

Gotthard tunnel tragedy

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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand**

Band (Jahr): **68 (2002)**

Heft [2]

PDF erstellt am: **22.07.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-945426>

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Your Corner...

This month we have a recipe for 'Ungarisches Gulasch', as well as the following report on a unique experience Trudy had while taking part at a Rural Leadership course.

Trudy was recently elected President of the Waikato-King Country Rural Women's Organisation in Te Awamutu.

Leadership Course

Recently I had the opportunity to apply for the Kellogg Primary Industry Council Rural Leadership Course. I was one of the 24 lucky participants accepted into this prestigious course. Lincoln University in Christchurch runs this event, which is designed to train you in management issues such as public speaking, analytical thinking, negotiation skills, media relations, people skills, leadership practices, how to speak with purpose and research skills; as well as tips on making presentations on PowerPoint and how to conduct and evaluate a survey. We had top speakers from right across the producer boards who gave us a great insight as to how these leaders got there and how their businesses are run. At Brighton Domain we gained a 'warrant of fitness' for completing a 'high rise obstacle course' and gained confidence in team-building. A lot was crammed into 10 days and our brains felt suitably stimulated. As a part of this course, we now have to compile a project on any subject we are interested in. At the end of the year we will come together again to present our projects to the peers, and any lecturers interested in our themes are invited to attend. They will evaluate us and will be our constructive critics. We will then fly to Wellington where we will meet with the country's major decision makers and interview them. This then concludes the Kellogg Course.

An unusual coincidence I have to mention is that in the 18 years of the Kellogg Course, there have never before been two Swiss present. It was a pleasure to meet Basil Meyer, from Westland. He is a dairy farmer and originates from Luzern.

UNGARISCHES GULASCH for four people

800 gr Beef, suitable for long slow cooking / stewing
125 gr smoked bacon in cubes
1 large, or 2-3 medium size onions
1-2 tbs tomato purée
2-3 tsp paprika
seasonings - pepper, salt, rosemary and aromats
1 bay leaf
1 clove garlic (optional)
1-1½ lt hot beef stock
Oil

Wash and dry the meat and cut into 2cm cubes. Sprinkle with paprika and other seasonings. Finely chop onion.

In a frying pan heat 30 gr fat or oil and fry the bacon - turn onto plate.

Add meat to frying pan and brown on all sides.

Add onions and roast quickly; add tomato purée and the beef stock.

The meat must be covered at all times. Add bay leaf.

Stew for 1½ - 2 hours. Check for taste, season.

Serve with Spaetzli, rice or mashed potatoes.

En Guete - Enjoy !

Doris and Trudy

GOTTHARD TUNNEL TRAGEDY

After barely two months of quiet, the traffic is flowing again.

We can all recall the tragic fire in the Gotthard road tunnel on 24th October 2001, when a truck crossed the centre line causing a head-on collision and ultimately claimed 11 lives. The ensuing investigation revealed that the vehicle at fault was operated by a Belgian trucking firm, supposedly in receivership. In order to continue trading the firm hired a truck from another company, which in turn had hired the vehicle from a third party. To complicate matters even further the driver, a Turk, at the time residing in Belgium on a six month visitor's permit, did not possess a heavy vehicle license.

Nearly two weeks after the collision, when the temperature in the 'red zone' finally cooled sufficiently for rescue teams to enter, the driver's body was discovered some distance from the point of impact. Although very badly burned, the autopsy revealed that he died of asphyxiation -

and alcohol was found in his blood! Work to repair the 750m section got underway mid-November. In the meantime traffic had to be re-routed - trucks through the San Bernadine Pass, and cars over the Gotthard Pass road, which is normally closed over Winter due to snow and ice.

The tunnel was finally reopened on 21st December. In approx. 14,000 working hours, at times in extremely cold conditions, a workforce of 73, working around the clock, took just 26 days to repair the tunnel to the necessary safety standards. Up to 14,000 vehicles crossed the pass daily. Remarkably, the road was kept open until the last day, aided by 3000 working hours and 500t of salt. To emphasise the importance of the Gotthard north-south connection, of the 20 or so vehicles (mainly trucks) destroyed, only about 30% were Swiss registered. The same percentage applies to the victims caught up in the tragedy.

And in the final analysis no one need have died. For some reason, the driver causing the accident did not escape in time and eventually died of smoke inhalation. One driver appeared to have returned to his car to retrieve some papers and was caught in the flames from an exploding petrol tank. Nine others died, at up to one kilometre from the point of impact, of asphyxiation. The question remains as to why these people did not escape into the safety tunnel, as so many others had managed successfully? There are openings into this tunnel about every 250m and they are very clearly marked by modern signs. Was it panic, or perhaps just total ignorance of the safety features inside the tunnel? No one knows.

(compiled by Heinz Leuenberger)

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