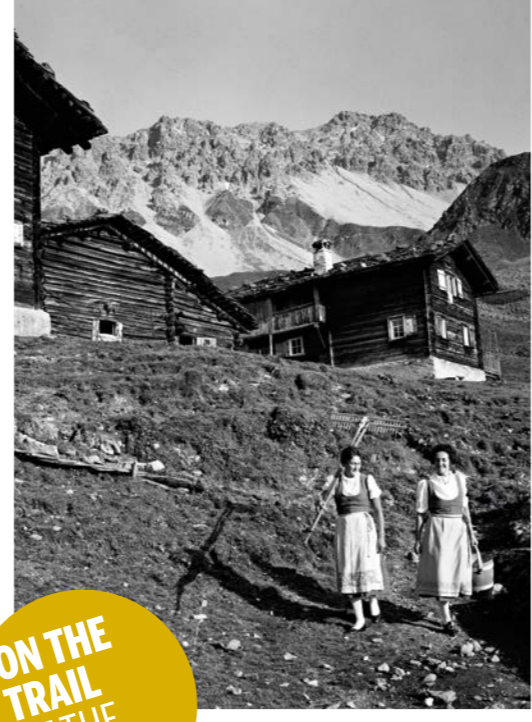




ON THE  
TRAIL  
OF THE  
WALSERS



“THE OLD PLACE WAS TOO CRAMPED FOR ME NOW I STAND HERE IN THE SUN AND FREE DISPLACED AT THE TIME OF THE SECOND WORLD FIRE MAY GOD’S HAND SAVE US FROM WAR’S MISERY AND IRE.”



## Fondei, Sapün and Medergen

Looking out from our “Stüva Medergen” breakfast room, you can see the Walser settlement in Medergen in the distance beyond the 18-hole golf course.

**Medergen** (or Medrige in Swiss-German) is an Alpine settlement above Langwies. Situated on a panoramic plateau to the west of the Strelakette in the lap of the 2706-metre Mederger Flue, it has been part of the Arosa municipality since the beginning of 2013. For an enjoyable day trip, particularly in summer, you can walk or cycle to the romantic Walser settlement. Like the neighbouring Alp Tiejä, Medergen’s location makes it a popular destination for ski trips in winter.

For those visiting the Walser settlement, it’s worth taking the short train trip from Arosa to Langwies, which is free in summer thanks to the Arosa Card. You can even hike the route if you’re up to it. From Schanfiggerstrasse in Langwies, take the road that branches off from the Sonnenrüti towards Medergen. You can also reach the Walser settlement in Medergen from the Arosa reservoir and Grünsee lake via the Schanfigger Höhenweg/Walserweg Graubünden (Schanfigger ridgeway/Grisons Walser trail). If you fancy a longer tour, you can take the footpath from Medergen to the Sapün and then pass via the steps

and the Latschüelfurgga until you reach Davos Platz and via the Schwifurgga (Furggaltji) until you reach Davos Frauenkirch. It’s well worth taking a train on the Rhaetian Railway to return to Arosa in the evening.

### The Walsers – history and traditions

While Medergen was originally solely an Alpine area for the then Rhaeto-Romanic inhabitants of the valley, German-speaking Walsers migrating from the Landwasser valley started to settle here circa 1300 – as they did in the Sapün, the Fondei and Arosa – upgrading it to a permanent settlement.

As the High Middle Ages drew to a close, the Walsers – an Alemannic ethnic group from what is today the canton of Valais – also settled in other Alpine regions in Switzerland, north-western Italy, Liechtenstein and western Austria, and occasionally also in Savoy and Bavaria. There are still around 150 Walser settlements scattered along around 300 kilometres of the Alpine arc. The descendants in many of these places still speak a Highest Alemannic dialect known as Walser German. Arguably the highest concentration of Walser settlements can be found in the canton of Graubünden – from Vals to the Schanfigg to the Prättigau.

