

Guest article by Diccon Bewes - the shape of Switzerland

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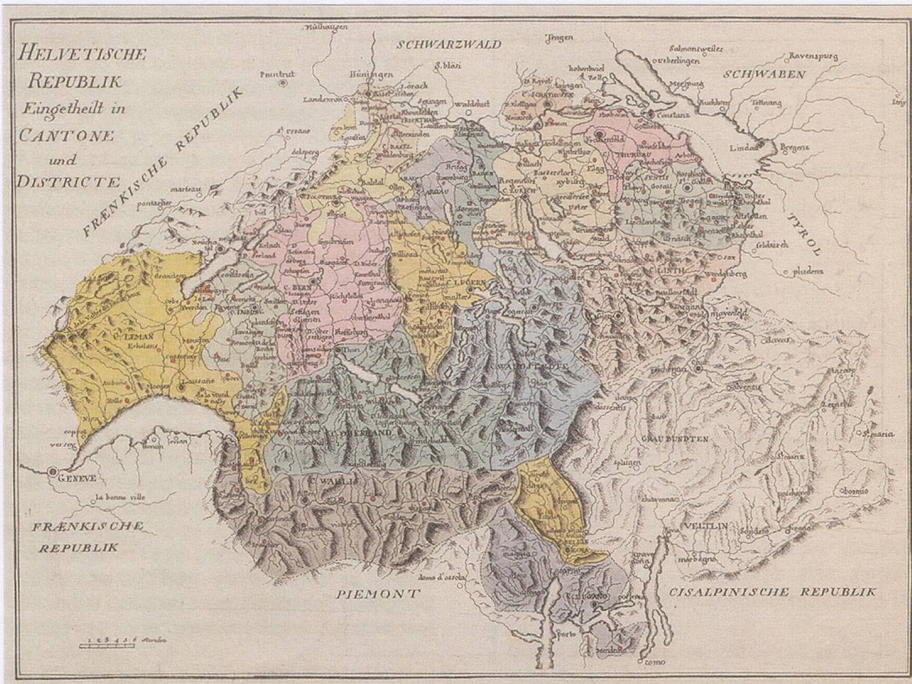
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Guest Article by Diccon Bewes - The shape of Switzerland



Switzerland is a country that shouldn't really exist. It defies nature, both Mother and human, with borders that make no geographic, linguistic or political sense. And yet, its national borders have remained unchanged since 1815, which is quite an achievement for a European country given the tumultuous history of the last two centuries. For exactly 200 years Switzerland has kept its borders while countries all across the continent were changing shape every few decades. Not forgetting that Europe has always been a very complicated jigsaw puzzle.

European countries tend not to have straight-line boundaries that march across the map without bothering about complications like rivers and mountains. But even by European standards, Switzerland is a decidedly odd shape. Its borders wiggle all over the place, following rivers then leaping them to create bulges on the other bank, or zigzagging over lakes so that a simple boat trip has you crossing and re-crossing the lines. Essentially, the country looks like a horribly misshapen jigsaw piece, uncomfortably locked into its neighbours. And at times, it can seem like the missing piece needed to complete the puzzle; one look at a modern map of Europe and you'll notice a Switzerland-shaped hole in the middle of the European Union.

But look at that same map another way, and Switzerland changes from a hole in the heart of the continent to an island in the middle of a vast sea of deep blue. It is surrounded on every side by the EU flying its blue flag dotted with

