

# **WALKING IN THE BAVARIAN ALPS**



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## WALKING IN THE BAVARIAN ALPS

70 MOUNTAIN WALKS AND TREKS IN  
SOUTHERN GERMANY

by Grant Bourne and Sabine Körner-Bourne

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### Dedication

*Für meine Frau – GB*

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*Front cover: St Coloman, near Füssen in the Ammergau Alps (Part II)*

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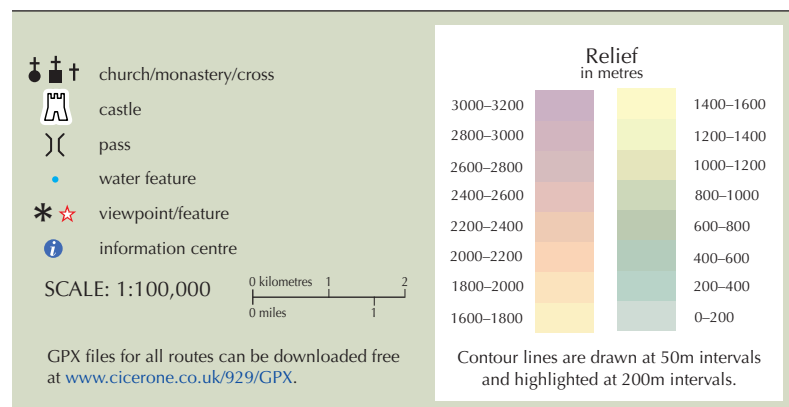
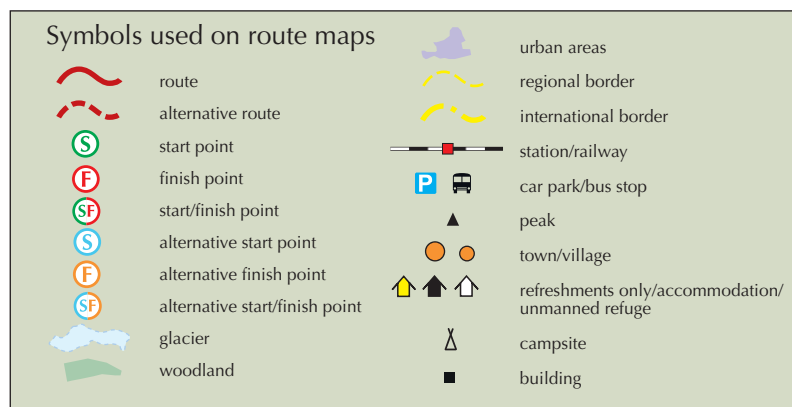
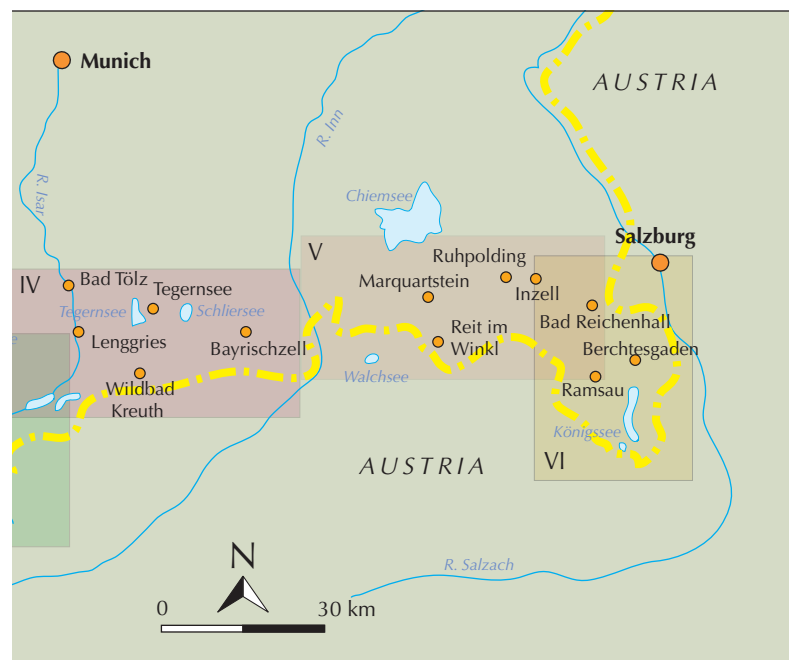
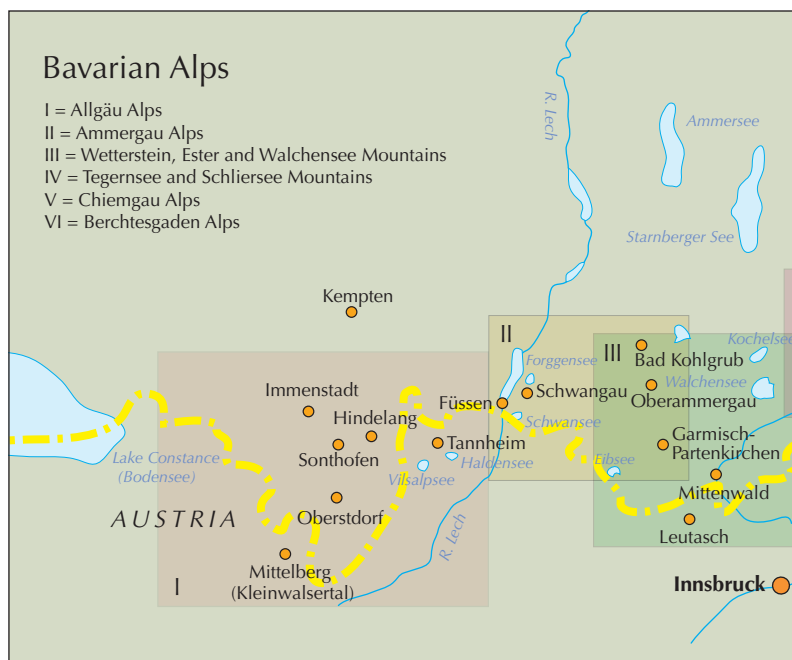
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Atop the Rubihorn (Walk 4)



