



18 Vine St.
Evesham
Worcs
UK
WR11 4RL

T: +44 (0)1386 462181
F: +44 (0)1386 761414
rob@expeditionguide.com

Arolla to Zermatt (The Matterhorn) – A Walkers Haute Route

Distance: 64 km Length: 6 days Highest Point: 2894m

This is a trek of outstanding quality in scenery that is some of the best and most stunning in the whole of the Alps. The Trek takes in small Alpine villages, valley pastures, high mountain passes, remote mountain huts, exposed high trails and heads past countless 4000m peaks to its journey's end at one of the most instantly recognisable mountains in the world – the Matterhorn. To top it all, this trek can be done in just 1 week's holiday.



The trek starts under the looming mass of the Pigne D'Arolla and passes Mont Collon, the Dent Blanches, Grand Cornier, Ober Gabelhorn and Weisshorn and stiletto pointed Zinalrothorn; then there's the Dom and Taschorn, Breithorn and of course Matterhorn with all of their dramatic neighbours in their impressive cloak of ice and snow.

This route manages to stay under the 3000m mark for its duration, requires no technical mountaineering skills and avoids glacier crossings. That said it is still a strenuous trip and you should be reasonably fit to complete it enjoyably. There are also some exposed sections where a head for heights is a bonus!

Most days lead to small Alpine villages although on one of the nights you will stay in a more remote Alpine hut. At each stop meals are provided so it is not necessary to carry food and cooking equipment. These stop-overs are very much part of the experience. In the villages you will have time to sample some of the local culture, whilst in the refuges you will enter a world that is normally the preserve of the climber and mountaineer and witness high mountain scenery that you will never forget.

Flora & Fauna

This region contains some of the richest Flora in all of Switzerland. The rock is a mixture of limestone, gneiss and schistose and this encourages lime loving plants to flourish in some areas. There are also marked differences in the altitude levels of the trek which leads to a great diversity of flora.

You are also likely to see a wide range of fauna



including the Marmot, a regular sight and often heard before he is seen with a sharp shrill whistle alerting you of his presence. You may also see Chamois and Ibex as well as a range of mountain birds.

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Weather

The altitude of the trek varies on a daily basis, and so will the weather. During the day in the valleys temperatures may be around 30 degrees C. This may drop to below freezing at night on the high level passes. Snow can fall at any time of year and afternoon lightening storms are not uncommon.

The Valais region of the Alps, which this trek runs through, receives more sunshine, higher temperatures and less rainfall than any other region of the Alps so you stand a good chance of a sun-tan!

The Programme:

Day One - Sunday

We will meet on Sunday evening at the Hotel du Pigne where you will be booked in for your first nights accommodation. The hotel is situated in the centre of the village, has a pleasant restaurant and terrace where we can enjoy a meal and a beer, soak up the views and plan the week ahead.

Summary: Arrive in Arolla. Stay at Hotel du Pigne.

1 night – 77CHF per person based on a twin room B&B. (2006 prices)

Accept VISA

Day 2 – Monday



Arolla – Lac Bleu – Les Hauderes – La Sage

Distance: 10km

Time: 4 hours

Start Altitude: 2006m



A pleasant easy days walking to get into the swing of things. The route is mainly downhill and allows us to get used to the altitude without too much exertion. Along the way we will enjoy a picnic lunch at Lac Bleu and can also stop for refreshments

and a local café.

Accommodation: Local hotel with twin room accommodation with breakfast. 45CHF each. 3 course dinner 25CHF. Accept VISA

Day 2 – Tuesday – 18th July 06

La Sage – Col du Tsate – Cabane de Moiry

Distance: 10km

Time: 5.5 hours

Start Altitude: 1667m



The morning is spent pulling up to the Col du Tsate. A great deal of ascent is achieved in the forest, away from the heat of the sun. As we pull up over the tree line and onto the Col we gain tremendous views back to Arolla and of the way ahead. Features that we enjoy today include the Val de Moiry with the Grand Cornier, the Moiry Icefall and the Moiry Glacier.

Accommodation: Cabane de Moiry, a mountain refuge owned by the Montreux section of the Swiss Alpine Club. The hut is built in a dramatic location among a horseshoe of peaks and glaciers. Cost: 50 CHF Each for bed, breakfast and evening meal. Cash Only.

