



Water Paths: The Aflaj of the Sultanate of Oman

When water traces paths between arid lands and mountains

The Musée valaisan des Bisses opened its doors on April 18, 2026 in Ayent for a new season dedicated to dialogue and transmission. On Sunday, **May 31**, it will inaugurate its new temporary and international exhibition *Water Paths: The Aflaj of the Sultanate of Oman*.

At first glance, the Alpine landscapes of Valais and the arid expanses of Oman seem worlds apart. Yet they are connected by an invisible thread: water. In these demanding environments, societies have learned to capture, channel and share this vital resource with remarkable ingenuity. The exhibition offers a sensory immersion into Oman's traditional irrigation systems-the aflaj-in dialogue with the bisses, revealing unexpected correspondences.



Ayent (Valais, Switzerland)



Opening: Sunday, May 31, 2026



Switzerland – Sultanate of Oman

Listed as a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**, the aflaj are among the oldest irrigation systems still in use today. Their operation relies on discreet yet highly precise engineering: water is captured from underground aquifers or springs, then conveyed over long distances through hand-dug underground channels, sometimes extending for several kilometres. Thanks to a carefully controlled gradient, the water flows naturally, without mechanical systems, before being redistributed through a network of secondary channels adapted to agricultural needs.

Time itself is measured through water.

Yet these systems tell more than a story of technical achievement. In the oases, water structures collective life. It shapes daily rhythms, organizes usage and defines social relationships. Time itself is measured through water, using sundials or the observation of shadows. Water rights are transmitted, negotiated and adjusted across generations, within a fragile balance between tradition and adaptation. The channels thus become spaces of life, agricultural, domestic and social, contributing to the creation of cultural landscapes where production, habitat and community intertwine.

In parallel, the bisses reflect a similar intelligence of the territory. Here too, water management relies on deep environmental knowledge, collective organization and adaptability to natural constraints.

By bringing these two cultures into dialogue, the exhibition reveals an unexpected proximity: that of shared knowledge, born out of necessity and sustained by collective practices.

Through objects, archives, films, testimonies and interactive installations, visitors are invited to explore these systems in all their complexity, as well as in their deeply human dimension. The experience extends through participatory workshops and activities, including the construction of raw earth channels (rammed earth and experimental techniques), exploration of geometry in Islamic art through its patterns, and the discovery of traditional know-how. These activities embody a living approach to transmission, at the heart of the museum's identity, where knowledge is both shared and experienced.

Beyond its content, *Water Paths* is part of a broader process of cultural cooperation. By bringing together Swiss and Omani partners around a shared issue, water, the project creates a space for intercultural dialogue. At a time when resources are becoming scarce and balances increasingly fragile, it proposes another way of thinking: grounded in sharing, sustainability and collective intelligence.

This exhibition invites us to rethink our relationship to water - no longer as a resource to be exploited, but as a bond to be nurtured.



OPENING EVENT – SUNDAY, MAY 31, 2026

11:00 – 11:30: Official speeches

- Jasmine Vesper, Co-President of the Association of the Musée valaisan des Bisses (welcome speech)
- Mathieu Aymon, President of the Municipality of Ayent
- Christophe Darbellay, President of the Government of the Canton of Valais
- His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud bin Hamad Alhasani, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Swiss Confederation
- Gaëtan Morard, Director and Scientific Head of the Museum

11:30 – 12:00 Guided tour of the exhibition

12:00 Reception and informal gathering

11:00 – 14:00 Free admission to the museum

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

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This exhibition has been developed in close collaboration with the Sultanate of Oman and the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in Bern, reflecting a concrete institutional dialogue around contemporary water-related challenges.



Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries
Wealth & Water Resources



Embassy of the Sultanate of
Oman, Bern



Le Canton du Valais
encourage la culture
Der Kanton Wallis
fördert Kultur



About the Musée valaisan des Bisses

The museum is dedicated to promoting Alpine hydraulic heritage, combining research, mediation and creation. It develops both local and international projects focused on water, landscape and society.

Between desert and mountains, this unique exhibition creates a dialogue between Omani aflaj and bisses, offering a renewed perspective on our relationship with water.

Photos Yves Magat