

Diemtigtal House Traits



Diemtigtal House Trail

The Diemtigtal (130 km²) is the largest side valley in the Simmental and consists of eight villages: Oey, Bächlen, Horben, Riedern, Entschwil, Zwischenflüh, Schwenden and Diemtigen. Together they form the municipality of Diemtigen, which has approximately 2,200 inhabitants.

The entire valley is devoted to Alpine farming, and primarily livestock farming. Diemtigen is the sixth largest municipality in the canton of Bern and the most important municipality for Alpine farming in Switzerland. It is livestock farming that is largely responsible for the scattered housing which is still characteristic of the valley today.

Thanks to far-sighted local planning, the municipality of Diemtigen has successfully preserved the character of the valley's settlements. As a result of its efforts, it was awarded the Henri-Louis Wakker Prize by the Swiss Heritage Society in 1986.

The oldest houses in the Diemtigtal date from the 16th century. However, it is the buildings from the second half of the 18th century and beginning of the 19th century which lend the landscape its special character. The Diemtigtal owes its magnificent buildings to a combination of prosperous farmers and talented craftsmen, including renowned carpenters such as the master carpenter Hans Messerli (1720–1806).

Thanks to its unique and beautiful landscape, its well-preserved architecture and culture of construction, and its abundant and ecologically valuable fauna and flora, in 2011 the Diemtigtal was designated a Swiss Regional Nature Park – Landscape of National Importance.



Practical information

Transport

The BLS Lötschberger RegioExpress provides regular direct services from Bern to Oey-Diemtigen station. From there the PostBus runs to Schwenden at the end of the Diemtigtal.

Timetables and other information can be found at bls.ch/loetschberger

The Diemtigtal House Trail generally follows the marked footpaths. There are also brown signposts to guide you. Each house has a brown plaque with the number corresponding to the information in this guide.

Apps and further information on the Diemtigtal House Trail can be found at www.diemtigtal.ch/en/house-trails.

House Trails	Front valley	Middle valley	Rear valley
Start	Station Oey-Diemtigen	Busstop Horboden	Riedli Parking Wiriehornbahnen
Distance	8.92 km	10.24 km	11.98 km
Ascents/Descents	455 m	498 m	442 m 282 m
Altitude min/max	669m 964 m	813 m 1128 m	990 m 1237 m
Walking time	2 hrs 50 min	3 hrs 10 min	3 hrs 20 min

Front of the valley

The village of Diemtigen is the municipality's main village and the home of the parish priest. With the exception of the church, rectory and oven house, school and inn, the road is mainly edged with farmhouses and their outbuildings.

1 Styg (Styg 7)

A multi-purpose house, with living quarters at the front and a barn at the back. The first Ründihaus (arched-gable house) in Diemtigen, it was built in 1789 by the army captain and local treasurer, Jakob Mani. In the 19th century it was owned by Johann Jakob Karlen, a member of both the Swiss National Council and the Bernese Cantonal Government.

The elegant arch stretches over the symmetrical façade, which is three rooms wide. Vertical wooden projections and roof corbels emphasise the vertical lines, while the groups of windows and associated decorations emphasise the horizontal ones. Pretty river cobbles surround the house. This magnificent building in a striking location marks the north-eastern edge of the village.

2 Moser House (Dorf 4)

Central building from the 16th century, asymmetrical and two rooms wide. Grooves on the window sills and ridges on the underside of the wooden corbels. Extended several times. Year of construction and builder of the northern addition are recorded in Roman script: IN 1647 JACOB FLOGGERZI AND BARBLA MANI BUILT THIS IN GOD THEY TRUST. Southern extension on the eaves side probably 18th century; southern extension to the front of the house probably 19th century.

3 Hirschen Inn (Dorf 10)

Built around 1800 as an inn. The twin flights of external stairs are an invitation to stop and rest. The gabled arch sweeps harmoniously across the façade, which is richly decorated in keeping with the time. It is here that the skin of the last bear to be killed in the valley is said to have been exhibited in 1819.

