

HISTORY

The origin of the name "Livigno"

According to the historian Sertolis Salis the name Livigno stood for "Vinea et Vineloa", Latin for vineyard. However, today it is generally believed that the name, without the prefix "Li", probably originates from the old Romansch word "lavina", meaning avalanche, as it is most improbable that wine was ever cultivated in the mountain valley of Livigno, at over 1800m altitude. Considering the fact that even in olden times the Livigno valley was buried under a vast blanket of snow for many months of the year, the second theory seems more plausible. Historians also disagree on the origin of and the period in which settlers first arrived in this valley. Whilst most believe the first settlers of this region of the Alps were of Ligurian or Rhetian origin, others remain firmly convinced that the area was first inhabited by Etruscans. A third theory is that Slavs first settled here, having followed the Danube and Inn rivers.

Livigno's main assets: forests, fields, snow

In order to understand the lifestyle of the inhabitants of Livigno we must look at the history of these three assets. The larch forests around Livigno grew over hundreds of years. Due to the raw climate found at this altitude of over 1800m, the trees only grow during 4 months of the year and at a much slower rate than in lower regions. For

the remaining 8 months of the year growth remains dormant. The trees around Livigno were not only used as the main construction material for houses, but also felled to obtain heating fuel for the long winter months, as well as in order to provide larger fields for grazing cattle. Forest clearing for the sake of pasture lands is not a new invention. Even in the past farmers found the need to increase their pastures to be able to feed more cattle and hence have more meat to better survive the long winter months. Hundreds of years ago cattle-farming was the only way to survive and make a living at such a high altitude, which consequently led to deforestation. It has always been said that Livigno farmers keep their pastures in very good condition; a habit partly motivated by the fact hay is only cut once a year at this altitude. The vast amounts of timber made available due to the expansion of pasture lands defined the building style in the valley. The old buildings are purely residential (il bait) and are generally situated alongside or at an angle to the farm building (la stala). The houses were originally built exclusively with wood, which means that more recent buildings are easily recognizable as they have a stone base. The roof (il teit) traditionally has two gables and is covered with larch shingles. Several long pieces of timber are laid across (shindledächer??) the shingles to prevent the snow from sliding off. Chimneys are rare and windows small and shuttered in order to minimize heat

loss. Originally these houses were built far apart from each other in order to avoid the risk of fire spreading from one building to another. This also led to the strong sense of isolation and individualism of the Livigno family clans. Autonomy was essential in order to be able to survive during the isolation imposed by winter conditions. During these long months people would only leave their houses to tend to the cattle in the stable nearby. The residential building that stands beside the pasture land would have been the main centre of activity. The "Tea", the farmer's summer residence, would be situated slightly higher up the mountain at the outer limits of the pastures. A few decades ago Livigno still had the appearance of a village stuck in the past – resembling an open air museum. To keep the village this way would have meant losing the younger generation to jobs outside the valley which ultimately would have brought about even greater isolation than that already suffered during winter. Fortunately the inhabitants of Livigno realized the potential of their high altitude situation, with guaranteed white winters. Concentrating all efforts on the winter tourism trade was the only logical way to give the area a commercial future and provide the younger generation with jobs. The development of winter tourism has led to a new style of buildings and infrastructures such as ski lifts and hotels

that have, over time, altered the original character and layout of the village. Where the old houses had been set far apart new buildings have come crowding in, transforming Livigno into what is today a bustling and quite densely populated village that stretches over 12 kilometres.

Development of tourism in Livigno

Before the construction of the electricity plant in 1965 that led to the building of the dam which gave Livigno its lake, there was very little tourism in the village. The winter closure of both access roads, the Foscagno Pass and the Forcola di Livigno, meant that up until the 1950's the village could only offer summer tourism. It was only in 1952 that it was first attempted to keep the road over the Foscagno Pass to Bormio open in winter. In 1959 the first ski lifts were built, leading to a modest amount of winter tourism. The real breakthrough for tourism came with the opening of the Munt la Schera tunnel in 1965, directly linking Livigno to Switzerland. Whilst there were 6 hotels and 2 ski lifts in Livigno in 1965 this number has steadily increased and in 2001 the village boasted over 100 hotels with 4800 beds, over 900 holiday flats, 32 lifts with over 110 kilometres of prepared slopes. The small, single-lane tunnel linking Livigno to Switzerland had opened up the area for



guests from the north. Now open to public use, this tunnel was initially constructed in order to enable the transport of building materials to the dam construction site.