## PREFACE

As far as most non-German mountain walkers are concerned the Bavarian Alps lie very much in the shadow of the Austrian and Swiss Alps. This is a shame, for what this border region lacks in terms of the comparative height and extent of its mountains is more than compensated for by the diversity of its landscape and cultural attractions.

This fourth edition of the guidebook hopes to bring that diversity to the attention of more outdoor enthusiasts. Moving from west to east, the guidebook starts with a look at the Allgäu, a region renowned for its wildflowers, tranquil alpine pastures and the impossibly steep grass slopes that characterise many of its well-known peaks. Moving further east, mountain trails lead past famous castles such as Neuschwanstein, which seems to have materialised from the pages of a storybook. In the vicinity of Garmisch-Partenkirchen you can sunbathe on the grassy summit of the Wank while enjoying a fantastic bird's-eye view over the world-famous alpine resort. At the foot of the Zugspitze, Germany's highest mountain, a trail skirts the shores of the beautiful Eibsee, a pristine lake surpassed in beauty only by the Königssee, visited in the final section of the guidebook. Here, in the Berchtesgaden Alps, trails in the shadow of the mighty Watzmann massif lead you through a landscape of Wagnerian grandeur.

There is, of course, much more to discover along these mountain trails. Upland moors, an ice cave, remote other-worldly karst landscapes like the Steinernes Meer and wild mountain gorges such as the Höllentalklamm, Leutaschkklamm and Partnachklamm are just a few of the highlights. But for those who really want to discover the full beauty of the mountains the biggest highlight will be one of the multi-day tours. Perhaps you will experience the famed alpenglow while staying at a remote hut like Kärlinger Haus (Walk 68), or spot a rare bearded vulture on the two-day hike to Leutasch in Austria (Walk 25). Above all, after a few days without the distractions and stress of urban living, you might achieve that sense of calm that only a longer sojourn in the mountains can bring.

