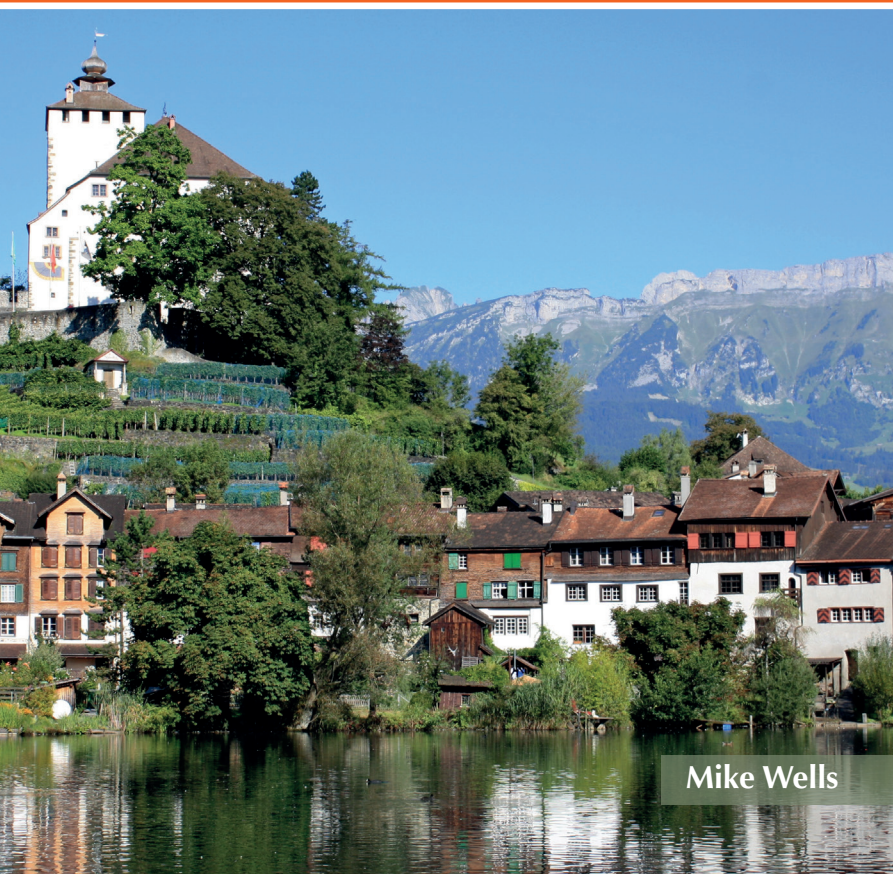


CICERONE



THE RHINE CYCLE ROUTE

Cycle touring EuroVelo 15
through six countries



Mike Wells

THE RHINE CYCLE ROUTE

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CYCLE TOURING EUROVELO 15
THROUGH SIX COUNTRIES

by Mike Wells

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 would usually be expected. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the Cicerone website (www.cicerone.co.uk/1109/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 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.

Front cover: Werdenberg, the smallest town in Switzerland (Stage 4)

