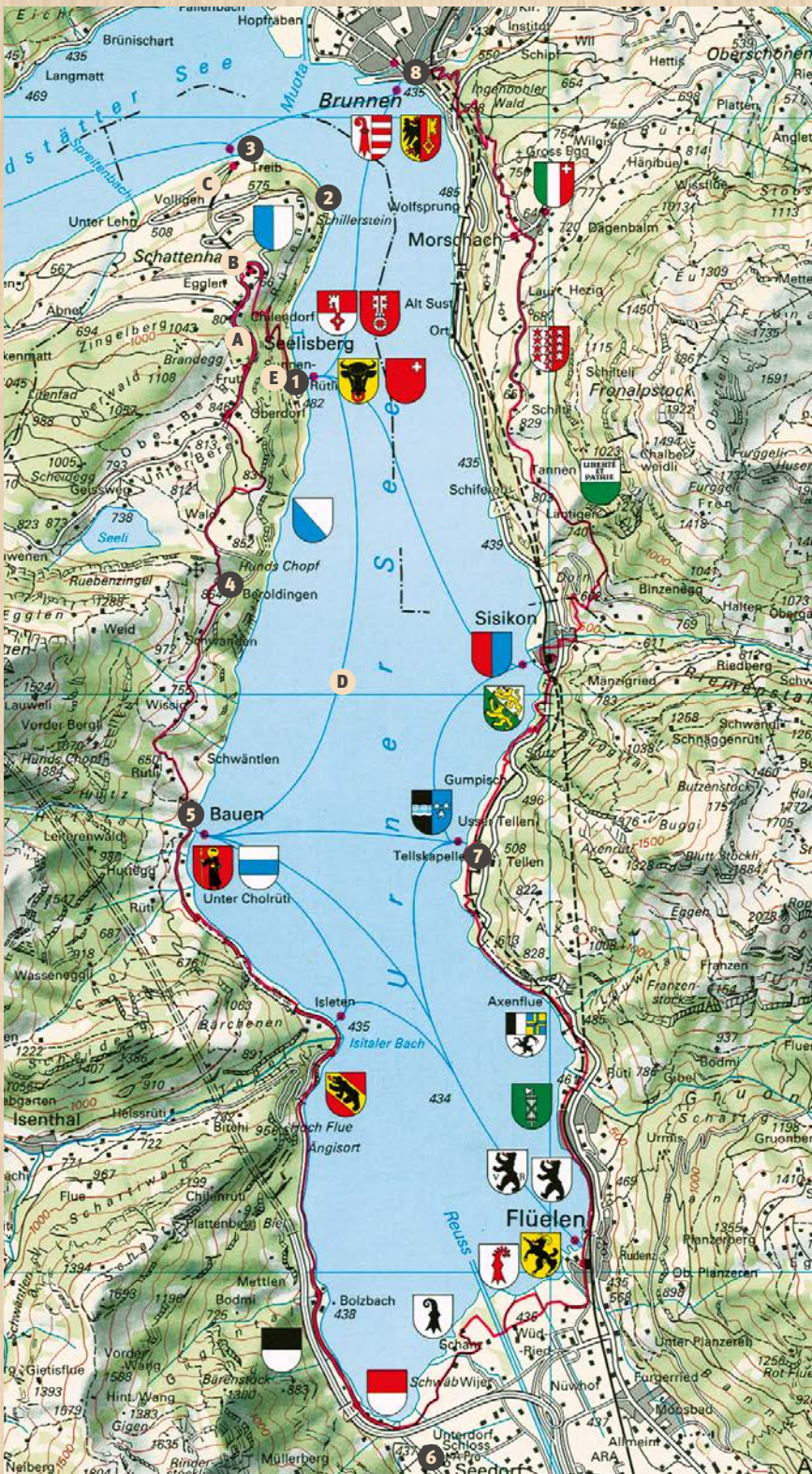


# Fascination of Lake Uri

## Homeland hike on «The Swiss Path»



— The Swiss Path



# History along the Swiss Path

## 1 Rütli

The Rütli Meadow is considered to be the birthplace of the Swiss Confederation. Here, below Seelisberg, in a clearing slightly above Lake Uri on the opposite side of the lake from Brunnen and the Mythen mountains, is where representatives from the three founding cantons – Uri, Schwyz and Nidwalden – are said to have met on August 1, 1291 amidst continuing Habsburg repression to sign a pact of eternal mutual defence (the Rütli Oath), thereby laying the foundation of the Swiss Confederation as it stands today: “We want to be a band of brothers, sticking together through thick and thin!”. Over the years the Rütli has come to be seen as the national cradle of Switzerland. The meadow was purchased with the aid of a collection by schoolchildren in 1859 in order to protect it from proposed hotel building and subsequently donated to the state with the proviso that it should remain sacrosanct. The Rütli these days is a peaceful sanctuary on the lake. Nearby is the little Memo Museum commemorating Swiss history, an efficient restaurant, three springs and a large picnicking area. The Rütli is car-free and can be accessed only by boat or on foot via the Swiss Path from Seelisberg or Treib (walking time: one hour).

## 2 Schillerstein

A 30 meters tall obelisk-shaped boulder can be seen emerging from the water at the entrance to Lake Uri. Also known as the “Stone of Myths”, this rock was originally one third taller but had to be shortened for safety reasons. In 1859, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the birth of Friedrich Schiller – author of the drama Wilhelm Tell first premiered in 1804 in Weimar, Germany – Switzerland’s founding cantons decided that it should become a natural monument and renamed it “Schillerstein” (Schiller Stone). It bears the inscription (in German): “To the singer of Tell/F. Schiller/The Founding Cantons/1859”. The Schillerstein cannot be reached by land, but is a stirring sight seen from the boat between Brunnen and the Rütli.

