

- Slab cists predating the church buildings
- Hall church 10th/11th cent. (probably with an apse)
- Campanile from the middle to the second half of the 11th cent.
- Hall church with rectangular choir and narthex around 1100
- Alteration work to create a Protestant church after the Reformation
- Sacristy, 16th/17th cent.
- Burials

From an early medieval hall church to a post-reformation church

Both the restorations of the 1940s and those of 2015–2017 were accompanied by architectural surveys. The results helped reconstruct the construction history of the Parish Church of St. Peter.

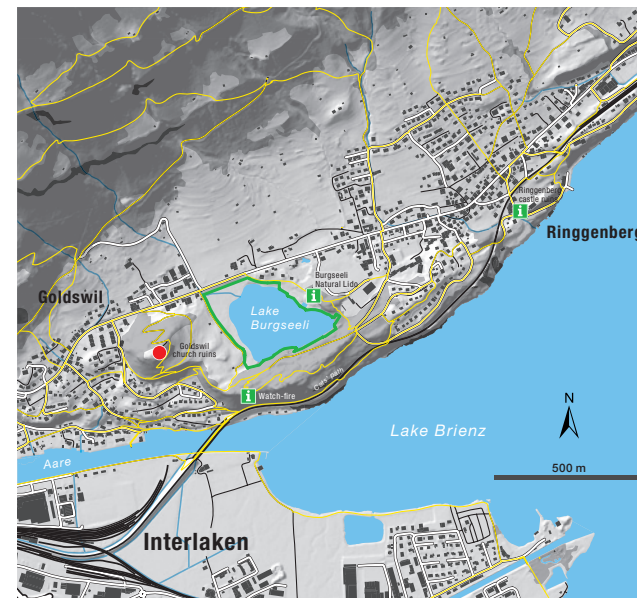
Two slab cists attest to an older, early medieval graveyard. The first church was built in the 10th or early 11th century on a natural rocky outcrop. The sanctuary in the trapezoid hall building was probably a semi-circular apse. The masonry still includes slanted layers of stone. The choir was replaced by a freestanding bell tower around 1050/80. The church itself was rebuilt a short time later. A rectangular choir was added, as was a west annex, which served as a vestibule. The top tower stage and pyramid roof were replaced by a gable roof even before the Reformation. After the Reformation, in 1528, the parish church was converted into a Protestant church without a chancel arch or threshold. The sacristy is slightly later in date.

Chronology



Romantic view of the Goldswil ruins. Steel engraving around 1865.

- 8th–10th cent. Graveyard with slab cists on Goldswil hill prior to the founding of the first church
- 10th/11th cent. The first stone-built church on Goldswil hill is constructed
- c. 1050/1080 The bell tower is erected in the form of a campanile
- c. 1100 A new church with a western annex is constructed
- 12th/13th cent. The imperial governors of Brienz hold the rights of patronage over the Parish Church of St. Peter
- 1240 The barons of Ringgenberg transfer the rights of patronage to the Augustinian Chapter of Canons at Interlaken
- 13th/14th cent. A two-storey chancel house chapel is constructed
- 13th–16th cent. Mass is celebrated on Goldswil hill by priests from the Interlaken Chapter
- 1528 The appointment of a Protestant pastor at Goldswil coincides with the Reformation in the state of Bern
- post 1528 The Catholic Parish Church is converted into a Protestant church; a sacristy is added and the old rectory is renovated
- 1564 A new rectory is constructed at the foot of the hill
- 1671 The parish is moved to the former castle of the barons of Ringgenberg and the Goldswil buildings decay
- 1695 The graveyard is moved from Goldswil to Ringgenberg
- 1729 The pastor permanently moves from Goldswil to Ringgenberg
- 1940–1945 First comprehensive restoration of the church ruins, tower and chancel house chapel
- 2015–2017 Second restoration of the church ruins and restructuring of the graveyard



An attractive circular route connects the Goldswil church ruins with the Ringgenberg castle ruins. The locations have close historical ties. Various paths take you past many natural and historical highlights and open up magnificent views across Lakes Thun and Brienz.

- Goldswil church ruins, ■ more information points on the circular route
- Boundary of the nature reserve, — hiking trails

Circular route from Goldswil to Ringgenberg

The starting point is the carpark on the through-road at Goldswil. Following an easy hiking trail, the route climbs the hill with the church ruins. As in the Middle Ages, the path leads into the western end of the graveyard after a few hundred metres, or you can follow the route along the churchyard wall, across the ruins of the rectory on the south slope of the hill. Having visited the church ruins, continue downhill via a narrow trail on the east side, following the sign for the watch-fire.

The route continues through open forest and sumptuous meadows above the eastern shore of Lake Burgseeli. It is worth taking a quick detour to the old watch-fire. Back on the route, the castle rock of the barons of Ringgenberg soon becomes visible in the distance. Having visited the medieval castle ruins and Baroque church, the route continues along the western shore of the lake back to the starting point. Information points at the lido highlight the special features of the landscape around the bog lake.

Cover picture: Goldswil church ruins in November 2016, photograph taken from a drone.

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RINGGENBERG

The Goldswil church ruins

Useful information: The original tufa sculptures are on display at the town hall in Goldswil.

Restoration and design: Site manager: Matthias Schmocker, Ringgenberg; wall restoration: ARGE Nufer-Andereg-Zurbuchen, Ringgenberg, Ruedi Jaggi; technical management: ADB, Markus Leibundgut, Martin Portmann; scientific management: ADB, Volker Herrmann; restoration: Fischer Restauratoren, Bern, Matthias Kilchhofer.