Church

The church, dedicated to St Nicholas and St Catherine, was first mentioned in 1314. It is a Romanesque single-aisle church with a narrower, rectangular chancel, above which is the tower. The present building was completed before the middle of the 15th century. In the 18th century the nave was extended to the west and the concave wooden ceiling was added. The church was restored in 1915, 1956 and 1985.

Inside is a simple wooden pulpit from the 16th century in the Renaissance style, and a late Gothic font bearing the coat of arms of Rector Johann Rudolf Kyburz and his wife Katharina Salome Lupicius.

The murals were created between 1915 and 1917 by the ecclesiastical artist and glass painter Paul Zehnder: on the chancel arch the Ascension of Jesus Christ; on the back wall of the chancel the Garden of Gethsemane. The window near the pulpit features two panes designed by Zehnder and Robert Schär – a likeness of the Good Shepherd and the Archangel Michael – while over the north door is an image of the Sower. The present organ was built in 2000 by Kuhn Organ Builders, Männedorf ZH. It is the fourth since 1795. The organ case is made of larch and was built by a Diemtigen craftsman. The bells are tuned to F sharp, A and B, and date from 1629, 1637 and 1973.



Village of Diemtigen



Church of Diemtigen



Church of Diemtigen



Rectory (Dorf 21)

The Rectory was built in 1781/82, at the same time that the church was extended.

Like all typical Bernese manor houses it is plastered and features a bonnet roof. On the side facing the road a peristyle (porch formed by a row of columns) accentuates the entrance.

The covered balcony on the east side dates from the 19th century. To the west, and from the same period, is the Rectory's oven house (Dorf 21A), a substantial building under a half-hip roof with carved door and window jambs. Of particular note are the original gutters, complete with rafter brackets. The oven house was on the verge of collapse in 1981 when it was renovated and made accessible again. Now the oven is lit once a month from October to May (on request).



The Rectory

4 Grosshaus (Dorf 28)

Built in 1805 by Jakob Reber. Master carpenter unknown. Jakob Reber held numerous offices in the municipality and was one of the most prosperous and influential residents of Diemtigen. He also owned the Trogmatt (Dorf 32), whose housebarn (Styggässli 20) he commissioned the master carpenter Hans Messerli to build in 1779. In 1792 he commissioned the same craftsman to build the Ründihaus (arched-gable house) in Wiler.

The imposing residence of this public official and local dignitary impresses thanks to its location, generous proportions and façade with twin flights of stone stairs leading up to the artistically carved front door ornamented with metalwork. Abundant flat carvings.



Oven house

5 Trogmatt (Dorf 32)

Built around 1770. The master carpenter was probably Hans Messerli. This is a particularly good example of a Simmental farmhouse from the heyday of the carpenter's art.

Wide façade, gently pitched gable roof with a generous overhang; standing on the basement walls the living quarters in post-and-beam construction with three groups of windows, each with five windows; above, the sleeping quarters, constructed using the «blockbau» system, with three groups of windows, each with four somewhat smaller windows. Two covered balconies on the eaves sides. The protruding sills, trusses and walls, the continuous window ledges, the vertical wooden projections, roof corbels and associated decorations combine to lend the façade a sculptural quality.

To find out how the house would have looked 200 years ago, visit the Agensteinhaus in Erlenbach (Landschaftsmuseum), which would have been furnished in the same style.



Grosshaus

6 Reber House (Dorf 35)

Lovely example of 16th century Gothic-style carpentry. The back of the house, which faces the street, is almost unchanged. The building opposite is its housebarn (Dorf 36), built in 1765 by Peter Reber.

7 Iseli House (Dorf 41)

Built in 1648 by the master carpenter Stefan Bergmann, one of the most talented craftsmen of his time. Unusually, the ridge runs parallel to the street. This is the only remaining house in the village from the 17th century.

The decorative elements were originally painted white, red and black.



Trogmatt

Carved inscription in Roman script. The small consoles under the upper floor truss have been removed, the windows have been enlarged and the building has been extended on the side facing the valley.

