

# **WALKING IN THE HAUTE SAVOIE: NORTH**

**30 DAY WALKS AROUND SALEVE, VALLEE VERTE,  
ABONDANCE, BELLEVAUX AND MORZINE**



### About the Author

Janette Norton was born in England but lived near Geneva with her husband Alan for over 40 years, raising four children and working in the marketing and educational fields. Her love of walking and exploring the mountains dated from the time she was a guide in Switzerland in her twenties, and the proximity of both the Alps and the Jura enabled her to continue her passion. After writing her first book on the Haute Savoie, she moved further afield to explore other areas of France, such as Provence, the Cevennes and the Dordogne. Sadly Janette died from cancer in January 2013, and her books are now revised by Alan Norton and Pamela Harris.

Alan Norton studied Physics at Edinburgh and Oxford universities before moving to Geneva to work at CERN on Particle Physics research. Since retirement, he has continued to participate in CERN experiments as a professor at the Italian University of Ferrara. As leisure activities, he has completed many mountain running events at the rear of the field, and helped Janette with walking and map preparation for her guides.

Pamela Harris graduated from Reading University and then moved to Switzerland, where she taught English and Classical studies at international schools in the Geneva area. A long-time member of both the Alpine Club and the Swiss Alpine Club, she has walked and climbed extensively in the mountains of Europe and the Himalayas. For several years she walked with Janette and assisted with previous editions of her guides.

#### **Other Cicerone guides by the author**

*Walking in the Haute Savoie: South*

*Walking in Provence: East*

*Walking in Provence: West*

*Walking in the Cevennes*

*Walking in the Dordogne*

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**by Janette Norton**

**Revised by Alan Norton and Pamela Harris**

**CICERONE**

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## Acknowledgements

It is a daunting task to revise a guidebook when the original author is no longer present to share her skills and experience. Fortunately Janette left us perfect records, as well as wonderful memories, making it a pleasure to pick up her legacy. Even so, we would not have managed without several friends who enthusiastically re-visited some of the trails, providing text updates, GPS traces and brilliant new photographs.

We are especially indebted to Sharon Bryand, Richard Saynor and William Westermeyer, who took charge of the more challenging routes. Thanks also to those who accompanied them or us on various occasions: Patrick Bryand, Kevin Bryand, Carol Saynor, Rosie Westermeyer, Philip Jenkins, Mark Warren, Mike Goodyer, Rebecca Norton, Katherine Heery and Diane Mueller.

It is a pleasure to work with Cicerone, a very special company: cosily small, efficient and demanding when needed, but above all human and understanding when it matters most.

Finally, we are extremely grateful for the information provided by the various tourist offices in the Haute Savoie.

*Front cover:* Cornettes de Bise in early autumn (Walk 21): photo Richard Saynor

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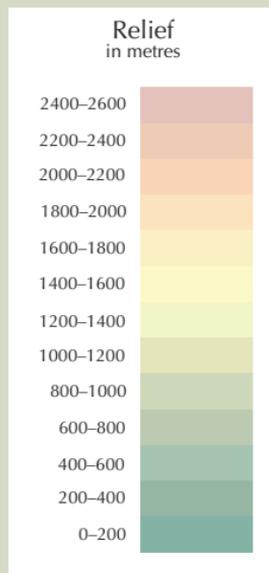
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## Symbols used on route maps

	route
	alternative route
	start/finish point
	alternative finish point
	woodland
	urban areas
	international border
	peak
	refuge
	building
	chapel/monastery
	col

Contour lines are drawn at 25m intervals and highlighted at 100m intervals.