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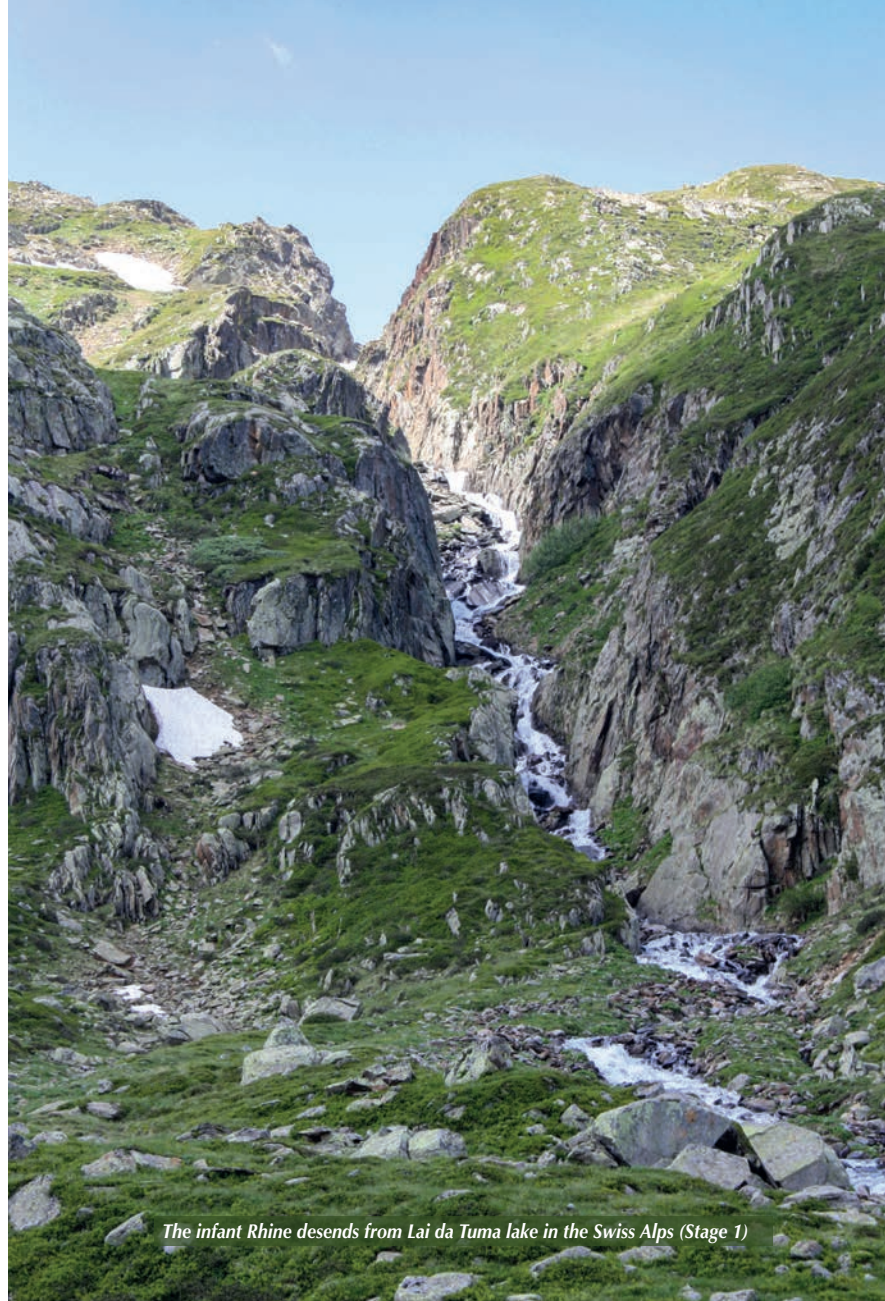
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Note on mapping

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. However, we have reviewed them closely in the light of local knowledge as part of the preparation of this guide.



The infant Rhine descends from Lai da Tuma lake in the Swiss Alps (Stage 1)

PREFACE

When I wrote the first edition of this guide ten years ago, I thought that my completed volume would be definitive and last for years. I now know better; a long-distance cycle route is a living entity that is forever changing. I incorporated a small number of route changes in the second edition and more in the third edition. This fourth edition also has a number of route changes. In addition to the usual changes to road layouts, new one-way systems, new roundabouts, etc, there have been a few more significant amendments. In France the Veloroute network continues to grow with use being made of a new section of *voie verte* on the towpath of the Canal du Rhône au Rhin between Neuf-Brisach and Kunheim (Stage 10). In Germany and the Netherlands the main changes are due to hydrological works which have been on-going since flooding in 1995. New raised flood dykes have been used to re-route Stage 15 before Oppenheim and Stages 22/23 before and after Xanten, while a diversion has been necessary to avoid two newly created flood-water retention polders between Nackenheim and Laubenheim (Stage 15).

However, the vast bulk of the route remains unchanged and the Rhine Cycle Route remains one of Europe's most popular long-distance trails for cyclists. With cycle touring growing in popularity, well-waymarked and designated traffic-free routes like much of the Rhine route will continue to attract riders.

There is one area of concern: cycle carriage by train. Provision of space and the rules for carrying bikes have changed in each edition of this guide. This relates to both Eurostar from London to Paris (where, at the time of writing, cycle carriage has been suspended for 20 months due to the COVID-19 pandemic) and SNCF between Paris and Switzerland where direct Paris–Basel–Zurich and Paris–Geneva/Lausanne Lyria trains have had cycle spaces permanently removed. It is now necessary to use TGV Est trains via Strasbourg where the number of trains with cycle space has increased. In Switzerland, where tickets were not previously train-specific, you are now required to specify a particular train and this appears on your ticket. On the positive side there has been a small reduction in the cost of a Swiss trains one-day cycle pass.



