

WALKING IN ZERMATT AND SAAS-FEE

50 ROUTES IN THE VALAIS: MATTERTAL AND SAASTAL



About the Authors

Jonathan has been Cicerone's publisher and managing director for over 20 years, working with authors and leading the development of the range. Lesley has been Cicerone's marketing director, leading Cicerone's sales efforts and now concentrating on the overall marketing strategy. Although they met at sea, they quickly gravitated to the mountains and trekking, before taking on Cicerone to communicate their passion for mountains, wild places and other journeys on foot or by bike. Based on the edge of the Lake District, they have few excuses for not spending days in the hills but do need to get out more. They would like to thank the whole Cicerone team for allowing them to moonlight as authors.

Our thanks to Kev Reynolds for all his encouragement with this project, the Cicerone team who have done their (absolutely normal) great job: Andrea Grimshaw, Victoria O'Dowd, Sian Jenkins and Clare Crooke. Also Rebecca Coles for her wise words on the Mischabelhütte – thanks, Becky.

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50 ROUTES IN THE VALAIS: MATTERTAL AND SAASTAL

by Jonathan Williams and Lesley Williams

CICERONE

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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. This guidebook was researched and written before the COVID-19 pandemic. While we are not aware of any significant changes to routes or facilities at the time of printing, it is likely that the current situation will give rise to more changes than usual. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the Cicerone website (www.cicerone.co.uk/1075/updates), so please check before planning your trip. We also advise that you check information about transport, accommodation and shops locally.

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 or by post to Cicerone, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Road, Kendal, LA9 7RL.

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.

Note on Mapping

The route maps in this guide are derived from publicly available data, databases and crowd-sourced data. As such they have not been through the detailed checking procedures that would generally 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.

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Symbols used on route maps

	route
	alternative route
	start point/alt start point
	start point/alt start point
	finish point/alt start finish
	finish point/alt start finish
	start/finish point/alt start/finish point
	start/finish point/alt start/finish point
	route direction
	glacier
	woodland
	urban areas
	regional border
	international border
	station/railway
	peak
	manned/unmanned refuge
	campsite
	building
	church/monastery/cross
	castle
	pass
	water feature
	viewpoint
	picnic area
	cable car
	refreshment

