

I was something of a biking fanatic when I lived in Switzerland. I was still running and cycling once or twice a week gave my knees a break. Either that or the boyfriend who truly was a biking fanatic got me hooked. From the first of May through October, most weekends found me pedaling.

Just a few miles from the center of the Geneva, the office buildings, banks and apartment houses give way to ancient farms and rustic villages. Although I lived there for years, it never ceased to amaze me how quickly you could go from international metropolis to farm country. That said, I had no trouble taking advantage of the open space. As long as the day was warm and the sky clear, I'd hop on my bike and take a spin through the countryside.



That's when I discovered the leaky borders between Switzerland and France. First, a little lesson in geopolitics. Geneva is more or less surrounded by France on three sides. While Switzerland is part of Europe, it is not part of the European Union. While there are border crossings, there is no great wall to separate the two countries. If you're out rambling through the fields, you could cross from one country to another without knowing it. As for those border crossings, they look a little like a tollbooth without the basket for your change. Some are manned and some not. If there are any, more often than not, the guards just wave you through.

However, if they are bored, the guards will sometimes make you stop, show your passport and ask if you have anything to declare. As for contraband, I'm not talking about dangerous drugs but a couple of nice, thick steaks, a few kilos of butter or several bottles of wine. All of which are much cheaper in France than Switzerland. Sometimes the guards will go so far as to ask you to step out of the car and open the trunk. According to the aforementioned bike-riding boyfriend, this is particularly true if the driver is wearing a short skirt.

Happily for me, any contraband I may or may not have carried across the border was not detected. I'm pretty sure that the statute of limitations protects me from incarceration for any smuggling that I may or may not have done. However, no need to spill my guts and invite trouble.

Anyway, back to bicycling. Weaving my way by farms, fields and forests, I would head mostly west and just a tad north down to the lake. Although I can read a map, I usually cycled without one. A map offers little help when you travel on narrow, unmarked agricultural roads. Now, my sense of direction is not exactly brilliant. So, you guessed it, on more than one occasion, I unwittingly ended up at the border. I'd slow down, wait for the nod and then sail through with a cheery wave.

That's assuming the crossing had one of little booths, with or without a guard. On more than one occasion, I'd suddenly realize I wasn't in Switzerland anymore. Could be a road marker or a maybe a roundabout gave it away. There are lots of roundabouts in France. Sometimes things looked familiar and sometimes not. No need to panic, I would simply keep an eye on the sun or the Salève and work my way down to the lake. At some point, I was bound to cross back over the border.

There is an awful lot of talk about borders and walls these days. Some go so far as to contend that a country can't truly be a country without a wall. If that's the case than there are a lot of non-countries out there. I know because I've driven, walked, skied and cycled through my fair share of them. I've even lived in two.

With longer, warmer days, it's time for all of us to get out and about. Bon appétit!

Pissaladière

Usually served as an appetizer with a glass of white wine, Pissaladière will be a delicious addition to your French cooking repertoire. Enjoy!

Serves 8

- 1-2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1-2 tablespoons butter
- 1 1/2-2 large onions (about 2 pounds), thinly sliced
- 1 teaspoon fresh thyme leaves
- 1 teaspoon finely chopped fresh rosemary
- Sea salt and freshly ground pepper
- 1/4 cup dry white wine
- 1-2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1-2 tablespoons anchovy paste*
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
- 1 pound your favorite pizza dough
- 12-16 Niçoise olives, pitted and halved
- 1-2 tablespoons capers



Put the butter and oil in a large pan and heat over medium-low until the butter melts. Add the onions, sprinkle with thyme and rosemary, season with salt and pepper and toss to combine. Drizzle with the white wine, cover the pan and, stirring occasionally, simmer until the onions are soft.

Uncover the pan, add the garlic, anchovy paste and vinegar and toss to combine. Continue cooking, uncovered, until any liquid has evaporated and the onions are lightly browned and very tender. Remove from heat and reserve.

Meanwhile, preheat the oven and a pizza stone (if you have one) to 450 degrees.

Cut the dough in 2, 3 or 4 pieces – whatever is easiest for you. Pat or roll each piece of dough out into a thin round and place on a piece of parchment paper. Top with the onions, sprinkle with olives and capers.

Working in batches, transfer the pissaladière to the preheated pizza stone or a baking sheet. Bake the pissaladière until golden, 8-12 minutes with a pizza stone and 12-15 minutes with a baking sheet.

Cut into wedges or squares. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Can be made a few hours ahead and served at room temperature.

** If you prefer, use 6-8 anchovies. Instead of tossing them with the onions, cut them lengthwise and decoratively arrange them on top of the Pissaladière before baking.*