

# **TREKKING THE TOUR OF MONT BLANC**

### About the Author

Kev Reynolds is a freelance travel writer and lecturer who lives in the Kent countryside when not trekking in distant mountain ranges. His close association with Cicerone Press began in 1978 with his guide to the Pyrenees, followed by numerous other titles covering the Alps, the Himalaya and the more gentle landscapes of southern England. Some of his adventures when researching routes for his books appear in *A Walk in the Clouds*, a collection of short stories celebrating his life among mountains worldwide. In 2015 Cicerone published his memoir of trekking adventures in Nepal, entitled *Abode of the Gods*. He also acted as contributing editor for the Cicerone anniversary book, *Fifty Years of Adventure*.

Elected an honorary member of the Outdoor Writers' & Photographers' Guild, SELVA (the Société d'Etude de la Littérature de Voyage du monde Anglophone) and the British Association of International Mountain Leaders (BAIML), Kev's enthusiasm for the countryside in general, and mountains in particular, remains undiminished after a lifetime's activity. During the winter months he regularly travels throughout Britain to share that enthusiasm through his lectures.

Check him out on [www.kevreynolds.co.uk](http://www.kevreynolds.co.uk).

### Other Cicerone guides by the author

<i>100 Hut Walks in the Alps</i>	<i>Tour of the Vanoise</i>
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<i>Chamonix to Zermatt</i>	<i>Trekking in the Silvretta &amp;</i>
<i>Swiss Alpine Pass Route –</i>	<i>Rätikon Alps</i>
<i>Via Alpina Route 1</i>	<i>Walking in Austria</i>
<i>The Bernese Oberland</i>	<i>Walking in Kent</i>
<i>The Cotswold Way</i>	<i>Walking in Sussex</i>
<i>The Mountain Hut Book</i>	<i>Walking in the Alps</i>
<i>The North Downs Way</i>	<i>Walking in the Valais</i>
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<i>The South Downs Way</i>	<i>Walks in the Engadine</i>
<i>The Swiss Alps</i>	<i>Walks in the South Downs</i>
<i>Tour of the Jungfrau Region</i>	<i>National Park</i>
<i>Tour of the Oisans: The GR54</i>	

## TREKKING THE TOUR OF MONT BLANC

### COMPLETE TWO-WAY HIKING GUIDEBOOK AND MAP BOOKLET

by Kev Reynolds

**CICERONE**

JUNIPER HOUSE, MURLEY MOSS,  
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All photographs are by the author unless otherwise stated.

### Note on Mapping

The route maps in this guide are derived from publicly available data, databases and crowd-sourced data. They have not been through the detailed checking procedures that would be applied to a published map from an official mapping agency, although we have reviewed them closely in the light of local knowledge as part of the preparation of this guide. For more information refer to the sheet maps recommended in this book, and to the map booklet.

### 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.*

Front cover: The Italian flank of Mont Blanc, seen from Rifugio Bonatti  
(photo: David Jordan)

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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/1062/updates](http://www.cicerone.co.uk/1062/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. The author is indebted to David Jordan and Jonathan Williams for checking route statistics and conditions on the ground to make this edition as up-to-date as possible, and to Joe Williams for gathering all the figures and making sense of them.

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, United Kingdom.

**Register your book:** To sign up to receive free updates, special offers and GPX files where available, register your book at [www.cicerone.co.uk](http://www.cicerone.co.uk).

## 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 an answer is received. 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

If telephoning from the UK the dialling codes are:

*France:* 0033; *Italy:* 0039; *Switzerland:* 0041

*France:* PGHM (Peloton de Gendarmerie de Haute Montagne):

tel 04 50 53 16 89; Emergency services: tel 112 (mobile phones)

