

TOUR OF MONT BLANC

by
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CICERONE

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the memory of Andrew Harper (1930–2001), author of the first English-language guide to the Tour of Mont Blanc.

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Front cover: Mont Blanc from the Grand Balcon Sud between La Flégère and Le Brévent

STAGE 3

Les Chapieux – Col de la Seigne – Rifugio Elisabetta

Start point	Les Chapieux (1554m)
Distance	15km
Height gain	1004m
Height loss	258m
Time	4½–5hrs
High point	Col de la Seigne (2516m)
Accommodation	Les Mottets (2hrs) – privately-owned refuge Rifugio Elisabetta – CAI refuge

On this stage the TMB crosses out of France and enters Italy at the Col de la Seigne, one of the easiest crossings of the circuit, but one which also happens to be among the most scenic. Given reasonable visibility, the view of Mont Blanc and the Aiguille Noire from Col de la Seigne is stunning, and is seen at its best early in the morning.

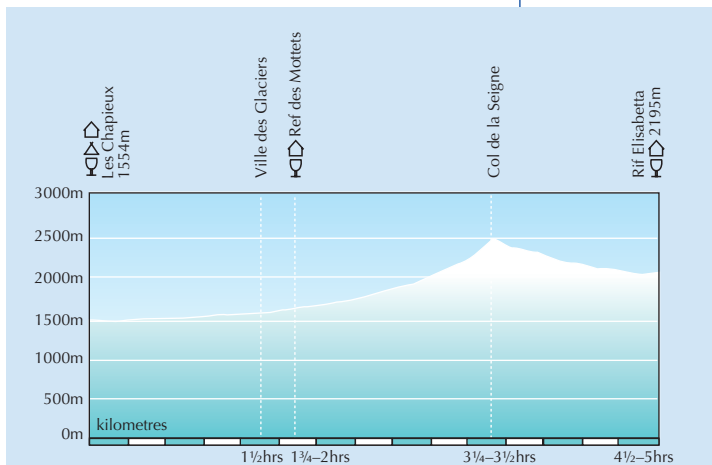
This relatively short stage will enable you to relax a little after what will have been two fairly demanding days, and there's a good chance you'll arrive at Rifugio Elisabetta with plenty of time in hand.

Walk out of Les Chapieux heading northeast along the road, shortly joining company with the river and entering a defile which is, in effect, the demarcation between the lower and upper valleys. Less than 1km from Les Chapieux take a signed footpath on the right which entices you off the road, exchanging what would otherwise be a slog on tarmac, for a more pleasant walk. The path climbs some way above the road before sloping down to cross the river on a fine bridge, then continues heading upstream through the Vallée des Glaciers, at the head of which the pinnacle of the Aiguille des Glaciers is the most prominent feature. Soon the Col de la Seigne appears to the right of the aiguille. Drawing level with the few farm buildings of **La Ville des Glaciers** (1789m, 1½hrs), the footpath comes onto a track feeding from the road. It is here that the Col des Fours