8 Muurhus (Dorf 42)

Built in 1823. Between 1789 and around 1830 seven arched-gable houses were erected in the farming community of Diemtigen, four constructed using both post-and-beam and «blockbau» methods, and three purely of post-and-beam construction with windows arranged individually rather than in groups, as in this case.

From 1869 until its closure just a few years later, this house served as Diemtigen secondary school. Next to it is the second so-called Muurhus (Dorf 44), undated, but decorated in typical 16th-century style. With the exception of the corner room, which has been added on the north side of the house, and the replacement of the wall panels on the lower floor, it has remained in its original condition.

Further on there are three more perfect examples of 19th-century Simmental houses.



Muurhus

9 Riesen House (Dorf 56)

The house dates from the 16th century. The upper and attic floors are original. The asymmetry, the fine grooves in the window sill on the upper floor, and the decoration on the roof corbels are all typical of Gothic-style carpentry.

The extension on the side facing the stream was once the village forge, and later the tailor's.



Vorderes Bergli (Bergli 12)

10 Vorderes Bergli (Bergli 6)

Built in 1804. Beautiful unchanged façade with a decorative cubed frieze, rosettes and carved plant motifs.

11 Vorderes Bergli (Bergli 12)

Built in 1627 by the master carpenter Hans Iulmi for Bendicht Schwin-gruber and Kathrin Mani (Roman script). Restored in 1988. The upper and attic floors are original. The covered balcony under the eaves on the south side, and the corner room on the north side, are more recent additions. The walls on the lower floor have been renewed.

Instead of the grooves in the window sill, decoration is now provided in the form of a cubed frieze. The substantial projections are supported by small corbels and the roof corbels are heavily chamfered. As a result the façade is very sculptural for its period.



Bergli

12 Gruebi (Häusern 6)

Built at the end of the 18th century. Symmetrical façade, two rooms wide, with carved strips of tulips and waves. The extension on the side facing the mountains was built later.

In its oven house the housewives from Bächlen would bake their bread. The farmers planted the grain themselves and had it milled at either Horboden or Diemtigen, both of which had mills.

13 Heidenhus (Dörfli Bächlen 12)

Former muleteers' inn. The growth rings in the timber suggest that it was built between 1507 and 1510, making it one of the oldest houses in the Diemtigal.

Originally two rooms wide, the upper floor and gable are original. Side struts brace the gable posts, which in turn support the overhanging



Heidenhus

roof, a construction which later became known as a «pagan cross». The sill on the upper storey, adorned with grooves, is the oldest known protruding wall in the Bernese Oberland. The decorative ridges on the underside of the roof purlin are typical of the 16th century. Until 1908 the corner room on the left-hand side belonged to Bächlen school and served as a second classroom. In the 1930s it was again used as a schoolroom. Between 1941 and 1946 the «Alpenrösli» restaurant was based in the house.

14 Gmeinen (Gmeinen 12)

Built in 1688 by the master carpenter Michel Reber. Renovated in 1962. Decorated north and south façades. In typical Michel Reber style, the house bears inscriptions in both Roman and Gothic script (see houses 17, 21 and 22 in this guide).

15 Sälbeze (Selbezen 2)

Built in 1636, north-facing and symmetrical. The gable and upper floor truss are original. On the truss, instead of the usual house dedication in Roman script and numerals, there is a quote from Psalm 122 (Peace be within thy walls and prosperity).

16 Sälbeze (Selbezen 10)

Built in 1738, probably by the master carpenter Christian Wolet for Christen Jantz and Susanna Hiltbrand. Impressive example of local Simmental carpentry and painting. Pure residential dwelling built on a masonry base, lower floor of post-and-beam construction, upper floor constructed using the «blockbau» system. The symmetrical gable façade with external staircase is a virtuoso display of ornamentation with strong sculptural accentuation of sills, trusses, ledges, cross-beams and corbels. The overall effect is heightened by the colouring of the carpenter's decoration, which is accompanied by paintings of flowers and animals, coats of arms and abundant Gothic inscriptions. The representation of David and Goliath on the southern façade suggests that the artist may have been Stefan Allenbach.