*Italy:* Carabinieri: tel 0165 84 22 25; Emergency Services: tel 118

*Switzerland:* OCVS (Organisation Cantonale Valaisanne de Secours): tel 144

### Weather reports

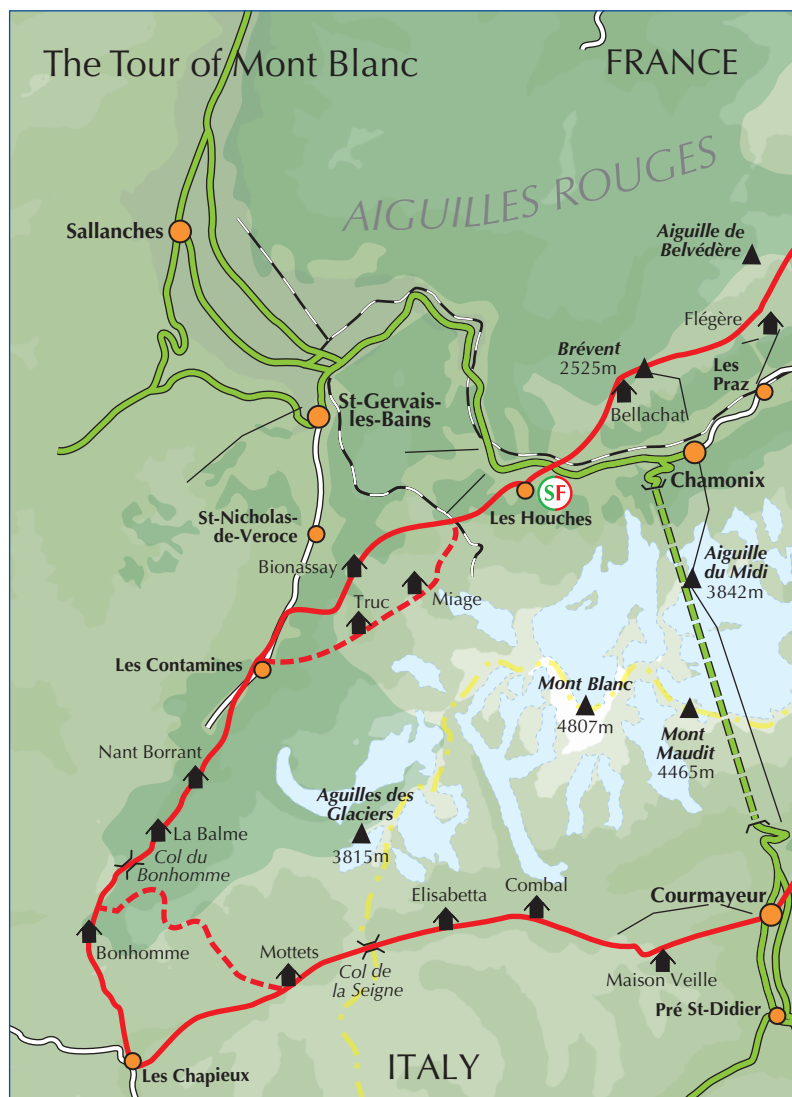
*France:* Chamonix: tel 08 92 68 02 74, [www.meteo.fr](http://www.meteo.fr) or tel 3250

*Italy:* tel 0165 44 113

*Switzerland:* tel 162 (in French, German or Italian), [www.meteoschweiz.ch/en](http://www.meteoschweiz.ch/en)

**Mountain rescue can be very expensive – be adequately insured.**





## Map key

## Features on route maps

	main TMB		international border
	TMB variante		station/railway
	alternative route		cable car line/station
	start point		peak
	finish point		campsite
	alternative start point		building
	alternative start point		church
	glacier		pass
	woodland		footbridge
	urban areas		other feature
			manned hut
			unmanned hut

## Facilities

	accommodation (general)
	tourist information
	food
	groceries
	ATM
	pharmacy
	church
	station
	bus stop
	post office

Relief  
in metres

2200-2400	4600-4800
2000-2200	4400-4600
1800-2000	4200-4400
1600-1800	4000-4200
1400-1600	3800-4000
1200-1400	3600-3800
1000-1200	3400-3600
800-1000	3200-3400
600-800	3000-3200
400-600	2800-3000
200-400	2600-2800
0-200	2400-2600

