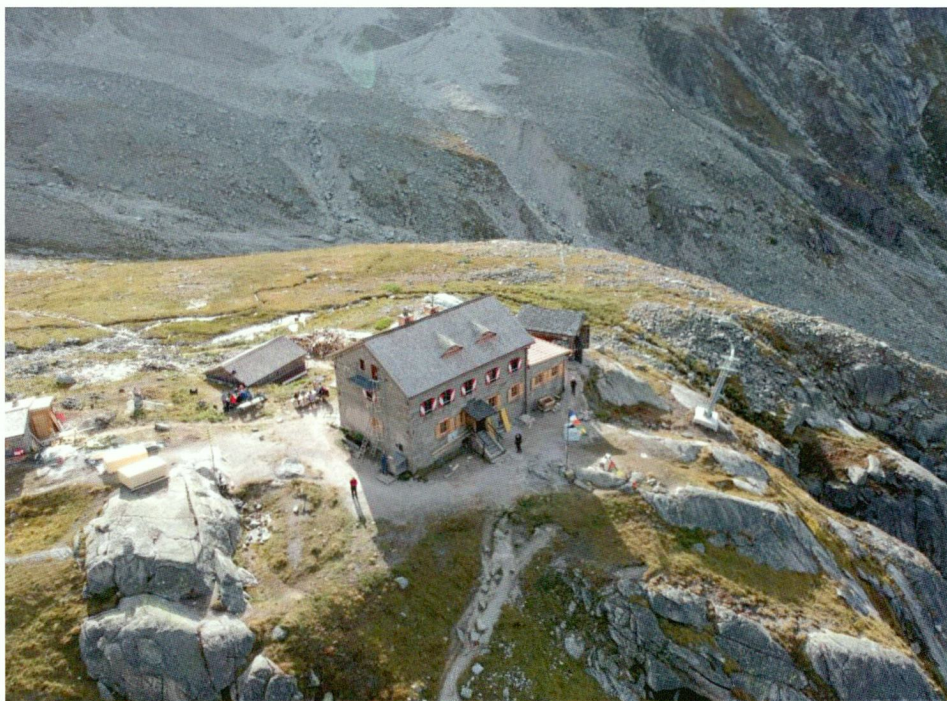
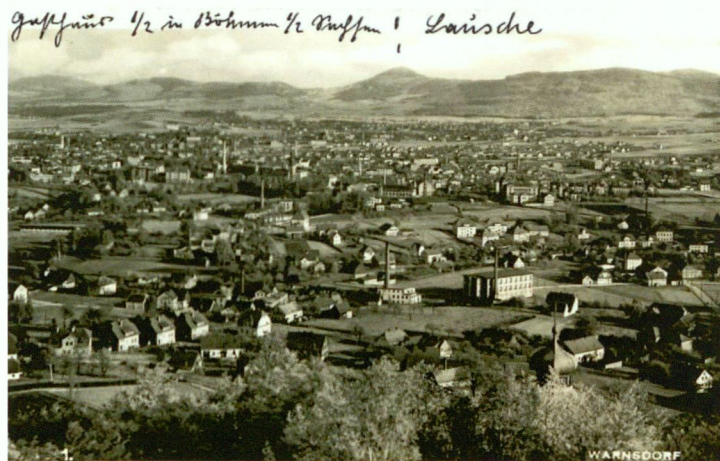


