



HISTORICAL ITINERARIES IN VILSBERG

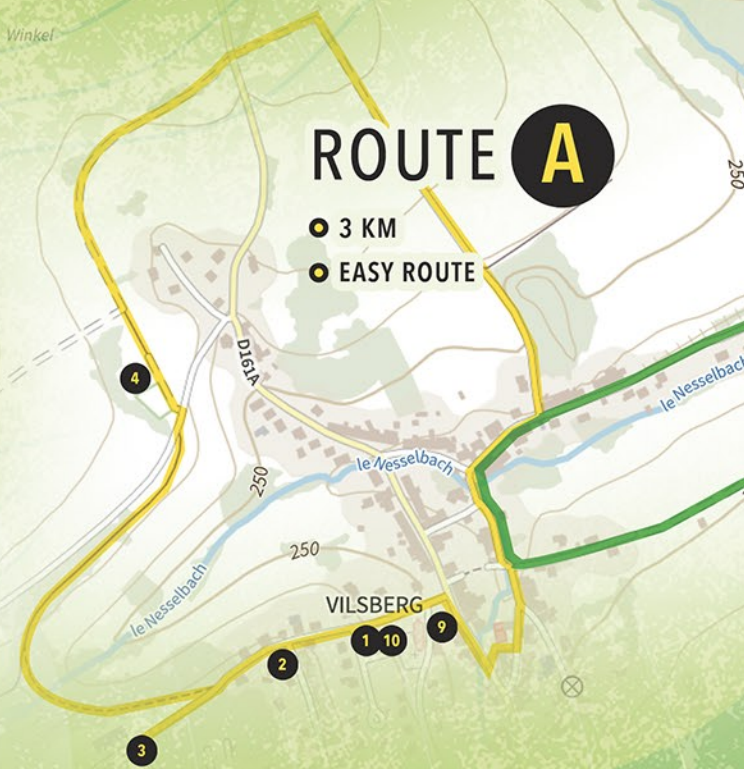
Come and discover Vilsberg through our historical itineraries, which will provide you with a wealth of information as you criss-cross our village following a number of stages. There are two possible circuits:

Route A and Route B.

Throughout the route, you will be able to follow a map and find out information on your mobile phone by scanning the QR code on each panel.

VILSBERG THROUGH TIME...

- WYLSPERCH AND WILDESBERG (1367)
- WILSPERG (1589)
- VILSPERG (1591)
- VILTZBERG (1719)
- VILSPERG (1756)
- VILSCHBERG OR LE NEUF-VILLAGE (CASSINI)
- WILSBERG (19TH CENTURY)
- WILSCHBUERJ (LORRAINE FRANCONIAN)
- WILSBERG (STANDARD GERMAN)



ROUTE B

- EXTENSION OF ROUTE A
- 4 ADDITIONAL STAGES
- 4,5 KM



Wear walking shoes to walk through the forest. The ground may be muddy in places, depending on the season.

