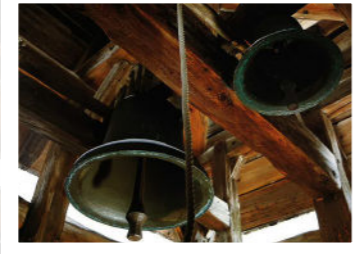


OUR SUMMER TIP

ALWAYS A SPECIAL
EXPERIENCE –
A VISIT TO AROSA'S
BERGKIRCHLI CHURCH

SUMMER
TIP





A HEAVENLY
LANDMARK
OF AROSA



The Bergkirchli church

A prominent feature in the village of Arosa for over 500 years, the Bergkirchli is the oldest church in this Grisons holiday resort and also its oldest surviving building. It is located in Innerarosa, on the route between the local history museum in Schanfigg and the Tschuggen mountain, right next to the valley station of the Carmenna chairlift at 1,900 metres above sea level. Those who attend sermons, concerts or weddings in the church are captivated by its warm and comforting aura.

It is assumed that the Bergkirchli was built between 1490 and 1492 before being finished in 1493. The Walser inhabitants of the small scattered settlement would certainly have had their work cut out to complete the project. Given the church's balanced shape and proportions, it's likely that a foreman was appointed for the planning. As for the execution, however, the parishioners themselves lent a hand – hence the church's lopsided windows and slightly crooked walls. But it's precisely these imperfections that lend this place of worship its unique charm.

The community doubtless looked long and hard for a plot on which to build its church, weighing up the pros and cons of various locations before choosing the best one. With a strong will, the parishioners joined forces to build the hub of their parish on the moraine trail, which is clearly visible from anywhere in the valley basin. Although the Bergkirchli is in a remote location today, things would have looked a lot different in 1493, when it lay at the heart of all the widely scattered farmsteads.

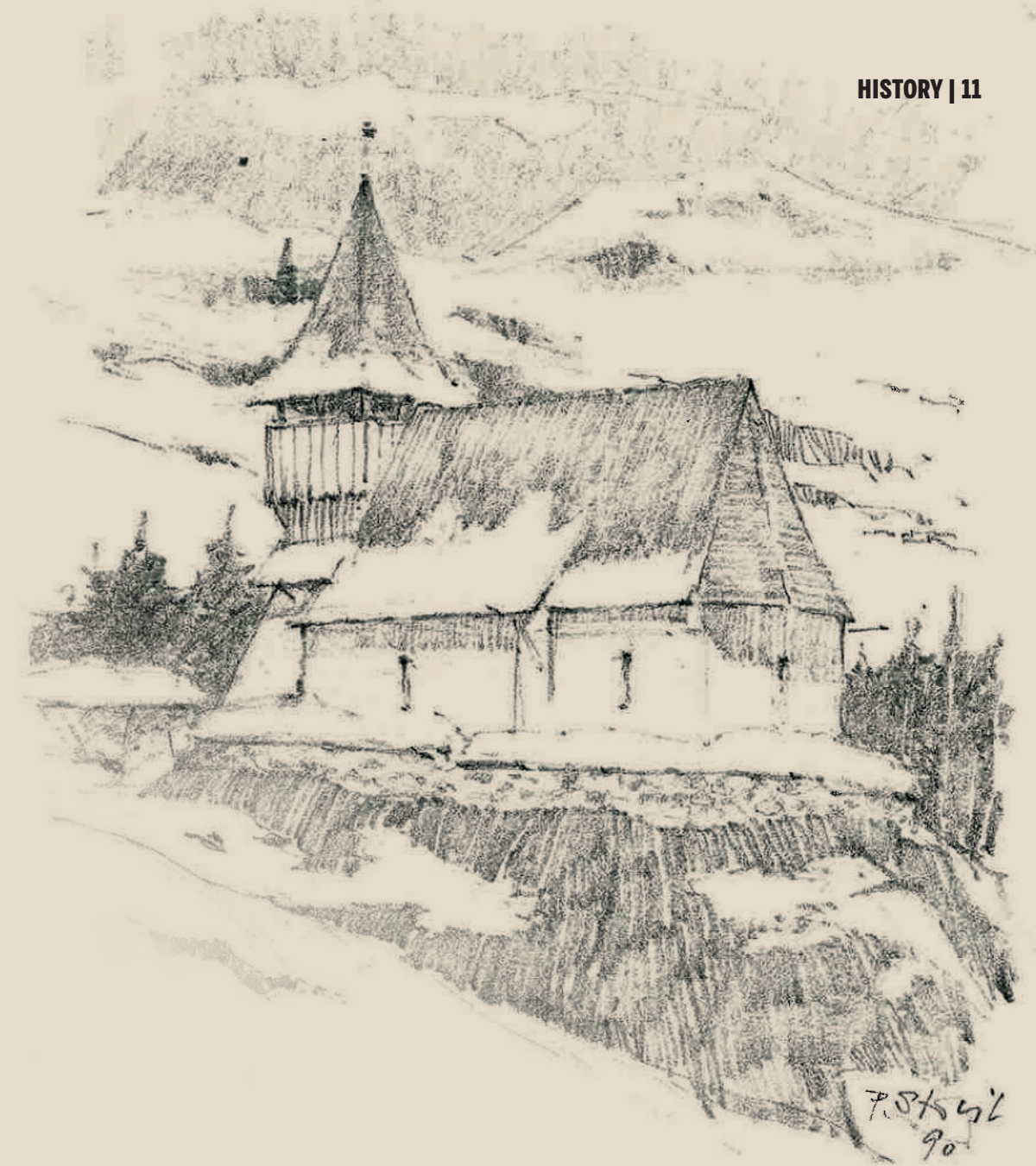
Arosa split from the parish of Langwies in 1520, becoming an independent chaplaincy. Eight years later, in 1528, Arosa converted to the Reformed faith, and the Bergkirchli has been a Reformed church ever since. A church tax was introduced in 1661, enabling the appointment of a pastor for Arosa.

