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Tour du Mont Blanc

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Finally, a big thank you and a big hug to Claire, Oren and Zara for allowing me to explore... and allowing me to come home...

A request

The author and publisher have tried to ensure that this guide is as accurate and up to date as possible. However, things change even on these well-worn routes. If you notice any changes or omissions that should be included in the next edition of this guide, please email or write to Jim Manthorpe at Trailblazer (address above). You can also contact us via the Trailblazer website (✉ trailblazer-guides.com). Those persons making a significant contribution will be rewarded with a free copy of the next edition.

Warning: mountain walking can be dangerous

Please read the notes on mountain safety on pp57-64.

Every effort has been made by the author and publisher to ensure that the information contained herein is as accurate and up to date as possible. However, they are unable to accept responsibility for any inconvenience, loss or injury sustained by anyone as a result of the advice and information given in this guide.

Updated information will be available on: ✉ trailblazer-guides.com

Photos – Front cover and this page: On the trail above Val Veni on the Italian side of the Mont Blanc massif with spectacular views of the Aiguille Noire de Peuterey.

Overleaf: The high ridge of Mont de la Saxe above Val Ferret in Italy.

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INTRODUCTION

Mont Blanc, that grand marvel, not only of Europe, but of the whole world.

Francis Trench, *A Walk Round Mont Blanc*, 1847

In 1767 a scientist by the name of Horace Bénédict de Saussure walked around the massif of Mont Blanc, looking for a route to the summit of the unclimbed mountain. Since then many thousands of trekkers have followed in his footsteps and some have gone on to follow him to the top of the mountain itself. Others are just content to enjoy the startlingly beautiful Mont Blanc massif with Mont Blanc itself as the centrepiece.

At 4808m (15,777ft), Mont Blanc, the highest mountain in Western Europe

**At 4808m (15,777ft),
Mont Blanc is the highest
mountain in western Europe**

and one of the most famous mountains in the world, does not stand alone. The snow-dome summit is the highest point of a spectacular massif of peaks stretching 60 miles by 20 miles. The heights of Mont Blanc and its adjacent peaks, such as the Grandes Jorasses and Mont Dolent, allow for the development of vast glaciers that slip from the



Above: The route is well waymarked; you're unlikely to get lost. Look for red and white paint splashes on rocks or yellow signs – some with the green TMB logo – such as these at Grand Col Ferret (see p125). **Left:** Lac de Combal (p105) in the Italian Val Veni.



Above: After the strenuous ascent to 2443 metres to reach it, the Refuge de la Croix du Bonhomme (see p 94) is a welcome spot for lunch or an overnight stay.

a linguist, remember to brush up on your rusty French and Italian; a ‘bonjour’ here and a ‘bon giorno’ there will usually bring a smile.

The trail is waymarked and poses few difficulties. That said, it is a strenuous trek involving significant ascents and descents, crossing high passes and, in places, passing over rough ground. Despite this, there are plenty of home comforts on offer after a hard day’s trek. The trail passes through some beautiful villages, all of which offer good-value accommodation and restaurants for tired, hungry walkers. There is also a fantastic network of mountain huts providing food and lodging in the remoter spots. For those who prefer to camp, you can do so at organised campsites and, occasionally, outside a refuge if the warden permits it.

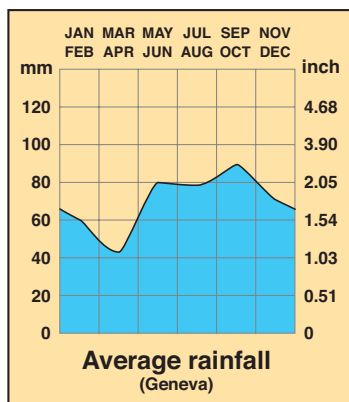
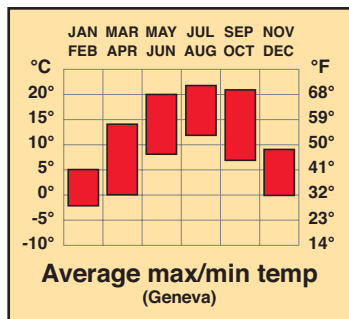


Above: Chalet-Refuge Nant Borrant (see p90) is one of the most beautiful mountain refuges on the Tour, with a lovely garden that will tempt you into stopping for a cold drink.



Above: The chapel of Notre Dame de la Gorge (p90), outside Les Contamines, at the point where the road through the valley ends and the trail to the Col du Bonhomme begins.





the month so be sure to check in advance. The refuges usually stay open until mid September. You will likely need to book a bed in advance during July and August as they tend to be full every night.

WEATHER AND CLIMATE

[see also pp61-4] June to August boasts some beautiful weather. Days tend to be sunny and warm, nights cool and clear. Daytime temperatures are 20-30°C at 1000m, about 10°C lower at 2000m. Sometimes it can be uncomfortably hot at lower altitudes, making long ascents with a heavy rucksack a sweaty business. One or two wet days per week is normal but you'd be unlucky to have a completely wet holiday. The downside to warm, sunny weather in the mountains is that it invariably leads to afternoon thunderstorms. These are particularly common later in the summer. It is always a good idea to get your day's walk done by lunchtime to avoid any such storms, which at best can leave you with a pile of soggy clothing and at worst fry you alive on a ridge if a

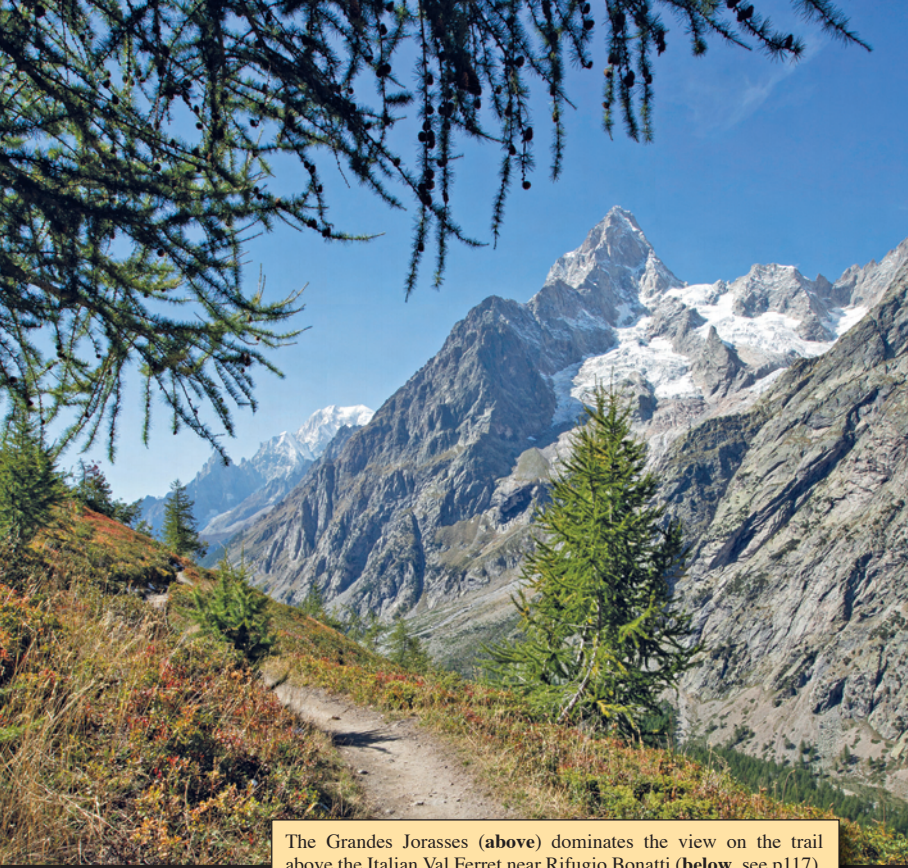
bolt of lightning scores a direct hit. Your motto should be: be prepared for anything. On one occasion in Chamonix in mid August I enjoyed a morning of sunshine and temperatures of 32°C followed by a night of dramatic thunderstorms and floods, finished off the following day with more wet weather, a top temperature of 14°C and snow falling down to 1700m.

For more on mountain weather and safety, see pp57-64.

LATE SNOW PATCHES

In June large semi-permanent snow patches can still be present on the higher passes. They are not usually difficult to cross but they can be very exposed with long drops below them. If you don't feel comfortable negotiating these wintry remnants it may be wise to walk the trail later in the summer when most of them will have melted. The earlier in the season, the more likely it is that you will have to cross some large patches of snow. The following high passes hold snow well into the summer: Col du Bonhomme, Col de la Croix du Bonhomme, Col des Fours, Col de la Seigne, Grand Col Ferret and Fenêtre d'Arpette.

You can check real time trail conditions at autourdumontblanc.com.



The Grandes Jorasses (**above**) dominates the view on the trail above the Italian Val Ferret near Rifugio Bonatti (**below**, see p117).



PLANNING YOUR TREK

1

With a group or on your own?

Trekkers who walk alone will have a completely different experience to those in a group but one approach is not necessarily better than the other. If you are the gregarious type and enjoy the camaraderie that goes with a group hike in the mountains, the choice is obvious and you should hook up with some friends. If you don't have any like-minded mountain-loving pals get in touch with one of the numerous commercial outfits who run guided and self-guided trips (see pp18-19).

Some people may find that sharing a trek with a group of strangers, or even friends, detracts from the 'wilderness' experience. The great thing about walking the Tour alone is that you get the best of both worlds; you can spend most of the day trekking on your own, making the most of the peace, quiet and solitude; then in the evening, when you start to feel like a loner, you can enjoy a drink in a refuge or bar with other trekkers.

In fact the Tour is such a popular trek that if you are after some serious solitude you may be disappointed. Invariably you bump into the same people each day so, unless you are happy to be a cantankerous hermit, you may as well just talk to the blighters.

WALKING ALONE

Walking alone in the mountains is often frowned upon because it is thought to be more dangerous. If you have an accident who will call for help? In practice those who walk alone are far more aware of their own vulnerability and consequently they take fewer risks. People in groups often develop a false sense of security. A person is more likely to push themselves beyond their limits in a group, either for fear of letting their peers down or to try to impress them. If you want to walk alone, do so and don't let anyone suggest you are being irresponsible. But if you do walk alone you should bear in mind the following points:

- Let someone know your planned route for the day
- Let someone know your estimated arrival time at your destination
- Be adequately equipped (see pp35-9)
- Check the weather forecast and be prepared to abandon a day's walk if it's bad
- Know what to do in the event of an accident (see pp60-1)

❑ NEW EU ENTRY REQUIREMENTS FOR UK NATIONALS

Although as we go to press UK nationals can visit the countries on the route of the Tour du Mont Blanc (France, Italy and Switzerland) without prior authorisation or a visa, from 2024 they will need to register online with ETIAS (European Travel Information and Authorisation System) at etias.eu. Though it costs €7, it is not a visa and will need to be done every three years. Check online for the exact start date as the system was to have launched in 2021 and since been postponed several times.

- **Ryder Walker** (☎ 1-888 586 8365, ryderwalker.com) Eight-day itinerary staying in high-end hotels.

Getting there

GETTING TO GENEVA/CHAMONIX

By air

Geneva, in Switzerland, has the most convenient airport for reaching the start of the walk. Swiss (www.swiss.com) operate daily direct flights to Geneva from many parts of the world, though not at the time of writing from Australia or New Zealand. However, connecting flights via either Asia or the USA are readily available. Most national airlines in the UK, mainland Europe, the USA and Canada operate direct daily flights to Geneva.

If you do fly from somewhere in Europe, budget airline EasyJet (easyjet.com) is probably the least-polluting option as they tend to cram people in rather than fly half-empty planes. They fly to Geneva from over 70 cities in Europe.

See p20 for the bus from Geneva Airport to Chamonix or Les Houches.

❑ AIRPORT TRANSFER SERVICES

The following companies will collect you from Geneva Airport at a pre-arranged time and take you to your accommodation in Les Houches or Chamonix. They will do the same (in reverse) on your return to the airport.

Journey times are about 90 minutes from the airport to Chamonix. Fares depend on how many others are booked into the bus/taxi but they all charge similar prices (€19-40/£17-36/US\$20-45pp one-way).