The Livigno Lake

The dam and reservoir lake that has covered the northern part of the Spöl valley for more than 30 years is without doubt the structure that spurred the most important changes in the valley. The negotiations that finally culminated in the construction of the dam in the Ponte del Gallo area of Livigno were lengthy and complicated. The reason for this is the international character of the River Spöl. The first 23km of this river flow along the Livigno valley. It then continues through the territory of the Swiss National Park to Zernez where it joins the River Inn. Switzerland had shown interest in gaining electricity from the Inn as far back as the beginning of the 20th century. In order to realize this project, a reservoir lake was necessary in order to regulate the seasonally varying flow of the River Inn. The ideal location for the construction of such a lake was the northernmost part of the Spöl valley, situated on Italian territory. Around the same time, the electricity works of the city of Milan were also looking at possible ways to use the waters of the Spöl and had drafted a project in 1942 that would have enabled them to deviate it through subterranean canals and into the River Adda. The waters of the Spöl were hence of great interest to both countries. On May 27th

1957 the two parties reached an agreement that would satisfy both projects. Work on the Ponte del Gallo dam started in 1964 and reached completion in 1968. The official opening ceremony took place on August 27th 1971. The 3.4km long Munt la Schera tunnel was opened in 1965 during the construction of the dam, thereby linking the Livigno valley to Punt la Drossa in the Swiss National Park. Originally constructed for the transport of building materials the tunnel is today open to public traffic in both directions. The opening of this tunnel, providing direct access to Switzerland and thereby central Europe, was of great importance to the Livigno economy as it has brought an ever increasing number of tourists from the northern regions.

Livigno – duty-free area

As early as the 17th century, the rulers of the county of Grisons, who at that time governed the Veltlin valley, granted the Livigno farmers complete economic and legal autonomy, allowing the inhabitants of the valley to be exempt from tax. The reason for this lies in the high altitude situation of the valley which meant that produce from farming was just enough for a family to survive on but left no margin for paying taxes. Imposing tax on the area would have forced its inhabitants to abandon their lands in pursuit of more productive areas, leaving the Livigno valley uninhabited. This same high altitude situation later led Napoleon to grant Livigno duty-free advantages, which were

in turn confirmed by Austro-Hungarian rulers, reinforced by Italy in 1910 and finally reconfirmed by the European Community in 1960.

For this reason Livigno is today not only renowned for its beautiful, untouched high alpine countryside and its large skiing domain but also as a duty-free area. Benefits gained by local businesses from tax relief and VAT exemption are largely passed on to the consumer, offering some of the cheapest prices in Europe: petrol is about half price, but also other products such as cigarettes, alcohol, perfume, cameras, optical instruments, computers and famous clothes brands are much cheaper than elsewhere. There is however a limit to the amount of duty-free products you can carry over the border into Europe: bikers carrying more than 1 carton of 200 cigarettes or 1 bottle of distilled spirits or liquor would, if caught, be considered modern smugglers.

The Livigno bike concept

Especially during the summer months the duty-free character of the area lures many visitors to Livigno to fill their petrol tanks and buy gifts. By evening these guests have all disappeared, with virtually no impact at all on hotels. Therefore, the tourism manager and hotel directors of Livigno decided to concentrate their

efforts on bikers as the main summer tourist, given that they need much the same amenities as skiers in winter, simply exchanging snowy descents for extensive single-trail and gravel path tours on the grassy summer slopes in the beautiful untouched natural surroundings. The amazing variety of possibilities for bikers around Livigno is impressive. There are over 600 kilometres of military roads, smugglers paths and single-trails – all practicable for cyclists and set in the beautiful alpine landscape at over 1800m altitude. Most of these trails are accessible even to less experienced bikers and offer breathtaking panoramic views of the of the Ortler glacier, Cima Piazze and Bernina ranges. You would be hard put to find a more beautiful biking region in the Alps, with such an impressive combination of mountains, views and cycle trails. Fully aware of this, the Livigno authorities decided to concentrate on bikers as their main target market. Their aim is to prove that Livigno is as great a biker's destination as Lake Garda. Livigno is of course unable to offer the all important snow-free paths in spring and autumn, but they certainly have it all during the summer months: a mild, pleasant climate, fascinating well-kept single-trails that are accessible even to less seasoned bikers, a variety of tours to match all tastes and abilities including a number of two-day



tours or more that can be made into mini Transalp excursions, as well as providing the optimum conditions for high altitude training sessions. One of the first steps towards building a bike region of worldwide renown has been the candidature for the mountain bike World Championships that will be held in Livigno in 2005. In order to host this competition the region had to demonstrate perfect cross-country and marathon trails. With help from the Stelvio/Stilfserjoch National park, old and disused walking paths were transformed into state-of-the-art bike trails. Livigno's mayor Lionello Silvestri personally drove the small digger used to expand the trails over the Passo di Val Trela, Passo Alpisella and the Valle delle Mine. Over 20 members of the local bike club lent a hand with spades and pickaxes. This expansion is currently an ongoing project. An improved ascent to the Eira Pass and a new trail from Monte della Neve to the Vallaccia Pass are planned for 2004, banishing the push-sections from these routes. In order to offer appropriate accommodation, 24 hoteliers have so far agreed to transform their properties into specialized Bike Hotels with tailored services. There are also plans to develop a large network of mountain bike routes in the areas of St. Moritz - Upper Engadine, Santa Maria - Val Müstair and Bormio - Valtellina. Most of these routes (see two-day tours) already offer the ideal conditions for a fascinating and adventurous bike holiday.

USEFUL TIP

Please use the menu just below the Bike GPS logo to view the history to download the roadbook, the altitude profile or the photos to the tour of your choice. You must keep the roadbook and altitude profile files in the same folder as the characteristics file in order to enable the automatic links. You can print all three files separately, fold them down the middle and take them along on the tour.