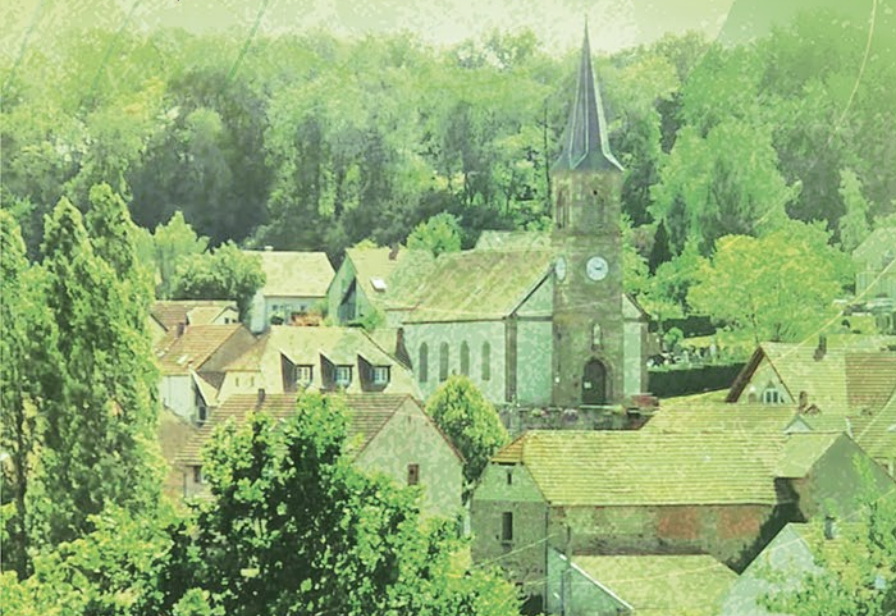
ROUTE A

- 3 KM
- EASY ROUTE

THE ROUTE STAGES

- STAGE 1: THE CASTLE
- STAGE 2: THE STATION
- STAGE 3: THE LARGE QUARRY
- STAGE 4: THE QUARRIES
- STAGE 5: THE "KRIMÉE" (CRIMEA)
- STAGE 6: THE VILSBERG MILL "MUEHLMATT"
- STAGE 7: THE FIRING RANGE
- STAGE 8: THE GLASSMATT
- STAGE 9: "LANGE BRUNNE" FOUNTAIN
- STAGE 10: THE CHURCH

ROUTE SIGNAGE:



○ STAGE 1: THE CASTLE



In the Middle Ages, the fiefdom of Vilsberg was run by a noble and ancient line of knights.

In 1300, they faced Eberhardt d'Andlau in battle, right here in Vilsberg. They were defeated and Eberhardt destroyed the castle and village in revenge. The castle would never be rebuilt. The fiefdom was abandoned until 1345, when the Lords of La Petite-Pierre tasked one of the descendants of the line with taking over the running of the territory. **He took the name of Berthold I Münch of Vilsberg.**

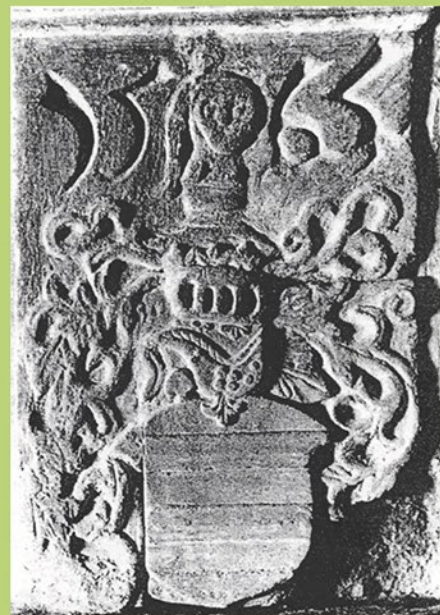
He died on 29 September 1378.

He is buried in the Franciscan Recollect church in Saverne, where he served as "Oberschultheis" (Mayor).

In addition to the fiefdom of Vilsberg and its forest, this line of knights owned (at various times) a large number of fiefdoms and castles in the region.

They established their seat in Saverne and ruled from the 13th to the 16th century over a large swathe of the Northern Vosges region.

They were vassals of the Lords of La Petite-Pierre and Lichtenberg.



On 2 July 1587, the final descendant of the Münch of Vilsberg line died. He bequeathed a hamlet to Vilsberg named "Schlossgarten" (castle park) and its coat of arms (with three alternating red and white horizontal stripes), the emblem of the municipality.



1863 drawing of Vilsberg Castle

○ STAGE 2: THE STATION



You are now standing in front of the Vilsberg station building. Nowadays, it is a private residential property.

