

Snippets and news from Switzerland

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Past events....

24 March: Easter egg painting at the Clubhouse

A pleasant way to spend a Sunday afternoon for parents and children one would have thought. Well, apart from the Committee, precisely one mother and one child turned up to indulge in this age-old custom of using paint, onion peelings and grasses to decorate eggs for Easter. What an opportunity missed to learn new patterns and techniques from each other and just having fun!

Forthcoming events...

2 June 2002:

Annual General Meeting of the Swiss Society and 50th Jubilee of the Taranaki Swiss Club

Wellington Swiss Club members are most heartily encouraged to attend the AGM and to help Taranaki celebrate. We all know how good our Taranaki compatriots are at throwing a festive party and for this occasion they have the Swiss Kiwi Yodel Group and the Guggemusig from Auckland to help them.

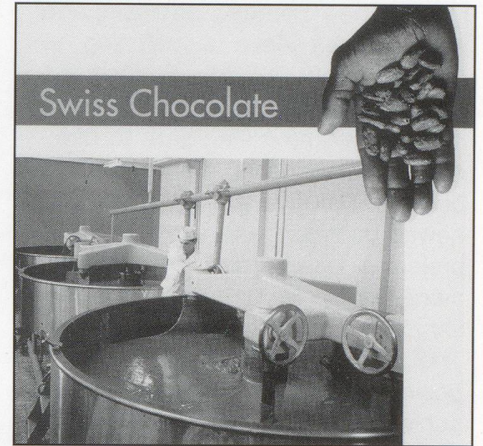
Would all those who intend going independently please get their dinner tickets from Marianne Drummond 06 7628718 and book their own accommodation. Do not delay, they expect a lot of people. Would those who would like to go in a group, please ring Roland Schuetz (568 6772) urgently.

L.N.

Snippets and News from Switzerland

Swiss have a sweet tooth

Chocolate consumption has increased to a record annual 12.3kg per head of population. The Swiss are the undisputed champions in chocolate eating - Germany comes a distant second at 10kg. Chocolate manufacturers last year produced a record 141,243 tonnes of this tasty confectionery - up 2.1% from the previous year - bringing in Fr.1.28 billion (approx. \$1.8 billion). Together with imports, the Swiss munched their way through no less than 89,109t of chocolate in total. Best sellers continue to be the time honoured Easter bunnies, chocolate eggs and Christmas decorations, accounting for 11.9% of production. Even the sale of the chocolate bars (Tafeln) increased by 7.1%. New creations are said to be primarily responsible for this improvement - the bar section alone created 90 new products last year. Exports have increased even more than inland consumption to 66,041t - although sales did drop sharply after September 11th.



Chocosuisse continues to enjoy a very good name throughout the world, no doubt supported by clever marketing. Of the 130 countries Chocosuisse counts as customers, Germany accounts for 25% of total sales, followed by Britain, 11%; France, 10%; and USA, 6%.

This article contributed by Heinz Leuenberger.

Swissport finally sold

Swissair has sold its dispatch company, Swissport, to the British investment firm, Candover, for Fr. 580m (approx. \$803m). No redundancies are anticipated. Candover is investing Fr.274m of its own capital, and five trading banks another Fr.345m. Transfer costs will be about Fr.39m. Swissport is satisfied with the arrangements. The new firm will continue to pursue an aggressive expansion policy. Candover will fully support the world's second largest dispatch company and does not see the investment as a short term profit oriented venture. Swissport is active at 130 airports in 23 countries and is well positioned

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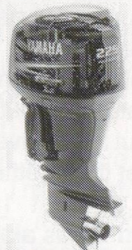
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Chris Hornell & Manuela Gmür

to gain new markets as more and more airlines leave 'dispatching' to the specialists. Worldwide, the company employs 13,000 full-time and 4,000 part-time staff. Due to business fluctuations (11 Sept) 400 jobs became redundant. However, renewed confidence in air travel, plus projected expansions, new recruitments will more than offset the earlier job losses.

The sale of Swissport represents a positive move, albeit small, in the sorry saga of the collapse of Switzerland's once proud national carrier.

This article contributed by Heinz Leuenberger.

Celts raise questions in Basel

Valuable vases from the Celtic period are on display at the Historical Museum in Basel.

An exhibition about the inhabitants of Basel over 2,000 years ago reveals details about their everyday life – but raises more questions than it gives answers.

