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Autor: Werthmüller, Paul
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Sahara crossing by Andrea Vogel

It is 150 years since the last Europeans completed this route across the Sahara desert. In medieval times and up to the early 20th century, Bedouins used this route to transport salt and other goods on camel back across the desert. But over the last decades the desert has increased a great deal, some of the once active wells have dried out and oases just vanished in the sand. Another problem are the different war lords.

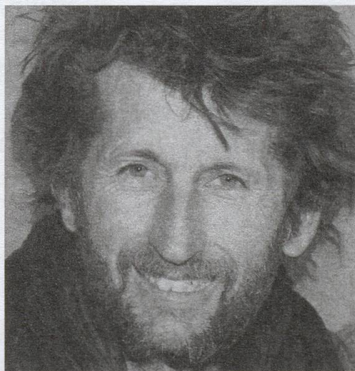


Andrea Vogel came up with the idea of crossing the Sahara on foot a while ago. He had great difficulties to find local guides experienced enough to lead him through the desert. He started in Timbuktu, Mali, and walked to Marrakesh, Morocco, in 71 days. He was accompanied by two Tuareg guides and a number of camels carrying their luggage. On the way he climbed the highest peak of Northern Africa, Mt. Jebel Toubkal 4167 m, and crossed the Erg Chech, the greatest sand sea on earth. In Marrakesh he was welcomed and congratulated to his outstanding achievement by a representative of the king of Morocco and the Swiss ambassador.



Andrea Vogel was born in 1958 in Grösch, Kanton Graubünden. He was leader of several expeditions. He is also a photographer, writer and lecturer. He also has an entry in the Guinness Book of Records for climbing eleven peaks in the Swiss Alps within 24 hours. Another outstanding athletic and mental achievement was the solo surrounding of Switzerland, along the Swiss border. The reason for his adventures is to encourage others to give way to personal longings and go for the impossible.

Paul Werthmüller



Thousands of army guns are lost

More than 4'300 army guns have been lost or stolen over the past decade, the Swiss defence ministry has confirmed. The guns had been stolen or lost outside military service. In addition, around 260 have been reported stolen and then recovered. Assault rifles disappeared the most frequently, followed by pistols, according to the defence ministry. Weapons are also lost or stolen during service, but this is much more rare. Since 2005 this has been around ten per year, apart from in 2006. In that year 82 rifles were stolen from an army depot in Marly in French-speaking Switzerland, bringing the 2006 total to 84 rifles plus 15 pistols.

The army does not keep statistics that make a distinction between lost or stolen weapons. Those that simply disappear are categorised as lost.

According to some estimates there could be as many as 1.5 million army weapons in circulation.

Questions have been raised in the country over whether the practice of keeping guns at home should be continued. Those against it point to the fact that army-issued weapons are said to be involved in the deaths of more than 300 people a year in the country.

Parliament last year banned the keeping of ammunition at home. But centre-left Social Democratic Party and pacifist organisations have gone further and launched a people's initiative to ban army guns and rifles at home. They want these weapons to remain in the barracks and a national gun register set up, arguing that keeping guns at home no longer has a military purpose.

But opponents – including the strong gun lobby – argue that decommissioning weakens Swiss security and is a vote of no confidence in soldiers.

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