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EDITORIAL

At first glance it seems that Switzerland has nothing much in common with the Netherlands except perhaps for the Rhine which delivers to the Dutch, free of charge, all the polluted water that the Swiss no longer want.

But apart from the Rhein, Switzerland and the Netherlands have one huge thing in common: the fascination with mountains. We Swiss love our mountains because they are there, right at our doorstep, huge, majestic, beautiful in their splendour. The Dutch love the mountains too but mainly because they haven't got any, unless, of course, as we will see later, they are simply invisible to any non-Dutch person.

If you want proof that the Dutch love the mountains, you only have to drive up any little side valley anywhere in Switzerland and you are sure to find at the very top, where roads turn into gravel and finally into mountain tracks a car with a Dutch (NL) number plate on it. It never fails.

Every Swiss and for that matter non-Dutch person believes that the Netherlands are absolutely flat. Apart from a few hills in the very South-East of their country, the Dutch seem to have only two levels to live on: sea-level and below sea-level. The difference in altitude is merely the height of the dikes that stop the rivers and the Northsea from flooding half the country.

And yet the Dutch, contrary to everyone else in the world, seem to see mountains everywhere in their land.

We all know that the Dutch have a great sense of humour (in this respect they have nothing much in common with the Swiss...) and they certainly need this to be able to stand the stress of living a life-long life below sea-level (a thought that would send any true alpine Swiss into an absolute panic).

You may not believe this, but there are well over 70 towns and villages in the Netherlands containing the name "Berg" or mountain. Some of them are simply called "Berg" but amongst all sorts of combinations, you also find places such as "Bergambach" (trade mountain), "Bergstoep (mountain step), "De Berg, Gramsbergen, Kalenberg, Middelberg, Spiesberg, Wagenberg, Wijnbergen (Weinberg) and Zandberg" (mountain of sand which is most likely just a sand dune). Surprisingly there is also a "Giersbergen" and more surprisingly a "Berg en Dal" (mountain and valley). And yet all these places are in what seems to us to be the flattest area of the world.

Where the Dutch sense of humour really comes to the fore is at a place called "Driebergen" (three mountains). It lies on the main road between Utrecht and Arnhem. Make a stop and have a look around. The land is as flat as a pancake, not even the smallest mole hill in sight and yet the Dutch see there three mountains unless, of course, they are just having us on.

But the Dutch's biggest coup lies near Breda where within a few kilometres of one another, in an absolutely flat landscape they have a "Zevenbergen"

(seven mountains) a "Zevenbergschehoek" and a "Zwartenberg" (black mountain).

Faced with such a formidable opposition, the Swiss, with their few alpine peaks, have no hope of competing against the Dutch.

But the Dutch are not satisfied with just place names. Family names also reflect the mountainous terrain of the Netherlands. There are three types of inhabitants in the Netherlands: those who live on top of the dikes; these are the Van den Berg's, those who live half way up the dikes and who are called the Van Dam's or the Van Dijk's and then the poor Van de Meer's who live below or under the sea. Since some 50% of the Dutch population seems to be called Van den Berg, it stands to reason that there must be a sufficient number of mountains in the Netherlands to accommodate them all, otherwise why would they be called Van den Berg.

Of course, we Swiss can match this classification of inhabitants quite easily. All those Swiss living up in the Alps are called Von Alp or Von Allmen, those who have fallen off the Alps are called Ab der Alp or, in old Swiss-German Abplanalp, those who tried to get up the mountains but got stuck half-way up are the Amberg's and the Amstutz's and those who never got off the ground at all are the Von Tobel's. The Imboden's are of course the direct descendants from the prehistoric cave men since they still have not managed to surface yet.

So there you are, the mountains and their associated family and place names are the one major thing we have in common with the Dutch. If you do not believe us, go and take a trip to the Netherlands, but make sure you do not fall off one of their high mountains. You would never live it down in your whole life.

SEQUEL TO OUR EDITORIALS IN THE JUNE AND JULY/AUGUST ISSUES.

The incident where a Wairarapa student, while on bail, killed the father of the boy who laid sexual abuse charges against him totally proves every word we said in those articles: the law is more concerned with protecting the human rights of criminals than those of innocent people. What makes this case even more stressful is that the criminal, even before being granted bail, had made open threats to kill one or more members of the family in question. And yet, against that background and despite desperate pleas from the family and the police, bail was foolishly granted.

The final blow came when the judges

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NOTE TO SECRETARIES

Next issue of the Helvetia magazine: OCTOBER 1996. All contributions must be in by 15 September. Many thanks for your kind cooperation.

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