



International Boundary Study

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France – Switzerland Boundary

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INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY STUDY

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FRANCE - SWITZERLAND BOUNDARY

I. BACKGROUND

The Franco - Swiss boundary represents, for the most part, the historical limits of Burgundy and Savoy on one hand and the (medieval) Bishopric of Basle and the principalities of Neuchatel, Vaud, Geneva, and Valais on the other.

The Treaty of Paris, May 30, 1814, and its subsequent declaration (1815), convention (1818) and procés verbal (1824) established definitively the current alignment of the newly-neutralized and constituted Swiss Confederation. With the exception of a small exchange of territory in the Vallée des Dappes in 1862, the 1814 boundary remained valid for almost 140 years.

On February 25, 1953, France and Switzerland signed three conventions affecting their mutual boundary:

- a) Convention on Minor Modifications of the Frontier
- b) Convention on Minor Modifications of the frontier along French National Route 206
- c) Convention of the Determination of the Frontier in Lake Geneva

The first and third of these conventions entered into force on September 10, 1957 while the second has not yet become operative. The first convention made fourteen minor adjustments in the extreme north. Of the changes two are between the canton of Solothurn and the department of Haut-Rhin; one is between Bern and Haut-Rhin; ten are between Bern and the territory of Belfort; and one is between Bern and Doubs.

The third convention changed the principle used for the establishment of the Lake Geneva boundary from a median line to a series of straight lines approximating the original median line.

II. TREATIES

The following treaties conventions, and agreements serve as the basis for the modern Franco - Swiss boundary:

A. Definitive Treaty of Peace between Great Britain, Austria, Portugal, Prussia, Russia, Spain, Sweden and France signed at Paris on May 20, 1814. This treaty recognized the independence of the Swiss Confederation with boundaries substantially as at present.

B. Declaration of the 8 Powers on the Affairs of the Helvetic Confederacy signed at

Vienna on March 20, 1815. The Vallée des Dappes was given to Switzerland by the declaration. The Treaty (of the Congress) of Vienna (June 9, 1815) incorporated many of the provisions of the Declaration.

- C. **Boundary Convention** signed at Bern on July 9, 1818, delimited the questionable sectors of the boundary in detail.
- D. **Procès Verbal between the Commissioners of France, Switzerland, and Neuchatel for the demarcation of the frontier between France and Neuchatel** signed at Neuchatel, November 4, 1824. This action completed the process begun 10 years before.
- E. **Treaty between France and Switzerland, relative to an Exchange of Territory in the Vallée des Dappes** signed at Bern, on December 8, 1862. The strategic route through Vallée des Dappes, long a source of irritation between the two states, was ceded to France in exchange for a like area immediately to the north. Slightly less than 3 square miles of territory (746.5 hectares) were involved.
- F. **Convention between Switzerland and France on Minor Modifications of the Frontier** signed at Geneva on February 25, 1953. Entered in force on September 10, 1957.

The exceedingly small adjustments made by this convention were aimed at straightening the frontier, removing dual jurisdiction over border roads and paths, and placing certain associated buildings and establishments in one country only. A summary of the changes is as follows:

1. Between boundary markers 1 and 12 (Solothurn and Haut-Rhin) the dual jurisdiction over several boundary paths is ended by placing them entirely in France or in Switzerland.
2. Between boundary markers 76 and 80 (Solothurn and Haut-Rhin), certain adjustments are made to place the entire Hinterer Forest in Switzerland.
3. Between boundary markers 104 and 107 (Bern and Haut-Rhin), a meandering boundary was replaced by a series of straight lines.
4. Between markers 151a and 152a (Bern and Belfort), the adjustment places a building completely in France.
5. Between markers 215 and 221 (Bern and Belfort), dual control over a path is removed and a general straightening of the boundary takes place.
6. Between markers 239 and 240 (Bern and Belfort), Switzerland gains full control over a border path.

7. Between markers 250 and 256 (Bern and Belfort), the greatest change occurs. A triangular penetration into France is squared off placing all buildings at Queue au Loup in Switzerland.
8. Between markers 279 and 281 (Bern and Belfort), the boundary, formerly comprised of an arc, is altered to a series of straight lines.
9. Between markers 292 and 293 (Bern and Belfort), an arc is again replaced by a straight line.
10. Between markers 300 and 302 (Bern and Belfort), jurisdiction over a border path passes completely to Switzerland.
11. Between markers 318 and 319 (Bern and Belfort), a triangular section of France passes to Switzerland to locate a building of Le Paradis in that country.
12. Between markers 320 and 321a (Bern and Belfort), a very minor straightening of the line occurs.
13. Between markers 323 and 326 (Bern and Belfort), three arcs are replaced by three straight line segments.
14. Between markers 342 and 343 (Bern and Doubs), the boundary was moved westward to place a building, which had previously been bisected by the boundary, completely in Switzerland.

The maps (14) annexed to the convention are at scales ranging from 1:1,000 to 1:5,000. In a departure from normal practice, the maps take precedence over the text of the convention.

G. Convention between Switzerland and France on the Determination of the Frontier in Lake Geneva signed at Geneva on February 25, 1953. Entered into force on September 10, 1957.

The applicable sections of the conventions are as follows:

Article 1

The trace of the frontier in Lake Geneva is formed by a median line and by two transverse projections to Hermance and to St-Gingolph.

The median line is theoretically defined by the locus of the centers of circles encribed between the Swiss and French banks.

This theoretical line is superseded, however, for practical reasons by a polygonal line of six sides which results in an (equal) division of the surface.

Article 2

The transverse projections of the frontier are defined as two lines normal to the median line of the low-water lake and to the two points forming the frontier on the shore at Hermance and at St-Gingolph.

These two normal lines will be identified by their intersections with the two banks through the pillars placed at Hermance, at Coppet, at St-Gingolph and at Vevey.

Article 3 states that the points mentioned in articles 1 and 2 are represented on a map which is an integral part of the convention.

The boundary rectifications in the first convention are located on map 35411 while the Lake Geneva frontier is shown on map 35410. For full detail, the treaty maps should be consulted.

III. SUMMARY

The two conventions of 1953, involving modification of the France - Switzerland boundary, in no way materially affect its general alignment. This international boundary has proved to be most stable for nearly a century and a half; the changes effected by the conventions were no more than minor adjustments which can only appear cartographically on large scale maps.

Nevertheless, the alterations are significant in an administrative sense, for they tend to simplify the point to point alignment and eliminate local inequities. For example, the new boundary in Lake Geneva will reduce the technical problem of constructing a median line and the possibility of conflicting opinions on jurisdiction. Further, the conventions and their realization demonstrate that boundary problems or inequalities can be resolved in harmony.

Official French and Swiss maps show the boundaries correctly at all scales. Certain sheets, however, in the areas affected by the convention have not been revised since the transfer of territory. The treaty maps should be consulted in these areas.

This International Boundary Study is one of a series of specific boundary papers prepared in the Office of the Geographer, Department of State, in accordance with provisions of Bureau of the Budget Circular No. A-16, Exhibit D.

Government agencies may obtain additional information and copies of the study by calling the Office of the Geographer, Room 8744, State Department Building, Department of State, Washington 25, D.C. (telephone: Code 182, extension 4507).