Brief History of the Richterhütte



1897-2022

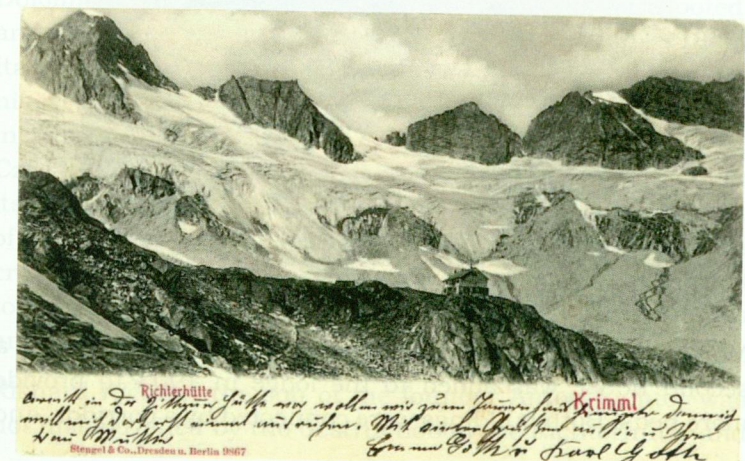
The Richterhütte can look back over a 125-year history. The first attempt to build a lodge at this location was made in 1895 by Bohemian industrialist Anton Richter, the second chairman of the Warnsdorf section of the German and Austrian Alpine Association (DuOeAV).



Warnsdorf, postcard circa 1900

In 1892, the Warnsdorf Section commissioned the construction of the Warnsdorfer Hütte (Warnsdorf lodge) in the farthest reaches of the Krimmler Achental valley, which had been used as a summer grazing area since the Middle Ages. The Tauernhaus inn had been built as early as 1389. It mainly served as a hostel for traders and other travellers who used the mule track over the Krimmler Tauern pass to travel south from Pinzgau to the Ahrntal valley and onwards to Italy. Presumably, this mule track had already been used in the Bronze Age—the discovery of the "Ötzi" or "Iceman" glacier mummy on the Similaun mountain hints at the importance of these mountain crossings in early times.

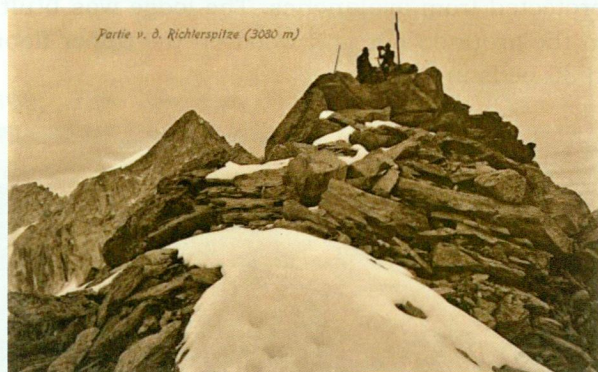
The Warnsdorfer Hütte served as a base for mountaineers climbing the Großvenediger peak. It was generally used as a south-western outpost for mountaineering tours in the Venediger mountain range, as the Reichenspitz range of the Zillertal Alps further to the west had not been developed yet. The Warnsdorf Section intended to open up this primeval mountain range surrounding the Rainbachtal valley for alpine tourism as well, but the association lacked the necessary financial means to do so. This is where Anton Richter stepped in and commissioned the construction of a bridle path from the Tauernhaus to the head of the Rainbachtal valley at his own expense. He also had a lodge built below the Rainbach Glacier on the slopes of the Reichenspitze mountain in 1895 at an altitude of approx. 2700 m. However, the almost completed shell of the lodge was destroyed in an avalanche the following year. But Richter was not discouraged by this, so construction work for a new lodge began soon after in the summer of 1896. The new shelter was moved further east to the other side of the valley and to a much lower altitude of 2374 m, where it was better protected from avalanches. The lodge was built with stone on the ground floor and wood on the upper floor and featured 30 beds in 12 dorms.



Richterhütte, postcard before 1903

Until 2001, the Richterhütte had never been an Alpine Association lodge, but it had always been privately owned by the Richter family and passed down through generations. Nonetheless, it had always been run like an Alpine association lodge and its members had always enjoyed the same privileges here as in other lodges run by the association.

The construction of the Richterhütte marked the beginning of the actual development of the Reichenspitz mountain range for alpine sports and tourism, and numerous first ascents of the peaks used it as their base. In quick succession, the Warnsdorf Section then built the Zittauer Hütte (Zittau lodge) below the Wildgerlosspitze mountain, the Neugersdorfer Hütte (Neugersdorf lodge) on the south side of the Krimmler Tauern mountain pass, several open refuges (including in the Gamsscharte pass) as well as a dense network of paths. In honour of the developer of the Reichenspitz mountain range, the peak north of the Gamsscharte pass was christened "Richterspitze".



