

## **Via Alpina Red Trail**

### **General comments + notes on each stage R1-R161**

as experienced in the summers of 2021-23

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Below are three sets of general comments on the Via Alpina, each written after the summer's hiking, followed by a set of notes on all stages, R1-R161.

The stage notes do not use fully consistent notation as I started anew each summer.

### **General comments after walking stages R1 – R 40 of the Via Alpina 2021**

30 June – 24 July 2021

For navigation, I downloaded the GPS data (.kml file) from the [via-alpina.org](http://via-alpina.org) website. (1) I imported the GPS data into the (free) app Maps.me on my Android phone, then downloaded the (at the time: free) detailed regional maps of Maps.me for the regions that I walked through. The Via Alpina GPS data are of mixed quality; data for some stages are of very poor quality. (2) I also loaded the GPS data into the app Gaia GPS, which only displays one chosen stage at a time whereas Maps.me displays all stages. (3) The app AllTrails has superior (independent) GPS data for all stages and displays the trail well on detailed topographical maps as long as one has cellular reception; to download the maps requires an annual subscription.

I mostly relied on Maps.me. I would also use Maps.me to figure out how to walk from point A to B when I diverged from the Via Alpina (such as in bad weather) or to see alternatives to the official Via Alpina. The trail which Maps.me would chose unfortunately could be anything: a faint track (it's walkable), a good hiking trail, a forest road, a macadam road, an asphalt road, and even a glacier crossing. In Maps.me all of these might be represented by the same type of dotted line. Routes on Maps.me come with a reliable altimetric diagram and correct distances. In general, Maps.me displays only a fraction of the trails/roads that I actually encountered.

As guidebook, I downloaded one pdf file from the [via-alpina.org](http://via-alpina.org) website covering the sections I was planning to walk. The pdf file came with the title "Via Alpina Guidebook." The distances in the Via Alpina Guidebook tend to be underestimates (compared to what Maps.me and AllTrails say). The altitude gain in the Via Alpina Guidebook can be off many times. (For example, the actual altitude gain could be five times higher.) The "walking time" given in the Via Alpina Guidebook seems to be for someone doing a day trip covering no more than one stage, without a backpack of any significant size or weight. A long-distance hiker carrying tent, sleeping bag, and several days' worth of food may take significantly longer. The "detailed description" in the Via Alpina Guidebook often resembles a murder mystery challenging the reader to figure out what are digressions, diversions, or mistakes, and what part of the information is relevant for a hiker walking this stage. Rare are straightforward instructions such as "take signposted trail 36 for two-thirds of the ascent until signposted trail 42 branches off; continue on trail 42 to the pass; descend from the pass on signposted trail 9 to the bottom of the valley where signposted trail 1 branches off on the left;

continue on trail 1.” Perhaps authors were given instructions to write exactly 150 words, distracting from getting the right amount (of precise) information to the hiker.

After about R15, hikers’ comments in the guidebook sound increasingly exasperated; some use words such as ‘scam.’ The guidebook entry for Dun (R35) speaks volumes:

Die Via Alpina ist ein Wanderweg, der die lokale Entwicklung fördern soll, sowohl für Privatpersonen als auch für betroffene Gebietskörperschaften – 30 Regionen und über 200 Gemeinden, die von einem Anstieg oder einer besseren Aufteilung der Touristenbesuche profitieren. Sie verfolgt das Ziel, ein neues Werkzeug für Bergführer, Begleiter und Hütten- und Gasthausbetreiber zu schaffen, die um die Wege herum Aufenthalte und Entdeckungswanderungen anbieten können.

which google translates as:

The Via Alpina is a hiking trail that aims to promote local development, both for private individuals as well as affected local authorities - 30 regions and over 200 municipalities that benefit from an increase or a better distribution of tourist visits. Its aim is to create a new tool for mountain guides, companions and hut and inn operators who can offer stays and discovery hikes around the paths.

So there it is: The mission of the Via Alpina is not to provide a great hiking experience, but to make money for the businesses along the route.

One might thus question the beginning and end points of stages: Am I going to the end point of the stage solely to drop money into a business’s hands, or am I going there because it provides a nice hiking experience? Am I walking this three-stage detour to enrich someone financially, or because it’s a great trail in a great landscape?

The comments in the guidebook as well as my own experience suggest looking at the Via Alpina route promoted by the guidebook as an excellent way to experience a large part of the Alps, and to use my own judgment as to the exact choice of trails that I take.

Regarding R1 – R40, apart from sometimes questionable beginning and end points of stages, the dilapidated and unmaintained Kaernter Hoehenweg is a very big disappointment, as is the guidebook’s incredibly inappropriate routing through the Zillertal.

The business calculation underlying the money-making objective of the Via Alpina seems problematic. Spending a minimum of around Euro 60-80 per day on food and accommodation in huts adds up to, over 161 stages, Euro 10,000 – 13,000, which isn’t the kind of cash that long distance hikers typically have to spend. (This ignores the long list of suggested hard copy maps to consult for each stage of the Via Alpina, which probably adds up to a thousand maps at Euro 10 each.)

Long-distance hikers may want to pay much more attention to good resupply opportunities and to possibilities to camp/bivouac in each stage than the guidebook provides.

The Via Alpina is \*not\* consistently signposted and doesn’t have its own paint-marks. There are many stages without a single Via Alpina sign. The Via Alpina is simply the assurance that there is a trail (or road) of some form.

Given the kind of elevation gain that the Via Alpina provides and given the limited possibilities to resupply, I found three days of food (for about 5 stages) most appropriate. Carrying food for more days—I have done a maximum of seven on the Via Alpina—meant an exceedingly heavy backpack, given the elevation gain and the quality of the trail. Ideally, my backpack newly stocked with food for three days and a liter of water didn't exceed c.10kg of weight.

I twice wrote to [mail@via-alpina.org](mailto:mail@via-alpina.org) (a month apart) about not being able to post comments at via-alpina.org due to a 'captcha' that would not clear, and asked what I am doing wrong or what I should do in order to post comments. I never heard back. [At some later point, I was able to post comments.]

### **General comments after walking stages R41 – R 100 of the Via Alpina 2022**

July/August 2022

The google map app is highly unreliable for public transport in (at least) Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. Austria is well served by the OEBB app, and Switzerland by the SBB app (the respective country-specific public transport apps).

In Switzerland, the Coop supermarket typically has free wifi.

For Switzerland, the Swisstopo app reliably shows trails (and which trails are closed!). Continuous lines, broken lines, and dotted lines indicate trail difficulty.

The Pareto rule also applies to the Via Alpina: 20% of the route accounts for the bottom 80% hiking experiences on the Via Alpina (VA). Identify these 20% and choose a more enjoyable alternative.

The stated mission of the VA is to promote local development. In several stages of the VA, the VA's listed accommodations or resupply options no longer exist. The VA thus has failed in its mission. To fulfill its mission, the VA would need to be redrawn to promote development where more development is desired by local businesses and administrations, rather than keep the VA in areas where it has failed (and has no chance) to fulfill its mission. On the other hand, the VA goes to places such as Oberstdorf or Leukerbad, which clearly do not need any further development, and it goes via the Fuerstensteig in Liechtenstein, which is clearly not about bringing development anywhere. In other words, the VA in some stages utterly fails in its stated mission and in other stages utterly ignores its mission.

The VA guidebook gives the difficulty of each stage but does not say what the evaluation "difficulty" reflects: Is the stage long? Are there exceedingly steep slopes in the stage that cannot be walked (without aid/ hiking poles)? Does the stage have exposed passages? Does the stage not have a reliable trail but descend into an unmaintained track or worse? Does the stage have ladders and ropes? – What does "difficult" (in the guidebook) mean??

The VA is a jumble of inconsistent stages: one may walk on roads for three days [R41-43] and then find oneself scrambling up and down – with the necessary aid of hiking poles – tracks that are unfit for walking. The guidebook may, in one stage, praise the gorge that one crosses when one has crossed a much more impressive gorge a few days earlier.

The VA guidebook is a historical document of a route that runs on some trails that are about to disappear and on some trails that are no longer maintained, and it lists some accommodation and shops that no longer exist. Given the dates of hiker comments, this historical document was created in 2011 or earlier.

Many/most of the VA stages appear to not have actually been walked by the designers of the VA. The GPS coordinates of many/most stages then presumably were created at a desk. Repeatedly, it is practically impossible for a person who is an ‘Ungeuebter’—non-Alpinist, the German language using ‘Geuebter’ for someone who is comfortable with scrambling / light climbing—carrying a bulky 12-15kg backpack to actually have walked a particular stage and recorded the GPS coordinates.

### **General comments after walking stages R101 – R 160 of the Via Alpina 2023**

July/August 2023

The app Maps.Me now charges for map downloads exceeding ten downloads and I switched to the app Organic Maps (which resembles the original Maps.Me), including with its free map downloads.

This third summer on the Via Alpina (VA) I found the conflict between “following the Via Alpina” and “having the best possible hiking experience” of increasing interest, the difficulty being to a priori (without sufficient information) evaluate which trail provides the best possible hiking experience at any given point in time. (I am reminded of the Milgram experiment re ‘obedience’ to the leader / VA guidebook, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milgram\\_experiment](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milgram_experiment), video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rdrKCilEhC0>.)

I frequently contrasted the VA routing with what the Organic Maps app would suggest, and regularly by-passed long descents/detours at the end of a stage that allow the VA to reach some form of (sometimes no longer existent) accommodation.

Soon after Tignes (R121/122) the presence of cows diminished and I became conscious of to what extent the VA, especially in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland, is actually a ‘shitshow’ (often presented on signs along the trail as preserving our [due to climate change probably unsustainable] ‘cultural landscape’): wading through cow dung, eating cow dung (dust), and drinking cow dung (polluted water). The last quarter of the VA offered some unexpected, pleasant surprises.

My notes re bivouac possibilities are possibly biased in that I am particularly aware of bivouac possibilities when I am looking for one myself, and paying less attention to bivouac possibilities early in the day. Similarly for water. My notes on grocery stores are probably more consistent, though I didn’t consistently keep track of their opening hours (google / google maps is reliable most, but not all of the time). When bivouac possibilities are not an issue in a particular stage (if they are plentiful), I don’t cover ‘bivouac.’ Same for water.

## **R1 – R40 (July 2021)**

### **R1 (30 June 2021)**

Confusing trail out of Muggia; 2+ trails before Laghetti delle Noghere; nice highline trail in woods in second half. GPS markers misleading (trail can be 1-2 km distant from the line that connects two GPS points), and often wrong. Summary altitude statistics grotesquely wrong -- probably a '1' missing in front (add 1000m); the altitude diagram is plausible except that the last hill is 420m high, not 200.

Muggia: From the bus terminus (bus 20 from Trieste runs around the clock) head back about 100m to the road into town and follow the signs to (the starting point) "municipio," approximately 200m away, the piazza on the left behind a building. In the South-East corner of the piazza is a postcard-sized sign "Alpe-Adria Trail" attached to a pole. Do not go into that street and up to the castle -- I did, the castle is not the starting point, it's a simple building not worth a side trip, and the view from the "castle" is blocked by trees/shrubs. I continued past the castle, searching for signs, which was all wrong. -- From the piazza head inland (South) through a pedestrian passage. At the end of it, at a road, there will likely be another sign (I came back from the castle etc. down a street and passed a sign, probably at this location, and kept going straight, East, which was wrong). Check across the street (heading South) if there are further signs. Eventually, one walks on the road to Santa Barbara (if need be, put Santa Barbara into google maps). From Santa Barbara, the trail is well marked, with the next two exceptions.

(1) Approaching the motorway, it seems there are at least two "trails" to Laghetti delle Noghere. When I was 100m away from the motorway, at a junction, I only saw a faded red-white paint mark leading to the motorway (very close to the border control on the motorway). I followed the GPS data and the faded paint marks and approximately 20min later, after a major roundabout, on a long, straight, sun-drenched street in an industrial area heading South, found excellent signs on the left, heading East, which I followed for maybe 15min until I realized I was heading back to Muggia.... Correct: Follow that long, straight road South.

Yellow arrows on the asphalt and on walls *\*never\** led me in a wrong direction. The yellow arrows seem to always point in the correct direction, heading out from Muggia, while the signposts and paint marks tend to favor walking *\*towards\** Muggia. (There are also what seem to be city walking signs, which may yet present the fastest/nicest way from Santa Barbara to here.)

Careful at the intersection below Cresana / Mackolje (as identified on the app Maps.me). 20m past the intersection, the trail heads into the bushes on the left, with the paint marks overgrown.

(2) Shortly after the final high point at 420m (about 95% into this stage) the trail becomes a track, still well marked. The paint marks then end at a grotto. A multitude of faint trails lead down a steep hillside - wrong, and quickly very unpleasant. Maps.me says to walk back 100m from the grotto and find the decent trail down (it's still a tough downhill slog, but the trail, to which I cut across after trying the direct descent, makes it manageable). The grotto is not worth visiting.

There is no water during this stage except at a little creek (good flow 30 June 2021, do not cross at first encounter, trail continues to head up another 50m) about 70% into the stage, at 45°35'49.3"N, 13°51'18.3"E, needs filtering, and a fountain (acqua non potabile) about 80% into the stage at 45°35'57.2"N, 13°51'34.2"E.

The city is present almost everywhere along the trail, if not with road walking then in sight and sound. If I had to redo this stage, I would slackpack it: Stay in Trieste, take a very early bus to Muggia (4:57am) to avoid the current 34 degree afternoon temperature, and at the end of R1 walk 10min to the bus stop in the village to head back to Trieste and be in a shower and an air-conditioned room by 11am or 12 noon. Or consider walking out of Trieste and start with R2 (skipping R1 altogether). If I were to redo R1 (with full backpack) and wanted to continue into R2 without a night back in Trieste, I would cut out the poor descent from the final high point at 420m and descend on the \*other\* side of the hill on what looked from afar like a very decent trail to reach a point roughly 2km into R2, at the bottom of the valley.

## **R2**

After Bottazzo, when reaching the former railroad track, consider following it to Draga (probably nice). If one continues straight uphill, careful about the switch from trail 1 to 17.

Public water faucet in Draga.

After Draga, careful about when to leave the former railroad track.

Impressive cave system (big tourist attraction) at end of R2.

## **R3**

No water. Good-sized supermarket in Lokev. Well-stocked supermarket (~30sqm) in Senožeče. No supermarket in Razdrto.

## **R4**

Spring halfway down Nanos. Trickle on 2 July 2021 after rains. Water fountain in Strane. Faucet and picnic table at exit out of Smihel. Creek just before Predjama; toilets/water at the ticket office to the Predjama Castle.

## **R5**

No water except at end of R5 in Crni Vrh: faucet labeled "drinking water" in square. Crni Vrh also has a good supermarket (on the same square).

## **R6**

Idrija: first full-service town since Trieste; all major supermarket chains with big stores. Geopark 100m off route, at suspension bridge across river, c.2km before Idrija.

## **R7**

From Idrija to Guest House Kmecki Hram do NOT follow GPS coordinates and official trail description on [via-alpina.org](http://via-alpina.org) (they are WRONG) unless you want to climb straight up a 60 degree incline on vague trails, tracks, and occasionally without tracks, constantly holding the GPS map in your hand, facing being crushed by mountain bike daredevils falling down the hillside, and all of this only to overshoot in altitude by 100% and engage in a long road walk to lead back down... Markers are missing at junctions but can occasionally be found between junctions. Comments on Maps.Me seem to also direct one to this WRONG route. (The app

AllTrails also uses these wrong GPS data.) -- Correct: In Idrija, after crossing the bridge and entering the road out of town (as the GPS data indicate), CONTINUE to follow paint marks (red doughnut with white in middle) and hope for the best (you are walking the updated, correct trail but without GPS waymarks). At Guest House Kmecki Hram, the way down to Idrija is clearly indicated (signpost, paint marks), as is the continuation of the Via Alpina.

Signage for the Via Alpina continues to digress at times from the GPS waypoints, but in easily comprehensible ways. Whether a faint trail with a 30 degree incline is preferable to a switchback on the road is a personal choice.

In R7, if one ever finds oneself on an enjoyable, level trail, it's time to check one's coordinates. One is almost certainly going in the wrong direction. If one finds oneself on a 30+ degree incline, on an overgrown trail, or sliding down a newly manure-drenched meadow without trail, one is almost certainly on the Via Alpina.

The guidebook gives as altitude climbed 1278m; at least subjectively, if not objectively (don't have enough battery to record my tracks), this appears a large underestimate.

Water: pipe out of concrete encasement about half-way through R7 (trickle), and similarly about 85% through R7 (good flow): 46°4'2170N, 14°1'6100E; 46°5'8310N, 14°0'1500E.

Consider descending from Kladje (2.5km before the end of R7) to the larger village of Cerkno (and spend the night in a nice hotel), then walk a road (could be a dirt road) to meet the Via Alpina in R8 at c.1000m altitude. Cerkno is little below the lowest point of R8. On the Via Alpina, the first 300m altitude gain from Poljane are on a trail with a 45 degree incline, the next 200m (to reach 1000m) on a 30 degree incline, i.e. are brutally straight up. Alternative: go from Cerkno to Poce and take the trail from there directly to the peak, joining R9 c.200 altitude meters below the peak.

Alternatively, 500m before the lowest point of R8, as one reaches the tarmac road, turn right and go up to Dolenji Novaki, then make your way up from there to somewhere on the R8.

I can see three reasons to walk R7 and R8 as described in the guidebook: bring business to the huts/lodges, prove to yourself that you are a tough person who zooms up 45 degree inclines, or visit the partisan hospital site B. Franja (reconstructed huts in a gorge, as far as I understand -- see the guidebook).

## **R8**

Water: 500m above lowest point, creek crossing; subsequently several creeks up to c.800m altitude; trough c.100 altitude meters below peak with clean trickle after rain; sound of running water from enclosed area 20m off trail c.50m altitude below peak. Faucet outside hut (end of R8) with sign that not potable.

## **R9**

Water: faucet at Petrovo Brdo Brt outside in back, creek shortly after, otherwise none on ascent.

Last campsite on ascent is (very roughly) one hour up, after leaving the old Ronan road and walking on a good trail along the hillside, at a small animal breeder club's hut (flat grassy area, great views).

## **R10 (A and B)**

Spectacular ridge and highline walk; highly unpleasant last 2 km of overgrown Karst landscape (trail goes up-down-left-right).

No water. (Faucet with sign non-potable a few steps down from the hut at the beginning of R10.)

No good camping possibilities -- Ignoring the side-tracking at the end of R10A (and the same, in return, as the beginning of R10B): Extremely few/poor possibilities in second half of R10A (beware of fierce winds along ridge), and one occasion perhaps two-thirds into R10B. Map shows flat areas around end of R10B: Karst area, impossible to camp.

A bulky backpack could be a hindrance in some delicate passages of R10, which tend to come with overhanging rocks or shrubs. Ideally, the backpack does not extend beyond one's body width; a sleeping mat attached at the top, for example, might mean that in making a step forward the mat hits an overhang and pushes one outward ("over the cliff"). Backpack weight should be stable and close to the body; when the body moves into a non-vertical position, the backpack should not shift weight and create its own momentum.

Hundreds of tourists walk up Šija mountain at the transition from 10A to 10B (not part of 10A or B).

The highly unpleasant last two kilometers of 10B can be avoided by continuing on the current good trail (rather than turn right, up, into the Karst undergrowth) to Loca Pod Bogatinum (hut, overnight possibility unbeknownst to me, later saw sign that it's "open" with picture that would suggest enough space to have overnight opportunities), which then connects directly to about 2km into R11 (beginning and end of this alternative route look very good).