- **AlpyBus** ☎ (UK) +44 (0)1509-213696, (Switzerland) +41 (0) 227 232 984, alpybus.com
- **Cham Van** ☎ (France) +33 (0)4 80 80 61 88, cham-van.com
- **ChamExpress** ☎ (Switzerland) +41 (0) 227 232 984, (France) +33 (0)4 85 80 00 39, chamexpress.com
- **Chamonix Cabs** ☎ (France) +33 (0)6-79 01 46 02, chamonixcabs.com
- **Easybus** easybus.com
- **Mountain Drop-offs** ☎ (UK) +44 (0)20-7043 4874, (France) +33 (0)4 50 47 17 73, mountaindropoffs.com

Getting around

PUBLIC TRANSPORT – A SUMMARY

Public transport around the Mont Blanc massif and particularly in the Chamonix valley is excellent, which makes it quite easy to pick off a few day and weekend walks and still be able to get back to where you started (see ‘Highlights – day and weekend walks’, box p334).



Chamonix Valley

It’s easy to get around the Chamonix valley with regular trains and buses running up and down throughout the summer. Chamonix Bus operates from late April to the end of December. Mont Blanc Express Train operates services linking Le Fayet in France and Martigny in Switzerland (with a change at the French–Swiss border). For a taxi call Taxi Besson +33 (0)4-50 93 62 07,  taxi-montblanc.com.

Les Contamines

To get to Les Contamines you should catch a train to Le Fayet. From the railway station in Le Fayet a bus operates six times a day (July and August) up the valley to Les Contamines.

Chamonix to Courmayeur

If you are staying in Chamonix, the bus that runs through the Mont Blanc tunnel is useful for getting to the Italian side of the massif for some day walks. Buses operate from the end of June to the start of September (6-7 a day). Tickets must be bought in advance from the ticket office outside the railway station in Chamonix, at the bus station in Courmayeur or online at either  satmontblanc.com or  flixbus.com.

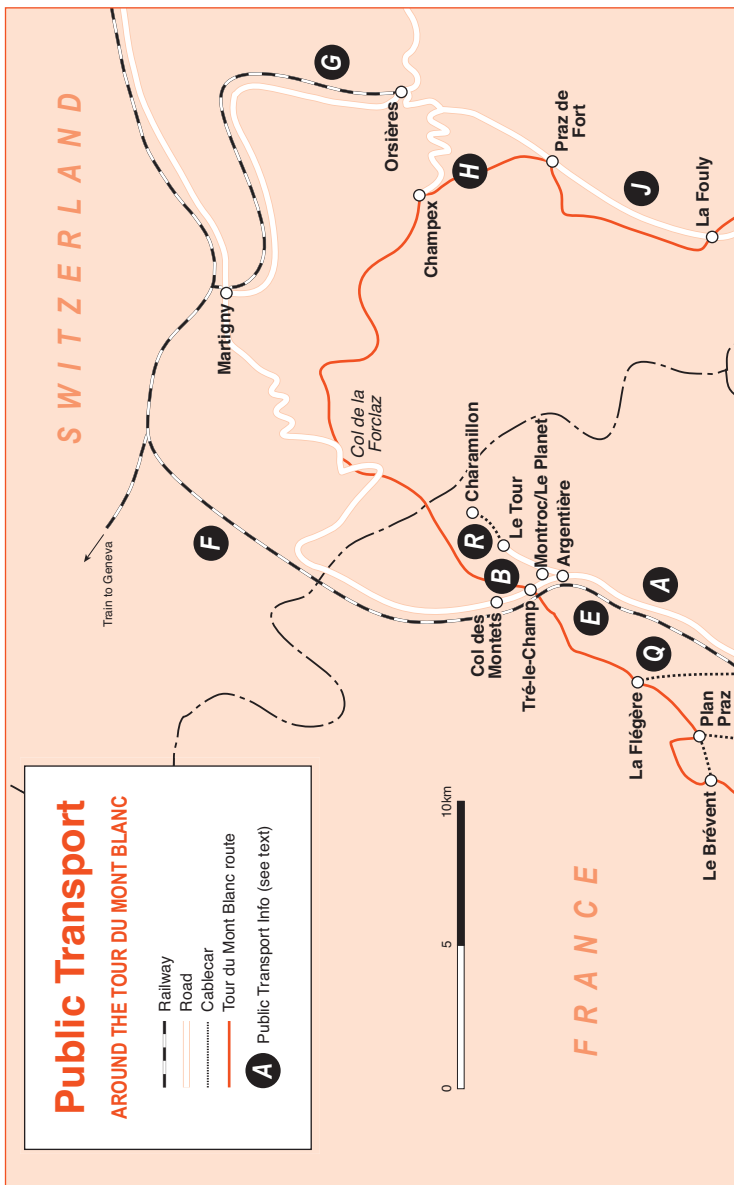
Champex

Getting to Champex from the Chamonix valley is not as difficult as it first appears thanks to the efficient French and Swiss public transport systems. Eleven trains operate daily from Chamonix to Martigny (changing at Le Châtelard-Frontière) but be sure to catch one that corresponds with one of the 15 connecting train services from Martigny to Orsières. From Orsières a bus climbs the steep road to Champex seven times a day.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT – THE DETAILS

The frequency of buses and trains around the Mont Blanc massif varies from one area to the next. Buses and trains in the Chamonix valley are frequent and reliable while Les Chapieux to the south is a bit of a public transport black hole. Courmayeur and Chamonix are linked by a daily bus service through the Mont

(cont’d on p26)



Sadly, **wild camping** (see pp56-7) is discouraged and for much of the route is illegal below 2500 metres. It is a much-flouted law and some people have had success in persuading the guardians of mountain huts (refuges/rifugios) to allow them to camp within the vicinity of the hut. If you do wild camp, be sure to leave no trace of your having been there to minimise your impact on the environment.

Be warned, however, that the police do check for illegal campers and will fine offenders. It is a shame that well-meaning campers are made to feel they are doing something wrong when camping is such a harmless activity if carried out in a responsible way; but that, unfortunately, is the reality of camping on the Tour.

BIVVYING

Another option is to bivvy. This is an even better way to feel part of the great outdoors. You can get away with sleeping in a Gore-Tex bivvy bag in the rain but it's not as much fun. The advantages of sleeping in such a minimalist way, aside from the obvious delight of sleeping rough beneath the stars and the night breeze, is that you don't have to carry as much as you would if you were camping and you can sleep just about anywhere; see also p56.

Bivvying in the Alps is a wonderful way of immersing yourself in this magnificent environment if the weather is good but consider staying in a refuge if a thunderstorm is forecast.

MOUNTAIN HUTS

Mountain huts, known as *refuges* in France and Switzerland and *rifugios* in Italy (and referred to as such in this guide), have been part of the mountain landscape of the Alps for a long time. They are popular places to stay, offering accommodation, sumptuous meals (see box p29 about Alpine food) – and sometimes a bar – in very remote and wild spots.

In a refuge there is the choice of a *chambre* (private room), usually a twin or double though singles are sometimes available for a supplement of around €10-15, or a *dortoir* (dormitory); the latter are cramped but far cheaper than a room. You can also choose to opt for bed only or for *demi-pension* (usually including an evening meal and breakfast but sometimes just the evening meal) which is usually worth plumping for since the meals are invariably excellent and very filling – just what you need after (and indeed before) a day's trek in the mountains.

Sleeping in a dortoir is a sociable experience in that, very often, the sleeping arrangements involve not individual bunks or beds but long sleeping platforms that accommodate large numbers of people, both males and females together. If you feel it is too early for this level of intimacy with strangers you've just met on the trail, opt for a chambre.

When staying at mountain huts you should take your boots off at the door and use a pair of hut slippers, which should be provided. Book in at the reception and

wiches, bananas, nuts, raisins and chocolate will keep you going. A packed lunch bought from a refuge will usually include a sandwich plus some fruit and chocolate and maybe a bag of crisps.

For dinner treat yourself to a good meal with lots of carbohydrates such as pasta or rice. Restaurants and serviced accommodation in the area offer a range of meals from local specialities such as *raclette* and *fondue* (see box p29) to more international flavours including spaghetti bolognese and salmon.

Suggested itineraries

Part of the fun of walking the Tour is in the planning; the deciding on where to stay each night and how far to walk each day. The itineraries here are just suggestions so don't feel you have to stick to them. They are designed, simply, to help you with your own plans.

The table below is for those wishing to camp most of the time. Note that there is a dearth of official campsites and wild camping (see p27) is not looked upon kindly by the lawmakers. This makes it difficult to spend every night

STAYING IN CAMPSITES AND/OR MOUNTAIN HUTS

Relaxed pace

Steady pace

Night	Place	Distance		Place	Distance	
		miles	km		miles	km
0	Les Houches			Les Houches		
1	Les Contamines	8½	14	Les Contamines	8½	14
2	Chalet la Balme	4½	7	Les Chapieux	10½	17
3	Les Chapieux	6	10	Rifugio Elisabetta	8½	13½
4	Rifugio Elisabetta	8½	13½	Rifugio Bertone	12	19
5	Rifugio Monte Bianco	7	11½	Rifugio Elena	10	16
6	Rifugio Bertone	5½	9	La Fouly	6½	11
7	Rifugio Bonatti	6	10	Champex	9	14
8	Rifugio Elena	4	6	Le Peuty	9	14½
9	La Fouly	6½	11	Tré le Champ	7½	12
10	Champex	9	14	Les Houches	16	25
11	Col de la Forclaz	8	13			
12	Tré le Champ	8½	13½			
13	La Flégère	5	8			
14	Refuge de Bellachat	7	11			
15	Les Houches	4	6			

In many places wild camping is discouraged or illegal. In practice you may be allowed to camp outside mountain huts but be prepared to stay indoors if asked to do so.

Suunto and Silva both produce fancy watches that come with an altimeter. Some also include a **barometer** (for predicting what the overall weather is doing) and even an **anemometer** for measuring wind speed and windchill temperatures. There are a number of **smart watches** now available that feature altimeters, barometers and even Google maps. Brands such as Suunto, Garmin and Casio are worth a look.

SLEEPING KIT

Refuges, particularly the *dortoir* (dormitory) accommodation, do not usually provide bedding so if you plan to stay in a *dortoir* (or to camp, see below), you will need a **sleeping bag**.

CAMPING GEAR

A lightweight dome or ridge **tent** is fine. You will need a good two-season **sleeping bag** plus a **sleeping mat** or **inflatable mattress**. This is not just for comfort; it offers insulation from the cold ground. Inflatable mattresses, such as the ever-popular Thermarest, are much more comfortable than foam mats.

Campers will also need a **mug**, a couple of **cooking pots** with lids, **pan handle**, **spoon**, a wire or plastic **scrubber** for washing up and a **stove** and **fuel**. The very popular MSR stoves, which boil water in seconds, run best on petrol while the much slower Trangia stoves run on methylated spirits. These fuels are available in Chamonix and Courmayeur, as are gas canisters for gas-based stoves.

BIVVY GEAR

Waterproof, breathable **bivvy bags** are hardwearing and extremely light, making them a good alternative to a tent. As well as the bivvy bag you will need the same kit as you would for camping (except the tent of course). Bivvy bags come in all shapes and sizes and price ranges, from simple 'sacks' that can cope with light rain for around £60 to much tougher bags for around £250 that will protect you from more serious weather. Some include a hoop over the head that offers a little more space.

A waterproof, breathable bivvy bag together with a good two-season sleeping bag and a sleeping mat can make for a surprisingly comfortable night's sleep if the weather is in your favour. For more on bivvyng see p27.

❑ MOBILE PHONE AND WI-FI COVERAGE

Mobile phone coverage is patchy throughout the walk. The best signal tends to be in the larger towns and villages and on high, exposed ground. But it's best not to rely on a mobile phone on the TMB. Free **wi-fi** is generally available in most accommodation, although some refuges have limited access to it. Restaurants and bars in Chamonix and Courmayeur usually have free wi-fi as do tourist information centres.