### GPX files

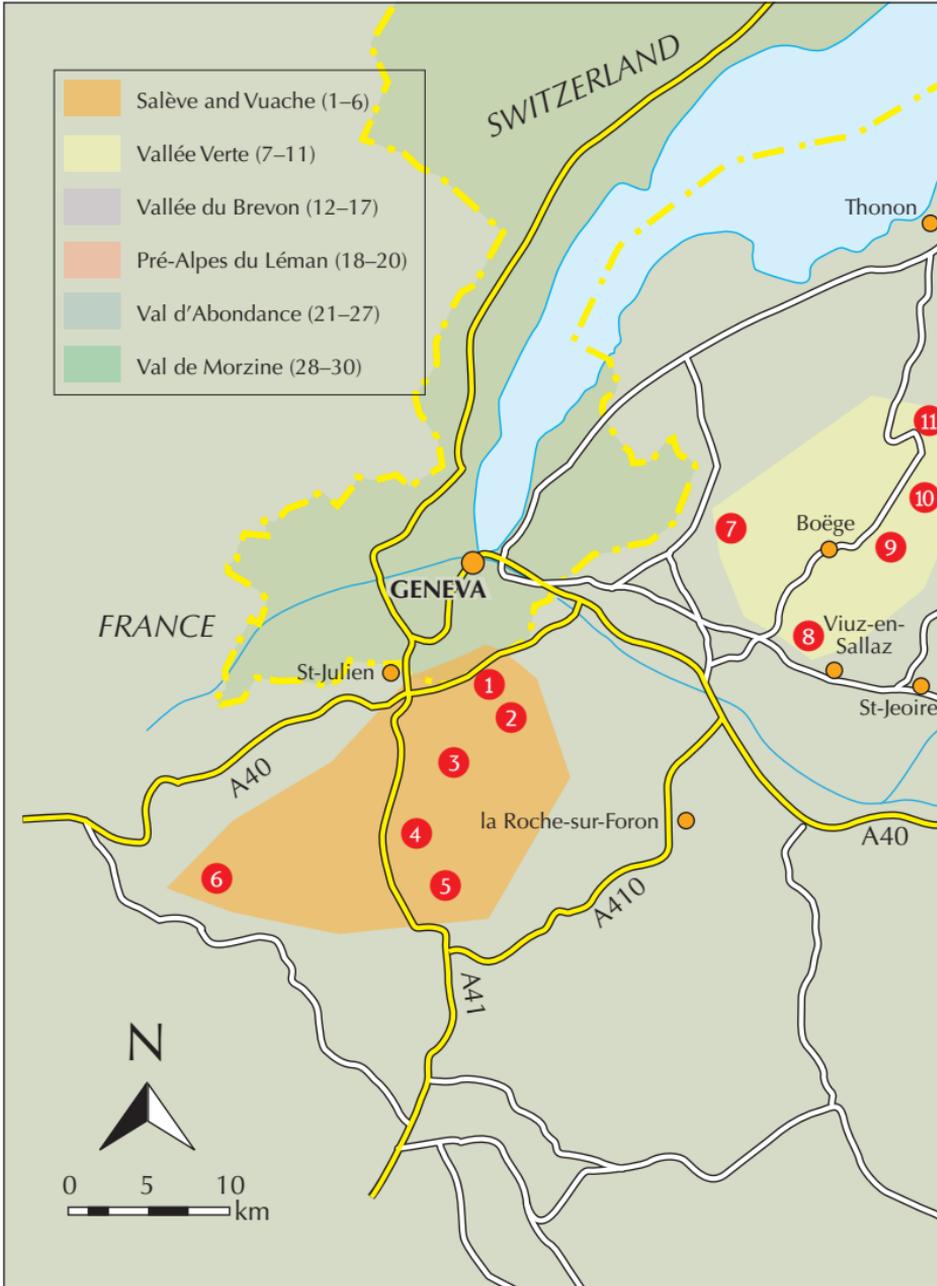
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