### The Walserweg Graubünden trail

Walserweg Graubünden follows the trail of the Walsers through the high valleys of Graubünden in 23 stages. The route follows historic trails set in breathtaking natural and cultivated landscapes. Most of the stages include a pass crossing, allowing you to take in the vast array of altitudes and vegetation zones as you go.

Medergen was mentioned in a document of 1272 in connection with “usufructum alpinum de Sampuin et Medi” – the name is derived from the Walser word “Meder” (mowable Alpine grassland).

Due to building regulations, the typical Walser houses in Medergen are not allowed to have electricity or running water. In the snow-free months, they are sometimes used as Alpine huts but mostly purely for holidaying purposes.

### “Der geschwünd Jöri”

Georg Engel (1854–1936) was a farmer and poet in Medergen. In keeping with Walser customs, his life as a farmer was “frugal and self-sufficient”. It was a nomadic lifestyle, where people frequently moved to the place that provided the best living conditions for the particular season, taking their possessions and livestock with them. They lived in close harmony with nature – in the valley in winter and in the mountains in summer. Engel was nicknamed “Der geschwünd Jöri” – presumably because of his ability to cover vast distances very quickly. After tending to his cattle, on many Sundays he would travel from Medergen to Arosa to visit the “z Chilchä” mountain church. His poems can still be seen in Arosa’s local history museum.

### The “Engelshüsli”

The Engelshüsli (Engel house) symbolises the adaptability and resilience of Medergen’s inhabitants. Georg Engel’s house stood cramped between other buildings – so his niece moved it to a sunny slope without further ado.

On a hike to Medergen, it’s worth stopping off at the “Alpenrose” mountain restaurant, where owners Migga and Fredo Falett serve home-made cake and a fine “Medergen Baileys Coffee” to prepare you for the day’s next stage. Incidentally, Switzerland’s highest “Friends of Nature” house, “Naturfreundehaus Medergerfluh”, is located very close to the Medergen settlement – a perfect place to stay for one or several nights.

Together with the villages of Dörfji and Schmitten in the Sapün high valley and the Walser settlement at Strassberg in the Fondei high valley, Medergen forms a trio of exceptionally well-maintained examples of Walser settlements. All three are Langwies sites of national importance (ISOS).

### Dörfji and Schmitten in the Sapün high valley

The tiny settlement of Dörfji and Schmitten, no longer inhabited for the entire year, is located in the Sapün high valley, leading to Davos via the historically important Strela pass crossing.

Sapün, at the foot of the Chüpfenflue, is home to the romantically located 300-year-old mountain inn “Heimeli”, which is always well worth a visit in summer or winter. Culinary classics served here by Gabriella and René Pahud include “Sapüner Stai-suppa” (a local soup) and the inn’s own coffee that is roasted above a Graubünden Swiss pine fire.

### The Fondei high valley

The former Walser settlement in Strassberg sits on a panoramic plateau in the Fondei high valley. Gently rolling hills fit for agricultural use descend towards the Fondeierbach stream, stretching far into the distance towards the Duranna Pass and Casanna Pass.

Two mountain inns – “Strassberg” and “Casanna” – are perfect places to stop for refreshment on a hike to the Fondei. At “Casanna”, Carmen Menegon and Thomas Lauer serve seasonal highlights, including game dishes and home-made sausages. At “Strassberg”, guests can recharge their batteries while savouring the panoramic views and a local meat platter from Sonnenrüti – an organic butcher’s shop in Langwies.

### Our tip: a hike on the 17th stage of Walserweg Graubünden

From Arosa, you can hike the 17th stage of Walserweg Graubünden (the Walser trail) to the beautiful Walser settlement in Medergen, where the sun-blackened wooden houses are packed tightly side by side at an altitude of 2,000 metres. Gentle uphill and downhill stretches then take you over the Seebjiboden to Sapün. There, every house is from a time when the Walsers lived in this natural valley all year round. Following the old summer trail, the hike finally takes you to Langwies – once the centre for the Walsers “im hinteren Schanfigg”.

The exact route description can be found in the book “Walserweg Graubünden”, which you can borrow from our reception area. The trail is signposted throughout with route number 35.