

SHORT PROJECT DOCUMENTATION

ABOUT



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T I B E T

FROM 18.5.2001 TO 20.4.2002

ON TOP OF MOUNT SAENTIS, SWITZERLAND

Co-Production of

Tibetan Community in Switzerland, Tibetan Youth Association in Europe (VTJE),
Tibetan Women's Association Switzerland (TWAS) and Association Swiss-Tibetan Friendship (GSTF)

SUMMARY

For nearly one year Tibet was present on top of mount Saentis, the highest peak in the north-eastern part of Switzerland, a place visited by more than half a million visitors per year.

The aim was to inform about the political situation of Tibet in a special location, where many people gather, have time and an open mind.

We could reach a large public by means of an exhibition (information posters, photo's, slideshow), gala-dinner and cultural shows, workshops and panel discussions for the public as well as for schools and the publication of a chapter about Tibet in a Saentis publication.

About 100 000 visitors did see the exhibition. More than 1000 persons did write a personal wish for Tibet. The echo in the media was successful, since we had a long contribution in the evening news of the national TV channel, as well as detailed reports in important newspapers.

In remembrance of the arrival of the first Tibetans in Switzerland 40 years ago (1960/61) a special ceremony was held. A commemorative plaque was jointly uncovered by the director of the federal office for refugees and the president of the Tibetan community in Switzerland.

In addition a Choerten (Stupa) built on top of Mount Saentis expresses the gratitude of the Tibetan community in Switzerland towards the Swiss public and government.

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1. MOTIVATION AND OBJECTIVES

How to reach more people and inform them about Tibet? How to reach people, who are not already well informed or even Tibet supporters? **How to reach the ordinary man and woman and raise their awareness about the political situation in Tibet ?**

We should have an opportunity to have an exhibition in a special place, where many people gather, have a bit of time and an open mind. Why not a tourist spot in the mountains ?

On top of Mount Saentis we found such conditions.

The management of the cable train company (Saentis Schwebbahn AG) was very sympathetic towards our project proposal, encouraged us to have a bigger and longer lasting exhibition and gave us a lot of support in form of free transport, manpower and material.

We had the chance to present Tibet as part of an exhibition which was dedicated to the general topic of rescue in mountains. Hence in the context of Tibet we did focus on the fact, that even today Tibetans have to escape as refugees from Tibet.

We wanted to bring the **following messages across**:

- 40 YEARS AGO THE FIRST TIBETAN REFUGEES CAME TO SWITZERLAND. THEY ARE THANKFUL FOR THE ACCEPTANCE IN THE HOST COUNTRY. HENCE A COMMEMORATIVE PLAQUE AND A STUPA AS MEMORIAL SHOULD EXPRESS THIS GRATITUDE PERMANENTLY.
- THE TIBETAN COMMUNITY IN EXILE TRIES TO KEEP ITS RICH CULTURE ALIVE, WHAT AT THE SAME TIME IS AN ENRICHMENT OF THE SWISS MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY
- THE TRAGEDY IS THAT STILL TODAY MANY TIBETANS HAVE TO ESCAPE FROM THEIR COUNTRY, FOR THE SAME REASONS AS 40 YEARS AGO.

HENCE THE TIBETAN ISSUE IS NOT SOLVED YET. HOWEVER THERE ARE CONSTRUCTIVE PROPOSALS FROM TIBETAN SIDE TO START A DIALOGUE WITH THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT. TIBET MIGHT FOLLOW A SIMILAR WAY AS OTHER NATIONS, WHO REGAINED SOVEREIGNTY OR AUTONOMY AFTER A PERIOD OF OPPRESSION.

- EVEN THOUGH TIBET ENJOYS WORLD WIDE SYMPATHIES THERE IS NOT ENOUGH POLITICAL PRESSURE ON AN INTERNATIONAL LEVEL.
- IT IS WORTHWILE TO SUPPORT TIBET AND THERE ARE SEVERAL WAYS TO DO SO

2. LOCATION: MOUNT SAENTIS



Mount Saentis_ is a very well known mountain in the eastern part of Switzerland and with its altitude of 2500 Meter the **highest peak** in the area, called as well the roof of the lake of Constance area.

The top can be reached by a cable railway and was visited last year by more than **half a million visitors**.

40 years ago the **first Tibetan settlements** were in villages **around this mountain**. Still today Tibetans like to visit the beautiful area for a picnic.



