

## Summer in the Ötztal

### A Mountain Novel in 4 Parts

#### Part 4: Cows, spotted nutcrackers and magic herbs

"Inge, do you know how many nuts a spotted nutcracker collects before the cold winter season arrives?" asks Claudia, the eight year old daughter of my best friend Heike. My ten year old son Niki insists: "And do you know how deep the nutcracker's food storage sites are hidden in the snow?" After their adventurous bird watching experience together with a certified Nature Park Guide, Claudia and Niki are really enthusiastic: spotted nutcrackers collect some 80,000 nuts, hiding them in various storage sites which are covered by a four to five meter high snow layer. And of course plenty of other birds live in the Nature Park such as eagles, Alpine titmice, bearded vultures, warblers, nuthatches, snow finches, and a many more...

Heike, my husband Peter and his friend Markus are impressed by all these interesting facts the kids learned on their guided Nature Park tour in Obergurgl. In the meantime, we went on a wonderful theme hike across the Nature Preserve surrounding Lake Piburger See. Our guide Dorli, an expert chemist, told us that nature provides us with an infinite variety of medicinal herbs against all possible aches and health problems, for example: lady's mantle is good for stomach ailments, small-flowered rosebay willow herbs can ease prostate problems, ribwort has healing effects on insect bites. Heike and I made written notes of the most important medicinal herbs. Peter and Markus were more interested in the use of Ötztal's fresh herbs from the culinary point of view – they heard about spinach made of nettles and spicy salad with dandelions for the first time. We found thyme in the middle of nowhere and took it home as a souvenir for the next lamb roast.

Finally we are sitting around an old wooden table amid one of the rustic parlors of quaint Gampe Thaya mountain hut near Hochsölden. We are tired as we did a lot of walking and we also joined a cow milking competition with the local farmer Jakob Prantl and his very special "milking machine". We tried fresh Alpine milk from cows we personally know - Dora, Luna, Zenzi and Stella. And we also tasted the traditional "Melchermus", a kind of delicious mush prepared with homemade butter, fine corn meal, milk and salt. It is cooked in a big copper pan on the open fire place. What's best: everyone takes a spoon and the food in whole pan is shared! Afterwards we sampled other hearty snacks with speck and smoked sausages, a couple of typical dumplings, and the famous "Kaiserschmarrn" - shredded pancake with sugar and raisins. The mountain farmer Jakob tells us more about everyday life on an Alpine pasture: he gets up already at 5.00 am in the morning and milks the cows, called "Kuisle" by the locals. In Ötztal's Alpine pasturelands hikers do not only find cows but also thousands of sheep, coming from the South Tirolean Schnalstal valley and spending the summer months in the upper Ötztal. This is an old tradition deeply rooted in history.

"I would love to see the spectacular Sheep Drive", says Heike on our way down to the valley. We are much too late for this unique event but we can still follow the tracks of the very first shepherds who lived in the Ötztal Valley. The outstanding Ötzi Village in Umhausen displays a wide range of working sites, living rooms and storage huts as they used to be in 3000 BC. Niki and Claudia are filled with enthusiasm! They admire the clothes made of animal skin as well as the sheep, goats, pigs and other rare domestic animals. But also the refined "primitive" working and hunting tools dating back to the Neolithic Age made quite an impression on us. Young men make fire with pyrite and flint. Niki is very impressed: "Where did you learn that?" Vincent, a young biology student, replies: "At the Tirol Survival School!" Now, the kids want to try the Survival School as well...

"Next year", consoles Markus, "I don't know if you agree but I would strongly recommend the Ötztal Valley as our holiday destination in 2010. One summer vacation is really not enough for such a breathtaking valley!" "Yeah, great, cool"

– no vote against! Claudia, our youngest Ötztal fan, has a last question: "Mum, Inge – do you think Dorli the herb expert also knows a magic herb which makes me grow faster? Next year I want to try river rafting and also join you on a tour across the glacier fields..."

**Media Contact Partner:**

NICOL KLOTZ

Presse ÖTZTAL TOURISMUS

Gemeindestrasse 4, 6450 Sölden Austria

T +43 (0) 57200 217 F +43 (0) 57200 201 Mobile +43 (0) 664 8557163

nicol.klotz@oetztal.com [www.oetztal.com](http://www.oetztal.com)