

Virtual tour of Selkingen

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Geography

THE RHÔNE GLACIER¹

Valley glacier (or alpine glacier) at the source of the Rhône, in north-eastern Valais, at the foot of the Gotthard massif, first mentioned in 1547/1548 in Johannes Stumpf's *Chronik der Eidgenossenschaft*, then in 1561 in Sebastian Münster's *Cosmographia*. In 1708 Johann Jakob Scheuchzer made the first accurate descriptions of the site. At the time of the glaciations, the Rhône glacier was the largest in present-day Switzerland. One of its arms reached the Jura (as far as the Basel region) and the Middle Country (as far as the future cities of Solothurn and Olten), the other extended as far as the Lyon region. The erratic blocks discovered on the Plateau gave Louis Agassiz valuable clues for his glacier theory. Around 11,000 B.C., the glacier still reached the area around Brig. In the middle of the 16th century, it probably stopped near Gletsch. Since then, it has fluctuated and continued to retreat: in particular, it decreased between 1780 and 1810, but increased by 420 m between 1812 and 1818 and reached Gletsch again in 1856. Since 1857, it has continuously retreated, with the exception of a few slight advances. In 2007, it was 7.85 km long with a surface area of 15.9 km² and a volume of 2 km³.

As early as 1874, the Rhone was studied by the College of Glaciers, formed on the initiative of the Swiss Alpine Club and the Swiss Society of Natural Sciences (from 1893, Glacier Commission of the SHSN), which published in 1916 the *Measurements of Rhône glacier 1874-1915*, a reference work on glaciology written by Paul-Louis Mercanton. Thanks to its location on a classic tourist route through the Swiss Alps, the Rhone was soon well served and became one of the most visited glaciers in Switzerland. An ice cave, which is re-cut every year, gives visitors a glimpse of the glacial world.

THE VALLEY

Conches dizain, district²

Dizain of Valais until 1798, district of the Canton of Valais under the Helvetic Republic (district of Ernen, 1798-1802), dizain of the Republic of Valais (1802-1810), circle or canton of the French department of Simplon (1810-1814), dizain (1815-1848) and district (from 1848) of the Canton of Valais. Following several mergers, the number of communes in the district increased between 2000 and 2004 from twenty-one to fourteen, while the number of parishes remained stable (14). In 2017, after two further mergers (2009 and 2017), the district was reduced to eight communes. It lies between the Bernese and Valais Alps and includes the upper Rhone Valley and its tributaries from the glacier to the Deischberg. Above Fiesch, a landing separates its lower and upper parts. The name Conches (German Goms) comes from the Celtic word kumbas (conchas in Roman), which means undulations. Initially only applicable to Münster (1269 a Forcla de Conches inferius, 1272 apud Gomes), it became established in the 15th century for the whole valley (1403 vallis Comesii), when the dizain was constituted as a political entity. Previously the territory was called Monte Dei (Deischberg) superius.

ALPINE PASTURES

The Valais benefits from an extraordinary diversity of landscapes that contrast between snow-covered peaks at over 4,000 m and dry hillsides and wet valley bottoms. The particular climates of the Rhône Valley, the presence of wide open spaces and the extent of natural forests naturally reflect an exceptional wealth of vegetation. The alpine level is above the forests. It is here that low lawns develop, reflecting the many variations in soil and microclimate. These areas are impressive for their flowering, fragrance and diversity. It is in these mountain pastures that the cattle stay in summer. The specialized vegetation is not influenced by the grazing that develops on scree slopes, ridges and dry slopes. In the rocks, there are a multitude of plants that grow in tufts and are adapted to the various rustic environments.

¹Source: Stephanie Summermatter, *Historical Dictionary of Switzerland*

² Source: *Historical Dictionary of Switzerland*, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/fr/articles/012443/2007-01-04/>

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*The Raclette du Valais*³

In 1574, processed cheese was already known in Valais. However, it was only in 1874 that it was officially given the name "raclette", derived from the verb "scrape", because the layer of processed cheese that forms on the slice of a cheese wheel placed in front of the fire is scraped off. Note that raclette is the cheese used for raclette. The "Raclette du Valais" has been registered as a protected designation of origin since 2007 and became part of Switzerland's culinary heritage in 2008.

The rich flora of the mountains and the Valais Alps, the Mediterranean climate and the traditional method of production give the PDO Raclette du Valais a unique taste that is both fresh and full-bodied.

History

THE MIDDLE AGE⁴

From 1237 until the invasion of the French in 1799, today's settlements Selkingen, Biel, Ritzingen and Gluringen formed the so-called county.