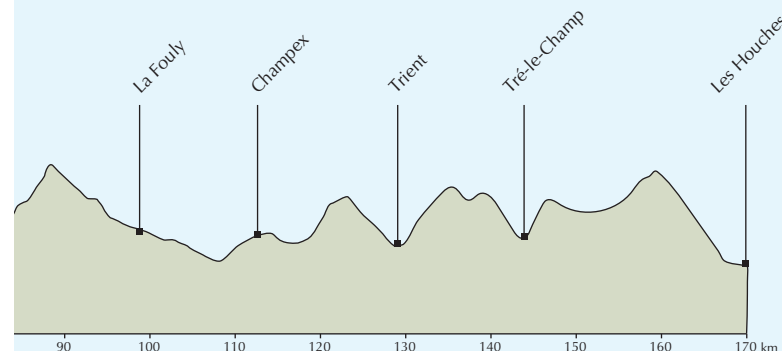
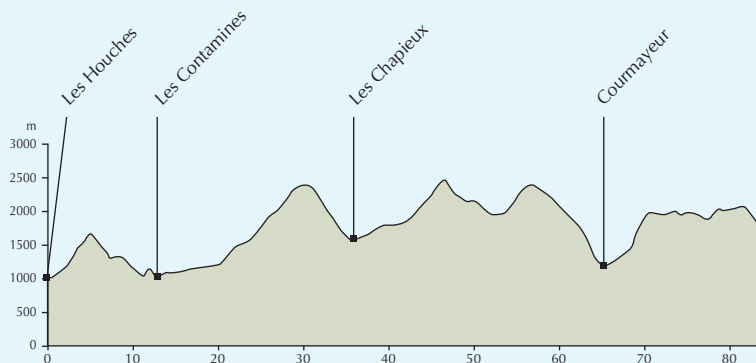
SCALE: 1:100,000

0 kilometres 1 2  
0 miles 1

Contour lines are drawn at 50m intervals  
and highlighted at 200m intervals.

GPX files for all routes can be downloaded free at [www.cicerone.co.uk/1062/GPX](http://www.cicerone.co.uk/1062/GPX).

## Tour of Mont Blanc anti-clockwise



## ROUTE SUMMARY TABLE – ANTI-CLOCKWISE

Stage no.	Start/Finish	Distance	Time	Ascent	Descent	Page no.
1	Les Houches – Bionnassay – Les Contamines	17.5km	5hr–5hr 30min	1010m	850m	40
1A	Les Houches – Refuge de Miage – Les Contamines	18.5km	7hr 30min	1480m	1320m	47
2	Les Contamines – Croix du Bonhomme – Les Chapieux	19km or 20km	7hr–7hr 30min or 7hr 30min–8hr	1360m or 1580m	970m or 880m	53
3	Les Chapieux – Col de la Seigne – Rifugio Elisabetta	14km	4hr 30min–5hr	1100m	460m	61
4	Rifugio Elisabetta – Courmayeur	15.5km or 19.5km	5hr–5hr 30min	580m	1550m	65
5	Courmayeur – Rifugio Bonatti	12km or 16km	4hr 30min or 6hr–6hr 30min	1080m or 1620m	280m or 820m	74
6	Rifugio Bonatti – Grand Col Ferret – La Fouly	20km	6hr–6hr 30min	980m	1400m	80
7	La Fouly – Champex	15.5km	4hr–4hr 30min	510m	650m	87
8	Champex – Alp Bovine – Trient	16km	5hr 30min–6hr	850m	1040m	92
8A	Champex – Fenêtre d'Arpette – Trient	16km	7hr	1200m	1390m	98
9	Trient – Col de Balme – Tré-le-Champ	14km	5hr	980m	840m	104
10	Tré-le-Champ – Refuge La Flégère	8km or 9km	3hr 30min–4hr or 3hr 30min to 3hr 45min	730m	270m	112
11	Refuge La Flégère – Le Brévent – Les Houches	18.5km	6hr 30min	900m	1770m	119
<b>Totals - main route</b>		<b>170km</b>	<b>60hr</b>	<b>10080m</b>	<b>10080m</b>	

## ROUTE SUMMARY TABLE – CLOCKWISE

Stage no.	Start/Finish	Distance	Time	Ascent	Descent	Page no.
1	Champex – Ferret	18km	5hr	760m	520m	142
2	Ferret – Grand Col Ferret – Rifugio Bonatti	17.5km	6hr 30min	1290m	970m	149
3	Rifugio Bonatti – Courmayeur	12km or 16km	3hr 45min or 4hr 30min–5hr	280m or 820m	1080m or 1620m	155
4	Courmayeur – Rifugio Elisabetta	15.5km	6hr	1550m	580m	161
5	Rifugio Elisabetta – Refuge de la Croix du Bonhomme	19km or 16km	6hr 45min or 1130m	1350m or 1130m	1100m or 950m	167
6	Refuge de la Croix du Bonhomme – Les Contamines	14km	4hr	80m	1360m	173
7	Les Contamines – Bionnassay – Les Houches	17.5km	5hr 30min	850m	1010m	180
7A	Les Contamines – Refuge de Miage – Les Houches	18.5km	5hr–5hr 30min	1320m	1480m	187
8	Les Houches – Le Brévent – La Flégère	18.5km	8hr 15min	1770m	900m	192
9	La Flégère – Col de Balme – Trient	22km	8hr 15min	1110m	1710m	198
10	Trient – Alp Bovine – Champex	16km	5hr 30min	1040m	850m	206
10A	Trient – Fenêtre d'Arpette – Champex	16km	6hr 30min–7hr 30min	1390m	1200m	210
<b>Totals - main route</b>		<b>170km</b>	<b>60hr</b>	<b>10080m</b>	<b>10080m</b>	





