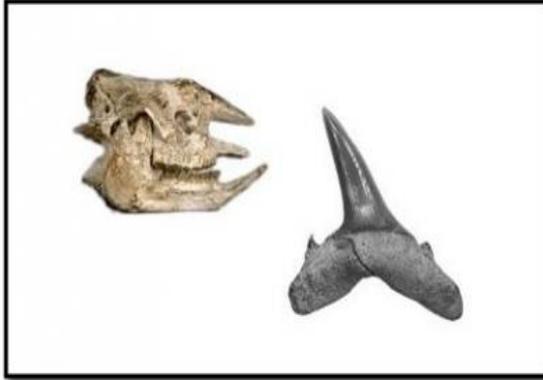




**BASEL MESSE - Hall 5 - l'Entree**  
**Sunday, May 30th Admission free!**



Rhino skull and shark tooth (not to scale)

## Toothpaste and shark teeth brighten Swiss geology event

by Tatiana Tissot  
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**A national event unearths the humble work of geologists this weekend. Around 300 functions are scheduled for Living Geology around the country, including excursions and laboratory visits. The public can also discover the secret link between tooth paste and geology, or learn why shark teeth are found in great numbers in Zurich.**

"Toothpaste is composed of minerals. Some even feature diamond particles that are advertised to make teeth whiter," Pierre Dèzes, vice-president of Living Geology, told Swisster.

"Thus, the majority of the objects from our daily life are also composed of minerals. To produce plastic or paper, you need minerals that have to be extracted from the ground: therefore you need . . . geologists."

Living Geology – first organized by the Swiss geologists association and the Swiss academy of natural sciences in 2007 – is intended to reveal more about this misunderstood science.

"The idea is to catch the attention of the Swiss population so that they understand the work of geologists," said Dèzes.

On May 28-29, **around 300 excursions, museum visits and other events** are organized all over Switzerland, including one to **a subterranean laboratory underneath Mount Terri** in canton Jura, where scientists study how radioactive waste can be stored in clay formations.

"As geology is not taught at school, people have little knowledge of it, though Switzerland is an important place for this discipline," said Dèzes.

Geologists are often called on to help ensure national security by assessing the risk of natural disasters such as landslides.

They're also required to verify ground stability before the construction of say, a tunnel or building.

Groundwater purity also falls under their domain. "Geologists are everywhere. They are at the beginning of production chains for mineral materials and water," said Dèzes.

Although Switzerland holds limited precious metal deposits, other materials are mined: ballast for railways, or salt, which is found in mines in Basel or **Bex**.

"The Basel mines provide salt for nearly the whole of Switzerland and it is used in the food industry or for the roads in winter," said Dèzes.

Among the highlights of Living Geology this year: "**Sharks and rhinoceri in the canton of Zurich**", an exhibition set up by the palaeontology museum of Zurich University.

"Around 10 million years ago, Switzerland was partly covered with sea – sharks and other marine species lived there," explained Dèzes.

"Fossils of rhinoceros skulls are also found in Bern because it had been a savanna before. Geology is interesting as it has you realize how much the landscape has changed," he added.

Living Geology is scheduled every 3 years. "We cannot organize them on a more regular basis for they are made possible thanks to the work of volunteers," said Dèzes.

"Most guides are volunteers. They are professional geologists that usually work in offices, or amateurs who have very good knowledge of geology. In addition, museums participate because it is their task to popularize this science," he added.

An entry fee of 10 or 20 francs is requested at some events to offset costs, according to Dèzes.