History

HISTORY OF THE TOUR DU MONT BLANC

I heard nothing but the sounds of avalanches...this conversation of nature in the highest Alps ... impresses the mind with a terrible sublimity; for all else is icy stillness

JD Gardner, *Ascent and Tour of Mont Blanc ...* 1851

It wasn't until 1952 that the Tour du Mont Blanc was officially inaugurated as a 'grande-randonnée' and the route waymarked but the history of the trail stretches back to 1758. It was in that year that **Professor Horace-Bénédict de Saussure** made the first full circuit of the Massif du Mont Blanc. His inspiration was not solely recreational: de Saussure was a scientist and a man driven by the allure of Mont Blanc so he used the journey to take notes on the botany and geology and, most importantly to him, to look for a potential route to the summit of the mountain (see 'History of mountaineering on Mont Blanc', pp42-6).

De Saussure was not the only man who had been bewitched by the seductive snowy dome of Mont Blanc. His contemporary, **Marc-Théodore Bourrit**, followed in his footsteps in 1785 and in 1847 **Francis Trench** made the same journey. His journal, *A Walk Round Mont Blanc*, is one of the most detailed early accounts of the route. In it, he reveals as much about the beauty of the mountains as he does about his ability to 'bear fatigue' and keep pace with the ladies. It appears that the best way to hide one's own shortcomings at the time was to disguise them as chivalrous concern for the well-being of the women in your party:

It was between three and four o'clock before we reached Chamonix, after making this interesting expedition. Such was the spirit and capacity to bear fatigue on the part of the ladies in our party, that as we descended, to my great surprise, the proposition was made to undertake another excursion in the evening ... I must confess that I personally felt that a very good day's work had been already performed, and though I was perfectly willing to undertake an evening walk if decided upon yet, on another consideration, could not with sincerity give every cordial encouragement to the design. For I really considered it almost a matter of certainty that such continued exertion must be too much for any female capacity, and accordingly, when referred to, ventured to use some dissuasive argument.

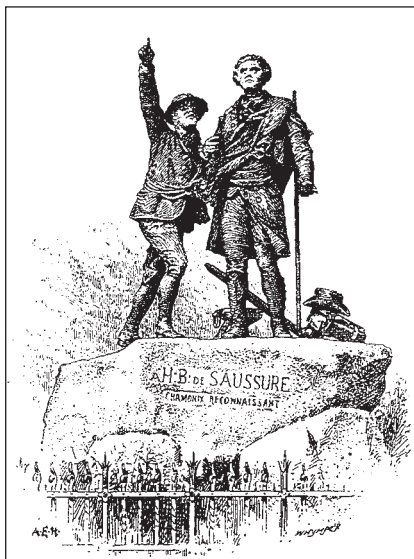
were poor farmers and cheese makers and had little interest in climbing the mountain until de Saussure's money was put on the table. So it was not until 1775 that any serious effort was made.

In that year, on 14 July, **Jean Nicolas Couteran**, accompanied by **François Paccard**, **Dr Michel Paccard** and **Victor Tissai**, made a valiant effort, gaining the summit of the **Dôme du Gouter** – at 4303 metres, just 506 metres and about a mile short of the summit.

In 1783 another Mont Blanc fanatic, **Marc-Théodore Bourrit**, made an attempt on the mountain. Bourrit was a well-known Geneva socialite who had a genuine passion for the Alps which he explored and painted. His chief motivation for climbing Mont Blanc, however, appears to have been egotistical and competitive. While Bourrit certainly had a passion for the mountains, he did not have the physical or mental capability to endure a serious attempt on the high summits. In his book *Killing Dragons*, Fergus Fleming notes how Bourrit's repeated efforts to climb in the Alps were 'thwarted by three debilitations: he dreaded cold, he disliked rain and he suffered from vertigo'. Nevertheless Bourrit was talented when it came to self-glorification, praising himself for his noble assault, with Dr Michel Paccard, on Mont Blanc in 1783.

Dr Michel Paccard, however, found Bourrit to be nothing more than a coward who painted himself as a dashing hero of the mountains. While Bourrit wrote of their valiant travails on the mountain, Dr Paccard merely commented on how Bourrit 'did not dare go on the ice'. Unsurprisingly, Dr Paccard never climbed again with Bourrit. That's not to say that he never climbed again, however. Indeed, in 1786 Paccard decided to have another shot. He hired a porter, **Jacques Balmat**, to help carry his food and equipment and, on 8 August 1786 at 6.23pm, the two men became the first to reach the summit of Mont Blanc, using what is now known as the **Grands Mulets route** (see p168).

The ascent was witnessed by **Baron Adolf Traugott von Gersdorf** who watched through his telescope as the men scaled the mountain. The day after the summiters' successful climb



Monument in Chamonix to Horace Bénédict de Saussure, with Balmat beside him.

(From *A Guide to Chamonix and the Range of Mont Blanc*, Edward Whymper).



View of Mont Blanc, showing the route taken by de Saussure in 1787.
(Edward Whymper, *A Guide to Chamonix and the Range of Mont Blanc*)

arêtes and shattered peaks. The glaciers which still fill the high cirques and deep valleys are remnants of a once much greater and thicker ice sheet.

This dynamic landscape of granite, gneiss and schist is evidently far from permanent; its present-day appearance is a result of 500 million years of mountain building and the effects of ice ages. And the story hasn't finished; the Alps are still rising by a millimetre a year and while the glaciers may be retreating for now, who knows when the next ice age will come?

Flora and fauna

VEGETATION ZONES

It's not difficult to see the change in vegetation as one climbs a mountain. Down in the valley, below about 1200 metres, are the deciduous trees: **beech**, **oak** and **ash**. The Tour du Mont Blanc trekker will see little of this broad-leaved woodland, partly because most of the trail lies above its altitudinal limit and partly because much of it has been felled anyway. There are still some pockets remaining, however, particularly to the south of Les Contamines.

Above 1200 metres the forest cover is dominated by **mountain pine** and **European larch** whose thin needles are more resistant to the colder temperatures that occur at these heights. At the upper limit of this coniferous zone, around 2000 to 2200 metres, the trees are stunted and more sparsely distributed as the climate gets harsher.

Eventually, they give way to a shrub zone where **alpenrose** and ground-hugging **juniper** dominate. At altitudes of 2500 metres and higher, plant life struggles to grow and the bare, frost-shattered rock is left to the **lichens**. Surprisingly, however, a few flowering plants, such as **Alpine rock jasmine** and the **glacier buttercup**, have adapted to live in this particular niche.

FLOWERING PLANTS

There are said to be 4500 species of plants in the Alps and nearly a tenth of those are endemic. This immense variety of plant life is quite evident throughout the summer when the high Alpine meadows, alive with dancing, hissing grasshoppers, burn with reds, blues and yellows.

- **Alpenrose** This native dwarf rhododendron grows between 1200 and 2200 metres and can form quite dense shrub layers. Its flimsy pink flowers are at their best in July and August. Good places to see them include on the Aiguillette des Posettes, between Col de Balme and Tré le Champ (Map 34) and also on the high route between Rifugio Bonatti and Chalet La Ferret (Map 21).
- **Alpine rock jasmine** Alpine rock jasmine is one of the few flowering plants to grow above 4000 metres. It forms small cushions of delicate white and pink flowers amongst broken rocks.
- **Alpine gentian** Of the many gentians that flourish in the Alps, this is one of the most beautiful. It has striking, deep-blue trumpet flowers.
- **Bavarian gentian** Rarer than the Alpine gentian but locally abundant in parts of the Alps, Bavarian gentian is quite distinct from the Alpine gentian in several ways: it grows closer to the ground, is smaller, grows in abundant clusters and each flower has five blue petals rather than a single trumpet. It has a wide altitudinal range from around 1600 to 3500 metres.
- **Edelweiss** The flower most commonly associated with the Alps, edelweiss is an extraordinary plant. It has very fine soft hairs on both the leaves and the petals, giving it a diffused frosted appearance. The flower heads are a pale yellow with a star-shaped corolla of pale off-white petals. It flowers from July to September at between 2000 and 3000 metres.
- **False aster** As is clearly evident from its appearance, the false aster is a member of the daisy family, with large thin white petals encircling a large yellow flower head. They are a common component in Alpine meadows and a welcome splash of emulsion amongst gaudier colours. The aster flowers from April to August up to an altitude of 2500 metres.
- **Glacier buttercup** Another flower that manages to eke out an existence above 4000 metres, the glacier buttercup has a pretty white corolla of petals emanating from a yellow flower head.

C2 Common flora



Globoseflower
Trollius europaeus



St John's Wort
Hypericum perforatum



Meadow Clary
Salvia pratensis



© Henry Stedman

Rock Jasmine
Androsace



Alpine Cinquefoil
Potentilla crantzii



© Bryn Thomas

Marsh Marigold
Caltha palustris



© Henry Stedman

Alpine Poppy
Papaver alpinum



© Bryn Thomas

Common Dog Violet
Viola riviniana



Cottongrass
Eriophorum angustifolium



© Bryn Thomas

Tormentil
Potentilla erecta



© Bryn Thomas

Heather (Ling)
Calluna vulgaris



© Bryn Thomas

Honeysuckle
Lonicera periclymenum

● **Griffon vulture** This huge vulture, with a wingspan of nearly three metres, is not a common sight but you may be lucky to see one soaring on the thermals above the Val Veni (Map 14) in Italy and around the Col du Bonhomme (Map 8). They have a wedge-shaped appearance when viewed from below.

● **Bearded vulture** The bearded vulture is another huge raptor with a similar wing span to that of the griffon vulture. It's distinctive bearded appearance is only apparent if you are fortunate enough to see one up close. When seen in the sky they can be identified by their long, slender wings and long, fan-shaped tail. Bearded vultures specialise in feeding on bone marrow. They take bones from carcasses and drop them from a great height to break them open.

In the early 20th century bearded vultures were persecuted to local extinction in the Alps but thanks to a reintroduction project they returned to former haunts from 1986 and there are now around 300 individuals in the Alps. I was lucky enough to see one at the Col de la Seigne (Map 12) while researching this third edition and I have also seen them over the Col du Bonhomme (Map 8), along with griffon vultures.

● **Kestrel** A common falcon found throughout Europe, the kestrel is not a mountain species so the only place you are likely to see it whilst walking the Tour du Mont Blanc is in the valleys. Kestrels are brown with black primary feathers and a slate-grey head and tail. They are very skilled at hovering in the same spot, even in a strong wind, and will stoop down to pounce on voles and mice in rough grassland.

❑ ULTRA TRAIL

It takes about a week and a half to complete the 168km of length and 10,000m of ascent that constitute the Tour du Mont Blanc – unless you are a competitor in the Ultra Trail, an annual race around the massif, in which case it should take less than 46½ hours. The Ultra Trail is one of a number of endurance marathons held in mountainous regions around the world. In truth, the route laid out for these athletes varies slightly from the trekkers' route described in this book. There are two alternatives to choose from. The first is the 'Full Tour' which starts and finishes in Chamonix and measures 163km with a combined ascent of 8900 metres. There's a time limit of an astonishing 46½ hours with many competitors completing the circuit in under 24 hours. If that seems a little excessive the 'easier' option is the CCC (Courmayeur–Champex–Chamonix) event which is a mere 86km with 5000 metres of ascent and a time limit of just 24 hours.

So when you find yourself on that final stretch of the Tour du Mont Blanc, and you have nine or ten days' of trekking behind you, spare a thought for the guys and gals who ran the same route in under 24 hours.

The Ultra Trail takes place in the last week of August and causes little disruption to the more leisurely TMB trekker, not least because it's all over with so quickly. See

📄 www.utmbmontblanc.com.

MINIMUM IMPACT & OUTDOOR SAFETY

3

Minimum impact walking

Landscapes as beautiful as those found on the Tour inevitably attract hordes of visitors. From skiing to paragliding, mountain biking to trekking, people have found all sorts of ways of enjoying the fresh mountain air and exploring the wild valleys and peaks. With this wonderful opportunity to discover the mountains, however, comes a responsibility to tread lightly in a fragile environment that is home to a diverse range of species and also the home and workplace of many people.

MOUNTAIN CHALLENGE OR EXPERIENCE?