Day 3 – Wednesday 19th July

Cabane de Moiry – Col de Sorebois – Zinal

Distance: 14km

Time: 5.5 hours

Start Altitude: 2825m



The day starts off downhill before the trail takes us to another high col, the Col de Sorebois. We leave the arctic splendour of the upper Val

de Moiry to enter the alpine valley environment of Zinal. There is a good chance of seeing Chamois and even Ibex and the hillside is famed for its range of Alpine flowers.

Accommodation: A comfortable Alpine hotel with twin room accommodation. Cost 85CHF each B&B. Cash Only. There is a selection of restaurants for our evening meal and a supermarket to stock up on supplies.

Day 4 – Thursday 20th July 06

Zinal – Forcletta – Gruben

Distance: 14 km

Time: 6 hours

Start Altitude: 1675m



The path takes us over the Forcletta Pass, a stunning high alpine pass offering views of the Weisshorn and Bishorn as we descend. We pass through several small Alp hamlets and our journey ends in the small village of Gruben. This is the first German speaking community we enter into and is a “Swiss Village of the Golden Age of Mountaineering”.

Accommodation: A comfortable Alpine hotel with twin room accommodation. Cost: 80 CHF Per person B & B. Cash Only. The hotel has a restaurant for evening meals.

Day 5 – Friday 21st July 06

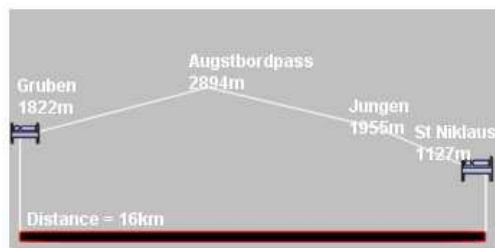
Gruben to St Niklaus and then train to Zermatt.

Distance: 16 km

Time: 7.5 hours

Start Altitude: 1822m





This last day offers a grand finale and you would be hard pushed to find a better days walk any where in the Alps. It is a day of contrasts and heads over the high Augstbordpass, an historic trading route, that offers some of the loveliest views in Switzerland. The trail takes in spacious woodland, high pastures and stony wilderness and the beautiful mountain hamlet of Jungen where we can enjoy an Ice Tea with a view of journeys end, Zermatt.

Zermatt is approached by a short train ride where we can enjoy a well earned celebration meal and a comfortable hotel and views of the Matterhorn.

Accommodation: Zermatt – Twin room B&B accommodation. Accept VISA.



Getting There



The trek starts in the Swiss Alpine village of Arolla (pictured left). You can choose to fly or drive out. If there are enough of you to fill a car the driving from the UK can be cheaper, and is also more environmentally friendly.

Flights: You need to fly to Geneva. The main operators from the UK are Swissair (020 7434 7300), British Airways (0845 722 2111) and Easyjet (0870 600 0000).

You will often get cheaper flights by booking online.

From Geneva you catch a train to Sion and from there catch the Post Bus to Arolla. As one would expect in Switzerland the whole journey is efficient and simple. Visit this website for timetable and prices: <http://www.sbb.ch/en/> At the end of the trek it is equally simple to return to Geneva from Zermatt.



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Driving: The journey from Calais to Arolla is 675 miles and takes approximately 9 hours without too many stops. Ferries are cheaper when booked online and if you are prepared to cross at night or early morning. Road tolls costs approximately 60 Euros and you need to buy road tax at the Swiss Border which costs another 30 Euros.

You can leave your car in Arolla for the duration of the trek although the hotel may make a small charge. Public transport is then available from Zermatt back to Arolla at the end of the trek. The journey takes just under 4 hours and there are 4 departures a day from Zermatt.

Course assembly & Departure



We will meet at the Hotel du Pigne in Arolla any time from 4:00pm onwards. A pre-course briefing will take place in the bar at 7:00pm. Please contact me on my mobile if you are running late for any reason. Number 0044(0)7970 409102

The course will finish in Zermatt on the Friday evening. Zermatt can only be reached by train or on foot. Course members can therefore

leave at their leisure on Friday night or any time afterwards. I will stay for a celebration meal on the Friday night and catch a train Saturday morning back to Arolla to collect my car.

Additional Costs

The course fee includes instruction/leadership only. I have shown the costs of hotels and huts as they were in 2006 based on two people sharing a twin room but these may be subject to slight change. Many of the hotels insist on being paid in cash and there is only 1 cash machine on route. The currency is Swiss Francs.

