

# Swiss Exodus from the Alps

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## Chocolate Sauce blocks Autobahn

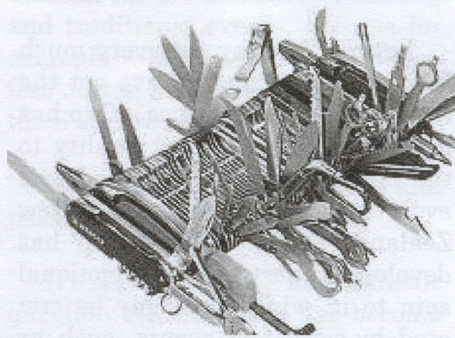
It actually happened in September, but it is just too good a story not to be told: Thirteen tons of chocolate flowed across an Autobahn one night in September, when a semi-truck loaded with 13 tons of chocolate bars had a small accident. Apparently, the truck then suddenly caught fire.

The driver managed to separate the tractor from the trailer but could not prevent a chocolate disaster: The heat from the fire made quick work of the sweet cargo and before long, a mini chocolate river was flowing across the highway. It took most of the night to put out the fire and get the dessert cleaned up. The damage was estimated at Euro 100'000.- not counting the psychological harm by the chocolate shortage in that area.

## Swiss Army Knife – made in China?

The production of a first series of 65'000 Swiss Army knives is up for international tender. This has caused quite a storm in Switzerland, and a petition is running to keep the production in Switzerland.

The Swiss Army knife was developed by Victorinox, Ibach SZ, in 1891. Victorinox still produces 70% of the famous knives, with Wenger, Delemont JU producing the remaining 30%. Two years ago, Victorinox took over Wenger, but both brands still exist. Victorinox employs 1300 workers, Wenger 200. They have a yearly turn-over of SFr 400'000'000.



Wenger has made it into the Guinness Book of Records with their newest pocket knife. Well, it would not exactly fit into an ordinary pocket; it is more of a rucksackmesser than a sackmesser, weighing 1,34 kg for the 87 tools it offers! They are produced in a limited edition, not widely available and cost SFr 990.

## Babies

*A German, a Frenchman and a Swiss were discussing where babies came from. The German said: "Everyone knows that the stork brings them." The Frenchman laughed and said: "In France we know that babies come from a man and a woman making love." They turned to the Swiss and asked what he thought. He said: "In Switzerland it varies from canton to canton."*

## Swiss Exodus from the Alps

Beyond the cliché of idyllic snow capped peaks and the sound of cowbells, living and working in the Alps can be extremely tough and poorly paid. As more and more Swiss decide to pack their bags and leave the mountains, foreigners are taking their place to look after and to farm the picture-postcard alpine pastures.



The Oltscheren Alp in the Bernese Oberland rises like a fortress at the end of the valley. Wooden farmers' huts are dotted here and there. Cows graze between rockslides as if stuck to the mountains, and water can be heard trickling down. However, this spectacular alpine setting is becoming less and less attractive to the Swiss. The Swiss who grew up in the Alps now prefer the cities to the tough mountain life.

A growing number of shepherds and herdsmen are also leaving prematurely. There are around 7'500 people working as farmers in the Swiss Alps. Farming the land and looking after animals plays an important role in maintaining biodiversity in alpine regions. Without the help of mountain dwellers from Germany, Austria, France, the Netherlands, Argentina, Australia, Poland and Hungary, many alpine regions could not be farmed.

The minimum daily wage for shepherds is sFr 135 and sFr 115 for herdsmen; working days can be long, and living standards are not that great on some Alps. As one of these foreign workers puts it: "I'd much rather be in the mountains without having to worry about putting up fences or chasing after cows."



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