

# **WALKS IN THE ENGADINE**

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*Walks in the South Downs*

*National Park*

# WALKS IN THE ENGADINE

by Kev Reynolds

**CICERONE**

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### Dedication

*For family and friends who have shared Engadine days with me*

### 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/1052/updates](http://www.cicerone.co.uk/1052/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 LA9 7RL.

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*Front cover:* In early summer the meadows of Val Tuoi are full of wild flowers (Route 85)

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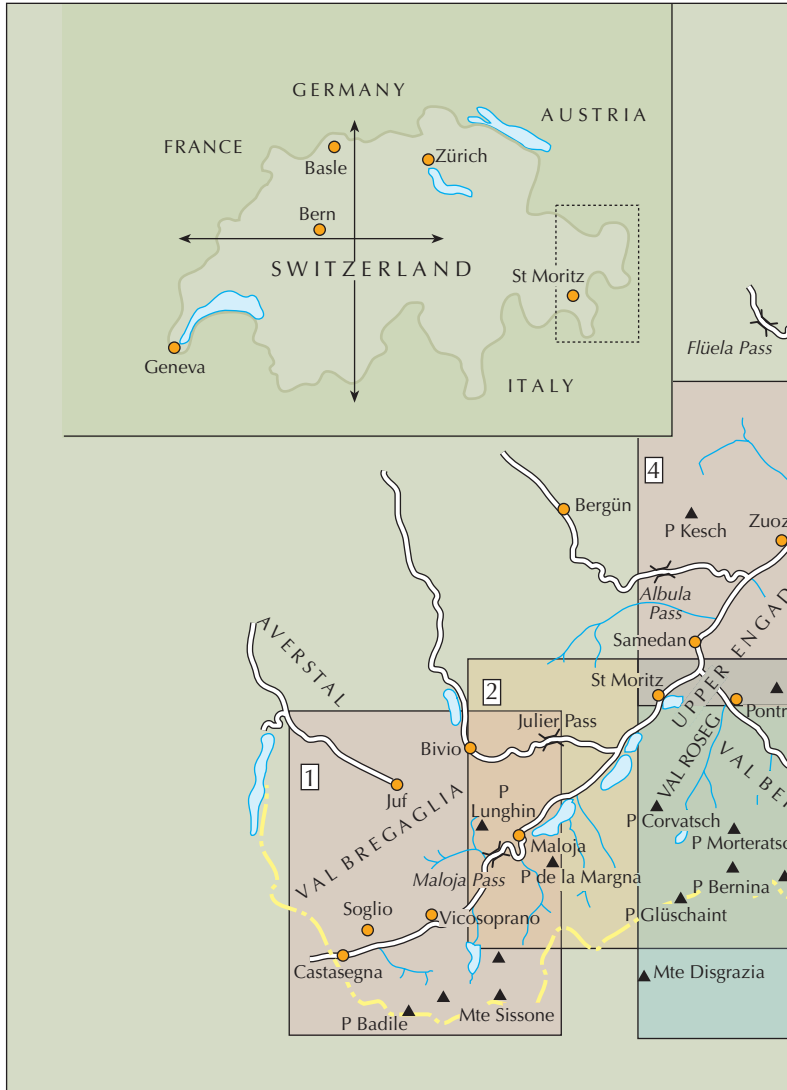
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### Map Key

	ridge
	glacier
	road
	national park
	boundary
	hut
	col
	summit
	railway/station
	lake/river
	tunnel
	train tunnel
	town
	village
	cable car



- 1: Val Bregaglia
- 2: Upper Engadine (Lakes Region)
- 3: Val Bernina
- 4: Upper Engadine (Northern Region)
- 5: The National Park
- 6: The Lower Engadine



*From many paths above Pontresina the glimmering snows of Piz Palü dominate the views (Routes 46 and 47)*

## PREFACE

---

My first view of the Engadine came more than 50 years ago. It was a week before Christmas; snow lay deep, a big moon hung over the mountains, and everything glistened with frost. Next day, as the sun flooded the valley, the intensity of light was almost painful as I ploughed my way across frozen lakes and ducked beneath trees bowed down with hanging baskets of the purest snow I'd ever seen. Smitten by the beauty of an Alpine winter, I imagined no other season could match it. But the Engadine is a valley for all seasons, and working there during the following months I experienced its magic as winter turned to spring, spring to summer, and then autumn transformed the landscape with the Midas touch of gold.