3. CO-PRODUCTION AND TEAM WORK

We realised soon that the event would reach such a magnitude, that one organisation alone could not manage it properly.

A group of about 15 Tibetan and Swiss, representing different age groups and the different Tibetan organisations and support groups (see footnote) did work intensively and jointly together.

The preparations did last for 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ years, the exhibition itself had a duration of nearly 1 year.

It was our aim to find mutual understanding among all team members and communicate the progress of the project continuously to the Tibetan community and the representative of His Holiness.

4. 40 YEARS TIBETANS IN SWITZERLAND: OPENING CEREMONY AND COMMEMORATION

On 25.8.2001 - a beautiful summer day with a wonderful view in the mountains - about 300 people gathered for a commemorative ceremony.



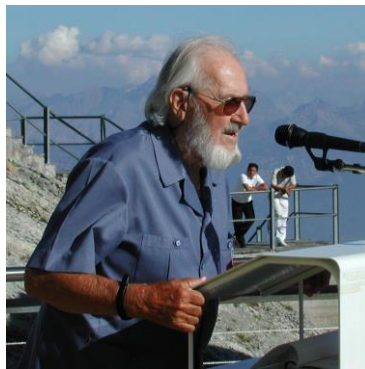
The ceremony started with a prayer



Several speakers highlighted different aspects of the Tibetan cause and summarised the struggle for freedom in the last 40 years. From Tibetan side also gratitude towards the Swiss public and government was expressed



Mr. H. Höhener,
Chairman Sântisbahn AG
gees



Mr. Toni Hagen
'man of the first hour'



Mr. J.D. Gerber
Director, federal office for refu-
gees



Mrs. Koren Chungdak
Representative of H.H. Dalai Lama



Mr. Kalsang Chokteng
President Tibetan Community Switzerland



Mr. Mario Fehr
Member of Parliament

A commemorative stone plaque was uncovered by the federal director
for refugees and the president of the Tibetan community



Text:

Switzerland - as first country in the west - accepted from 1960 onwards 1000 Tibetan refugees. By now more than 2000 Tibetans found here a second home.

*The Tibetan community in Switzerland wants to express its gratitude towards the
Swiss public and government for this generous help.*

25.8.2001

Tibetan Community Switzerland

5. EXHIBITION: ESCAPE FROM TIBET

The exhibition was opened on 17.5.02 in the presence of many Tibetans, representatives of support groups and media staff.



Mr. H. Höhener, Chairman of Sântisbahn AG



Tibetan and Swiss in harmony



In several rooms of the huge building on top of Mount Saentis we could install an exhibition about Tibet, focusing on the fact, that still today Tibetans leave their country or send their children to get a Tibetan education.

- Information posters: Tibet's history and culture
- photos taken by Mr. Erhard Hürsch during his 3 visits to Tibet: showing landscape, people and important sites
- photos taken by Mr. Jay Ullal: showing Lhasa today
- historical photos showing the arrival of the first groups of Tibetans in Switzerland 1960 and 1961
- audio-visual show: 'Escape from Tibet' by Manuel Bauer, who accompanied the girl Yangdol and her father during their escape over the Himalayas
- Poster exhibition: individual biographies showing "The strength of Tibet's women"
- An altar, symbol of the importance of religion for Tibetans and a big thangkha, showing the Potala palace



The large scale photos of Mr. Hürsch



Altar and thangkha



Photos by Jay Ullal show the sad reality of Lhasa today



Escape from Tibet: many spectators were moved a lot



Mr. Manuel Bauer who did accompany Yangdol

6. TIBET DINNERS AND CULTURAL SHOWS

On three Saturday evenings the restaurant on Mount Saentis was fully booked with over 100 guests, mostly Swiss, who did enjoy a splendid Tibetan dinner. Various cultural shows (traditional music, dances and a fashion show, presenting traditional and modern Tibetan dresses) gave a impression of the rich Tibetan culture.



7. WORKSHOP AND PANEL DISCUSSIONS

On 2 Sundays more than one hundred people came on each day to attend the workshops about political topics.

POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES FOR TIBET

We all need hope and a positive outlook from time to time to continue the struggle for Tibet's freedom or autonomy.

We wanted to learn from experiences made by other nationalities, which were suppressed until recently and wanted to draw conclusions for Tibet. The examples of **Lithuania** and **South Tyrol (Italy)** show two different ways and were compared with the ideal of the 'middle way' being the actual strategy envisaged by the Tibetan government in exile.