*Dômes de Miage from Miage meadows (Stage 1A anti-clockwise/7A clockwise)*

## INTRODUCTION



*Reflections provide another opportunity to celebrate and capture the monarch of the Alps  
(photo: David Jordan)*

Were it to stand alone with no near neighbour to lend it scale, the great snow- and ice-crustured dome of Mont Blanc would still lay claim to the title of Monarch of the Alps. At 4807m (15,771ft) the summit stands a good 3700m (12,000ft) above Chamonix, and is 3km higher than the nearest habitation on the Italian flank. On blue-sky days it dazzles in the sunshine or floats on a raft of cloud, commanding attention with its dominating height, for it has a regal presence equal both to its appearance and its stature. That presence is not always benign, of course, for the mountain also dictates the weather and controls the climate of its surrounding valleys.

But catch it in a benevolent mood, and those valleys bask in its glory.

Mont Blanc does not stand alone, however, and the large number of attendant peaks and *aiguilles* (sharp peaks or needles), rock walls, ridges and tumbling glaciers, rather than detract from its grandeur, simply add to it with their own individuality – courtiers whose impressive company would grace any massif anywhere in the world. The Grandes Jorasses, Aiguille Noire, the Verte and Drus, Aiguille du Midi, Mont Maudit and Mont Dolent, on which the borders of three countries meet, each of these (and there are many more) would stand out in any mountain crowd.

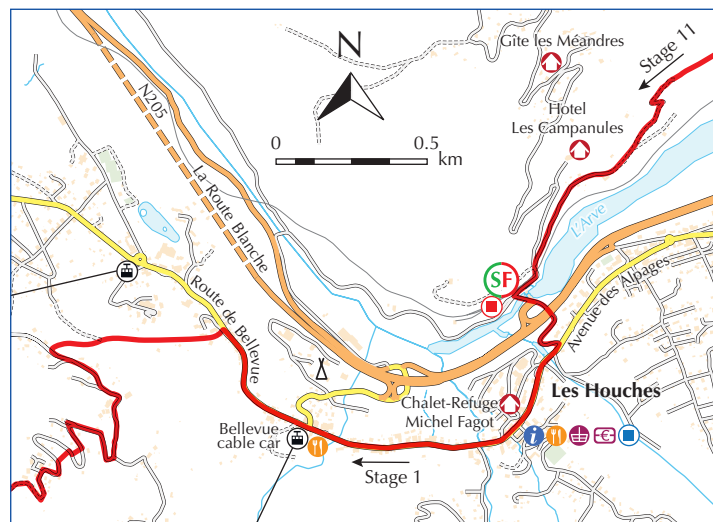
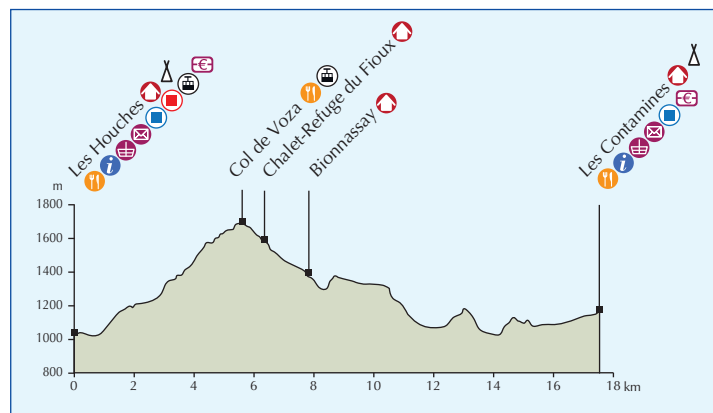
## STAGE 1