A 1.5l water bottle costs Euro 4.40 at the hut at the end of R10B. The hut is a big building that has many 2-bed rooms. No shower.

## **R11**

No water, except at faucet a few steps aside from the hut at the end of R11.

## **R12**

Beautiful scenery.

No water (possibly from lakes).

Camping: no good sites and possibly prohibited.

On 6 July 2021, snow in the final ascent, near-full snow cover on the slightly ascending plateau at the top (easy traverse), dangerous descent near-completely on snow to hut at end of R12. Recommend not to do R12 under such conditions (takes significantly more concentration than R10A, and perhaps luck). Was possible only due to high temperatures with soft snow in the afternoon, and a good number of people walking R12 in reverse (easier in snow) and creating sufficient tread. Snow continued for about 1km into R13, with equally dangerous passages.



### **R13**

Beautiful mule trail followed by easy forest walk (and shade).

Water beginning about an hour before the end of the stage on several occasions (creek, river) and spring with trough and wooden half-pipe c.1.5km before the end of R13.

Camping possibilities starting c.1 hour before the end of R13, though possibly prohibited.

Last hour invites on several occasions to sit and relax.

Trenta Market (store) is tiny (20sqm?) but has a bit of everything. Closes 19:30 (at least on a Tuesday in early July).

### **R14**

Water: on ascent: repeatedly creeks/river until just before reaching the road near the pass; none on the descent until about 1km from the end. Faucet with trough across meadow to West of hut.

Camping opportunities during ascent and at end.

Warning: on 7 July 2021, gorge c.1 km from end was covered by 3-5m thick snow/icefield. Sun does not reach it before around noon. Was covered with some rocks and dirt that facilitated a steep descent for c.200m to exit the snowfield on the opposite side (where snow cover receded earlier).

I found this section uninteresting, and in parts crowded with people. There seems to be an alternative trail from the pass down to the end of R14 that would avoid the gorge (and the steep and slippery descent into the gorge).

First time I encounter mosquitoes (and also horseflies). Only here and in the next few stages. (I never needed mosquito repellent.)

### **R15 (7/8Jul2021)**

Water: Creek just before and after Podkoren (needs filtering); rivelets (good water) at 1430m on ascent; rivelets on descent at 1070m quickly followed by sound of creek (needs sidetracking) which one crosses 10min later. River just before Thoerl (invites to a dip). Water at end of R15 c.100m to East on main road (faucet into trough).

Camping: frequent possibilities

Guidebook mentions bakery/supermarket in Podkoren -- did not see on or near route; google maps shows a supermarket 3km away.

R15 includes a formal border crossing into Austria (passport check, Covid test / vaccination check). Maps.me shows possibilities to cut out boring road walk via Podkoren by heading straight to the Dreilaendereck from about 5km into R15. That also avoids a formal border crossing.

Weekdays only buses from Thoerl to 3km away Arnoldstein (major supermarkets at both ends, hourly trains to Villach, bicycle path runs parallel to road all the way from the end of

R15 to Arnoldstein). Arnoldstein is also accessible by direct descent from Dreilaendereck 'hut.'

Bus continues past Arnoldstein for 15km to scenic and major city Villach. Bus departs Thoerl early morning (latest around 8am), then 12:30 and a couple more times later in the afternoon. Hermagor-Villach line (timetable is online). Trail passes busstop in Thoerl.

For next major resupply consider an alternative route for R20.

## **R16**

Water faucet/trough in Thoerl (once or twice depending on if one follow signposts or GPS coordinates). -- From here on, the guidebook occasionally mentions water sources; generally, water is not an issue from here on.

Camping opportunities all along.

Given that the Karst territory has ended and that the guidebook covers water sources, there is little/no need to document water sources and camping opportunities from here on.

Starting from the Goerlacher Alm spring, I would have done well to check my GPS coordinates every 5min, for the next hour or so (As usual, when in doubt, if I am on a nice trail, it's the wrong one.)

This is the beginning of major cow territory (for at least the next twenty stages). No matter how far away from the cows one camps, they will find one, lick the tent, and keep one awake with their cow bells at night.

## **R17**

At signpost 'Feistritzer Alm 2 hrs' step \*behind\* the signpost for alternative trail directions also used by GPS coordinates Recommend not to take alternative trail (not to follow the GPS coordinates): it's a track at best, goes straight up, is overgrown in places, and blocked in steepest parts by fallen trees. Where the two trails rejoin before the Feistritzer Alm, no signpost and no paint marks on the ground indicate the alternative trail (which the GPS coordinates follow) in the reverse direction.

## **R20**

Worst section of the Via Alpina so far. Except for beginning and end, the trail deteriorates into a track that is exceedingly difficult to walk. Be prepared to slip: walking sticks as support are almost a must, gloves to protect one's hands when one slips, long pants as protection against the undergrowth (and stinging nettles at one place on the descent). Much of the difficult track consists of crossing steep slopes, plus a steep descent. The scenery does not warrant this painful track. The vegetation suggests that this is a particularly rainy corner. Halfway down the descent, the signposted trail diverges from the GPS (and the trail indicated by the GPS coordinates no longer exists).

Alternative: Consider descending from the Zollnersee Huette (beginning of R20) to the town of Mauthen to resupply (Maps.me will display a walking route) and then returning to (almost) the end of R21(?) on a small road that runs parallel to (though distant from) the main road (or check for a bus).

## **R22**

On final ascent just before Hochweisssteinhaus continue on trail/abandoned road past dilapidated Alm to signpost, then take the switchback to reach the pass. GPS waymarks (and painted marks on rocks) end in impenetrably overgrown and very steep bushes that could formerly have contained a trail.

## **R23**

Similar to 10A but longer and more exposed. This is not a hiking trail as there are many instances of scrambling, and passages with (much needed) ropes and iron footholds. In many locations the trail is dilapidated / in urgent need of maintenance in order to be safe(r), for example where steel and wooden steps have broken away. I suggest to view the R23 currently described in the guidebook as a challenging 'Alternative.'

The safe way (a hiking trail) goes from Hochweisssteinhaus via (likely) the Hochalplpass to the Italian side, where it follows a comfortable, hikeable dirt road; close to the Porze hut (end of stage R23), signposts point away from the dirt road to the Porze hut. Old comments on R23 in the guidebook provide a bit more detail, and describe possibilities to overnight. (In bad weather, I started out on the R23 as described in the guidebook and three-quarters the way to Porze hut descended to the Italian side.)

## **R24**

After descending on the Italian side in the direction of the end of R24, in continually bad weather, I used the app Maps.me to find a valley route to Sexten; the route turned out to be on hiking trails, forest roads, and occasionally on country roads. There are dozens of signposted trails in the lower regions, off the ridge. I enjoyed a mostly rain-free and at times even sunny day while the ridge was in clouds all day. (I covered a bit more distance as well as elevation gain than the official R24-R26 stages to Sexten do, and *walked* into Sexten rather than taking a gondola. And I saw some interesting villages rather than clouds only.)

## **R26**

Basic resupply at Despar in Sexten.

Frequent bus 446 (every 20min) up and down the valley (down to Innichen, which may or may not have better resupply options).

For resupply, also consider a side trip (bus) in R27.

A free hiking map available at the Sexten tourist office (in the entrance area when the office is closed) is useful through R29.

## **R27-R29**

Resupply: At the road crossing at Landro (Hoehlensteintal), c. 2hr 10min into R27, is a bus stop for a bus to Cortina d'Ampezzo (c. 20km journey, half a dozen buses a day from Toblach) which is a bigger town that should offer better resupply opportunities than the Sexten valley.

Alternative route given the (earlier warning) comments on via-alpina.org re the second half of R27 and R28: Just before reaching the road at Landro (Hoehlensteintal), it's possible to take the macadam road heading South, first trail 6 then trail 6B, for c.2.5km around the far side (away from road) of the Duerrensee (lake). Once one reaches an excellent bicycle macadam road, follow it Southwest for c.3.5km to Cimabanche and c.0.5km further to a small parking area on the Western side of the parallel road (has two big map displays), just before some dilapidated houses. Follow forest road West to hamlet Ra Stua (c.7.5km), then continue

North (with some variation, and various options) to Seekofelhütte. The app Maps.me will display this route if done in two stages, first to Ra Stua, then to the Seekofelhütte. A free hiking map available at the Sexten tourist office (in the entrance area when the office is closed) also shows this possibility. -- I wasn't up for any more (unmaintained?) via ferrata in drizzling rain, and a comment in the guidebook suggests that the via ferrata part of R28 is closed, anyway. This alternative is slightly longer and has slightly more elevation gain. I found it easy walking and rather enjoyable.

The Seekofelhütte, the pass after it, and the descent are boring and with the alternative I did it would have made sense to divert to the Sennes Alm about an hour before reaching the Seekofelhütte (and probably before actually reaching the Sennes Alm) to head to the Seitenbachscharte (pass) from where a trail leads down to Wildsee, i.e. bypassing the Seekofelhütte / pass descent altogether. 20 min before reaching the Seekofelhütte another trail to Seitenbachscharte is signposted.

The regular descent from Seekofelhütte is unpleasant with on a late Sunday morning about 300 people stumbling through the narrow passages (and clogging up the trail for lengthy periods). The descent includes 2 secured passages of 50 and 20m; in R23 such passages were not secured. Here one could get by without the cables.

The app Maps.me shows all relevant trails / alternative trails.

## **R29**

No water on the alternative approach to the Seekofelhütte for the last hour, none at the Seekofelhütte, none on the regular descent, none at the Prags Wildsee. First water c. 30min after Prags Wildsee, 5 meters from the trail, as it passes the parking lot behind an old, very large hotel: The typical pipe continuously dispensing water into a trough. Three such outlets in Schmieden, several in Welsberg.

Resupply: Schmieden has a Despar, Welsberg a Coop. (Both were closed on Sunday when I passed through.)

The app Maps.me displays the detailed way to St. Martin (25km from Prags Wildsee). Trail 1 to Schmieden, 2A continuing to Welsberg, then the Talblickweg to St. Martin; all except the first are bicycle paths, typically but not always asphalt.

I enjoyed getting a feeling for the distance between the Dolomites and what comes next, but would, on second thought, seriously consider taking the bus from Prags Wildsee (every 30min) to Welsberg, followed by a bus to St. Martin.

The app AllTrails has 32km and 1000m elevation gain for R29 -- it seems to divert to hiking trails, including a significant climb (in the direction of R30) after Welsberg; on the AllTrails route, it should be possible to rather than complete R29 and descend to St. Martin switch to a point some kilometers into R30. (St. Martin seems a perfectly arbitrary stage between two sections.) See the app Maps.me for bypassing St. Martin even when following the Via Alpina GPS data. If walking R29 from Prags Wildsee roughly in accordance with the GPS coordinates, then enter "Karch" or "Galfall Alm" into Maps.me to avoid a couple of kilometers of detour to St Martin (and a corresponding road walk).

In case of bad weather: The app Maps.me has a low-level route suggestion, mostly off-road, for a 33km walk from Welsberg to the Talstation in R33 (or a 38km walk with an ascent towards the end of R33).

### **R30**

On the ascent, at the Ochsenfelder Alm, the Via Alpina continues \*behind\* the last house, straight up for 1min to find the trail. The trail goes up the spur in switchbacks (not up the valley floor any longer).

Superb trail on the way down. Beautiful switchbacks carved and secured with stone walls built into the mountainside.

Highly misleading, false GPS coordinates further down the descent. Descend on trail 9, then switch to trail 1 (already in the valley) when that branches off. Detailed descriptions in guidebook report on trail 1 in the wrong direction. -- Do not take trail 8 on the descent unless you want the thrill of walking across 70-80 degree slopes for an extra 3km with a hundred meters of elevation gain thrown in (trail 8 is wrongly indicated by the GPS coordinates).

Bakery in center of town Antholz-Mittert. Gol Supermarket, medium-sized, well stocked, as one heads out of town to R31. (At the end of town is a green area / children's playground, shaded, with benches and water fountain.)

### **R31**

Final 20min mostly on wooden staircases 1m wide, additionally secured with cables for extra comfort, built on to the rock and sometimes partly off the rock face. Not difficult or dangerous (as long as I don't look down).

### **R32 (20 July 2021)**

No good water source all the way to Rein, water fountain in Rein not in use, a couple of meadow springs after Rein (perhaps fed by recent rains), otherwise no good water till the churchyard in Ahornach where the outlet carries a sign that the water is potable.

Rein: Gol Supermarket similar to the one in Antholz-Mittert. Gol supermarket in Ahornach seems extremely small and was shuttered when I walked by at 15:24 on a weekday (may be out of operation, or opens only at 15:30, with the typical 12:30-15:30 siesta in this region).

Roadwalk into Reins, 3km: Now replaced by dirt road parallel to road.

Trail from Reins to Ahornach first ascends close to 400m (elevation gain summary in guidebook misses out on this elevation gain) before descending to Ahornach. Macadam road, with half a dozen vehicles passing me and leaving me in a dust cloud. Not as enjoyable a walk as the guidebook makes it out to be.

To get from Ahornach to the Talstation, follow the main road down out of town. At its first switchback (quite some ways), at a house with the name "Talblick" on its side, continue in the original direction (on a now different road). Signposts for trail 6 appear, while the app Maps.me suggests a route with likely less road walking.

The app Maps.me shows the possibility of a 11km purely downhill walk from where one hits the road to Reins, before Reins (turn the other direction, downhill), mostly off road, and

going through a larger village, Sand in Taufers (google map shows good-sized Despar and more), to the Talstation. This compares to the "official" "trail" of perhaps 16km and 600m elevation gain.

### **R33**

No water on descent from Ahornach, no water if one takes the gondola up, no water until two-thirds through the ridge; then several seeps and creeks. Good camping opportunities halfway through the ridge, with a couple of minor opportunities later.

One gondola to 2000m; last one down is 5pm, so last one up could be 4:30pm. Euro 17 one way up. At top, 10min walk to a chairlift that goes to 2400m, a point (Sonnklar) that is 10 minutes away from the trail in R33. Last chairlift down is no later than 4:30pm, possibly 4pm; therefore the last chairlift up is possibly 3:30-4pm. -- To take the gondola plus chairlift, one should probably arrive at the Talstation no later than 3pm.

### **R34**

Two options from Chemnitzer hut to Edelraut Hut: (1) Descend to lake, then ascend to Edelraut Hut, 7km, 700m elevation gain, almost wheelchair accessible trail quality. (2) Neves highline trail (trail 1): 10-12km, 400-700m elevation gain, good, maintained trail over rough territory (rocks). One bridge over creek, one 5m long one-foot wide ledge with cable that in late afternoon resembles a waterfall (no problem, but one will get wet feet), signposted as 4 hours (which are much needed), very scenic. The guidebook in its elevation diagram shows option 1; the GPS coordinates are for option 1. The guidebook in its description covers option 2, giving 8km, 161m elevation gain for option 2 plus the remainder of R34, and states 2 hours.

Continuing from Edelraut hut (which looked very modern): At the end of the lake about 15min down from Edelraut hut towards Dun, a signpost states trail 18 to Dun; it leads over massive boulders and then across a low and flat ridge, before descending to an Alm and continuing from there on a macadam road the c.5km to Dun. Good trail, medium scenic. Guidebook, GPS, and Maps.me ignore this trail and go for the guidebook's shorter way (and perhaps better-quality trail/road) to Dun.

Possibly camping close to Dun on the approach to Dun, though probably only with difficulty. At the beginning of R35, where one leaves the main road to go straight up, several hotel advertisements are posted, including one that offers pickup if called.

### **R35**

No camping after Dun (too steep, a few far-fetched possibilities filled with fresh cow dung), none at the Grindlbergsee (lake) (rocky) just before the Gliederscharte (pass); possibly poor campsite 10min after the lake and before the final ascent to the Gliederscharte if not snow-covered. Poor camping possibility on descent as one approaches the valley floor; none after to the end of this stage.

Guidebook: "Gliederscharte should, however, only be tackled in good weather and on safe ground (i.e. no snow fields!)." – Ascent was unproblematic; the incline is such that one should be able to cross snowfields without problems. The descent also posed no difficulty but is steeper than the ascent (had only 1% snow coverage compared to the ascent from the Grindlbergsee with maybe 5% snow coverage). The descent to the valley floor is interrupted

half-way down by a 500m long steep slope crossing in a grassy hillside that posed no difficulty (Used hands twice, no hiking poles).

Water: At Obere Engbergtalalm on ascent, and on descent close to valley floor in form of a spring in a switchback. Plenty of water otherwise, but of questionable quality.

Lowest point in this section (before ascent to Pfitscherjoch hut) on macadam road to Pfitscherjoch hut has 3 buses a day passing on way to the Pfitscherjoch hut; they run from Stein (a bit further down and from the “last bus stop,” yet a bit further down, to the Pfitscherjoch hut; departure times from Stein are 7:35, 8:59, 15:35.

Pfitscherjoch hut is a nice hotel.

**WARNING R36** starting from the Schlegeis Reservoir through halfway of R38, the Via Alpina is a Via Horribile Anti-Alpina (low-level valley walk, on or near asphalt roads (with cars), nothing to see...)

Half a dozen buses a day run from the dam of the Schlegeis reservoir (about 5km into this stage) to Ginzling and on to Mayrhofen (resupply). I did not see a shop in Ginzling (or anything else of interest). Restaurants were closed, and I didn't look for and didn't see accommodation.

Default: Take the bus from the Schlegeis Reservoir to Mayrhofen (full resupply, affordable hotels), and then a bus from Mayrhofen to Moesl (the Finkenberg-Moesl leg is a pointless up and down in a non-satisfying environment). From Moesl, it's possible to walk to Schwaz (end of R40) in one day (R39 and R40 double-count the ascent to Kellerjochhütte, and one may well bypass the final climb to that hut). Schwaz (also) has excellent resupply. -- I don't favor taking buses to shorten the distance walked, but the situation here is different from Pragser Wildsee to St Martin, which gave me a nice impression of the changing landscape. Here, in R36-R38, there is nothing worth to be experienced; the routing is plain offensive.

In good weather, from near the dam of the Schlegeis Reservoir (or perhaps where one first reaches the reservoir) it's possible to follow signposts for sections of the Berliner Höhenweg via the Olperer Hütte and the Gams Hütte to Finkenberg (a worthy highline trail). Google Berliner Höhenweg for more information. Probably really nice. Most perplexing that the official Via Alpina doesn't follow the Berliner Höhenweg.

### **R36 (22 July 2021)**

Strange to spend one's time crossing the Zillertal (famous for the beauty of its mountains) walking on a road (or parallel to a road) deep in the valleys, to the sound of traffic. Incomprehensible why the guidebook does not, early in the stage, at the reservoir, lead to the Berliner Höhenweg (which would also have appropriate hut accommodation, and goes to Finkenberg, the end point of R37).

### **R37**

Via Horribile Anti-Alpina

Highlight is the 150m climb to an electricity pylon before descending again to Finkenberg. Potable water faucet at fountain c.30m before supermarket Spar in Finkenberg. Supermarket is smaller than in Sexten but well-stocked.

### **R38**

In sunny weather, the first climb of the day in the morning up a South-East facing hillside is nicely warm, and after the descent the second climb of the day in the afternoon up a West-facing hillside is also nicely warm.

I took the Finkenberg gondola to its Mittelstation (first leg only) and then walked over (100m elevation gain, then level, then down) to the Penken Bahn station, where I joined R38 after a 5min descent; total walking time 1 hour. This was the only worthwhile hiking that I experienced in the Zillertal.