Given to the episcopal mense in 1237 by Boson, Bishop of Sion and last descendant of the old family of the Counts of Grenchen, this territory constituted until 1799 a high autonomous jurisdiction, headed by an amman elected by its inhabitants. The adult men elected on average every 2 years an amman by hand. He administered justice in civil and criminal matters and was also the guardianship authority. He was authorized to pass death sentences. In the 17th and 18th century, titles were particularly important. In this respect he was equal to Zendemeier and was called like this "Spectabilis" - the "visible" gentleman⁵.

[Swiss "landamman" (german Landammann) literally means "amman of the country", amman being the contraction of Amtmann, holder of office, bailiff.]

THE FRENCH PERIOD⁶

In the history of the county we must not dismiss the French period with a few words, because it brought a lot of misery and suffering in addition to the new form of administration and government. It was an extremely hard time.

Ritzingerfeld, cradle of the first uprising

After the French had gradually increased their influence in Valais to such an extent that they practically dictated the government, the people of Upper Valais feared for their freedom and for the preservation of the Catholic faith.

So in April 1798, the people of Oberhammer gathered on the Ritzingerfeld and vowed to preserve and defend freedom and faith. Already on May 1st they rose under the leadership of the giant Sebastian Weber. Everywhere like-minded people joined them, and those who did not want to were persuaded to do so by slaps in the face. In this way also de Tourten was persuaded to take over the supreme command. On May 17th they were decisively beaten at the Morse and had to turn back.

Each municipality had to pay a considerable war tax to the French. Thus we find in the parish archives of Biel/Bienne a register from 1798, which shows that money was demanded from the citizens and that the silver family cups had to be collected and delivered. In the archives of Kitzingen the list of payments of each household contains 29 items

³ <https://www.fromagesdesuisse.fr/fromages-suisse/assortiment/le-raclette-du-valais-aop>

⁴ Source: Bernard Truffer, Historical Dictionary of Switzerland

⁵ Source : »On the history of the county" by Br. Stanislaus Noti, 1975

⁶ Source: Grafschaft einst und heute, Cäsar Biderbost, 1991 Druck Tscherrig, pp.11-16

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Bartholomäus Walther von Selkingen, leader of the second uprising

After the French wanted to dig up young men for the French army, the second uprising took place. They preferred to die on their own soil, for their own cause.

This uprising of 1799 was more planned and orderly. The supreme command was led by Moritz Perrig von Brig with his adjutant Venetz, Count von Saas. The troops were led by the two Majors Bartholomäus Walther von Selkingen and Josef Schmid von Ernen.

Bartholomäus had formerly been in French service under King Ludwig. It was he who, together with 300 men, stormed Varen in a daring night mountain march, thus initiating the victory of the Valaisans at Pfyn. He reunited with the fighters at Pfyn and, like them, was surprised and driven back when the French attacked again.

He tried again to build up resistance at Visp and fell there. This describes us of the 20-year-old eye-witness fighting as follows: " Walther was pursued by several hussars, blew up in a garden leaning against a wall and defended himself like a hero against the enemy superiority, a second Hans Wala. Several times he had been asked to surrender, with the assurance that his life would be spared; only Walther spurned this request and continued the fight. At last he sank from the horse with a split skull, shouting: Long live the emperor! Long live the old freedom! »

At the Massa, the Goms once again put up a fight. Johann Guntern, Biel, Ignaz Biderbost and Martin Hagen von Ritzingen fell here.

The French in the Goms

Justin Ritz, painter and teacher from Niederwald, was three years old at the time and tells us that the storm bells were ringing. Women, children and old people left the villages at night and took refuge in the Alps. The villages stood empty when the French arrived. They blew open the doors and robbed what could be robbed.

No house was burnt in Goms, but there was a great famine when the French withdrew to Brig in late autumn. Most of the cattle had been eaten, and the harvest could not be brought in. The Helvetic commissioner Wild describes in his report: « ... Even the houses spared by the fire are mostly made uninhabitable: Gates, windows, panelling and roofs torn away... Already for 14 days whole families have been feeding themselves only with holderberries... »

The French spent 9 months in our villages. In the community archive in Biel/Bienne there is a document which testifies that this time too a huge tax had to be paid to the French.

Until the liberation

The people had to bear the burden of these war damages and debts for a long time. French troops remained in Valais until 1803, and the whole of the Valais had to provide for their maintenance. It is likely that county soldiers also had to perform corvée services on the military road across the Simplon. However, this cannot be proven.

On the other hand, it is certain that counties were also dug up for the Russian campaign. By lot a Zeiter and an Andereggen from Biel were determined to set off eastwards with Napoleon. The oral tradition tells of them that one of the two was a drummer and a Kodak smashed the drum on his back. Both should have helped to build up Moscow, but deserted and returned home safely.

