

Panels in english

Panel 1

Valdes – a wealthy merchant and the biblical word

The Waldensians trace their origins back to a wealthy French merchant named Valdes. Around 1180, he decided to live a life of poverty and began to preach. He also had the Bible translated into the common language.

His followers soon spread throughout Europe during the 13th century. Their message was very simple:

Follow the Sermon on the Mount

The Catholic Church did not like this, and the Waldensians were banned from preaching and persecuted as heretics.

In 1532, the Waldensians joined the Reformation. They received support from John Calvin.

In 1545, the Waldensian movement was completely destroyed in the Luberon. In 1561, the same thing happened in Calabria.

Only in a few areas did the Waldensians survive the persecutions. The most important center was located in the border area between France and the Duchy of Savoy-Piedmont.

Are there moments in my life that have changed my faith or my convictions?

We begin our journey at the New Cemetery, follow Calwer Straße out of town to Welscher Weg. After 900 m, we reach a crossroads between Welscher Weg and Hummelwiesenlinie (Station 2). Alternative: Shortened route via stations A and B

Panel 2

Stay or go - Which path do I choose?

For a long time, the Calvinist-Reformed Waldensians were guaranteed the right to worship publicly. After the Edict of Nantes (1598) was revoked by French King Louis XIV in 1685, many Waldensians fled to neighboring Savoy-Piedmont. This led to the first emigration of French Waldensians, while others returned temporarily under their leader Henri Arnaud.

Pressure from Louis XIV on the Duke of Savoy-Piedmont led to a second wave of refugees. Around 3,000 people found refuge in Hesse and Württemberg.

Some of the Waldensians ended up in Arheiligen (Hesse) and, dissatisfied, moved on to Neuhengstett.

Neuhengstett was founded on September 1, 1700. In the early years, the Waldensians lived in temporary accommodation, in barracks. Living conditions were harsh and relations with their neighbors were difficult.

What about the decisions we have to make, often without knowing whether they are the right ones?

Who helps me in such situations?

At the crossroads, we turn right into Hummelwiesenlinie and follow the path for 500 m until we reach the sign for “Esslesbrunnen” (Wasserweg). The fountain is on the left, slightly off the path.

Panel 3

The Esslesbrunnen: Conflict over water – learning to share

The economic basis of the Waldensians was guaranteed by orders and special privileges granted by the Duke.

These included self-government and ten years of tax exemption. No wonder this repeatedly led to conflicts with their neighbors.

The Esslesbrunnen served as a watering place for livestock, but was claimed by the residents of Althengstetten, Neuhengstetten, and the Ottenbronner Hof.

This led to long-standing disputes between them.

The duke had a boundary stone placed in the middle of the watering place so that all parties could lead their herds to drink without entering another property.

A truly Solomonic judgment.

“I will give freely to anyone who is thirsty from the spring of the water of life!”
(Revelation 21:6)

We return to the main path (Wasserweg) and continue straight ahead. After 600 meters, we reach a bench on the left side via the ascending Hengstetter Straße.

Panel 4

Across the Alps: Hardship and vision

We travel back in time to the 16th and 17th centuries, when the Waldensians professed their faith publicly and were persecuted.

They were faced with the choice of becoming Catholic or fleeing to Protestant countries. Many chose to flee.

They set off for Geneva across rocky Alpine passes.

The Mont Cenis Pass was over 2,000 meters high and had to be crossed in all weathers.

From Geneva, they continued by ship or on long foot marches via Schaffhausen and Tuttlingen to their destinations in Württemberg or Hesse.

The Waldensians from the lower Chisone Valley settled in Perouse, Pinache, Groß- and Kleinvillars, and Schönenberg in 1699, for example.

The “Neuhengstetters” from the Bourcet Valley could not cope with the conditions in Hesse and did not arrive until 1700.

Do not dwell on what has been, and do not brood over the past. (..)

I am making a way through the wilderness and creating rivers in the desert.
(Isaiah 43:18–19)

After a barn, we turn right and follow the dirt road parallel to the district road for 800 meters. At the T-junction, we turn right and continue for 700 meters. Here, Ottenbronner Straße leads straight to Neuhengstett.

Panel 5

Look for the straight path

The straight streets in Neuhengstett are striking. The houses in the historic town center face the street with their gables.

The street layout and orientation of the buildings were planned by land surveyor Johannes Stahl.

We invite you to enjoy this stretch of road ahead of us alone and in silence.

Take your time to think positive thoughts:

Where in your life have you experienced straight or easy paths?

We have crossed Ottenbronner Straße and now follow the dirt road parallel to the district road for 300 meters before crossing it at a junction – dangerous! – to the horse paddock on the opposite side. Next to the district road, we walk back 100 meters to the hiking car park. On Auf dem Strietstraße, we walk to the Jagweg junction. There is a bench on the left (station 6).

Alternatively, you can go directly to station 8 – 300 meters straight ahead.

Panel 6

Have the courage to pause

With this impulse, we invite you to walk the following section of the trail in silence.