Rerouting of trail to Moesl, different from guidebook/GPS coordinates (also from AllTrails map), with original trail seemingly under nature restoration. This means a descent to 1327m before ascending towards Moesl (with another short descent in the 15min before Moesl).

No water at Rastkogelhütte; possibilities before and after (some judgment required as to quality).

Highline / ridge trail alternative from Finkenberg: Take Finkengerger Almbahn (gondola) to the very top (Penkenjochhaus) and continue from there via the Rastkogel to the Rastkogelhütte. Maps.me has the trail with 4 hours 33 minutes, 13km and 704m of elevation gain (and a similar elevation loss in the diagram); I would probably double-check in Finkenberg as to the difficulty; as far as I can tell from looking at the Rastkogel (peak), it's not difficult.

### **R39**

Water at Pfundsalm, Lamarkalm, and Maschentalm.

The guidebook includes the 2-hour ascent to the Kellerjochhütte in both R39 and R40.

### **R40**

Ascending towards the Kellerjochhütte from the Gamssteinhaus at the beginning of R40, after about 15 minutes signposts give two options to reach the Kellerjochhütte: straight up, or via a highline trail ("Hochebenweg") circling around the mountain and then ascending a spur to the hut. Both are signposted with the same time (I think it was 1 3/4 hours). Unless one wants to spend the night at the hut or for some other reason wishes to go up there, the highline trail \*without\* final ascent (bypass the hut, since one has to descend to 550m altitude Schwaz afterwards -- why add another 500m elevation gain to what's already a big drop?) for no real gain -- may well be preferable. Where the spur trail branches off the highline trail to go up, one can continue the highline trail and either start descending to Schwaz (on trails) or continue in order to rejoin, after a bit of ascent, the GPS waypoints of the Via Alpina to go to the Gratzenkopf (a lower peak).

If one goes to the Kellerjochhütte, one has 3 possibilities to continue: (1) Follow the GPS waypoints, which means an about 2km slope crossing (the slope is at a 70-80 degree angle but the trail is good, albeit narrow, early on secured with c.200m of cables that aren't necessarily needed, and the slope is covered in grass and small bushes), or (2) walk around the Kellerjochhütte and find the spur trail down to the highline trail (from afar, this looked like the easiest option; it will likely provide an incentive to bypass the Gratzenkopf), or (3) continue from the hut to the chapel and beyond to rejoin the GPS waypoints; the trail to the chapel (300-500m) may look challenging, being secured with cables in the beginning, but to judge from conversations with other hikers, could yet be easier than (1) (which I took).



About 5km before Schwaz one reaches an asphalt road and a bus stop, Pertrach (buses run almost every hour to Schwaz). The guidebook says walk the road into town. The app Maps.me shows a hiking trail that takes off in the second far (East) curve down; signposts appear 5min into the trail, but where it starts from the asphalt road there is only a sign about a "Rodelbahn"; this somewhat rough trail descends rapidly along a creek and then moves diagonally away from the creek, crosses the asphalt road, and continues as a forest trail to the very edge of Schwaz. Another option at Pertrach is to follow the signs to "Burg Freundsberg" with a trail that seems to continue through nice old forest; the GPS waypoints for the Via Alpina lead to within 300m and 100m altitude (below) the Burg, so from the Burg it's just a matter of descending to rejoin the GPS route.

Excellent resupply in Schwaz. Start at the shopping mall "Stadtgalerien" in the center of town (just before the river, on the left, the Via Alpina passes it, with supermarket as well as DM and Muller markets, the latter two carrying their usual range of health foods). Past the train station (whose pedestrian underpass one has to use) is a Hofer/Aldi. Prices in Schwaz are about half of what they were in Sexten or Finkenberg.

## **R41 – R100 (July/August 2022)**

*Resupply R41-R50; Schwaz excellent, Scharnitz +7km to Mittenwald, Biberwier good, Weissbach excellent, Oberstdorf*

### **R41 Schwaz -> Lamsenjochhuette 8Jul2022**

Water: No water (even after a night of heavy rain), except (1) at outskirts of Schwaz, the last village has pipe/trough, and (2) at 1660m altitude, in a right-curve of the road, the sound of flowing water, with a trough visible 200m (distance) uphill on the left. A closed trail heads roughly in that direction.

### **R42 Lamsenjochhuette -> Falkenhuette**

Trail from Lamsenjochhuette is excellent (absolutely no concern about needing to be sure-footed or free of vertigo, no matter what the guidebook says). Binsalm ([www.binsalm.at](http://www.binsalm.at)) offers wood-fired mountain water mini jacuzzi for Euro 50 at 2.5 hours' notice. Also seems to offer half a dozen private rooms in a bungalow-style addition. Plenty of accommodation also at Eng Alm and 1km earlier (following Via Alpina gps coordinates). Falkenhuette can be bypassed by, where the trail reaches the dirt road (c10min below the Falkenhuette, reached on that same road, going uphill), continuing down the road.

Water: An abundance of water (after a night of heavy rain).

### **R43 Falkenhuette -> Scharnitz**

Kleiner Ahornboden meadow not suitable for picnic due to aggressive cows. [Cows using their body mass to push through to my backpack and sticking their snouts in it. Took beating

with a stick before they backed off, and throwing significant rocks that hit hard to chase them away - for about 2min before they were back. Impossible to eat food on this meadow.]

Water: pipe/trough towards end of Kleiner Ahornboden meadow, and equally half an hour, uphill, further on.

Can bypass Karwendelhaus by taking the mountain bike road downhill c. 5min before Karwendelhaus. On descent from Karwendelhaus to valley floor, GPS coordinates often point to trails that are overgrown.

Tentsites: Superb possibilities on valley floor until c.5-7km before Scharnitz. From 5km before until 5km after Scharnitz: severe horse fly plague.

Resupply: Mittenwald, 7km from Scharnitz (roughly hourly bus, 13min ride), has several major German supermarkets.

#### **R44 Scharnitz -> Meilerhuetten 10Jul2022**

GPS coordinates infrequent, leading to gross route approximations, including a dead end heading out of Scharnitz (backtrack 200m, turn left from point of view of original walking direction, and after about 3 houses turn right into street "Sportplatzweg;" alternatively, from the center of Scharnitz, take the main road to the gas station, check out their shop, then turn into Sportplatzweg opposite the gas station, and after the creek turn left to follow Sportplatzweg).

First 500m climbing the side of the canyon, after a plaque commemorating someone's death, a bit rough, slippery in bad weather but manageable if using hands. Thereafter a similar 5m patch about half way up, and a 50m patch close to the top. Bad weather alternative from Scharnitz into Reintal at low level.

Water: Last water c3km after Ahrn, at a bench and a junction with a trail coming from below.

Tent sites: Poor tent sites heading out of Scharnitz, good ones just before Hoher Sattel (after exiting the switchbacks), superb ones at Hoher Sattel (but unofficial-looking sign prohibiting tents; hunting lodge overlooks Hoher Sattel). Good possibilities for about 1-3km after Ahrn.

#### **R45 Meilerhuetten -> Reintalanger Huetten**

From Schachenhaus down: Knee-busting descent over hundreds of switchbacks, including dilapidated, rotten wooden staircases with steps missing. Not dangerous but arduous. I didn't meet a single person after Schachelalm—trail is reserved for masochistic Via Alpina (VA) hikers. Trail is fastest way down short of jumping off the mountain

Water: C.20min after cSchachenhaus, and about 30min into the ascent to Reintalangerhuetten. Both times a spring running over rocks.

Tent sites: Difficult; perhaps in public view near Schachenhaus. Ascent to Reintalangerhuetten: possibly in dry riverbed, accessible from trail only once, about half way

up the valley. Strict prohibition of camping near the hut (and c.15min later at meadow), where it would be possible. Sign at hut says that in the Reintal (Rein valley) camping and bivouac are strictly prohibited, police patrol the area and there is aerial surveillance. Severe penalties...

#### **R46 Reintalanger Huette -> Coburger Huette**

C. 15min after Pestkapelle, the VA joins a bike road to Seebenalm;; ignore signs for Coburger Huette -- it's a meandering hiking trail almost as wide as the road, likewise going (first) to Seebenalm, with 200 people per hour.

Alert: Exceedingly steep descent from shortly after Coburger Huette in R47. Alternative: From Pestkapelle or Seebenalm walk towards Ehrwald 2 hrs (should be on a gentle downward slope), then walk the Panoramaweg c.3km to Biberwier and rejoin the VA c.3km before Biberwier. Or continue from Ehrwald to just after Kleinstockach (13km) in R48. What one misses: Seeben Lake, the environs of Coburger Huette (which are nice), a knee-busting 900m vertical descent (of which the first 300m altitude on steep scree), the MiniM market in Biberwier, which is probably good for resupply, a very steep 700m ascent to a ski area and a gravel road to Wolfgangshuette, a brief sharp descent followed by two hours wading up a cowshit gulch, marvelous views East and West from the Sommerbergjoechle, and a knee-busting 1000m altitude descent. What one gains: probably a nice stroll through beautiful landscape to Ehrwald (or take the cablecar from the Ehrwald Alm, 1km from the Pestkapelle), several resupply options in Ehrwald, a leisurely stroll back to the VA, monstrously grateful knees. In bad weather, this alternative is a no-brainer, both for safety reasons and because the views will likely be better in the valley. In good weather, it's a toss-up.

Water: At creek at Reintalanger Huette, then 10min before Hochfeldernalm (3 springs within about 200m) and at Hochfeldernalm (pipe/trough) and likewise at Pestkapelle, and in a meadow just below Seebenalm.

Tent sites: Endless possibilities from around Hochfeldernalm to Seeben Lake (above Seebenalm, before Coburger Huette); but it's cow territory, and in the woods it's one ant hill to every five trees.

#### **R47 Coburger Huette -> Wolfratshauer Huette**

From Biberwier Scharte (pass), the descent with heavy backpack and without hiking poles is very strenuous (fastest possible descent without jumping off the mountain. Hundreds of mini switchbacks. Very steep trail. The first 300m of altitude are on plantless very steep scree/gravel and it's almost impossible not to slip. When wet, this may be even worse. The next 300m of altitude are on superb, knee-friendly switchbacks through mountain pine. After that, it's back to a fastest possible track, now in a forest at a much reduced slope. I didn't meet a single person. For an alternative see my notes to R46.

Tent sites: None until about 500m from Biberwier, at some wooden structures which may serve wildlife feeding in winter. After Biberwier starting at 1,400m altitude a couple of

possibilities, and then endless possibilities at the ski area at the top.

Water: faucet in Biberwier cemetery (which one passes).

Resupply: Biberwier MiniM, c.200 sqm, looks good (passed it when closed), open Mon-Sat 7:30-18.

## **R48**

Ascent to Sommerbergjoechle: After brief initial descent from Wolfratshauser Huette immediately turn left at the end of the forest to head up the meadow (rocks with red dots). Signpost visible further down is out of the way. Ascent is dominated by cows to the extent that at times there is no identifiable trail. Stick to the left, following a line of rocks up.

Water: pipe/trough at Bichlbaechrr Alm, cemetery in Bergwal (pipe with running water, quality?), after the reservoir after Rinnen many creeks but water does not look promising (reservoir water looks like sewage).

Tent sites: Ascent to Sommerbergjoechle halfway up at a wooden hut. Between lowest point in R48, through Bergwal, to Rinnen many possibilities but in very public space. After Rinnen almost no possibility as gravel road cuts across steep slope; c. 2km before Weissenbach, during descent, a gravel road comes in from the left, side-tracking on which for about 500m leads to possibilities in old side roads in the woods. Alternatively, descend all the way to reach a 1+km flat meadow largely sheltered from views. Followed by a smaller meadow on the right that offers more protection from views.

Resupply: Shop in Bergwal closed Tuesdays (when I passed). Looks very small and tourist-oriented.

## **R49 Weissenbach am Lech**

Alert: Horsefly plague from shortly after Weissenbach to 1,400m altitude (ended exactly where crossed cow fence into cow-free territory). I killed about 50 horseflies, and got bitten half a dozen times.

Alert: After the private hut at 1,500m, the trail continues up and then suddenly ends. The app Maps.me shows this to be a dead-end trail. The VA branches off earlier (after the private hut) to the left. Both Maps.me and the VA GPS coordinates have some wrong routing between the hut and the rock face ahead. Follow red marks on rocks. When in doubt head across meadow and between mountain pine to the left (Southeast) end of the rock face. From there, the trail leads up along (just below) the rock face to the right onto a meadowy slight plateau. Just before the plateau, a trail heads down(!), probably made by hikers going the other direction, that soon peters out (coming up without trail, one might be able to catch this trail). Without trail, the slope here is too steep.

Water at pipe/trough on North side of church or faucet in cemetery. During ascent (1) at c.1130m altitude, well into long flat stretch into the Schwarzwasserbach Valley (probably c.4 hours after Weissbach), and (2) at 1,500m, up and 30m to the left, behind a private hut. Both

times pipe/trough.

Resupply: Supermarket MPREIS: very large, excellent. Open. Mon-Fri 7:30-19, Sat 8-18. Bakery/cafe in MPREIS or another bakery/cafe diagonally across the road, opens earlier (7am or earlier).

Tent sites: Plentiful the first c. 4km (for tent sitestake one of the smaller paths towards the water rather than the bicycle path), not immediately after the road crossing, but then again soon for the remainder of the 8km along the Lech (there is a 'no camping' sign somewhere). Repeatedly in the valley going up (cows!), few in the second climb starting at the end of the flat road. Probably at the private hut at 1,500m, at the (high) meadow plateau at 1,800m, and possibly at the pass itself, though probably none of these very good.

[ As you walk along the flat road through the Schwarzwassertal Valley, notice the logging, a denuded hillside, and the meadow(s) torn up by logging equipment (they tried to hide it by placing the warzone away from the road). This is an official "Naturpark "Compare to the damage done by a tent pressing down a few grasses for a night when encountering any no-camping sign or admonition.]

### **R50 Prinz-Luitpold-Haus – Oberstdorf**

Water: (1) 15min after Prinz-Luipolt Haus, seep with source/spring 20m above. (2) C.30min down from/after Himmeleck Pass, at private hut (pipe /trough).

Tent sites: (1) None before Himmelseck, except at 200m altitude below Himmelseck and only if it's dry (otherwise swampy) - very exposed to being seen. A pristine spot. (2) At Himmeleck pass. (3) At private hut c.30min down/after Himmeleck pass.-- Further down, Kaeseralpe and beyond: hundreds of cows. There could be possibilities all the way until 30-45min before Oberstdorf, but cows until c. Cytalhaus, and typically no privacy. Sign at Cytalhouse, pointing uphill (the VA route), says no camping.

Resupply: Very touristy Oberstdorf with central (pedestrian zone) Netto and Feneberg supermarkets, and central Reformhaus/Bioladen health food shop. Many sports shops.

### **R51 Oberstdorf -> Mindelheimerhuette 15Jul2022**

Tip: One can spare oneself half a dozen horsefly bites in the early morning and a, except for a somewhat pleasant first couple of km, 75% of the way boring/tedious walk to Birgsau by taking the first Bus 7 from Oberstdorf to Birgsau and get out of the low region before the sun gets too hot and while one can wear protective layers against the horseflies. For walking to Birgsau, the GPS coordinates are sub-optimal: they stay on the tarred vehicle road longer than needed, have a longer distance than needed, and go through an overgrown and fenced in (without gate) area towards the end. After Lorretto, follow signposts to Birgsau; summer 2021 construction closure only applies to bicycles, hikers can pass.

Info: Guggensee Lake is a small puddle of dirty water. Beautiful highline trail (in some places: track) from Guggensee Lake to Mildenheim Huette.

Water: (1) Just before the Loretto Chapel (pipe/trough). (2) After crossing the creek in Birgsau and climbing to the end of the first meadow to some trees: there are a variety of pipes (local water supply?) across a gully, one of which leaks significantly. (3) At a private hut c.15 min past Guggensee Lake, inside a fenced area (open faucet, trough). (4) C.1 hour past Guggensee Lake, at a second private hut, same arrangement but no fence, open access

Tent sites: Opportunities between Oberstdorf and Birgsau: very limited at Guggensee lake (and pristine environment, one could try next to an empty concrete trough after the lake), possibly at three private huts (which may be occupied; the third one is a detour, below Mildenheim Huette). There is a sign at the Fastenoy parking area prohibiting, among others, camping, bivouac, and loitering ("lagern").

### **R52 Mindelheimerhuette -> Schroecken (15 and 16 Jul2022)**

Guidebook's 4h30 walking time does not match walking times given in the text (more like 6+ hours).

Beautiful highline / Plateau trail from pass after Milsenheim Huette to Widderstein Huette.

Water: (1) At Hochtannbergpass, if one walks along the road after the descent from the Widderstein Huette rather than make the detour to the chapel, at the end of the road parking area is a fountain with a sign that explicitly says potable water. (2) Walking from Hotel Koerbersee to Schroecken on the road, after c. 30min, just before Batzenalpe, pipe/trough at road (next to private house). (3) At Batzen Alpenmuseum (just after Batzen Alpe), pipe/trough, low flow.

Tent sites: Some possibilities after first pass (not at pass), the area c. 1-2 hours after Mildenheim Huette: plateau with generally very uneven, rocky ground with patches of grass and mountain pine. Possibilities after Hochtannbergpass until c. half an hour before Schroecken.

Resupply: Schroecken Spar, c.70 sqm, good, Mon-Sat 7:30-12:30, 15:30-18:30 except Sat only till 18:00.

### **R53 Schroecken -> Buchboden**

Alert: C.20min after the Biberacher Huette, where crossing a fence, a sign for Buchboden points straight ahead. The VA veers right, instead, which I noticed too late and did not turn back. The direct way to Buchboden passes through some Alpe (water pipe/trough) and then descends on a at first rather pleasant later rather tedious path to the valley road, which leads in 40min to Buchboden.

Before Schroecken an alternative high path leads to the Biberacher Huette (do not know difficulty, sign in Schroecken, pointing in the direction from which I came, from Koerbersee, did not mention any requirements). May be preferable to the 45min descent from Schroecken to Landsberg followed by the steep ascent.

Water: (1) C.15min into ascent, spring on right towards end of a straight, steep stretch (c.1hr from Schroecken). (2). At c.1450m altitude, pipe/trough. (3) At Buchboden, opposite church (pipe/trough).

Tent sites: None until shortly before Biberacher Huette, (except perhaps, earlier, on a side road to some private hut, or on a parking space). On the direct path to Buchboden: none / very difficult (at top also cows). Signs further down say no camping across whole valley/community.

### **R54 Buchboden -> St. Gerold**

Alert: GPS coordinates leading out of Buchboden are incorrect. Follow signs for "Grasella Walserweg." Descends from Buchboden past Hotel Kreuz, which is just West of the church. When signposts Garsella Walserweg end, follow Blons Walserweg. When signposts and GPS coordinates diverged, I followed the signposts. When signs were lacking, I double-checked the GPS coordinates.

Alert: Garsella to Blons is a mix of trail, track, meadow-walking without tracks (wet in the morning) and tarred roads, going up and down and here and there. -- In the early morning, it might be best to walk the vehicular road.

Water: Buchboden opposite church, quickly followed by two instances of pipe/trough, then more later. Also springs / rivulets.

Tent sites (repeatedly 'no camping' signs): Various possibilities, keeping in mind that there are villages and houses, and the 'trail' is shared with other hikers, e-bikes, horse riders, off-road vehicles, and sometimes cars. Best between Buchboden and Garsella. Later more difficult to find a spot.