There are also opportunities for catching cable cars on some days and for lunch time stops. Cable cars are available on 2 days and cost in the region of 12 CHF each and lunch can be anything from 12CHF for a packed lunch to 60CHF if you go to town in a restaurant.

If you budget for 750 CHF per person to pay for all accommodation, food, uplift etc that should be plenty, indeed you should have some left over for presents!

Insurance





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Each course member must have with them and show proof of insurance for the duration of the course on the first evening ie personal accident, rescue and public liability. Our approved insurance contractors are:

BMC: 0870 0104878 or **The Foundry:** 0114 2755806 or **Snowcard:** 0132 7262805

We also strongly recommend that you take out cancellation cover insurance.

You should also carry an E111 card.

Kit List

Temperatures vary a great deal in a week trekking in the Alps. We could have a complete range from snow to 35 degrees heat so a layering system works best. Sunglasses and sun cream are essential and should be a good quality.

Light weight is emphasised because you have got to carry it all week!

What to wear:

Trousers – Schoeller type are ideal but anything that is quick drying and not cotton

Long sleeve wicking top – preferably in white so that it is not so hot

Sun hat

Sun glasses

Sun cream – preferably a mountain cream and more than factor 20 at least

Fleece jumper in the morning

Walking boots and walking socks

What to carry:

Rucksack – 40 litres

Lightweight Waterproof jacket

Lightweight Waterproof trousers

Head Torch with spare batteries and bulb

Drinks bottle

Hat and Gloves

1 x spare gloves

1 x spare warm layer ie fleece gillet or jumper

Fleece jacket

Lightweight T Shirt and Shorts

Spare food

Personal First Aid & sanitary supplies – include head ache tablets

Sunglasses and Sun Cream

Silk sleeping bag liner for huts

Ear Plugs for the huts

Spare underwear x 3 to include spare walking socks

Trekking poles – can be useful but not essential





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Waterproof rucksack liner and a couple of drybags to pack sleeping bag liner, gloves and spare warm layer in.

Insurance Certificate – photocopy will be fine

Passport

E111 Card

Travel tickets

Money – Swiss Francs (You will need Euros for the road tolls in France if you are driving out)

Fitness & Health

The fitter you are, the more you will enjoy this trip. It is well worth doing some training in advance to prepare yourself. The sooner you can start a training programme the better, but its never too late.

To enjoy the trek you need to be happy walking all day with a light rucksack on your back for 5 days in a row. The height gain each day is approximately 1000m, which is about the same as many of the mountains in Snowdonia, The Lake District and Scotland. An ideal training programme would be to spend as many weekends as possible walking in the mountains prior to the trip. If you can bag one or two summits on each day that you go out your fitness will soon improve.

Additionally you should aim for two sessions a week of aerobic exercise to get the heart pumping. I find swimming particularly good as it is a low impact all round work out but cycling and brisk walking are equally suitable.

Whatever exercise you choose start off very easily and slowly increase the duration of the exercise. Make sure you warm up before hand to avoid muscle pain and warm down slowly at the end. Vary your weekly routine or you will soon get bored.

If you have any existing heart condition or breathing condition you should consult your doctor before joining the trek as we will be walking at altitude – see the article attached.

Trekking at Altitude

I have attached an article that I have written on altitude sickness. It is also available on my website, along with articles on hill food, weather and a history of the Alps.





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Altitude Sickness

By Rob Johnson August 2006

When we visit high mountain regions we become susceptible to altitude sickness, known as Acute Mountain Sickness, or AMS. If you are planning a visit to anywhere over 2000m then it is worth understanding the causes, symptoms and possible outcomes of AMS your life could depend on it.

In its early stages AMS can be as innocuous as a head ache but if ignored it can lead to unconsciousness and death.

When does it occur?

For the average person the threshold is 2500m to 3000m, but people have been known to suffer as low as 2000m. There doesn't seem to be any way of telling who will suffer and who won't. Being physically fit does not seem to be a guarantee of avoiding AMS, indeed it is normally the young and fit who suffer most but this is probably because they do not have the patience to acclimatise slowly. Acclimatisation stops at around 5300m above sea level.

How can we avoid it?

