Partnach-GORGE

Geology & Origin
Economic exploitation
Development of the tourism

GARMISCH-PARTENKIRCHEN
Welcome to the natural monument Partnach Gorge!

The remarkable Partnach Gorge is ca. 2.305 ft. in length, its walls rise to 263 ft. It is also accessible in winter due to galleries cut into the rocks and an alley where bizarre ice sculptures give this natural beauty its unique charm.

The gorge can be passed by an iron bridge situated 223 ft. above the river which has been constructed in 1914.

About 200,000 visitors can be counted every year.

The origin of the gorge

The Partnach originates at the Reintalanger alp and is the natural discharge of the Schneeferner, a vestige of an ice-age glacier at the Zugspitz plateau. From its source, the so called Partnachursprung, west of the Brunntal in the rear of the Reintal valley, the Partnach tosses down icy waters through the romantic Reintal surrounded by the walls of the Blassenkamm in the north and the steep slopes of the Hochwanner and the Teufelsgrat (Devil's Crest) in the south. The Reintal is considered to be one of the most impressive plateaus of the Northern Limestone Alps. The Partnach flows underground in the so called Steingerümpel. At the Bockhütte (Ram’s Hut) it flows off in northern direction, passes through the Hinter and the Mitterklammgorge, both of which are inaccessible and picks up a brook called Bodenlaine coming from the Kreuzeck area. Before arriving at the Partnach Gorge the Ferchenbach on the right supplies the waters of the Ferchensee, a mountain lake, and those of numerous other brooks located in the forest lands in front of the Wetterstein wall.

Before the ice-age, the Partnach traversed the valley of the Ferchenbach eastward; from there its course continued via the Drüsselgraben, the Kranzbach Valley and the town Klais, passing on to the town Krün where it finally flew into the river Isar. Geologists suppose that a little streamlet made its actual bed by piercing through the wall of shell-limestone of the Graseck which then barred the access to the Loisach valley.

By the way, the name Partnach consists of two words: the Indo-German designation for passage, gateway: “portn” and the old High-German: “aha” (equal to “Ache”) which means watercourse. The part of the town called Partenkirchen, the former Latin “Parta-num”, became its name from the river.

Economic exploitation

The Partnach Gorge played a more significant role for the transportation of wood when the forest authorities of the Bishops of Freising (the Werdenfels county belonged until 1802 to the Grand Chapter of Freising) granted the private households the right to cut firewood and timber of the episcopal properties in the valleys of Ferchen and Reintal as well as in the Stuiben area. Since the end of the 18th century, the so called “Triften” (floating of timber) was practiced by the local people. For this reason, after the cutting the trunks were sawn into 4-feet-long logs and marked with the so called “Hausmarch” which meant that the brand of the respective beneficiary had been cut into the trunk.

After the marking the trunks were thrown into the waters of the Partnach and the Ferchenbach and floated towards the valley. This so called “water wood”- in difference to the “mountain wood” which was transported on horse sleighs - was floated in the river in springtime in order to use the high waters caused by the melting of the snow.

In former times when the logs were tightly wedged or immobilized at the embankments and before an approach was constructed, the woodcutters had to be roped down into the gorge sitting on a special kind of chair which was covered by a little roof against rockfall. By using crooked hooks (“Grieshaken”) at the end of long poles, the cutters tried to get the logs floating again. This work was extremely dangerous. A floodgate barred the course of the Partnach near the so called “Holzhof” (timber yard) where nowadays the State Vocational School is situated, and drained off the waters into a lateral ditch by means of a grid installed half-way up. This small canal united with the main course of the river somewhere downstream.

At this point, the logs were halted at an underwater sandbank where the woodcutters drew them out, piled them up, and the foresters measured them.
The president of the local Alpine Club, the engineer Adolf Zoeppritz - who had also made the Höllental gorge accessible for tourists in 1905 - started finally in 1910 the enlargement of the up to 262 ft deep gorge. Upon completion of an utmost difficult work - tunnels had to be blasted into the rocks and financial difficulties had to be overcome - the Partnach Gorge was opened for tourists. The Partenkirchen Tourist and Sports Club proposed in 1930 that the municipal authorities should take over the Partnach Gorge and assure the access in winter in order to see the remarkable ice-cascades through supplementary construction. In addition to this, the Wildenauer Strasse was enlarged for tourists and horse-drawn coaches. Remains of the old path can still be seen today. A well-known mountain guide, Josef Bergkofer (Pitzner) who owned a hut at the entrance of the gorge escorted timid visitors through the gorge with its tossing waters.

There is a street in Garmisch which has been named after this famous site: the Klammstrasse.

Every year floods and ice-cascades cause great damage which call for costly repair work. Quite often mountaineers have to be roped down the walls in order to remove the loose rocks and thus to protect the visitors from falling stones. Balustrades and planks are regularly controlled in order to guarantee the highest safety standards for our tourists.

Open daily:
Summer from 8 a.m. - 18 p.m.
Winter from 9 a.m. - 17 p.m.

Short term closures sometimes become inevitable due to security reasons.

Telephone and Fax 088 21 / 31 67

New attraction after the rockfall

On June 1, 1991 about 5,000 cubicmetres of rocks broke loose of a wall at the south end of the gorge and blocked the existing path as well as the course of the brook. Fortunately, this accident did not cause any victims. Thus a small, natural reservoir was formed and the Partnach made its way though the gigantic boulders. Since 1992 a 108-metres-long gallery which has been sprung into the rocks passes along the rocks and reservoir. This gallery is illuminated by windows from which this natural monument can be watched.