Blons has a small store. I don't know size and opening hours (came through on a Sunday).

### **R55 St. Gerold -> Feldkirch**

Trail changes name from Walserweg to Walgauweg some time in this stage, maybe from Thueringerberg on.

Unexpectedly pleasant village hopping until it got tedious around Satteins. I would have preferred the Via Alpina to go up slightly in St Gerold or Thueringerberg and to follow a highline trail that only descends at the end, into Feldkirch. -- Where the VA crosses the river, half an hour before Feldkirch, I kept going into Franstranz (ice cream parlor and Restaurant/Gasthof near church) and then up the hill to join the VA in R56 about 1.5 hours before the Feldkitcher Huette, by-passing downtown Feldkirch. (Resupply possible in Satteins.)

Water: frequent, including village pipe/troughs

Tent sites: frequent, including after Satteins

Resupply:

Spar Schnifis Mon,Tue,Wed, Fri 7:30-12:30, 16:00-18:30 Thu, 7:30-12:30, Sat 7:30-12:00.  
Spar Satteins (big), off-trail down main road 5min, Mon-Sat 6:50(!)-19:00 except Sat till  
18:00. Diskont gas station in Satteins does not have shop.

### **R56 Feldkirch -> Gafadurahuette**

Alert: Run a google search "image Fuerstensteig Liechtenstein" and decide if you want to do this over several kilometers in stage 57. Alternative: Walk from Amerluegen in 4h30 to Suecka, end of R57 (I suggest to side-track up the road for 5-10min to a hiker's tunnel, walk through, and spend some time taking in the scenery of the Rhinetal). The trail, probably a gravel road, will likely be signposted as going to Steg, a 10min walk below Suecka. From Steg, at the tunnel, buses go approx, hourly to Vaduz, a 20+min ride.

No water after Amerluegen (and don't know before).

Tent sites: limited possibilities after Feldkircher Huette

### **R57 Gafadarhuette -> Suecka**

See alert with R58. After Amerluegen in R56 it's too late to avoid the Fuerstensteig. At the Garsella Aloe, faint tracks lead to an alternative ridge, not confidence-inspiring enough to be used in an attempt to circumvent the Fuerstensteig. A signpost shows no trail in that direction. I suspect there is a trail down (didn't check as I wasn't aware of the severity of the Fuerstensteig), which would then probably meet the trail from Amerluegen to Steg/Suecka.

The Fuerstensteig is definitely not a hiking trail. Of the c.6km from the ridge above Garsella-Alp to Silum, the first km is severe, followed by c. 2km of hiking trail, before, according to a local hiker, the Fuerstensteig becomes even more exposed than in the first km. At this point (c. 3km into the 6km) it is possible to take a trail heading left /East and quickly climbing to a side ridge on what is a highly engineered (excellent) trail. It descends as a normal hiking trail the other side and one can then walk a hiking trail on a wooded (harmless) ridge (or partly bypass the ridge via a level trail); this option is joined by the VA (at the tunnel), a few minutes before Suecka. I took this route after the first 3km of the Fuerstensteig. I would not have done any part of the Fuerstenweg had I known how severe it is. (I met half a dozen people on those first 3km, none with a significant backpack. The weather was perfect. I still would not do it, knowing what I know now, having done the first 3km. The views do not outweigh the anxiety/danger with a heavy and bulky backpack. It's ok for thrill seeking day hikers.)

Gasthof Suecka looked dead. No restaurant.

Water: C. 20m behind the Garsella Alpe Huette is a small trough. One meter behind it is a faucet.

Camping: Around Garaella Alpe.

### **R58 Suecka -> Pfaelzerhuette**



Alternative: From Steg (just down from Suecka) to Pfaelzerhuettee: Gravel road, faster than VA (which only has a couple of km of gravel road and no traffic). Choice could be dependent on sun and time of day (VA could be wet in the morning). From above, it looks as if there is a café/restaurant at the end of the Steg parking lot. In rain, the cowshit valley in the final ascent to the Pfaelzerhuettee will likely turn into ankle-deep sludge.

Water: pipe/trough at Gasthof Suecka

Tent sites; Very occasionally in first half. (Heavy cow pollution in the second half.)

### **R59 Pfaelzerhuettee -> Schesaplana Huette**

Alert: C.30min after the pass, the trail becomes very tedious (not clear from afar: up and down, narrow path in places on steep slope, rocky path). It would be possible to descend to a road, down along the creek, then walk the road to the Schesaplana hut or bypass the hut and join the VA 500m further on (will have to bridge the 10m (ten meters) distance btw road and VA by walking across grass).

Water: (1) 15min after pass off-trail (200m, track leads to seeps that immediately form a creek. (2) 15 and 10min before Schesaplana: creek crossings with creek near spring.

Tent sites: Starting c.30min after Pfaelzerhuettee until pass (repeatedly very good spots. In Switzerland, "Wild camping is only allowed in the mountains above the tree line." (Some exceptions apply, eg nature reserves, <https://www.myswissalps.com/campsites/wildcamping>) Cowboy-camping (no tent) is always and everywhere allowed.

### **R60 Schesaplana Huette -> Carschinahuettee**

Alert: Trail between first and third pass in places only one foot wide (and at the same time sloping). Hiking poles are useful. Alternative: Before the first pass, where the VA makes a sharp left uphill turn continue straight to Golrosa. From there, a trail rejoins the VA after the third pass. This trail seems to run rather level and looks easy from above (from the VA). What is missed is the view of a reservoir on the Austrian side at the second pass (and a lot of tedious track and up and down).

Water: Starting c.30min after Schesaplana Huette plentiful, from seeps to springs to creeks to pipe/troughs. No water from first to third pass and down into the dip (about halfway through the stage); at the bottom of the dip is a creek coming out of the rock

Tent sites: Before first pass. After third pass difficult due to frequent slope, uneven territory, and at times cows.

### **R61 Carschinahuettee -> St. Antoenien**

Water: Creek early on (cows below)

Tent sites: Early on, later too steep and cows

### **R62 St. Antoenien -> Gargellen**

Water: Creek before pass

Tent sites: Possibly halfway on descent

I can recommend Hotel Alpenrose in Gargellen -- centrally located with very nice standard rooms.

Resupply: Spar, c. 100sqm, good, open c.9-12, 15-c18

### **R63 Gargellen -> Tuebinger Huette** (21July, all day in clouds never saw more than 50m ahead)

One of the best-quality hiking trails on the Via Alpina

Water: Pipe/trough at Vergaldaalpe and at Tuebinger Huette. Creek near its source just before pass.

Tent sites: limited on way out of town. Good after c.45min but then also entering cow territory. Not in ascent to pass. Limited on descent. Excellent c.10min before Tuebinger Huette.

### **R64 Tuebinger Huette -> Madlener Haus**

After the Hochmaderer Joch, the trail soon becomes a tedious track (highly uneven track, partly overgrown, lots of altitude variation).

Water: Pipe/trough at Tuebinger Huette only. After a rainy night various seeps on the way.

Tent sites: Limited (and early) on ascent to Hochmaderer Joch. Limited shortly after Joch, then none until c. 30min before Madlener Haus (but cows).

### **R65 Madlener Haus -> Jamtalhuette**

Alert: Difficult 200m altitude up to as well as down from pass, on both sides, otherwise standard track; no ropes, ladders etc. Final ascent on steep dust (higher up: sand), steep boulders, steep slate. Used hands 10-20% of the time, no hiking pole. Severe descent, used my one hiking pole, steep dust/slate, steep slope crossings, climbing down rocks. Other VA stages would have had ropes in several places. Took 90min for 200m altitude descent. Track moves consistently along the mountainside, just below/hugging the cliff. I was happy to have rock/cliff in places to hold on to. Heard/saw several mini rock slides on both sides of the pass. Researched the pass online before walking this stage and found no factual information on what to expect (but lots of personal bravado). The one fact I found is that the

Getschnerscharte is rated T3+. Fuerstensteig and Drei Schwestern together are rated T4. (After T6 follows climbing scale II.) I had perfect weather and closely followed all paint signs on the rocks.

Knowing about the pass what I do now, I would probably still do it, as one such stage among two dozen 'normal' stages. I wouldn't do it twice. I wouldn't do it in bad weather. The signposts at the reservoir are white-blue-white, meaning the track is for experienced alpinists only, and the local hiking map shows the trail as a dotted line, for experienced alpinists only. But the marks on the rocks were white-red-white, not white-blue-white. On the descent, my Osprey Levity 45 backpack posed an obstacle in about a dozen instances.

Alternative: The guidebook in the culture/nature section talks at great length about Galtuer but then the VA doesn't go there. From the end of the reservoir (at the tarred road) one can follow hiking signs for Galtuer, probably leading down a dirt road that roughly parallels the tarred road, or take a bus, with buses running from 9-18 roughly every half hour (and continuing beyond Galtuer to Landeck). From Galtuer, one then walks up the valley to the Jamtalhütte on what looks, from above, like a nice walk.

Water: Ascent: seeps early on after reservoir. Creeks later (no cows above). Descent: seep c.20min before Jamtalhütte; faucet/trough at Jamtalhütte with illegible note (potable or not?).

Tent sites: Grassy plateau c.1hour after reservoir. Descent: possibly halfway down, where crossing the glacial creek (but ground might be wet).

### **R66 Jamtalhütte -> Scuol**

Very pleasant stage with great landscape, on good trail.

Water: Faucet/trough at Jamtalhütte (cows all the way up the valley). Descent: Sseep at 2480m altitude, c1 hour before Ftan, in forest, pipe/trough; several pipe/troughs in Ftan.

Tent sites: Ascent: excellent site c.30min into the stage, after rounding a small cliff face, before a flat valley area with lots of water and cows (30m off trail, 3m up, to left (downhill direction)). Descent: excellent spot at 2480m, before descent to valley floor; on valley floor once past cows, for c30min, before reaching an area with little bungalows, cars, people, dogs, large mown meadows; none once entering forest until possibly just before Ftan, on forest trail (after leaving road), or on meadows in approach to Ftan. C.50 altitude meter before pass: Small, probably one-room hut on left, possibly emergency refuge.

Resupply: (1) Ftan Vlog, 100sqm, very good. Open Mon-Fri 7-7, Sat-Sun 7-6.  
(2) Scuol Coop, 1,500sqm, excellent. Open Mon-Sat 8-7, Sun 9-6. Coop has free wifi.  
(Inferior to Coop: Vlog Scuol near church/river, 100sqm, basic, open Mon-Sat 7:30-18:30 except Sat till 18:00)

### **R67 Scuol -> S-charl 23Jul2022**

Alert: Gorge closed. I walked down from the Coop in Scuol on the VA past the hotel but instead of making the sharp right turn of the VA (which heads up-river on the left bank to a bridge) I walked a further 10m to a signpost "S-charls" that directed me across another bridge (here). After the bridge, at a sports field, a sign to the gorge pointing to the right was covered by duct tape. There was no more sign for S-charls. I continued straight up the slope following signs for "San Jon", crossing the tarred road a couple of times, until a sign for S-charls appeared to continue ahead rather than turn as for San Jon. From there on, the way to S-charls was signposted. Another km or two later this trail / dirt road joined the tarred road, and after one km on the tarred road the VA GPS coordinates joined. At which point a sign said "Wegen Murgaaenen ist die Clemgia Schlucht bis auf weiteres geschlossen." (Gorge closed, due to landslides in 2017) -- I enjoyed this stage, good walking and much to see.

S-charls is a tiny vacation hamlet with c.3 hotels. As an earlier hiker commented, it would be utterly feasible to spend two nights in Scuol and walk to (or from) S-charls on a day trip, taking the bus one way (and spending the rest of the day in the Therme). Bus departure times from Scuol: 8:05 and then hourly with a couple of holes until 17:05. From S-charls 8:45 and then hourly with a couple of holes, solely the last bus at 17:15 not matching the X:45 pattern.

Water: None en route; pipe/trough in Scuol in old village center near church/river, also in S-charls.

Tent sites (on my hike): 30+min after Scuol, in a lightly sloping forest without undergrowth; 500m after the bus stop "Plan da Funtanas" (level ground, mountainside); the last quarter of the way to S-charls along the river and on the other side of the river (wooden bridge at one point). 1km before S-charls is a 'no camping' sign

### **R68 S-charl -> Taufers/Tubre**

Transition stage with no particular beauty after leaving the S-charls valley, and a long steep descent on a tarred road. Encountered mosquitos at Cruscetta Pass.

Water: Pipe/trough in S-charls, possibly spring at pass or shortly after; on descent pipe/trough at two alpes (farms) though do not look great; pipe/trough 10m left of tarred road at 1480(?)m altitude (hardly noticeable were it not for the sound of running water); pipe/trough at entrance of Taufers and on main street heading out of town.

Tent sites: For c30min after S-charls, until VA splits from valley road and soon enters cow territory; a few minutes after Cruscetta pass signposted tiny hut 100m off trail; 20min after pass upon reaching grassy valley floor (cow dung permitting); limited on further descent, ending c.3km before Taufers (cars, barbeque area?, trash).

Resupply: Tubres Taufers Golmarket, 100sqm. Open 7:15-12:00, 15:00-18:30, closed Sundays (when I passed through).

### **R69/70 Taufers/Tubre -> Stilfs/Stelvio -> Stilsfer Joch/Passo dello Stelvio**

Shortly after Puntweil I realized that the GPS coordinates are so infrequent as to be useless. Reading the trail descriptions of R69/70 I wondered why these stages? The hikers' comments

sounded rather negative. The ridge was in clouds. I consulted the apps [maps.me](https://www.maps.me) and Swisstopo and walked to the Pass Umbrail (which is a couple of km into R71). Warning: [maps.me](https://www.maps.me) is unaware of an important trail closure in the early ascent. One must cross the tarred road to the pass where one first comes across the tarred road. Use Swisstopo. It's a pleasant early walk on trail/bicycle path up the valley, and then quite a grind to get to the pass, always near the road (many motorcycles) if not, by choice, on the road (nice, steady gradient, no cowshit). OK in late afternoon when traffic quietened down. Getting a glimpse of the Ortler massif the next morning, in good weather, the second part of R70 should probably not be missed (perhaps relying on bus, cable car, to cover R69 and the first half of R70).

### **R71 Stilfser Joch/Passo dello Stelvio -> Arnoga**

Poor GPS coordinates.

Water: Pipe/trough c30min past Umbrail Pass, then repeatedly seeps and creeks (no cows) until shortly after Malga di Forcola. Frequent water sources on level dirt road for 2hrs before Arnoga (start c30min after beginning of level road).

Tent sites: Umbrail Pass; on the descent from Bocchetta di Forcola; picnic area c.30min before Lago di Cancano; difficult around level road to Arnoga due to slope and private houses.

### **R72-76**

I spontaneously decided to walk from Arnoga to Poschiavo, a leisurely 7-9 hour walk up Val di Viola to Passo di Val Viola 2460m (with a Rifugio di Viola an hour before the pass), and then down to Poschiavo on various trails (using the app Swisstopo). It's a beautiful stage except for the last 5km in the valley, exposed to the sun (avoidable by, c.8km before Poschiavo, choosing a higher route). The weather, the low altitude of Tirano (437m), my dwindling food supply (at the end of the third day, in Arnoga, and no resupply opportunity until Tirano, 4 stages later), the hiker comments on the next stages, the quality of the GPS coordinates (suggesting the VA designers didn't walk those stages, either), my incomprehension about any rationale for the VA routing (to bring business to some rarely visited places, all in the same mountain massif?)... Instead of heading from Arnoga to Poschiavo, one could also bypass Poschiavo and after the Passo di Val Viola stay higher up and head straight for St. Moritz and continue to rejoin the VA, for instance, in R79, Maloja, or R80. Probably beats the near-vertical 1600m altitude ascent out of Poschiavo in R77, followed by a grind up a steep ski slope (which, to judge by the GPS coordinates, not even the designers of the VA undertook) in R78, and a mediocre R79 into pointless Maloja.

### **R77 Poschiavo -> Rifugio Zoia (Campo Moro)**

Exceedingly steep ascent almost all the way to the pass, beautiful pass area on both sides. Could walk on dirt road for longer to cover the first 800m altitude at a more pleasant gradient. C.15min before the pass, the 'Glacier Track' veers to the right, crosses a glacier runoff on a bridge, and then ascends softly and swiftly to the pass. Masochists take the VA route which offers a detour and the opportunity to get wet feet in a mini glacier runoff delta

(no bridge) as well as some hands-on bouldering.

Water: Ascent: Depends on which of the two signposted options (or the GPS coordinates, third option) one follows -- possibly pipe/trough in the Selva area: pipe/trough at c. 2020m and again shortly after. Descent: two rivulets feeding a small pond c.20min after the pass.

Tent sites: Extensive flat meadows in the Selva area but also two dozen houses. Continuing ascent, possibly next to road or on unused side road at 1840m altitude, a couple of small meadowy plateaus further up (none great, also consider cows). Beautiful sites in approach to pass, last 30min. Descent: Soon cow meadows, relatively flat.

Resupply: Coop Pischio, 1,000 sqm, excellent. Open Mon-Fri 8-12:15, 13:30-18:30, Sat 8-18. Coop has free wifi.

### **R78 Rifugio Zoia (Campo Moro) -> Chiareggio**

Guidebook description useful. Altitude gain grossly false; AllTrails gives R78 as 17.7km and 708m feet altitude gain. GPS coordinates dangerously misleading. Trail marked by plastic strips hanging off trees/bushes.

Water: Creek a few minutes before Alpe Musella; pipe/trough at Alpe Campolungo, near Alpe Palu, and immediately after Zocca. Three pipes/troughs spread through Chiareggio.

Tent sites: Repeatedly through Alpe Palu ('no camping' sign at Lake Palu), then more difficult due to private houses with meadows and otherwise steep slope. Good meadow opportunities end probably 2 hours before Chiareggio. After Palulangu high point, descending good forest road, perhaps halfway down to the tarred road, a faint unused trail joins from the left that can be followed for 30m to a mini plateau in the woods; otherwise at the same (near-invisible) junction for a c.300m stretch on the forest road some possibilities left and right.

Resupply Chiareggio: Two tiny (20sqm?) shops, no opening times (both closed at 7am), the one that wasn't shuttered seems to cater predominantly to tourist non-food needs.

### **R79 Chiareggio -> Maloja 28Jul2022**

In Maloja, consider taking the c. hourly bus to St. Moritz, a 40-min bus ride away and a place worth visiting in itself.

Water: Pipe/troughs in Chiareggio, and one at entrance of Maloja if follow VA signposts (if follow GPS coordinates, the pipe/trough is to the right, off the road, where a stretch of low houses reaches the Maloja main road). There is a pipe/trough at an alpe just before Lagh da Cavloc (an hour before Maloja) and I have a bad feeling about their water.

Tent sites: limited opportunities for the first hour (until approx. Alpe dell Oro). None for 2 hours on each side of the pass. Some possibilities for 30min before Lagh de Calvoc, from where on it gets very touristy. Where the trail leaves the tarred main road in Chiareggio is a sign that says no camping in the Chesio community (this valley).

Resupply Maloja: Latteria, c15sqm, basic, dairy-oriented but also has other foods (muesli, nuts, chocolate). Cash only if under CHF 50. Gruff staff.

### **R80 Maloja - Juf**

Water: Seeps after Pass Lunghin; rivulet and seeps on ascent to Forcellina.

Tent sites: Very limited in first 20min coming out of Maloja: possibilities from Lago dal Lunghin to Pass da Sett; a couple of sheltered mini plateaus c.75 and 50m altitude below Forcellina, at Forcellina (a few meters up, more on pebbles than grass), some possibilities on first c20min of descent from Forcellina.

