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Book Review:Swiss and Alpine Islands

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Ed. Vladi, *Fahrid Swiss and Alpine Islands* (Luzern, Switzerland: teNeues, 2013). ISBN: 978-3-8327-9699-0. Hardback \$55.00

When one visits Switzerland, the main attraction for most is the beautiful mountains that dominate the majority of the countryside. Iconic peaks such as the Matterhorn, the entire Jungfrau Massif, but the Eiger in particular, command attention. Farther east in canton Appenzell the peak of Santis grabs the attention of the tourist and resident alike. Mt Niesen just south of Thun has an annual run up the steps that go along the cog railway. Everywhere one looks there are mountains.

Nestled among the towering peaks, are numerous lakes. These lakes vary in size from the largest in Europe, the Lac Léman or Lake Geneva to very small ponds nestled high in alpine meadows. Fahrid Vladi in his edited work *Swiss and Alpine Islands* addresses the beauty of islands in Switzerland and the surrounding nations. This work is at its core a book to highlight the visually stunning beauty of these islands and their surroundings. Vladi, who is one part real estate broker, specifically in the area of the purchase and sale of Islands, has compiled this book for two purposes. One, to showcase these islands to potential buyers. Two, to allow the majority of us, those who could never afford to buy an island, the ability to see these properties.

Vladi has selected these islands not just for their beauty, but for his “Checklist of Island buyers.” A Checklist that includes the following criteria: “a temperate climate, full and complete ownership, political stability in the respective country, and the ability to reach medical facilities within 90 minutes” (Page 4). These criteria tell much about the editor as well as the prospective buyers. It is interesting to note what is not on the list of requirements, that of cost. Vladi is obviously catering to the very wealthy. In addition, laws to deter foreigners from purchasing Swiss property are not mentioned in the book at all. Once again the perception is that if needed, or more likely desired, there are possible ways around the laws, with the proper connections and money.

The book dramatically captures the splendor of the islands with many images. Aerial shots enhance the visual splendor of the work, by providing the reader to see the beauty of the island, as well as the surrounding water and inevitable mountains. But aerial shots are

not the only pictures in the book. There are also close-up shots to gain a better appreciation of the diversity of flora and fauna, as well as the architecture on the islands.

Each island has a paragraph telling some of its history and importance, as well as some of the vital facts about the island. Since this is a book predominantly about Switzerland, all captions are in German, English, French and Italian. A great example of the story behind the island is found on page 18 in the description of Schloss Mauensee. This is a small island on Lake Mauensee in Canton Luzern. According to the caption, the owner of the island is a former diplomat, who during one of his mandatory military maneuvers as a young Swiss Army officer “stormed” the island and captured it. He proceeded to fall in love with the island and had it as a goal to eventually purchase it. Finally in 1998, he and his wife were able to purchase the Island. The island and its residence were first mentioned in 1184 in relationship to the nearby monastery of Engelberg (Page 34).

Another example is the island of Werd, located in Canton Thurgau, on Lake Constance. This island is owned by a Franciscan order which moved to the island in 1957. The interesting aspect of this island is that the current wooden bridge is built near a much older stone one. During the Roman occupation of Switzerland, the Romans constructed a 20 foot wide stone bridge, which was completed in 82 A.D. (Page 64). This example highlights again the history that can be gleaned from this book.

Although not a book about Swiss or Swiss American History, *Swiss and Alpine Islands* does provide insight into Swiss life. From the Island that Jean Jacques Rousseau lived on for a part of his life (page 10), to an island in the middle of the Aare River that has been in the same family for five generations (page 60). From the island of Ufenau, an island with a settlement in Texas by the same name (page 48) to the famous Chateau de Chillon, the “most frequently visited historical monument “in Switzerland (page 70). This book is a great look at the beauty and the splendor that is the islands found in the land of Mountains.

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