During this evil time, another misfortune struck the count's ambassadors in 1807. An avalanche tore away a part of the field chapel. Despite all the adversities, our ancestors managed to rebuild them in a short time.

He eats like an imperial

In 1814 foreign troops came to Goms again. It was the Austrians who had already been with us once in 1798 as "liberators". These too had to be fed and apparently had quite an appetite, as we sometimes heard from old people when one of them was even able to eat: « He eats like an imperial! »

Gradually the wounds of the French period healed. Especially the year 1818 gave a rich harvest and the diligence of the county councilors did the rest.

New order

After the French period, the communities were reorganized as mentioned above, and communities were created according to the current pattern.

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THE GRAFSCHAFT NOW

1318 meters above sea level, population < 50, cross-country ski trail, historico-cultural trails, Norse mill⁷

Selkingen is a former commune of canton Valais, district of Conches. The municipality of Grafschaft was formed in 2000 from the merger of Biel, Ritzingen and Selkingen (192 inhabitants in 2000).

Inhabitants	1816	1960	1990	2016
Selkingen	85	75	62	
Biel	116	102	60	
Ritzingen	92	89	86	
Grafschaft				212

Selkingen merged in 2017 with Blitzingen, Münster-Geschinen, Niederwald and Reckingen-Gluringen to form the commune of Goms (1216 inhabitants in 2018)⁸.

MY REAL NAME IS SELKINGEN | *Why do some people know me as Grafschaft ("County")?*

I used to be part of the bigger church community Münster together with Gluringen, Ritzingen and Biel. Then, my name was District Grafschaft, which is still my vernacular name today. The first time I was mentioned officially, was in 1374. Formerly, the people from Selkingen lived on the other shore of the Rhône as well. But later on, these early dwellers abandoned the small hamlets called Sechshäusern and Zeiterdorf. The population used to rely on Chapel Antonius located above the village to be saved from natural hazards such as avalanches and floods. After the year 2000, the dam became the new protection wall against the usually quite calm brook, the Wallibach. Take your time to visit my enchanting old houses, chapels and the ancient Norse mill.

Rye cultivation is experiencing a revival in the Goms region⁹

GRAFSCHAFT | On the Ritzingerfeld rye is again systematically planted. The self-sufficiency up to the bread was freshly started by the cooperative Grafschaft Kultur, which stands up for old traditions. Previously, potato farming in the region had largely degenerated into monoculture. Soon the fourth harvest is due. Tony Chastonay, president of the cooperative and, together with Norbert Carlen and Beat Mutter, one of the driving forces behind the "Rye Cultivation in the County" project, expects a medium yield for this year. The record of 2.7 tons from 1.3 hectares in 2017 is unlikely to be reached.

The initiators are less concerned with the yield than with the preservation of the diversity of agricultural forms of use. A great deal of passion has been invested in this in recent years. The initial spark came from the renovation of the Stock-mill in Selkingen. The municipality had bought it and the cooperative was repaired in 2013. With the call for local rye and after the first cultivation tests, the Stock-mill was awakened from its slumber after 41 years.

From field to bread the Grisons mountain rye Cadi was preferred to the traditional Valais rye because it is more labour-friendly and more productive. The farmers - now nine are actively involved - only had to prepare their fields after initial persuasion. The cooperative bought the seeds and guaranteed the purchase of the harvest at a good price. A combine harvester was purchased so that the work could be done more efficiently. Several machines were purchased for

⁷ Source : <https://www.obergoms.ch/mountain-village/villages/selkingen/>

⁸ Source : [https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goms_\(Valais\)](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goms_(Valais))

⁹ Source : Thomas Rieder, Walliser Bote 16. August 2019

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the four-stage grain cleaning process. The initiators found what they were looking for in Poland, Austria and even China.

After harvesting, drying and cleaning, the rye is stored in the granaries of the foundation's own barn. The miller brings it from there to be ground as required. On the baking days, which take place several times a year, around 100 rye breads of 500 grams each are baked. According to Tony Chastonay, the products have become popular with customers all over Switzerland. The Goms Farmers' Market, announced for the third time at the end of September 2019, is also suitable for this. Potatoes are no less in demand there alongside other self-marketing products. Alternating with rye, the fields have become more productive again.

"Gommer Grafen Whisky" from rye

The next project in the pipeline is a whisky made from pure Goms rye by the Graf-schaft Kultur cooperative. The surplus from the 2017 harvest was used to supply a German-Swiss contract distillery with the aim of producing one cask of rye spirit (approx. 220 litres) per year in future. This requires 800 kg of grain, guaranteed by the cooperative. The first brandy will be sold in autumn 2021 under the title "Gommer Grafen Whisky".