In the early 60ies of last century wood-floating lost its importance, when rather large forest roads made the Reintal and the adjacent valleys accessible. Only names like Triftstrasse (Floating street) or Am Holzhof (At the timber yard) remind us of the floating and the former timber yard. The street name Kohlstattstrasse refers to the Kohlstätte, the former working place of a charcoalburner. They fabricated charcoal in the so-called “Meiler” (charcoal piles).

Already in 1897/98 the gorge was to be opened to the traffic. The construction of a railway connection between the town of Partenkirchen and the Partnach Gorge, the town of Garmisch and the Eisee was suggested. This project failed due to lack of financial means.

In 1949 a totally different economic exploitation of the Partnach and its affluents was considered. Plans were made to bar the upper end of the gorge by a 361 ft. high dam in order to convert the entire front part of the Reintal and Ferchenbachtal into a huge reservoir.

The installation of a power-station in the Wildenau was also proposed in order to produce power for the Bavarian Electricity Supply. This intention failed due to heavy opposition.

Development of the tourism

It was not until 1912 that the Partnach gorge was opened as natural monument. The floating industry boosted this development. In 1885 a devastating windfall destroyed large parts of the forests in the Partnach and Ferchenbach valley as well as in the Schachen region.

Therefore, it was considered to build a footpath through the inaccessible gorge in order to facilitate the floating of timber.

The forest authorities ordered the necessary work by fixing steel griders into the steep walls of rock just above the torrent which were covered with thick boards. Thus a provisional passage was built in 1886. The woodcutters - equipped with iron poles - stood on this small bridge and tried to keep the logs going through the gorge.

Whereas the path was mainly used by hunters, foresters and woodcutters, some adventurous tourists began to hike through the Partnach Gorge in the course of the steadily expanding tourism.
Some suggestions for hiking fans

The Partnach Gorge is the point of departure for many walking points in the Ferchenbach valley, the Reintal, the Eckbauer, Hausberg and Kreuzeck areas.

The easiest way to reach the gorge by car is via the Mittenwalder- and Wildenauerstrasse. Your car can be parked in front of the Olympiapark (big parking lot and city-bus-stop), as the entrance by car to the Wildenau and to the gorge is not allowed. There are beautiful walking paths to the Olympic Ski Stadium, the departure point, leading along the railway track Grainau-Garmisch as well as from the railway station along the Partnach river banks.

From there, the hike begins with a walk of ca. 25 minutes or a horse-drawn carriage ride through the Wildenau on flat ground. Inns and kiosks line the street, leading to the gorge entrance just before a road forks left to a hamlet called Vordergraseck.

This hamlet is situated 427 ft. above the Partnach gorge and can be reached easily by an automatic cable car, the so called Grasekbbahn. Another way branches off to the left, leads across a footbridge on the right side in a 15 - 20 minutes hike up to the Hohe Brücke (High Bridge). To the left of this bridge Vordergraseck can be reached easily in a 10-minute walk and from the right it takes only 15 minutes to the Partnachalm, a mountain inn, 328 ft. above the gorge. Those who want to go through the gorge (low entrance fee) will find more possibilities to continue hiking at its end. The left-hand path leads in 25 minutes to Vordergraseck (Forsthaus Graseck Hotel, Hanneslabauer and Wetterstein inns); straight ahead, the way continues in direction to the Ferchenbach which flows into the Partnach from this point. From here, a way leads to the Partnachalm within 25 minutes. A forest road leads along the Ferchenbach to Elmau and the lakes Ferchensee and Lautersee. Another forest road leads upwards - along the Partnach to the Reintal valley. We highly recommend to try an excursion to the King Ludwig chalet of Schachen.

After the Partnach gorge you walk more than half a mile upstream on the forest road along the Ferchenbach river towards Elmau Castle until a signpost appears. Here a steep forest road begins which leads to a forester’s hut called Am Steilenn. You continue by passing the sign-post via the timber storage area to the Königswege (the King’s Road) which is the forest road from Elmau Castle to Schachen Chalet. Staying on this road, you arrive first at the Wettersteinalm (a 3.5 - hour hike from the Olympic Ski Stadium). During summer time, this small alpine inn - situated in a basin below the magnificent rock formation - offers snacks and refreshments.

On this forest road, you will reach the Schachen Chalet within a 1.5-hour walk, a mountain refuge with lodging facilities and inn, open only in summer. In 1871 King Ludwig II of Bavaria constructed this small and extraordinary castle. Its exterior resembles a swiss chalet, the interior holds on the second floor a lavish and colourful reception hall in oriental style for the king. The castle can be visited by paying a small entrance fee (from 11:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m.). Below the chalet, the remarkable Alpine Garden with rare alpine flowers and plants can also be visited.

From the hamlet Vordergraseck different ways lead to Hintergraseck, up to the Eckbauer and on to Wamberg. The way coming down from the Reintal makes a turn to the Bodenlaine and reascends to the Kreuzeck, Stuiben and Alp spitze areas. The way along the Partnach to the Bockhütte (Ram’s hut) leads on the left via the Oberreintal to the Schachen, the Meilerhütte and the Drei- torspitze, on the right via the huts Angerhütte and Knorrhütte to the Zugspitze.

From the mountain inn Partnachalm you may walk to the Reintaler Hof (closed to the public) and continue to the Reintal. Other paths lead to the Bayernhaus inn and to the Kreuzeck as well as to Partenkirchen (Olympic Ski Stadium) or via the Kochelbergalm inn to Garmisch.

Please always keep in mind: solid hiking boots and the respective protective clothing are absolutely necessary. When you are hiking in alpine regions, it is also advisable to consult maps and guides beforehand.