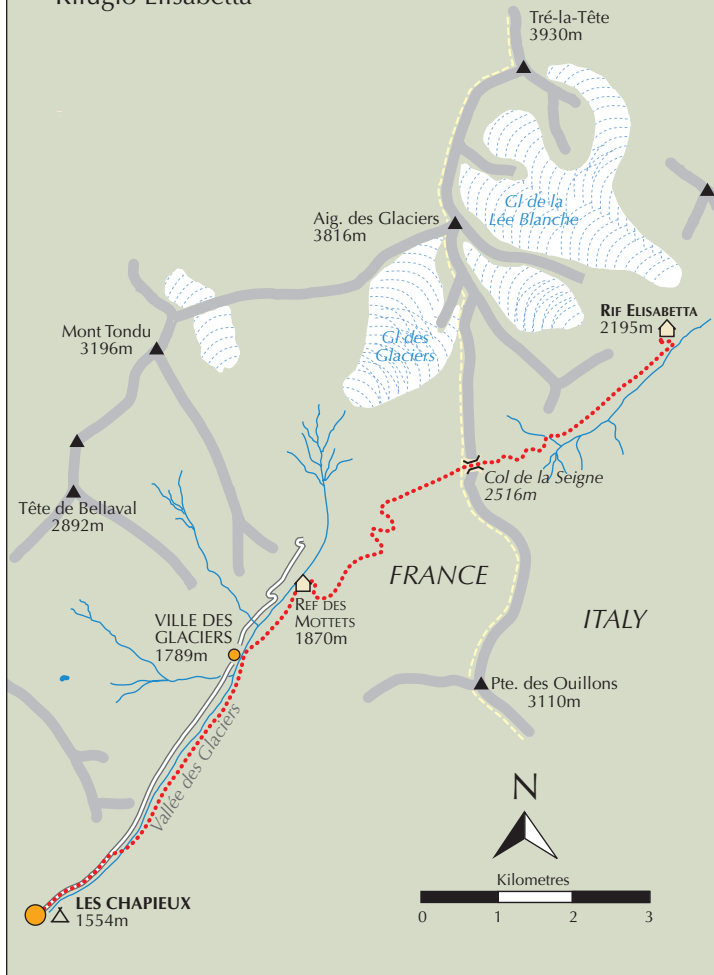


variante joins the main route. There's a toilet block just across the bridge here, and an opportunity to top up water bottles. Apart from the refuge 30mins ahead, there will be no further guaranteed supply until you reach Rifugio Elisabetta.

The small hamlet of Les Chapieux nestles on a bend in the Vallée des Glaciers



Les Chapieux
to
Rifugio Elisabetta



The valley's upper basin now spreads out to reveal the rocky eminence of Mont Tondou, above to the left; a pastoral area that encroaches as far as the outliers of the Mont Blanc massif. Follow the track ahead to the ruins of a one-time hotel and continue to the former dairy farm that has been converted to the

REFUGE DES MOTTETS (1870m, 2hrs) accommodation, refreshments; 90 dortoir places; open mid-June to mid-Sept (Tel 04 79 07 01 70; www.lesmottets.com).

This is an atmospheric place for a night's lodging, with a dining room decorated with an assortment of old cheese-making implements, and the former cowshed turned into a dormitory. As it is the only place for refreshments between Les Chapieux and Rifugio Elisabetta, it's worth stopping to tank up before heading for the pass.

From here the route to the col is neither long nor particularly arduous, although it has a few short, steep sections. Initially a broad, well-graded path, it later breaks into a skein of often muddy trails. Ascending high pastures, it dips into a stream-cut ravine and eases up the final broad slope that leads to the **Col de la Seigne** (11) (2516m, 3¼–3½hrs) and the revelation of a new world.

Arrival at the col is an eye-opener. Standing on the borders of France and Italy views in all directions are magnificent. Directly ahead the hillside falls away into a long, deep trench that forms a moat to the southern bastions of the Mont Blanc range. Immediately below the col the Vallon de la Lée Blanche, guarded by the Pyramides Calcaires, spills into the Val Veni, which in itself leads to the (Italian) Val Ferret, at whose head the Grand Col Ferret will be crossed in another three days' time. Beyond that rise Mont Vélán and the Grand Combin. Along the right-hand wall of this 'moat' a rumpled green hillside carries the route of the TMB, while the left-hand wall boasts a succession of astonishingly rugged peaks and spiky ridges interrupted by cascades of ice and grey moraines. Dominant in all this is the graceful iced dome of Mont Blanc itself, with the spectacular



on the left. The trail is often greasy in places, with some steeply descending sections. On occasion a brief view is gained through the trees to Martigny on a bend in the Rhône valley, and of the road which snakes its way up through the Martigny Combe to Forclaz.

At last the path emerges from woodland with the **Col de la Forclaz (19)** just ahead.