Celts are believed to have arrived in the area between 150 and 80 BC. It is not known where they came from, how many of them settled there and why they left. However, various objects discovered during excavation work have provided archaeologists with information about the physical and social structure of the settlement as well as an insight into the day-to-day and economic life of the Celts. The first traces of Celtic life in what is now Switzerland's third-biggest city were found during construction work in 1911. More discoveries were made in recent years after work began on the building of a motorway slip road. Pottery, objects made of glass, iron, bronze and wood – and even bones – are among the items unearthed and now on display in Basel's Historical Museum. "We have no idea how many lived here," says archaeologist Yolanda Hecht, adding that one estimate of about 5,000 was excessive. "But we have been able to deduce that their settlement covered an area of at least 15,000 square metres, and it was alongside the Rhine."

Skilled artisans

The exhibition shows that the Celts were skilled handicraft workers.

The wealthier women wore glass or bronze rings around their arms and the settlement was split into different areas based on the social status of its inhabitants. They used tableware and wine jugs brought from what is now Italy, and possessed amber beads and graphite-clay vessels from Eastern Europe.

It also describes their funeral and sacrificial cults, and their diet – lamb, beef, dog meat and wild plants.

In about 80 BC the Celts abandoned their Basel homes. Nobody knows why they left and where they went. "We can say it was not because of war or a catastrophic event," Hecht told swissinfo. "Maybe the forest was too far away to provide them with wood, or maybe it was their way of life to leave a settlement after three or four generations. It's just another mystery." by swissinfo.

Walking in Einstein's footsteps

Before they were married, Einstein and Mileva Mari exchanged countless love letters

Albert Einstein came to Bern exactly 100 years ago, a poor unemployed foreigner in his early 20s. Within a few years, he would turn the universe on its head. Einstein couldn't keep still. He changed Bern residences on average once a year during the seven years he lived in the

Swiss capital.

The Einstein House at Kramgasse 49 in Bern's well-preserved old town is where he lived from 1903 to 1905. It is a small museum and memorial to the physicist who has been called the greatest man of the 20th century.

Modest apartment

In reality, the house is a rather modest two-room apartment. "Here we are in the living room. It probably served Einstein as a study as well," explains Barbara Bürki of the Einstein House. It's a rather large room so there was a big table in here and a nice clock on the wall. This is probably where life took place during the day." And it was when Einstein lived on Kramgasse in 1905 that he formulated his groundbreaking theories. It was considered the miracle year. "1905 really marks the beginning of a brilliant career. He wrote the paper for which he would get the Nobel Prize later on – the light quantum hypothesis," Bürki says. "He also wrote a paper on Brownian motion, another paper which became his doctoral dissertation – both of them on atoms and molecules. Then he worked on the special theory of relativity. Of course as we look at it nowadays, this was the most fundamental of the 1905 papers." by swissinfo.



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Swiss chestnut trail in Ticino

The chestnut trail was the brainchild of Carlo Scheggia, who wants to see the chestnut tree regain some of the respect it once had.

The path meanders along the peaceful mountain slopes of Ticino's Malcantone region – which is only a chestnut's throw from the hectic streets of the city of Lugano.

Lived on chestnuts

The trail is only a few years old – surprising since the chestnut for centuries played an integral role in Ticino. Hikers are reminded of the time when people living in the Ticino countryside lived on nothing but chestnuts for many months of the year. "The trees are privately owned but the fields belong to the communities," says Scheggia, who adds that the chestnut was known as the poor man's bread. "Each and every person needed the fruit from about 15 trees to feed himself for the six months when they depended on the chestnut." Today, holidaymakers – and not the locals – gather the fallen fruit. It is nothing more than a pastime, because commercially, it's too costly to harvest the fruit by hand, and there are no longer any cultivated plantations suitable for machine harvesting.

Chestnut pasta

Peter Lendi's company, Erboristi Lendi, imports organic herbs and spices and produces chestnut flour and pasta at a plant in the Malcantone village of Curio.

As Lendi reaches into a large sack of dried chestnuts, he explains that he has to import most of them because there simply aren't enough harvested in Ticino to meet his needs. Part of the reason, he says, is that the local people don't want to be reminded of the past. "The older generation doesn't want to know anything about the chestnut because it brings back bad memories of poor times when they had nothing to eat in winter but chestnuts. They don't want to hear any more about chestnuts. They think we are crazy when we tell them it is a very good food." So good in fact that the peasants never starved. The different native varieties have few calories, are rich in protein and calcium and counterbalance fatty acids.



Chestnuts are used to make beer, 'muesli flakes' or noodles !