17 Hasli (Hasli 21)

Built in 1689 by the master carpenter Michel Reber with contemporary annex (restored in 1979). Black, notched Roman and Gothic inscriptions accompany the red-and-black carvings of cubes and diamonds. Also worthy of note is the house to the north (Hasli 9), with the year 1516 under the roof corbel. This is the oldest visible date in the Bernese Oberland; the gable facing the mountains is original. Notice in particular the tapered purlins, unusual for the Diemtigtal.

18 Feld (Feldweg 51)

Built in 1737 by the master carpenter Christian Wolet for Constable Agenstein and Margret Regez. The pediment is original. The rest of the façade with its paintings and inscriptions was renewed in imitation of Eichstalden, above Boltigen, which was built by the same master carpenter in 1745.



Sälbeze (Selbezen 10)



Sälbeze (Selbezen 10)



Sälbeze (Selbezen 10)



Feld

Middle of the valley

19 Sodmatte (Entschwil 22)

Dated 1618, extended in 1828. The asymmetrical façade, which is two rooms wide, features delicate grooves and cubed friezes. The overhanging eaves on the gable side are wider at the top than the bottom. This mode of construction was discontinued when roofs began to be tiled.

20 Entschwil (Unterberg 1)

Built in 1791 by the master carpenter Hans Messerli for Jakob Stucki and Maria Hiltbrand. The façade, with two groups of five windows, is divided into clear sections by three strips of rich black Gothic script and the continuous lines of the beautifully shaped window ledges. The substantial central cross-beam and the curved timber corbels, on which the wide overhanging roof rests, lend the façade a sculptural quality. The inscription reports the prizes for corn and wine in 1791.

21 Entschwil (Unterberg 3)

Built in 1699 by the master carpenter Niklaus Reber, son of Michel Reber. A special feature of the house is an inscription in early Gothic script alongside an inscription in Roman script. Other houses, also with both Roman and Gothic inscriptions, were built by Reber senior in Hasli and Moos (see houses 14, 17 and 22 in this guide). The windows have been replaced and enlarged.

22 Moos (Riedern 37)

Built in 1684 by the master carpenter Michel Reber. Wall panels and northern addition are new. The original building was two rooms wide. The upper floor and gable walls protrude slightly and are supported by corbels. Continuous window ledge with delicate, double, cubed frieze. Here too, Reber uses Roman script on the upper-floor truss and a notched Gothic script on the lower-floor truss.

23 Untere Walkenmatte (Walkenmatte 5)

Two-rooms-wide, symmetrical house, built around 1750 for Antoni Knutti and Susanna Mani, renovated in 1976. Beautiful wooden corbels and other wooden projections. The extensive painting on the façade is picturesque, in keeping with the progressive earlier Simmental style.

24 Obere Walkenmatte (Walkenmatte 13)

Built in 1757 by David Lörtscher, constable and carpenter, and his wife Susanna Karlen «for the benefit of themselves and posterity». Renovated in 1976. Lower-floor wall panels replaced in the 19th or early 20th century. Few houses in the Oberland can rival the abundance of painting and carving that can be seen here! The paintings, probably by Stefan Allenbach, are already in the later Simmental style (picturesque approach, particular motifs such as panels with inscriptions, shells, cartouches, etc.; based on urban bourgeois decorative painting). Stefan Allenbach also worked on the Haus auf dem Büel in Oberwil (see Simmentaler House Trail, Wimmis – Boltigen, No. 26). Exceptional carvings like a braided frieze on the lower-floor truss further enliven the façade. On the front of the upper floor are two strips of elaborately notched Gothic script. The exuberantly decorated façade is spanned by a sky painted on the underside of the roof, complete with sun, moon and stars.



Untere Walkenmatte



Obere Walkenmatte

25 Rüti (Rüti 7)

Built in 1712 for Jakob Schläppi and his wife Madlena Hildebrand. Restored in 1944. The original house was later extended to include additional living space and barns. Polychrome painting (bears and flowers) and richly ornamented Gothic script adorn the original upper-floor and gable area.