In 1871, France ceded Alsace and Moselle to the German Reich as war reparations. At that time, Germany planned major construction projects, especially the northern expansion of the city of Strasbourg. This would become the future 'Neustadt'. To carry out its plans, the Reich needed huge quantities of cut stone. They used every quarry in the region, including those at Vilsberg. The industrial exploitation of sandstone quarries between 1871 and 1914 faced a considerable obstacle. The roads were poor and transport using animal-drawn carts unreliable, while there was a huge and pressing need for stone.

The Germans therefore built a special railway line (metre-gauge) to link the quarries in Vilsberg with the Marne-Rhine Canal in Lutzelbourg and the Strasbourg-Paris railway line.



Opening of the railway line on 1 October 1883

It was used to transport goods but also passengers. When it was launched, the Lutzelbourg-Vilsberg line was 6.8 km long. It carried up to 23,602 tonnes of stone per year.



Currently, only a part of the loading platform remains (on your left) and the marshalling yard has been replaced by a housing estate.

Nevertheless, you can still see where the line came into Vilsberg and where it left in the direction of Berling, which is the route we are also going to take.

Note the names of the two streets:

Rue de l'ancienne gare (Former station street): In memory of the 'Eselbahn' (or donkey railway), as the line was dubbed.

Rue des 3 journeaux (3 day labourers street): The name of this street recalls the workers who would come here, every morning, to hire themselves out for a day's work in the quarries. The spelling of the word in French comes from 'journaliers'.

After repeated pleas from the neighbouring municipalities, the line would be extended to Drulingen. The work began in 1901, with the line inaugurated on 1 October 1903 and closing permanently on 1 September 1953 after 70 years of faithful service.

All the stations along the line were constructed according to the same architectural plan as a cost-saving measure.

The industrialisation of the more cost-effective manufacture of bricks and building blocks led to the closure of the quarries. The use of cement became more widespread, with concrete more commonly used in construction.



○ STAGE 3: THE LARGE QUARRY



The first traces of quarrying at Vilsberg date back to Celtic and Roman times.

In the 17th century, Vauban used these quarries for his fortifications. In 1871, Germany took control of the region and decided to expand the city of Strasbourg to the north through the construction of the 'Neustadt' (new city). The need for stone soared. Quarrying then became an industrial operation. At the time, Vilsberg was one of the most important quarrying areas in the whole of Lorraine.

You are now at the entrance to one of the largest quarries in Vilsberg. In fact, it is actually 2 quarries, one of which is the extension of the other. Since 1980, it has housed a campsite.

The path you have just followed passed along a hillside. But the hill is artificial, built from quarry rubble.

There are 6 quarries visible today. They provided stones for construction and produced huge millstones for the mills.

Not all the stones taken from these quarries were used exclusively for the construction of the 'Neustadt'.

Some were used to build the Catholic church in Phalsbourg, construct the former bridge Pont de l'Europe (Pont de Kehl), repair the cathedrals in Strasbourg and Reims after the First World War and various other projects. Apparently, some stones even went to Rome and found a new home within the walls of the Sistine Chapel!

MAIN EXTRACTION TECHNIQUES USED

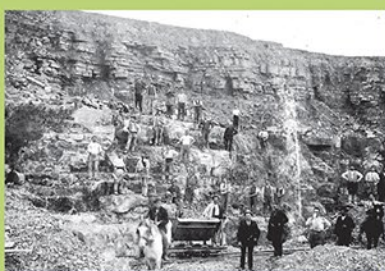
1ST METHOD:

Using long rods, the quarry workers would make deep holes in the rock. They would then put in freshly cut wood and use water to fill the cavities, which were 15 to 20 cm apart. As the wood expanded, the rock would shatter along the required length. There are still clearly visible traces of this on the quarry faces. However, this method was limited by the desired thickness of the block.

2ND METHOD:

The quarry workers would dig out a crack behind the rock according to the desired thickness. This crack would rarely exceed 40 cm - just enough for a man to get in there.

The job of a quarry worker was extremely dangerous (accidents and sickness, including silicosis from inhaling dust).