The Mont Blanc massif is a big old beast but even a massif nearly five kilometres high can easily be missed if you're looking at the path in front of you all the time; and if it's possible to miss a mountain it's possible to miss the wildflowers, grasshoppers, butterflies and birds. You could walk through a beautiful Alpine meadow and feel nothing, hear nothing and see nothing but the path at your feet. But pause while in that meadow and you'll feel the sun on your face, hear the incessant hiss of grasshoppers and see wildflower heads dancing around you. You can get as much or as little out of the mountains as you wish but so many people walk as if hurrying to catch a bus. Perhaps you really are. But perhaps it doesn't matter if you miss it. Take time to stop, look around and enjoy the sights and sounds.

It usually takes a few days to shake off the stresses and worries of everyday life. Your first day's trekking could feel like purgatory but stick with it. After a few days you get into the rhythm of walking through the landscape to a point where the mountains feel more like home than beautiful suburbia ever could. By the end of the trek you won't want to stop. (Well, possibly you might!)

In the past, the talk was of conquering mountains. Today, it is about appreciating and admiring them. Whether you are drawn to the mountains for the views or for the opportunity to explore, one thing is certain; the mountains have an ability to humble even the greatest of egos. Feeling in awe of the landscape helps us to think more broadly about ourselves and our place within the natural world. Some



- Don't light fires (and take care not to accidentally light vegetation)
- Never leave any litter (this includes leftover food)
- Don't use soap or detergent in streams
- Don't disturb wildlife or domestic animals
- Follow the guidelines in this book when going to the toilet outdoors (see p55)
- Never keep your tent in the same position for more than one night
- Leave no trace of your having been there.

Mountain safety and weather

Mountains can be dangerous but not if you are aware of the hazards, are willing to prepare for them and learn how to minimise their potential to happen. Start by wearing the right clothes (see pp36-7) and follow this up by packing the extra clothing you may need to cope with any deterioration in the weather.

The next step is to learn about the mountains. Experienced mountain travellers develop an almost instinctive awareness of potential dangers. It is only with experience that you learn how to place your feet to avoid spraining an ankle, which rocks look unstable and what the weather is about to do.

KNOW YOUR LIMITS

The Tour du Mont Blanc is quite a demanding trek with some significant ascents and descents. It's always a good idea to build up a bit of **stamina and fitness** before you leave for the Alps and, once there, take the first two or three days steadily.

Don't try to do too much each day. The first few miles of the Tour offer quite a tough introduction with over 600 metres of ascent from Les Houches to Col de Voza. If you find this exhausting, don't let it dishearten you: it does get easier once you have a couple of days' trekking behind you.

It's worth keeping the first day as short as possible because of the tough ascent to Col de Voza. For this reason, it's wise to stick to the less strenuous main route via Bionnassay unless you have already done some trekking recently, in which case you will be more able to enjoy the variante route which takes you closer to the high mountains. If you want to ease yourself into the first day and avoid that punishing ascent from Les Houches to Col de Voza, you can take the Tramway du Mont Blanc from Le Fayet (accessible by train from Les Houches) and jump off at either Col de Voza or Bellevue.

MOUNTAIN SAFETY

Equipment

Effective items of equipment are the key ingredients for enjoying the mountains. The essentials are strong boots, clothing that can cope with the worst the weather can serve up, a comfortable rucksack or daypack and a water bottle or



Chamonix – Above: The river Arve crashes through the centre of Chamonix with a backdrop of Mont Blanc. **Below:** Professor HB de Saussure and Jacques Balmat (**left**) gaze upon Mont Blanc from their monument in Chamonix. On 8th August 1786, with Dr Michel Paccard (**right**), Balmat became the first person to scale Mont Blanc (see pp42-5).



CHAMONIX

4

The town of Chamonix is small and, independent of its locality, would be quite devoid of interest. Its peculiar position, however, renders it one of the most interesting localities in the whole world.

Francis Trench, *A Walk Round Mont Blanc* 1847

Chamonix has been a popular tourist resort for over a hundred years so it has plenty of experience in catering for visitors; and unlike some tourist destinations, it has just about learnt how to get it right. Certainly, some may find its unashamed drive on tourism a little off-putting but this is still a lively and friendly town with plenty of rustic tradition amongst the chintzy street cafés and knick-knack shops.

With Mont Blanc a metaphorical stone's throw away it was perhaps inevitable that Chamonix would mature from a sleepy little farming community in the 1800s into one of the world's most important mountain resorts, considered the birthplace of mountaineering by many. More recently it has opened itself up to the skiing fraternity making it a year-round destination. After the exertions of the Tour du Mont Blanc, Chamonix is a wonderful antidote to roughing it. Let yourself be a tourist and wander the streets, have plenty of long lunches at pavement cafés and enjoy the bustle of life passing by.

Most of what Chamonix has to offer is fairly centrally located, with a few other options for a drink or a meal south of the river in **Chamonix Sud** (see p71).

Of the sights to see around town one of the most interesting is the **Musée Alpin/Musée de Mont Blanc** (📄 musee-alpin-chamonix.fr, ☎ 04-50 53 25 93; closed for refurbishment at time of writing). It specialises in the history of mountaineering and skiing in the region. There are some interesting old paintings of the surrounding area from when Chamonix was just a tiny village and the glaciers used to spill into the main valley. The highlights, however, are the old wooden bobsleigh from the 1924 Winter Olympics and examples of early ice axes and crampons from the late 18th century.

Out on the bridge by Place Balmat is the famous **Monument Saussure** depicting Jacques Balmat pointing out a route up Mont Blanc to Horace-Bénédict de Saussure, alpine climber, Mont Blanc obsessive and widely presumed founder of alpinism. De Saussure offered a reward to the first person to conquer the mountain. On 8 August 1786 Jacques Balmat and Michel-Gabriel Paccard achieved just that, with de Saussure following in their footsteps a year later (see pp40-5).



(p148), near Argentière, and Bellefact (p76), near Les Houches which is right at the start of the Tour. There are sites closer to Chamonix if you can't be bothered with the bus ride. Down the valley from the centre is **Camping Les Arolles** (off map p68; ☎ 04-50 53 14 30, 📧 lesarolles.com; early Jun-end Sep; 28 spaces) where a pitch costs €4.10 plus €7.60 per person. Closer to the river and a little more peaceful is **Camping L'Île des Barrats** (off map p68; ☎ 04-50 53 51 44, 📧 campingdesbarrats.com; Jun-mid Sep; 52 spaces), which has fantastic views of Mont Blanc and the Aiguilles Rouges. Prices here are €20 per pitch. There is also a handful of campsites in Les Praz de Chamonix, one train stop away to the north.

Chamonix Mont Blanc Youth Hostel (off map p68, ☎ 04-50 53 14 52, 📧 hi.france.org; Dec-Oct; 126 beds; from €42pp inc breakfast) is a mile south of town at Les Pèlerins. It's a 20-minute walk or you can catch a bus (7/day) or the more frequent train. If you have a lot of luggage take the bus as it drops you almost at the door, while the train only goes as near as the village of Les Pèlerins from where it is a steep climb to the hostel. Often crowded with school groups in summer, although this large hostel is a little soulless it does offer good value for money. Dormitories usually comprise a couple of bunks and a wash basin. There's a TV room, games room and a large dining area where you can get breakfast.

There are a couple of independent hostels closer to the centre. At the top of the steep La Mollard road is **Chalet Ski Station** (☎ 04-50 53 20 25, 📧 chalet-ski-station-chamonix.hotelmix.co.uk/; 45 beds; dortoir €23pp), managed by a delightful woman who set the place up while still a student. It's a very laid-back, no-frills hostel; don't expect luxury but do expect to be made welcome. The alternative is **Gîte Le Vagabond** (☎ 04-50 53 15 43, 📧 www.gitevagabond.com; dortoir €22pp, dortoir demi-pension €35pp, chambre (sgl) demi-pension €45), an expats' retreat on ave Ravel le Rouge, complete with late-night bar.

In the town centre there are plenty of affordable hotels. **Hôtel Le Chamonix** (☎ 04-50 53 11 07, 📧 hotel-le-chamonix.com; 16 rooms) is one of the cheapest and most homely. You'll find it on a quiet street right in the centre, close to the tourist office. Prices range from €39 to €65pp; breakfast costs €10.

Just a short stroll from the railway station is the **Hôtel Pointe Isabelle** (☎ 04-50 53 12 87, 📧 pointeisabelle.com; 45 rooms) with balconies looking onto the busy street. The tariff is €70-94pp with breakfast an extra €13. The hotel's biggest attraction is their restaurant where you can get a filling lunch or dinner (see p70).

The large **Hôtel Croix Blanche** (☎ 04-50 53 00 11, 📧 hoteltcroixblanche-chamonix.fr; 35 rooms) has rooms looking over the hustle and bustle of the town-centre plazas. Prices are from €47-67pp. **Chalet-Hôtel Les Gourmets** (☎ 04-50 53 01 38, 📧 hoteltgourmets-chamonix.com), perched on the riverbank, is close to the town centre yet away from much of the noise associated with it. All rooms are en suite with prices at €55-65pp (from €80pp sgl occ). Along the same road is **Hotel Vallée Blanche** (☎ 04-50 53 04 50; 📧 vallee-blanche.com) with cosy Swiss chalet-style rooms. Rates are around €59-123pp. The traditional **Hôtel Richemond** (☎ 04-50 53 08 85, 📧 richemond.fr; 53 rooms) is a substantial hotel in a quiet location a few minutes' walk from the town centre. The tariff ranges from €59 to €95pp (€74.60 sgl occ).

Less traditional but very swish and comfortable is the towering **Hotel Le Prieuré** (☎ 04-50 53 20 72, 📧 priureuchamonix.com) with a huge number of rooms ranging in price from €66 to €200pp. It's on allée Recteur Payot, not far from the Aiguille du Midi train station.

Finally, if you have money to burn look no further than **Grand Hôtel des Alpes** (☎ 04-50 53 37 80, 📧 grandhoteldesalpes.com; 30 rooms) offering four-star opulence from €129 to €285pp. Breakfast is €25. It has everything you might expect from such an establishment including an indoor swimming pool, Jacuzzi and a private garden.

[cont'd on p70]

Chamonix

0 50 100 150m

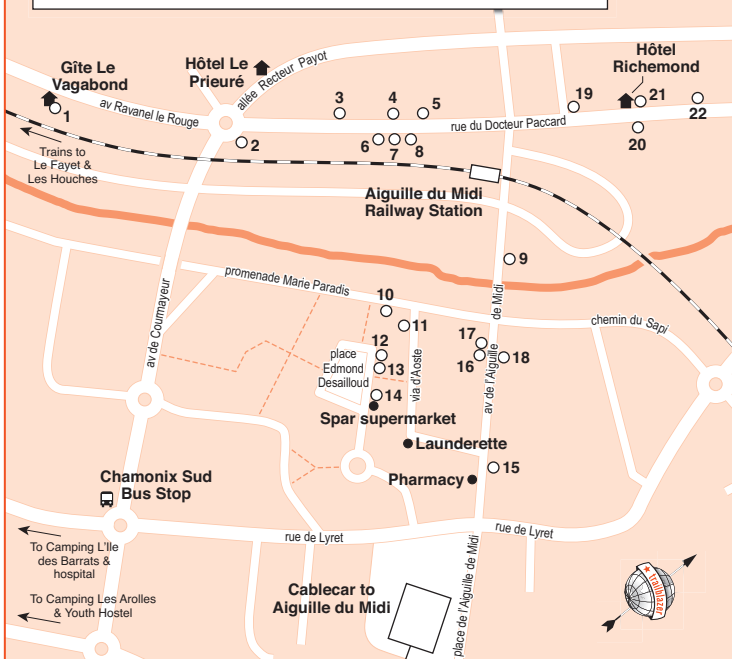


Places to eat and drink

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 Bar Brévent | 13 Bighorn Bistro |
| 2 Annapurna II Indian Restaurant | 14 South Bar |
| 3 Beer o'Clock | 15 Le Dragon d'Or |
| 4 Annapurna Indian Restaurant | 16 Le Fournil |
| 5 Chez Constant | 17 L'Amnesia |
| 6 Chez Paolo | 18 Couleur Café |
| 7 Big Mountain Brewing Co. | 19 Le Bivouac |
| 8 L'Hydromel | 20 The Pub |
| 9 La Ferme | 21 Shouka |
| 10 The Dainty | 22 Le Serac |
| 11 Paradiso Pizza | 23 Poco Loco |
| 12 Monkey Bar | 24 La Maison des Burgers |
| | 25 Chez Yang |
| | 26 Le National |
| | 27 La Caleche |
| | 28 La Fabrica |

Chalet
Ski Station
Hostel

Cablecar to
Plan Praz
(& Brévent)



10pm) for a Savoyarde salad with bacon, nuts and cheese (€22). Next is small, rustic **Le Bivouac** (☎ 04-50 53 34 08), a good place to try fondue (€19-23.50) or hamburger with egg (€17.10).