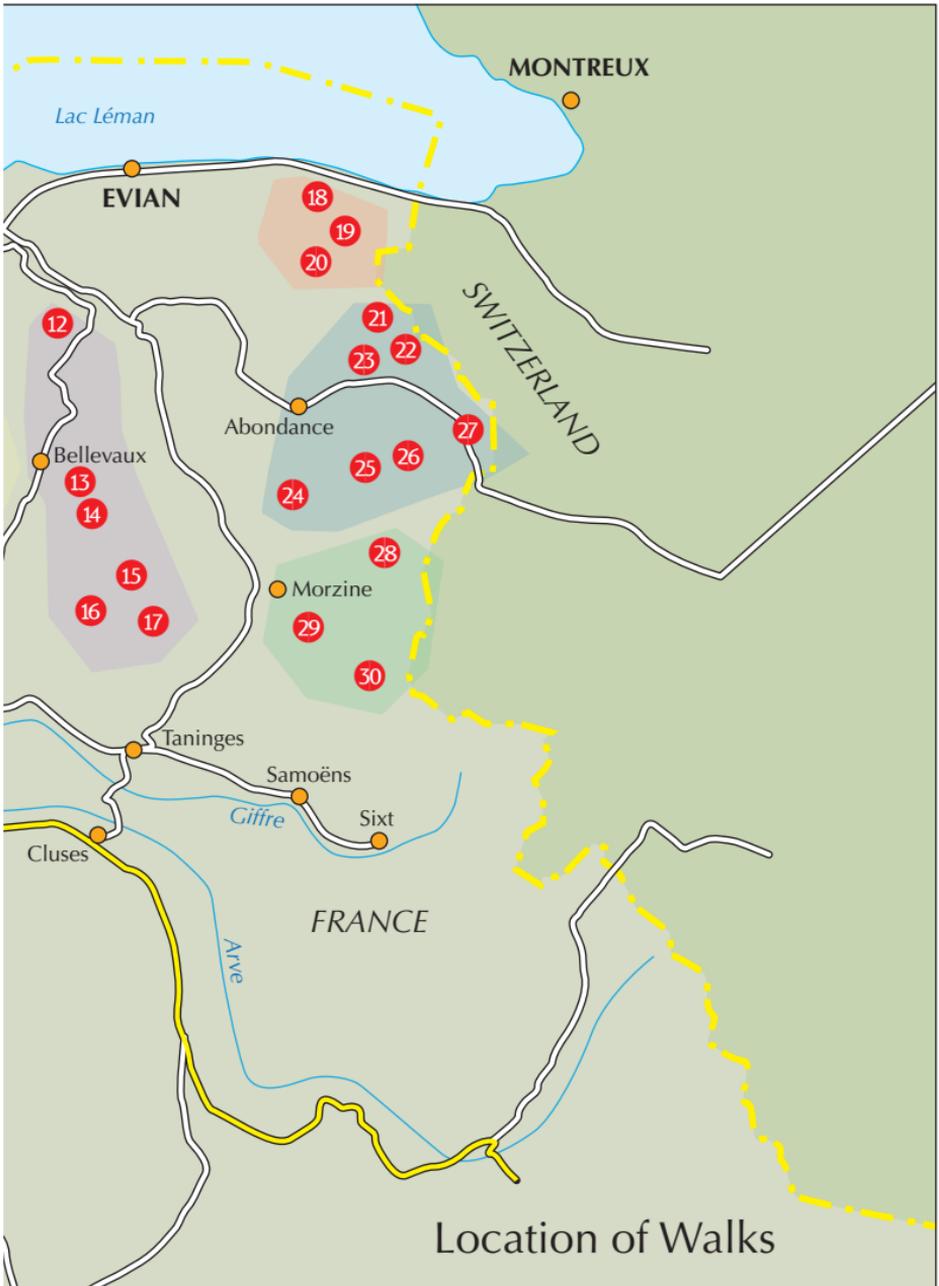
## Updates to this Guide