If the gate is open, you can head into the campsite (during the summer). Make sure you tell reception and respect the site and the peace of the residents. At the back of the campsite, the quarry face is still clearly visible. Now, retrace your steps for about a hundred metres to rejoin the itinerary along the path accessed through the little green gate, following the usual signage.

○ STAGE 4: THE QUARRIES



You are now standing at one of the six quarries that are still visible today. A large part of it has been filled in and the municipality has developed an area for young people.

A hill rises just behind you. Just like the hill at the campsite, it is entirely man-made. Here again, rubble from the quarry was used to build it. Nature has reclaimed its territory, like on all of the waste heaps.

Now, continue following the route of the Eselbahn. A little bit further, you will start to see the hill from a different angle. The circular paths taken by the quarry workers in carrying the rubble to the top of the waste heap can still clearly be seen.



Further along still, as you descend towards the village, you will skirt another quarry, clearly visible on your left through the trees.

○ STAGE 5: THE 'KRIMÉE' (CRIMEA)



The land registry map of Vilsberg mentions, as far back as 1836, this hamlet by the name of 'Krimée' (Crimea), as well as the track known as the 'Chemin de Krimée' (Crimea path). No one has yet been able to explain this name.

However, a number of our more elderly residents remember their parents or grandparents often referring to the 'Russe Weij' (Russian path). This forest track linked Oberhoff to the Vilsberg mill and then headed into the village by the mill path and then La Krimée. It is claimed that this is the route the Russian troops followed into Vilsberg.

