



# Farmstead Trail



V Ö L S A M S C H L E R N





# Farmstead Trail

Spectacular walk through varied countryside and cultivated land along the most southerly foothills of Völs.



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seiser ALM  
Südtirol

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Gemeinde Völs am Schlern

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# The Oachner Farmstead Trail

## \_From Schloss Prösels to St. Kathrein's church

A glimpse of rural life and well-preserved art and cultural treasures is what awaits walkers on this path running from Schloss Prösels to St. Kathrein's Church. The Oachner Farmstead Trail passes through the southern foothills of Völs and features varied landscapes rich in flora and fauna.

This challenging walk can be tackled in segments or from the opposite direction. You can join and leave the path at different points via connecting paths, shown on the map (page 24) as a dotted line:

- Via Mitterpsenn
- Via Oberpsenn to Gstatsch
- Via Innerpeskoler
- Via Federer to Gunterschöll
- Between Front and Völser Aicha
- Between Unterharder and Völser Aicha

The stretch from Prösels, via 'Wirtskeller', Oberpsenn and Gunterschöll to Völser Aicha is also suitable for pushchairs on. Children will enjoy the path with the suspension bridge over the Lausbach stream beneath Völser Aicha.

**Returning**, you can walk via Schnaggenkreuz (1010m), path no. 5, or take the bus back to Prösels.

The path goes past farmsteads and across private land. The people living there will be happy to let you gain an insight into their way of life and work, but please respect their property and customs.

### **When to go:**

all year round,  
very hot in summer

### **Start:**

Schloss Prösels at 856m  
above sea level, car park

### **Finish:**

St.Kathrein at 867m  
above sea level

### **Difference in altitude:**

descent 130 m  
ascent 140 m

### **Length:**

approx. 8 km

### **Time required:**

approx. 4-5 hours

## 01\_A Castle & Witches



View from the path of Schloss Prösels and the Pulverturm, with the Schlern and Hammerwand in the background

Schloss Prösels is strategically placed on the edge of a plateau where the road from the Eisacktal valley meets the **historical road** going from Völs via Tiers and the Karerpass into the Fassa valley. The hill that the castle is built on drops nearly vertically downwards on three sides into the Schlernbach ravine. Above the castle, first mentioned in records in 1279, are the safe and accessible ruins of a tower enjoying magnificent views, known locally as the ‚**Pulverturm**‘. This dates back to the first half of the 13th century, judging by its layout and masonry and can be reached via a circular path laid in 2007.

Schloss Prösels



The **lords of Völs**, vassals of the bishops Brixen and the counts of Tyrol, as chieftains seized temporal power in the diocese, moved their seat and that of the court from their village castle to Schloss Prösels, which was in their possession from 1450 to 1804.

**Leonhard von Völs** (1458-1530), politician, warrior, princely administrator of the salt pond in Hall, for over 30 years head of government of the Etsch and Burggraf in Tyrol, faithful servant and friend of the ‚Last Knight‘ Emperor Maximilian, gave the castle the shape it has today, combining the latest defence techniques of the time with the need for image and comfort. He was made a baron and could trace his bloodline back to the Roman aristocratic family of Colonna, whose columns he used in his coat of arms. These columns feature in the coat of arms of the district of Völs today. It was during his time that the infamous **witch trials** took place at Schloss Prösels (1506 and 1510), the cruelty of which is commemorated in a monument erected by the District of Völs in front of the castle. ‚**The farmers‘ war** (1525) also took place during this time, when the castle, where the Tyrolean Freedom Letters are kept, was occupied by insurgent farmers.



The coat of arms and outer castle gate serves as a reminder of the former castle owner, Leonhard von Völs (1458-1530)

The inner courtyard with loggia

After Leonhard von Völs's name died out, the castle and its valuable contents were neglected, despite the efforts of its rapidly changing owners, such as the President of the Chamber of Commerce of Bozen Franz Anton von Kofler, and the wealthy Munich art dealer Alexander Günther. In 1893 Günther commissioned the then young Hamburg architect Fritz Schumacher, later famous as a city planner, with the restoration of the castle and the design of the Knights' Hall. In 1981 the castle was acquired by a committee founded for the purpose of opening it to visitors and using it as a venue for hosting cultural events.



## 02\_Cold Storage & Cellars

The so-called **,Wirtskeller'** is on the path between Blumau and Prösels. In the past it was used by the innkeeper in Prösels, at the former Gasthof Rose, for storing wine, **,speck'** and cheese and has a **,natural ventilation system'**. Due to its position, the cellar became a simple, yet popular stopping place and was once even equipped with a bowling alley. The building fell into ruin over the years but, whilst setting up the Farmstead Trail, a part of the old wall structure was re-built and demonstrates the effects of its impressive natural ventilation system to walkers in need of refreshment during the summer months.