Bodensee radweg in Meersburg, with Altes Burg castle behind (Stage 5)

The Wasserturm is the symbol of Mannheim (Stage 14)



INTRODUCTION



Marksburg castle in the Rhine gorge (Stage 17)

The great attraction of following a river from source to sea is that it is downhill all the way (well, almost all the way – our route does occasionally climb a little for spectacular views down into the valley). From the summit of Oberalppass (which can be reached by cycle-friendly train), near the source of the river at Lai da Tuma, the Rhine Cycle Route descends 2046m to the North Sea at Hoek van Holland (Hook of Holland), a distance of 1368km. The cycling is straightforward, with much of the route following well-surfaced cycle tracks, often along the riverbank or flood dykes. On those occasions where roads are

used, these are usually quiet country routes with dedicated cycle lanes. All the countries it passes through are highly cycle-friendly, and motorists will generally give you plenty of room. This route is suitable both for experienced long-distance cyclists and those who have done only a little cycle touring and wish to attempt something more adventurous.

The route mostly follows Swiss, German, French and Dutch national cycle trails, with a high standard of waymarking throughout. This guide breaks the route into 27 stages, averaging 51km per stage. A fit cyclist, covering two stages per day, should

be able to complete the trip in two weeks. A more leisurely 80km per day would allow for some sightseeing and you would still complete the journey in 17 days. You can break the journey at almost any point as there are many places to stay along the way. These are suitable for all budgets, varying from 40 Hostelling International youth hostels and many backpacker hostels to B&Bs, guest-houses and hotels. If you do not mind the extra weight of camping gear, there are many official campsites.

The Rhine is rightly one of the world's greatest rivers and one of the most visited by tourists. Many travel by boat, disembarking only at tourist honey-pots and eating international food on-board. By cycling the length of the river you will have a different perspective, passing through smaller towns, meeting local people and eating local food. English is widely spoken, almost universally in Switzerland and the Netherlands.

This is a journey of variety. Passing through six countries (Switzerland, Germany, France and the Netherlands, with short sections in Liechtenstein and Austria) you will be exposed to much of the geography, history, culture and economic success of Western Europe.

From the Rhine's upper reaches in Switzerland, surrounded by high Alpine mountains, our route passes the tiny principality of Liechtenstein to reach Bodensee (Lake Constance), Western Europe's

second largest natural lake. On the shores of Bodensee are the Austrian festival town of Bregenz, where open-air opera is presented every summer on a stage over the water, and Friedrichshafen, home to the Zeppelin. Beyond the lake is Rheinfall, continental Europe's largest waterfall by volume of water. Below here the river flows through an attractive wooded valley between the Black Forest and the Jura mountains, passing a series of unspoilt medieval towns. After Basel, the route turns north through French Alsace, an area much fought over, with many remnants of successive wars. Then it is on past the French gastronomic centre of Strasbourg, the great industrial cities of Karlsruhe and Mannheim/Ludwigshafen, and the imperial cities and religious centres of Speyer, Worms and Mainz, before reaching the barrier of the Taunus and Hunsrück mountains. The Rhine Gorge, cutting between these ranges, is the most spectacular stage of all, lined with fairy-tale castles and award-winning vineyards. Halfway through is the infamous Loreley rock. Continuing between the dormant volcanic Eifel and Siebengebirge ranges, where an active geyser demonstrates the power of vulcanism, the Rhine emerges onto the North German plain.

