

## MAP DEVELOPER EXCHANGE—REVIEW

### GETTING BACK TO NORMAL (OR BETTER: DIFFERENT)

In one of the first editions of this newspaper we had an interview with Simon Dellenbach and Jon Curtis. Both are developers in the IPG ICP Product Line Group. They exchanged their lives for a one-year experience in the other ones home, country and office. You can get to the first article here: <https://share.autodesk.com/sites/CH/Documents/NewspaperOurSwissTimesJuly2012.pdf>

Now it's time for a review of what has happened to them and how they feel after that. Our Swiss Times (OST) again had a few questions and here are their answers.

#### OST: How was the end of your exchange?

**Simon:** We originally planned to stay a little longer and have another trip to the east coast in June, but instead decided to come back to Switzerland in April to prepare for the birth of our daughter (so she's partially a Californian baby ;).

It was a goodbye with mixed feelings, because we enjoyed our stay very much, made good friends and wanted to see more of the United States, but we also missed our family and were looking forward to seeing them again.

In the last few weeks, we were packing our whole life into four suitcases (with 23kg weight limit), which got a bit stressful: It turned out that we acquired too much stuff even for a temporary stay, so we gave away what we couldn't take with us.

**Jon:** After the work visa of one year, we had planned my US sabbatical, for an additional 6 weeks in Europe. It made for an emotional roller coaster. We were sad to be going, saying goodbye to all our friends in the office and in my chorus. But at the same time we had something to look forward to – a 7 week bicycle tour through France.

But putting the sabbatical in the middle had a big impact on our re-entry to the US. First, after spending a year struggling with two German languages, we would spend our final weeks brushing up on our limited French. Then weeks of cycling in less than ideal weather, with the late spring, rains and flooding, and topping it off with a heat wave as we approached Switzerland and returned to Bern.

It is one thing to return back to work after a sabbatical, but quite another when you add to that a re-entry after a year abroad. It took weeks to remember the locations of things we had packed away around the house. And though we had come back after a year without a car, with a commitment to not slump back into the US car habit – we quickly discovered that things around the US are considerably further apart than in Switzerland.

Our 'local' grocery store here in California is about the distance from Gümligen to Bern's West Side Mall, and there's no public transportation available to get there.

#### OST: Will/Do you miss your exchange country? If so, what especially?

**Simon:** Yes, absolutely. We will miss nature and the sea. Even though we have travelled a lot, we have not seen everything we wanted to.

And we miss the California weather, especially now that Swiss fall is getting cold and wet. My wife also misses the great opportunities to take dancing classes with the best tribal belly dancers in the world.

**Jon:** We do miss Switzerland very much. At the top of our list is the better cycling conditions, and the walking trails that go almost everywhere. It took a while for us to adjust to the multicultural and multi-language environment of Switzerland, but now we find ourselves missing the variety and mix of so many people.



Looking back, we realize that we didn't really act like "residents" of Switzerland. Besides not knowing the language, not being able to participate in the politics, or even read the newspapers – we didn't spend the year in a resident's mode.

In most places we have lived, including San Francisco, we have yet to visit many of the usual tourist sites – thinking that we will get there

"someday", or only visiting when we have guests visiting us.

But knowing that we only had one year in Europe, we planned our time very carefully, filling almost every day off with some kind of travel, cycling, museum, or event. We don't act that way at home. As we look back over the year, it turned out that we were acting more like tourists the whole time. And, even after a year, there's still so much more to see.



#### OST: What's the first/last thing you do in the country you're leaving/joining?

**Simon:** We had a few BBQs with friends. Thanks to Jon for providing the Pro Grill Equipment. :) Back in Switzerland, on our way home to Gümligen from the airport, we stopped at a fuel shop along the A1 to pick up: Ovomaltine, Rivella, canned Ravioli from Migros and some fresh bread rolls.

The culture shock coming back struck us way more than the differences we experienced a year ago: On the narrow freeways, I felt like everybody was driving aggressively and the next day in Bern,

☞ Continued on next page

## MAP DEVELOPER EXCHANGE (CONTINUED)

the hectic commuters appeared to us like an impatient bunch of jerks, willing to push over a 9 months pregnant woman just to get into the bus half a second earlier

**Jon:** I had hoped to swim in the Aare, but chickened out, as it was still a little too cold, and we had too much packing to take care of in our final days after the bike tour. But our favorite final experience was having dinner with the Gümligen office ex-pats, and hanging out one last time at Turnhalle. The office ex-pats were a wonderful support group throughout the year.

My chorus friendships never quite developed as much as we had hoped. But it made all the difference to have a group of people that helped us to experience a Via Ferrata, rising before dawn for an Onion Festival, and hanging out in the pouring rain at a German Wine Festival.

The first things we did back in the US mostly have to do with no longer living in a Swiss apartment. It was a nice enough place, and the location near the office was excellent. However, upon return-

ing to our home we got to: Work in the yard. Crank up the TV really loud late at night. Wheel our bicycles out of the garage, instead of up/down a flight of stairs. Weed the garden. Talk with the neighbors (in English). Pick and eat fruit from our trees. And BBQ.

**OST: How different was the work atmosphere?**

**Simon:** Well, due to office remodelling at 3950 Civic Center Drive in San Rafael, I went from single office, to cubicles (in another office building during said remodelling) to an open floor plan. Since it is a rather large open area most people were not used to, it could get quite noisy sometimes. But at least, I would see my co-workers every day, instead of just once a week. ;) With regards to my team members, I hadn't worked closely with most of them before. It was great to finally meet them in person and I learned a lot from them. And I think they also learned a lot of Topobase from me.

**Jon:** I really loved the Gümligen office. There is a

great feeling of camaraderie and the management is well organized and involved in the morale and life of the teams.

Even though I rarely got in on time, it was neat to see the group having their morning break together, and the custom of bringing in treats on birthdays. I'll miss Martyn's automated pizza orders, and hearing about Freddy's morning commute – via some mountain ski run. BonApp, Durums, and Migros takeout. There is a greater sense of teamwork and a collective desire to make the office a “Great Place to Work” in Switzerland.

**OST: What last words you'd like to say to your co-workers about the experience you had?**

**Simon:** This exchange year was one if not the best experience in our lives so far. We'd certainly do it again and plan to go back for a month or two, combined with vacation.

**Jon:** My wife and I both agree that it was a fantastic experience and one that we are so grateful to have had. Switzerland is a beautiful country

with so many wonderful customs and festivals. We felt safe, not only bicycling, but just out walking and riding the trains, being out late at night. We are so grateful to Autodesk for making the year possible, and getting to know the team in Gümligen will be a great benefit as we continue to create cool software together.

And finally, we'll share a photo of our last bike ride through Switzerland. In the Swiss times last year, we were on one of our first bicycle trips, down the Rhine. In the final days of our tour through France we returned to Switzerland along that same stretch of the Rhine. Comparing the two photos shows that we completely re-outfitted the bicycle for touring this past year. It took most of the year to find and test the right pannier system for our custom tandem. But it was necessary to give up the trailer, in order to travel the sometimes narrower and rougher bike paths of France and Switzerland. And, I think we also look a bit happier and healthier as well!

-Simon Freihart



Jon and Mary Carol



Melanie and Simon