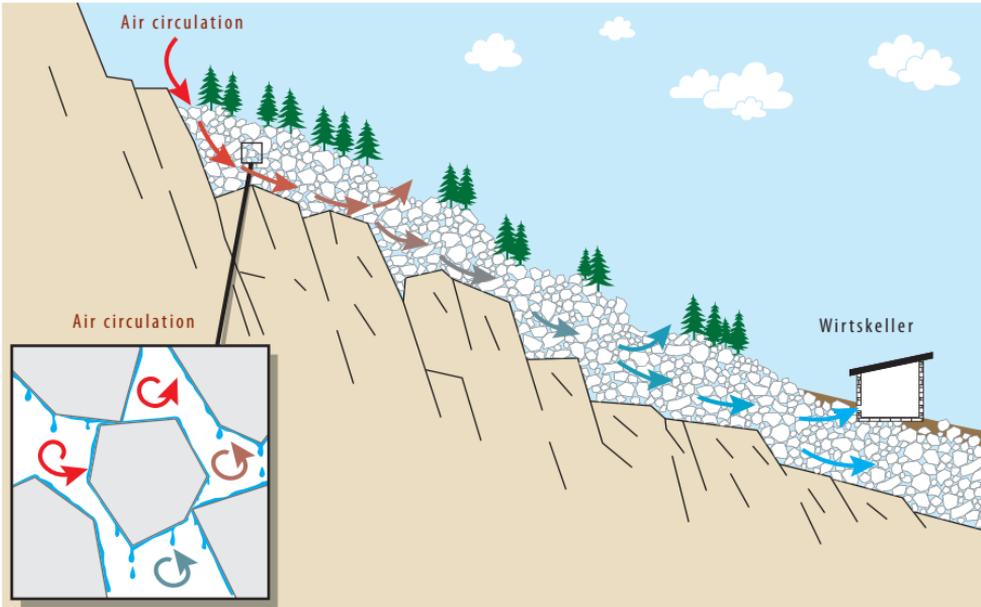


Rowanberries

**Cold air flows out of a mound of stone blocks formed by a landslip.** This cold air phenomenon is due to the **,windpipe'** principle. A system of channels with openings at varying heights runs through the area. If the air in the channels is cooler than the air outside, the cool air sinks and sucks warm air down with it. The heavy air flowing through the channels absorbs moisture and cools down as a result of giving out heat from evaporation. The cold, moist air then comes out of the end of the windpipes. The temperature of the air emitted is on average 12-15 °C. Lower temperatures can also be found in places where the air flows faster. These are the so-called ice holes.



The **,Wirtskeller'** in Prösler Ried; in the background the re-built construction, in the foreground left the exit holes for cold air can be seen



How the ice holes work



Alpine shrubs such as rhododendron grow in the ice holes at the same altitude as sweet chestnut trees

The cold air flowing out all year round creates a **local micro-climate**. The densely growing lichen, moss and fern points to high air humidity. Plants such as rhododendron, usually only found in alpine regions, thrive here thanks to the climate. This is a place to study ecology close up.

Some farmers still use the ice holes as a fridge today.



Mound formed as a result of landslip with characteristic vegetation; 'Wirtskeller' in the background

## 03\_Low Mountains & the Mediterranean

The elegant feather grass of the dry grassland is worn in the hats of musicians from Völs and Völser Aicha



Varied **mixed** and **edge woodland** vegetation characterise the farmstead path in **Prösler Ried**. Woodland edges are ecologically valuable borders between the tree/shrub population and open cultivated land with meadows and fields.

Woodland as well as field animals make use of the shelter and the proliferation of food in the form of flowers and fruit that it offers. Deer venture out of the wood to graze in the fields when it gets dark. Birds of prey, crows and red-backed shrikes rely on the tree/shrub vegetation just as much as on the open



Deer and Downy oak

field for feeding their young. Chestnuts, beech, nut trees, ash, rowan and linden trees entice woodpeckers to bore their holes. Spruce, scots pine and larch also grow, whilst willow, birch and

aspens complete the sparse **mixed woodland of the low mountains.**

The farmstead path from Gemoaner in the direction of Völser Aicha runs along a sunny, dry porphyry rockface characterised by a heat-loving **downy oak copsewood.** In spring you particularly notice the white blossom of the flowering ash, blackthorn and sour cherry. Besides downy oak and flowering ash, smoke trees, bladder senna



Woodpecker

Flowering ash





Border between woodland  
and meadow

and European cornel also thrive here. In sparse bush woodland and on dry grassland you come across several sub-Mediterranean lifeforms such as blue lettuce, white swallow-wort, St. Bernard's lily, sun rose, black bryony, broom, erect clematis and cranesbill.