Relief in metres

5000 and above

4800–5000

4600–4800

4400–4600

4200–4400

4000–4200

3800–4000

3600–3800

3400–3600

3200–3400

3000–3200

2800–3000

2600–2800

2400–2600

2200–2400

2000–2200

1800–2000

1600–1800

1400–1600

1200–1400

1000–1200

800–1000

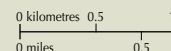
600–800

400–600

200–400

0–200

SCALE: 1:50,000



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

Some stage maps are 1:50,000 expanded to 1:40,000

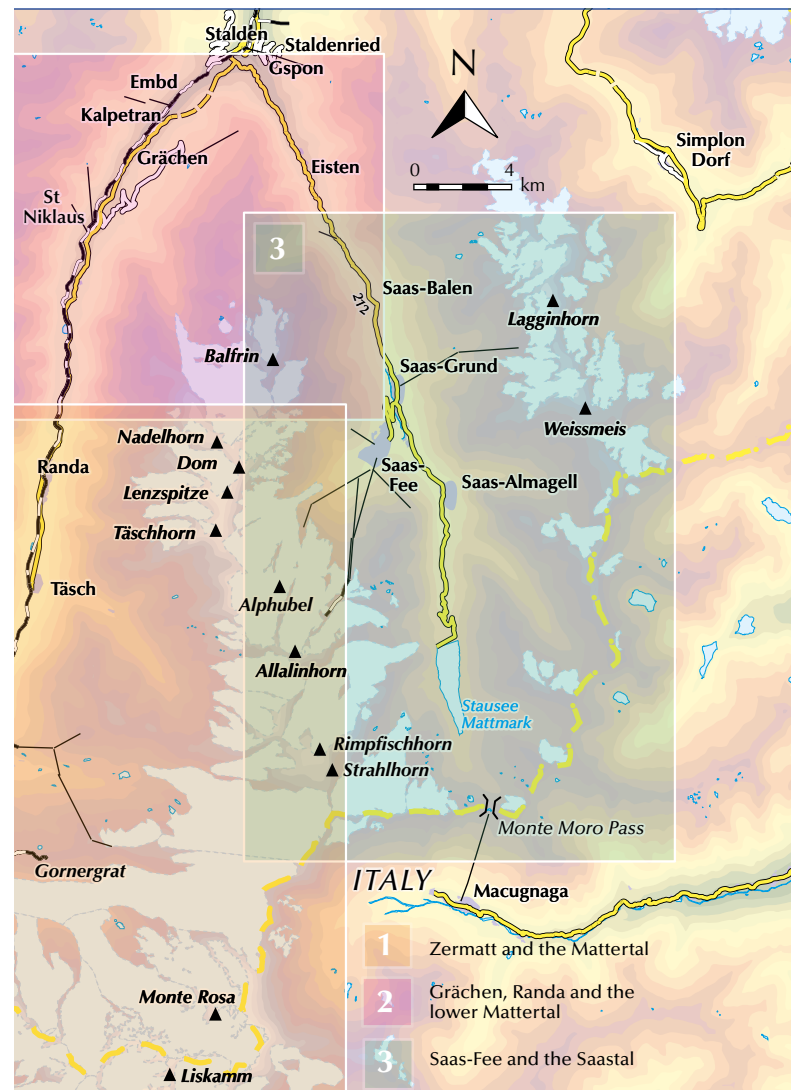
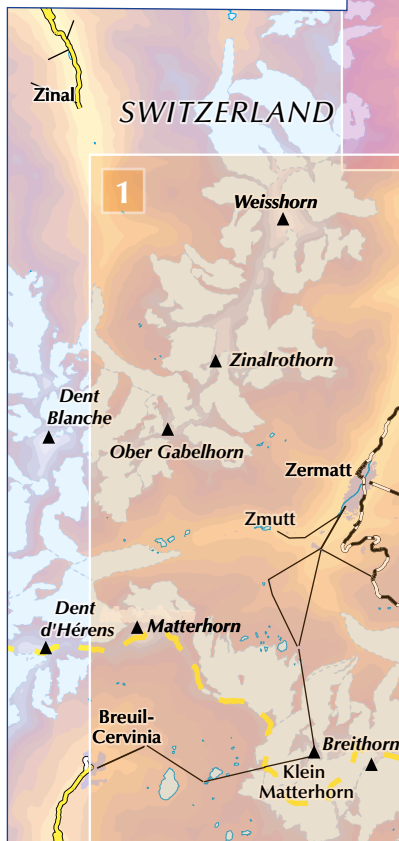
GPX files for all routes can be downloaded free at www.cicerone.co.uk/1075/GPX.



Top: Looking down on Riffelalp from Riffelberg with Zermatt far below (Walk 11)

Middle: The rocky path to Stafel (Walk 28)

Bottom: Old barns in the centre of Saas-Grund (Walk 31)



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 code is: 0041

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

Weather reports

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

Mountain rescue can be very expensive – be adequately insured.

ROUTE SUMMARY TABLE

Route	Walk title	Distance (km)	Ascent (m)	Descent (m)	Grade (1–4)	Time (hr/min)	Page
Zermatt							
1	The Trift gorge and Hotel du Trift	8	720	720	2	4hr	44
2	Ascent of the Mettelhorn and Plathorn from Trift	14.5	1280	2000	4	7hr 30min	49
3	Two-day expedition – Schönbielhütte via Höhbalmen	28.5	1660	1660	3	10hr	53
4	The villages of Zmutt, Zum See and Blatten	7.5	360	360	1	2hr 30min	58
5	Balcony route to Zmutt and the Kulturweg	9	460	460	2	3hr 45min	60
6	Zermatt to Sunnegga – the Findeln villages	6	670	670	1	2hr	64
7	Gletschergarten and Gorner gorge walk	6.5	180	420	1–2	2hr	66
8	Schwarzsee and Staifelalp – under the Matterhorn	16.5	1030	1030	3	5hr 30min	70
9	Schwarzsee to the Hörnlihütte	8	720	720	3–4	4hr	74
10	The Matterhorn Glacier Trail	6.5	550	200	2	2hr 30min	77
11	Gornegrat to Rifelsee, Riffelberg and Riffelalp	6.5	40	880	2	2hr 15min	81
12	Riffelalp and a woodland walk to Grüensee	7	260	260	1	2hr	85
13	The Gornegletscher and Monte Rosa Hütte	18	1000	1000	4	8hr	89
14	The mountain restaurants of Findeln	9	80	750	1–2	2hr	93
15	Blauherd to Sunnegga via Tuferen	4	70	350	1–2	1hr 30min	96
16	The Five Lakes Walk in the Findeln valley	11	500	500	2	3hr 30min	98
17	The Oberrothorn	16.5	1320	1320	3	7hr	102