Literature: Volker Herrmann, Die mittelalterliche Kirchenruine St. Peter auf dem Kirchhubel Goldswil. Jahrbuch Uferschutzverband Thuner- und Brienersee 2016, 121–154; Volker Herrmann, Die Kirchenruine St. Peter – Baugeschichte und Sanierung. In: Einwohnergemeinde Ringgenberg (ed.), Kirchenruine St. Peter Goldswil. Ringgenberg 2017, 6–38.

Design: Melchior Amacher, Ringgenberg, and ADB, Volker Herrmann; signage: ADB, Volker Herrmann and Max Stöckli.

Picture credits: Cover picture and aerial photograph of the church ruins: Jean Claude Plattner, Adliswil; side elevation of the tower: ADB, Raphael Ehrensperger; mascarons and atlas: ADB, Markus Leibundgut; tower 1945: KDP archive, Martin Hesse; work on the tower in 2015: ADB, Raphael Ehrensperger; ground-plan: ADB, Marc Müller; historical view of the ruins: copy in the ADB archive; map: Office of Agriculture and Nature of Canton Bern, section nature promotion.

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The ruins of St. Peter's church on the hill in Goldswil is a monument of supra-regional importance. The richly adorned 11th century bell tower, in particular, attracts much interest from cultural historians. Following their restoration in 2015/16, the ruins and tower once again fulfil their role as a landmark standing visible from afar above the Bödeli area.

Churchyard of the medieval Parish Church of St. Peter after the restoration in 2016. The charnel house chapel is visible to the north-east of the church ruins.



The bell tower, which now stands at a height of 16 m, originally had another belfry-stage with triforia and a pyramid roof.



Blind arcades with mascarons above the biforium on the south side of the bell tower.



Grotesque male sculpture of an atlas in the upper belfry-stage on the east side of the bell tower.



The tower during the restoration work in 1945. A concrete crown was inserted to maintain its structural integrity.

Craftsmen at work on the upper tower terminal during the restoration in summer 2015.



Important cultural monument – the former Parish Church of St. Peter

The first church was built on the hill before AD 1000. It was at the centre of a large parish which, besides Goldswil, also included Beatenberg-Waldegg, Habkern, Niederried, Ringgenberg and Unterseen. The remains of the earliest hall church are preserved in the walls of today's ruins. The bell tower was constructed in the late 11th century as a freestanding, Italian-style campanile. Visible from afar, the landmark was also a symbol of the power of its aristocratic founders. By around 1100 at the latest the church had also been rebuilt. In the 12th and 13th centuries the imperial governors of Brienz were given the rights of patronage over the Parish Church of St. Peter. In 1240, their descendants, the barons of Ringgenberg transferred the rights to the Augustinian Chapter of Canons at Interlaken. The chapter's priests celebrated Mass at Goldswil until the Reformation in 1528.

Besides celebrating Mass, they also administered the sacraments and commemorated the dead in the charnel house chapel. Deceased community members were buried in the walled churchyard. After the Reformation, the building was converted into a Protestant church. The pastors resided at the rectory on the south slope of the hill. When the parish was moved to the former castle of the barons of Ringgenberg, the church at Goldswil lost its importance as an ecclesiastical centre and the buildings fell into ruin.



Coins found in the church attest to a busy trans-Alpine trade. Denarius minted in the Duchy of Milan, 1450–1466.

A campanile modelled on examples from Lombardy

Visible from afar, the Romanesque bell tower amid the church ruins attracts one's attention. It is a distinct marker that still dominates the landscape above the Bödeli area. As one approaches the Goldswil hill, the freestanding tower is a sight to behold, thanks to its rich architectural decoration and abat-vents, which allow sound to escape. This type of tower originated in Upper Italy, where it was called a campanile and was an expression of Lombard architecture and tradition.

Similar church towers are regularly found on Alpine and pre-Alpine transport routes between the Ticino region and Burgundy. It has no comparisons, however, in Canton Bern, apart from the simpler and probably more recent towers at Brienz, Meiringen and Steffisburg. The campanile attests to a busy trade and exchange between the region and Upper Italy and Lombard craftsmen may even have been involved in its construction.

Rich architectural decoration – Christian symbolism and pagan superstition

The Goldswil campanile is impressive thanks to its rich decoration. From a formal point of view, it is built in the High and Late Romanesque style of architecture widespread throughout Europe in the 11th and 12th centuries. Characteristic features are high blind niches with round-arched corbel tables breaking up the wall surfaces. Other elements include bevelled cornices with plant and animal ornaments and decorated imposts with stylised animal depictions in the triforia of the belfry-stages.

Besides Christian symbols, there are also two male atlases made of tufa which originally served as pillars in the upper stage of the tower's east side. Such archaic figures were linked in folk religion with protection, strength and perhaps fertility. Their hands are raised, shielding their heads. Copies of the two sculptures are on display on the bottom storey of the tower.

The restorations of 1940–1945 and 2015–2017

When the parish was transferred to Ringgenberg in 1661, the buildings lost their function and were left to decay. Valuable building materials were removed and only the tower has survived the past 350 years relatively unscathed.

The first comprehensive restoration took place between 1940 and 1945. At that time, the church ruins, which had been forgotten, were awakened from their slumbers. The tower and the walls of the church and charnel house were restored in line with the then principles of heritage protection. Approximately 70 years later, the buildings were once again severely threatened. The entire complex was restored a second time and modernised from 2015 to 2017, taking into consideration historical and heritage protection interests. The tower was equipped with a new bell and its top storey replaced by a modern protective roof.