Common yellow  
swallowtail



At points on the steep rockface where trees cannot grow, varied dry grassland has developed with various kinds of steppe grass and herbs, as well as the numerous southern plants. Animals



Bloody cranesbill

native to the **Mediterranean area** that have come as far north as their nature will allow them can be observed in the downy oak woodland as well as the numerous southern plants. As far as reptiles are concerned, the aesculapian snakes are of special note and praying mantisses can be found on the dry grassland. The brightly coloured herbs are visited by numerous butterflies such as smoky moths, scarce swallowtail and common yellow swallowtail.



Praying mantis



Western green lizard

## 04\_ Culture & Nature



Due to its unique position, wine grapes have been grown in Völser Aicha and Prösler Ried for generations

The sweet chestnut is characteristic of this landscape

Völser Aicha has largely preserved the beauty of its **natural landscape**, despite the scenic tourist road and recent construction. This naturally dry, irrigated hamlet is made up of hilltops that were carved out by glaciers and some of which were inhabited back in pre-historic times. The influence of centuries-old land cultivation around Völser Aicha and Prösler Ried can be seen in the tree vegetation in the form of sweet chestnut, cherry and nut trees in coppices.

The **chestnut** was widespread back in early history, especially during Roman times, as a cultivated and coppice tree. The use of chestnut wood as vine supports is partly due to the presence of so many of these trees in wine growing areas.

**Wine grapes** have been grown here for generations thanks to the mild climate. Starting in medieval times, farmers were obliged to pay tax to their temporal and spiritual landlords and, along with **grain and cheese**, this wine tax gained in importance in the Völser Aicha area.





This also explains the often impressive **construction** of the wine farms in these parts. Around the mid-19th century wine farming ran into trouble, but today it is on the up and excellent wines are being produced. While around a hundred years ago arable farming, mainly of wheat, rye and buckwheat, defined the landscape as a secondary crop, it has largely disappeared now from the community of Völser Aicha and has been replaced by **grassland**.



There is a coat of arms above the entrance to the Fronthof made of sandstone, with vine cutter, grape and vine leaf in relief



Old and new cultures:  
mulberries and blueberries

Today **vineyards**, **orchards**, **chestnut groves** and smaller **berry-growing** areas make for a rich and varied landscape. Here and there a mulberry tree serves as a reminder of a long-gone silkworm farming tradition. In this multi-structured country-



side there is also room for nature, with **dry stone walls** making good habitats for small animals (e.g. lizards, snails) and plants such as houseleeks (*sempervivum*) and sedum.

Typical inhabitants of  
drystone walls: heliophil  
fern, sedum and houseleeks

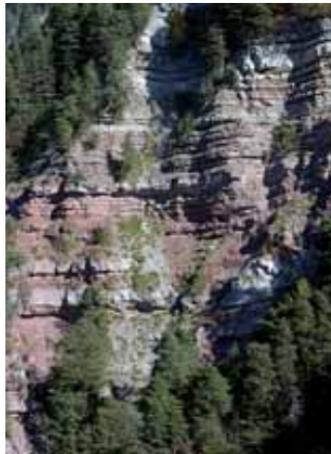
## 05\_Volcanos & Coral



View from Gemoaner farmstead across the Tierser Tal valley with the Rosengarten in the background

The Gemoaner farmstead is a well-known wine farm in Unteraicha. From here you can gaze over the whole of the Tierser Tal valley with the Rosengarten as a backdrop. The village of Steinegg can be seen on the opposite side of the valley,

whilst Völser Aicha lies on the mild, sunny side – ancient farm country with farmhouses scattered here and there. The city of Bozen is visible as you look downwards. The easily recognisable stone sequence of the Dolomites is witness to deposits put down around 280 to 240 million years ago.



View of geological strata, Ritztal / Breien

The Tierser Tal valley, which was drained by Briebach, has a ravine-like entrance. The steep



rockfaces are made of red **porphyry**, belonging to the extensive volcanic complex of the Bozen quartz porphyry plate.

**Sandstone from Gröden** rests on top of the porphyry, weathered into cultivable ground. It is particularly noticeable even from afar against the red layers of stone from the Ritztal valley, which, running beneath the Tschafon, forms the border between the two districts of Völs and Tiers. At this point the geological structure of the area can be read like a book. On the Gröden Sandstone we find gypsum-rich **Bellerophon stone** and the marly **Werfen strata**, which testify to the former flooding of the mainland by the so-called Tethys Sea. Snails and mussels are fossils typical of the Werfen Strata.