## Les Houches – Bionnassay – Les Contamines

<b>Start point</b>	Les Houches (1007m)
<b>Distance</b>	17.5km
<b>Walking time</b>	5hr–5hr 30min
<b>High point</b>	Col de Voza (1653m)
<b>Height gain</b>	1010m
<b>Height loss</b>	850m
<b>Accommodation</b>	Les Houches: hotels, <i>dortoirs</i> (dormitory rooms), gîte, camping; Chalet-Refuge du Fioux (2hr 40min): gîte; Col de Voza (2hr 15min–2hr 30min): hotel; Bionnassay (3hr): gîte; Les Contamines: hotels, <i>dortoirs</i> , gîte, Chalet des Contamines (CAF) refuge, camping
<b>Transport options</b>	Cableway (Les Houches–Bellevue); train (St-Gervais–Col de Voza); bus (Tresse–Les Contamines)
<b>Alternative route</b>	Col de Voza – Les Contamines via Col de Tricot and Refuge de Miage (see Stage 1A)

Of the two possible routes to Les Contamines-Montjoie, this is the shorter and easier. It's also recommended as the bad-weather option, for apart from the crossing of Col de Voza it remains fairly low and has no really exposed country to pass through. It also involves more road-walking than any other stage; but that being said, there are some fine views (weather permitting), attractive hamlets and plenty of accommodation options even before you reach Les Contamines.

Although it does not have the dramatic appeal of the alternative route, this stage is straightforward but demanding enough for a first day, during which newcomers to the Alps will be able to get into their stride and, from a variety of points along the way, gain an impression of the scenic delights that promise much for the days ahead. Just before reaching Col de Voza, for example, a row of *aiguilles* that guard Mont Blanc offer themselves for inspection. The Dôme du Goûter and Aiguille de Bionnassay then dominate views on the south side of the col, with the impressive Bionnassay glacier spilling between them, while from the hamlet of Le Champel the whole Val Montjoie is seen ahead, with a hint of the Col du Bonhomme at its southern end.



**Les Houches** (1007m) Tourist information centre (tel 0450 555062; [www.leshouches.com](http://www.leshouches.com)), hotels, gîte, camping, shops, restaurants, banks, ATM, PO, railway, buses, cable car. Lower-priced accommodation: Chalet-Refuge Michel Fagot in centre of the village, 36 dortoir places, open mid December



to end of September (tel 0450 544228; [www.gite-fagot.com](http://www.gite-fagot.com)); Hotel Les Campanules, 120 beds, open end December to mid September (tel 0450 544071; [www.hotel-campanules.com](http://www.hotel-campanules.com)); Hotel Les Mélézes, 44 rooms, open year round (tel 0450 544009; [www.hotellesmelezes.com](http://www.hotellesmelezes.com)). For a full list of hotels, contact the tourist office.

From the railway station cross the road bridge over the river **l'Arve** and walk uphill into **Les Houches (1)**, where the tourist office is found in the heart of the village. An arch has been installed in Les Houches as an 'official' start/finish point.

To reach the first climb on the Tour of Mont Blanc (TMB), continue past the tourist office heading west until you reach the valley station of the **Bellevue cable car** (*téléphérique*) on the left of the road. Continue beyond, under the road tunnel and up the road until you reach 'Le Grand Balcon' where a sign directs you left up steep wooden steps, then along a track. Shortly afterwards at a fork, turn left up a path, then left again up a road passing some chalets.

The route is now straightforward all the way to the col. As a metalled road with footpath shortcuts it winds up to the chalets of Maison-Neuve, then you fork right on a track that soon enters forest and eventually makes a hairpin at the two buildings of La Tuile (1370m), where a sign gives 55min to the col. Refreshments are sometimes available here at the rustic Restaurant Les Vieilles Luges. The track then continues, fairly steeply in places, all the way to **Col de Voza** (1653m, 2hr 15 min–2hr 30min, [refreshments](#), [water supply](#), [wc](#)) with its splendid view back down into the Vallée de l'Arve flanked by a row of *aiguilles*. A large hotel, the Village de Vacances APAS, dominates the col, while a small bar-restaurant stands beside the line of the Tramway du Mont Blanc (2).

**Note** If you turn right just before the col you will find, about 30min to the northwest, the

**Hotel Le Prarion** (1860m) 15 dortoir places and 19 beds; open mid June to early September (tel 0450 544007; [www.prarion.com](http://www.prarion.com)). Access from Les Houches/Les Chavants via *télécabine* (gondola). A fine viewpoint.