Participants: Mrs. K. Prunskiene, former President of Lithuania



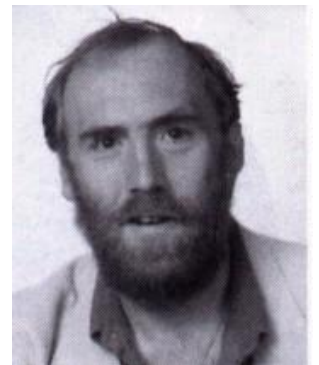
- Mr. G. Cologna, European Academy, representing South-Tyrol, Italy
- Mr. Chhimey Choekyapa, Representative of H.H. the Dalai Lama, Geneva



- Mrs. Ruth Gonseth, Member of Parliament, Switzerland



- Mr. K. Ludwig, Journalist, Germany



For this important meeting we did invite the 2 members of Parliament representing the Tibetans of Europe, Mr. Tsering Dorje and Mr. Sonam Frasi, all Thumey's (elected representatives of the Tibetan settlements in Switzerland) and the presidents of the various Tibet organisations.

The discussions were controversial being a good example of a democratic approach to find a solution.

We were told by several participants that the positive example of other countries gave themselves hope and energy.

TOURISM AND TIBET: THE PROS AND CONS

For many Swiss people the idea of a trip to Tibet remains controversial. Does it any good for the people living in Tibet or does one just finance the Chinese authorities ?

The consensus after the several presentations and a discussion was, that tourists who are well informed about the situation in Tibet can be of benefit for the Tibetan cause.

Participants:

- Mr. Philip Hepp, Tibet Songtsen House, Zurich
- Mr. Uwe Maya, Journalist, Basel
- Mr. Dawa Sigrist, Tibet Culture Trekking Tours, Travel Agency, Zurich
- Mr. A. Lüthi, Globetrotter, Travel Agency, Bern
- Mr. H. Wirth, Swiss Alpine Organisation

8. A CHAPTER IN A SAENTIS BOOK ABOUT TIBET

In the person of the late Gyaltzen Gyaltag we found the most competent author for a comprehensive text about Tibet's history from its beginning until now and the social changes the Tibetans in Switzerland had and still have to face.



G. Gyaltag

This contribution with the title 'Tibet - a nation in between past and future' - became part of a book published by the Saentis Schwebbahn AG in 2001 (Berge und Rettung, Heinrich Kuhn).

9. WORKSHOP FOR SCHOOLS

Several classes did use the opportunity to follow an interactive workshop about Tibet on top of Mount Saentis.

The children could inform themselves with the help of an interactive CD-ROM, listen to Tibetan stories while drinking tea and eating 'Khabse', gain experiences by printing of 'lucky signs' and finally learn a Tibetan dance.





10. CONSTRUCTION AND INAUGURATION OF A CHO-ERTEN (STUPA)

The idea to build a Choerten as part of the activities during the Tibet exhibition came up rather late. Originally it was a request by the Saentisbahn AG to build a typical Tibetan construction as a permanent remembrance. After we had shown them the Stupa next to the Rikon monastery, as an example, they motivated us to initiate the Stupa construction as a separate project and promised the necessary support from their side .

This was an unexpected new challenge for our team. We did see a twofold meaning of this Stupa construction:

- the Stupa will serve as a monument in a prominent place in Switzerland, presented by the Tibetan community, expressing the gratitude of Tibetan people and their good wishes for the new home country
- for the Tibetans themselves it will have a religious meaning. Thus all ritual steps had to be done correctly.



First discussion about Stupa construction. Mr. P. Christen, Engineer and managing director of Saentis Schwebbahn, Pari Rimpoche, Thupten Nyendak and Mrs. Tsering Pelling (TWAS)

Saentisbahn AG did contact representatives of Christian churches in the area and clarified the questions regarding building permission. As site they offered an area next to the top balcony of the building, a

suitable place. They offered free transport of all building materials and took over the engineering work free of cost.

Members of our group took up intensive talks with the abbot of the Rikon monastery as well as with all elected representatives of the Tibetan communities in Switzerland. Both sides did react positively about the proposal and gave their support.

