets us into some of his secrets.

René Lenzin