26 Wattfluh (Wattfluh 14)

The façade facing the valley features 16th-century decoration. It was extended along the ridge in 1752 by the master carpenter Michel Tschabold for Christian Mani and Elsbeth Schwendimann. The paintings on the façade facing the mountains date from the same period.

27 Wampflen (Wampflen 30)

– on the valley path!

Old mill, formerly with a bakehouse. Built in 1740 for Stäffen Agenstein and Verena Willen. The inscription reads «Built in 1740, when the harsh winter only ended in the hay-making month», shedding an interesting light on the history of the local climate. An old millstone in the paving between the residential house and the barn indicates the house's original function.

Next door is a two-rooms-wide farmhouse (Wampflen 17) dating from 1784 with remarkable friezes. The façade was probably symmetrical at one time.

Rear of the valley

28 Hinteres Riedli (Riedli 50)

Built around 1780. Well-designed façade with vigorous decorative carpentry.

29 Shop (Laden, Oeyen 32)

Built around 1780. Well-designed, well-proportioned façade, with vigorous carvings on the lower- and upper-floor trusses. This building used to be a shop.

Neighbouring house to the east (Oeyen 36)

Built in 1715, this house has a very well-designed façade. Of the original painted decoration, the two bears on the gable are still easily discernible. In parts, the inscriptions have been effectively restored, but the remainder of the bold Gothic script is barely decipherable.

30 Grosshaus (Oeyen 18)

While the grooves and ridges on the façade purlins, dating from 1680, still hark back to the time of Gothic-style carpentry, the cubed friezes on the small extension already announce a new stylistic era. Of particular note are the five St Andrew's crosses on the purlins. Houses with St Andrew's crosses on the roof timbers were probably built by men who belonged to a religious organisation, the «Andresen». (see Christian Rubi's book, Das Simmentaler Bauernhaus).

31 Kumm (Oeyen 13)

Built in 1708, although some parts of the house are clearly older. Originally two rooms wide and well proportioned. Well-designed façade with cubed friezes and weatherworn Gothic inscriptions on a double



Wattfluh



Wattfluh



Wampflen



Hinteres Riedli

beam. Of particular note are the elaborately designed small corbels supporting the protruding upper floor. Here too, the St Andrew's crosses are visible on the purlins.

Further into the valley, below the road, is the Brunnenhaus (Oeyen 10). Built in 1717, it features lovely cubed friezes and the remains of a Gothic inscription.

32 Boden (Narrenbach 6 + 8)

Built in 1785, probably by Christian Klossner and his wife Elisabeth Knutti (initials under the gable window ledge). The master carpenter has signed H.M. (Hans Messerli). Broad, asymmetrical façade. The asymmetry and the increasingly profuse decoration towards the top of the building, together with the significantly protruding gable wall, introduce tension into the façade. Indented prow on the western side and some original grid partitions in the upper-floor and gable windows. Extended in 2015.

When the house was divided the inhabitants of the right-hand side of the house were given the legal right to walk through the living area of the left-hand side of the house to fetch water from the well.

The neighbouring house to the west (Narrenbach 12) is a multi-purpose building, divided lengthwise, as is common in the Frutigland. The central part is original.



Boden



Houeten

33 Houeten (Narrenbach 36)

Built in 1753 by Niklaus Kuntz and Madlena Heren «his spouse». It is signed by the master carpenter Antoni Baumer, who in 1751 was still working as a master craftsman in Tiermatti. The house is three rooms wide and was probably previously symmetrical. Richly designed façade with cubed, diamond and blind arch friezes. On the upper-floor truss are decorative wavy lines; on the gable a low book-spine frieze. The windows have all been preserved in the original style. The magnificent, expansive Gothic script was expertly restored in 1992. It is striking that the abundant ornamental script only covers the leftmost two thirds of the building, suggesting that when the house was divided only the owners of the left-hand side could afford the inscription. Also worth mentioning is the internal cellar staircase, unusual for the 18th century, which survives in its original form.