From the col, cross the tramway line and walk ahead on a dirt road that slopes downhill between woods and open meadows from which you gain impressive views of the Dôme du Goûter, Aiguille de Bionnassay and its glacier. About 10min from the col, you'll arrive at the well-situated

**Chalet-Refuge du Fioux** (1520m) accommodation (24 beds) and refreshments; open end of May to end September (tel 0450 935243).





Continue down to a car park where the track becomes a metalled road. Shortly after this the buildings of Le Crozat are seen to the left, with more fine views – local goat cheese is sometimes for sale here. A few minutes later pass a *buvette* (snack bar) – La Barmette – and a café, both on the left of the road. These are the first buildings of **Bionnassay** (1314m, 3hr, [accommodation](#), [refreshments](#)), a small hamlet nestling just above the narrows of the Bionnassay valley (3). As the road curves sharply to the right, the TMB breaks away left on the Chemin des Tetras. A few paces beyond this turning stands the gîte d'étape

**Auberge de Bionnassay** (1314m) 27 dortoir places, 18 beds; open June to end September (tel 0450 934523; [www.auberge-bionnassay.com](http://www.auberge-bionnassay.com)).

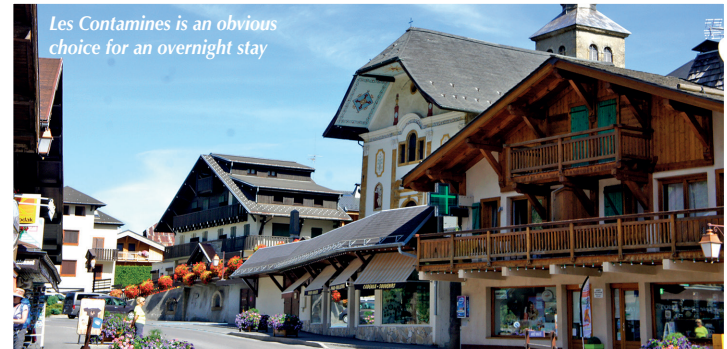
Passing a tiny chapel descend into forest to cross a bridge over the thunderous Bionnassay torrent, then steeply up to a level track/dirt road where you turn right. When you eventually emerge from the forest there's a view downvalley to St-Gervais-les-Bains. Remaining high above the valley you come to **Le Champel** (1201m, 3hr 30min), a neat hamlet of old houses and another tiny chapel with an altar made of logs. A short distance beyond the chapel, the TMB swings left on a metalled road.

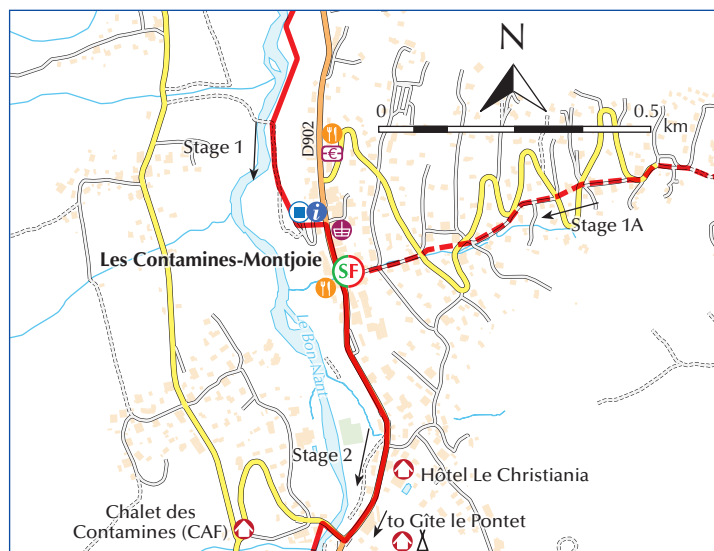
Wandering down this road you gain a fine view ahead along the Val Montjoie (4), but at the first hairpin, leave the road and continue straight ahead on a track

(Chemin des Chevreuils), which leads to **La Villette** (1090m). Veer left in the village by a large water trough and follow the narrow road past chalets, farms and meadows to a minor crossroads on the edge of **La Gruvaz** (3hr 50min). Turn left up a narrow track that shortcuts the road bends, and rejoin the road by some houses and another water supply. Bear left as far as a car park, where the road ends at the entrance to the Gorges de la Gruvaz. Cross the bridge spanning a torrent pouring from the unseen Glacier du Miage, and turn immediately right to descend a steep, narrow, damp footpath through forest.