While every effort is made by our authors to ensure the accuracy of guidebooks as they go to print, changes can occur during the lifetime of an edition. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the Cicerone website ([www.cicerone.co.uk/810/updates](http://www.cicerone.co.uk/810/updates)), so please check before planning your trip. We also advise that you check information about such things as transport, accommodation and shops locally. Even rights of way can be altered over time. We are always grateful for information about any discrepancies between a guidebook and the facts on the ground, sent by email to [updates@cicerone.co.uk](mailto:updates@cicerone.co.uk) or by post to Cicerone, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Road, Kendal, Cumbria LA9 7RL, United Kingdom.

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WALKING IN THE HAUTE SAVOIE (NORTH)





Location of Walks

*WALKING IN THE HAUTE SAVOIE (NORTH)*

*Lac de Montriond from the Col de Chésery (Walk 28)*



## PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

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Since moving to the Geneva area about 50 years ago, the mountains of the Haute Savoie have been part of our lives. In good weather the Môle and the Salève are always visible across the lake, with the peaks of the Chablais behind and the glistening snows of Mont Blanc towering over all. It is a view we will never tire of, and the walks in this guide lead visitors into the spectacular beauty of what has become our home.

As revisers, we have had great pleasure in preparing this new edition and in re-discovering the delights of the walks we did in our younger days. In the past two years all the walks have been re-done by ourselves and helpers, relying on a few younger – and faster – friends in the case of the more challenging ones.

Although the walking takes longer as the years pass, route finding has become easier, for new signposts and information boards have sprung up almost everywhere. As a result all the route descriptions needed updating, and an increase in building has necessitated the re-routing of some walks or finding a more suitable parking place at the start. Two walks have been suppressed and even lovelier new ones added in their place.

The general introduction has been revised and the walks re-structured into six sections, each with its own introduction. Each walk is accompanied by a new sketch map which overlays a recorded GPS track and key features on a colourful Cicerone base map, and by a profile plot which shows the steepness of the uphill and downhill sections. In addition, the many new photos will illustrate to readers the variety and beauty of this region which we have grown to love so much.

*Alan Norton and Pamela Harris*



*Janette Norton descending from the Col de Planchamp (Walk 20)*

## INTRODUCTION

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*Mont Blanc and the peaks of Chablais from Mont Forchat (Walk 11): photo Richard Saynor*

Most people associate the French Alps with the town of Chamonix, dominated by Mont Blanc, the highest mountain in Western Europe, and the dazzling array of challenging peaks that surround it. Visitors flock to the Chamonix area to walk and explore, but they do not always realise that the Mont Blanc range is only part of the Haute Savoie. Not far away there are dozens of other interesting mountains and villages to discover, less frequented, steeped in history, and criss-crossed with delightful walking trails.

The Haute Savoie is located in eastern France, bordering Switzerland

and Italy. To the north is Lake Geneva (known to the French as Lac Léman), to the southeast is Chamonix, and to the southwest is Lake Annecy. The area in the northeast, which extends into Switzerland, is known as the Chablais, and was originally a separate province. Running for 100km through the centre of the region is the River Arve, rising in the glaciers of the Mont Blanc range and flowing north-west through the towns of Sallanches, Cluses, Bonneville and Annemasse to join the River Rhône and the lake at Geneva. This is the major artery of the region, with the motorway known as



the autoroute blanche running alongside to eventually go through the Mont Blanc Tunnel into Italy, an important link between north and south Europe. To the north of the Arve is another east–west artery, the River Giffre, rising in the snowfields of Mont Ruan and flowing through Sixt and Samoëns to join the Arve above Cluses.

This is one of the most mountainous regions in France, with the lower mountains of the Chablais in the north rising to the high peaks of the Mont Blanc range in the south. The walks all give spectacular views, and the trails are well marked and easy to follow. Walks around Chamonix are not included as they are covered in Cicerone's *Mont Blanc Walks*, by Hilary Sharp.

The walks in *Walking in the Haute Savoie: North* are located near to Lake Geneva, beginning with those

on the Salève and Vuache in the west. The remainder are all in the Chablais, a large mountainous area stretching south of the lake and eastwards into Switzerland, which has been divided into the following sections: the Vallée Verte around Boège; the Vallée du Brevon around Bellevaux; the Pré-Alpes du Léman above Evian; and the two main valleys of the River Dranse: the Val d'Abondance and Val de Morzine.

The walks in the companion volume *Walking in the Haute Savoie: South* are mostly located south of the Giffre and Arve rivers. They are situated along the Vallée de l'Arve and above the Plateau d'Assy nearer to Chamonix; in the Vallée du Haut Giffre near Sixt and Samoëns; in the Chaîne des Aravis near La Clusaz and Thônes; on the Plateau de la Borne near la Roche-sur-Foron; and near the shores of Lac d'Annecy.