For burgers with a difference try **L'Hydromel** (☎ 04-50 34 10 35) which has a small outside decking area. They have all sorts of concoctions from goat cheese burger (€19) to salmon tataki burger (€20.50). They also do tapas from €4.50. For traditional dishes try the intimate **Chez Constant** (☎ 04-50 53 96 74) which does fondue Savoyarde for €22.

For the best fresh bread and pastries hunt down the **boulangerie** (bakery), not far from the tourist office on place de l'Église. Seek out café culture at the eastern end of rue Joseph Vallot: at **Café 4810** (☎ 04-50 53 00 43) a tasty salad will set you back €15 and **Arctic Juice Café** on the street corner serves smoothies as cool as the vibe. They also do a great cooked breakfast for €12.

There are a number of crêperies around town. Try **Poco Loco** (☎ 04-50 53 43 03; 11am-10pm) on rue du Docteur Paccard. It is a claustrophobic little place with a bar and a long narrow seating area upstairs. You can choose from a variety of fillings for your crêpe, including chocolate and maple syrup, with prices around the €5 mark. They also do burgers from €7.50. Next door is **La Maison des Burgers** (☎ 04-50 53 44 10; 10am-midnight), a tiny eatery with a street terrace. The burgers cost from €9 and they also do crêpes from €5. **La Ferme** (☎ 04-50 96 76 73) also does good crêpes (from €5 to €15) as well as tartiflette and other Savoyarde dishes for around €15. You'll find it on avenue de l'Aiguillette de Midi.

For those with a gluten-free diet head to **Bizes** (☎ 04-51 92 25 03; noon-2.30pm & 7-10pm) a peaceful and intimate restaurant with vegan curry for €23.50 and lamb shank for €28.50.

If you'd like a taste of cuisine from other parts of the globe you could do worse than **Casa Valerio** (☎ 04-50 55 93 40), a smart Italian joint with pizza and pasta from €9.50. **Chez Paolo** (☎ 04-56 12 30

83) is not quite as smart but does a decent pizza too, from €11.50. They also do pasta dishes from €12.50.

Chinese food can be found at **Chez Yang** (☎ 04-50 53 18 35) which has chicken dishes from €15 and fish from €18. **Annapurna Indian Restaurant** (☎ 04-50 55 81 39), on rue du Dr Paccard, has sumptuous curries from €13.50, plus a second restaurant (**Annapurna II**) with a lovely outside terrace at the far southern end of the same street. Completing our Asian journey, **Tanpopo** (☎ 04-50 93 87 04), near the main railway station, is the go-to restaurant for Japanese food with ramen dishes from €10. They also have vegetarian and vegan options.

Chamonix Sud

South of the river, **Le Fournil** (daily 7am-7pm) caters for early starts with toasties, paninis and an assortment of baked delights. There is a quiet terrace around the back. The very hip **Couleur Café** (☎ 04-57 44 12 38) does more than just good coffee. You can get a quiche and pizza too. In the evening it's a popular bar (see Nightlife).

There are two pizza places at this end of town: **Paradiso Pizza** (☎ 04-50 21 69 84) is always packed. They are mainly a take-away joint but have a few bar stools if you fancy enjoying the crowded atmosphere. For a proper sit-down experience with artisan sourdough pizzas head round the corner to **The Dainty Pizza** (☎ 04-50 96 73 59).

Alternatively, **Le Dragon d'Or** (☎ 04-50 53 37 25; 10am-11pm) does chicken curry (€12.50) and spare ribs (€14).

NIGHTLIFE

Central Chamonix

Throughout the summer the town centre street cafés are chock full throughout the day, as well as into the evening when the late-night bars also open their doors. The best of these are all crammed into one tiny cobbled street: rue des Moulins.

At the far end of the street is Aussie-centric **Bar'd Up** which has a small outside seating area, pool table, computer games and lots of TV screens, with one embedded in the surfboard above the bar. The surfing

Using this guide

ROUTE MAPS

Scale and walking times

The maps that correspond to the daily route descriptions are drawn at approximately 1:20,000 (1cm = 200m; 3¹/₈ inches = one mile). Each route description represents one full day's trekking. It is important to remember that much of the walking is up- and down-hill and the actual distance of a trail section is no indication as to how long it will take you to complete it. So in the margin of each map you'll see the approximate amount of time it takes to get from one point to another. Bear in mind that some people will walk faster than others, based on fitness, quantity of kit carried, the size of the group and the weather conditions encountered. Consequently, these times should be used as a rough guide only.

Note that the time given refers only to the time spent actually walking and doesn't include rest stops or meal breaks. Again, this obviously varies from person to person but as a rough guide add 20-30% to allow for stops. The arrows show to which direction the walking time refers. Finally, the trail map key is on p176.

Up or down?

The track is marked as a dotted line. Much of the Tour is up or down, as the track climbs in and out of Alpine valleys. An arrow across the

❑ GETTING TO LES HOUCHES

The unofficial start and finish of the Tour du Mont Blanc is at the point where the trail crosses the southern end of the Chamonix valley, at Les Houches, about 4 miles (6km) down valley from Chamonix. If staying in Chamonix, or anywhere along the Chamonix valley for that matter, you can get to Les Houches by bus or train quite easily. From the end of June to the end of August **Chamonix Bus** (see 'C'; p22) runs between Chamonix and Les Houches roughly every hour from 6.55am to 7.55pm (with a stop at Les Pèlerins train station, useful for those staying at the youth hostel). Alternatively, hop on the **Mont Blanc Express train** (see 'D'; p22) which runs roughly every 90 minutes on a daily basis throughout the year.

To find the start of the trail once in Les Houches, see box p74.

trail indicates a slope and always points uphill. Two arrows placed close together mean that the gradient is steep. If, for example, you are walking from A (at 900m) to B (at 1200m) and the trail between the two is short and steep, it would be shown thus: A —> >— B.

The Tour du Mont Blanc

LES HOUCHES

Les Houches is a compact town with a village feel. Everything you might need before the trek – food, drink, money – can be found along a short stretch of the main street with a few more options half a mile to the west at **Belleface** (see p76). The Tour du Mont Blanc (TMB) and the trail between the two is short and steep, it would be shown thus: A —> >— B.

There is also a great museum, **Musée Montagnard** (☎ 04-50 54 54 74; July to Aug Wed-Mon 2.30-6pm; €4.10) which has reconstructions of what domestic life in the valley would have been like in the 19th century.

Services

The **tourist information centre** (TIC; ☎ 04-50 55 50 62, 🌐 leshouches.com; daily 9am-noon & 2.30-6.30pm) is right in the centre of the village on the main road, with the usual pile of information on where to stay and eat. They can also give directions to the start of the trail though hopefully the box below is sufficient.

The Carrefour **supermarket** (Mon-Sat 8am-8pm, Sun 8am-1pm) is just behind the TIC. Almost next door to the TIC is a **bank** with ATM and a **pharmacy** (Mon-Sat 9am-12.30pm), while across the road is a **post office**. The **bakery** (Mon-Fri 6am-12.30pm & 3-7pm, Sat 6am-12.30pm, closed Sun) is a good place to get a cheap lunch. At the start of the trek you may need the services of an **outdoor shop** for last-minute supplies. There are three: one in Belleface near the start of the trek and two others about ten minutes' walk east of the centre of Les Houches. At the end of the trek you may require the services of the **laundrette** (see Map 1) which is also ten minutes' walk east of the centre of Les Houches.

Where to stay

Campers should head half a mile west to Belleface (see p76).

If you prefer a **bed** for the night, head for **Gîte Michel Fagot** (☎ 04-50 54 42 28, 🌐 gite-fagot.com) a homely place right in the centre of Les Houches, by the museum,

▣ GETTING TO THE START FROM LES HOUCHES

By bus Arriving in Les Houches you'll alight near the tourist office on the main **rue de l'Essert**. A large archway outside the tourist office indicates the official **start/finish of the TMB**. To get to the trail proper you have a 15-minute stomp alongside the road so you may want to jump on one of the regular buses (line 1) to Le Fouilly. The dirt trail starts right by this bus stop.

By train From the train station (see Map 1) cross the road bridge over the river, then the dual carriageway, before climbing the steep road to reach **rue de l'Église**. Turn right along this road which soon becomes **rue de l'Essert**. Look out for the **tourist office** ahead on the left then follow the directions above to reach the start of the trail. The walk from Les Houches to Le Fouilly should take 30-35 minutes.

☐ TRAMWAY DU MONT BLANC

Tour du Mont Blanc trekkers wishing to cut out the big ascent from Les Houches may like to take this small mountain railway from Le Fayet, or St-Gervais-les-Bains. The railway crosses the Tour du Mont Blanc at both Col de Voza and Bellevue. It then goes up to 2372m and Nid d'Aigle for a fantastic view over the imposing Glacier de Bionnassay.

A return ticket from St-Gervais to Bellevue costs €34. Trains operate between six and eleven times a day depending on the season: see 'N' and 'O' on p23 and the map on pp24-5 for further details.

path climbs to a metalled road. Follow this relentlessly upwards, using the short sections of path to cut off the hairpins until you arrive at La Maison Neuve chairlift.

Continue ever upwards past the grassy ski pistes and through patches of woodland to **Col de Voza** (Map 2). At the col there is an imposing hotel on the *alp* and a small station for the Tramway du Mont Blanc (see box above). **Café La Rioule**, just across the tramway tracks, is a welcome sight after such a relentless climb. Soft drinks, ice-creams and light meals are expensive (€10 for an omelette!) but you'll find it hard to resist. Take a seat outside and admire the view up the Chamonix valley.

COL DE VOZA TO LES CONTAMINES [Map 2, Map 3 p80, Map 4 p87]

The route via Bionnassay is the easier of the two possibilities (see p82 for the Col de Tricot variante) for this section so if you found the first stretch to Col de Voza a little taxing this is the route for you.

From the col continue along the main track, ignoring the turning to the left. The track drops sharply through the trees, passing a series of farm buildings and cottages.

One of these is **Refuge du Fioux** (☎ 04-50 93 52 43, 📧 montourdumontblanc.com; end May to end Sep; 22 beds; demi-pension €52pp) which must have one of the most enviable views in the region. If you are **camping** you can enjoy that view from their lawn where they have a few pitches for tents (€5pp). Meals include potato fritters for €18, salads from €10 and omelettes from €7.

BIONNASSAY

[Map 2]

This sleepy village, clinging to the lush mountainside, is home to **Auberge de Bionnassay** (☎ 04-50 93 45 23, 📧 aubergebionnassay.com; Jun-Sep; 27 beds; dortoir €20pp, dortoir with demi-pension €43pp, chambre €30pp, chambre with demi-pension €52pp). It's right in the centre of the village and makes a good overnight stop for those who are finding the first day a little

punishing. They also do evening meals such as beef (€21) and risotto (€16).