Many of the base towns mentioned offer free travel on buses within a designated region. This makes it even easier for visitors to the Bavarian Alps to leave their cars behind and let somebody else do the driving. Not only can the start of many of the walks described be reached for free, but you also have the satisfaction of knowing you are helping the environment at the same time.

Although every attempt has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information given on the routes, floods and other natural events can erase landmarks, make it necessary to modify routes, or occasionally render a section of track unwalkable. However, a look at an up-to-date map, or a chat with hut wardens and other hikers on the spot, will ensure that such inconveniences are kept to a minimum.

*Grant Bourne and Sabine Körner-Bourne, 2018*



Meadow at Schöna (near Königssee, Berchtesgaden Alps)



## INTRODUCTION

Those seeking alpine superlatives in the Bavarian Alps will search in vain. There are no peaks that can compete with the Matterhorn or Mont Blanc in terms of height, no glaciers of considerable extent, and even the ski slopes have a rather provincial aspect when compared to such famous resorts as Zermatt or St Moritz. Nevertheless, even without superlatives the Bavarian Alps still have their fair share of dramatic scenery. Their position between the lowlands to the north and the higher alpine regions further south offers a dramatic contrast in landscapes, and the proximity of Austria adds further to the region's charms.

For the walker the advantages of this location are many. For example, it is never far from the valley bottom to the top of a rugged mountain peak, from a picturesque village nestling in the lush green foothills to a lonely alpine tarn. A day in the mountains could be followed by an outing to historic Salzburg (especially if you are based in either Bad Reichenhall or Berchtesgaden) or Munich from where, on a clear autumn day, the mountains seem only a stone's throw away. One need not even go that far to enjoy a lazy day, for strung along the edge of the Alps is a succession of beautiful lakes (many of which are suitable for bathing), fairy-tale castles (around Füssen), ancient monasteries and opulent baroque churches. Folklore traditions are particularly strong in this part of Bavaria, evident in the numerous *Heimatabende* (evenings of folk

dancing and songs) and the not-uncommon aspect of gnarled old men sporting flowing white beards and wearing *lederhosen*.

Of the many hundreds of excellent walking trails to be explored in the Bavarian Alps only a small selection are described in detail in this book. They vary in length from a half-day to four or five days and many are circular (convenient if you have to get back to your car). Where possible, suggestions have been made for longer tours, but with the help of the recommended maps it should be possible to work out your own variations and additional routes.

### HISTORY

Much of the history of what we now know as Germany is characterised by the fluctuating borders of independent and often warring duchies, princedoms and kingdoms. Bavaria's history reflects this from the time Germanic tribes coalesced with other groups left after the retreat of the Romans in the late fifth century. This amalgam of peoples came to be known as the Baiuvarii or Bavarians.

In the sixth century Bavaria became a duchy and remained so until 1806. During this span of time its borders repeatedly changed; at one point large parts of Austria and part of northern Italy belonged to Bavaria. With the advent of the 10th century the duchy joined the Holy Roman Empire. In 1180 the Emperor awarded the duchy to the Wittelsbachs who were to rule



first as dukes and later kings for over 700 years.

When Napoleon I abolished the Holy Roman Empire in 1806 Bavaria became a constitutional monarchy. With the rise of Prussia, and the unification of Germany under the German Empire in 1871, the kingdom became a state within the empire. After World War I the monarchy and the empire came to an end. A short-lived socialist republic followed and then Bavaria joined the Weimar Republic. The instability of this republic enabled the emergence of the Nazis, and Hitler helped stage the Beer Hall Putsch in Munich in 1923. After the end of Nazi rule (1933–1945) Bavaria became a part of the Federal Republic of Germany. Today it is the largest and one of the wealthiest of Germany's 16 states.