The Engadine has enticed me back many times in the decades since that awakening. No longer having an interest in skiing her slopes, I prefer to walk her paths, cross high passes and stand on a few of her summits; or perhaps wander up to a favourite alp and simply absorb the glories all around me. There's plenty to absorb.

My most recent visits have been to trek the 9-day Tour of the Bernina, and the week-long Tour of the Silvretta, which sneaks into the Lower Engadine. Both these treks stray into neighbouring countries – Italy for the first, and Austria for the second

– yet those stages that touch upon the Engadine are full of highlights and would make a fine introduction for newcomers to this corner of the Swiss Alps.

If the routes in this book give you, the reader, as much pleasure as they brought me when walking them, I'll be well satisfied.

Here's a hint: try some of the walks in 'less-obvious' side valleys where you may wander for hours through the most magical of alpine pastures without catching sight of another human being. Give yourself time to sit on a rock and soak in the wonder of it all, and you'll be enriched.

Since my last visit to the Engadine district, a massive rock fall from Piz Cengalo devastated parts of the splendid Val Bondasca (Bregaglia region) and wrought havoc to the village of Bondo below the valley's entrance. Since then the whole of Val Bondasca has been put out of bounds, affecting routes 15-19 & 23 described in this guidebook. We have decided to retain these as they were when I last walked them, in the hope and expectation that before this edition goes out of print, the valley will be reopened and the two huts (Sciora and Sasc Furä) will be back in business. However, visitors will doubtless find many changes there, although Bondasca

will still be one of the loveliest of all valleys and worthy of exploration. (A further warning appears in the relevant sections of this guide.)

My thanks to those friends and correspondents who continue to feed me with essential updates for this guide; to Myrta and Jörg Dössegger of St Moritz, for decades of friendship and hospitality; to hutkeepers, hostel wardens and the staff at various tourist offices throughout the region for patiently answering my questions; to the Swiss National Tourist Office for practical assistance; and to my wife (as ever) for her loving support and for sharing so many Engadine trails with me.

Once again I am grateful to Jonathan Williams at Cicerone for his company on the hut to hut treks we've made together, for the joy of planning new routes with him, as well as the new books and opportunities to revitalize existing titles with his talented team in Kendal. I owe my gratitude to all those at Juniper House who have given life to this latest edition.

As I have said on many occasions, creating a guidebook is a team effort – mine is the pleasure of wandering the mountains, while the rest of the Cicerone do the work! So I thank them all for enabling me to have the world's best job.

Finally, information in this guide is given in good faith, and routes described offered in the hope that users will enjoy many happy days when following them. But I am fully aware that changes occur from time to time, not just to resort facilities, or to roads and huts, but to the landscape too – sometimes through natural causes, but often by the hand of man. It may be that you will discover paths or tracks that have been rerouted, or landscape features altered to such an extent that some of the route descriptions are no longer valid. Should this be the case, I sincerely hope that such changes in no way spoil your holiday, but would appreciate an email giving details in order that I might check them out for future editions. Please write to [info@cicerone.co.uk](mailto:info@cicerone.co.uk).

*Kev Reynolds*

## Mountain safety

Every mountain walk has its dangers, and those described in this guidebook are no exception. All who walk or climb in the mountains should recognise this and take responsibility for themselves and their companions along the way. The author and publisher have made every effort to ensure that the information contained in this guide was correct when it went to press, but, except for any liability that cannot be excluded by law, they cannot accept responsibility for any loss, injury or inconvenience sustained by any person using this book.