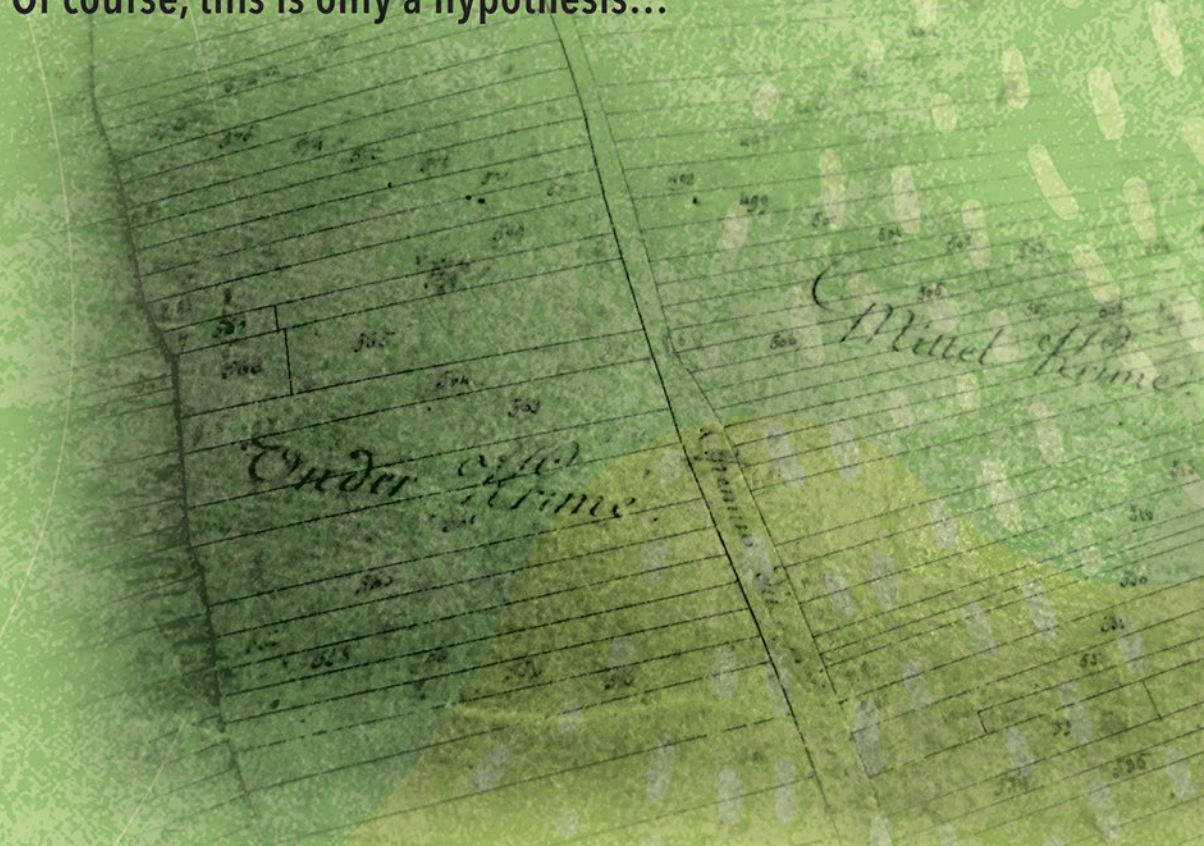
A bit of history

In October 1813, Napoleon Bonaparte was defeated at the Battle of Leipzig. The French forces retreated back into France. They were pursued by the Coalition armies, namely the British, Austrians, Prussians... and Russians. They crossed the Rhine in early 1814 and entered France. This was the first time that Russian troops had ever entered French territory.

Regiments of various nationalities took part in the first siege of Phalsbourg in 1814, especially Bavarians and Prussians, but also Cossacks and, more specifically, regiments from Crimea. Some say that one or more Russian regiments were stationed at Vilsberg in this hamlet, out of the range of the cannons of the town of Phalsbourg.

It therefore seems reasonable to believe that the name of this hamlet comes from that period and is linked to the stationing of those troops in Vilsberg.

Of course, this is only a hypothesis...



Land registry plan dating from 1836

○ STAGE 6: THE VILSBERG MILL



50 metres in front of you, by the small hill, lies the site of the old Vilsberg Mill.

From the Middle Ages until the 19th century, a watermill was located in the Muehlmatt hamlet of Vilsberg.

This mill belonged to the 'Münch de Vilsberg' family until the 16th century. Written sources from the time refer to two mills, though the location of the second remains a mystery.

This mill still existed when the municipal land registry plans were drawn up in 1836, as you can see on the map opposite.

It disappeared some time afterwards.



○ STAGE 7: THE FIRING RANGE



This is located in the Vilsberg national forest, 100 m from the edge of the municipality of Pfalzweyer. It was built specially for the Phalsbourg garrison.

After the French defeat at Sedan on 2 September 1870, Napoleon III ceded Alsace and Moselle to Germany. In September 1871, the German army stationed itself in the barracks at Phalsbourg.

To train their men to shoot, the German Reich decided to construct a shooting range in the forest at Vilsberg, facing towards the north-east.

Firstly, three trenches were dug, 150 m long, 4 m wide and 3 m deep, as well as 6-metre-high backstop mounds. A hut was set up to house the targets.

In 1888, the German army was equipped with the new Mauser rifle, with a range of 300 m. The 3 shooting ditches were then extended, each by 150 m, and now measured 300 m in length. Three brick shelters were then built to protect the shooters, along with a cabin that could hold around a hundred men in the event of heavy rain. There was also a large wooden building, the 'Gewehrstube' (weapons room) for calibrating and cleaning the guns.

Lastly, the Germans completed the facilities by building, alongside the initial range, a large firing range (Angriffsfeld), with a length of 500 m, width of 25 m and 8-metre-high backstop. This was the first and largest shooting range in Alsace-Lorraine.

The firing activities here were particularly intense.

1919

The French forces return to Phalsbourg. They use this firing range for training.

