

TRANSHUMANCE IN AUSTRIA

Transhumance is the seasonal movement of people with their livestock between fixed summer and winter pastures. *Vertical transhumance* implies movement between higher pastures in summer and lower valleys in winter. Herders have a permanent home, typically in valleys. Only the herds travel, with the people necessary to tend them.

OSTTIROLER ALMEN

Alms are a centuries old culture established out of economic necessity to use high altitude alpine pastures in the summer, due to the limited lower pastures available for haying. At the beginning of the summer, cattle and other grazing animals were driven to higher altitude pastures, often by children, where alpine herdsman and dairyman (der Senner) and the dairywoman (die Sennerin), as well as their children (die Kinder) looked after the herd.

600 ALMS IN OSTTIROL

Today, few people can grasp how difficult a life it was for the families to care for the herd without roads and limited to the most basic foods and exposed to all manner of weather.

The Alms are located right below the mountainous peaks on the more gentle pastoral sections of the Osttirol Berge (mountains).

The Alm tradition and culture has withstood the passage of time and the addition of roads, helicopter service and cable lifts because this blending of culture and nature remains a sensible addition to running a farm.

ALMS AND TOURISM

Alms represent a simple way of life that is valued by hikers wandering on holiday because of its restorative effect. The Alms (both the land and the buildings) are a well kept mosaic between the valleys and the higher rocky peaks. They are the highest elevation of seasonal inhabitants.

The best way to experience Alm life is to go and wander there. Over the last few years, I have wandered through several alpine regions in Osttirol with the full confidence that when we arrived at an Alm we would be welcomed by the Sennerin, treated to a wonderfully satisfying local meal and, with good fortune, offered a small glass of home made schnaps to make the rest of the journey more pleasant.

Join me in singing a Wanderlied (hiking song) as we visit a few special Osttiroler Almen...



STRUMERHOF, 1451 M (1966)

Strumerhof is not an Alm, but it is where my story starts. If my wife had not visited there with her parents, she never would have developed a life long relationship with the culture of Osttirol that I have been fortunate to experience first hand.

Strumerhof is a foodie destination that sits perched on the side of a mountain looking down toward Mauterthaler Alm.



HOLZER FAMILY - 1967

The Holzer family raised 9 children that all worked on the farm from the youngest to the oldest. My wife, wearing fashionable red Lederhosen became the 10th child.



HAYING THE “LOWER” PASTURE, 1966

As soon as the hay in the lower pastures can be harvested, it is cut by hand and every one grabs a rake to help turn it in the sunshine and eventually get it into the barn for winter feed. An interesting note about the fields in this area is that they are rich in nutrients and are credited with flavoring the milk produced by the cows.



PUTTING THE HAY IN THE BARN, 1966

Large stacks of hay are hoisted into the barn where the manual labor resumes to get them stored for the winter



HAYING, 2010

On my first trip to Strumerhof, I observed the exact same method of haying that my father in law had recorded 50 years earlier.



CLEANING CHANTERELLE MUSHROOMS (1967)

Chanterelle mushrooms grow wild in the forest and are a treasured addition to many traditional meals. As with haying, much manual work needs to be done before the meal is served. Serving meals to guests supplemented the family income. Today the traditional dishes are in great demand by visitors wishing to sample true Osttirol fare.



EVERYONE WORKS TO BRING IN THE HAY (1967)



WINTER IN OSTTIROL (1967)

“Winter comes down from the mountain” each year. It can snow anytime after September and the snow will cover the ground until spring.



STRUMERHOF IM WINTER (1966)

While Strumerhof im Winter does resemble to Winter Palace in the movie Doctor Zhivago, it is a constant reminder that it is important to make hay while the sunshines.

STALLER ALM, 1914M



Staller Alm is in der Staller Sattel which separates Austria from Italy.
1/2 of the Alm's land is in each country

One out way down from the Staller Alm, traffic was halted by the local residents who had decided to sample the greenery along both sides of the road. While the car in front of us wondered what to do, my wife jumped out and encouraged the cows to move along in the same manner as she did as a child.

JAGDHAUSALM, 2009M - EST 1590



The trek to the Jagdhausalm (hunters house pasture) resembles a trip across Tibet. The settlement, once inhabited year round, is unusual in that the buildings are made from stone, rather than wood. The meal we had out of doors was fabulous, but it was so cold (in July) that we wished we had brought hats and gloves. On the way back, we were more concerned about snow than rain.

ZUNIG ALM, 1846M



The Zunig Alm sits just under the Kleine Zunig, which sits next to the Grosse Zunig. It is a fabulous hike to the Alm. After lunch, the Sennerin brought us two glasses of Schnaps. When I declined mine, both were offered to my wife.

ARNITZ ALM, 1848M



You are now seeing the fine theme of hiking to an Alm. There will be a table, a Bankl, a menu and great home made food to enjoy while you contemplate your journey back home.

WOODENALM, 1825M



The Woodenalm, sits above Strumerhof and is a very easy hike. Here Susanne is photographing our midday meal – Kaiserschmarrn (on the left) and a lovely platter of home made cheese and speck, along with home baked bread.

GOTTSCHAUNALM, 1946M



The Gottschaunalm (God's View Alm) is spectacular. The snow on the Grossvenediger (the 4th highest mountain in Austria at 3666m – 12,000 feet) in the distance fell the night before this hike. It was mid July.

JÖRGNALM, 1977M



The valley at the foot of the Grossglockner (highest mountain in Austria, 12,460 feet – 3798m) is the home of several Alms.

DÖRFLERTALALMEN - A WAY OF LIFE

A planned hydro dam would have flooded this pastoral valley, home of many family Alms, to the point indicated in the picture if it was not for the Sennerinnen of the region networking with influential women in Wien to intercede and halt the project.

Fortunately, the Dörflertalalmen will continue to represent the transhumance in Osttirol for generations yet to come.

