

The connection between Google and Switzerland began in 2006, when the search engine giant bought a Swiss company, Endoxon. Founded in 1988 by two brothers, Stefan and Bruno Muff, the business was a pioneer in digitizing the world's maps. Inspired by the graphic capabilities of the Apple computer, Endoxon started its radical digitization process by first mapping the Muff brothers' hometown, Lucerne, and its surroundings, Mount Pilatus and Mount Rigi. Google bought Endoxon's database of digital maps, its ability to process and create these maps, and its mobile division.

According to cartography experts around the world, Swiss topographic mapping capability is a symbol of institutional and historic excellence. Map reading is taught in schools, instilling residents with an appreciation for maps and the necessary skills to put them to good use. The Institute of Cartography at the ETH Zurich is the oldest university institute for cartography in the world. Experts who wrote the standard textbooks in the field, such as Professor Eduard Imhof and Professor Ernst Spiess, founded the group. By the 1970s, this research group was already at the forefront of computer-aided cartography, a basis for the digital maps of today.

For the Love of the Land

Following in the footsteps of these masters, Bruno Muff and his brother built a company that created a map database unrivaled by any other – and Google wanted it. Muff may still look like a programmer, with glasses, a soft way of speaking, and tussled hair, but nowadays, he has switched professions, working as a farmer. As the owner of Haldihof, an organic farm, he makes 300 different products from the harvest of 500 fruit trees and the produce from 10 partnering farms. Located near idyllic Mount Rigi, the Haldihof could not be more different from the Google complex in Zurich. The property is overrun with furry chickens, curious llamas, and a pair of peacocks. Coffee is self-serve in a little wooden shop – where at other times, executives from Coop and Globus sample the products they would like to distribute in their stores. The soaps, fragrances, liquors, vinegars, condiments, and preserves manufactured on the premises have made their way to supermarkets and department stores all over Switzerland. The secret to Haldihof's success may be in its attention to detail and its unyielding standard for quality that marks all of its products.

Looking out over shimmering Lake Lucerne, Muff says "I like this work. It's the best place in the world." It's here that he was able to realize his first dream of building a company. Now, he has grounded his new dream again in the area around Mount Rigi, which has provided him consistently with inspiration, ideas, and a feeling of belonging. This love of the land is what drove him to study maps in the first place. Herein perhaps lies the real power behind Swiss cartography. Technology, know-how, attention to detail, and intelligence may be a part of the truth, but the secret: a Swiss longing and desire to be in – and understand – their mountains and land.



Bruno Muff and Haldihof.

DAY TRIP TO HALDIHOF

The Haldihof farm with its idyllic location on the shores of Lake Lucerne makes for a beautiful and relaxing day trip from Zurich. The small farm café is the perfect spot to unwind and get lost in the gorgeous views. In the small farm shop, visitors have the choice of the many products manufactured on site.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Haldihof
Halde, Weggis.
» www.haldihof.ch

Opening hours:

Shop: Mon. – Sat. 8 am – 7 pm.

Café: Mon. – Sun. 8 am – 8 pm.

HOW TO GET THERE

The fastest way (ca. 1 h 20 mins) is to take the train from Zurich to Küssnacht am Rigi, changing trains in Arth-Goldau, then board bus no. 2 in direction Schwyz. Get off at "Weggis, Langenzihl," and walk in the direction of travel. Take the second small street to the right (the first is just a country lane). For train schedules and connections, check:

» www.sbb.ch

For directions with Google Maps, search for "Halde, Weggis."