



Image from: [View of Stockalper Palace, Brig, Valais canton, Switzerland, 17th century. in Bridgeman Images: DeAgostini Library](#)

Summary Article: **Valais**
from *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

(välä'), Ger. *Wallis*, canton (1993 pop. 262,400), 2,021 sq mi (5,234 sq km), S Switzerland. Sion is the capital. Bordering on France and Italy, the Valais extends from the Bernese Alps in the north to the Pennine Alps in the south, with the fertile upper Rhône valley between them. It has some of the highest peaks (Matterhorn, Dufourspitze, Dom, and Weisshorn) in Switzerland. It is a transportation hub, with an airport and 10 railways, which support an extensive tourist trade. Mainly a livestock-raising and agricultural canton, it is also known for its fine wines. The Valais has a well-developed hydroelectric system, which produces about 15% of Switzerland's power, and its industries produce metal products and chemicals. Zermatt is the largest of its numerous resorts and winter sports centers. Most of the population is French-speaking and Roman Catholic.

Taken by the Romans in 57 B.C., the region later passed to the Burgundians and to the Franks. In 999, Rudolf III of Burgundy made the bishop of Sion lord of Valais, but the country later split, with the Lower Valais passing to Savoy. In 1475, the bishop of Sion and the communes of the Upper Valais, which had gained considerable autonomy, defeated the duke of Savoy, and from then until 1798 the Lower Valais was held in subjection by the Upper Valais. Made a canton of the Helvetic Republic in 1798, an independent republic in 1802, and a French department in 1810, the Valais became a canton of the Swiss Confederation in 1815.

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