Being at altitude is all about taking things slowly. Take a leaf out of the late, great Don Whillans and do the very minimum you can get away with whilst you acclimatise.

Being physically fit will definitely not be a disadvantage, it will also greatly aid your enjoyment once you are acclimatised so put some effort in before your trip. Aim for 3 sessions of hard exercise a week totalling 30 minutes or more. Swimming is ideal as it will give your cardiovascular system a good work out without stressing joints.

Drink plenty of water. As you acclimatise your body will need more water to adjust its fluid levels. You will also use more moisture than normal by breathing in dry mountain air and exerting yourself with reduced levels of oxygen in the air. Your urine should be clear and plentiful. The average adult male should be drinking 4 to 6 litres of water a day.

Keep your sleeping altitude as low as possible. The daily difference should not exceed 300 to 600 metres once you are over about 2500m, this will vary from person to person so keep an eye on each other for the symptoms detailed below. Always try a sleep lower than that days highest altitude.

Change your diet. You will need a great deal more calories than normal when trekking at altitude but your body won't deal well with fats and proteins. Carbohydrates are the way forward.





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Patients with heart or lung disease or high blood pressure should seek specialist medical advice before travelling above 4000m. Diamox. This drug can be used to prevent AMS. It is used to reduce fluid retention (makes you pee) and increases the amount of oxygen in the blood. It needs to be taken for several days before an ascent and for 3 days afterwards and has several side effects. It can cause nausea, tingling in the fingers and make you generally feel unwell. More unusual side effects include flushing, rashes, thirst, drowsiness and excitement. It can be very useful for rescue teams who cannot afford to acclimatise properly but trekkers and climbers should consider the ethics of using drugs for sport.

The Symptoms

Most people will feel a little unwell at altitude, it is perfectly normal and doesn't mean you about to drop down dead! After a day or so at the same altitude then you should feel normal again, that's acclimatisation.

At altitude the fine tissues in your lungs and head that normally act as barriers start to leak. When you acclimatise slowly then this fluid, called oedema, is managed by your body and disposed of. If you don't acclimatise slowly it builds up.

If the oedema builds up in the head its called cerebral oedema, if its in the lungs its called pulmonary oedema. This happens to less than 2% of travellers at 4000 to 5000m, occasionally lower.

High Altitude Pulmonary Oedema (HAPE)

Early symptoms:

Headaches,

a bad cough or chest infection causing breathlessness.

If these are ignored HAPE may come on in minutes and can be recognised by breathlessness at rest and sometimes a bubbling sound in the chest and blood stained mucus. Patients are then dangerously ill and should be evacuated to a lower altitude as an emergency.

High Altitude Cerebral Oedema (HACE)

Symptoms: Massive headaches, lack of balance and dizziness, patients become drowsy, irrational and confused over a period of hours and their walking becomes unsteady. Double vision may occur. Again patients are dangerously ill and should be sent to a lower altitude as an emergency.





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Treatment

As mentioned above most people suffer some of the early symptoms of AMS. If the symptoms get worse don't go any higher. Wait 2 or 3 days for improvement. If there is none then descend at least 500m.

In these early stages where a headache is common you can take headache tablets but they tend to just mask the symptoms. Oxygen by mask will also help the symptoms.

It is worth re-emphasising that the acute symptoms of AMS ie HACE & HAPE are rare, this is because the early symptoms are strong enough not to be ignored. Your body is sending you this message for a reason – don't ignore it!

Anyone that suffers from the symptoms of HACE or HAPE should descend immediately and seek medical attention if possible. Often a descent of 500m is all that is required but the lower the better. The patient should not gain height again until medical attention has been sought.

Conclusion

Build your trip programme around proper acclimatisation. I plan all of my courses that will involve altitude around the simple adage that gaining height slowly and descending rapidly if one is ill cannot be bettered. This sometimes means that we are more expensive than other operators but believe it's worth spending a little extra on a longer trip so that you can acclimatise properly and enjoy the trip safely.

The fitter you are before the trip, the more you will enjoy it and it can only help in acclimatisation.

On the trip itself get used to monitoring how you feel and watching others for any changes in their personality that may be as a result of altitude sickness. Don't be afraid to discuss any aches or pains that you may have.

Have an emergency plan if someone needs to go down, who will accompany them, what will happen to the others?

Go slowly. If you have a worsening headache, go down!

