

## **“Silicon Valley: Meet the Swiss”**

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About once every five years I travel in Europe, primarily Germany. When I do I visit my nephew Rolf and his family in Switzerland. Rolf and his spouse are German by birth but found jobs as teachers in a village near Interlaken ("City between the Lakes"). After their twins were born, Rolf and Kerstin acquired dual citizenship. In his student days, Rolf spent a summer with my family on California's central coast, where he and our three boys (his cousins once removed) developed lasting friendships.

Recently Rolf and family traveled to the U.S. with the goal of visiting all three of Rolf's cousins, two of whom live in California and work in Silicon-Valley-type tech companies. Since the family wouldn't have time to visit Wyoming I traveled to California to greet Rolf and family. While there we made the acquaintance of a scientist who performs sleep studies at NASAAMES Research Center. Erin offered to take us on a tour, which included first getting from Livermore to Mountain View, a two-hour drive in heavy traffic. Located on Moffett Field, formerly in Mountain View, the Research Center has become part of the town of Silicon Valley.

"I avoid driving to work when I can," Eri said, explaining that she bikes from her home to the commuter-train station, a nine-mile bike ride, and again from the station to her work place at Moffett Field.

The tour was impressive. We were able to touch the space suits worn by the original astronauts and viewed the packages of the freeze-dried food they imbibed while in space. We learned of NASA core competencies in Aerosciences, Advanced Computing and IT Systems, Air Traffic Management, Astrobiology and Life Sciences, and so forth.

"I'd be great if you could join use for lunch," I said. "Though you may not be able to take off that much time."

"No worries," she said. "I work odd hours. Was on the computer at 6 AM this morning, monitoring my clients in the sleep center. Most of them are pilots, you know. We monitor their sleep patterns, stress levels, propensity to drowsiness, and so on."

Erin directed us to a cafe at a small lake. "The Google contingent comes here," she said, referring to the workforce of the nearby company. "You'll see them on

their bikes, very distinctive colors, yellow and green." We soon saw them arrive in droves.

Corporate bike fleets have become popular on the sprawling campuses of Facebook and others, she said. Even Apple has campus bikes. None, however, are as flashy as the Google ones, which are produced and repaired on site. As we ate Erin explained that she had been in Switzerland recently on work-related matters. "My Swiss colleagues were wonderful," she said. "We put in regular workdays but still they found the time to show us around, from Interlaken to Zurich to Basel."

When Erin took her leave, she embraced Rolf and Kirsten in the manner of the French, which the Swiss tend to emulate. It involves pressing your cheek three times against that of the leave-taker, alternating right, left, right in a show of air-kissing each other. It's a custom quite unlike anything I've seen in the States. As for myself, I simply hugged Erin good-bye. True, I lived in Paris, France, as a young woman; while there, I embraced acquaintances similarly--but that was a long time ago. In California I enjoyed taking in the unexpected ritual.

Rolf and family are off to Texas now, to be with my oldest son. While there they hope to make a stop at the Houston Space Center, which Erin assured them is spectacular--much bigger than the NASA AMES, she said, having been there herself. I hear it is up and running again despite recent hurricane damage to the city. By the time they get there I'll be on my return leg to Wyoming.