### A SHORT HISTORY OF THE HAUTE SAVOIE

The department of the Haute Savoie did not come into being until 1860 when Napoleon III and King Vittorio-Emmanuele signed the Treaty of Turin, and the Duchy of Savoie, along with Kingdom of Nice, was annexed to France. The area of the Duchy was then split into Haute Savoie, the upper or northern region, and Savoie, the southern region.

The history of the region goes back to prehistoric times when it was



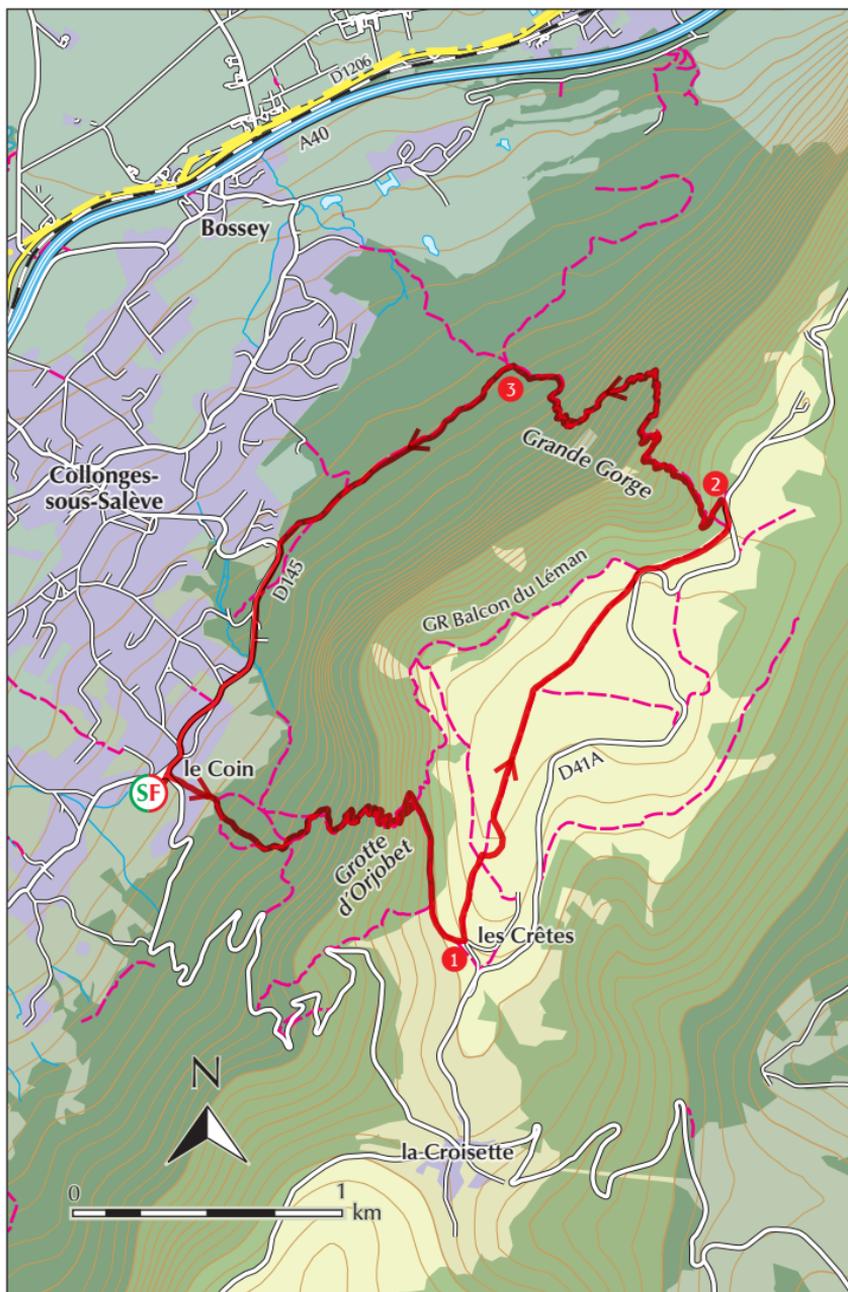
*The ruined castle at Chaumont (Walk 6)*