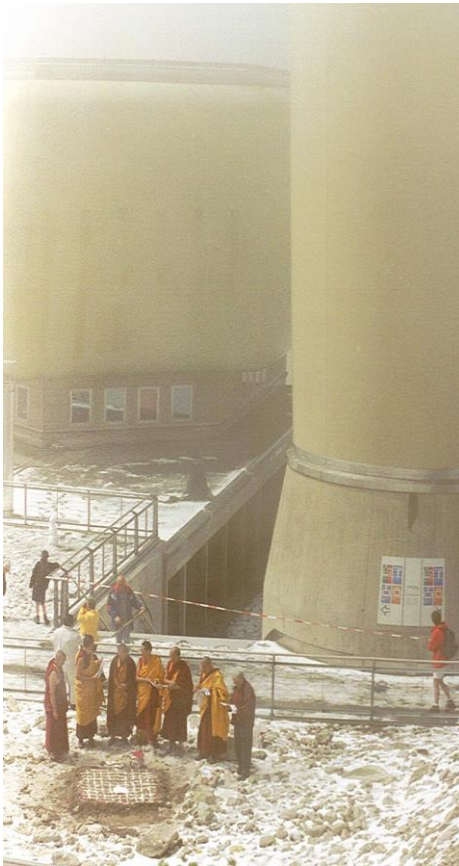
We did contact in writing the private secretary of His Holiness the Dalai Lama Mr. Lobsang Jampa and the abbot of the Namgyal Monastery Jado Rimpoche (both in India) to get advice, how to perform all the necessary rituals correctly and to order the necessary ingredients.

As a result Pari Rimpoche was sent from Dharamsala to lead the preparations and did arrive here in July 2001. He brought a lot of material along with.

As a first step a day long ground blessing ceremony took place on 21.7.2001, a cold, foggy summer day with some snow.



The beginning of the ground blessing ceremony on the future construction site



21.7.02 Ground blessing ceremony



Praying in a nearby building

The technical aspects merit some comments too. Due to the extreme climatic conditions on mount Saentis we had to choose an appropriate material for the construction. Hence we selected not a concrete structure but took a solid natural stone construction (Tessiner Gneis, a stone originating from the southern part of the Swiss Alps), which is so light-coloured, that a white painting would not be necessary.

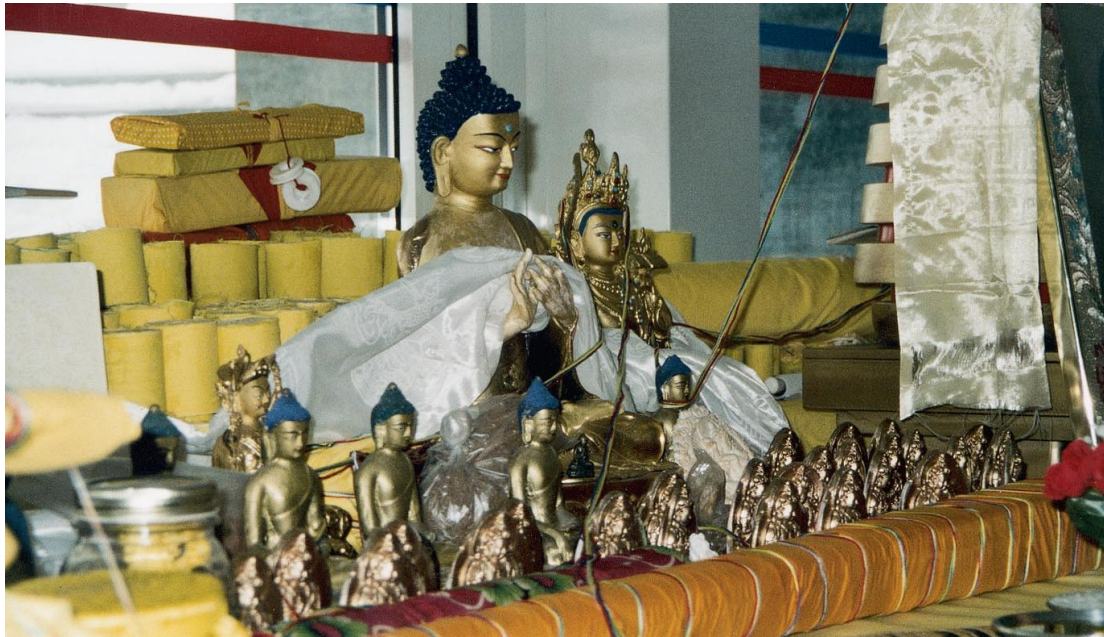
For the same reason we did it without gold decoration outside or a visible Buddha shrine. The stupa became as simple and pure as the traditional ones we know of pictures from rural sites in the Himalayas.