The route continues to Bonn, past the Bundeshaus (where the West German parliament sat 1949–99) and Beethoven's birthplace, then on to Köln (Cologne), which with over



Impregnable Ehrenbreitstein fortress opposite Koblenz (Stage 17)

one million inhabitants is the largest city en route and site of the world's second tallest cathedral spire. Then past Düsseldorf and through industrial Duisburg, which produces half of all German steel and is Europe's largest inland port. For most of the way through this area, the river is followed, avoiding much of the intensive industrial development. Continuing through wide open flat agricultural land into the Netherlands, the river starts dividing to eventually reach the North Sea by way of five different channels. Our route follows one of these, the Lek, cycling on top of flood dykes with intensively farmed *polders* (drained land), lower than the river and reclaimed over many centuries, lining the river's course. At Kinderdijk there are 19 surviving windmills of the type used to drain this land. The last great city is Rotterdam, rebuilt hurriedly after destruction in the Second

World War and now being rebuilt again with much stunning modern architecture. On the opposite bank, between Rotterdam and the North Sea is Europoort, which was the world's busiest port until overtaken by Shanghai in 2004.

BACKGROUND

Geographically the Rhine has six distinct sections:

- Alpenrhein (Alpine Rhine) is the combination of the Vorderrhein and Hinterrhein tributaries that flow rapidly down the north side of the Alps, along deep glacial valleys, into Bodensee.
- Hochrhein (Higher Rhine) continues descending through broad wooded gorges providing the border between Switzerland and Baden-Württemberg (Germany) from Bodensee to Basel.

- Oberrhein (Upper Rhine) means north from Basel across a broad plain, between the Vosges mountains in French Alsace and the German Black Forest, as far as Mainz.
- Mittelrhein (Middle Rhine) is a picturesque stretch from Mainz to Bonn, where the river has cut the Rhine Gorge between the Hunsrück/Eifel mountains (west) and the Taunus/Siebengebirge ranges (east).
- Niederrhein (Lower Rhine) crosses the North German plain from Bonn to the Dutch border.
- Delta Rijn (Rhine Delta) is the Dutch part of the river, which divides into five different arms to reach the North Sea.

However, the Rhine is more than just a river. Flowing through the heart

of Western Europe, it has significance far beyond its relatively modest 1232km length. It can be described as four rivers in one. Firstly, it functions as an important national border; secondly it is the source of many of the myths and legends central to European culture; thirdly it is a great commercial artery and location for industry; and fourthly it has a magnetic attraction to tourists and pursuers of leisure activities.

The border Rhine

For two millennia, the river has represented the border between major national entities. The Romans set their northern frontier along the Rhine/Danube axis and established the first towns on the Rhine at Colonia (Köln), Mainz, Strasbourg and Xanten as bases for legions defending their

empire against barbarian tribes to the east. By medieval times this demarcation had developed into a border between Germanic speaking nations of the Holy Roman Empire, east of the river, and Francophone ones to the west. From the Middle Ages up to the mid-20th century, continuing power struggles saw frequent territorial claims and border incursions. Further south, Swiss, Austrians and Bavarians competed to control the northern approaches to the Alps, with the Rhine becoming a natural boundary between their interests. In the far north, both the Dutch and Spanish used the river in their struggle for hegemony over the Netherlands.

As a result, the river is peppered with military hardware from Roman fortifications, through medieval castles, fortified military towns and integrated defensive lines to concrete anti-tank defences, each passing into history as the technological progress of warfare made them redundant. Riverside settlements still show the scars of battle, particularly from the Second World War, where intensive bombing was followed by destructive land warfare. This is particularly evident in relation to the bridges. In the mid-19th century, the Prussian military authorities controlling the Rhineland resisted the construction of railway bridges as a potential danger of invasion. Before and during the First World War German forces constructed a series of mighty bridges to support the war in France, only

to destroy them in 1944–45 in an attempt to prevent Allied invasion of Germany.

The legendary Rhine

The oldest tales of the Rhine are derived from the *Nibelungenlied*, a 13th-century poem by an unknown German author. It centred on the bloodthirsty affairs of court in Worms and featured Siegfried, Brunhilde and a hoard of gold that caused much strife and was eventually buried in the Rhine to prevent further trouble. Siegfried went on to feature in many other legends. Composer Richard Wagner (1813–83) used this tale for the basis of *Das Rheingold* and subsequent works making up 'The Ring of the Nibelung' opera cycle.

Many of the towns, villages and castles along the German part of the river have local legends, some of which are related in the route description. Perhaps the most famous is the song of the Loreley maiden. First appearing in 1801, the story was rewritten by the author Heinrich Heine in 1824 and set to music in 1837.