Health food

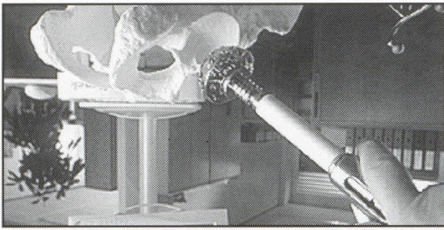
They also help people with heart or circulation problems, and rheumatism sufferers. But because chestnuts are rich in carbohydrates, Lendi says creativity is called for to make chestnut dishes that are not too rich. Gone are the days when most people in Ticino were labourers, requiring a high-energy diet. "We suggest preparing chestnuts together with vegetables and an Indian curry. About four times as many vegetables as chestnuts, and you have quite a light dish to eat," he says. "We have been experimenting with cooks and nutritionists to find out how best to prepare chestnuts for the modern kitchen." Most of the 35 tons harvested annually in Ticino are sold fresh and roasted during the chestnut festivals held each autumn in the canton. Back on the trail, Scheggia explains that a chestnut is not just a chestnut. There are about 15 different varieties native to the Malcantone region. "These different varieties were an important part of the local people's diet. There were kinds which ripened early or late, there were small and large ones which were good dried or used as animal feed." And traditionally, after St Martin's day in mid-November, goats were put out to graze in the chestnut groves. The fruit, leaves and shells had been gathered by this time.

Chestnuts underfoot

The walk takes about five hours. Hikers trample chestnuts underfoot as they pass through chestnut groves and quaint villages. The houses in these villages are made of local stone and of course, chestnut wood. Surprisingly, there are no interpretive signposts. Wandering the chestnut trail Carlo Scheggia knows each chestnut tree has a story to tell.

For centuries, the chestnut tree was the tree of life for the people of Ticino in southern Switzerland. Its story is told on the "chestnut trail", marking the way. "We didn't want to pollute the countryside with signs. It doesn't matter if someone taking the trail doesn't know everything there is to know about chestnuts by the end of the walk," says Scheggia. "It's important that they enjoyed the walk, and that it awoke their senses. That is the most important thing." Scheggia is often called upon to accompany school children on the trail. He says that he sits them down under one of the oldest, gnarled and twisted trees and tells them a story. "They listen with wide open eyes. This is an important way to come into contact with nature," he says smiling. "Not that we have to leave nature to itself. The chestnut tree was introduced by man about 2,000 years ago, and the groves can only survive if we take care of them."

article by swissinfo.



Billion-dollar settlement in sight for Sulzer Medica

Defective hip implants caused misery for thousands of patients. Sulzer Medica has agreed to tentative settlement terms in an American class-action suit that could cost up to \$1 billion (SFr 1.72 billion).

The medical device maker is facing claims from up to 4,000 patients who received defective hip and knee implants. Around 2,780 of them have already undergone remedial hip surgery, while over 260 others have gone through further knee operations.

The agreement with the plaintiffs' lawyers came on Friday, as the deadline set by a US federal court in Cleveland approached. Judge Kathleen O'Malley had originally set February 1 as the final date before allowing individual suits to proceed, before pushing it back three weeks on Friday. Each patient who was operated on will receive approximately \$200,000 from Sulzer Medica and its former parent company, Sulzer. The medical device manufacturer is prepared to pay out \$725 million, with \$400 million in cash and \$300 million in other financial instruments.

No Sulzer responsibility

Sulzer will hand over \$50 million in cash, and will also convert \$200 million insurance policy to help pay for its share of the settlement. It will also make its packet of 480,000 Sulzer Medica shares, worth \$25 million, available. The former parent company, despite picking part of the tab, still refuses to admit any responsibility for the defective implants though. "We can close the case satisfactorily and avoid further years of litigation," said Fred Kindle, CEO of Sulzer. "We prefer to spend our time on our customers and markets rather than in court."

Plaintiffs have until May 2 to agree with the settlement, when O'Malley will hold a final hearing. Sulzer Medica expects few patients to turn down the offer, although the com-

pany has not said how many were represented by the lawyers who negotiated the deal. "This agreement allows us to look confidently into the future," said Stephan Rietiker, Sulzer Medica's CEO. "The patients will receive greater compensation and we can proceed under the assumption very few will opt out."

Sulzer Medica had made a previous offer totalling \$783 million, partly made up of cash and the rest in shares. Patients at best would have received just under half of what is proposed in the latest settlement.

article by swissinfo.

If there's no room at the inn?

Stay in an igloo! The back-to-basics arctic accommodation has become an environmentally friendly way of spending a night in the Swiss Alps during the past winter month.

Snow and expertise are the main ingredients for successful igloo building, and alpine resorts have caught on to the icy craze.