COL DE LA FORCLAZ (1526m, 4½–5hrs)
refreshments, shop, bus to Martigny and Trient,
accommodation in Hotel du Col de la Forclaz, 40
dortoir places, 35 beds, camping, open mid-Dec to
Nov (Tel 027 722 26 88; colforclazhotel@bluewin.ch;
www.coldelaforclaz.ch).

Note Dortoir accommodation is also available in Trient
(+ 30mins) and Le Peuty – also camping (+ 45mins) in
the Vallée du Trient below to the west. See Stage 9 below
for details.

*The Bovine alp, with
the Grand Combin in
the distance floating
among the clouds*

- Hotel du Col de la Forclaz (in 45mins) – beds and dortoirs
- Refuge Les Grands – no meals provision (1½hrs)
- Le Peuty for gîte and camping (30mins) and Trient (45mins) for dortoirs.

Much, of course, will depend on your state of fitness after the demands of the route so far. But you'll also need to consider tomorrow's route too, for there's more than one way to reach the Col de Balme on Stage 9. All of the above overnight options are on one route or another to the col, except the Forclaz hotel. Walkers choosing to spend the night there will either return to this junction at Chalet du Glacier or descend to the road near Trient and walk back upvalley. Details will be found under Stage 9.

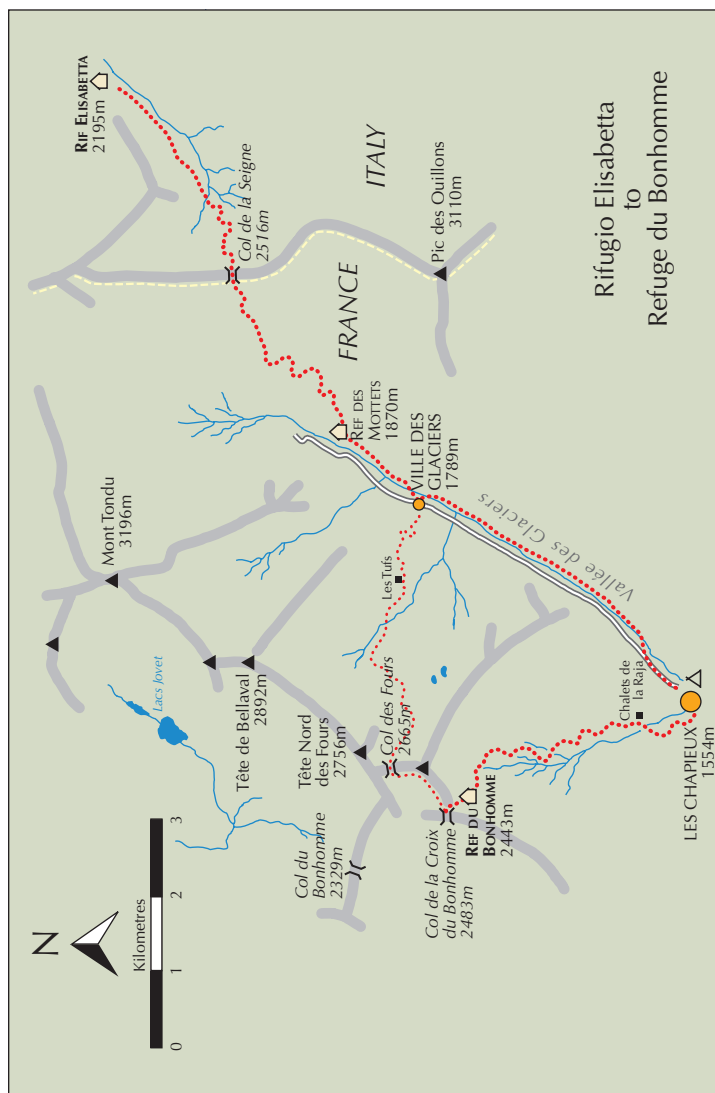
Route to Col de la Forclaz

Do not cross the torrent, but keep ahead along the easy, near-level path which accompanies the Bisse du Trient (22) for about 45mins all the way to the

HOTEL DU COL DE LA FORCLAZ (1526m, 6½hrs) refreshments, shop, bus to Martigny and Trient, accommodation; 40 dortoir places, 35 beds, camping, open mid-Dec to Nov (Tel 027 722 26 88; colforclazhotel@bluewin.ch; www.coldelaforclaz.ch).