The Rhine provided the inspiration for two great patriotic songs. *La Marseillaise*, the French national anthem, was written in Strasbourg in 1792 as a 'War song for the Army of the Rhine' to honour troops defending post-revolutionary France from Prussian and Austrian invasion. On the German side, the poem/song *Die Wacht am Rhein* ('The Guard



Blockhouse turret on the Maginot line near Marckolsheim (Stage 10)

STAGE 1

Oberalppass to Ilanz

Start Oberalppass summit (2046m)
Finish Ilanz square (705m)
Distance 52km
Waymarking R2

A fast descent on a well-surfaced minor Alpine pass road through Surselva, passing a series of Alpine villages, leads to the monastery town of Disentis/Mustér. From here, a mix of off-road tracks and quiet country lanes take you to Ilanz. Superb mountain scenery and high Alpine peaks abound. The Rhine evolves from a tiny mountain stream to a fast-flowing river over the course of this stage. The local language is Romansh, although German is spoken by all.

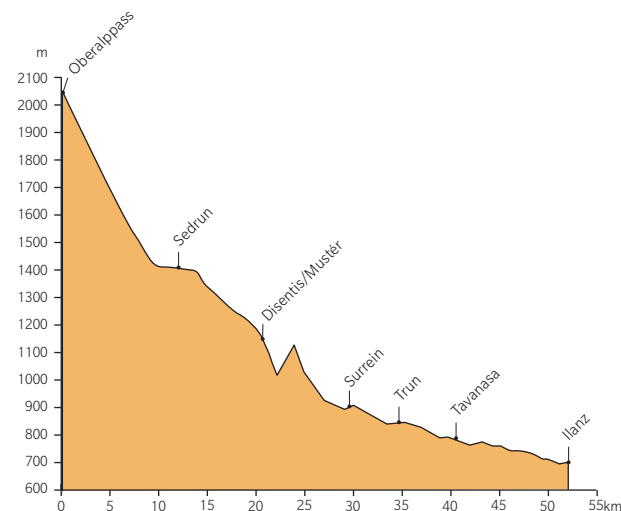
Rheinquelle, the official source of Vorderrhein, is an outflow from Lai da Tuma lake (2345m), high on the mountainside south of Oberalppass. It can be reached in an hour and a half by footpath, which is not accessible to cycles. The footpath branches right, off the pass road, shortly after summit.

Although Oberalppass is a quiet Alpine pass, it can become busy on summer weekends, particularly attracting many motorcyclists.

Care should be taken as there is no dedicated cycle lane.

From **Oberalppass** summit (2046m) (accommodation, refreshments, tourist office, station) follow road SE passing lighthouse and tourist office R (limited hours). Pass start of footpath that leads across mountainside to Rheinquelle and descend steeply around series of hairpin bends. ◀

Road passes through tiny village of **Tschamut** (5.5km, 1645m) (accommodation, refreshments, station) and then continues above golf course at Selva, one of the highest in Europe. Levelling off, road crosses grassy plateau, passing in quick succession through villages of Dieni



(accommodation, refreshments, station), **Rueras** (10.5km, 1405m) (accommodation, refreshments, camping,