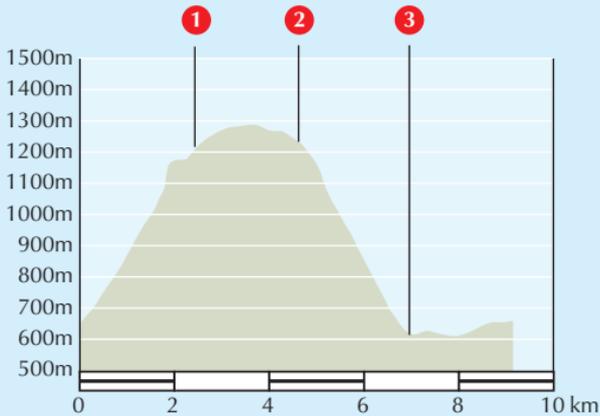
## WALK 1

### *Gorges du Salève*

<b>Start/Finish</b>	Le Coin, 665m
<b>Distance</b>	9km
<b>Total ascent</b>	690m
<b>Grade</b>	Medium
<b>Time</b>	4hr 15min
<b>Maximum altitude</b>	1295m
<b>Map</b>	IGN 3430 OT Mont Salève/St-Julien-en-Genevois/ Annemasse 1:25,000
<b>Access</b>	From St-Julien-en-Genevois, take the D1206 to Collonges and follow all signs to le Salève. At le Coin take the D45 towards le Salève/Croisette, and immediately after the turning leave your car in the large parking area on the right. In the car park there is an information board with a map of the walk.
<b>Signposting</b>	Good – new signposts, posts with yellow arrows on green, and red/white GR signs when on the Balcon du Léman
<b>Note</b>	Do not do this walk after it has been raining or snowing as the rocks can get very slippery and icy.

This is an exciting and dramatic walk up onto the Salève, the mountain which dominates Geneva. The limestone face is steep, making it a good training ground for rock climbers, and it was the Geneva section of the Swiss Alpine Club that created both paths used on this walk. The route up the mountain goes through the large and impressive Grotte d'Orjobet, and down through the Grande Gorge. Both paths are steep and protected in part by cables. As the Salève is within easy reach of Geneva all the walks on it are very popular, and you are likely to meet many other people, especially at weekends and at the top. There are magnificent views on the way up and down as well as on the summit, with Mont Blanc and the whole range of the Alps visible on one side, and the Geneva countryside and the Jura range of mountains on the other.





Before entering the cave, go over to the viewpoint on the left, from where there is a dramatic view down over the Geneva countryside, with the Jura mountain range on the horizon.

From the signpost at le Coin (665m), opposite the entrance to the car park, turn right and walk up the Chemin d'Orjobet towards Grotte d'Orjobet/Sur Orjobet. This is a narrow tarmac road that soon becomes stony, leading to a clearing on the left-hand side where there is the first of a series of information boards on the geology of the Salève.

Just after this you reach a fork where you go right, following the yellow arrow on the post. This is a steep track winding up through woods, clearly marked by posts with yellow arrows on green. The path becomes stony, going past a rock face. Continue upwards to reach the second information board (1hr 10min).

You then climb round an overhanging rock face on natural rocky steps with a metal barrier on the left and a cable for security on the right. Soon after you see the letters 'CAS 1905' painted in orange high above an opening in the rock face, which is the entrance to the **Grotte d'Orjobet**. ◀

At the entrance to the cave, beneath the orange letters, there is a small plaque on the wall saying 'Sentier d'Orjobet crée 1905 par la Section Genevoise du Club Alpin Suisse'. Walk past this to reach a long wooden plank with steps that you walk up to enter the cave.

Inside there are large steps cut out of the natural stone, with another metal cable. It takes about 10mins to climb up these through the cave and out on to the other side. Inside the cave there is a third information board, and a plaque erected in 2012 giving the history of the path through the cave.