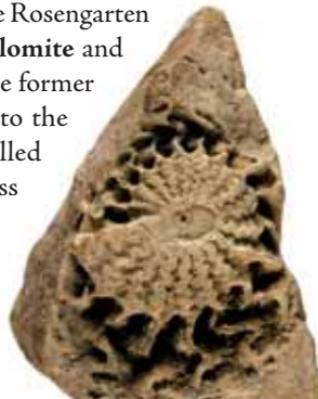


Gastropod, internal mold from the Bellerophon Formation (about 255-250 million years ago)



*Claraia clara* (Emmrich). Imprints of several bivalves from the Werfen Strata (about 250-245 million years ago)

The majestic setting of the Rosengarten is a petrified coral reef. At the time it was formed the landscape may have looked like today's South Sea archipelago. The Rosengarten is mainly made up of **Schlern dolomite** and tectonic and erosive forces gave the former reef the shape it has today. Due to the disturbance caused by the so-called 'Tierser Line', which stretches across Steinegg and Karneid up to the valley basin of Bozen, the Rosengarten is about 800 m higher than the Schlern.



Ammonite of the family of Gymnitidae. Schlern dolomite (about 235-230 million years ago).

## 06\_Art & Architecture

Anyone walking through the varied **natural and cultivated landscape** of Völser Aicha and surveying the world around them will not have their eye just on its **art historical sights**, but will also be looking at the old (and new) dwellings of its inhabitants, past and present. This sprawling settlement is fascinating: the way in which it extends for metres upwards, the seclusion of the spot where people once wrested cultivable farmland away from nature and how modern development has guaranteed the further working of the land via an appropriate network of paths.



The Fronthof is the largest surviving intact gothic stone farmhouse situated on a steep slope in South Tyrol

Archaeologists have found **traces of numerous settlements** here going back to early history. Historians and archivists have even been able to follow the history of some families or farms back as far as **medieval times**, when defence **towers** were constructed here along the important highway to Tiers and were later partially integrated into the local houses. **Wine farms** were of great importance then and this caused some notable structures to be built.



The back of the Federerhaus. The built-in gothic spiral staircase goes up two storeys and the built-in romanescque tower can still be seen from the outside



At the Fingerhof a low-hanging canopy shields a round arch leading to 13th century fresco depicting the saints George, Margaret and Florian

Therefore it is not surprising, however architecturally significant, that the ancient structure of several farmhouses has survived in the form of foundation walls and vaulted cellars, archways and wall frescos, entrance halls and living rooms.

Although these features may seem modest and unremarkable, these farmhouses are **monuments** to an immortal culture and are gems of hidden beauty. Hikers may fail to notice some things belonging more to the private family sphere or not close enough to the marked path. However, besides getting an overall impression, such as the way the farmhouses are set out on the land and constructed, they will be able to observe several artistically interesting details at close hand. The old panelled parlours, like at Gemoaner and Front, invite passers-by to stop a while for refreshment during the ‚törggelen‘ season in autumn.



The cellar in the Fronthof with its sandstone pillars and four massive arches is worthy of note



Detail of the impressive gothic parlour at Unterspenn.

## 07\_ History & Paths



Large retouched silex arrowhead from Schnaggen

Whilst digging to lay an irrigation plant around Völser Aicha in 1978, clear traces of human activity from the period between the early **Stone Age** (Neolithic) and the **Roman acquisition of land** were discovered. It seems that the early settlers of this spot had already made use of its fertile soil.

The first signs of human intervention go back over **6,000 years**, when communities of early Stone Age **farmers** settled in the area where the Finger and Zafluner farmsteads stand today. The terraced, flat and sun-kissed soil was relatively easy to work. Archaeological digs and examinations have shown that small walls for **barley** cultivation were constructed in several places in the area around Völser Aicha. The surrounding land was used as grazing land for **sheep, goats and cattle**.



Miniature lead reproduction of an early Bronze Age bronze axe, found near Schloss Prösels

During the **Bronze Age** and later the **Iron Age** the areas around Prösels, Zafluner and Finger, as well as those around Kompatsch, Mongadui and Federer farmsteads and also the area from Großsteinegg and Schnaggen were chosen for settling on (between approx. 2000 BC and 100 BC). The settlers made a living from **arable and cattle farming**. They also made intensive use of the high alpine land: seasonally used areas of an agricultural and religious nature were discovered dating back to early history on the Seiser Alm, on the Schlern, as well as on the Tschafon.