It's now possible in many parts of the Swiss Alps to enjoy a mulled wine in your very own igloo after an invigorating day hiking in the snow. That is of course, once you've put up the structure. The resort of Engelberg



near Lucerne offers a weekend igloo building course, as do tour operators in Meiringen in the Bernese Oberland and in Rothenthurm in central Switzerland. Experienced guides lead the tours, some by snowshoe, into hidden valleys and instruct the participants in the fine art of igloo building. Once complete, a fondue meal and mulled wine inside the snow walls await the weekend Eskimos and help keep out the chill. Scuol in the Lower Engadine valley offers overnight stays in pre-made igloos, which are easily reached on foot from the resort. Cheese fondue and tee is served inside and sleeping bags are provided. The "romantic igloo" is decorated with flowers and its two sleeping bags have been zipped together to enhance the romance. Prices for the various tours start at about SFr90 and go up to about SFr150.

article by swissinfo.

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The fine art of making fondue

Fondue is the quintessential Swiss dish - a fast, friendly dining experience. Now, a Swiss couple are teaching "golden rules" to produce a foolproof fondue.

French-speaking farmers first ate cheese fondue in the 1930s, after developing a tasty and thrifty way of eating stale bread and mature cheese.

These days, it is an après-ski staple: hungry snowboarders and skiers dip pieces of bread stuck on the end of a long fork into a pot of melted cheese.

Fondue is a great food to dunk, swirl and savour, as one cookbook put it, and experts say it is simple to make.

No bubbling

Christian and Renate Hofer offer winter classes to fondue aficionados at their cheese shop, the Chäs-Stube, in Etzelkofen, in central Switzerland. Their "golden rules" for excellent fondue begin with the right ingredients. "To start, a good white wine should be selected, one that is on the acid side, not a sweet wine," said their assistant, Eugen Koller. "Then you should use Maizena which is a flour made out of corn or potatoes and this should always be fresh. You should heat the mixture up slowly and never allow it to bubble," he continued. The star ingredient is, naturally, cheese, and one hot tip from the Hofer kitchen is that when it comes to selecting the cheese, there are no hard or fast rules.

Cauliflower and cheese?

While Fribourg cheeses Gruyère and Vacherin might form the basis



of a fondue, add cheeses of your own choice to taste. "A good base includes about 50 per cent of Gruyère, maybe 25 per cent of Vacherin, and then add a different types of cheese be it Gorgonzola, Appenzeller or Tilsitter depending on the taste you would like to have at the end," Koller suggested. Other fondue experts prefer Emmentaler.

Don't be shy about personalising the dish, says Renate Hofer. Another way to impress the guests is to be inventive with the food chosen to dip and swirl in the cheese. Potatoes, cauliflower or even pineapples go well with the heavy cheese.

Presto! It's ready

Hofer believes sharing fondue is social dining at its best and should be prepared in front of the guests. So, take the fondue pot, its stand and rechaud (burner) out to the dining table. Add all the ingredients and stir before heating the mixture. "I add the wine, cloves of garlic and the grated cheese mix. Then take the Maizena and add a little, as well as some Kirsch," explains Hofer. She stirs the mixture well to blend the ingredients. The next step is to set the fondue pot on its stand, with a

lighted burner, and stir the mixture continuously in a figure of eight movement, until it looks smooth and flows freely. To speed up the process, some cooks heat the mixture first on the kitchen stove, before transferring the pot to the fondue stand.

Fans say fondue is very "gemütlich" - fun - especially when someone drops a piece of bread in the pot.

Persecution by yodelling

Fondue etiquette dictates that the culprit should pay for a round of drinks, Hofer says. More sinister punishments may be exacted like yodelling.

While there are golden rules for making and eating cheese fondue, one tip not included in the Hofer manual is to ventilate the dining room well after the meal. The cheese gives off a strong smell that gets into clothes and curtains. Scented candles should help to neutralise the smell.

Fondue is an interactive meal that merits being eaten with those you care for. Koller suggests a glass of schnapps to help digest the cheese and a walk in the fresh air "with your loved one" to top off an excellent meal.

article by swissinfo.

Ant colony marches across Europe

Swiss, French and Danish scientists have discovered a supercolony of ants, stretching thousands of kilometres from the Italian Riviera to northwest Spain.

The 5,800-kilometre colony, running along the Mediterranean and Atlantic coastlines, consists of billions of Argentine ants living in millions of nests, which cooperate with one another. "It's the largest cooperative unit ever recorded," Laurent Keller, a prize-winning myremecologist from Lausanne University, told swissinfo.