### International distress signal *(emergency only)*

Six blasts on a whistle (and flashes with a torch after dark) spaced evenly for one minute, followed by a minute's pause. Repeat until located by a rescuer. The response is three signals per minute followed by a minute's pause.

### Helicopter rescue

The following signals are used to communicate with a helicopter:

Help needed:  
raise both arms  
above head to  
form a 'Y'



Help not needed:  
raise one arm  
above head, extend  
other arm downward



### Emergency telephone numbers

Emergency telephone number: (117 (police) 144 (ambulance)  
Swiss Air Search & Rescue (REGA): Tel 1414  
Weather report: Tel 162 (in French, German or Italian)

### Weather reports

France: Chamonix: tel 08 92 68 02 74, [www.meteo.fr](http://www.meteo.fr) or tel 3250  
Italy: tel 0165 44 113  
Switzerland: tel 162 (in French, German or Italian), [www.meteoschweiz.ch/en](http://www.meteoschweiz.ch/en)

**Note: Mountain rescue can be very expensive – be adequately insured (see Appendix A).**



*Piz Badile and Piz Cengalo, still snow-dusted in early summer, as seen from Tombal above Soglio (Routes 7, 8 and 13)*



## INTRODUCTION

*The lake at the head of the Bernina Pass (Photo: Jonathan Williams)*



Lying in the southeastern corner of Switzerland, the Engadine Valley forms a trench almost 100km long. In it, and on hillsides that flank it, there's something for every walker's taste: gentle valley rambles for a family outing; craggy mid-mountain walks for the more adventurous; high-level routes that lead across glacier, snowfield and rugged pass for the experienced mountain trekker. Dazzling lakes make tempting picnic sites. There are forest walks with deer leaping through the undergrowth; high pastures with ancient haybarns linked one with another by narrow trails, and snow-peaks gleaming as a backdrop.

It's a high valley, a valley of contrasts. In the Upper Engadine between Maloja and St Moritz, several large lakes almost fill the valley floor at an altitude of around 1800m, while snow-peaks of the Bernina Alps rise nearby. Shapely mountains like Piz Palü, Bellavista, Piz Roseg and Piz Bernina spawn glaciers that hang like frozen cascades, or spill into side valleys among lengthy walls of moraine.

In the Lower Engadine, which runs northeastward and gradually loses altitude between Cinuos-chel and Martina, the valley narrows. In places the River Inn squeezes through tight gorges, wild and foaming in cataracts as a fine white-water river. But



while the Inn may thunder into these gorges, the valley itself is a green and verdant land, with forests clothing the lower slopes. Flower-rich meadows ease between romantically attractive villages. Some of these are in the valley; others catch the sunshine from a natural terrace on the northern hillside.

The mountains here are quite different to those of the upper valley; mostly bare of snow in summer, grey turrets rising from a world of greenery. But push into some of the northern tributary glens and you'll come up against the Silvretta Alps that display small glaciers and snowfields, and charm those drawn to them with their individuality.

But this guidebook is not limited to the Engadine (although if it were there'd be quite enough walks to justify it). Instead we look at some of its neighbouring valleys too, for each one broadens the walker's opportunities, and adds to the scenic dimension. In the south, for example, at the Engadine's head where the lake of Sils gives way to meadows around the village of Maloja, a sudden drop over the valley's lip shows the Maloja Pass writhing its way with countless hairpins into a deep shaft of a valley filled with the soft air and warmth of Italy. This is Val Bregaglia, still Swiss but running into Italy and absorbing its atmosphere. It's a captivating region with abrupt side glens topped by jagged granite peaks, slabs and walls like those of Piz Badile and Cengalo.

Perched upon hillsides that rise from chestnut woods nearby, unspoilt villages appear to have been built there precisely to capture the most dramatic views. Some of these villages count among the loveliest in all the Alps.