## CULTURE

### Art and architecture

In few areas of Germany did the opulent baroque and rococo styles (17th–18th centuries) achieve the pre-eminence that they have in Upper Bavaria. Baroque churches with their onion domes seem to rise above every village and are seen perched on hills throughout the region. The even brighter colours and more joyful forms of the rococo (which developed from the baroque) can be admired in many village churches, but it is above all the Pilgrimage Church of Wies (Wieskirche) near Steingaden where it can be seen at its most stunning.

However, the baroque influence was not restricted to just the church, it also filtered down to the world of the ordinary



*Ceiling detail in the former baroque Monastery Church of St Martin at Fischbachau, near Birkenstein (Walk 43)*

folk. This is mainly seen in the 18th-century frescoed house-fronts (Lüftlmalerei) of Oberammergau and Mittenwald and in folk-art such as the painted farmhouse

furniture that can be admired in numerous museums of local history.

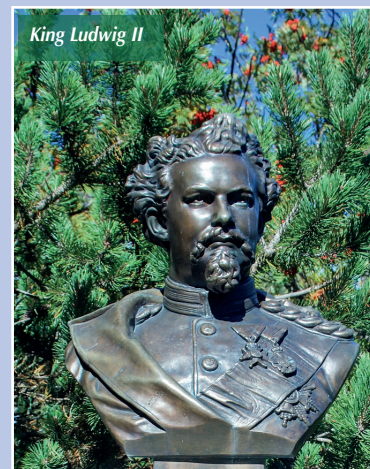
Large, picturesque wooden farmhouses are also typical of the region.

*Tradition runs strong in Bavaria: alpenhorn concert at the Kanzelwandbahn (Walk 9)*



## LUDWIG II, KING OF BAVARIA

Ludwig II (1845–86), King of Bavaria, was both a romantic and tragic figure. He was deposed in 1886 on grounds of supposed insanity and soon after found drowned under mysterious circumstances. A patron of the arts and friend of Wagner, his passion for building castles brought him to the verge of ruin. Yet it is Ludwig who is today the most popular of Bavarian monarchs. His castles Neuschwanstein, Linderhof and Herrenchiemsee now attract visitors from all over the world. They also earned him the title of 'fairy-tale' king.



*King Ludwig II*

**THE KLEINWALSERTAL**

This valley was settled by farmers from the Valais, a canton in Switzerland, in the 13th century. Although it has belonged to Austria since 1453 it is only easily accessible from Germany. This caused problems for farmers when it came to selling their produce within Austria as they had to cross high alpine passes to get to markets in the south. In winter they were completely isolated from the motherland. This difficult and economically disastrous state of affairs came to an end in 1891 when Austria

and Germany signed a treaty which exempted the 'Walser' from the need to pay duty on goods brought to and from Germany.

The valley is entered at Walserschanz (no customs post), only a few kilometres southwest of Oberstdorf. For mountain walkers the Kleinwalsertal provides plenty of carefully waymarked trails and magnificent scenery. A bus (Walserbus) runs daily (May–October, every 30min) from Oberstdorf railway station to Baad at the end of the valley.

**OBERSTDORF (WALKS 1–8)**

Tourist office: Tourist-Information in Oberstdorf Haus, Prinzregenten-Platz 1, D-87561 Oberstdorf. Tel (08322) 700-0, [www.oberstdorf.de](http://www.oberstdorf.de), [info@oberstdorf.de](mailto:info@oberstdorf.de). Tourist-Information, Bahnhofplatz (opposite railway station), tel (08322) 700 417 (accommodation service).



*Oberstdorf provides a good range of restaurants and accommodation for its guests*

Oberstdorf can be reached by train from Munich and is popular as a tourist resort in both summer and winter. Although not unattractive, this modern-looking town lacks the rural charm of some of the smaller settlements in this region (in 1865 a devastating fire destroyed most of the older buildings). It is well served with a good range of accommodation (campsite, youth hostel and hotels in all price categories) and offers all the usual tourist facilities.