### **R81 Juf - Innerferrera**

Alert: This is a pure tarred road walk of 16km, consistently downhill. The VA at times avoids the road by detouring and, according to the guidebook, adding 305m of altitude in those detours. From c.6am until c.6pm, a total of 9 buses run that same route (and beyond). If one needs to resupply, walking to Cesta (the nicer part of the valley) and then taking the bus may make most sense. If I knew beforehand what I know now, I would have taken the bus all the way. -- If one walks the road: In the lower part make sure to bypass the 1km tunnel-bridge-tunnel (car) road by taking to the obvious side trail, the only somewhat nice part of the lower valley.

Water: Good pipe/trough in Cesta, also a couple less trustworthy ones in other places.

Tent sites: Throughout, with varying degrees of visibility. Farmers spray sewage on the (cut) meadows.

Resupply: Cresta Volg, 50sqm, good/very good. Open Mon-Sar 8-12, 13:30-18 except Thu open only in morning and Sat afternoon closing at 17. (The shop in Juf is targeting tourists and is not a source for resupply).

### **R82 Innerferrara - Isola**

See alert for R83 (may want to divert before Suetta in R82 and miss out on gorge with 500m of trail partly hewn in rock)

Tip: If you have no reason to descend to Isola, then walk out of Rasdeglia (30min before Isola) on the tarred, then dirt road. Once this road reaches the tarred road coming up from Isola, continue that tarred road up through Canto to Ca Rasen to join the R83 there.

Water: Pipe/trough shortly before and at Alp Niemet; shortly before Rifugio Bertacchi; shortly before reaching the tarred road at Stuetta; in Rasdeglia (30min before Isola).

Tent sites: Starting at 1750m altitude through shortly before Alp Niemet (then cows almost to Pass da Niemet, and exceedingly wet / cow sludge). Shortly before and at pass, and then

beautiful spots on the much drier descent, almost to Rifugio Bertacchi.

### **R83 Isola- Pian San Giacomo 30Jul2022**

Alert: Very beautiful (paradisical) from around pass on for c.3km, inviting to stay longer, followed by brutal descent requiring hiking poles and ideally only a toothbrush-backpack. At/after pass no signpost, no paint marks, no trail, minimal/no track, occasional mini cairns. GPS coordinates go along the right side of the immediate valley/plateau; the left side would seem easier as long as one can cross the creek at the end of this immediate valley/plateau. After border stone at end of this immediate valley/plateau, regular paint marks appear. Sometimes difficult to find the next paint mark (no trail, occasionally track) – not good in bad weather! There is no recognizable Alp de Balniscio. Around 2050m, an extremely steep descent on a visible track begins. The track appears to have recently been maintained, with grass and bushes cut back, and the occasional, new-looking chain. (The dry grass on a 70 degree track turns the track into the perfect slide.) There is no signpost anywhere from the pass onwards, until the very end of this stage (which comes after the steep descent and several tarred roads afterwards). In reverse, the beginning of the track from the paved road in Pian San Giacomo is not signposted. This is a truly Via Masochista exclusive track! The descent is accompanied by major motorway noise. From the pass on, it is a heaven to hell experience. -- There is no good workaround for this stage (Swisstopo shows a potential Northern alternative starting well before Isola). It took me 4 hours from the pass to the end of the stage, not the guidebook's 2 hours 10min.

Since the businesses at the end of R82 and R83, which the VA was designed to support, no longer exist, the rationale for the current routing has fallen away and one may well feel free to choose the \*most beautiful\* \*hiking\* route. Since at the end of R83 overnigheters have to bus to San Bernardino, one could also go there by default, from above Suetta in R82, Northern pass, resupply, then Passo di Passit as R84.

Water: Pipe/trough at Ca Rasen, c.20min later at cow fence, 4x in Alpe di Borghetto (spread along trail across the whole length of the settlement), seeps/early creeks after pass.

Tent sites: occasionally from Ca Rasen to pass; beautiful sites around and after pass until steep descent (and at bottom of descent, on top of motorway semi-tunnel, noisy)

### **R84 Pian c.di Giomico - Selma**

Alert: Since this stage's descent is not only "steep" (as in R83) but also requires sure-footedness (suggesting it's worse than R83), and since starting out by descending 400m to Mesoccoa which has no attraction for me (it's Sunday) and then having to climb yet more has no attraction for me, I walked from Pian San Giacomo to the Lago d'Isola (the opposite direction to Mescilla, North, near San Bernadino), a beautiful forest walk, and then crossed over to Valbella via Passo di Passit (a gentle ascent to a nice pass where a hundred bison-like creatures gave me a welcome concert, followed by a descent on a track that wasn't great but a lot better than the descent in R83, no hiking poles needed).

Water on my R84: Creek c.30min after Pian San Giacini, pipe/trough at Alpe d'Ocola, 2x at Valvella.



Tent sites: C.20min after Pian di Giomico, after a mini ascent, in level forest on both sides of the road; possibly after Alpe d'Ocola; upon reaching the valley floor c.30min before Valbella.

### **R85, R86 Selma – (Capanna Alpe Cava -) Biasca**

Alert: Another descent in order to ascend yet more and descend steeply yet again. -- Since I am not of the masochist type, at the exit of Valbella I followed the road that goes \*up\* (rather than the one that goes down to Selma) to its end, Alp de Naucal (with a couple hiking trail shortcuts), and from there the faint, marked track to Pass Giuemela, followed by a friendly track down to Alpe di Giuemela (which has a Swiss rifugio) and then a great, easy, wide trail (former mule path?) down a cliff face to Alpe di Lesgiuena. So happy to see hiker-friendly descents. Definitely not a good choice for Via Masochista aficionados. C.30min after Alpe di Lesgiuena one reaches Biborgh, from where it's 15km to Bascia; the first c.8km on a tarred single-lane road (perfect gradient and empty in the early morning), 3km on a forest dirt road (now wide trail, probably formerly the access to the valley, comfortably switch-backing down), and 4km on trail, dirt road, bicycle road (of which 2+km parallel to a busy road) at the valley bottom to the center of Biasca (or get on the hourly bus for these last 4km). -- Used Maps.Me to determine how to get from Valbella to Biasca, then double-checked the feasibility on Swisstopo.-- Would do this alternative again, in a heartbeat.

Water on my R85/R86: Pipe/troughs in Valbella. Creek/seeps well after the pass.  
Pipe/troughs in villages down.

Tent sites: limited possibilities on road to Alp de Naucal, one tentsite a few meters after the pass, possibilities around Alpe di Giuemela (which also has a rifugio). Limited possibilities afterwards, including some in public sight after Biborgh.

### **R87 and R88 Biasca – Capanna d'Efra**

Alert: Arduous climb from perhaps 1400m altitude to 1900m; not dangerous but hiking poles very useful (steep, grassy/hazelnut slope with highly uneven track, including necessity of at time big steps, heaving oneself up). From around 1000m altitude, the trail becomes a track, sometimes faint, with scarce paint marks (GPS coordinates are spot-on; no cell phone reception and I didn't meet anyone (this may be another, de facto, Via Alpina exclusive). Around c.2000m altitude, the track began to show signs of significant maintenance. From the rifugio down it's a model trail, almost too good to be true.

Low-altitude Biasca: I hung out about 150m above Personico under old chestnut trees until 3pm, when trees and mountain began to give shade on the trail.

Alternative: Take the train from Biasca to Locarno for a full resupply and the feel of a nice city, then take the bus to Sonogno for R89.

Water: C.30min after the reservoir pipe out of the rock (picnic table 5min later and trail probably wide enough to camp), then pipe/trough at a couple of chalets and also at 1100m and at 1230m; on descent at rifugio and c.30min later at an abandoned Alpe.

Tent sites: Possibly a very short patch on trail half-way up to reservoir from Personico (wide, grassy, level trail area); possibly on trail c.30min after reservoir, on mown meadow of an unused Alpe (there is a 'chalet') at 1100m (excellent!) and 5min later in the woods; possibly at 1230m, another unused Alpe, ground less even, this being the last chance before highly uneven meadowland at 2100m (there could be one more chance at 1400m in front of some stone ruins); up through 1230m occasional odd spots in the woods offer good tent sites (c.5min after a bifurcation where the left/straight forward trail loops back to Personico is an unexpected, level small clearing); not at pass; c.10min after pass several ledges; top quality rifugio; with some difficulty at Alpe c.30min after rifugio (largest of the abandoned buildings has roof, picnic table, and otherwise open views).

### **R88 Capanna d'Efra -> Sonogno**

Did not keep record. Some tent site possibilities between Lago d'Efra and Frasco, and between Frasco and Sonogno (nothing great)..

Resupply: C. hourly bus to Locarno (c. one-hour ride). I consider Locarno worth a visit. Good Coop in center of Locarno, and very large Coop and other supermarkets in the vicinity. (If one overnights in Locarno, public transport is free, and it's frequent.)

### **R89 Sonogno -> Prato Sornico**

- (1) The morning sun is directly on the ascent.
- (2) Shortly after Sonogno, signposts direct hiker to the right bank of the creek to take a road-avoidance pseudo trail that takes three times more effort than continuing on the road (which is what the GPS coordinates show), and twice as long.
- (3) After Puescen Negro, the trail becomes a track. After a plastic container goat Alpe, perhaps at 1700m, the track first disappears (probably due to goat damage) but eventually reappears. Follow paint marks meticulously (GPS coordinates probably wrong for a bit after the Alpe). The track on a grassy slope is narrow and steep: a hiking pole comes in handy (but isn't necessary). On the descent, between c.1800 and 1400m, in a handful of 1-5m long instances I went slow (without heavy backpack and sufficient strength one might just skip down); there is one instance of 50m of chains around a rock face, with the chains not absolutely necessary (but very welcome, also due to the occasionally wet ground). The track on the descent tends to be wide (1-1.5m) and often approaching trail quality.
- (4) Paint marks abruptly end at 1400m; follow the track. At 1200m a good trail turns off down to the left -- it's not on Swisstopo and the GPS coordinates continue straight, level through a boulder-grass mix without much track.
- (5) 8 hours of walking for me.

Water: Pipe/trough in Sonogno, along tarred road out of Sonogno, at Puescen Negro, and at the goat Alpe. On descent, seeps and creeks from high on, with some cows appearing at 1400m. Pipe/trough in M. di Predee and Prato Sornico.

Tent sites: Limited opportunities along road out of Sonogno (quite public); none on ascent and descent until 1200m (where a track branches off to the left) on the trail, and at 1100m where the trail reaches the dirt road; after that it's meadows and chalets.

## **R90 Prato Sornico - Fontana (Val Bovana) 3Aug2022**

Can someone please tell me why I should walk R90? I gain no utility from steep ascents/descents in bushes with a brief peak at the horizon at the pass (not much different than the day before, some silhouette of peaks in the haze). I don't have a need to prove anything to myself. I am not seeking thrills or have masochistic tendencies. -- I took the low route via Bignasco (evening / early morning as it is hot in the valley) -- Looking at the map, I noticed one could also go up, to Fusio and then Lago Naret, and cross from there over to the end of R91, Robiei, or even into R93. On the map it looks fantastic, always high up, and out of the bushes. – Prato Sornico has a bus to Bignasco and on to Locarno.

Water: Pipe/trough in almost every village.

Tent sites: Difficult around Bignasco. Opportunities on abandoned "garden balconies" shortly before Fontana.

## **R91 Fontana - Robiei 4Aug2022**

Fontana to San Carlo: Best to follow GPS coordinates and use common sense -- a non-road trail is now signposted for the whole distance, and it doesn't always make sense.

The trail from San Carlo to Robiei looks good from above (the cable car). Cable car one-way is CHF 19, departs base station at 8, 9 10, 11, 12, 14, 14:50, 15:35, 16:20, 17.

Water: Pipe/trough in almost every village.

Tent sites: very good opportunities from Fontana to San Carlo. Opportunities during ascent to Robiei. Camping is prohibited in all of Bavona Valley (presumably from Bignasco to Bocchetta du Val Maggia)

## **R92 Robiei – Riale**

No hiking poles needed but useful. Early steep ascent due to destroyed switchbacks. Later c.3 times steep 10-15m slabs of rock to be crossed, no problem in dry weather (and circumvention possible). Trail quickly becomes track. First c.300m altitude descent on switchbacks, ground tends to be rocks or dust. C.3 times no track and freestyle crossing of 20-30m patches of big boulders (not overly steep).

Water: Pipe/trough at Robiei and at private huts at 2200m (I do not have a good feeling about the latter water). Descent: Spring 20m off trail c.200m altitude below pass.

Tent sites: From c2200m until shortly before pass; after pass c.300m altitude down, around Boden lakes (later: cows, people).

## **R93 Riale - Ulrichen**

Bus departs Ladstafel for Ulrichen at 8:16, 11:49, 14:49, 16:34. The descent to Ulrichen is quite pleasant, despite being frequently close to the road

Water: Pipe/trough in Riale village (the village towards the dam), final ascent to the pass several creeks. Descent: Shortly after Ladstafel a dozen seeps/creeks, pipe/trough at 1550m.

Tent sites: At far end of Lago Morasco; after ascent to Baettelmatt Alpe (before Alpe, before entering this upper valley, tent sites where the ascent flattens out at the mouth of the valley; valley has cows). C.150m altitude below the pass a surprise site just before crossing an unexpected creek. At the broad pass but pebbly (200m West of where the trail crosses the pass (equally on the pass) is a small A-Frame that looks like an emergency shelter. Descent: Repeatedly opportunities after Ladstafel (on trail), and specifically at 1550m (also water), albeit close to road.

### **R94 Ulrichen - Fieschertal 5Aug2022**

Alert: The Gommer Hoehenweg, which the VA follows, is not a Hoehenweg (highline trail) but an up and down patchwork of dirt roads, tracks, and trails. One goes up into a side valley on a trail that goes further up the side valley, and then down the side valley the way the people from the next village would come up to go on up the side valley. Repeat. Repeatedly. Knowing what I know now, I would absolutely not walk this fake Hoehenweg. Maps.me offers a 6-hour route from Ulrichen train station to the Burghuette (to where the VA takes 12h35, an underestimate) by walking along the valley floor until Blitzingen, then ascending to Bellwald and on to Burghuette. Definitely preferable to the Via Masochista (and no continuous road noise as on the Hoehenweg, something to see, water and tent sites, and one isn't being scammed). Otherwise just take the hourly train to Fiesch (and resupply there).

Alert 2: As also noted by earlier hikers, from Bellwald, 2 hours 30min before the end of the stage, it is possible to walk in 2 hours to the Burghuette (1 hour 35min into R95). (a) Follow signposts to Burghuette, somewhat confusing if not inconsistent to the bottom of the side valley that one has to cross, and rejoin the VA in R95 in the ascent to the Burghuette. ("Titter", on the way to and perhaps 20min before the Burghuette, is the name of a couple of buildings that can be rented by groups, and the mountain station of a non-public aerial tramway.) (b) Follow signs to the "Haengebruecke," a suspension bridge that crosses the side valley to just above Titter. To access the bridge from Bellwald requires climbing to 200m (altitude) above the bridge before descending to it. -- Both options take c.2 hours.

Resupply:

- (1) Ulrichen Volg near train station, c.200sqm, good.
- (2) I walked to Muenster along the valley hiking/biking route for a Coop, c.400sqm, very good, Mon-Sat 8-18:30, and rejoined the VA from Muenster in the direction of travel.
- (3) Probably best: Volg Bellwald, c.150sqm, very good. Open 7:30-19 every day (incl. Sunday!)

Water: In my VA via Muenster repeatedly pipe/trough along valley to Muenster, in Muenster, and in Bellwald.

Tent sites: Possibly on passing places on dirt road, none when the VA is on a track/trail. Where a signpost says Bellwald 2:15 is a Berghuette Walivach, a small restaurant: in the

evening it looked deserted and had level space on their terrace covered in what looked like wood chips. Where a signpost says Bellwald 1:45 follow the dirt road up to the next curve (2min) which has space for a tent off-road, or follow it down (in line with the VA) for ten minutes to another curve with a slightly lesser space. Possibly on meadows just before Bellwald, but then in public view.

## **R95 Fieschertal - Riederalp**

From shortly after the pass onwards, the views are spectacular.

The ascent is fully in the morning sun.

Alert: towards the end of this stage there are two relevant trail closures (affecting the VA). 30min before Biel (where Biel is the name of, roughly, the lowest point (saddle) on the ridge ahead) one climbs an extra 150m into a detour that adds 30-45min. Follow signs to Riederalp, with the trail then leading down the \*East\* of the ridge (whereas the VA is on closed trails West of the ridge, with a second closure after Alte Stafel that means an additional detour and climb back up). Even if one doesn't want to go to Riederalp and wanted to shortcut into R96, going to Riederalp might be the best option due to a dozen trail closures; the shortcut options almost certainly take longer than going via Riederalp. (Additionally: (a) There is a maze of trails, and the signposting isn't great. (b) Hikers' comments mention walking from Riederalp to Blatten and taking the cable car to Belalp, cutting the first c.4 hours out of R96.)

Alert2: After the Gletscherstube area, no water till c30min after the suspension bridge, c.6 hours later.

Water (from Bellwald): Pipe/trough in Bellwald, also on way down into side valley; a good seep at 2200m and a creek a few minutes earlier. Unlike mentioned in hiker comments, no free water at Gletscherstube. Creeks shortly thereafter that seemed to originate from the rocks only 100m up or so (quality?); from c.30min after Gletscherstube onwards no water.

Tent sites (from Bellwald): Possibilities at the bottom of the side valley and in the ascent until c.20min before the Burghuette (good at Titter if uninhabited, and on wide trail from there to just past the Haengebruecke). After the Burghuette difficult. Good at wide pass (though from here on sheep) and until c.30min past Gletscherstube. Many beautiful possibilities on ridge descending toward Riederalp (1hr - 30min before Riederalp, eventually hitting cow territory).

## **R96 Riederalp - Mund**

The ascent is fully in the morning sun.

Alert: Mund not mentioned on signposts after Baell. Follow signs to Birgisch until c.1275m (altitude) where stay on current route and do not turn to Birgisch (GPS coordinates are correct). -- Or descend to Birgisch to make your way to Leukerbad (next alert).

Alert 2: Given what I know now, I would from Mund take the bus to Brig, train to Leuk, bus to Leukerbad. If I were in Mund by 3pm, I would be in Leukerbad by shortly after 5pm (and if I were to camp and wanted to be back in nature, could still take the cable car up from

Leukerbad). By thus skipping R97 and R98 I would miss the constant sight of the heavily populated and heavily industrialized (Visp) area, the constant car/train/city noise, the valley heat, a senseless R97 'trail' justifiable only by the need for the VA not to be interrupted, and solve the problem that parts of R97 may not be passable.

The final c.5km into Mund are along one of the famous water canals. It involves short tunnels (and I had to get out my torch). With a bulky backpack and the normal body size of a today's male, I had to crouch (bend my knees, lean forward) in order to get through the tunnels (very strenuous). The guidebook does not mention the tunnels, the need for a torch, the difficulty with a backpack. The GPS coordinates grotesquely cut short the routing into the side valley before Mund - the GPS coordinates cannot have been produced by someone actually walking R97. (It's an extra 1km into and 1km out of the side valley.) This suggests that the VA designers never walked the trail which they are hawking, and if they actually walked the occasional stage, they probably forgot the backpack of long distance hikers. I would like to see the person writing this stage description confirm that s/he walked this stage, with a long distance hiker's backpack. AllTrails gives 970m altitude gain, not 749 as in the guidebook.

