Online Maps of Switzerland

Switzerland "How to" Guide, Beginner Level: Instruction

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GOAL

This "How to" Guide will help you use the website map.geo.admin.ch to find named locations (towns, villages, farms, etc.) in Switzerland and determine distances between them.

INTRODUCTION

In Switzerland, every town, village, and farm has a name. These locations can appear in any record. The website map.geo.admin.ch is a mapping website compiled by the Swiss federal government that can help identify these locations on both modern and 1800s maps.

HOW TO

To use this website, follow these directions:

1. Navigate to map.geo.admin.ch.
2. The website may default to German. If so, in the upper right corner, click **EN** to change the website to English.
3. The search bar is located at the top of the website. Enter in your location.
4. As you type, a list of matches will appear. If there is no exact match, possible matches may appear. Once you have identified your location, click on it to show it on the map. The search will also return partial matches (i.e. a search for Lutzenberg returns Glutzenberg).
5. If you can only read part of a Swiss location in a record, search for the letters you can identify, with spaces in places of the indecipherable letters (i.e. a search for **rug obel** will return matches for Bruggtobel and Rugghubel among others).

Interpreting the results:

The results list will indicate the type of place you are searching for. Below are listed the most common types of locations. Other location types are usually indicated in italics.

- Municipality: the place name is bolded and is followed by the two-letter canton abbreviation.
  Example: **Cressier (NE)**
- Populated place: the place name is followed by the two-letter canton abbreviation, which is followed by a hyphen and the name of the municipality.
  Example: Aschbach (ZH) - Maur
- House number: the place name is followed by the house number, which is followed by the bolded four-digit postcode and the bolded name of the municipality.
  Example: Hinterergeten 116 **9427 Wolfhalden**

To identify the two-letter canton abbreviation, see the Wikipedia article [Cantons of Switzerland](#) under the section [List](#).

Viewing the map

Once the location is shown on the map, you can zoom in and out using the **+** and **–** buttons in the upper right corner. The map can be zoomed in to see individual buildings, shown on the map as black objects. All streets, roads, and even paths are also displayed. Canton boundaries are shown by a thick solid pink line; municipality boundaries are indicated by a thin pink line. Topographical lines showing elevation are indicated by the thin brown lines.

You can also view maps from other years. From the left side bar, click on the box next to **Journey through time – Maps**. Click on the date 1864, and then select the year of interest. The map from that year will now be visible. To return to the modern map, click to uncheck the check mark next to **Journey through time – Maps**. Note that not all years are available for all areas in Switzerland. If the map does not appear for your specific area, select a different year.

Municipal boundaries

Currently, the smallest geographical division in Switzerland is the *Gemeinde* / *commune* / *comune* or municipality. In many cases, these modern municipalities were formed along pre-1800 church parish boundaries. In some cantons, there has been merging of municipalities. This website shows the modern municipal boundaries. This feature is useful if you know the modern municipality of your location or parish.

To add the municipal boundaries layer, enter the term **Municipal boundaries** in the search bar. In the left side bar, the Municipal boundaries layer should be checked. If the option is not showing, click on **Maps displayed**. The boundaries are indicated on the map by purple lines; canton boundaries are in thicker purple lines. Click anywhere inside the municipality to highlight the entire municipality in yellow. An informational box about the municipality will appear in the top right corner, with the name of the municipality listed next to **Name**.

To make the yellow highlighted area disappear, click on the **x** in the informational box. To make the lines disappear, click to uncheck the check mark next to Municipal boundaries.

Identifying locations in a municipality

One fantastic feature is the ability of view a list of all locations within a specific municipality. This is particularly helpful when researching in a parish with a location listed that is unclear. In the search bar, type in the municipality, The search will then show a list of locations found within the municipality. Only the first 50 hits are shown, so your location may not be listed.

Marking locations

Locations can be marked on the map for reference points. To mark a location, follow these steps:

1. In the search bar at the top, enter your location, and select the correct location from the list of matches. The map will zoom in on the location.

2. In the left side bar, click on **Draw & Measure on map**.
3. A new side bar will appear. Click on **Marker**.
4. Move your mouse over the map. A large red dot (the marker) will appear. Double-click on the location on the map to place the marker.
5. A small box will appear. You can type in a label for your marker in the **Text** box.
6. In the upper left corner, click on **Back / Finish drawing** to return to the map.

Measuring distance

Another great feature is the ability of measure distances between locations. Before measuring distances, make sure to identify the two locations on the map you are interested in. To measure distance, follow these steps:

1. From the map screen, identify the first location from where you want to measure.
2. In the left side bar, click on **Draw & Measure on map**.
3. A new side bar will appear. Click on **Measure**.
4. Click on the first location. This is the marker from which the distance will be measured.
5. As you move the arrow, a circle will appear. The red box indicates the distance in kilometers from the first location to any point on the circle. If you have already placed markers on the map, the red circle will move to the marker once the mouse is close enough to the marker.
6. Move the arrow to your second location. Double-click to set the circle. The distance between the two points is listed in the red box. The change in elevation between the two points is shown at the bottom of the screen.
7. To erase the circle, click **Delete**. Note that this will delete all distances and markers.
8. In the upper left corner, click on **Back / Finish drawing** to return to the map.

PRACTICE

Let's use the map to solve a genealogical problem. A document shows that Johannes Rohner was born in Lom, Switzerland, near the Rhine River. A search of Google Maps does not show the location of Lom.

1. Go to the website map.geo.admin.ch. If the website is not in English, click **EN** in the upper right corner.
2. In the search bar, type in **Lom**. There are two options: Lom (SG) – Rebstein and Lom (GR) – Soazza.
3. Click on each option and zoom out to identify which Lom is near the Rhine River. The best option is Lom (SG) – Rebstein.

Now, let's find out how close Lom is to the center of Rebstein.

4. In the left side bar, click on **Draw & Measure on map**. Then click on **Measure**.
5. In the map, identify Lom and Rebstein. Rebstein is to the southeast of Lom.
6. Click on Lom. Then move the arrow and double click on the R in Rebstein. The distance should be approximately 1.3–1.5 km. The elevation shows that there is a descent from Lom to Rebstein.
7. Click on Delete to delete the red circle.

A subsequent record shows that Johannes Rohner's mother was from the location of im Elmath,

in Rebstein. Let's see if we can find im Elmath.

8. In the search bar, type in **im Elmath**. There are no results.
9. In the search bar, type in **Municipal boundaries**. If Municipal boundaries is not displayed, click on **Maps displayed** to show the option. Make sure the box next to Municipal boundaries is checked, and the map is displaying purple boundaries.
10. Click on Lom. This will highlight the municipality of Rebstein in yellow.
11. Browse through the parish until you find the location **im Elmat**. It is located north of Winkel.

ACTIVITY

Now, test your skills you have learned in this "How to" Guide. The Activity is a way to check your knowledge and let you know you've mastered the Guide! Click here to try out the Activity.