If the **church** is open it's worth popping in to this early 17th century place of worship as it houses some historic paintings, most notably one depicting the Madonna, presented to the church in 1633. While the current building dates to this period, there has been a chapel here since the 14th century

□ TÊTE NORD DES FOURS

MAP 8

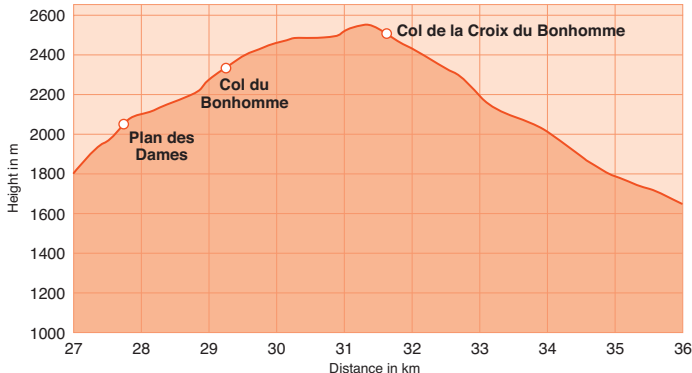
It takes only 10-15 minutes from Col des Fours to reach this 2756m summit. Follow a trail of small cairns across the orange ribs of rock and then across easier ground which takes you onto the summit ridge. There is a less-than-inviting shelter here. It's quite hard to find – hidden behind a rock wall – and is good only for sheltering from the rain as it has no door and a muddy floor. The summit is obvious ahead, marked by a big indicator dial which points out all the mountains you can see on a clear day. The rollcall includes Mont Pouri, Monte Rosa, the Matterhorn and, of course, the beautiful white dome of Mont Blanc looming right there in front of you. Retrace your steps to return to the col. The return trip from the col, not including time spent to admire the view, takes about 20-30 minutes.

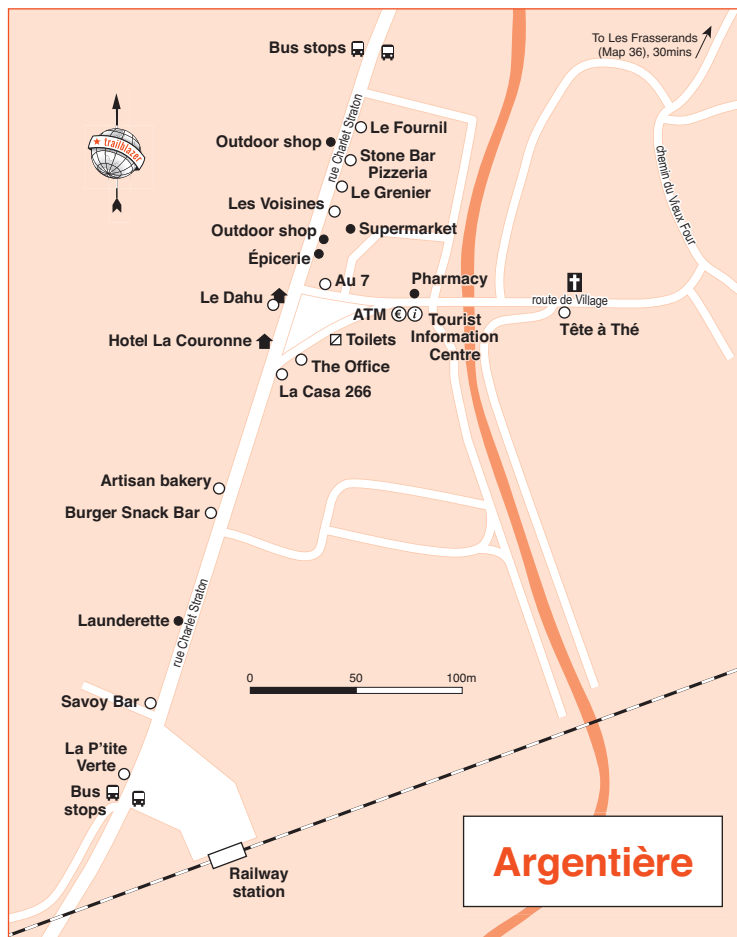
(cont'd from p88) At one point the track crosses an old Roman bridge by a waterfall. Look out too for the **natural bridge**, a rocky arch spanning the tumbling river just west of the track.

A short distance on from the Roman bridge is the *Chalet-Refuge de Nant Borrant* (Map 6; ☎ 04-50 47 03 57, 🌐 refuge-nantborrant.com; June-Sep; 35 beds; demi-pension €52pp). This is the last place to fuel up before the col. They do very tasty local dishes including *assiette de jambon fumé* (smoked ham) and tartiflette, both priced at €16, and sweeter treats such as chocolate waffles for €6. They can also provide a packed lunch for €12.

Leaving the chalet behind, the track now climbs sharply into more woodland before the gradient eases on reaching a beautiful flat area of meadows and cattle pasture in the upper valley. Ten minutes beyond Nant Borrant, at Rollaz, there is a wonderful, informal **campsite** just a couple of minutes off the path in a beautiful spot by the tumbling river. Despite the unceasing crash of the river and the probable clanging of cow bells from the nearby meadow, this is

Maps 7-9: Col du Bonhomme, Col de la Croix du Bonhomme





70pp, breakfast €13). It was closed for major renovation at the time of writing but planned to reopen with a spa and restaurant as well as refurbished rooms.

There is no shortage of places to enjoy a good meal in Argentière. At the northern end of the village the street is lined with restaurants starting with **Stone Bar Pizzeria** (☎ 04-50 54 13 17) which has a vast range

of pizzas with prices starting at €8.50. Next door is **Le Grenier** (☎ 04-50 54 06 00) where you can enjoy everything from crêpes from €4 to burgers from €17. **Les Voisines** (☎ 04-50 54 19 43; Tue-Sat noon-2pm & 7-9pm, Sun noon-2pm) has more sophisticated dishes such as coq au vin for €18 and halibut fillet for €20. You can also eat at **Le Dahu** hotel (see p150) which does

cheeseburgers (€24) and fondue (€24) amongst many other dishes.

On the other side of the road is **Au7**, a tiny bar and restaurant looking over the square; a good place for people-watching while tucking into a hot dog for €7. They also serve veggie breakfasts for €10.

On Route du Village is **Tête à Thé** (☞ 09-53 15 28 39), a quiet spot for lunch away from the busy road. They do a dish of the day for €16 which includes pitta bread dishes.

For food and beer a good bet is **The Office** (☞ 04-50 54 15 46), a bar and restaurant which attracts a mixed crowd to its terrace during the day but is mainly a hangout for 20-somethings when the sun goes down. The food here is good value and plentiful; you can get a burger for €17 and tacos for €12.50.

Down near the train station is an intimate restaurant, **La P'tite Verte** (☞ 04-50 54 54 54), where you can indulge in their excellent steak tartare for €23 and tartiflette for €19. For something quick and cheap head for the **burger snack bar** (burgers from €6.50).

There are two **bakeries**: **Artisan Bakery** and, at the top end of the high street, **Le Fournil**, where you can grab coffee and cake as well as pastries and sandwiches.

For a beer, as well as **The Office** (see column opposite), there is **La Casa 266**, a small bar and nightclub next door serving hotdogs and cocktails, and the **Savoy Bar** at the southern end of the street.

❑ MER DE GLACE AND THE MONTENVERS MOUNTAIN RAILWAY

No words can depict this remarkable scene, the ice being jammed and forced up, and broken into the most hideous gulfs and chasms.

J D Gardner, 1851

The Mer de Glace is the second longest glacier in the Alps and by far the longest in the Mont Blanc massif. Thanks to the relatively easy access to the glacier from the valley below, it has been a place of sightseeing pilgrimage for over 250 years. This resulted in the construction of the Montenvers Hôtel, on the ridge above the ice. Since 1908 tourists have been carried up to the hotel and viewpoint by the mountain railway. The size of the glacier is almost overwhelming but you can get a real sense of its scale by looking for the tiny black figures of climbers crossing the ice on their way to the peaks in the heart of the Mont Blanc massif.

There is a long flight of stairs below the restaurant that leads right down to the glacier, or you can take a cablecar some of the way. Once you reach the ice the path continues right into the glacier. This man-made tunnel or 'ice grotto' goes under the blue ice and takes you past sculptures carved into the wall.

There is a sinister side to this experience. The glacier has been shrinking at an astonishing rate, so much so that the cable car that once carried passengers down to the edge of the glacier no longer reaches far enough. In 1990 twelve steps had to be built below the cable-car station so sightseers could continue the journey to the ice. Every year more sections of steps have to be added as the ice retreats further and further. Today there are around 400 steps down the cliff-face. As you descend the steps look out for the signs bolted into the rock, each one with a year written on it showing you the level of the glacier at that point in that given year. As an example of the impact of climate change there can be few sights more chilling; the retreating Mer de Glace is a canary in a coalmine.

The train leaves from the smaller railway station in Chamonix (see map p69; it's behind the main station). A return ticket costs €37 (for further information see 'S' p23 and the map pp24-5).

MAP 39

55-75 MINS TO CHAIRLIFT
(MAP 38)

PLAN PRAZ

45-75 MINS

LE BRÉVENT

60-90 MINS FROM
REFUGE DE BELLACHAT (MAP 40)

GR5 ROUTE;
WRONG WAY!
COL DE BRÉVENT
(2368M)

WRONG WAY!
WILD COUNTRY
AWAY FROM
SKI
INSTALLATIONS

GOOD
IBEX
COUNTRY
SHORT
SCRAMBLE

ROUTE FINDING
TRICKY IN LOW
CLOUD LOOK FOR
PAINT MARKS ON
ROCKS & CAIRNS

ILLUSION OF
WILDERNESS ENDS
AT THE TRACK
VIEWS TOWARDS
FLEINE

LAC DU BRÉVENT

WRONG WAY!

CLIMB RIDGE A
SHORT DISTANCE
BEFORE CONTOURING
ROUND NORTH FLANK

PATH THROUGH
ROCKY BOWL

STEPS UP TO
VIEWING TERRACE

LE BRÉVENT 2525M

LADDERS

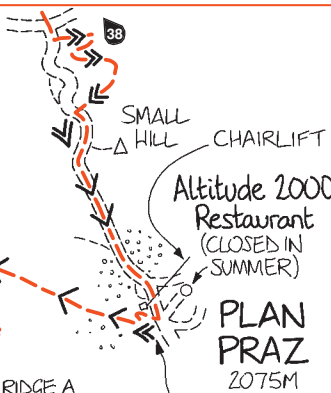
CABLECAR
VIEWING TERRACE
& ECOMUSEUM
RESTAURANT

GREAT VIEWS
OF MONT BLANC



PATH FOLLOWS
BEAUTIFUL
RIDGE

IRON
RAILINGS



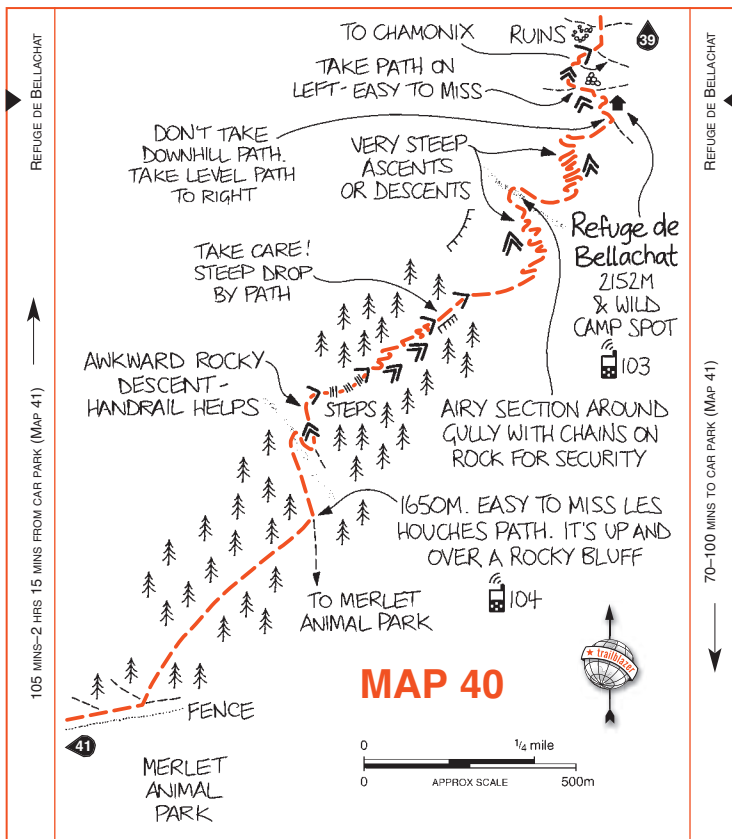
45-60 MINS FROM CHAIRLIFT
(MAP 38)

PLAN PRAZ

60-90 MINS

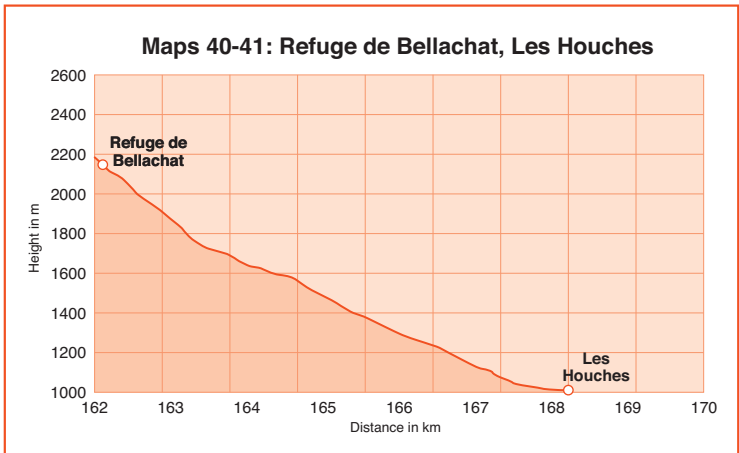
LE BRÉVENT

45-60 MINS TO
REFUGE DE BELLACHAT (MAP 40)



Mont Blanc there is from a restaurant table. On top of the crag, above the restaurant, there is a small **ecomuseum** (free entry) with displays on the local fauna and flora. You can also get a **cable car** (€27.50; mid Jun to mid July & Sep 9am-4pm, mid Jul to Aug 8am-5pm) down to Plan Praz and from there down to Chamonix. Tour walkers, however, must do it on foot!