Branching either side of the Upper Engadine, other little valleys are worth exploring: Fedoz, Fex, the narrow wedge of Val Champagna, Suvretta, Val Bever and the seductive Val Susauna. Val Bernina forms a link between Engadine extravagance and modest Val Poschiavo. Like the Bregaglia, Poschiavo too is Italian by nature, lying as it is far below the Bernina Pass and draining across the border into Valtellina. Val Bernina, administered by Pontresina, is the gateway not only to Poschiavo and Valtellina, but – more importantly for us – to the massif from which it takes its name. Access to the Bernina Alps is through either of two tributary glens: Val Roseg or Val Morteratsch. The first is a real gem of a valley, the second dominated by its retreating glacier and an astonishingly beautiful headwall of snow and ice.

The Lower Engadine has its fair share of delightful side valleys, too. Although they may not be as well known as some of those of the upper valley, they're no less rewarding to visit. Val Tuoi behind Guarda is a classic example. At its head the dominant peak is Piz Buin, along whose ridges runs the border with Austria, where Vorarlberg and Tyrol merge in the Silvretta Alps. There's Val Tasna,



*The path that runs alongside Lej Vadret eventually climbs to the Coaz Hut (Routes 51 and 52)*

flowing parallel to the east of Tuoi, a delight of forest, meadow and running streams, with a wild and stony inner core of glens leading up to the frontier again. Then there's the Val Sinestra, broad and open where it empties into the Engadine, but enticingly mysterious in its upper reaches. There's Val S-charl too, on the south side of the Inn, with the boundary of Switzerland's only national park being drawn along its river.

The national park comprises a number of fine valleys. Contained solely within the Lower Engadine, the park is extraordinarily rich in wildlife, and the sensitive visitor will quickly come to appreciate its unique qualities. Here is a wilderness rarely found in Europe, for the needs of humans are subordinate to those of Nature.

Man has a very low priority, and the natural world is allowed freedom to develop as it will, without his moulding influence. Some of the valleys are out of bounds to walkers, while in those that do have access, one can sense an air of calm, and gain opportunities to observe wildlife grazing or roaming untroubled in a pristine environment. That alone makes a visit to the Engadine worthwhile.

The Engadine is perhaps best known as a winter playground. With international resorts like St Moritz, Pontresina and Scuol, and with such classic ski grounds as those of Corvatsch near Silvaplana, and Diavolezza and Lagalb in the Val Bernina, together with the world-renowned Cresta Run hurtling between St Moritz and Celerina, this

## ROUTE 1

*Maloja (1815m) – Lägħ da Cavloc  
(Cavolocciosee) (1907m) – Maloja*

<b>Start</b>	Maloja (1815m)
<b>Distance</b>	7km (4.3 miles)
<b>Height gain</b>	92m (302ft)
<b>Height loss</b>	92m (302ft)
<b>Grade</b>	1
<b>Time</b>	2hr
<b>Location</b>	South of Maloja

An hour's walk from Maloja leads to an utterly charming, partially tree-fringed lake in the lower reaches of Val Forno. Lägħ da Cavloc is justifiably popular as both a destination for a family outing and as a picnic site. The route to it follows a modestly graded track among open meadows, shrubs and trees. In the early summer masses of pink primulas colour the banks, while in September there are bilberries in vast quantities. At the southeastern end of the lake a restaurant enjoys a view across the water to Piz Lagrev, while the southern view looks beyond the low buildings of Alp Cavloc to Monte del Forno. This walk makes a circuit of the lake and a varied return to Maloja.

Just over the Orlegna stream an alternative path breaks right to Lägħ da Biterbergh (1854m) in 20min, then 1hr uphill to the viewpoint of Motta Salacina (2150m) – fine views of the Bregaglia and Engadine lakes.

Walk along the main road towards the Maloja Pass, and when it curves to the right take a service road cutting ahead – a sign indicates the way to Lägħ da Cavloc, Plan Canin and so on. Passing a few houses the road ends, and is replaced by a track which, in turn, becomes a footpath. This is part of the *Sentiero Segantini*, and as you progress along it you'll pass a few information panels depicting scenes from the artist's work.