Leave the forest by the first houses of **Tresse** and continue down to the D902, the main road running from St-Gervais to Les Contamines (bus stop nearby). Cross directly ahead and take the Chemin du Quay across the Bon Nant river, then wind uphill to the few houses of **Le Quay**. Here a minor track leaves the road to go straight ahead past a couple of chalets before becoming a footpath. Alternating between forest and pasture, the way brings you to the few farms and houses of **Les Hoches**. Alexis Bouvard, the astronomer who discovered the planet Neptune, was born in Les Hoches. (A sign on a building on the left gives details.) Carry on along a metalled road between meadows, and about 4hr 30min from Les Houches, you'll come to a T-junction.

Bear left, and shortly after come to another road at a hairpin by a timber yard. Here you cross the Bon Nant river again by the Pont du Plan de Moulin, and immediately turn right on a riverside path. This is the Sentier de Val Montjoie, which remains among trees and makes a very pleasant approach to Les Contamines. A little under 20min along this path, it forks. If you plan to find accommodation at the Chalet des Contamines CAF refuge, continue ahead for 15min, otherwise take the left branch which angles up the slope and brings you into the heart of **Les Contamines-Montjoie** (5) a few paces from the tourist office.





**Les Contamines-Montjoie** (1167m, 5hr–5hr 30min) Tourist information centre (tel 0450 470158; [www.lescontamines.com](http://www.lescontamines.com)), hotels, pensions, dortoirs, gîte, refuge, camping; restaurants, shops (last supplies until Courmayeur), bank, ATM, PO, bus link with St-Gervais-les-Bains. Lower-priced accommodation: Chalet des Contamines (CAF), 26 dortoir places, open mid June to mid September (tel 0450 470088); Hotel Christiania, beds (tel 0450 470272; [www.lechristiania-hotel.com](http://www.lechristiania-hotel.com)); Chalet-Hôtel Gai Soleil, beds (tel 0450 470294; [www.gaisoleil.com](http://www.gaisoleil.com)). The Gîte le Pontet is located at Camping Le Pontet (tel 0450 470404; [campingdupontet@wanadoo.fr](mailto:campingdupontet@wanadoo.fr)), 2km south of the village: 32 dortoir places, mini cabins and camping, open June to late September. See Stage 2 for access. For complete hotel details, contact the tourist office.

## STAGE 1A

### *Les Houches – Refuge de Miage – Les Contamines*

<b>Start point</b>	Les Houches (1007m)
<b>Distance</b>	18.5km
<b>Walking time</b>	7hr 30min
<b>High point</b>	Col de Tricot (2120m)
<b>Height gain</b>	1480m
<b>Height loss</b>	1320m
<b>Accommodation</b>	Les Houches: hotels, dortoirs, gîte, camping; Col de Voza (2hr 15min–2hr 30min): hotel; Chalets de Miage (5hr–5hr 30min): refuge; Truc (6hr): auberge; Les Contamines: hotels, dortoirs, gîte, Chalet des Contamines (CAF) refuge, camping
<b>Transport options</b>	Cableway (Les Houches–Bellevue); cableway (Les Houches/Les Chavants–Prarion); train (St-Gervais–Col de Voza–Bellevue)
<b>Alternative route</b>	Col de Voza – Les Contamines via Bionnassay (see Stage 1)

The bare statistics of height gain and loss, and the amount of time calculated to walk this stage, underline the fact that it's a demanding route for a first day. But it's also a magnificent section, rich in high mountain views and a worthy introduction to the TMB. As far as Col de Voza, the route is the same as that for the main TMB, but thereafter the two options are very different. This is a true high route, for the trail ventures close to the world of glacier, moraine and rock, crosses a 2000m pass (Col de Tricot) and avoids permanent habitation until Les Contamines is reached.

There's no need to go all the way to Les Contamines on this stage, for there's much to be said for choosing either Refuge de Miage or Auberge du Truc in which to spend the night. Both provide a sense of isolated tranquillity under the Dômes de Miage.

A note of warning before setting out: check the weather forecast, and if a storm is predicted, opt for the main TMB route via Bionnassay, for there's no real shelter between Col de Voza and the Chalets de Miage, and crossing Col de Tricot in stormy conditions is inadvisable. But if the weather looks good, go for it! It's a great walk.