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Media Information – Customs and Traditions.

A fascinating overview: a living heritage, time-honoured ceremonies, historical events.

A RICH PAST – PART OF THE PRESENT

Every year, the Appenzellerland celebrates over 31 high days and holidays. The innumerable official feast days, both traditional and ecclesiastical, symbolise the turbulent history of this tiny land in north-east Switzerland. Fierce battles to stave off hostile forces, famine, and religious disputes, all have left visible traces in the culture and folk-memory of this hill country.

The Appenzellers bear these traces inwardly and outwardly in their traditions and customs. In full skirt, old-fashioned jewellery and shawl, girls and women dance to the music of the string quintets at the «Stobete». In no other region is everyday life so steeped in its historical culture. All year round, the little population of these green hills celebrates or commemorates happy and tragic moments in the lives of their forefathers and great-grandmothers.

Bells on a golden ribbon.

In many places, skilled craftsmen are still busily occupied in trades that have long since died out elsewhere: bell-saddlers, goldsmiths, shingle-makers, for instance. Again and again, lovers of the great cast cowbells, traditional jewellery or simple wooden utensils travel thousands of miles to buy the unique pieces of art produced in Appenzell. For instance, Roger Dörig from the Innerrhoden capital of Appenzell is a genuine bell-saddler. He demonstrates to visitors the dexterity required to make belts, braces and bell-collars showing off his tincraft. Using fine strips of dyed kidskin parchment only 3 millimetres wide, Roger Dörig takes 10 to 12 hours to embroider a pattern in the leather, thus making sure that the cattle-drives continue to be as bright and beautiful as ever, now and in the future.

Marching up to the Alp in a procession.

The juicy Alpine grass is enticing. Naturally there is also a colourful celebration when animals and people “go up” to the Alp. From the middle of May onwards the Alpine dairymen wear their traditional costumes on the long march up to the mountains. The Alpine cattle drive is almost always led by a boy in traditional herdsman’s costume. Behind him trots an Appenzeller goat, which is white and has no horns. This keeps a girl in children’s costume on her toes – they are followed by a dairyman in festive costume with yellow leather knee-length trousers, a red cloth waistcoat, a black hat decorated with flowers and ribbons, braces with metal decorations, white knee socks and dairyman’s jewellery. On the left shoulder he will carry a richly decorated bucket. He will be accompanied by the three best-looking cows, which sway the large cow bells with decorated straps from side to side making a deafening noise. Four dairymen march in front of the rest of the herd. The horse-drawn carts with the equipment for the Alp and the pigs bring up the rear together with the farmers and the Appenzeller brass band.

The hills are alive ...

The serenity of life on the summer pastures is interrupted only briefly. Following a time-honoured ritual, the herdsmen on some Alpine pastures close the day by singing out a prayer, the «Betruf». A welcome break in the monotonous life on the Alpine pastures is the «Stobete». The mountain inns resound with the full range of the internationally acclaimed Appenzell folk music: yodelling, «Talerschwingen» (coin-spinning in a pottery bowl), «Schölleschötte» (rhythmically swinging the three great cowbells) and original Appenzell string quintets with «Hackbrett» (hammered dulcimer), double bass, cello and two violins – and sometimes an accordion. Men and women in their local costumes can also be seen dancing to traditional melodies. Johannes Fuchs from Appenzell, nicknamed «Chlinn Fochsli» (Little Fox) is a renowned maker and player of the hammered dulcimer. He is a consummate performer on this instrument, which originated in the Orient, and plays folk music extempore.

Finery for a fine occasion.

On Corpus Christi Thursday, ten days after Whitsun (Pentecost), the Catholics of Innerrhoden celebrate their most important day, «Ösehegottstag». The brightly coloured procession carrying the

host in its monstrance includes a large group of women in their traditional Sunday costumes, a dress of unparalleled dignity and ceremonial elegance. These costumes are particularly noteworthy for the extremely fine hand-embroidery.

Bernadette Nef from Contebad is one of the few traditional costume dressmakers in Appenzell Innerrhoden. She has been making countless items of the elaborate women's traditional costumes by hand for approximately 34 years. She learnt the handicraft from her grandmother, who also made traditional costumes. A representative collection of costumes from Innerrhoden and items embroidered by hand from Appenzell can be viewed in the Appenzell Museum.