Route to Refuge Les Grands

Bear left at the signpost below the Chalet du Glacier, cross the footbridge and turn left on a good path which rises along the wooded hillside. When the path forks take the upper option (the alternative leads to the Alpage des Petoudes). Shortly after this junction the gradient steepens, and the path climbs in zigzags up the west side of the narrow valley falling from the Glacier des Grands. At the top of the zigzags the way slants to the right and crosses a shelf (safeguarded with fixed cable) against an impressive rock slab, and just above this comes to the



Rifugio Elisabetta
to
Refuge du Bonhomme



*Once a dairy farm,
Refuge des Mottets
now provides
accommodation for
TMB walkers below
Col de la Seigne*

dormitories, and the dining room in the main building being decorated with an assortment of old cheese-making and farming implements. Some evenings the guardianne entertains with music on her accordion.

A short distance beyond the refuge cross a stream on a footbridge, and a few paces after this join a track. When it curves to cross a bridge below the farming hamlet of **La Ville des Glaciers** (1789m; water supply and toilet block), take a footpath heading downvalley, still on the left bank of the Torrent des Glaciers. However, should it be your plan to take the Col des Fours *variante*, cross the bridge, go up the slope to the buildings and follow directions as below.

Main Route via Les Chapieux

Follow the left bank footpath heading downstream. Shortly before reaching Les Chapieux, it crosses the river then climbs above the road for a while before sloping down onto the road leading into the hamlet of

STAGE 10

Trient – Alp Bovine – Champex

Start point	Trient (1279m)
Distance	17km
Height gain	929m
Height loss	742m
Time	5½hrs
High point	Collet Portalo (2040m)
Accommodation	Col de la Forclaz (45mins) – hotel/dortoir, camping Bovine (2½hrs) – emergency dortoir only Champex d'en Haut (4½hrs) – gîte, hotel Champex – hotels, pensions, gîte, camping
Alternative route	Les Grands – Fenêtre d'Arpette – Champex (see Alternative Stage 10)

Of the two routes to Champex, this is the easier – but it does have its challenging sections, and some surprising views of the Rhône Valley, Bernese Alps and Grand Combin. For the Fenêtre d'Arpette *variante*, see below.

The day begins by walking up the hillside to the Col de la Forclaz, and to achieve this you make your way above the church in Trient to the main road, where you bear right. A short distance along this, turn off by a stone cross on a broad grass track rising above the road. Entering woodland, this track brings you onto the Forclaz road. Bear right for a few paces, then cross a footbridge to a continuing trail which climbs steeply, eventually bringing you onto a lovely level footpath beside a *bisse* (irrigation channel). Turn left, shortly to arrive at the

COL DE LA FORCLAZ (19) (1526m, 45mins)
refreshments, shop, bus to Martigny, accommodation in
Hotel du Col de la Forclaz; 40 dortoir places, 35 beds,
camping, open mid-Dec to Nov (Tel 027 722 26 88;
colforclazhotel@bluewin.ch; www.coldelaforclaz.ch).



The eastern view from the Fenêtre d'Arpette shows long scree fans that sweep into the Val d'Arpette

d'en Haut and Champex d'en Bas to the craggy peaks of the Dents du Midi. Eventually emerge from the woodland to pass beneath the La Brea chairlift by a small pond, then up a short slope to a crossing road. Turn left and join the main road, where you bear right and wander downhill into **Champex (18)**, which effectively marks the completion of your Tour of Mont Blanc. Now's the time to celebrate. Congratulations on having achieved a great walk!