1940

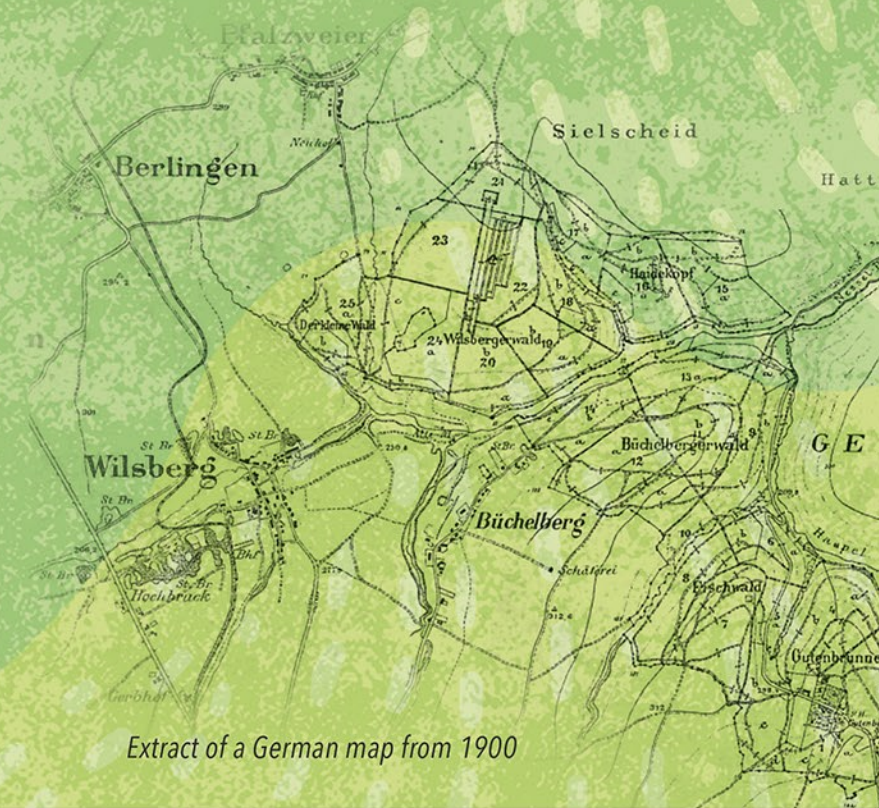
The German army returns. They take over the facilities and replace the brick shelters with concrete ones, constructing a shooting range specifically for anti-aircraft guns.

1944

23 November, liberation of the region by the 2nd Armoured Division.

The shooting range has been abandoned since 1945 but some of the infrastructures are still visible.

This military site, where thousands of soldiers trained for decades, remains completely unknown to many people.