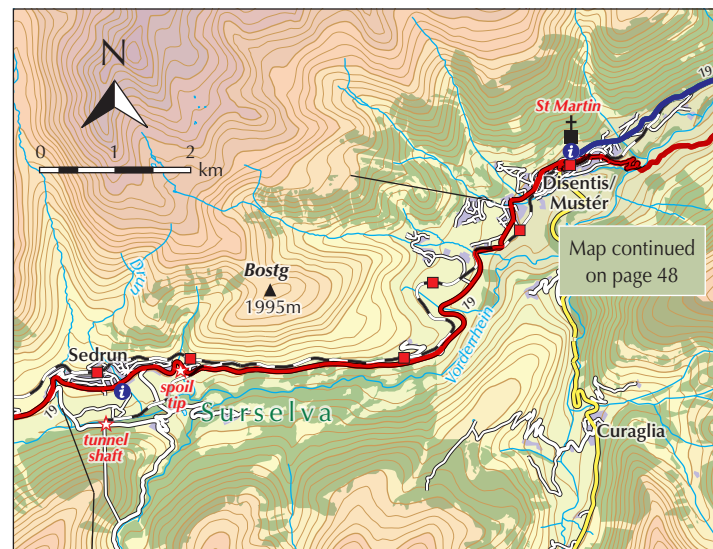
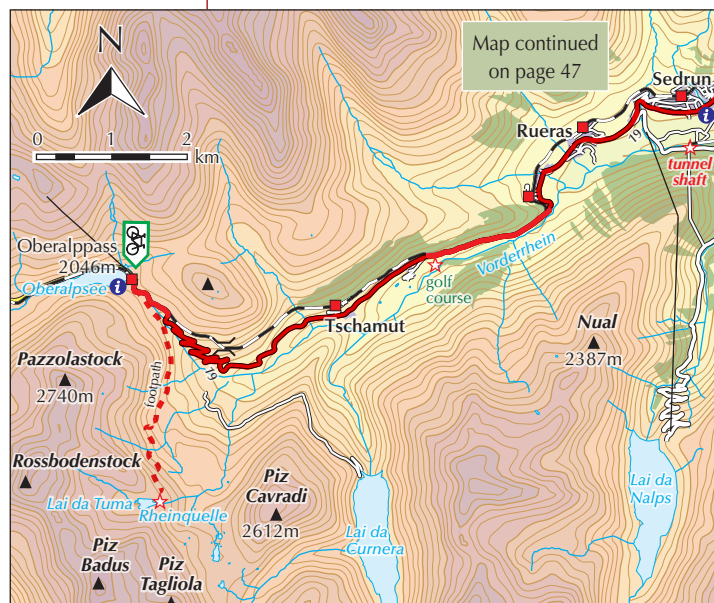
Rueras church



station), Camischolas (accommodation, refreshments) and **Sedrun** (12km, 1406m) (accommodation, refreshments, tourist office, station).

Just after Sedrun, a large pile of spoil was excavated from an intermediate shaft of the 57km-long **Gotthard base tunnel**, which is directly below the route at this point. The tunnel, which opened in 2016 after 21 years under construction, carries part of the Zürich–Milan high-speed rail line. Original plans for the shaft at Sedrun to be used to access a station in the tunnel 800m below ground have been dropped.

From Sedrun, road becomes busier as it resumes descending. After short tunnel and couple of hairpin bends, Disentis/Mustér, dominated by white facade of

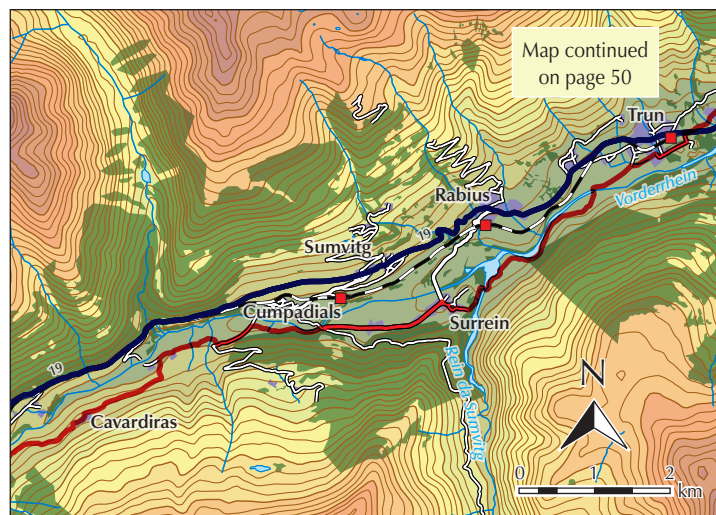


Kloster St Martin, comes into view. **Disentis/Mustér** (21km, 1142m) (accommodation, refreshments, camping, tourist office, cycle shop, station) is where you leave main road.

Founded in AD720, **Kloster St Martin** in Disentis is one of the oldest Benedictine abbeys in Switzerland. The current baroque edifice was completed in 1712. Plundered by French troops during the Napoleonic wars, the abbey barely survived the 19th century until restoration of Swiss religious houses in 1880 led to the founding of a secondary school. The community now includes 23 brothers.

On-road alternative

After Disentis/Mustér, route is mostly off-road, accessible to mountain bikes and hybrids. Going is not difficult and in dry conditions touring bikes will have no problems, especially after Danis. To bypass this section, use main



road to Ilanz. Off-road and road routes intersect at Trun and Danis. Alternative route shown in blue on maps.

