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# HELVE<sup>TI</sup>A

Magazine for the members of the Swiss Society of New Zealand Inc  
Helvetia is in its 73rd year

August/September 2007

## 1st of August - Swiss National Day

Since the end of the nineteenth century, the first of August has been celebrated as National Day.

The date refers to one of the first agreements made between the three cantons of Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden, who constituted the

public figure from political or cultural circles, accompanied by instrumental or choral performances, light athletic presentations, and the community singing of the national anthem are all traditional aspects of the celebration. Wealthy

majestically descending more than 20 metres to the Rhine below.

*So, how do the Swiss in New Zealand celebrate the first of August? Well, the Wellington Swiss have a proper first of August fire. Though it is on Petone Beach, instead of a hilltop. Because, in New Zealand August is in winter, the warmth of the fire is very much appreciated. Do you remember how we used to try to persuade our parents that it was dark enough to light the lamps at nine o'clock? Here it is definitely dark enough at six! The children have started their own tradition: they roast marshmallows on little fires nearby. tb*



Bonfire ready to be lit with Schilthorn in the background

focal point around which present-day Switzerland was built over the next 500 years. Men from these three cantons "at the beginning of the month of August" swore eternal allegiance to one another, promising mutual help and assistance. The alliance was formed against the Habsburgs, who at this time were trying to strengthen their position in the area leading to the Gotthard Pass.

In Switzerland, August 1<sup>st</sup> is celebrated exclusively in the communities; only a radio or television broadcast made by the President of the Confederation is an exception to this esteemed federal principle. Appropriate words of a prominent

communities, or tourist offices, sometimes provide a fireworks display.

Bonfires, mainly on hills or elevated ground, recall the expulsion of foreign bailiffs in the fourteenth century, which was signalled in this way. Children carrying lighted paper lanterns walk through the streets at night. Public and private buildings are decorated with national, cantonal and community flags, and the bakers bake bread rolls with a little Swiss flag on them.

A special kind of celebration takes place at the Rhine Falls at Neuhausen. The cascading water, rushing among the rocks before

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