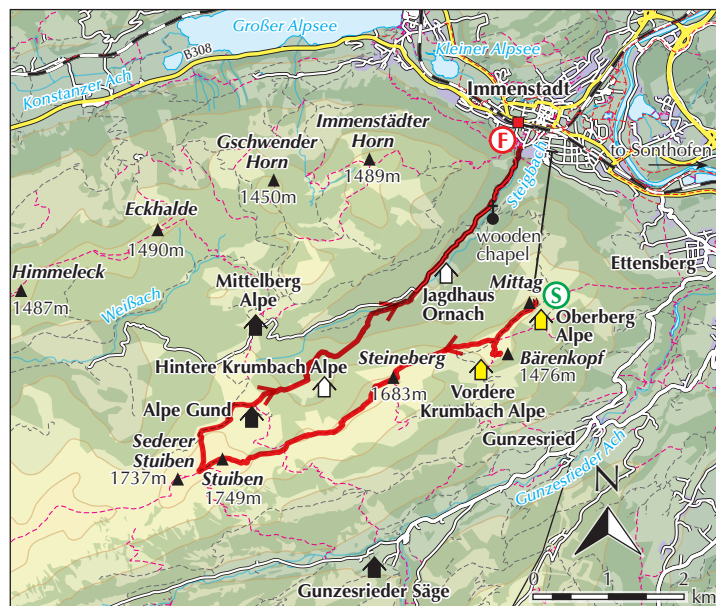
**WALK 1**

*The Nagelfluhkette: a ridge walk between the Mittagberg and Stuiben*

<b>Start</b>	Immenstadt, north of Oberstdorf
<b>Distance</b>	13.5km (8 miles)
<b>Total ascent</b>	514m (1686ft)
<b>Total descent</b>	1234m (4048ft)
<b>Grade</b>	2
<b>Time</b>	5hr
<b>Maps</b>	Kompass-Wanderkarte No 3: Allgäuer Alpen – Kleinwalsertal
<b>Refreshments</b>	Bergstation Mittagbahn, Alpe Gund
<b>Transport</b>	Regular trains from Oberstdorf
<b>Parking</b>	Car park next to Mittagbahn chairlift
<b>Note</b>	Although this route offers no extreme difficulties, some exposed sections require care. It is best undertaken in dry and stable weather conditions.

The Nagelfluh Chain extends for some 25km from Mittagberg, near Immenstadt, to the Hohe Häderich in Austria. It takes its name from the characteristic 'nagelfluh' rock, a type of conglomerate composed of smaller stones cemented together millions of years ago during the Pleistocene. In many ways this walk introduces much that is typical of walks in the region: unobstructed views of the main Allgäu chain and the lowlands to the north; in spring and summer a profusion of wildflowers; tracks flanked by steep grassy slopes on the one side and sheer cliffs on the other; the tinkling of cowbells from lonely alpine pastures; and alm huts offering milk and cheese produced on the spot.

The two-stage Mittagbahn chairlift brings walkers comfortably to the top of the **Mittagberg**, thus saving a roughly 2hr ascent. From the Bergstation (upper terminus) an easy trail leads in a southwesterly direction to a cross and memorial to one of the last brown bears that was shot here in 1746. A short detour to the modest peak of the **Bärenkopf** (1476m) can be undertaken from this spot. Otherwise, the onward route is clearly visible: at first continue comfortably a short



To avoid the ladder follow a narrow trail, which continues from the ladder and below the cliffs, before curving back to the summit along a harmless grass slope.

distance along grassy slopes then, on reaching a lightly wooded, narrow section of the ridge the trail begins its steep – and, in summer, very sweaty – ascent to the Steineberg.