Water: Creeks at 1780m. A dozen pipe/troughs starting 2min after Hotel Belalp thru Baell, in Nessel and in Mund.

Tent sites: Very difficult in Aletschwald and prohibited in this nature reserve. After the suspension bridge in ascent to Hotel Belalp at 1780m at Aletschji (Alpe) (and probably starting at 1750m). Repeatedly very good sites after Baell, including some in forest on descent, until c.5km before Mund

### **R97 Mund - Gampel-Steg**

See Alert in R96 on avoiding this stage.

Beforehand, the information provided in the guidebook re Baltschiedertal was grossly insufficient. Re the vertigo section, I would want to know how long this section is, and what happens if I slip (do I fall off the mountain or fall into water?). The tunnel alternative I first took as a joke since a 1.8km unlit tunnel is not plausible as an alternative (how wide and high is the tunnel?, is there water in it?, do you guarantee it's passable all the way thru and not caved in in places? Is it dry or are there passages where I am ankle-deep (or?) in some liquid that could be anything, such as stagnant black water? Do you guarantee there is enough ventilation/oxygen?). Is this a major tourist attraction with tour buses at the end? I need the person who wrote this stage description to confirm that s/he walked this tunnel, with a long distance hiker's backpack, and found it so uneventful/easy that there is no need to say anything further about the tunnel. Knowing what I know now, after R96, I would like to see every single VA designer grab a 12kg, bulky backpack and crouch through this tunnel -- a VA guide book is not a Mickey Mouse comic fantasized into existence at a desk.

I walked from Mund to Eggen, saw what R97 was about, walked down to Eggerberg and took the train to Hochtenn (runs roughly every two hours), then walked down to Gampel-Steg, which has a Coop (long closed for the day by the time I got there).

There is a straightforward 1 hour 10min trail from Eggen to Ausserberg, descending a bit to cross the side valley's creek. Why does the guidebook not mention this very regular trail and

instead gives an eccentric 3h20 escapade into Baltschiedertal while offering as only alternative a not further described 1.8km unlit tunnel???

Water: Pipe/trough in every village/hamlet.

Tent sites: Extremely difficult due to slope and otherwise populated areas

## **R98 Gampel-Steg - Leukerbad 8Jul2022**

The early ascent is in the morning sun, without shade.

From Erschmatt onwards one is back in 'nature'. Hiking route is mostly pleasant. Albinen spreads up the hillside; at a bifurcation before Albinen, continuing on the forest road leads to the upper end of Albinen from where the VA continues (while taking the trail / following the GPS coordinates down leads to the c.80m (altitude) lower part of Albinen with supposedly shop and water). After Albinen, signposts and GPS coordinates imply a less pleasant road-avoidance trail; the tarred road is significantly shorter/faster with less altitude gain and loss. No need to climb to Flaschen only to descend unsafe ladders with a heavy backpack; follow the tarred road from Albinen to Leukerbad (it doesn't climb all the way to Flaschen and passes through a well-lit c.400m long tunnel with pedestrian sidewalk as official hiking trail); immediately after the tunnel rejoin the hiking trail into Leukerbad. Via Alpina designers: Why do you not mention the official risk-free hiking route from Albinen to Leukerbad and instead present the rather dangerous ladders as the only option?

To avoid the long climb out of Gampel-Steg: There is a cable car from Gampel-Steg to Jeizinen ("Luftseilbahn Gampel-Jeizinen LGJ") that runs about twenty times a day from 6:40 (and possibly earlier) until 20:15 (and possibly later). Hiking R98, I repeatedly saw signs to Jeizinen. From Jeizinen one could rejoin the VA around Feschel and elsewhere.

Water: Pipe/trough in every village/hamlet.

Tent sites: Chapel above Gampel-Steg is unlocked. Three-quarters the way to Bratsch at a bench, and just before Bratsch next to then a dirt road. Between Bratsch and Erschmatt possibly on meadow balconies. Erschmatt-Feschel: first good tent site in this stage on grassy dirt road (quiet, views, nice). After Feschel occasional opportunities, not between Flaschen and Leukerbad.

Resupply:

- (1) Gampel-Steg Coop (closed when I passed through).
- (2) Erschmatt has a c.80sqm 'Prima' supermarket. Open Mon-Sat 8-12, 15-18:30 except Thursday closed in the afternoon and Saturday afternoon times 13:30-16.
- (3) Leukerbad Migros supermarket, very large (didn't check it out), open (google) Mon-Sun 8-19.

## **R99 Leukerbad - Schwarenbach**

Water alert: No water en route. Pipe/troughs in Leukerbad. If one continues directly into R100 to Adelboden, the signposted trail leads around the Western side of the glacial

Daubensee and the next water, at best, is 30min down after the Chindbettipass. That would be c.6 hours' hiking from Leukerbad.

I took the Gemmi cable car since a hiker's comment mentions 'via ferrata'. From the cable car I saw that this is an extremely well engineered, family-friendly, wide trail that beautifully winds its way up. Would now walk, not take the cable car. At mid-day, the sun is frontally on the hiking route and closed-in Leukerbad gets hot. Might be best to hike in morning or mid-/late afternoon when the sun is behind the mountains (and the rocks are still warm). The Gemmi lodge at the top is a nice place to hang out for a while (self-service so one won't be hassled).

Tent sites: Between Gemmi Pass and Daubensee (open landscape), realistically, due to slope, in the valley that feeds into the Daubensee.

### **R100 Schwarenbach - Adelboden**

Correction: From Rote Chumme 2618m it's 40min to Chindbettipass 2636m via a low point of 2540m in the glacial valley in between.

In descending into /ascending out of the glacial valley a hiking pole added comfort (but was not a necessity).

The trail from the Engstligenalp to the cable car base station is a well engineered, family-friendly, wide trail with passages through the rock face.

The Birg-Engstligenalp cable car runs 8:30-17:10 (and costs CHF 25 one-way); buses from the base station to Adelboden depart 8:20-17:40.

Water: (1) Descending from Chindbettipass, at 2390m, just after leaving the rock/scree territory behind and entering grassy slopes, listen for the sound of flowing water (from the rock field South of the trail); water flows from a pipe underneath the rocks into a metal bucket, and exits the bucket into another black pipe that feeds a pipe/trough in cow area fifteen minutes further along the trail. Otherwise, a few minutes on, at the Dossenseeli, listen for the sound of flowing water from the puddle to the South and see if that water can be collected. (2) Halfway down from the Engstligenalp cable car mountain station to the base station: good seeps/rivelets from the rocks

Tent sites: before ascending to the Rote Chumme Pass (many options); one sub-optimal site on pebbles a few meters before the Chindbettipass (ground might not take tent pegs); in the vicinity of Dossenseeli (soon afterwards cow territory, including the vast, watery plateau of Engstligenalp); very limited possibilities just before and after the Engstligenalp cable car Birg base station.

Resupply: Adelboden Coop, c.500sqm, excellent. Open Mon-Sat 8-18:30.



## **R101 – R161 (July/August 2023)**

### **R101 Adelboden – Lenk**

To avoid tarmac from Geisbuehl to Hahnenmoospass, follow signs to Hahnenmoospass and "Berg[wander]weg" (not: GPS coordinates). Possible to take bus to G., then gondola to H. From H., a 30min walk should take one to a gondola down to near Lenk; descending on the VA, after 40min one reaches a bus stop to Lenk. -- Horseflies.

Lenk has a very large Coop.

### **R102 Lenk – Lauenen**

Bivouac: Very difficult on ascent (slope, terrain, cows) with a possibility just before the pass; on descent half an hour before Lauenen.

Small shop in L. (Sundays open 9-10).

Horseflies.

### **R103 Lauenen – Gsteig**

Bivouac: c. half an hour before Gsteig.

Small shop in Gsteig (Sundays open 7:30-11).

### **R104 Gsteig – Godey**

Bivouac: from the barrage to Sex Rouge (pass); beautiful near the pass; also possible shortly after pass.

Well manicured, impressive trail to the barrage. Or gondola (CHF 16, walk-in/on demand [can be pre-booked, capacity 40 people/hour], last one down 5pm [last one up may be as early as 3pm]).

No signposts between Col du Sanetsch and Sex Rouge; sporadic marks (on rocks), frequent marks after Taanfleuron where trail becomes little more than a track.

Descent after Mie includes strenuous passage (very roughly) for c.70m elevation loss, of which two-thirds secured: 500m along very steep slope -- 30m rope -- 2 near-vertical ladders of about 20 rungs each (rung is a 3cm thick, round, steel bar) -- 30m rope -- 20m chain -- 20m rope -- half a dozen steel handholds along extremely steep switchbacks. I used every single support and did not need any further support. Difficult with thru-hiker backpack as cannot face valley (too steep) and have to descend backwards. Further 200m elevation drop through steep, rocky switchbacks. Trail/track on steep slope out the valley, crossing half a

dozen steep ravines with 5-10m minimal trail each. I would not want to do the descent from Mie in bad weather.

### **R105 Godey – Anzelndaz**

Water: cows above, all the way to pass. Fountain one-third up from Derborence "non-potable." 10min before pass rivulet from rocks above, crossing trail (second rivulet comes from cow-pass).

Bivouac (not having descended to Godey): c.500m before Derborence (difficult because rock fields), possibly just after Derborence (rocks, people). Plateau after pass but cows, people.

### **R106 Anzelndaz – Col du Demecre**

After Pont de Nant no water on ascent (creek muddy) except at Alp Nant.

La Vare to Pont de Nant GPS coordinates follow road; signposts show (good) trail. – At Pont de Nant beautiful botanical garden, free entry. Around 2000m altitude, GPS coordinates imply faint track to right, sign says not marked, not maintained, 'use at own risk.' I didn't check the GPS coordinates and kept going straight, ended up at Col Martines. Has a direct descent to Rionda with blue-white signs meaning Alpine track / Klettersteig.

Sign at Col Martines for La Trouche via Col des Perris. Phenomenal highline trail 2m below crest, West-facing, typically 1m wide, in 4 places 15m-chains (didn't use), 25min, past 3 seemingly man-made, identical caves 5m wide 10m deep (military origin?). Consider lingering. After highline trail descend 150-200m to Col Perris (rejoin GPS coordinates), good trail on non-dangerous slope. After col, good switchbacks down steep slope, 5min from col stone shelter on right 20m off trail, another switchback down 30m off trail cave with dilapidated building, spacious, both unexplored. After switchbacks c 800m slope crossing, of which 150m hewn into cliff, typically 1m wide, 5m chain in narrow passage (not used). Another narrow trail passage also c150m with some chains (used a couple of times). – All felt safe with no significant challenge. -- Ferocious winds after col M all the way beyond end of stage. – Descent: No water until Rionda. (From Rionda, possibility to descend into the valley towards Vernayaz.) Rionda to below Col du Demecre: c.2 hour slope crossing with a dozen ups and downs and ins and out of ravines, 4 cables 50-150m, 2 cables and chains 5m (none absolutely necessary).

No notes re tent bivouac; obviously not in rocky terrain at higher elevations.

### **R107 Cold du Demecre – Vernayaz**

No water except at gondola at Champex.

Possibility to skip Portail de Fully, follow signs. Then also possibility to skip Sex Carro radio station (good views of the valley) and walk a road (dirt road at top) to Champex (no excessive slope). -- Signage differs from GPS coordinates, especially around/just before Sex Carro. GPS descent from Sex Carro is very steep, two hiking poles useful.

I preferred the gondola from Champex to Dorenaz to a further, pointless, steep descent in the afternoon sun into a 35 degree valley. CHF 6. Runs every 30-50min from 5:45 or 7:30 to 19. About 3 busses a day from Dorenaz to Martigny. Or hourly train at .55 from Vernayaz train station to Martigny, 5min ride. VA by-passes Vernayaz center.

Martigny has a very large Coop, restaurants, hotels (full on weekends?), sports shops. In Martigny everything closes Sat 5pm till Monday, even the Coop.

### **R108 Vernayaz – Cabane de Susanfe**

Water in villages.

Bivouac: Sign 'wild camping prohibited' after the big campground in Van de Haut (and there wouldn't be any spot, except for a couple of rest areas, until just below the dam, which is cow area). Possibilities before the waterfall (after Les Granges, which is up from Salvan on the VA) and right after the waterfall, before Van de Bas, and possibly just after. Not around Van de Haut. At 6am, half a dozen tents in dam area on way to the col, possibly 7pm-9am bivouac allowed, after all.

Hourly (.18 [18 minutes after the hour]) "Mont Blanc Express train" or bus from Martigny/Vernayaz to Salvan.

### **R109 Cabane de Susanfe – Refuge Tornay-Bostan**

Water from creeks.

Descent from Cabane de Susanfe: c. 1km of arduous scrambling down and around rock face. Plenty of chains. Heavily frequented trail. -- Signposted trail from Col de la Golese to Samoens, 2hr40min, bypasses Refuge Tornay-Bostan.

### **R110 Refuge Tornay-Bostan – Salvagny**

Samoens: lively town center. -- Small supermarket Sherpa (50sqm?) one long block (towards VA) off center. Carrefour outside town (away from VA). -- Samoens to Salvagny: distance killer (with a detour up a rock landscape including two family ladders) only to join the original level trail (down) again. Arduous in sweltering heat, with horseflies. -- Consider walking from Samoens to Sixt-Fer-a-Cheval (near Salvagny) and take the bus up to Le Lignon in R111 (departs 7:47 [only this one also from Samoens tourism office 7:30], 8:35, 9:15, 9:55, 11:30, 14:15, 15:05, 17:05. Or take a taxi from Samoens as far into R111 as it will go.

### **R111 Salvagny – Refuge de Moede-Anterne and R112 Refuge de Moede-Antenne – La Flegere**

No water Col du Brevent to creek one hour after La Flegere.

Sign early on 'no camping', but also that bivouac allowed 7pm-9am.

Arduous ascent in sweltering heat with horseflies to the waterfall Le Lignon and then the end of the road. Said 'bonjour' 500 times. From Le Lignon to Chalet d'Anterne killed 50 horseflies. Beautiful landscape and cooler temperatures (only) once reach the plateau before the chalets.

Between col and La Flegere said 'bonjour' a thousand times (and ignored a thousand further people) -- heavily traveled trails with frequent stops to let people pass and frequent walking in line. -- Planpraz to La Flegere, up and down, dodging people, in mid-day heat with Mont Blanc in haze, was uninteresting. Better to take the cablecar from Planpraz to one end of downtown Chamonix, perhaps eat and resupply, then walk to the other end of downtown Chamonix and a bit beyond to catch the cablecar up to La Flegere (in pretty much the same time it takes to walk the VA between these two points).

### **R113 La Flegere – Trient**

Water at creek c. an hour after La Flegere, and just before Col des Montets. No water in the ascent.

No bivouac possibilities in the ascent to Col des Posettes until 1860m, at a 300m grassy road-width ledge.

No shop in Trient.

Follows the Tour de Mont Blanc (a 170km trail circumambulating Mont Blanc). Focusing on lowest and highest points: (i) La Flegere to La Tete aux Vents (altitude 21xx m) via creek/water and Chalet des Cheserys. (ii) La Tete aux Vents to Les Bluets (13xx m) via Col des Montets with rivulet just before. (iii) Les Bluets to Col de Balme (via Col des Posettes). (iv) Col de Balme to Trient.

Alternative 1: From La Tete aux Vents follow signs down to trail (with ladders 'echelles,' on signpost), then either re-join VA at Col des Montets or continue the Chamonix valley up to Col de Balme (route visible from La Tete aux Vents); looking back from Col de Balme, the ladder trail must be descending a 100m rockface.

Alternative 2: From Les Bluets continue walking downhill (a) to a gondola leading to Col des Posettes, (b) the train station to Martigny, (c) the bus stop to Trient, or (d) walk to Trient on this valley route.

Descending from the Col de Balme to Trient in the early morning, c.300 people were coming my way.

At entry to Trient (at a small campground), turn right and head uphill to avoid the lengthy detour through spread-out Trient, to directly reach Col de la Forclaz in R114.

There is a bus from Trient to Forclaz

It is strange to see where one has started R108 days earlier a stone's throw away, across the valley, with the 6 intervening stages seemingly only serving to lead to Mont Blanc and back. One could skip these stages and base oneself in Martigny; perhaps visit the waterfall with the staircase after Les Granges/Salvan. Take the train to Chamonix, then the cable car to the top of Brevent, from where walk via the Col de Brevent to Planpraz or La Flegère to take the cablecar down, or continue into R112 to Vallorcine to take the Mont Blanc Express back to Martigny.

The trail from Col des Montets in R113 to Orsilles in R115 would appear to be mostly a distance killer. Rather uninteresting up and downs (except that in good weather one may have a last good view from Col de Balme towards Mont Blanc). It would make perfectly good sense to continue the 20min? from Les Bluets in R113 to Vallorcine and train it rather swiftly (via Martigny) to Orsieres in R115.

### **R114 Trient – Champex**

Kiosk at Col de la Forclaz.

Follows Tour du Mont Blanc Focusing on lowest and highest points: (i) Trient to ridge altitude 2109m (via Col de la Forclaz). (ii) Ridge to Plan de l'Au 1329 (via Bovine). (iii) Plan de l'Au to beginning of Champex-Lac 1550m. (iv) Beginning of Champex-Lac to center 1466m.

Bus Forclaz to Martigny just down the hill (excellent re-supply)

Walking from Forclaz to Plan de l'Au in mid- and late morning, I encountered c.300 people coming against me (lots of stopping, letting pass).

While it may be nice to linger at the lake at Champex, hotels will likely be booked out (and expensive).

### **R115 Champex – Bourg-St-Pierre**

Medium-sized Volg supermarket in Orsieres

Two shops in Liddes: First small shop appears not well stocked, closed lunch times, all Thursday, Sunday afternoon. Second small shop in Liddes appears better stocked, closed Tuesday and Sunday afternoon.

Taking the bus straight down 700m to Orsieres was a great knee-saver for me. Can recommend Hotel Terminus directly at the train station / bus stop station.

R115 and R116 are road avoidance trails without making it too apparent.

There is a bus Orsieres - Col du Grand-Saint-Bernhard (several times a day)

Bourg-St-Pierre: near-ghost town; kiosk at gas station at entrance to village, slightly off VA.

C. 90min after Orsieres signs for Bourg-St-Pierre indicate a trail that diverges from the GPS coordinates (trail is ok). 15min into that trail, another trail branches off with a sign for Col du Grand-Saint-Bernhard; this trail takes significantly longer than the VA to reach the col and may involve walking along a crest. (Continuing rather than branching off leads onward to join the GPS coordinates again. Not a detour, not a shortcut.)

### **R116 Bourg-St-Pierre – Col du Grand-Saint-Bernard**

Good bivouac opportunities from after the reservoir (after Bourg-St-Pierre) to the col.

### **R117 Col du Grand-Saint-Bernard – Cerellaz**

Occasional Bivouac possibilities all the way down from the col; probably best at valley bottom.

Agip gas station in St Leonard may have kiosk; descend to gas station at first houses of St Leonard, then walk from gas station to church, level, for 400m.

Google maps shows a shop in Avise: does not exist; in that location is a hotel/restaurant. Avise is a ghost town. Runaz is some houses along a busy street with no shops.

Well graduated descent from the Col du Grand-Saint-Bernhard; follow signs for 'TDC' (or, equally, 103) from behind the last hotel at the col to Saint-Rhemy and then St Leonard. From St Leonard church follow signs down to Combaz and the bottom of the valley. GPS coordinates are indicative at best; do not follow at top.