Stonemasons in a nearby stone works were fascinated to prepare the building according to detailed plans (Monastic Institute Rikon). With a total height of about 3.5 meters the overall weight is about 10 tons.

Since this was too heavy to be transported in the cable train the Stupa is made of 6 solid elements of stone. These pieces of the Stupa had to be put together on the summit using a special glue.

For the filling of the stupa we did receive the following materials:

- from His Holiness the Dalai Lama: 2 statues (Avalokiteschvara, Yamantaka), 1 Buddha relic, 2 vases
- bought in India: 5 packages with holy texts
- donated from Tibetans in Switzerland: 24 statues, 20 holy books. Water from Manasarowar, Namtso, Kokonor, Gengitsch. Stone and earth from Samye, Ganden, Drepung, Sera, Varanasi, Boddghaya, Mount Kailash, Cherita and Kuschalnagar. 1 vase filled with gold, silver, copper, pearls, Tibetan 'sii-stone', corals, turquoise and 2 necklaces. 1 pistol and 1 sword.



For the filling of the stupa Pari Rimpoche, the abbot of Rikon monastery accompanied by several monks stayed for a couple of days on Mount Saentis.



On 9.9.2001, a very cold Sunday, a lot of Tibetans and their Swiss friends gathered on Mount Saentis for the inauguration of the Chörten.





11. Echo of the exhibition:

1000 wishes for Tibet and media coverage

Since we did want to inform visitors of the exhibition in an emotional way we wanted to give them as well an opportunity to express their feelings and wishes for Tibet.

Right outside the moving audio-visual show about Yangdol's escape from Tibet people had the chance to write a short statement on a paper. Over the time we did collect more than 1000 wishes, all expressing sympathy and support for the Tibetan cause.

Now these colourful papers are put together on several posters and handed over to the Tibetan community in Rikon with the hope, that they may have an encouraging influence in their new meeting room and Tibetan school.

The media coverage about the exhibition was very good. The opening ceremony was the topic in a longer report in the Saturday evening news program of the Swiss TV. A good summary was given about the background of the arrival of the first Tibetans 40 years ago.

Regional radio stations did send short reports about the events. Several national and regional newspapers wrote comprehensive articles too.

Unfortunately some members of fundamentalist Christian groups expressed criticism about the Stupa construction. However in a discussion with them, organised by the Saentisbahn AG on 24.4.2002, we could explain them, that from Tibetan side there is no missionary attitude behind. For the Saentisbahn, who will continue the exchange of ideas with this group, the stupa fits to their ideal of a mountain summit, where people of various background and nationality can meet.

12. FINANCES

- Exhibition and Events:

-	total income	from sponsors	52 000.- Fr.	(35 000 US\$)
		donations	1 850.- Fr.	(1 250 US\$)
		tickets	<u>9 500.- Fr.</u>	(6 300 US\$)
			63 000.- Fr.	(42 000 US\$)
-	total expenses		73 000.- Fr.	(48 500 US\$)
	DEFICIT		10 000.- Fr.	(6 500 US\$)

Through new activities (selling Momo's, organising parties, selling left over merchandising goods) we could reduce this deficit in the meantime.

- Choerten (Stupa) construction

-	income	donations	35 000.- Fr.	(23 300 US\$)
	expenses		45 000.- Fr.	(30 000 US\$)
	DEFICIT		10 000.- Fr.	(6 500 US\$)

The massive stone construction, necessary for the above mentioned climatic conditions, made the Choerten about one third more expensive than initially calculated.

A new collection of donations is under way.

13. OUTLOOK

The intensive and successful co-operation with the Saentisbahn AG and the development of skills in our team give a basis for new Tibet related activities on Mount Saentis in future.

We think of regular annual events like:

- Tibetan picnic
- 'Summit' - talk about political issues related to Tibet
- Creation of an new event, that attracts many Swiss people and would have a link to Tibet, for example a 'Tibet Mountain Marathon'
- Religious festival



Mount Saentis in Winter

Hans Gammeter

09.10.2002

Coordinator 'Tibet auf dem Säntis'

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