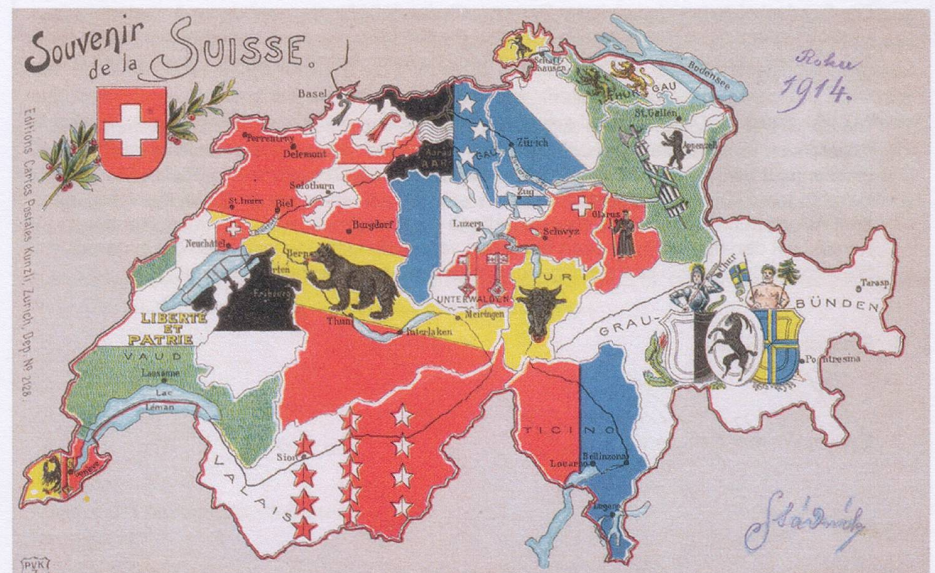
gold stars. This mountainous country isn't huge (at 41,285 square kilometres, it's roughly twice the size of Wales) but its location makes up for its size. For most of its history, Switzerland has been an anomaly at the centre of Europe, an Alpine republic encircled by monarchies and empires, dictators and generals. Occasionally the tide of history has washed across its borders, bringing Europe's conflicts and ideas into the farthest mountain valleys, but Switzerland has always managed to restore its island status. And it's a status it still relishes today.

But it wasn't always clear if Switzerland actually was one country. For many years it was more than a loose alliance but not quite a single entity. The modern French name – La Suisse – is singular

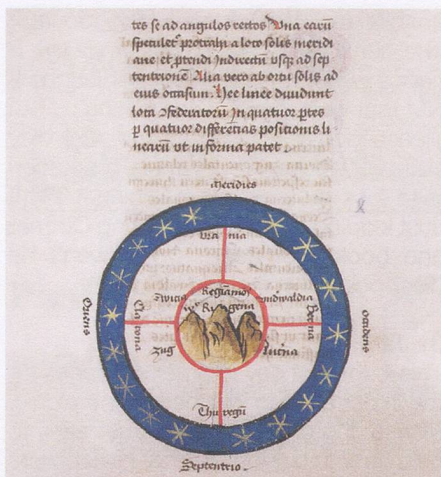
but on many old maps it is written as Les Suisses, plural. Or almost like 'the Switzerlands' (similar to the Netherlands), a confederation of 13 cantons that were joined together but not as one. That all changed with the creation of the modern Switzerland in the 19th century, but up until then the make-up of the country was constantly shifting. And the best way to see that is by looking at maps. Beautiful old maps, carefully drawn by hand or laboriously printed with copper plates. Each one a work of art.

Early maps were often drawn from the mapmaker's perspective, which in Switzerland usually meant sitting in Zurich or Bern and looking towards the Alps on the horizon. In other words, south at the top. To our modern eyes these maps are upside down, but back then this orientation was normal even logical, especially at a time when there were few other maps for comparison. It was natural to draw a map with the mountains as the horizon; not only that but it was the view towards Italy, the home of both Rome and the Renaissance. We take for granted that modern maps are oriented to the north but that wasn't always the case.

Using maps, we can chart the growth and development of Switzerland over the centuries. Its borders were constantly changing, shaped by conquest and defeat, with Ticino and Romandie gradually being added to the original German-speaking core. The French invasion of 1798 was the last great earthquake to affect the shape of Switzerland, and it was only in its aftermath that the Swiss borders were finally established – and guaranteed by the Great Powers. Since that date (1815)



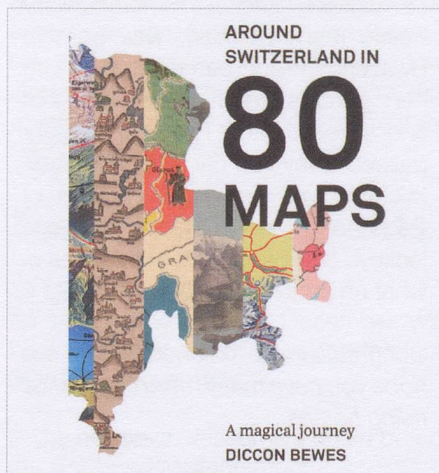
Fun Tips



tiny little Switzerland has managed to stay intact while all around it empires fell and borders shifted. A rock of stability at the centre of a continent in flux.