In the mid-18th century, the small mountain church was only open in summer, as it was too cold during the rest of the year. That's why the new poorhouse and schoolhouse, built on the Leinegga property in 1842, was used as a winter church with a rectory. After splitting from Davos in 1851, Arosa became an independent parish. As Arosa did not have a pastor at this time, however, the Langwies parish sent over a pastor for church services and pastoral care. Having only had 54 inhabitants in 1880, Arosa's population exploded as the village developed into a health and tourist resort. By 1890, Arosa had its own pastor again.

The Dorfkirche, the village church, was built between 1907 and 1909, as the Bergkirchli was no longer able to accommodate the congregation and Arosa needed a public clock. Church services took place in the Dorfkirche from that point on.

In 1922, the Bergkirchli was renovated with the help of the Bergkirchli Association of Friends in order to ensure its survival, and church services have been held there again ever since. The Bergkirchli underwent another revival at the end of the 1930s. Pastor Robert Kurtz believed that he was a servant of all, and his will to use music as a proclaiming power alongside words brought about a rich development of church music in Arosa. At around the same time, the then 15-year-old Ruth Licht gave the first lectures on the Bergkirchli in the classroom. Now 100 years old, she has conveyed the unique charm of this place of worship on her guided tours of the Bergkirchli every summer until just recently.

LOCAL SAYING:
“MAKE SURE
THE CHURCH
REMAINS
AT THE HEART
OF VILLAGE”



In the ensuing decades, the Bergkirchli was used as a storehouse and fell into disrepair – until good people recognised the cultural and art-historical value of the church and started to renovate the chapel on the moraine hill in 1992. In order to preserve the historical substance of the Bergkirchli, its doors now open only for special occasions – abridged services on major religious holidays, family celebrations, guided church tours (every summer) and a wealth of attractive concerts organised by the Arosa Culture team.

Bells

There are two bells in the Bergkirchli, the largest of which bears the date 1492 and the inscription “ave maria gratia plena” (“Hail Mary, full of grace”). This larger bell is 60 centimetres in diameter and weighs 150 kilos. The inscription, taken from the Gospel of Luke, references the announcement of the birth of Jesus by the angel Gabriel. There is no inscription on the smaller, lighter bell.

Tower

The timber-clad, 10-metre-high tower abuts on the north wall of the nave. The belfry opens outwards, while the square pointed spire is completed by a cupola. The tower dates back to the mid-17th century (circa 1665).

Shingle roof

Shingle-maker and roofer Lorenz Krättli produced a new shingle roof made of local larch in 1974, consisting of shingles that were 40 cm long and 3–4 mm thick. The building and the organ were listed in the same year.

Wooden ceiling

The late-Gothic wooden ceiling is dated 1493. Incidentally, these are the only written characters in the entire church interior. The wood plank ceiling is designed as a ribbed barrel vault. In addition to the bänderole depicting the year, it bears the coats of arms of Austria (the Habsburgs) and the Bishop of Chur, Heinrich V. von Hewen. Writing in the Deutsches Maler-Journal (German Painters Journal) in 1895, Basel painter and author Carl Egger described it as one of the best-preserved wooden ceilings in all of Switzerland.

The chamber organ

The organ is a single-manual chamber organ with no pedals. Double doors are attached to the simple, blue-coloured wooden casing, with the left door depicting King David playing the harp, the right door St. Cecilia playing the organ. The organ keys are individually attached with pieces of leather. Small metal pins beneath the keys, which lead down to the valves through the windchest, are used for the mechanical conveyance between the keys and the valves. A pedal operated by the left foot pumps air into the bellows. A black rod indicates how much air is in the bellows, which is often a test of nerves for the listener or observer, as the organ falls silent once the rod is no longer visible.

Unique charm

Sermons in the Bergkirchli are always special occasions – firstly because of the charm of this small, cosy church; secondly, thanks to the visitors, who often pop along by chance to pause and reflect for 30 minutes. Among the audience are guests in hiking or skiing gear, locals, and children who have just rung the bell by hand or are looking forward to blowing out the candles at the end of the service. Due to the church's limited size, people have no option but to sit closely together, and the low Swiss pine pulpit very close to the congregation only enhances this special sense of connectedness.

Many see the Bergkirchli as a place of power. The tranquillity exuded by the church interior, and conveyed to the beholders, is astonishing. People who otherwise have no time find a place of calm and retreat here in the cosy and comforting surroundings.

Our tip: attend one of the numerous concerts in the Bergkirchli and experience the truly special atmosphere of this small church; linger for a moment on one of the wooden benches bathed in sunshine at this unique location and enjoy the view of the mountains, including Erzhorn (the Arosa coat of arms) and Arosa Rothorn (the region's highest mountain, at 2,980 metres above sea level). Incidentally, it's well worth looking at the church from different angles to fully appreciate every aspect of its harmonious architecture. Then enjoy the wonderful evening ambience on the walk back to the hotel via the middle station.