

An embarrassing discovery during the construction of a bridge.

During the construction of a new bridge across the Rhine, between the German and the Swiss part of the town Laufenburg an embarrassing discovery has been made. There appears to be a height discrepancy of 54cm between the two outer ends of the bridge. On the German side of part's divided city the latest part of the access road to the bridge has been built lower then was intended.

It sounds crazy, but the problem lies in different height systems in the countries involved. The Swiss take the mean sea level of the Mediterranean as the base, the German calculate with respect to Normal Null which is based on the North Sea. "The difference of 27 cm. was certainly known, and everything had been drawn up correctly on paper" explained Beat von Arx, project manager at the department of Civil Works of the Swiss canton Aargau. Things went wrong during the implementation; on the Swiss side they had to add 27 cm., but instead they subtracted 27cm. The mistake only became apparent to the constructors as the crossing neared the German bank.

The project costs will be shared between the participants; however the construction will be carried out by the Swiss entirely. "It will cost the taxpayer nothing" assures von Arx. Any excessive costs will be covered by the engineer's office insurance. The construction of the new bridge started in 2002 and the completion is planned at the end of 2004.

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In the end everything went well with the Hochrheinbrücke, everyone can see it when sailing underneath



Illustration of Jeroen Bons for Schuttevaer weekly magazine