The descent begins on the west side of the summit where a path snakes down through a beautiful landscape of undulating ridges decorated with shrubs and boulder fields. It's a drawn-out descent so it's worth taking a break at **Refuge de Bellachat** (Map 40; ☎ 07-89 03 30 38, 📧 refuge-bellachat.com; end Jun to mid Sep; 24 beds). A bed here costs €57pp for demi-pension. Ignore the path that drops down from the hut and instead follow the level one to the west. After negotiating a couple of very steep sections – eased by the tight zigzagging



path – you enter the cool forest. While it may feel like the end is fast approaching, there is still some way to go. Continue past **Merlet Animal Park** (see p171) to a car park (Map 41).

About one hundred metres down the road from the car park pick up the trail again on the left. This heads down to the 70-year-old, 17-metre-high **Christ Roi** statue where you can stay in a beautiful old farm building in the woods, **Tupilak** (off Map 41; see p75), then down to a wide track, past some houses to the road.

Cross the railway and the river and climb the road into **Les Houches**. Well done! You've circumnavigated the Mont Blanc massif. That calls for a celebration – you can either stay in Les Houches (see pp74-5) or, if you prefer, head for the bright lights and bustle of Chamonix. You can catch a train there from the station you passed as you approached the village or a bus from the stop near the tourist information centre.

See pp22-5 for public transport details and pp65-72 for all the essential information on Chamonix.

THE ASCENT OF MONT BLANC

Having wandered around Mont Blanc's hem for a week or two you might feel lured to her icy summit. This is not an expedition to be taken lightly and is a long way from the world of trekking. That so many people climb the mountain (20,000 people do so each year) makes it appear easy to inexperienced mountain travellers. Seasoned alpine climbers may refer to the ascent as simply a snow plod but this is nothing more than elitist talk. In reality, climbing Mont Blanc is a serious Alpine mountaineering expedition that involves a minimum of three days of preparation on lesser peaks. You should have at least some winter mountaineering experience before even considering the ascent.

Mont Blanc poses few technical difficulties, depending on your route choice, but she will regularly pick off folk who set off with no understanding of how fierce and unpredictable she can be. People come a cropper on the mountain every year. A lack of experience leads to death through exposure, exhaustion, falling through crevasses, triggering of avalanches and rockfalls. You should certainly not attempt an ascent of Mont Blanc without first climbing one or two other mountains of between 3000 metres and 4000 metres. This will help you build up your fitness, acclimatise to the altitude and prepare you for the physical and mental effort required.

For advice on climbing Mont Blanc head for the **Office de Haute Montagne de Chamonix** (see box p66; ☎ 04 50 53 22 08, 🌐 chamoniarde.com; Mon-Sat 9am-noon & 3-6pm) in Maison de la Montagne, at 190 place de l'Eglise, 74400, Chamonix (see map, p69). Further good advice is available on the **British Mountaineering Council** website at 🌐 thebmc.co.uk/how-to-climb-mont-blanc.

WITH OR WITHOUT A GUIDE?

Mountaineers with plenty of experience of climbing in the Alps will know what to expect and will not need a guide. If you are wondering whether you have enough experience or not, you need a guide. Even if you have a guide you should still have some experience of climbing mountains in winter conditions, be it in the Alps or elsewhere.

Most guiding companies charge around €2000-2900pp which also includes the cost of food, accommodation and lift passes. There should be no more than two people per guide on the summit attempt.

- **Mont Blanc Guides** (☎ +44 (0)117-230 0144, 🌐 montblancguides.com) Six-day courses from €2995; includes half-board accommodation through the week and transport but not lunches.
- **Mountain Adventure Guides** (☎ +44 (0)330-321 1017, 🌐 mountainadventureguides.co.uk) Six-day courses from £2250 per person which includes half-board accommodation in the mountain huts and self-catering accommodation in the valley but not transport or meals in the valley.
- **Montagne Expeditions** (☎ 04-81 68 55 90, 🌐 montagne-expedition.com; 150 Route des Papillons, 74400, Chamonix) Three-day courses from €1395 per person and six-day courses from €2250 per person.

For mountain guides based in **Courmayeur, Italy**, contact **Società delle Guide Alpine Maestri di Alpinismo di Courmayeur** (see p112; ☎ +39 0165 842064, 🌐 guidecourmayeur.com; opposite the church on Via Roma, Courmayeur; daily 9am-12.30pm & 4-7pm). They offer six-day courses culminating in an ascent of Mont Blanc from €1425 for up to four people. The price includes guiding and transfers only.

WEATHER AND CLIMATE

The most popular months for the ascent are June to September; this is when most guiding companies offer their ascent courses. There is good reason for this: the weather is usually more reliable and there is less snow. However, it is possible to climb Mont Blanc at any time of year, depending on the weather. If you wish to do so with a guide, contact **Office de Haute Montagne de Chamonix** (see p164) to find out which guides are willing to take clients outside the main climbing season.

WHAT TO TAKE

This is not a trek so you can forget the trail shoes. This is a **mountaineering expedition** so you will need the following: ice axe and crampons, rope and harness, four-season mountaineering boots and clothing, goggles, helmet, flask, water bottle and sun block. You might want to take some of the items listed on p35-9 too.

THE ROUTES

There are a number of routes to the summit. Most mountain guides use the **Goûter Route** which is described below along with a couple of alternatives. These **general overviews** are intended as brief summaries and not detailed descriptions of the routes. The descent route is simply the reverse of the ascent route in each case. Other routes are possible but are not described here.

The Goûter Route

This is the most popular and least difficult approach, although it does involve a dangerous crossing of the Grand Couloir which is renowned for its incessant rockfalls. These have become more frequent in recent years; a consequence of

descending again to Col de la Brenva. Finally, you can begin to climb Mont Blanc itself via the Petits Mulets.

The Cosmiques Route is technically more difficult than the Goûter Route and you should attempt it only if you have experience of climbing in the Alps with ice axe and crampons.

The Grands Mulets Route

The route that Paccard and Balmat (see pp42-5) took to become the first men to stand on Mont Blanc's summit, the Grands Mulets Route is still used but is not as popular as it once was. It starts at the middle station on the Aiguille du Midi cable car and traverses the Glacier des Bossons before coming to the overnight stop at *Refuge des Grands Mulets* (☎ 07-50 70 45 99; Apr-Sep) at 3051m. The following day involves a lot of ascent so you will need to be very fit. From the hut you continue up the glacier to join the Goûter Route between Dôme du Goûter and Vallot Emergency Hut.

MOUNTAIN SAFETY

There is detailed information on mountain safety in Part 1 (see pp57-64) but there is one particular illness that is specific to climbing at high altitude: acute mountain sickness, or AMS, which is dealt with here.

Acute mountain sickness (AMS)

This is commonly referred to as altitude sickness and is a serious threat to anyone climbing above 3000 metres, particularly those who are inexperienced at high-altitude climbing because they are less aware of just how lethal it can be. AMS is caused by too rapid an ascent and a failure of the body to adapt quickly enough to the decrease in oxygen that occurs with altitude. It affects about three in ten people to a significant degree and has nothing to do with fitness. AMS itself does not kill but, if ignored, it can lead to high altitude cerebral edema (HACE; usually spelt HACO – high altitude cerebral oedema – in Britain) or high altitude pulmonary oedema (HAPE or HAPO) which is the build up of fluid in the brain and lungs respectively. Both of these conditions are fatal if ignored.

To avoid AMS, HAPE and HACE it is important to look out for the symptoms and act on them. The symptoms of AMS include headache, dizziness, nausea and loss of appetite. If you suspect AMS it's important to stop climbing any higher. Take plenty of rest and consider spending an extra night at a hut rather than attempting to climb higher. If the symptoms get worse you should descend.

Symptoms of HAPE include severe headache, lack of coordination, slurring of speech and blurred vision while the symptoms of HACE include breathlessness (even when resting), blue tinges to the lips and fingertips and drowsiness. These are serious symptoms and the only course of action that should be countenanced is to descend and get medical attention as soon as possible.

For more information on AMS look at the excellent *First Aid and Wilderness Medicine* by Dr Jim Duff and Dr Ross Anderson (Cicerone).

OTHER ACTIVITIES

7

You've photographed, admired, circumnavigated, and maybe even conquered Mont Blanc – but there are plenty of other things to do on or near the mountain to help you fill those last few days of your trip.

AIGUILLE DU MIDI

Cable car (☎ 04-50 53 22 75, 🌐 www.compagniedumontblanc.fr) runs daily at regular intervals (weather dependent). Chamonix–Aiguille du Midi €73 return. See p26 for details of the Mont Blanc Multipass. See also 'T' p23 and map pp24-5.

The Aiguille du Midi is a pinnacle of rock on a snowbound mountain ridge high above the Chamonix valley. The summit of the Aiguille is 3842m above sea level and it is nearly 3000m above the valley floor. When you take these figures into consideration it seems all the more remarkable that in 1956 engineers successfully finished construction of a cable car from Chamonix to the top of the mountain. It would not have been possible were it not for the vision of the Italian engineer Count Monte Dino Lora Totino or the thirty mountain guides who hauled a cable nearly two kilometres long and weighing over a tonne from Chamonix to the summit of that rocky needle.

The journey takes you from the bustle of Chamonix's streets in the warmth of the valley floor to a world of ice, crumbling black peaks and heart-stopping views. This is the kind of mountain scenery that is usually enjoyed only by mountaineers.

The cable car takes just 10 minutes to reach the lower station at Plan de l'Aiguille before arriving, another 10 minutes later, at Aiguille du Midi station at 3777m, a vast metallic building that clings to the rocky pinnacle. Here is a café, snack bar and restaurant but it is surely the views that you've come to see. Of the four terraces facing in different directions, it is the summit terrace that gives the all-round panorama and a real on-top-of-the-world feeling. A lift takes you up through the pinnacle to it where you can amble about safely and gawp at the mesmerising views. There is a barrier around the terrace to stop you from falling back to Chamonix.

While the 360° panorama includes the likes of the Matterhorn and Monte Rosa, it is Mont Blanc, just 3½ miles away as the alpine chough flies, that will command most of your attention. From the valley the summit of the mountain appears to be in a different world but here it feels conquerable.



CLIMBING

Chamonix is often called the birthplace of mountaineering but it also has a long history of climbing, blessed as it is with superb granite and limestone and reliably good weather to boot.

There are of course some magnificent winter climbs at high altitude but there are also plenty of crags and bouldering sites in the Chamonix valley. Beginners will need to get some tuition. Many of the mountain guides listed on pp165-6 offer climbing instruction.

Those who already know their figures of eight from their pieces of eight will be spoilt for choice. Try one of the following sites (there are many more):

Les Gaillands

Situated just outside the village of Les Pélerins, on the outskirts of Chamonix, this is a very popular crag with bolted routes for everyone from beginner to rock jock. A perfect place for those who like an audience; tourists often congregate to gawp and point.