Have the courage to pause
to marvel
at the blossoming and fading
the rooting and growing
Interrupt your routine
Allow yourself time
savour the moments you are given
be aware of what comes
And let it be

Listen to the silence
Let your thoughts wander
Give your longing space

Text (abridged): Bernhard Kraus

We continue along Jagweg until, after 700 meters, we turn right into Pflanzschulstraße. After another 500 meters, we reach a T-junction and follow Hårdlesweg on the right.

The Georgenau estate is on our left.

We continue to station 7 next to a parking bay.

Panel 7

Estate Georgenau - Provisions

The Waldensians of Neuhengstett always had close ties to the Georgenau estate. It offered them work when it came to clearing land that had been purchased. It provided for them.

The later owner of the estate, Emil Wilhelm Georgii-Georgenau, was also a strong advocate for the poor Waldensians.

Georgii knew what it meant to have to leave his homeland because of his faith. His ancestors were expelled from Strasbourg.

That is why I say to you: Do not worry about your daily life – about whether you have enough to eat, drink, and wear.

Is not life more than food and clothing?

Look at the birds. They do not sow or reap or gather into barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And you are worth much more than they.

Matthew 6:25-26

After about 50 meters, we turn right onto a dirt road that runs parallel to the country road towards Neuhengstett.

After 900 meters, we reach the country road, continue along the dirt road towards Ottenbronn, then cross the district road – dangerous! – and turn left towards the Waldenserstein Station 8

Table 8

Waldenserstein - Stone of the Waldensians: Where do I come from?

The Waldenserstein was erected in 1881 and, flanked by benches and trees, offers a beautiful view of Neuhengstett.

Two plaques commemorate the social commitment of the landowners Georgii von Georgenau and the families who arrived in Neuhengstett in 1700 in search of a better future.

To this day, the names Ayasse, Baral, Bounin, Gayde, Jourdan, Soulier, Talmon, Talmon l'Armée, and Talmon-Gros have been preserved in Neuhengstett.

The coat of arms of the Waldensians can be found on a metal plaque on the front of the stone.

We take time to remember our own origins and the places and people that have shaped us.

In the immediate vicinity of the Waldensian stone, the former foundation garden (station 9) has been recreated through planting.

Panel 9

Foundation Garden – Stiftungsgarten: Charity and humanity

The soil was poor. Many families had to give preference to more productive crops over fruit trees. The foundation garden was laid out in 1881 by the owner of the Georgenau estate, Emil Wilhelm Georgii-Georgenau, and his wife Sophie.

207 fruit trees were intended to provide for the poorer population of Neuhengstett.

"The yield of this orchard ... is to be used for the poor of the village," states the foundation deed.

Where have you yourself experienced support, perhaps unexpectedly, or been provided for? Who is waiting for your help?

We return to the Waldenserstein and turn left. The path, part of the Huguenot and Waldensian Trail, leads through the Brunnenstraße development area to Ottenbronner Straße after 700 meters. We keep to the left and reach the Waldensian Church after 400 meters.

Panel 10

Waldenserkirche – Waldensian Church: Living stones

The first church, with a thatched roof, was built in 1702, followed by a wooden one in 1716. The stone church of 1769 was built within a few months.

Today, a plaque in French in the chancel commemorates the construction of the church.

Visitors to churches in Waldensian communities will notice a special coat of arms. This is also the case in Neuhengstett: made of wood, it is an emblem of light shining in the darkness.

A golden candlestick with a burning candle is depicted on a blue background.

The inscription reads: "Lux lucet in tenebris" – "the light shines in the darkness."

The seven stars surrounding the candlestick refer to the biblical number "seven." The seven stars represent the seven angels and the seven churches from the Book of Revelation.

What do "living stones" mean to you? No two stones are alike, just as no two people are alike.

Shortly after the town hall on Möttliger Straße, where you can find information about the places of origin of the Waldensians, we turn right and reach

Silcherstraße via the footpath "das Gängle." We turn right shortly after onto Mühlweg and then immediately left onto Waldenserstraße.

After 200 meters, we reach the new Waldensian ensemble with the Waldensian Museum (Station 11).

Panel 11

Arrival and settling down

Arriving in Württemberg was not easy and took time. The problem of integration was also evident in the language. In everyday life, the Waldensians mostly used the Occitan dialect they had brought with them from the Alpine valleys. In schools and churches, however, French was spoken.

In 1823, the Waldensian communities in Württemberg were integrated into the Protestant state church. From then on, the communities no longer had Reformed pastors, but Protestant pastors from Württemberg who celebrated services in German and in the state church form.

School lessons also had to be taught in German.

As a result, the Waldensians lost part of their identity and independence. In return, the mayor, teachers, and pastors were financed by the state and the church, which helped the Waldensians, as they were hardly able to pay the salaries of their officials.

Where would I be more courageous in standing up for my convictions and my faith today?

Where would I get involved?

Diagonally across the street, we follow the footpath through the residential area, past the playground, which leads us to Rote Erde street. We keep to the right and after 200 meters we reach the New Cemetery, where our tour has started.