Shortly before the last section of the climb to the **Steineberg** summit cross the trail swings sharp left (south), before climbing steeply to the cliffs below the summit. This brings you to the ladder, which climbs directly to the summit cross. ◀

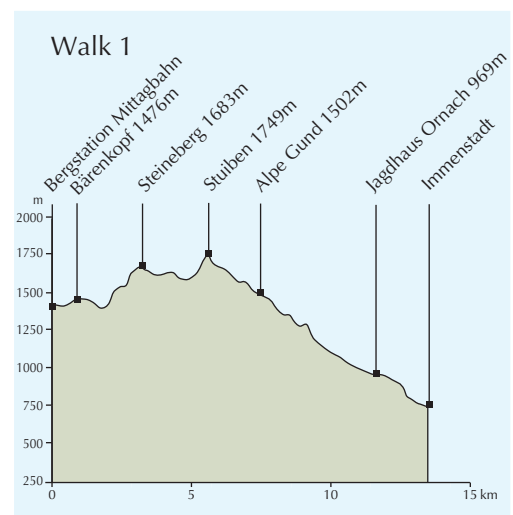
From here it is fairly easy going along the ridge towards the Stuiben, which is already visible in the distance. Wire ropes aid walkers on a few more exposed sections of track and most usefully along one easy traverse down a bare rock face. In early summer, the grass slopes along the trail are dotted with dark blue gentians, wild orchids and other wildflowers.

Not long after passing the intersection with the trail leading directly down to Alpe Gund (or Gund Alpe), the track begins its steep climb up the **Stuiben**. Just before the

summit, wire ropes aid your ascent along a steeply falling section of rock. Then it is an easy stroll to the summit cross and a splendid panoramic view.

Descend from the summit along a clear trail, which takes you in around 20min to **Alpe Gund** (accommodation and simple refreshments in summer). Continue from the east side of the alm hut in a (signposted) northeasterly direction – this route does not follow the gravel road down to Immenstadt via Mittelberg Alpe on the other side of the hut. Pass a trail up to the Steineberg and follow the signposted track to Immenstadt. It winds attractively through fields and lightly wooded slopes towards **Hintere Krumbach Alpe**. After reaching the broad meadows below the alm hut the trail crosses a simple log bridge over a stream, climbs briefly left, then descends through the woods. It takes you in roughly 40min to a gravel road where you turn right to Immenstadt (signposted).

Now follow the road past **Jagdhaus Ornach** (hunting lodge) to a small wooden chapel and picnic tables. A bit further on you have the choice of continuing along the road, or you can follow the more interesting Steigbachtobelweg, which runs just below the road through a lovely little gorge.







Exposed section  
of track en route  
to Stuiben

Near the outskirts of **Immenstadt** those who followed the Tobelweg will arrive at a junction. Either go right over a wooden bridge to the valley station of the Mittagbahn or continue straight ahead to town and the railway station (10min).

## WALK 2

### Over the Großer Ochsenkopf to Riedberger Horn

Start	Bolsterlang
Distance	12.2km (7½ miles)
Total ascent	461m (1512ft)
Total descent	1020m (3346ft)
Grade	1
Time	4½hr
Maps	Kompass-Wanderkarte No 3: Allgäuer Alpen – Kleinwalsertal
Refreshments	Schwaben Haus, Bolgen Alpe, Zunkleiten Alpe
Transport	Regular bus service from Oberstdorf (complicated timetable)
Parking	Car park at the Bolsterlanger Hörnerbahn
Accommodation	Schwaben Haus

Although not alpine in character, the ridge walk between Ochsenkopf and Riedberger Horn offers plenty of fine views to the higher mountains further south, and provides a good impression of the alm pastureland that is so typical of the Allgäu's grass-covered lower peaks. It is an easy walk with no major climbs and can be walked from spring to late autumn.

The **Bolsterlanger Hörnerbahn** (gondola-lift; [www.hoernerbahn.de](http://www.hoernerbahn.de)) takes you in less than 10min to an altitude of 1500m. At the top there is a magnificent view over the Iller Valley, and both the Großer Ochsenkopf and Riedberger Horn, the goals of this walk, are clearly visible to the west.

From the upper station of the two-stage gondola-lift an easy path leads to **Schwaben Haus**. Most walkers who want to climb the Riedberger Horn continue straight ahead from the hut. This is the easiest but least interesting route. It is much more interesting to turn right just before the hut and to climb steeply uphill towards the Großer Ochsenkopf. After