33A Schwenden Chapel (Grimmialp 35)

The Bernese Government approved the construction of a daughter church in Schwenden as early as 1854. Previously, the community in the rear of the valley was dependent on the church in Diemtigen and its residents had to carry their dead to the cemetery there(!). However, it was not until 1911 that work started on the present chapel at the Grimmialp spa house. The room has ogival windows and a shingled roof, with an overhang to the east and south supported by wooden pillars. A ridge turret identifies the building as a place of worship.



Schwenden Chapel

33B Spa house (Hotel Kurhaus, Grimmialp 25)

Built in 1899 on the initiative of J.J. Rebmann, a member of the Swiss National Council, who was born in 1846 in Schwenden. Originally intended as a spa for drinking and bathing treatments, its heyday came between 1925 and 1930 thanks to its popularity with the English, who visited all year round. In 1929 the house had 3,200 overnight stays in winter and 2,897 in summer. In 1926, the hotel owner, Rudolf Kunz, the founder's son-in-law, was able to take over the local bus and mail ser-



Spa house (Grand Hotel Kurhaus Grimmialp)

vice between Oey and Schwenden and became the first local postman. Guests included the jungle doctor and philanthropist Albert Schweitzer. In autumn 1946 the hotel was sold to the health insurance fund of the city of Basel and is now privately run as a family business. The building's covered balconies have been preserved. The solarium next to the main building is also in its original condition.

34 Schürmatte (Kileystrasse 7)

Built in 1778 by the master carpenter Hans Messerli for Peter Denner, Barbara Schläppi, Hans Regez and Magarita Heimann.

The southern room and barn section to the left are more recent. Renovated in 1968. The façade was originally two rooms wide and symmetrical. As well as the decorative carpentry consisting of bold, flat-carved vines on the lower-floor truss and a very sculptural frieze of cubes and blind arches, accentuating the overhang of the upper-floor wall, the façade features impressive black Gothic script. This was restored in 1968 and covers the gable and upper-floor balustrade, as well as the ends of the covered balconies under the eaves. The restrained paintings are an early sign that the practice of façade painting was dying out in the valley.

35 Rain (Kileystrasse 5)

Built in 1743. Three-rooms-wide house with barn area added on the eaves side. Despite being built in several different phases, it has a self-contained, asymmetrical façade with abundant decorative carpentry, weatherworn inscriptions and paintings. Of particular note are the wooden animal heads and the delicate pattern of plank ends piercing the front wall. Abundant Swiss stone pine.

36 Tiermatti (Tiermatti 33)

Built in 1751 by the master carpenter Gilgian Henni and his master craftsman Antoni Baumer for Jacob Rebmann and his wife Magdalena Regez. Façade renovated in 1938. In 1900 the two cheese cellars were converted into a restaurant and in 1931 a ballroom was added. The first house with a half-hip roof and book-spine frieze in the municipality of Diemtigen and therefore in the Simmental.

As well as the luxuriant botanical frieze on the lower-floor balustrade and delicate bellflower frieze under the window ledge on the upper floor, there is abundant sculptural ornamentation in geometric forms, accentuated by the addition of colour. The valley community's coat of arms, the two winegrowers' coats of arms and the two bears under the starry sky are accompanied by plant motifs in the later Simmental style. Five strips of Gothic script, painted in black, complement the plentiful ornamentation. Of particular note are the vertical wooden projections in the form of animal heads. A guard-like figure with a sword as tall as a man stands at the former entrance on the eaves side.

Directly to the south of the restaurant is Tiermatti 37, which was built in 1730 by the master carpenter Jakob Lutz. Symmetrical façade, two rooms wide. More recent extension. Very beautiful sculptural decoration. The paintings depict unusual leafy vines growing out of a white face; similar designs can be seen in Saanen. Unfortunately faded. The first telephone in the valley was in the room added on the north side, consequently still known today as «the telephone room».



Schürmatte



Tiermatti

Imprint

Inventories:

Federal Inventory of Swiss Heritage Sites www.isos.ch

Canton of Bern Inventory of Historical Monuments www.erz.be.ch

Maps:

Walking map of Diemtigtal, 1 : 25 000, available from Diemtigtal Nature Park

Walking map of Saanenland – Simmental, 1 : 50 000, Sheet 5025 T

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