Richterspitze, postcard circa 1900

More and more visitors were drawn to the region, so that a second house was added to the lodge in 1903 to provide more beds. Both buildings were connected by a corridor, and

there was even an outside bowling alley! The alley's walls were lined with velvet—Richter was the largest velvet manufacturer in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.



Richterhütte with extension and bowling alley, photograph before 1914

During World War I, alpinism died down almost completely, even though the war fronts were located further south in the Dolomites. The Warnsdorf and Zittau ironworks were looted, and the Neugersdorfer Hütte was confiscated in 1918 by Italy, which now owned South Tyrol. The Richterhütte was hit even harder: it was completely destroyed by an avalanche in the winter of 1916/17. Due to the founding of Czechoslovakia, the Warnsdorf Section had to reorganise itself as well, since it was no longer allowed to be a member of the German and Austrian Alpine Association. But its cross-border connections remained in place, and it started to list its prices in German Reichsmarks, Austrian schillings and Czech crowns.

Richard Richter, the son of the founder Anton Richter was not disheartened by the destruction of the Richterhütte and

began to plan to rebuild his father's lodge in the early 1920s. After being delayed by various crises, construction work began in 1928 on the same site of the original buildings. The new lodge, built entirely of stone, was opened with festivities in 1930.



Construction work, photograph circa 1928/29

However, the joy over the new lodge did not last very long. Although the Alpine clubs in Czechoslovakia remained largely unaffected until 1938, Hitler's 1000-mark ban—an economic sanction against Austria—massively reduced the flow of tourists. When the Sudetenland and Austria were finally "annexed" to Hitler's Germany, the Alpine clubs were forced into political alignment, and the position of chairperson was filled by a party member— democratic decision-making no longer existed. The Section's lodges were often used by Hitler Youth groups who were training for mountain warfare in the Alps.



Richterhütte 2260m im Raimbachtal

After the end of World War II, the German-speaking Richter family was expelled from Bohemia. They settled as displaced persons in Krimml, the valley village close to the Richterhütte, and continued running their lodge from here. The Warnsdorf Section also took up residence in Krimml.

After the war, in 1956, the new Alpine Association section "Bergfreunde Rheydt" was founded as well. It is based in the Rhineland town of Mönchengladbach (Rheydt was still an independent municipality at that time), more than 800 km from Krimml. This section greatly wished to own a lodge in the high mountains. Through the mediation of Peter Obholzer, the Richterhütte was leased by the Richter family to the Bergfreunde Rheydt Section. The beginning of the lease in 1967 was accompanied by huge festivities—a film by Rudi Gold still bears witness to this today. In 2001, the Rheydt Alpine Association finally bought the lodge from the Richter family.



Hoisting of the Rheydt flag, photograph 1967

To better cope with the increasing influx of hikers, an extension was constructed in 1970, which significantly enlarged the guest area on the ground floor. There was also lots of repair work, and a small power station was built to supply the lodge with electrical power.



Works on the extension to the "Rheydter Stube" (Rheydt lounge) with concrete mixer and workhorse, photograph 1970

The power station and the drinking water supply were damaged several times by elemental forces, most recently in 2015 by a mudslide that was so severe that a general renovation became necessary. In addition, the ropeway used to transport goods was in such a bad condition at this point that its operation was life-threatening.

The Bergfreunde Rheydt Section, supported by the Cologne Section, decided to carry out a complex and costly general renovation of the Richterhütte—the first big renovation since 1930. For this purpose, parts of the lodge were radically gutted. The general renovation included the roof (damaged by a storm), the kitchen, the electrical wiring, the tenant's flat, the storage rooms, the sanitary facilities, and the heating system. The power station was vigorously tested, and necessary repairs were carried out. The cable car was also renewed.



Guest lounge after renovation, photograph 2019

Just in time for the start of the 2019 season, the Richterhütte gleamed in new splendour and can now—in 2022—celebrate its 125th anniversary.



Construction site surrounding the lodge, photograph 2019

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Photos:

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