Le Brévent

Take the cable car from Chamonix and you will find yourself with plenty of multi-pitch routes.

La Joux

A small crag halfway between Chamonix and Argentière with 20m pitches and some bouldering opportunities too.

L'Aiguillette d'Argentière

This sharp needle of rock high above Argentière offers breathtaking views. Trekkers on the Tour du Mont Blanc will be familiar with it as it stands right by the trail on the way up to Tête aux Vents in the Aiguilles Rouges. Getting to the needle involves walking along, and up, the Tour du Mont Blanc for about



Climbers on L'Aiguillette d'Argentière

MAP WAYPT	MAP REF	DESCRIPTION	WHAT3WORDS
29 075	46.033713 7.103025	Bovine TMB rock at road/track junction	poppy.anguished.ringers
29 076	46.039723 7.094150	Track junction, Champex d'en Haut	scarcely.depths.palaces
29 077	46.030008 7.092957	Relais d'Arpette, variante route	masks.cups.stream
29b 078	46.019062 7.039872	Fenêtre d'Arpette	disposing.televised.tastier
30 079	46.046956 7.091453	Bridge at Champex d'en Bas	customers.polished.trek
30 080	46.049644 7.081324	Path meets/leaves road at Plan de l'Au	repelled.treatment.delight
31 081	46.055430 7.049699	Alp Bovine	alpha.skinny.threading
31 082	46.055974 7.033472	La Giète shepherd's hut & cross	eyeliner.name.replaces
32 083	46.057804 7.001369	Hôtel Col de la Forclaz	caravan.hotspots.pointer
32 084	46.046318 6.994451	Campsite Le Peuty	supplier.could.muted
33 085	46.040527 6.993127	River crossing	modifies.handle.offerings
33 086	46.034769 6.988274	Picnic table after/before zigzags	lived.defectors.tilting
33 087	46.023030 7.004760	Chalet des Grands	cadet.sketches.ridiculed
34 088	46.026798 6.970175	Refuge du Col de Balme	distanced.mealtime.surpassed
34 089	46.024627 6.951511	Path/track junction by huge red, white & blue signs	mingle.suffix.stimulate
35 090	46.018187 6.940331	Summit Aiguillettes des Posettes	salsa.confronting.oiling
35 091	46.005539 6.933577	Junction with path to/from Col des Posettes	northbound.juvenile.tangerine
36 092	45.998978 6.923996	Car park; path meets road	toasted.farmworkers.suburb
36 093	45.996642 6.926938	Junction with path to Easter Island statues	fundraisers.warrior.stir
36 094	45.984627 6.907572	Path junction	beaded.messaging.shrink
37 095	45.981468 6.891940	Stream crossing by Refuge du Lac Blanc	squealing.negotiating.error
37 096	45.973731 6.893017	Metal ramp and railings	trotted.rodeo.flung
38 097	45.960770 6.886955	La Flégère cable car station	tragically.laidback.paths
38 098	45.951112 6.869361	Path crosses track	horsepower.dualist.simplicity
39 099	45.938298 6.848891	Path/track junction near ski installations	unsubtle.slimmer.purport
39 100	45.941402 6.843460	Col de Brévent	tidally.toads.wanderer
39 101	45.933911 6.836930	Path/track junction at Le Brévent	pirate.beetles.assails
39 102	45.926535 6.833196	Hairpin by iron railings	stadiums.redeem.extraneous
40 103	45.922163 6.829602	Refuge Bellachat	compel.freefall.mountaineer
40 104	45.911099 6.820883	Merlet, 1650m, path junction	mapmaker.lasting.tinkling
41 105	45.905584 6.811691	Parking de Merlet, 1370m	lacework.latitudes.tolerate
41 106	45.902875 6.801780	Christ Roi statue	ornaments.allege.lodgers
41 107	45.893579 6.797036	Les Houches railway station	cleanser.pose.meekness

APPENDIX C – USEFUL WORDS AND PHRASES

General

	FRENCH	ITALIAN
Do you speak English?	<i>Parlez-vous Anglais?</i>	<i>Parlate Inglese?</i>
I can't speak French/Italian	<i>Je ne parle pas Français</i>	<i>Non parlo Italiano</i>
Please speak slowly	<i>Parlez plus lentement s'il vous plaît</i>	<i>Parli prego lentamente</i>
How are you?	<i>Comment allez-vous?</i>	<i>Come sta?</i>
Fine thanks and you?	<i>Bien merci, et vous?</i>	<i>Bene, grazie</i>
Hello	<i>Salut</i>	<i>Ciao</i>
Good morning	<i>Bonjour</i>	<i>Buongiorno</i>
Good evening	<i>Bonsoir</i>	<i>Buona sera</i>
Goodnight	<i>Bon nuit</i>	<i>Buona notte</i>
Goodbye	<i>Au revoir</i>	<i>Arrivederci</i>
See you tomorrow	<i>à demain</i>	<i>A domani</i>
See you later	<i>à bientôt</i>	<i>A più tardi</i>
Please	<i>S'il vous plaît</i>	<i>Per favore</i>
Thank you	<i>Merci</i>	<i>Grazie</i>
You're welcome/Don't mention it/That's okay	<i>De rien</i>	<i>Prego</i>
Excuse me	<i>Excusez-moi</i>	<i>Mi scusi</i>
I'm sorry	<i>Je suis désolé</i>	<i>Mi perdoni</i>
Closed	<i>Fermé(e)</i>	<i>Chiuso</i>

Accommodation

Do you have a room with one/two/three beds?	<i>Avez vous une chambre avec un/deux/trois lit(s)?</i>	<i>Avete una stanza con una base/due basi/tre basi?</i>
I'd like a single room/ a room with two beds	<i>Je voudrais une chambre pour une personne/deux personnes</i>	<i>Vorrei una camera singola/doppia matrimoniale</i>
Can I leave my luggage here?	<i>Puis-je laisser mes bagages ici?</i>	<i>Posso lasciare i miei bagagli qui?</i>
How much is...?	<i>C'est combien...?</i>	<i>Quanto è...?</i>
Accommodation	<i>Hébergement</i>	<i>Alloggio</i>
Shelter	<i>Abri</i>	<i>Riparo</i>
Inn/guesthouse	<i>Auberge/Gîte</i>	<i>Pensione</i>
Room	<i>Chambre</i>	<i>Stanza</i>
Half board	<i>Demi-pension</i>	<i>Mezza-pensione</i>
Dormitory	<i>Dortoir</i>	<i>Dormitorio</i>
Mountain Hut/Shelter	<i>Refuge/Cabane</i>	<i>Rifugio</i>
Bath	<i>Bain</i>	<i>Bagno</i>

Eating out

A table for one/two/ three please	<i>Une table pour une/deux/trois personne(s) s'il vous plaît</i>	<i>Un tavolo per una/due/ tre per favore</i>
The menu please	<i>Le menu s'il vous plaît</i>	<i>Il menu per favore</i>
What is this?	<i>Qu'est-ce que c'est?</i>	<i>Che cosa è questo?</i>
I'll have that	<i>Je prends ça</i>	<i>Prendo quello</i>
Starter	<i>Entrée</i>	<i>Il primo</i>
Main course	<i>Plat principal</i>	<i>Piatto principale</i>
Pudding	<i>Dessert</i>	<i>Dolce</i>
The bill please	<i>L'addition s'il vous plaît</i>	<i>La fattura per favore</i>

APPENDIX F – MOUNTAIN PHOTOGRAPHY

MOUNTAIN PHOTOGRAPHY

The art of mountain photography is in the ability to capture, in a two-dimensional image, the essence of these wild places; quite a challenge when one considers that mountains are not just a visual treat but a stimulus to all our senses. The trick therefore is to use the visual element to convey the sounds, scents and overall mood.

Light is a key consideration in this. The best time to photograph mountains is at dawn and dusk when the sun is low in the sky, casting shadows that capture the topography of the land. For the same reason, autumn and spring often throw up some beautifully subtle light, although these aren't the best seasons to walk the TMB as the huts are closed and the passes blocked by snow.

There are ways to improve your photography and learn from your own mistakes and successes. In the old pre-digital days of film each shot was expensive and you couldn't see it until days or weeks later; photographers would make sure they got the shot right first time. In today's world of digital photography we can take lots of shots, see the results instantly and keep tweaking the settings until we are happy. The disadvantage of this is we can become lazy and not put enough effort into getting the shot right first time but the advantage is you can experiment with different exposures, compositions and camera angles.

Anyone who takes landscape photography seriously will use a tripod. These are essential for holding the camera steady in low-light conditions when a slow shutter speed is needed. Using a slow shutter speed also helps bring out the natural colours in a photograph.

Composing a picture is down to personal taste. Most photographers agree that having a background, middle and foreground, works best. Having something in the foreground, a rock or stream for example, complements the mountains in the background, while natural lines leading to a focal point also work well.

But sticking to rules is the way to stem creativity. If the sky is full of beautiful cloud patterns then why not fill most of the frame with sky? And why not shoot into the sun with a small aperture? Doing so can create dramatic silhouettes of the mountains or your fellow trekkers. Many people put their cameras away when it's raining and grey but, if you know what to shoot, this can be a great time to get some moody shots. Dark clouds swirling around granite peaks can make for a dramatic image. Experimenting with different techniques is the best way to learn what works for you.

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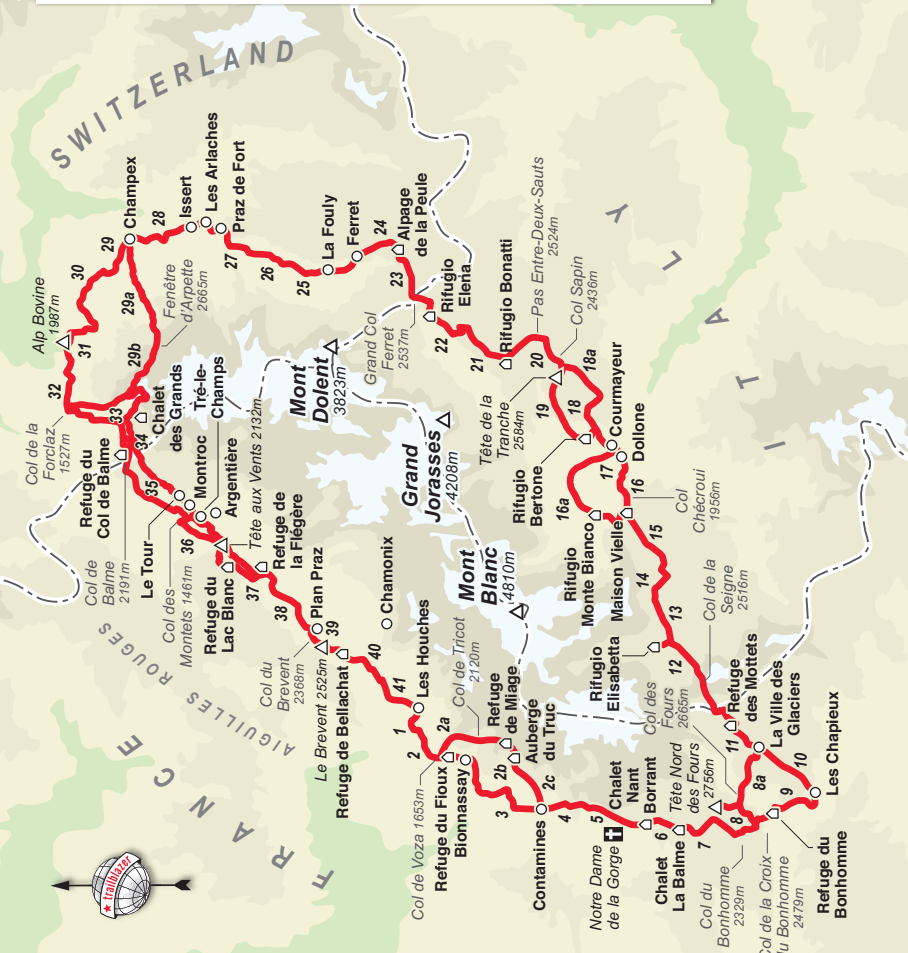
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