The path angles down through meadows, passes between houses, and comes onto a service road/track where you turn left to cross the Orlegna stream moments later. ◀



*Lägħ da Cavloc (the Cavolocciosee) is easily reached in an hour from Maloja (Routes 26–28)*

## GIOVANNI SEGANTINI (1858–99)

The artist, who came to live in Maloja and is buried there, was largely self-taught, but his portrayal of Alpine life in the 19th century ensures that his reputation lives on. Scenes from both the Engadine and Val Bregaglia feature largely in his work, and a visit to the Segantini Museum in St Moritz-Bad is recommended. See [www.segantini-museum.ch](http://www.segantini-museum.ch)

This track goes all the way to the lake, but has a few obvious footpath short cuts to avoid some of the bends. There are also several alternative paths cutting away, mostly to the right, but the recommendation is to remain with the track as it rises above a gorge and then passes along the eastern side of the **Lägħ da Cavloc**. At the earliest opportunity go through the trees beside the track and complete the walk to the restaurant on the lakeside path (about 1hr from Maloja.)

Just beyond the restaurant the way divides – left to Plan Canin, Passo Muretto and the Forno Hut; right for a circuit of the lake. Follow the lakeside path round the tranquil west side, among little grassy bays and rocky

Another option is to take the unmarked footpath, which descends across the track and provides an alternative route back to Maloja.

promontories, until you reach the northern end where the path forks. Take the left branch, a path of stone slabs rising through a wooded gully. On gaining a highpoint you then descend with views of Maloja ahead.

When the path forks again, with the route straight ahead signed to Läggh da Biterbergh, descend to the right below crags, then among larch, pine, alpenrose and juniper, and about 10min from the junction come onto the service road/track used on the way to the lake. Turn left and retrace your steps to **Maloja**. ◀

## ROUTE 2

*Maloja (1815m) – Läggh da Cavloc (1907m) – Passo del Muretto (2562m)*

<b>Start</b>	Maloja (1815m)
<b>Distance</b>	7km (4.3 miles) one way
<b>Height gain</b>	747m (2450ft)
<b>Grade</b>	3
<b>Time</b>	3–3½hr
<b>Location</b>	Southeast of Maloja

Standing on the Swiss-Italian border, the Muretto Pass is the divide between the Bernina and Bregaglia Alps. It's part of an old trading route, used since the 14th century, linking Maloja with Chiesa in the Italian Val Malenco (8–9hr), and it is also used by climbers moving from one side of the district to the other. Chiareggio, a small village at the very head of Val Malenco which makes a good walking/mountaineering centre, lies directly below the pass and is reached from there by a jeep track in about 2hr. The way up to the pass on the Maloja side is a little rough in places, and with some avalanche danger early in the season. The Italian slope offers wonderful views across to the ice-clad Monte Disgrazia (3678m), the dominant mountain of the Bregaglia Alps.



Take Route 1 as far as **Läggh da Cavloc** (1hr), then continue up-valley across the pasture of Alp Cavloc. Passing the low alp buildings to your left the path soon goes through a rocky cleft and eases downhill among pine and larchwoods towards the stony river bed. Rising again you come to a small hut, and moments later the way forks at **Plan Canin** (1975m), about 20min from the lake.

*A short distance from Läggh da Cavloc stand the low stone buildings of Alp Cavloc*

## MONTE DISGRAZIA

Seen from the Italian side of the pass, the 3678m Monte Disgrazia is the highest of the Bregaglia Alps, a mountain that stands alone, unsurpassed as to grace of form and classic proportions. First climbed in 1862 by E.S. Kennedy, Leslie Stephen and T. Cox, with Melchior Anderegg as guide, connoisseurs reckon it to be one of the most beautiful mountains in the Alps.

Leaving the Forno Hut path (which goes ahead), descend to a footbridge over the Orlegna stream, then up, fairly steeply, on the left (east) side of the **Val Muretto**. There is nothing difficult about the route, but as you gain height, so it becomes rougher as you pick a way