The **Grotte d'Orjobet** was first explored in 1779 by the eminent Geneva scientist H B de Saussure, who named it after his guide, François Orjobet, a native of le Coin. In 1905 the Geneva section of



*At the entrance to the Grotte d'Orjobet*

the Swiss Alpine Club created the path through the cave and were responsible for its upkeep until 2005, when it was handed over to the Association of the Salève, who upgraded the path between 2010 and 2012.

When you come out of the cave the path bears round to the right, curving round the side of the mountain to reach the GR Balcon du Léman at a T-junction and sign-post 'Sur Orjobet – alt. 1200m' (1hr 45min).



*Walking up the  
fixed cables: photo  
Mike Goodyer*

Go right, following the sign to la Bouillette/la Croisette. ▶ The path levels out somewhat and then comes out of the woodland onto the shoulder of the mountain.

Walk up the grassy slope to reach a stile just before the road at a corner ①. Do not go onto the road but turn hard left, leaving the GR, and follow the wide green path all along the top, with the lake down below on your left. On the right there is an aerial and a flag, indicating a jumping-off area for paragliders.

This is the ideal **picnic spot**. There are wonderful sweeping views of the Geneva countryside and the Jura range to the left, with the Alps to the right, dominated by Mont Blanc and the Dents du Midi, with the Môle in the foreground.

Follow the grassy track across pastures to reach the signpost 'Alpage des Crêts – alt. 1300m' (2hr 10min).

Continue straight on towards Grange Tournier/ Téléphérique, towards the observatory tower you can see

Left is a more difficult route via the Trou de la Tine/ la Corraterie, marked *escarpé*, meaning steep and exposed.

*Paragliding off the Salève*





*The Môle from the top of the Salève*

in the distance. The track reaches the road at a stone balustrade and another signpost at Sur le Charrot (1280m). Here you rejoin the GR for another short stretch. Following signs to Sur Grande Gorge, walk down across a meadow to reach the road again and a signpost 'Sur la Grande Gorge – alt. 1245m' (2hr 20min). Continue towards Sous Grande Gorge/le Coin par Grande Gorge, and turn off left into the woods, leaving the GR on a narrow path which winds downwards 2.

Soon after you reach a rock face to the left where there is a plaque saying 'Grande Gorge 1854 to 1954', with the words 'Section Genevoise CAS' scratched out. At first you curl round the mountain and then the path becomes steep and stony with cliffs on each side. In one place there are rough stone steps and a chain to hold on to, and further down an iron railing. The path actually goes down the side of the **Grande Gorge** and there is a viewpoint from where you get a magnificent view looking back up at the precipitous cliffs with trees on the summit. Another plaque, which says 'Sentier de la Grande Gorge', explains that the path has been maintained since 1868 by the Geneva section of the Swiss Alpine Club.

Continue down the steep path, which skirts the Grande Gorge for a short while, and then goes down more steeply, with steps and cables to help you on the more difficult parts. ▶ The path goes back down the side of the Grande Gorge and becomes less steep as you get lower. You cross a stony patch in the woods before reaching a junction at the signpost ‘Sous Gde Gorge Sud’ 3 (3hr 35min).

Go left following signs to le Pérouzet/le Coin (straight ahead goes to Bossy). This is a flat path going over a boggy area on wooden slats, following the contour of the hill, and is a welcome relief after the long, steep, stony descent. On the left is the steep rock face of the Salève looking even more dramatic from below. Keep straight for 10mins until you arrive at a jeep track at a post with a yellow arrow. Turn left to meet a wider jeep track coming in from the left and continue to meet the road at the signpost ‘le Pérouzet – alt. 620m’ (3hr 50min).

Turn left, with tennis courts down below, and walk up the road (Route de la Croisette) towards **le Coin**, passing the Nymphéa Club on the left and then the Campus Adventiste du Salève on the right. Walk between the houses and round the corner to get back to the car park (4hr 15min).

Take care as this can be very slippery after rain or snow.