CHAMPEX (1466m, 6–6½hrs) hotels, pensions, gîte, camping, restaurants, shops, PTT, bus to Orsières for trains to Martigny. Tourist information (Tel 027 783 12 27; champexlac@v-sb.ch; www.lafouly.ch). Lower-priced accommodation: Pension En Plein Air, 48 dortoir places, 25 beds, open all year (Tel 027 783 23 50; pensionenpleinair@bluewin.ch); Au Club Alpin, 25 dortoir places, open all year (Tel 027 783 11 61); Chalet du Jardin Alpin, 8 dortoir places, 13 beds, self-catering only; open May to end-Oct (Tel 027 783 12 17; fondation.aubert@bluewin.ch).

Camping Les Rocailles, open all year (Tel 027 783 19 79) is located at the top end of the village.

THE TOUR OF MONT BLANC

Le Peclet, Le Champel, 74170 Saint Gervais (Tel 06 84 18 45 55, lepeclet@orange.fr, www.lepeclet.fr) 6b: June–Sept

Refuge de Miage, 74170 Saint Gervais (Tel 04 50 93 22 91) – 37d, 2b: June–mid-Sept

Auberge du Truc, Chemin du Truc, 74170 Saint Gervais (Tel 04 50 93 12 48, aubergedutruc@hotmail.fr) – 28d: mid-June–mid-Sept

LES CONTAMINES-MONTJOIE

Office de Tourism, 18 Route de Notre Dame de la Gorge, BP7, 74170 Les Contamines-Montjoie (Tel 04 50 47 01 58, info@lescontamines.com; www.lescontamines.com)

Refuge du CAF, 22 Route du Plan du Moulin, 74170 Les Contamines (Tel 04 50 47 00 88) – 28d: mid-June–mid-Sept

Chalet Bonaventure, 135 Chemin du Nivorin d'en Bas, 74170 Les Contamines (Tel 04 50 47 23 53, camille.bonaventure@wanadoo.fr) – 8d: mid-June–mid-Sept

Hotel Christiania, 593 Route de ND de la Gorge, 74170 Les Contamines (Tel 04 50 47 02 72, hotel-christiania@wanadoo.fr; www.lechristiania-hotel.com) – b

Chalet-Hotel La Chemenaz, Les Hameaux du Lay, 74170 Les Contamines-Montjoie (Tel 04 50 47 02 44 www.chemenaz.com) – 112b

Gîte du Pontet, 2485 Route de N.D. de la Gorge, 74170 Les Contamines (Tel 04 50 47 04 04, campingdupontet@wanadoo.fr) – 32d: June–Sept

Refuge Nant Borrant, Chemin du Col du Bonhomme, 74170 Les Contamines (Tel 04 50 47 03 57, refugenantborrant@free.fr) – 35d: mid-June–Sept

Refuge de la Balme, Route Col du Bonhomme, 74170 Les Contamines (Tel 04 50 47 03 54) – 36d, 14b: mid-June–mid-Sept

Refuge de la Croix du Bonhomme, 73270 Beaufort/Doron (Tel 04 79 07 05 28, refuge-bonhomme@free.fr) – 113d: mid-June–mid-Sept

LES CHAPIEUX

Auberge de la Nova, Les Chapieux, 73700 Bourg St Maurice (Tel 04 79 89 07 15, info@refugelanova.com, www.refugelanova.com) – 35d, 35b: May–Oct

Chambre de Soleil, Les Chapieux, 73700 Bourg St Maurice (Tel 04 79 31 22, lesoleildeschapieux@gmail.com, www.leschambresdusoleil-montblanc.com) – 14b

Refuge des Mottets, Vallée des Glaciers, 73700 Bourg St Maurice (Tel 04 79 07 01 70, refuge@lesmottets.com, www.lesmottets.com) – 90d: mid-June–mid-Sept