At T-junction in middle of Disentis/Mustér, turn R (Via Lucmagn) and after 150 metres L (Via dalla Staziun, sp Cavardiras). Pass station R, and continue on Via Cavardiras, passing under railway and descending out of town.

The whole way from Oberalppass to Chur, the route runs close to the railway line used by **Glacier Express** trains. Traversing the Swiss Alps from Zermatt in Valais to St Moritz and Davos in Graubünden, a service of four luxury tourist trains runs daily. Taking nearly six hours for 290km, this is the world's slowest 'express' train, but what it lacks in speed is made up for by spectacular scenery. There is no provision for cycles, but if you wish to traverse this line, there is an hourly local service that you can catch with your bike.

At T-junction, bear L onto cinder track and descend via series of hairpin bends. Cross Rhine for first time and turn L ascending steadily on track cut into wooded hillside to reach **Cavardiras** (24km, 1136m).

Turn L downhill in village (Via Sogn Antoni) passing church R. At bottom of hill turn R and after 200 metres, bear L on rough track into woods. Cross two small streams and after emerging from woods turn L downhill (sp Laus). Turn R at crossroads before river (Via Resgia) and climb steeply past Resgia (**accommodation, refreshments**) on 4WD track. Descend to riverbank and continue to reach asphalt road. Turn R and immediately bear L (sp Surrein) along road through spread-out agricultural village of **Surrein** (29.5km, 898m) (**accommodation, refreshments**).

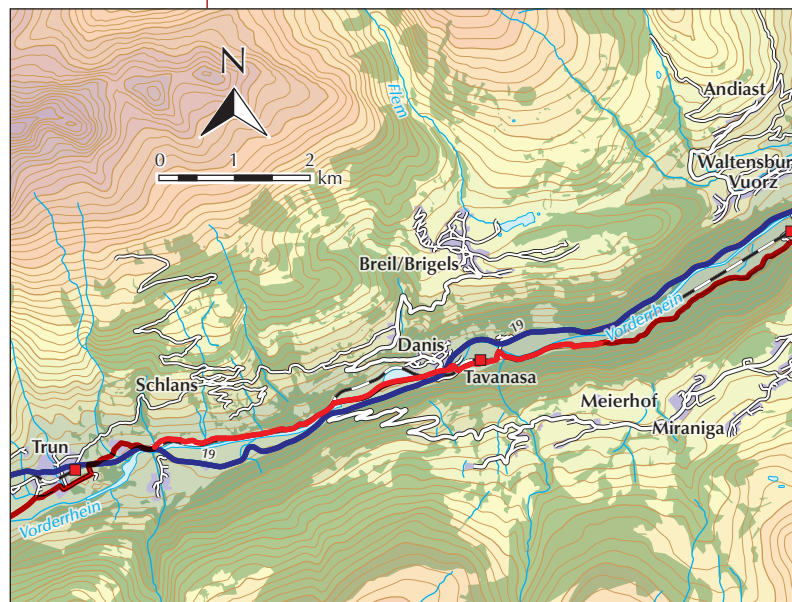
At T-junction by Surrein church, turn R and after 75 metres fork R following road gently uphill. Where asphalt ends, bear slightly L on cinder track into woods. Fork L on cinder track then turn R on bridge over river Sumvitg. Turn L on 4WD track alongside river, continuing for 2km undulating through woods. Emerge from woods then bear L onto road and cross Rhine. After bridge bear R and head across meadows with Trun visible ahead. Fork R (Via Pendas) and turn R at T-junction passing sports field R. ▶ Bear L (Via Ferrera), passing round timber yard, and continue across meadow. Bear L over bridge and level crossing to reach main road just E of **Trun** (34.5km, 853m).

Turn R for 75 metres along main road to petrol station and fork L gently uphill (Via Darvella) to reach small village of Darvella. Turn R at T-junction back downhill. At bottom turn L past houses and barns. Where road ends, continue ahead on cycle track leading up to main road. Continue alongside main road for 150 metres and where road bears R to cross Rhine, turn L steeply uphill for 50 metres. Asphalt ends at farm where gravel track drops down ahead, cut into hillside above railway. This becomes 4WD track undulating alongside railway. Cross over railway and continue on ledge between railway and Rhine to reach hydro-electric power station. Track becomes asphalt as it passes between dam R and

To visit Trun (**refreshments, camping, station**) turn left at the T-junction.

substation L. Continue past road leading to generator hall R and alongside reservoir L. Fork R halfway along reservoir and drop down under railway bridge on narrow track. Follow riverbank under three road bridges and immediately after last bridge turn sharply L uphill back under bridge. At top, turn R onto minor road between Danis and Tavanasa and bear R over Rhine. Turn L and continue through **Tavanasa** (40.5km, 798m) (*accommodation, refreshments, station*).

