

Pfyfoltru Trail



Source: Swiss Federal Office of Topography (570400294)

- 1 Pfyfoltru/village
- 2 Cover crops
- 3 Trees, dry grasslands, steppes
- 4 Historic irrigation channels (*suonen*)
- 5 Pfyfoltru wine
- Pfyfoltru Trail

Pfyfoltru/village

History:

The castle of “Varona” and the settlement around it were established between 1120 and 1150. The first document to mention “Varen” as a place name, however, is a deed from 1241 confirming the purchase of a vineyard. Around the same time, the Bishop of Sion bought the sovereign rights to the settlement from the Knights of Varona. The municipality re-acquired those rights in 1362. In 1272, there was also mention of a roadside warehouse and inn (“Suste”) at Varen. Around this time, in 1280, the Dala tower with its drawbridge was built as the gate to the town of Leuk-Stadt. This gate still stands proudly in its original location.

In 1543, the municipal statute was recorded in writing. Varen detached itself from the greater parish of Leuk in 1783. In 1799, during the Napoleonic Wars, the village was occupied by the French army as a way of protecting its flanks. However, the locals recaptured it shortly afterwards, hurling so many of the occupying forces into the Dala gorge that, when the ultimately victorious French troops seized Varen once again, they burned the village to the ground.

Varen was rebuilt between 1800 and 1803.

An earthquake that struck in 1946 caused severe damage, particularly to the church. Another quake in 1960 meant that a new church had to be built; it was constructed from 1967 to 1969. The original church tower, however, survived. In 1990, the new road and Dala bridge linking Varen and Leuk were opened, sending the Dala tower and its drawbridge into retirement after 700 years of operation.

Wine and hiking

“Pfyfoltru” is the Valais dialect term for “butterfly” and the choice of this word highlights the fact that the IP (integrated production) viticulture practised by many of Varen’s vintners is very close to nature.

On the Pfyfoltru Trail, which is accessible in both summer and winter, you will discover the simple secret of this exquisite Varen nectar. It is not a complicated concept: the cultivation of various cover crops and traditional care of the arable land encourages butterflies, beetles and other insects to live among the grapevines and keep pests under control. Other measures, such as placing a restriction on quantity, ensure that the resulting wine is of very high quality.

The hiking trail begins by the church in Varen and covers a distance of 3.5 km with a difference in elevation of 70 m. The trail combines a wine tour with a gentle hike that can be completed in one and a half hours.

Of course, the best way to finish the walk is with a glass of Pfyfoltru wine!

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Cover crops

Making sure that the grapevines receive sufficient nutrients is crucial for ensuring a good yield of high-quality grapes. On the one hand, sharing ground with other vegetation means that the grapevines have to compete for nutrients. On the other hand, however, cover crops can increase the amount of nutrients available to the vines, as they provide a greater biomass turnover and increase microbiological activity. The same goes for the water supply: while extra vegetation certainly adds to water consumption in the cultivated area, it also increases the soil's water storage capacity and improves infiltration, meaning that, overall, there is more water available. The net balance resulting from the interaction between these factors, as far as plant physiology and agronomic outcome are concerned, can be strongly influenced by the selection, location and cultivation of the cover crops as well as by the soil and climate.



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Trees, dry grasslands, steppes

This is an area of cracked earth, bare rock, dead trees, dry grasslands, steppes, various trees and bushes, old drystone walls and, of course, grapevines.

Once you realise that each one of these different habitats provides the perfect home for various species, you become aware that this is a little haven of biodiversity.





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Historic irrigation channels (*suonen*)

In former times, *suonen* were essential for survival of rural communities in the Valais. Varen, which was itself dependent on farming until well into the 20th century, relied on these valuable water channels for the irrigation of its meadows, fields, gardens and vineyards.

The first dispute between Salgesch, Varen, Miège and Sierre over the water channel diverted from the River Raspille is mentioned in a document from 1432. In 1484, an instance of damage resulted in the first set of rules being passed with regard to the Dala water channel, listing the associated rights and obligations. The document also precisely stipulated the maintenance measures to be taken and specified that no trees or bushes were to be felled in an area up to one fathom (six feet) below the channel. But disputes over water, especially that of the Raspille, continued for centuries – along with more instances of damage.





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To make the supply of irrigation water more secure, the Raspille channel was linked up to the Dala channel via pipes, following the route of an old *suone*. Channelling irrigation water through pipes meant that water loss was reduced to practically zero and the risk of water damage caused by defective or overflowing *suonen* was eliminated.

As the old open water channels dried up, the vegetation in these areas also changed. The lush vegetation of yore was replaced by the dry vegetation typical of the valley slopes today.

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Pfyfoltru wine

Pfyfoltru® wine is the quality product of Varen's vineyards, made in a way that respects nature. Pinot Noir is the grape of choice for Varen winemakers, as it thrives in the region's limestone-rich soils. The finest Pfyfoltru Pinot Noir develops its full flavour from grapes that are naturally cultivated in vineyards with IP (integrated production) classification, before being further processed just as carefully and naturally in the wine cellar. Before the Pinot Noir can obtain its Pfyfoltru seal of quality, it must first be tasted twice by a national degustation commission and rated "very good" on both occasions. Only then can the wine be decanted into the special Pfyfoltru bottles.

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