Inhabitants

MAJOR FAMILIES

Patronymics originating from this commune¹⁰

Anderegg	Bacher	Biderbost	Carlen	Chastonay
Guédon	Guntern	Hauser	Imhof	Mark
Pellanda	Praz	Ritz	Roncari	Rovina
Schmidt	Seiler	Walpen	Walther	Wirthner
Zeiter				

OUR ANCESTORS WALTHER

The family is first mentioned in Biel in 1372. The Walther family living today can be traced back to Lorenz Walther. He was born around 1500, was married to Anna Zeiter and was the first of 12 Walther's who were elected Ammann of the county. The genealogy of the descendants of the ancestor was made by pastor Joseph M. Schmid in 1872. Correspondingly, persons born later are missing in the present internet transmission. Additions, supplements are however gladly accepted! In this context already received but not yet published: First information about the family of Othmar Walther-Guntern (descendants of Alphons Walther, born 1866 around Selkingen).

How we managed to make the link between two photos, located on either side of the Atlantic¹¹, and identify the family bonds between Johann Joseph Walther, seventh cousin of Antoine's ancestor Alphonse Walther (links to Obergommer webpage¹²).

¹⁰ Source : Association valaisanne d'études généalogiques (Valaisan Association for Genealogical Studies) <http://www.aveg.ch/fr/Genealogie/commune.php?op=voir&loc=6073>

¹¹ <https://audrin.ch/johann-joseph-walther-26-jan-1829-selkingen-valais-25-jun-1899-chicago-il/>

¹² www.obergommer.ch

On this website: Genealogical database with information about more than 27'000 persons connected with the old, not yet extinct Obergommer families by descent or marriage.

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Family Walther von Selkingen VS¹³

u.a. Joseph Walther - USA

Ancestors of Antoine Audrin

Lorenz Walther oo Anna Zeiter

Bartholomäus Walther * 1530 oo Cäcilia Bacher

Johann Walther (frère de Bartholomäus) * 1570 oo Maria Rigger * 1580

1 Martin Walther * 1608 oo Barbara Albrecht * 1620

2 Melchior Walther * 1542 oo Maria Imhof

3 Melchior Walther * 1690 oo Barbara Nager

4 Joseph Theodul Walther * 1720 oo Katharina Heymen

5 Johann Franz Walther * 1758 oo Anna Minnig

6 Aloys Walther * 1807 oo Marie J. Zeiter

7 **Alphonse Walther * 1836 oo M.-T. De Riedmatten**

8 Charles Antoine Walther * 1869 oo A.M. De Riedmatten

9 Marguerite Walther * 1896 oo André Jean Haenni

Ancestors of Joseph Walther

Lorenz Walther * ca. 1500, Weibel von Selkingen oo Anna Zeiter

Bartholomäus Walther * ca. 1530 oo Cäcilia Bacher

Bartholomäus Walther (frère de Johann) * ca. 1570 oo Margisa Ruffiner

1 Johann Walther * 1609 oo Margaritha Seiler *

2 Bartholomäus Walther * 1646 oo Maria Kuony von Ritzingen * 1666

3 Martin Walther * 1703 + 1742 oo Barbara Walther * ? + 1768

4 Joseph Ignaz Walther * 1727 oo Theresa Biderpost

5 Joseph Valentin Walther * 1756 oo Anna Maria Müller

6 Joseph Anton Walther * 1797 oo Maria Josepha Jost

7 **Johann Joseph Walther * 1829 oo Sara Flanagan**

SELKINGEN NOW

Our itinerary

Tour through Selkingen according to the brochure "Kulturweg" (culture trail)¹⁴

1. Prefecture (1603) ren. 1765
2. House with advanced facade
3. House of St Andre's cross (1512)
4. House of the Pagans
5. House of the High Baroque (1718)
6. Renaissance house (1600) ren. 1972
7. Banner House
8. Pfister House (1733)
9. Horizontal wheel mill
10. Sawmill
11. Chapel of St Mark (ca. 1500)
12. House Ritz (ca. 1530-1630) ren. 1681
13. Chapel of St Anthony's Hill

¹³ Source : Gisela Dirac-Wahrenburg, 11.12.2016

¹⁴ Itinerary kindly proposed by Bernhard Walther.

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From the start up Selkingenstrasse, cross Furkastrasse (be careful! No pedestrian crossing), pass houses 5, 6, 7, 8 and 12 to 11 Markus-Kapelle (open during the day).

To the left you go up to 13 Antoniushügel. From there you have a good view of the village, but the climb is steep and may take too much time.

An alternative would be the way from 12 to point T or from the chapel over the bridge past 9 Stockmühle. In the Stockmühle rye is ground again, it can be visited by appointment. Details about the mill on <https://kultur.grafschaft.ch/index.php>