Route	Walk title	Distance (km)	Ascent (m)	Descent (m)	Grade (1–4)	Time (hr/min)	Page
18	Blauherd to Ptulwe and Täschalp	13	800	1180	3–4	5hr 15min	106
19	Täsch to Täschalp and the Täschhütte	12	1260	480	2	5hr	111
20	Täschalp to Zermatt	9.5	250	830	2	3hr	114

Grächen, Randa and the lower Mattertal

21	The Europahütte and Hängebrücke to Täschalp	13	1480	680	3	6hr	123
22	Schalberg alp	8.5	620	620	2–3	3hr 30min	127
23	Jungen, Sparru and the Jungtal	11	760	760	3	4–5hr	131
24	A tour of the villages – Grächen and Casenried	6.5	230	230	1	2hr 30min	135
25	Grächen leat paths – the Chilcheri and Eggeri	11.5	340	340	1–2	3hr	139
26	The Ried glacier and the Grathorn	15	780	780	2	4hr 30min	143
27	Hannigalp to Grächen via Hohschugge and Bärgij	6.5	100	600	1–2	2hr	148
28	Grächen to Hannigalp via Stafel	5	600	100	2–3	2hr 15min	151
29	Ascent of the Wannehorn	6.5	570	570	3	3hr 30min	154
30	The Grächen to Saas-Fee Höhenweg	17	700	1010	3	6hr 45min	158

Saas-Fee and the Saastal

31	Fee, Almagell, Grund and the Feevispa gorge	9	350	350	1	2hr 30min	169
32	Hannig from Saas-Fee	9	560	560	2	3hr 30min	174

Route	Walk title	Distance (km)	Ascent (m)	Descent (m)	Grade (1–4)	Time (hr/min)	Page
33	The ascent of Mällig – The Ibex Trail	9	420	960	3	4hr	177
34	Gletschergrotte, Spielboden and Längflue	4.5	690	40	2	2hr 15min	180
35	The Gensweg – a tour of the Saas-Fee valley	14	830	830	2–3	4hr 30min	184
36	The Mischabelhütte	12	1600	1600	4	7–8hr	188
37	Plattjen	8	780	780	2	4hr	192
38	The Britanniahütte	5	250	250	2	2hr	196
39	The Felskinn–Plattjen traverse	12	220	1410	4	4hr 30min	199
40	Saas-Grund to Saas-Fee – the Kapellenweg and Saumweg	4	250	250	1	1hr 30min	203
41	Saas-Grund to Saas-Fee via Bideralp	8	610	370	2	2hr 30min	206
42	Saas-Grund to Triftalp, Kreuzboden and the Weissmieshütte	8	1200	330	2	4hr	211
43	The Gspon Höhenweg	14	850	350	3	5hr	215
44	The descent of the Saastal – Mattmark to Saas-Balen	16	170	890	1–2	4hr 30min	221
45	Almagelleralp and the Almagellerhütte	15	1230	1230	3	6hr	226
46	The höhenweg from Saas-Almagell to Kreuzboden	13	900	170	3	5hr	230
47	Furggstalden and the Furggälli	12	700	700	2	4hr	235
48	Schwarzbergalp and circuit of the Mattmark	12	590	590	3	4hr 30min	239
49	The Monte Moro Pass	15	720	720	3	5hr	243
50	The Ofental, Jazizücke and Antronpass	18	1090	950	3–4	6hr 45min	247



INTRODUCTION



Flower meadows high above the Saas valley

Zermatt – big, bold and brash; fast, loose and overt. One of the capitals of world mountaineering. Surrounded by many of Europe's highest mountains, with the Matterhorn rising high in the southern sky, it is an international centre attracting visitors from all over the world.

Saas-Fee – smaller, mellower, slower perhaps, discrete. Also surrounded by large mountains, it is only slightly less famous – but a world apart – from its cousin less than 10km away.

Ever since the tragic first ascent by Whymper's party in 1865, the Matterhorn has been the iconic

symbol of mountains. From children's paintings to biscuit boxes, it is written into the consciousness of mountain lovers and, indeed, most people. The Mischabel wall above Saas-Fee, however, loses nothing in comparison: four vast mountains linked by a tenuous ridge, which fill the skyline from every viewpoint.