Ascent to Col Citrin is in morning sun.

20min after Jovençan, the dirt road splits. Consider taking the unmarked right-hand one for a comfortable, hassle-free descent; using the Organic Maps app and heading for Runaz. (In retrospect, I would.) The Via Alpina sign points to the left. The Via Alpina should then, within minutes, leave this road for a trail on the valley side, at the latest at the electricity pylon. Sign missing! Otherwise, following this road, I climbed 200m to a col, from where a sign to Vens (on the VA) points downhill to a 200m steep descent that ends at a horizontal trail with a VA sign pointing (back) along the missed trail. Continuing the other direction, to Vens, one follows a c.500m level, probably catchwater trail.

Vens has a restaurant/bar/auberge (Head for the clock tower and parking lot.) The VA sign at the parking lot points in the wrong direction. The trail downhill starts at the valley edge of the parking lot, going down along the supporting wall of the parking lot. Eventually a number 18 appears (correct trail) but at the next intersection, relevant signs are missing. This repeats for the next (altitude) 1000m down: signs are missing in crucial spots. Signs may point in the wrong direction. And, more generally, the altitude values given on some signs can be off by 100m, while the time (walking duration) appears mixed up (earlier sign in later location). I ended up in Avise without ever setting foot in Cerellaz.

There appears to be no public transport in Vens

From Runaz an approximately hourly bus goes the 17km (half hour) to Aosta, a town well worth visiting (full re-supply). From Aosta, 2-3 buses a day go to Valgrisenche (end R118).

### **R118 Cerellaz – Valgrisenche**

Small shop in Valgrisenche, not hiker-oriented, partial re-supply.

Signs at top end of Runaz. Confusion at next intersection (stay on forest road). I didn't want to have to rely on any more hiking signs in this area and let the Organic Maps app direct me to Valgrisenche, which, however, may have meant extra time as it went steeply up to Monte Colombo 1860m (excellent bivouac) before descending gradually (20min, 100m) to Baulin (1760m) where it met the VA. From Baulin I roadwalked to Planaval (low point of c.1570m shortly after) and on to Valgrisenche, ignoring a couple of VA road avoidance detours. (In retrospect, the Runaz-Aosta-Valgrisenche bus option would have been preferable. If I hadn't been to Aosta before, I would have wanted to go there, with bus options from St Leonard, Runaz, and Valgrisenche.)

### **R119 Valgrisenche – Refuge de l'Archeboc**

Bivouac around Arp Vieille; c.60min into 14a (grassy plateau); and on way down from Lago di San Grato (beautiful spots).

Trail 17 starts to right of church and cemetery, and ascends towards right, then via switchbacks up a steep, wooded diagonal ledge in the rock face. It seems an old mule track, in places very wide, though the 'outside' curves of a dozen switchbacks are only trail-width and felt exposed. Trail reaches an altitude of 2350m before descending to Arp Vieille and an intersection 5min beyond (also reachable by road from Valgrisenche). From there I took Trail 14a, whereas the GPS coordinates seem to follow 14b (in which case faint tracks from the earlier point 2350m may allow bypassing Arp Vieille) across a pass and then to abandon 14b to cut across meadows to 14a (c.90min into 14a) – the actual 14b trail joins 14a a little later. At ruins of houses (mountain side of trail 14a) signs for 14c point downward (and in the other direction back along 14a). A c.150m descent on 14c would bypass Lago di San Grato and head straight for Col du Mont (an hour less). Lago di San Grato had turquoise snow water. From Lago di San Grato 2550m one descends to 2220m to then ascend Col du Mont. Col du Mont had a (snow) cornice that looked daunting from (altitude) 200m below. The very limited remains of a mule track lead to a point 50m above the pass, to the right, without snow/problems; the GPS coordinates indicate to go this way. At the pass, it turned out that the straight approach is fairly gentle and the cornice could have been climbed or bypassed on the left, with some effort.

It would be possible to walk or bus (Aosta bus) up the main valley from Valgrisenche (tourists head to the upper reaches to approach the glacier) and to walk on a dirt road up the side valley that leads to Col du Mont, to an arp that's 10min from the beginning of the ascent to Col du Mont.

### **R120 Refuge de l'Archebox – Le Monal**

Bivouac 5min into this stage above the pond; 15min in dependent on cows; after c.90min at a picnic table; and occasionally in the remainder.

Station de St Foy does not exist, and there is no grocery store in the middle of nowhere (contrary to the guidebook).

### **R121 Le Monal – Le Lac de Tignes**

Very good resupply in Tignes at Carrefour Montagne (skip Spar).

No signposts out of Le Monal. Follow GPS coordinates.

Building with sign Refuge Le Monal is closed and dilapidated. The Le Chenal Gite d'etape is c.30 min further along.

From Les Boisses / Tignes 1800, a free bus runs to (Le Lac de) Tignes (and probably on to Val Claret), c. every 30min.

In good weather, the area around the lake is very lively and one may want to linger.

### **R122 Le Lac de Tignes – Refuge de La Laisse**

No water in R122.

A sequence of two chairlifts (Bonnin, Fesse) goes from Val Claret to Fesse. From Fesse to Col de la Laisse is probably 75min. GPS route does not go via Col de Fesse (unlike listed in the guidebook).

Very gentle col on both sides with long, gradually sloping valleys (no worries about snow and/or steepness).

### **R123 Refuge de La Laisse – Termignon-la-Vanoise**

Last water at Refuge de Plan de Lac (cows afterwards).

Camping not allowed before Oratoire Saint-Antoine; afterwards possibilities, two with picnic tables.

Termignon has a Utile supermarket, open daily 8:30-12:30, 15:30-19:30, medium-sized (shuttered when I came through at lunch time). Termignon is a little town with character.

Bus #4 runs from 10min after Refuge d'Entre-deux-Eaux to Parking de Bellecombe starting 8:40am, a dozen times a day, of which about three times continuing to Termignon. This is a national park.



About ten buses a day from Termignon to Modane, 25min ride.

### **R124 Termignon-la-Vanoise - Modana**

Took bus to Modane Hotel de Ville; Casino supermarket 3 blocks away; bus continues 2(?)km to the Modane train station (train Paris-Lyon-Turin-Milan), which has another supermarket and may be a more lively area than the town center.

### **R125 Modane – Granges de la Vallee Etroite**

Bivouac somewhat possible between Modane and Valfrejus though busy hillside with major road. Not for 1 hour after Valfrejus. Then very exposed to weather. (A thunderstorm dumped a layer of hail.)

Valfrejus Sherpa supermarket, medium sized, open daily 7:30-13, 15-20.

Bus on 3 days only (Tue/Wed(?)/Thu/Fri(?)): from Modane train station (passing by Hotel de Ville) to Le Charmaix (Valfrejus) at 8:30, 12, 17:30.

### **R126 Granges de la Vallee Etroite – Nevache**

Nevache does not have a grocery store, contrary to the guidebook. Perhaps Roubion, which the VA skirts 30min earlier, does. Nevache has an extremely popular bakery (boulangerie, patisserie) in the village center (opposite the church) where there is also a restaurant.

Col des Thuers with pond is a very popular tourist destination.

A bus plies the valley in an approximately one-hour interval.

### **R127 Nevache – Le Monetier-les-Bains**

Bivouac possible around Chalets/Refuge de Buffere and on to col and just beyond (exposed to weather), also possibly just before Le Monetier-des-Bains.

Sherpa supermarket in Monetier-les-Bains, medium-sized, complete or near-complete re-supply, off VA, walk main road into town. Second Sherpa 100m onward, opposite big church (open daily 8-12:30, 15:30-19:30). Sports shops, restaurants, bakery, fruit/vegetable shop.

On descent, red-white marks do not! lead to Le Monetier-des-Bains. Check GPS coordinates at every intersection.

Therme / public pools(?) down at river; VA R128 crosses its parking lot.

Descent time in guidebook obviously wrong.

**Alert: R129, R130** are pure distance killers to get to Mont-Dauphin, which is nice but does not warrant two days of poor hiking.

As others have mentioned in the comments, an alternative is to go straight from Briancon (downriver from Le Monetier-les-Bains, end R127) to Refuge de Furfande (end R131).—Vallouise (end R128) and R128 I still found of interest, and would make my way either from Vallouise or from half way through R129 to Refuge de Furfande. (Though Briancon might be of interest itself.)

Ex post: I would allocate time to Le Monetier-des-Bains with its therme, and then make my way from there (or from Vallouise, the end of R128) to Briancon and on to Refuge de Furfande (R131). Depending on the resupply situation in Ceillac (and with 21 stages without grocery store coming up), I would consider taking the bus from Ceillac to Guillestre gare routiere for a full re-supply at Carrefour, and if time permits take the free local bus from this gare routiere to Mont-Dauphin (even if just for a drive-thru loop). 7 July - 3 Sept 2023 ZOU 572 bus departs Guillestre for Ceillac at 8:35, 14, 18:45. From Ceillac likely all an hour earlier.

### **R128 Le-Monetier-les-Bains - Vallouise**

Bivouac easy from c. 2200m on, also repeatedly after col, then near Chalets de Chambran including picnic area 5min later. Difficult thereafter.

From Le Monetier-des-Bains follow trail to Le Bachas (the mountain station of a chairlift with a restaurant that is open). Two chairlifts would take one from Le Monetier-des-Bains to the col, Bachas and Eychauda; the fact that both chairlifts had chairs on them while the chairs had been removed from all other chairlifts in the vicinity suggests that they may occasionally (weekends?) be in operation.

### **R129 Vallouise – Freissinières**

Bivouac: campground c. 10min past Vallouise; campground/RV and trailer park shortly before Les Vigneaux; at Col de la Pusterle; around Col de Lauzes

Vallouise bakery and ‘8 a huit’ supermarket (closed when I passed, should be good-sized given the population, open 8-12:30, 14-19:30).

Walk or take the bus to Puy-St-Vincent and rejoin the VA from there. Otherwise downhill road avoidance walk (rely on GPS coordinates) of no attraction to Le Rif (bakery, no supermarket) at Les Vigneaux, followed by the climb to the very wide / flat Col de la Pusterle (where a car park, tourists, and picnic tables await).

Bus from Vallouises to Le Rif unclear, maybe a couple in the morning, probably via Puy-St-Vincent (big bus detour).

Second ascent, to Col de Lauzes, increasingly overgrown trail (including with stinging nettles). At the Bergerie des Lauzes (30min before Col de Lauzes) the GPS coordinates point

straight ahead even though there is no obvious trail - track is slightly uphill past the nettles and brush; stick to coordinates; trail is a heavily overgrown narrow track for the next 1+km before joining a forest road. Alternatively, near the bergerie, a signpost for Col de Lauzes points to the right (counterintuitive). The best alternative is probably to turn left, walk between the bergerie buildings and follow the bergerie forest road slightly down to a first switchback where one continues on a forest road branching off straight to Col de Lauzes.

Col de Lauzes is a non-event: a signpost sending one off on a (lesser) overgrown trail. No water between Les Vigneaux and Fressieres except at a private chalet before Pont du Fournel. (Creek 50min before Fressieres [and trail] had a phenomenal number of flies, with the explanation provided 10min later by a hundred sheep resting on the trail.)

Nice bus stop at Fressieres (with no bus scheduled ever).

Alternative: From Les Vigneaux one could continue c. 4km downhill to L'Argentiere-les-Ecrins, a city with a 10min train to Mont-Dauphin (end R130) or trail possibilities to re-join the VA at the end of R131 (cutting out the detour to Mont-Dauphin). From Point du Fournel one could equally quickly descend there.

### **R130 Freissinieres – Mont-Dauphin (Guillestre)**

Water in villages on the way.

Bivouac c. 30min+ after Fressieres; along the river; and c. 1 hour into my non-VA 3-hour walk from Pont de Pallon to Mont-Dauphin on grassy balconies overlooking the valley; or c.30min before Mont-Dauphin (reached via Eygliers).

From Pont de Pallon, a bus leaves for L'Argentiere-les-Ecrins at 8:45am, passing on the way through Roche de Rame village which is on a near-hourly bus line to Mont-Dauphin/Guillestre.

Also from Pont de Pallon, the Organic Maps app (and google maps) show a 3-hour walk to Mont-Dauphin compared to the 6h10 on the VA (due to its eventual uphill and out-of-the-way detour); I found this a pleasant 3-hour hike.

From Mont-Dauphin I descended to the Intermarche supermarket on the valley floor, across the river (c.30min), and then walked the campground/backroad to Guillestre (45min walk due to chaotic bus situation with some buses heading to Guillestre not stopping at the Intermarche bus stop). Carrefour (full resupply) in Guillestre is far superior to Intermarche; would now catch a bus from Mont-Dauphin to Guillestre (maybe half a dozen+ a day).

### **R131 Mont-Dauphin (Guillestre) – Refuge de Furfande**

### **R132 Refuge de Furfande – Ceillac**

Took bus from Guillestre to Ceillac / Le Pied du Melezet (8:35 from Guillestre gare routiere, typically delayed, 35min trip).

### **Resupply after Ceillac R132/133**

- (1) In R140, descend from Col de La Lombarde for 4km and 400m altitude to a Utile supermarket in Chastillon (looks large in google maps). Might be able to get a ride in a car from/to the col.
- (2) In Casterino, R147/148, take a bus to 'Tende Gare SNCF', a village for which google maps provides no further information, while the Organic Maps app shows a 'shop' and a bakery and half a dozen restaurants/bars. (A short train ride leads to a bigger place.)
- (3) Make a 600m altitude detour to Limonetto R148/149 from what would otherwise be a (partly off-VA) phenomenal highline trail, and take a bus to Limone (or, better, in R149 to Panice, with same bus Limonetto-Panice-Limone).
- (4) Ormea R151/152 on VA (and earlier a very small grocery store near the beginning of R151 in Viozene).
- (5) Garessio, on VA, has a supermarket, R152/153 (but one may not want to go to Garessio)
- (6) Large and good Carrefour in Breil R158/R159 (and a kiosk-quality grocery store one stage earlier in Saorge, R157/158).
- (7) Sospel R159/R160: Spar, Roxi.

### **R133 Ceillac - Maljasset**

No 'good' water except c.45min after the col, and at end (Maljasset).

Bivouac repeatedly on ascent except in initial climb, on descent best c.45min after the col.

Contrary to guidebook, no grocery store at Le Melezet nor in Maljasset (except possibly snacks at the CAF refuge in the latter). Last re-supply for the next 21 stages in Ceillac or Guillestre.

### **R134 Maljasset – Chiappera**

Bivouac around Maljasset and through much of ascent. On descent best in top third. Then a dozen cars with people driving up to camp for the night; no possibility on the 1-hour roadwalk along steep hillside [take trail continuation instead of road indicated by GPS coordinates to descend on right side of river for possibilities at bottom of valley], and a hundred cars and campground in the short, level stretch to the stage destination Chiappera.

### **R135 Chiappera - Chialvetta**

Water: fountain 20min past Chiappera; fountain at farmhouse close to end of stage (climb over string fence); some rivulets after heavy rain in previous night.

Bivouac: 20min past Chiappera near fountain; 1hour past Chiappera at Sorgenti del Maira (seems an official, free, meadow campground, including a couple of spaces a minute into the woods (along VA)), near col.

Unless one has a reason to go into Chialvetta, the R135-136 transition naturally bypasses it

## **R136 Chialveta – Pontebernardo**

No water except creek early on during ascent

Bivouac: possibly after Passo della Gardetta (off VA); immediately after Passo di Rocca Brancia; and c.30min down.

## **R137 Pontebernardo – Rifugio Zanolli**

Bivouac: In approach to Colle di Stau very roughly around 2100m, and then 3min before the col. Near the Prati del Vallone (valley bottom). At the Passo Sottano di Scolettas

Noticing in R136 that the end of R136 requires a 2km road walk (on a very busy and fast road) to Pontebernardo, I let the Organic Maps app give me a 2-hour walk from where the trail hits the road to Rio Forneris on the VA (44 20.9050N, 6.57.6320E): Follow the road uphill for c.700m, turn left into hamlet Prinardo (water faucet), walk briefly upstream to reach the forest road up Valley Forneris, at the end of the road follow track across meadow, then trail into woods, then narrow sidetrail for final 200m ascent (somewhat overgrown). After re-joining the VA, the track is also/still unmaintained, overgrown, very steep ascent, minimal time above bushes / brief pass, horseflies -- not even the VA designer wanted to walk this stage, to judge from the very poor GPS coordinates (guidebook calls them excellent), guidebook has wrong overall altitude gain/loss values (in reality much more), probably vastly underestimated distance. (Also see other hiker's comments re this stage being 10h25).

AllTrails has 9h40, 20.44km (which still seems on the low side) and 2,151m altitude gain.

Bottom line: Walk from Pontebernardo in 4 hours to Strepeis at the end of R138 (not a road walk), rather than follow the VA which leads up half a dozen passes (the guidebook does not note all high points and low points), climbs close to 4000m total, and spends 16-20 hours doing so. There is nothing particularly attractive about these passes: it's a very steep climb on a trail that's not great, and then a good trail on very steep slope down into which carefully graded switchbacks have been crafted (probably former military "roads").

A compromise could be to walk 5km (450m altitude gain) from Pontebernardo up the Vallone di Pontebernardo to join the VA two thirds of the way through R137, cutting out the worst of R137.

One reason to follow the guidebook R138 via Passo di Laroussa would be that one does not need to descend to Strepeis (1200m) but can take a trail at Calieri (1500m) via the Passo de Tesina to 100m altitude above Sant' Ana di Vinadio (end point R139), from where one can go straight into R140, by-passing the arduous, utterly uninteresting distance-killer R139.

## **R138 Rifugio Zanolli – Strepeis**

Bivouac: half way up to the Passo di Rostagno; around Rifugio Migliorero and in the flat-ish part of the valley below.

A big map just below the Rifugio Migliorero shows the VA to \*not\* go via Passo di Laroussa but to descend the valley to Stepeis in 2h30.

Some signposts on this way have the Via Alpina sign.

In Bagni di Vivadio one can go straight into R139 without side-tracking to Strepeis

Alert: Around R138, I gave up on walking times, distances, elevation change, and waymarks (“points,” “segments”) in the Via Alpina guidebook—too wrong/meaningless too often—and mostly relied on the GPS coordinates (and the Organic Maps app) unless signposts convincingly suggested otherwise.

### **R139 Strepeis – Sant’Anna di Vinadio**

Pure distance-killer of no interest.

Bivouac at the earliest around 2000m in grassy area but rocky ground (extremely steep ascent in narrow valley), and at 2200m (before the pass).

### **R140 Sant-Anna di Vinadio – Rifugio Malinvern**

Water at Sant-Anna di Vinadio. No water after roughly 30min into stage; and c. 1 hour before end of stage

Bivouac: starting c.45min into stage, continuing to Colle della Lombarda; half way on descent from Passo d'Orgials

Re-supply: from Colle della Lombarda descend (or hitch a ride) 4km / 400m altitude to the French side. The Organic Maps app shows a trail from there to the end of R141 in about 3 hours. (‘Trails’ in the app can be anything from forest roads to Klettersteig.)

### **For R141 and R142 there are choices:**

- (i) Follow the VA, Day 1 do R141; Day 2 do R142, consisting of descending on the order of 1000m into the morning sun, then sit in a warm terme at Terme di Valdieri, and when the early afternoon temperature has reached 30 degrees ascend on a warmed-up mountainside in bright sun for around 1000m to reach the refugio at the end of R142.
- (ii) Follow the GTA: On Day 1 skip the VA (1-hour) detour to Rifugio Questa and instead head straight to Terme di Valdieri with the afternoon sun in your back. Stay at the GTA accommodation at the Royal Hotel (see other hikers' comments) and soak in the terme. On Day 2 climb the 1000m in the early morning shade (and maybe move into R143, there is no shortage of refugios not mentioned in the VA guidebook).