Sadly there are no existing maps of Switzerland from its early years, when the legends of William Tell and the Rütli oath are set. The oldest one to show the country dates from 1480, drawn by Albrecht von Bonstetten, a monk in the monastery at Einsiedeln. It's remarkably simple, showing a circular Switzerland of eight cantons centred on Mt Rigi near Lucerne: the names of Zug and Berna can clearly be seen, as can 'Thuregum', the old name for Zurich. Surrounding this circular island is a ring of blue heavens dotted with golden stars, as if Switzerland were the only place on earth. How ironic that over 500 years after Bonstetten's map, Switzerland is once again an island surrounded by a sea of star-studded blue.

Diccon Bewes has lived in Switzerland for ten years and written two bestselling books about the country: *Swiss Watching* and *Slow Train to Switzerland*. His latest book, *Around in Switzerland in 80 Maps*, was published in October 2015. You can follow Diccon via his website (www.dicconbewes.com), his Facebook page (www.facebook.com/SwissWatching) or Twitter (@dicconb).



Fondue and Night Sledging in Grindelwald

A friend of ours invited us on this trip as a wedding present and I tell you this was one of the best things we've ever done!

Grindelwald has the longest toboggan run in Europe... their top-destination Bussalp is a sunny paradise for those who don't ski and Mecca for sled riders. The yellow Grindelwald buses will take you to the sunny terrace Bussalp with its wondrous panoramic view from 1,800 meters (almost 6,000 feet). Relax in the bright winter sunshine, enjoy the snowpark with your family, hike, but it's really the sledging that's fun at Bussalp! You can pick from a number of sled types, sleighs, toboggans or "velogemel". Yippee! Here we go! Off we go down the murderous sledge runs "City Run", "Big Pintenfritz", "Family Run" or "Bussalp Run".

Top off your stay at Grindelwald with a cozy chat over fondue in the evening and then a romantic sledge ride under a blanket of stars. Night sledging ... a unique winter pleasure for young and old! Important: A reservation for the bus, sledge rental and fondue is absolutely essential!

<http://www.grindelwaldbus.ch/en/sledging/night-sledging>

Hand Dipped Candles

This candle making technique started from humble beginnings in 1969 on the Bürkliplatz in Zurich and soon developed into a traditional pre-Christmas event.

In a very short time it conquered a solid place in the cultural life of Zurich. In the hectic pre-Christmas hustle and bustle an oasis of contemplation was created in the city centre where people from all walks of life came together to meet and be creative.

Until the invention of the light bulb, the candle was one of the common light sources. Wax smelters and candle makers formed a separate profession. These Artisans went from house to house to offer their services on an hourly or daily basis. Just as with many other small crafts, the candlestick maker has disappeared from our everyday lives completely. Candles are today manufactured in factories with powerful machines, with the exception of the hand-drawn candle. Thanks to the simple processes involved, the art of making hand dipped candles has been rediscovered all over the country and other places like local community centres may offer candle making during Advent - a new Swiss Custom has arisen. The origin of the rebirth of this old handmade art lies at the end of Zurich's Bahnhofstrasse, in the candles Pavilion at the Bürkliplatz. But meanwhile many other places like the local community centers may offer candle making during the Advent as well. Google it and dive in into the magic of candle making.

Alex Beskid-Jung

<http://www.zuercherkerzenziehen.ch/info.htm>

HO HO HO

Santa came early this year

First Place goes to Janine Macdonald for THE original Swiss plate! She is the lucky winner of a \$30 Gift Voucher from Fribesco!



Second Place goes to our Jodler Erich Widmer

Winner of a \$20 Gift Voucher from the Swiss Bakery in Milford

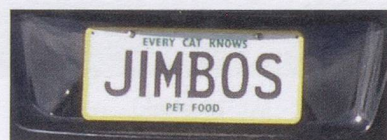


Third Place goes to P Deutsche (sonen Brunz nume dritt, haha! -AB) Winner of a \$20 Gift Voucher from the Swiss Bakery in Milford

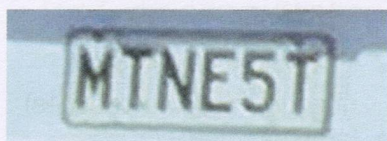


Fourth Place goes to Martin Beskid for his Jimbo which reminded him of the Jumbo DIY Store back in Switzerland!

Winner of a \$20 Gift Voucher from the Swiss Bakery in Milford



Fifth Place goes to Sandra Hess with her empty nest Winner of a FHB Tool Bag worth \$20 from Fribesco



Congratulations to all the winners! Many thanks to 'The Swiss Bakery' and 'Fribesco' for sponsoring the gift vouchers and presents

The Swiss Society of New Zealand wishes you all a merry Christmas and a happy New Year AB-J