Zermatt and Saas-Fee are the twin poles of this guide; poles apart maybe, but united in the mountains that surround them and the quality of the walking opportunities. United too in the absence of cars, which are confined to large car parks outside the resorts. Numerous lifts and mountain

WALK 1

The Trift gorge and Hotel du Trift

Start/finish	Zermatt, 1620m
Distance	8km
Total ascent/descent	720m
Grade	2
Time	4hr
Max altitude	Trift, 2337m
Refreshments	Edelweiss restaurant and hotel at Alterhaupt, Hotel du Trift

The ascent of the Trift gorge with its two mountain restaurants is one of the classic walks from Zermatt, and it is accessible directly from the centre of the town. The gorge carries the Triftbach stream down in a series of cascades from its origins in the Triftgletscher high above, while the welcoming *berghotel* at Trift stands within a beautiful grassy hanging valley surrounded by a bowl of higher peaks. The route is accessed from the middle of town and works its way up the always-interesting gorge with ever-grander views emerging as height is gained.

The main descent described here reverses the outward route (recommended after a long lunch). Or if you prefer, you can take one of the alternative but harder paths to make a circular route.

From here on
the climb passes
through the gorge.

From the church in the centre of Zermatt turn south and after 100 metres turn right onto Schälpmattgasse. After a further 150 metres turn right again onto a path leading out of the village and across pastures. After 15min turn right again towards the Trift gorge, and after 30min you will reach a **path junction at 1800m** just above a bridge (where the alternative ascent joins) crossing from the other side of the **Triftbach** stream. ◀

Alternatively, this point on the route can be accessed from the main street nearer the station. Find the small street called Chrum, 150 metres north of the church. This turns into Triftweg and climbs past chalets. After 15min



*The path climbs
alongside the
Triftbach in the gorge*

you leave the town and the path climbs to the bridge over the Triftbach and joins the main route at the 1800m path junction (30min).

Climb steadily, but steeply, as the path threads among large rocks, sometimes close to the stream, to reach Alterhaupt and the **Edelweiss restaurant** (1961m, 1hr 5min).

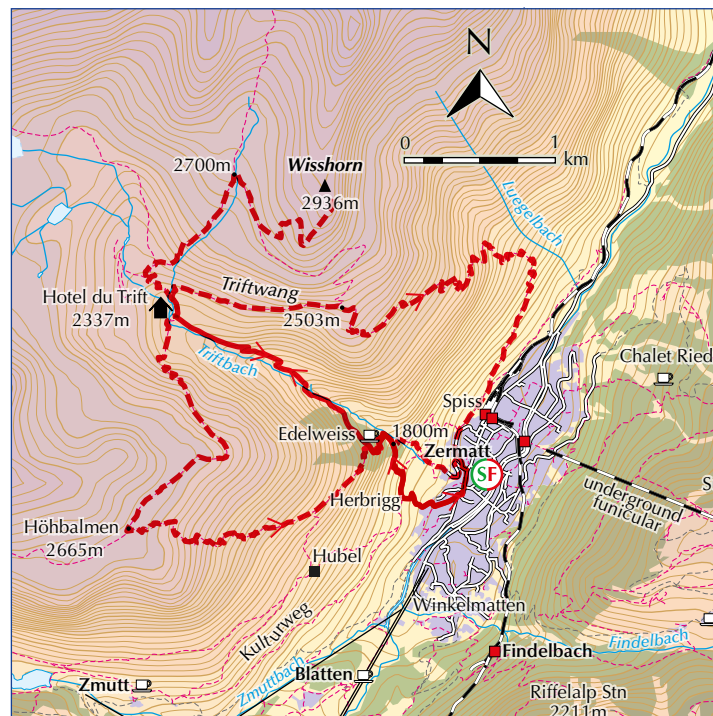
In summer 2019 a **raging torrent** of water and mud rushed down the gorge causing significant damage and alarm in the town. It was caused by the sudden outflow of an underground lake that had formed beneath the Trift glacier following several

hot months. Such deluges are becoming increasingly common and dangerous in mountain regions throughout the world. In this case the route was quickly repaired, but it is likely that the path will require further work in the future.

From the Edelweiss Restaurant continue up, at first on a gentle incline, through a lightly wooded area that becomes steeper, keeping close to the stream for a while. Climb away from the stream to surmount a large rock, then return to the stream to pass water flow control installations and cross the Triftbach to climb onto the north bank. About 100m below the *berghotel*, you will spot the Swiss flag encouraging you onwards and upwards before you arrive at the **Hotel du Trift** (2337m, 2hr 15min).