Continue through village and bear L under railway bridge. Just before girder bridge over Rhine turn R onto dirt road (Via Resgia). Cross small bridge and at three-way fork just before railway line, take middle fork along cinder track parallel with railway. Follow track as it bends R and L under railway before bearing away from railway following edge of forest R and meadows L for 5km, passing turn-off L to Waltensburg/Vuorz station.



Covered bridge leading to Rueun

Re-enter forest and drop down to riverbank, passing old covered wooden bridge that leads across Rhine to **Rueun** (47.5km, 746m) (**accommodation, refreshments**).

Continue S of river, mostly in trees, to road repair depot where asphalt surface begins. At beginning of industrial estate, bear L parallel to Rhine on track behind factories. Pass under railway and road bridges and continue along riverbank (Via Sorts) with houses and allotments R. Bear R across level crossing and turn L (Giessli) with skyline of Ilanz *altstadt* (old town) R. Turn R (Via Centrala) to reach square in centre of **Ilanz** (52km, 705m) (**accommodation, refreshments, tourist office, cycle shop, station**).

Ilanz (pop 2350) is the first town on the Rhine. It played an important role during the Reformation when in 1526 the Diat of Ilanz gave citizens the right to choose between Catholicism or Protestantism, the second town in the country after Zurich to adopt this freedom. Points of interest in the *altstadt* include medieval walls, a reformed church (1518) and fine 15th- and 16th-century houses.

Ilanz altstadt



STAGE 2

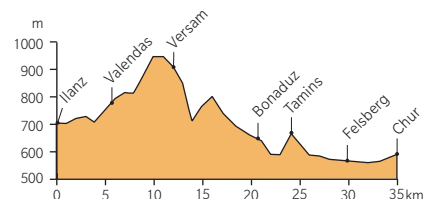
Ilanz to Chur

Start	Ilanz square (705m)
Finish	Chur station (585m)
Distance	35km
Waymarking	R2

This is the only stage with significant ascent (250m). From Ilanz, the route climbs steadily following a minor country road to Versam, drops down, and then climbs again to a superb viewpoint high above the gorge of Ruinaulta. Descending to cross the river at the confluence of Vorderrhein and Hinterrhein in Reichenau/Tamins, an asphalt cycle track is followed to the medieval city of Chur, capital of Graubünden canton.

From square in centre of **Ilanz**, follow Glennerstrasse E (sp Chur). At end of Ilanz, cross river Glenner, and join cycle track L, parallel with road ascending steadily to reach **Castrisch** (2km, 722m) where cycle track ends.

Turn R by fountain in centre of village and continue along road, descending gently for 1.5km, followed by steady ascent. First views of Ruinaulta canyon appear L, which will become more dramatic over next few kilometres. Continue climbing through **Valendas** (6.5km, 810m)





- **complete 1368km route in 27 stages from source to sea**
- **takes approximately two weeks to ride • easy and mostly downhill cycling mainly on dedicated cycle routes**

A guide to cycling the Rhine Cycle Route from source to sea with full route descriptions and comprehensive maps. It is described over 27 stages that take between two and three weeks to complete.

From the high Swiss Alps, a series of national cycle trails, waymarked as EuroVelo route 15 (EV15), lead to the North Sea, passing through six countries (Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Austria, Germany, France and Holland). Much of the route is on dedicated cycle tracks, mostly asphalt surfaced with some sections on hard compacted gravel.

The route traverses stunning scenery, including the castle-studded Rhine gorge between Mainz and Cologne, and visits many historic towns and cities.



- highlights include Bodensee, Basel, Strasbourg, Speyer, Rhine gorge, Koblenz, Köln, Arnhem, Rotterdam
- can be linked with the Moselle Cycle Route at Koblenz

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