Small bronze clasp in the shape of an axe from the cemetery dating back to Roman times at Kompatscher Hof



Fragments of clay vessels from the late Neolithic age found near the Finger Hof



During the **Roman occupation** several **estates** sprung up between Prösels and Tiers thanks to the extensive and easily cultivable flat land, which was blessed with a mild climate. The broad plateau at Gfell provided the ideal conditions for this.



Burial gifts from a cremation grave in the cemetery dating back to Roman times at Kompatscher Hof

The inhabitants chose the hill in front of the farmhouse at Kompatsch as a burial ground. This was a monumental setting for individual graves given headstones with the name and age of the deceased.

As **burial grounds** were usually near roads in Roman times, a connecting path must have gone between the Eisacktal valley and the Fassa area over the Niger pass. The archaeological excavation sites along the terrace-like country at Tiers testify to such a road, which could also have been pre-Roman. A few stretches of today's **Farmstead Path** are probably identical to these **connecting paths**.



Severa headstone from the cemetery dating back to Roman times at Kompatscher Hof



## 08\_Churches & Chapels



St. Katharina church lies on the ancient path between the Eisack valley and the Ladin-Dolomite area and was dedicated to St. Katharina, the patron saint of coachmen in the 15th century

The **Parish of Völs**, which has existed since the Carolingian period, used to extend over a huge area up to and into the valleys of Tiers and Eggen. Making a trip to the parish church could take between 1 and 4 hours. This is why the **rural communities**, called Mulgreien or Malgreien, built their own **places of worship in romanesque style** as of the 12th / 13th centuries, which the parish priest of Völs sent a fellow priest to on religious festivals. The church patrons gave Malgreien its name. At a time when there was no public protection from the weather's effects, the clergy was called upon for aid. It was the individual churches' administrative authorities that delved into donations to the church and other sources of income to help farmers out with interest due loans in times of need. A close relationship therefore developed between local people and their church, which came to be celebrated in the form of frescos and ornate altars. In the 15th century, **Tyrol's golden age**, nearly all churches in Völs, as well as St. Kathrein in Völser Aicha, were modernised in the **gothic style**.



Religious folk art has brought us numerous wayside shrines and chapels; such as this 1736 chapel at Innerpeskoler



Wayside crosses call to prayer or serve as shrines on the long journey to the graveyard in Völs

A few farms, such as Gemoaner and Außerpeskoler along the path, had their own small chapels, where the family said their rosaries.



The frescos on the southern facade of the church are particularly impressive

### St. Kathrein in Völser Aicha

The church, originally consecrated as St. Michael – the farmstead next door is called ‚Michaeler‘ – dates back to 1293 according to records. Towards the end of the 15th century the romanesque apse was replaced by a gothic chancel with a north-facing tower and the nave received a stellar vault.

Worthy of note are the colourful **frescos**, never re-painted, on the southern outer wall of the church dating back to around 1420. Vivid in gesture and expression, they tell the story of the Christian princess **Katharina von Alexandria**, who was accused by Emperor Maximinus (2) of destroying a graven image (above row 1 and who was then whipped (3) and locked up in a tower, where angels comforted her (picture 5, after the crucifixion over the door). She wins an argument with heathen philosophers sent by the Emperor (6) and even manages to convert some of them to the Christian faith, but they are then condemned to burn at the stake (bottom row 1). The Empress, who visits her during the night (2), is converted and consequently beheaded on the Emperor's orders (3). Orders were then given for St. Katharina to be broken on the wheel, yet angels destroy the wheel (4th right from the door). In the end, Katharina is also beheaded (5) and buried by angels on Mount Sinai, where Emperor Justinian had the famous Katharina Convent built in 557 (6).



Parts of the outer frescos of St. Katharina, St. Michael weighing the souls of the departed and a larger than life St. Christopher, patron saint of travellers and protector against sudden death



This walk can be tackled in segments or from the opposite direction. You can join and leave the path at different stages via **connecting paths**:

- Via Mitterspenn
- Via Oberpenn to Gstatsch
- Via Innerpeskoler
- Via Federer to Guntschöll
- Between Front and Völser Aicha
- Between Unterharder and Völser Aicha



La randonnée exige un certain niveau, elle peut cependant être effectuée par tronçons plus courts ou bien dans le sens inverse. Différents **autres chemins** permettent d'accéder au chemin des fermes ou de le quitter :

- par Mitterpsenn
- par Oberpsenn vers Gstatsch
- par Innerpeskoler
- par Federer vers Guntschöll
- depuis Front vers Völser Aicha
- depuis Unterharder vers Völser Aicha