Extract of a German map from 1900



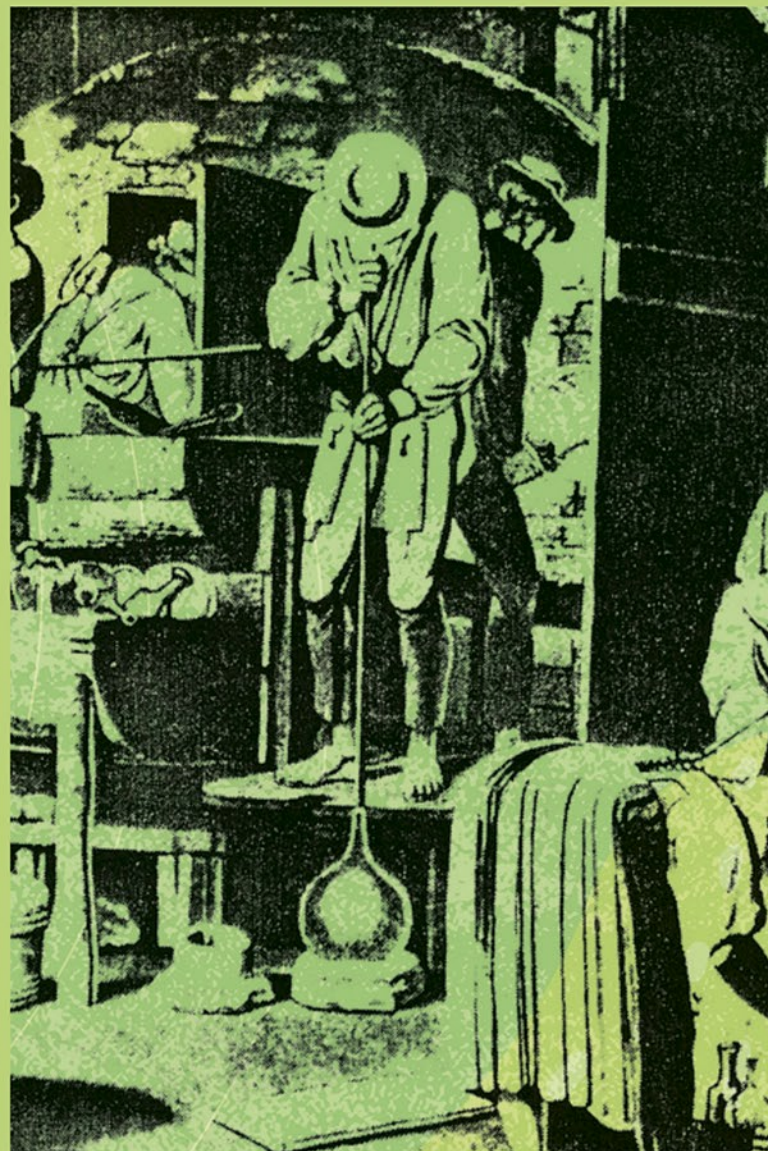
○ STAGE 8: THE GLASSMATT



This hamlet is named 'Glassmatt' or 'Glasmatt' (glass meadow) since, in the 16th century (1559), travelling glassmakers set up there on invitation from the Count of La Petite-Pierre. He paid them an advance of 200 florins to take up residence in Vilsberg and manufacture glass to meet his needs.

This was the ideal place to make glass, which needs:

- Water - the stream ran right alongside
- Wood - the forest was close by
- Clay for making the ovens - the soil in Vilsberg was rich in clay
- Sand (silica) - found in the forest



STAGE 9: 'LANGE BRUNNE' FOUNTAIN



This was a fountain made from a single block of sandstone taken from the quarries in Vilsberg. It is the only block which still remains in place here.

Originally (late 19th century), there were 3 large basins in a row. Hence the name 'Lange Brunne' (or long fountain). Connected directly to a water source, it provided water for the inhabitants of the village and their livestock and was also used as a washing place.

The photo dates from the end of the 19th century, or the very early 20th, before the construction of the retaining wall, which involved moving the fountain from its original location.

Three other fountains are dotted around the village.

They were connected to the running water network constructed in 1897, the 'Wilsberger Wasserwerk'. All are cut from a single block of sandstone taken from the quarries in Vilsberg.



The 'Lange Brunne'



●● STAGE 10: THE CHURCH



In the Middle Ages, this small hillock housed the castle of the Münch de Vilsberg family. It was replaced by the village church, which was erected partly on its foundations.

Until 1827, the inhabitants of Vilsberg were under the aegis of the church in Phalsbourg.

On 5 May 1829, Mr Ober, the mayor of the municipality, made a plea to the Bishop of Nancy-Toul to build a parish church in Vilsberg, since the village was home to 530 people.

He stated, in particular, that: "Your Excellency is not unfamiliar with the size of the parish of Phalsbourg, where there are only two members of the clergy; their multiple commitments and the poor weather during certain seasons make it extremely difficult, and sometimes impossible, for them to conduct services in Vilsberg, despite the commendable devotion these two gentlemen have never ceased to display".

This church was built in 1827 in Vosges sandstone (from Vilsberg) and dedicated to Saint Charles Borromeo. It was extended in 1885.

Thanks to the quarrying activities, the municipality now held 1,000 inhabitants. The population would continue to grow until the First World War.



The tower houses three bells named Charles, Marie and Aloïs. There is also a little bell sealed in the east wall of the tower and visible from the exterior.