## 3 Haus zur Treib

Treib has long had a harbour to protect lakefarers from the southerly winds (known here as the “Föhn”) that can whip up a storm on Lake Uri. First mentioned in 1482, the Haus zur Treib was the house in which the five-canton confederation held 72 sittings. The meeting room still forms part of the Haus zur Treib, now a hotel open to the public. The building has been sympathetically renovated over the years, most recently in 1982, and can be reached by boat, via the Treib-Seelisberg funicular railway or by car from Seelisberg.

## 4 Beroldingen Castle

This little castle is on the old mule track that led from Lucerne via Seelisberg to Altdorf. Located on the Swiss Path at the southern end of the village, first mention of it is made in documents dated 1500. It was the ancestral seat of the Beroldingen line of nobles, who for centuries held sway in the Uri valley. Yet this is no fortress: rather, it is a charming country residence with exquisite views of Lake Uri and the Reuss Valley. Hugely appealing is the chapel dedicated to St. Laurence, which was added in 1545. Its winged altar, choir screen and ceiling decorated with Rococo stucco plasterwork are well worth a visit. Beroldingen Castle can be reached on foot in 30 minutes from the upper reaches of Seelisberg village (bus stop: Tanzplatz).

## 5 Father Alberik Zwyssig

A memorial to Father Alberik Zwyssig (composer of the national anthem) stands right in front of the church in Bauen. Born in 1808 in this sun-kissed village on the shores of Lake Uri, Father Zwyssig composed Switzerland’s national anthem “When the morning skies grow red”. Bauen can be reached by boat, or by car taking the lakeside road from Flüelen via Seedorf and Isleten.

## 6 A Pro Castle

This castle-like edifice (whose moat today teems with trout!) was built in 1556. The nobility whose seat it was amassed prestige and wealth by trading in cereals and wine and participating in wars. This little castle is today home to the Uri Mineral Museum and is used by the canton’s government for prestigious meetings and assemblies. It lies at the northern end of the village of Seedorf, right by the motorway flyover and not far from the Swiss Path. It is easily reached by car or bus from Altdorf.

## 7 Tell’s Chapel

Legend has it that William Tell saved himself by leaping out of Bailiff Gessler’s boat in this corner of Lake Uri. A chapel was in existence here as early as 1388. The present-day chapel dates from 1879/80 and is decorated with four marvellous frescoes by Basel-born painter Ernst Stückelberg depicting the Tell myth, namely “The Rütli Oath”, “Shooting the Apple”, “Tell’s Leap” and “The Death of Gessler in the Hohle Gasse”. Just above the chapel is Switzerland’s biggest carillon: built in 2001, it plays one of a number of melodies every hour on the hour. Tell’s chapel can be reached by boat or on foot from the car park of Hotel Tellsplatte, which is on the Axenstrasse.

## 8 The Federal Chapel, Brunnen

Once the solemn pact, sworn in 1291 on the Rütli Meadow between the three founding cantons Uri, Schwyz and Nidwalden, had proved its worth in the Battle of Morgarten, the cantons gathered in Brunnen in 1315 to renew their oath of mutual assistance against foreign interference. From now on they called themselves “Confederates”. The village chapel in Brunnen, also known as the Federal Chapel, stands on the very spot where this second oath is said to have been sworn. It is located right by Brunnen’s landing stage and bus stop and is some seven minutes north of the railway station on the main street.

## The Legend of William Tell

With the receipt of an imperial charter in 1231, Uri was immediately placed under the emperor. The area of what is today central Switzerland had acquired political and economic importance with the opening of the Gotthard Pass at the beginning of the 13th century. Thus, both the dukes of Habsburg and the emperor wanted to increase their influence in Uri. Towards the end of the century, the Habsburgs were sent to the central cantons as governors appointed by the emperor with the objective of oppressing the population.

Governor Hermann Gessler decided to test the allegiance of the people of Uri. He had a pole erected in the square of Altdorf with a Habsburg hat on top and ordered everyone who passed to doff their hats to it as a sign of respect.

William Tell and his son Walter from Bürglen walked heedlessly past the hat – an act for which Tell was severely punished. He was ordered by the governor to shoot an apple off the head of his own son with a crossbow. The shot was true, and the arrow pierced the apple.

Gessler did not miss the fact that Tell had placed two arrows in his quiver and asked the reason for this. Tell responded angrily that if his shot had missed the apple and hit his son, he would have used the second arrow to shoot Gessler.

For this bold answer, Tell was put in chains and taken to Gessler’s boat in Flüelen, in order to then be taken to the fort at Küsnacht for life imprisonment. Just as the boat got underway, a violent storm broke over the lake and the boat

threatened to capsize. Gessler and his men recognized that they were in a life-threatening situation. They released Tell, who was just as renowned as a helmsman as a marksman, from his chains in order to be able to hold the boat on course. His sole objective was to reach the rock ledge on the Axen, with which he was so familiar. He steered the boat to the shore, seized his crossbow, jumped to the rock and gave the boat a mighty shove back out into the wind-whipped waters.

Tell hurriedly took the shortest way to the “Hohle Gasse”, near Küsnacht, where he found and shot the tyrannical governor Gessler with the second arrow which he had hidden in his quiver in Altdorf.

News of Tell’s act quickly spread through the entire country and

strengthened the freedom and independence movement in the three original cantons in Switzerland.