### **R141 Rifugio Malinvern – Rifugio Questa**

No water except from lakes

Bivouac: with difficulty (rocks) at Lago Malinvern; at Lago di Valscura (mosquitoes).

### **R142 Rifugio Questa – Rifugio Morelli-Buzzi**

No water on ascent until the rifugio (and big creek at beginning of ascent, approached again half way up).

Bivouac: on descent around 1800m at a large meadow; at Terme di Valdieri behind the church (first building, still 500m to the Royal Hotel, and ‘no camping’ in this area); on ascent vague memory of about two-thirds up (and what looked like poor spots behind Rifugio Morelli-Buzzi).

Encountered the only trail maintenance crew ever on the VA.

Alert: At Terme di Valdieri last cell phone reception until end-R147, Casterino.

Consider looking into GTA to avoid VA heavy bouldering in R145, R146 (see hiker comments, including one hiker having explicitly switched to the GTA).

### **R143 Rifugio Morelli-Buzzi – Rifugio Ellena-Soria**

Bivouac: None until possibly near (before) reservoir Lago di Chiotas; excellent bivouac with water 5min into trail(!) ascent to Colle di Fenestrelle; 20min before pass; just after pass and then easier 5 and 15min down; some possibilities at valley floor below Rifugio Ellena-Soria.

### **R144 Rifugio Ellena-Soria – Refuge de la Madone de Fenestre**

Water: In ascent to Colle Finestra c. 3 switchbacks up from upper valley floor, over c. 3 switchbacks.

Bivouac: with difficulty minutes after pass; very good at Lac de Fenestre; cows further down.

On descent, at 2,120 altitude an unmarked track to the left descends 65m to the valley floor and ascends 30m on the other side to join R145 (15min) (bypassing the refuge at the end of R144).

### **R145 Refuge de la Madone de Fenestre – Refuge de Nice**

No water or bivouac in ascent after 2100m (don't know before since I bypassed the refuge).  
Descent: Water from reservoir or its creek, or from rivulets around reservoir.

Bivouac starting 30min before Refuge de Nice at valley bottom, and then around reservoir and 5min after the refuge.

## **R146 Refuge de Nice – Refuge de Valmasque**

Water: on ascent early on before boulders, after pass only the reservoirs.

Bivouac until ascent across boulders starts and on descent once boulders end -- c. 300m altitude of boulders both sides of pass. Possibilities all around reservoirs until c.15min before Refuge de Valmasque.

At the first reservoir, if one were tired from two stages of bootcamp bouldering (no long distance hiking trail), the Organic Maps app offers a 17-hour walk straight to Monaco.

## **R147 Refuge de Valmasque – Casterino**

Water: cascades only

Bivouac: consider 15min after Refuge de Valmasque plus maybe 10min side trip without trail into park-like side valley in plain view on descent. Also possibilities c.30min after refuge, after the cascades. Then soon cows, and c.45min after refuge roadwalk into Casterino without possibilities.

C.20min before Casterino official hiking sign for Baisse de Peirifique (R149) that avoids the c.200m, 1.5km descent into Casterino (and the corresponding climb out of Casterino in R148).

Casterino: accommodation and multitude of 'private property, do not enter' signs. Bus to Tende (train station, grocery store) at 9:10, 12:15, 14:15, 17:10.

## **R148 Casterino – Limonetto**

Water: No fountain in Casterino. 10min after Fort de Giaure (descent along rock walk to first switchback) sidetrack from GPS coordinates to follow yellow marks to a few minutes after algae-filled pond: 20m off-track, a small stone shelter harbors a spring/source.

Bivouac: c.20min after Casterino at campfire place just off VA. At and after Vaisse de Peirifique repeatedly good opportunities.

From Fort de Giaure, two possibilities: (i) Follow the GPS coordinates, which involve c. 3km heavily overgrown track, often descending steeply on very slippery ground (hiking poles), and a total of c.6 km uninteresting territory, to Limonetto. (ii) Follow the GPS coordinates off the Fort de Giaure hill only and do not turn into the Limonetto track. Instead, continue along the beautiful ridge trail, around the back of Mont Bed Roux on to Fort Pernant before descending to Col di Tenda and Chalet Le Marmote 1hr45min into R149. This by-passes Limonetto and cuts out 600m of elevation loss/gain (and on the order of 3 hours arduous hiking). For re-supply, descend from Chalet Le Marmote (or catch a ride, many cars parked there) to Panice Soprana and catch the bus from there to Limone (leaves 10min before the Limonetto bus times, may go via Limonetto, around the hill); on the return take, from Panice



Soprana, the Cabanaira chairlift up, a couple of km further into R149 (was operating and had customers on the Saturday that I walked the R149 [also an option if staying in Limonetto]).

Limonetto is a drab little town (plenty of 'for sale' signs) with a tiny, well-stocked 20sqm grocery store at the far(!) end, not targeting hikers. Open 8-12:30, 16-19:30, closed Sundays. Very basic re-supply. Friendly staff.

The bus for Limone train station leaves from Limonetto Centro (wherever that is, I didn't see a bus stop sign and the bus driver did not stop for me when I waived him down in front of the grocery store) at 9:12, 12:07, 15:27 or 15:07 (one or the other), and 19:07.

The VA is cutting out a beautiful highline trail, which one would usually make every effort to walk, just in order to make a 3 hour 600 m altitude detour through an overgrown track to a village where one can possibly deliver one's cash to some limited form of accommodation.

### **R 149 Limonetto – Rifugio Garelli**

No water on this almost 10-hour hike (see AllTrails for accurate statistics), except possibly 2/3 of the way up to La Tende at a cow-free cow trough with fountain (after a rainy night), and 20-30min before the end of the stage at a creek, and then the mini reservoir from which it emanates.

Bivouac: poor ones shortly after Limonetto; a couple of times on the ridge and a couple of times by descending a bit on the almost 3-hour gravel road after Chalet Le Marmot, frequented by cars and motorcycles except Tuesday and Thursday (when closed to motorized traffic); many good possibilities in the second half of the stage.

GPS coordinates: Follow GTA route out of Limonetto, not the backtracking and detouring GPS coordinates. Just before Chalet Le Marmot, the GPS coordinates make an utterly pointless 1 km (50 m altitude) detour. While GPS coordinates then follow the gravel road, the GTA moves away at times, and towards the end of the almost 3-hour (gravel) road walk may offer better alternatives. The GPS coordinates leave the gravel road abruptly (attention!), then sometimes diverge somewhat from the actual trail, which seems to have undergone significant maintenance with minor rerouting.

Lots of people are up at Chalet Le Marmot at 8:30 (bicyclists, car parking). One might be able to catch a ride up those 600m altitude from Panice Soprana?

**For R150-R152** The guidebook only mentions covers the Via *Anti*-Alpina. Suitable for bad weather. With wrong statistics (distance, altitude gain, time).

A perfect Via Alpina is available. The app Organic Maps shows a high level alpine route to Ormea (and continuing along the river to Garesio). Trails are available to not descend to Ormea and to stay high all the way to Garesio. (The app always only gives the fastest route.)

The guidebook itself (at least twice) suggests to cut out 153 and R152 (which are massive road avoidance and distance killer routes).

These are the alternatives:

(0) From shortly after Porta Sestrera (R150), head East on highline trails all the way to Garassio

(i) From Passo della Croce (R150), cross over in 7h30 to R156

(ii) From Viozene (R151) cross over to R155 in c. 3 hours. (The GTA also heads South starting from Viozene, and does not continue to Ormea.)

(iii) From Ormea (end-R151), cross over into R154 in c. 2 hours. Or cross to Bocchino di Semola in R153, from which onward R153 is pleasant.

There is no grocery store in R153 (after Garassio) - R157 (before Saorge).

### **R150 Rifugio Garelli – Rifugio Mongioie**

Water: no fountain at refugio: 5min along VA notice the small concrete structure and hear a creek emanating from it (hard to reach, overgrown); Lago Raitara is a dirty pond; fountain 20min before Camino Superiore; frequent water afterwards.

Bivouac: many possibilities before Passo delle Mastrelle (though cows after Bivacco Saracco), possibilities between Camino Inferiore and Colle del Camino (esp. at the pass itself).

45min before Rifugio Mongioie, a signposted 35min trail to Viozene (35min into R151), begins its gradual descent (bypassing the rifugio).

### **R151 Rifugio Mongioie – Ormea**

Viozene: Kiosk/grocery store as part of/next to Hotel Italia; has very limited supplies, targets hikers, also open Sundays.

After Viozene at first enjoyable road replacement walk for a couple of hours, then massive road avoidance detour, not always in good condition.

Ormea is a small town with a touristy main street. Grocery store closed on Sunday. I got stared at as hiker -- this is no longer hiking territory!

### **R152 Ormea - Garessio**

Distance killer bicycle road walk to Garessio. I most strongly recommend taking the bus, runs at irregular times perhaps ten times a day. VA replaces first 4km of bicycle road walk by 14km(?), 600m altitude gain/loss road avoidance walk. (This stage is a very low and extremely inappropriate stage of the VA. Feels like the Liguria province of Italy wanted its share of the VA cake, too.)

Water at bicycle road out of Ormea. Bivouac difficult due to constant presence of 'civilization.'

### **R153 Garessio - Caprauna**

Start of the Alta Via del Monti Liguri that the VA follows through R157.

Garessio groceries: 'OK [Super]Market' daily 8:30-12:30, 15:30-19:30, closed Sunday afternoon. C. 600m off trail. Also bakery in Garessio (opens 7am but bread may not be available immediately).

Water: fountains in Garessio; Fontana delle Meraviglie (c.2h30 into the stage).

GPS coordinates follow road out of Garessio - instead, follow signs through centers of extended Garessio 'suburbs'; shortly after square of last suburb, signs for VA in two different directions to (i) Colle San Bernardo (unsightly abandoned houses, windmills) and (ii) Colle delle Meraviglie, bypassing Colle San Bernardo. The trail to Colle San Bernardo does not follow the road (unlike the GPS coordinates) except possibly the last 20min (if one opts not to take an overgrown trail).

At the end of R153, the track indicated by the GPS coordinates for Caprauna no longer exists (an alternative trail to Caprauna appears a few minutes later); the signposted routing goes straight to Rifugii dell'Alma in R154 (watch out for small rifugio sign to trail leaving the gravel road on the right, for shortcut). Rifugii dell'Alma is set in a very peaceful expansive meadow (not at all busy when I passed, seemed a good place to rest and read a book).

### **R154 Caprauna – Colle di Nava**

Water fountain behind and slightly up from the rifugio (water did not look good); a few minutes later pipe just below trail (water looked good). No water fountain at Colle di Nava.

C.30min before Colle di Nava vast (mowed) meadow in what appears a communal area, including for camping; not busy. Concrete building may have amenities (didn't check).

No grocery store at Colle di Nava, contrary to the guidebook.

Bus to Ormea c. 20min ride, several times a day. (May sometimes continue to Garessio.)

### **R155 Colle di Nava – San Bernardo di Mendatica**

Water: c.1 hour into the stage at c. 15min after trail crosses road for first time (where it touches [within 15m] the road again): Fontana della Teglia(?).

San Bernardo di Mendatica: Ghost town; auberge(s)/hotel, cafe all permanently closed.

After first hour, trail becomes a road avoidance trail. Towards end of stage, trail shortcuts the road.

### **R156 San Bernardo di Mendatica – Colle Melosa**

Water: fountain in San Bernardo di Mendatica; possibly at cow trough 20m off VA at 1620m altitude an hour later, then no water(!).

Meals and lodging at Rifugio La Terza 40min before Passo del Saccarello (not mentioned in guidebook) as only possibility in this stage (no water fountain).

### **R157 Colle Melosa – Saorge**

No/limited water. Sella d'Agnaira has cow water troughs fed by a large metal tank, which in turn is filled by a pipe running from at least 1km above -- possible to climb onto the water tank and take water directly from the pipe. On descent at 600m crossing a dry creek bed but sound of water above and below, hard to get to; 5min later trail descends altitude c.30m to creek. At Pont de Castou 428m VA crosses same creek via bridge (has creek access).

Bivouac: 10min after Sella d'Agneira at a pass. From then on switchbacks and cliff walks in steep slope. One possible spot around 1400m halfway through the hillside crossing to Col Corbeau (flat tent-sized spot with steep slopes all around). Possibility just before and at Col Sanderau. Good at Muratone. Thereafter difficult.

Saorge has a very small grocery store the quality of a kiosk.

At Col Corbeau, the Alta Via del Monti Liguri probably continues on the South side of the col, while the VA crosses to the North (French) side: the quality of the trail immediately deteriorates drastically, with often only a narrow track in extremely steep, heavily wooded terrain. This seems to have been a 2m wide road at some point, often hewn into the cliff, but in many places all that is left is a narrow trail, itself sloping. When the trail could widen, the heavily overgrown 'road' (hazelnut bushes, thorny bushes, trees) pushes the hiker to the very edge, onto the crumbling stone wall supporting the 'road.' It is slow and careful going. Since the Alta Via del Monti Liguruli reappears at Muratone, one is probably significantly better off to stay on the Alta Via del Monti Liguri until Muratone. At Muratone, plenty of signposts, *none* pointing the way the VA just came.

From Muratone, according to the Organic Maps app, it is about as far to Breil-sur-Roya (end-R158) as to Saorge (end-R157). See hiker comments re R158.

Consider: From Col de Muratone walk the GTA in 7h to Ventimiglia (optional Mediterranean end of the GTA), on the Italian coast and on the train line to Monaco, 20km East of Monaco. From Ventimiglia one could also mostly beach-walk to Monaco in about 5 hours.

### **R158 Saorge – Breil-sur-Roya**

Saorge – Breil gare / gare routiere 5 buses a day (9:02, 11:27, 13:52, 16:22, 16:57). The VA description sounds like a pure distance killer and I took the bus. In retrospect, would walk Muratone (R157) – Breil directly and cut out Saorge (with its 'hanging'/clinging old town and monastery attractions).

Two buildings down from the train station in Breil is a Carrefour supermarket - first full re-supply since Guillestre/Mont-Dauphin (end-R130). A short walk takes one to the center of town with lake/reservoir, at the far end of which are benches, water (faucet), and trash cans.

### **R159 Breil-sur-Roya – Sospel**

Water: at end of tarred road (fountain with faucet) and same at Col de Brouis. Creek crossing on descent at 600m (questions about water quality).

Bivouac: best at Baisse de Levens or on 300m long flat ridge just above Col de L'Agaisen (300m before the col, follow signs to Baisse de Figuiera, 3min, then walk along ridge to col for many options). Otherwise: many parts of these hills appear to have been populated before, with patches of terraces where there is now forest; one could probably clear a spot. Meadows at Col de Brouis.

Wild boar sighting during ascent.

### **R160 Sospel-Peillon**

#### **R161 Peillon – Monaco-Place du Palais**

No water, except at (decorative) fountain in Sospel (ex-post: questionable quality); at Col Saint Jean immediately after crossing the road notice the box set in the stone wall: it contains a water mains and a lever at a short metal pipe facing you, turn lever for water; possibly at low point/bridge before Peille (descend steeply c.7m to water of questionable quality); at fountain in Peille.

Bivouac: at 900m on ascent; at Baisse du Pape; and limited at Col du Farguet. Later only with difficulty, such as shortly after low point before Peille.

Sospel has 2 grocery stores, Spar and Proxi (don't open till 8, after I had already left).

Altitude 600m arduous descent from Col du Farguet is overgrown with thorny and hard bushes. Ascent from Sospel gets early morning sun (hot), descent from Col du Farguet gets late morning sun = oven, turning humans into human jerky. Ideally, bivouac at Col de Pape (to which to ascend in early evening), then make a run for Monaco early the next day.

I collected my one and only tick on the whole VA the day from Sospel to Monaco.

Having little skin left on my legs after the descent from Col du Farguet, I took the road to Peille at the first opportunity (also avoids the VA road avoidance altitude detour). From Peille, with no reason to descend (and ascend and descend, detouring) to Peillon, I let the Organic Maps app show me the way to La Turbie (there is also a bus, worth consideration), parts on road, parts on road avoidance trails, parts on shortcuts, and parts on the just before La Turbie 200m altitude detour VA (best to just walk the road!). I proceeded similarly from La Turbie (with its small-ish Casino grocery store and a perhaps affordable hotel) to Monaco. -- If one could bus from Col du Farguet (hiker-access only) to La Turbie, that would be ideal (one can't).

In Monaco I headed straight for the Jardin Exotique, which, at 17:50, was closed, contrary to what the guidebook says (7pm closure) -- a fitting conclusion to my VA experience, I thought. (A sign at the jardin gates said "Free access Tuesday to Saturday 8:30am to 3:30pm.") The Palais Square is another 30min away, and the Via Alpina commemoration sign is there, barely readable.

I returned to the Jardin Exotique at 10am the next day (Friday) and it was closed, with no other announcement than the (false) opening hours. The souvenir shop (strangely) was open and I was told the jardin is closed for renovation (renovation of a garden?, with no sign of even the slightest work being done). The staff knew about the VA, handed me the book for my entry, and gave me a VA keychain present (it takes pliers to open the keychain).

- - - The following is a comparison between AllTrails (AT) statistics and VA guidebook statistics, where even the AllTrails statistics sometimes feel like underestimates (and a couple of times may use slightly different routing than the VA guidebook). The Organic Maps app typically shows longer distances, more altitude changes, and longer walking hours than AllTrails.

R140

AT 14.00km, elevation gain 891

VA 12.39, 715, 4h10 (hiker comment: 7 hours)

R141

AT 8.69, 956, 4hr

VA 8.35, 920, 3h40

R142

AT 13.52, 978

VA 13.47, 972, 5hr

R143

AT 12.55, 785

VA 12.3, 736, 4h55

R144

AT 7.24, 688, 3h30

VA 7.01, 681, 3h05

R145

AT 5.79, 734

VA 5.5, 675, 3h15

R146

AT 8.37, 528

VA 7.9, 446, 3h -- actually, based on signs, minimum 4hrs if not 4.5

R147

AT 8.21, 23, 2h43

VA 7.9, 8, 1h50

R148  
AT 16.42, 942  
VA 15.76, 738, 5h05

R149  
AT 26.39, 1761, 9h39  
VA 26.51, 1732, 7h30

R150  
AT 13.84, 799, 6h  
VA 14.4, 912, 5h40

R151  
AT 23.01, 745, 8  
VA 23.45, 673, 7h

R152  
AT 17.86, 780, 6h10  
VA 22.9, 791, 6h55

R153  
AT 22.69, 1436, 8h11  
VA 18.6, 1395, 5h25

R154  
AT 9.56, 427, 3h25  
VA 10.8, 372, 3h10

R155  
AT 5.79, 734  
VA 9 5, 480, 2h45

R156  
AT 23.98, 1793, 10h  
VA 24, 1262, 8h30

R157  
AT 23.5, 1124, 9h52  
VA 22.9, 565, 6h40

R158  
AT 8.53, 519, 3h45  
VA 8.5, 317, 1:45

R159  
AT 13.84, 940, 5h37  
VA 13, 824, 4:20

R160

AT 19.31, 1236, 7h40  
VA 19.1, 1191, 5h44

R161  
AT 11.1, 440, 4h04  
VA 13.55, 371, 2h50