Who is the fairest in the land?

Women occupy an extraordinary position in the Appenzellerland. Legend has it that six hundred years ago, they bravely leapt to the aid of their menfolk, who were being driven into retreat at the battle of the Stoss. The women realized the severity of the situation and rushed into the fray with their pots and pans and kitchen utensils. This produced such a din that the Austrians fled. Another source of amazement is that the women of Innerrhoden were not granted the vote until 1990.

There are even beauty contests in Appenzell, though of a different kind. Every autumn, cows and bulls are groomed with lots of tender loving care, to be paraded at the many cattle shows held in various parishes. The aim of these competitions is to take home the fairest in the land at the end of the day. See and be seen, that is the motto at these events.

«Dewiisli» – a Christmas tree decoration.

The number of Christmas traditions is particularly high in Appenzell Innerhoden. Food such as «Chlausebickli», «Räuchle», «Filebrood» or «Dewiisli» sound exotic. «Dewiisli» are dainty images made from flour dough, which can vary in shape and relief. «Dewiisli» are now also modelled by hand or sprinkled with sugar. The subjects are representations of people, scenes from everyday life, all kinds of animals and flowers. The contours of the pictures stand out more because of the drawing. Hardly anyone from Appenzell can bear to eat something so enchanting and they therefore tend to be used as Christmas tree decorations or as part of the «Chlausezüüg». The «Dewiisli» are moving because the images feature mottos, known as slogans (Devisen).

Making the money go round: «Talerschwingen».

«Talerschwingen» usually accompanies the natural yodel for several voices, the «Zäuerli» or «Ruggusseli», sung a cappella. A coin is flicked against the inside of a conical milk bowl held on one hand. Rotating movements of the lower arm keep the coin revolving along the inner edge of the bowl, thus producing a humming sound. Today, the former milk bowls are no longer used as cream containers but are produced solely for musical purposes. Eastern Swiss yodlers generally use a set of three bowls of different sizes and capacity.

Hierig – the path of true love never runs smooth.

The highlight of a «Stobete», the herdsmen's Alpine ball, is the dance called the «Hierig». This very special and extremely expressive dance has survived in Appenzell Innerrhoden. The Hierig is a love story played out as a dramatic, intricate dance to be performed by a couple before an audience. The origin of the Hierig dates back to the end of the 18th century. The name means «e Hiesigs» (= someone from here). The dance consists of ten phases. The partners first have a lovers' spat, tease and mock each other, then are tenderly and respectfully reconciled, according to the motto: «The path of true love never runs smooth».

From cave bears to torture chamber: Appenzell Museum.

In the Cantonal Museum of Appenzell Innerrhoden the wide range of culture and history from Innerrhoden is presented in two impressive buildings: Haus Buherre Hanisefs (a former owner was the son of the building director = Buherr Hanisef) and the town hall (built 1560–1562).

The exhibition pieces focus in particular on the culture and customs of the Appenzellerland. For example it is possible to admire items embroidered by hand, works featuring farm and furniture painting, traditional handicraft and folklore items. The collection of traditional costumes is particularly magnificent, displaying the richly decorated festive costumes from Appenzell.

Finds from the Wildkirchlihöhle such as the skull of the enormous cave bear weighing up to a tonne or the skull of a brown bear discovered recently in another cave in the Alpstein – the animal emblem of the Canton – provide evidence of the prehistory of the Appenzellerland. A glance in the prison cell and the torture chamber, which was last used for the execution of the 18 year-old robber and murderer Anna Koch from Conten in 1849, gives you goose bumps. Another highlight of the Museum is the collection of coins from Appenzell.

Museums in the Appenzellerland.

Museum Appenzell	Appenzell	www.museum.ai.ch
Kunstmuseum Appenzell (art museum)	Appenzell	www.kunstmuseumappenzell.ch
Kunsthalle Ziegelhütte (art gallery)	Appenzell	www.kunsthalleziegelhuetten.ch

Note to editors.

Current image materials can be ordered from Appenzellerland Tourismus AI. Please contact us if you require further information:

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