Normally, ants from different nests fight. But the researchers concluded that ants in the supercolony were all close enough genetically to recognise one another, despite being from different nests with different queens

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Airline proudly serves old wine in new bottles

The Swiss national carrier has shed its Swissair colours, and is now simply swiss.

Swissair has risen from the ashes with the launch of Switzerland's new national carrier, "swiss".

The new swiss may have cut a third of the long-haul routes of its fallen predecessor, but in other respects it is sticking closely to the recipe followed by Swissair, keeping its sights firmly focused on the upper end of the market. The buzzword is quality, and the management of the new airline, which is built around the regional carrier Crossair, is hoping to revive the reputation that Swissair enjoyed for decades.

Initially, most travellers won't notice much difference between swiss and Swissair, but over the next couple of years, the long-haul MD-11s will be scrapped to make way for new Airbuses which boast levels of comfort and service not seen before.

Old wine in new bottles

While the old fleet is still flying, swiss will be concentrating on service in an effort to stamp its quality credentials into the minds of passengers. Meals will be served with proper cutlery and hungry passengers will be given a second helping with a smile. Wine is to be served properly – that is from seven decilitre bottles into glass goblets – to all passengers whether they are in first, business or economy class. "Glass in every class" is another swiss slo-



gan. "I always said Swissair had a very exclusive first class and a very good business class but, in the last few years, they were cutting on costs and saving on money in the economy class," says executive vice-president, Björn Näf, who is in charge of products and services at swiss.

"Crossair had good products in the economy class, so we put both these things together and improved the economy class on the whole network," he adds.

In touch with the ground

On the current Airbuses in the fleet

and when the new A340s-300s are put into service, passengers in all classes on all long-haul flights will have individual movie screens and video game consoles and be able to send SMS messages, e-mails and faxes from the comfort of their seats. In the meantime, though, while the Boeing MD 11 aircraft are still flying, economy passengers will have to make do with pre-selected films shown on central screens. In first and business class, the luxury seating and service that Swissair was famous for is being expanded and modernised with the latest comforts and technology.

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On the ground, the new airline is setting up "mobile information counters" at Zurich airport, and providing wireless Internet access in Swiss airport lounges.

Slick marketing campaign

To sell the "old wine" of Swissair in "new bottles", swiss has launched an expensive and very slick marketing campaign. The London-based "style guru", Tyler Brûlé, is the man behind the new image and campaign. The adverts are thin on content, putting the accent on the simple but well defined "swiss" logo, and a hint of the exclusivity that goes with it. "I think no matter where you are in the world an aircraft has to immediately announce where it's from," Brûlé says. "That's why we didn't want to go down this traditional design agency approach of trying to turn Switzerland's national carrier into something that it's not. It had to be Swiss and it had to feel international." And, according to Brûlé, the airline should appeal to the business traveller and older passenger, like its predecessor, Swissair.

Not trendy

"If you look at the aircraft and the livery that we've come up with it's very conservative, there's nothing trendy about it," he says. "There's nothing to be scared about if you're a 65-year-old business class traveller. I think everyone wants comfort and warmth inside the aircraft. "I think everything should suggest

quality and timelessness. We've had to come up with this notion of an instant classic, which has been no small feat, I have to say." Over the next couple of years, swiss will introduce new uniforms for personnel, a new food and beverage concept in all classes as well as a new seat configuration to increase legroom. First class will be reduced from 12 seats to eight.

article by swissinfo.

Government supports legalised abortion

The Swiss government has presented its position for legalising abortion and urged the Swiss public to vote "yes" in the June 2 referendum.

The justice minister, Ruth Metzler, said on Friday the 1942 abortion law needed to be changed to decriminalise the procedure. Although abortion is illegal in the country, currently, some 13,000 pregnancies are legally terminated each year, using loopholes in Swiss legislation.

"With our current legal system it's not the woman herself who can decide whether to have an abortion or not. The Swiss parliament wants women to be able to make their own decision," Metzler told swissinfo. Under the current law, the termination of a pregnancy is illegal, unless a woman's health is in danger. In

practice, however, more liberal solutions have been introduced in recent years and getting medical approval from a doctor, which is required before an abortion can be carried out, is relatively easy.

No prosecutions

There have been no abortion-related prosecutions since 1988 in Switzerland and in March last year both houses voted in favour of legalising the procedure if undertaken within the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.

If the Swiss vote in favour of this revised legislation, abortion will technically become legal, but women will still have to seek medical advice before being allowed to have their pregnancy terminated.

article by swissinfo.

Answer to the Puzzle on page 3

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