The **Hotel du Trift** (2337m) was built in 1900 in the same style as an earlier hotel that was destroyed by a huge avalanche in 1898. It has changed little over the years. It has space for 19 in rooms and 30 in the dormitory. It's a classic example of the old-style

*The welcoming
Trift hotel*



mountain inns developed for the tourists of the Victorian era, but it now serves a modern clientele with elegance and wit. Lunch and an overnight stay are recommended.

To return to Zermatt reverse the ascent path, which takes 1hr 45min into **Zermatt**, after taking the opportunity to refuel at the **Edelweiss** restaurant.

Other options from Trift

There are several options from Trift; these routes are Grade 3 walks involving long descents on steep mountainside paths.

- Descend via the Triftwang–Spiss path into Zermatt (2hr 30min)
- Climb to Höhbalmen and return to Edelweiss on a steep path before dropping into Zermatt (3hr)
- Make an excursion to climb the Wisshorn, 2936m (3hr out and back from Trift, plus the descent)

For the Triftwang–Spiss descent, walk past the hotel, turning right and then right again after 5min. The path climbs and then turns east along the hillside, with tremendous views, climbing gradually to a high point and junction at **2503m**. Descend through avalanche protection to reach the open mountainside. Traverse north towards the **Luegelbach** stream and descend alongside it before turning towards Zermatt and entering the town near the **Spiss** area, passing above the station and continuing into **Zermatt** town centre through the backstreets (2hr 30min).

For the Höhbalmen–Alterhaupt (Edelweiss) route, climb left from the hotel to the Höhbalmen ‘ledge’, which has extensive views of all the Zermatt peaks, especially the Matterhorn. At the **Höhbalmen path junction** (2665m, 1hr 10min) turn left and descend a good but steep path back to the **Edelweiss** (2hr 20min) and then reverse the initial ascent route into **Zermatt** (3hr).

For the Wisshorn route, follow signs for the Mettelhorn. After climbing for 1hr, turn right at a path junction at about **2700m** and traverse for 500 metres. Take a left turn and climb to two small buildings (one for sheep, the other presumably for their handlers). At this point the route to the 2936m **Wisshorn** summit is clear, passing up a broad ridge with some serious avalanche protection on either side. It’s a strange place and steeper than it looks. The summit views are excellent. You can descend the same way you came up, or at the two buildings turn left and drop down through a line of avalanche protection to join the Spiss descent near the **2503m** junction. The direct descent to **Zermatt** via the hotel is preferable (3hr round trip to the Wisshorn plus 1hr 40min descent to Zermatt).

WALK 2

Ascent of the Mettelhorn and Platthorn from Trift

Start	Trift, 2337m
Alternative start	Zermatt, 1620m
Finish	Zermatt, 1620m
Distance	14.5km (18.5km from Zermatt)
Total ascent	1280m (2000m from Zermatt)
Total descent	2000m
Grade	4
Time	7hr 30min (9hr 45min from Zermatt)
Max altitude	Mettelhorn summit, 3406m; Platthorn, 3345m
Refreshments	Hotel du Trift, Edelweiss restaurant at Alterhaupt on the descent
Warning	The short névé and glacier section requires crampons all season. If there is snow on the glacier and summit sections of the route, an ice axe will be needed – check with the Hotel du Trift.

This is certainly the best summit walk in the Zermatt region: a fine day out that takes walking as far as it can go without becoming mountaineering. The summit of the Mettelhorn is a magnificent viewpoint over the entire valley, taking in the sharp ridges of the nearby 4506m Weisshorn and across to the Dom and Täschhorn and north to the Bernese Oberland. The Zinalrothorn and Ober Gabelhorn are close by to the west.

This long, high walk has three sections that require care: a scree approach to the Furggi col; a short section higher on the glacier approach to the Mettelhorn, which is likely to be icy; and the final steep pull to Mettelhorn’s sharp, rocky summit.

The route also climbs the Platthorn, which needs no special equipment, although the final climb to the summit may be an even steeper climb than that of the Mettelhorn. The full route described here climbs both peaks – if the Mettelhorn is omitted the route will be 1hr shorter.

The route starts from the Hotel du Trift, saving the 2hr climb from Zermatt and allowing an overnight in this famous mountain hotel. It is possible to do the full route from Zermatt in a single day – but at around 10hr walking with 2000m of ascent and descent, this would be only for the very tough walker.