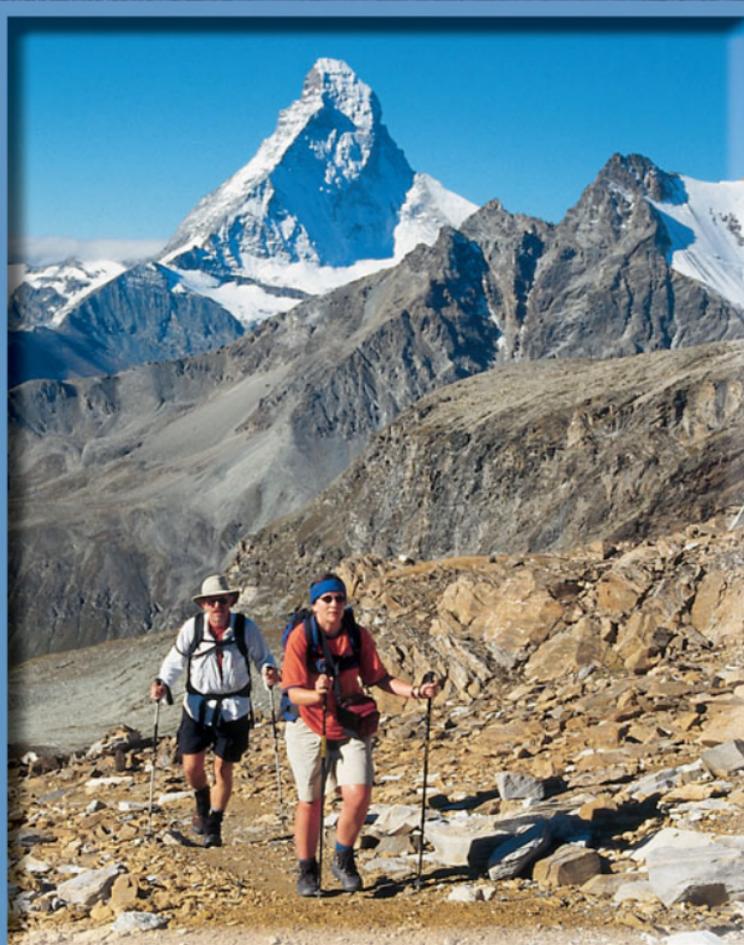


A CICERONE GUIDE
by Hilary Sharp

TOUR OF THE MATTERHORN

A TREKKING GUIDE



CICERONE

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PRACTICALITIES

WHEN TO GO

The Tour of the Matterhorn crosses cols of over 3000m, where snow is likely to remain until well into June. The huts used on the trek generally do not open until late June or early July, so it is not advisable to set out before the summer Alpine season begins. However, later is not necessarily better as certain areas benefit from a coating of snow to disguise the horrors of denuded ski resorts, which are far more acceptable in their winter garb.

You have to decide if you plan to walk every part of the route, or whether you intend to take the occasional lift, for example from Breuil-Cervinia to Testa Grigia. This section of the trek is quite ugly when there is no snow, but such conditions do allow you to walk up to the slopes. When névé remains walking may be more difficult – either because the snow is hard and slippery, or because it's a hot, late afternoon, the snow has partially melted, and therefore doesn't hold your weight.

If you're planning to take lifts to be sure of their open season – usually early July to early September.

The best time to do this trek is therefore during this brief summer holiday season. The earlier you go the more flowers will be in bloom on the

hillsides; the middle of the season sees the most holidaymakers in the Alps; the end is generally noted for beautiful autumn light, but can be prone to fresh snowfall above 3000m.

If in doubt call local tourist offices or the huts for up-to-date information on conditions.

HOW TO GET THERE

Zermatt

By air

The nearest airports to the Tour of the Matterhorn are Zurich and Geneva. From Britain **Zurich** is served by:

British Airways www.ba.com tel: 0845 722 2111

Easyjet www.easyjet.com tel: 0870 600 0000

Swiss International www.swiss.com tel: 0845 601 0956

Swiss International also operates from the USA and most other airports worldwide.

Zurich airport is found on www.zurich-airport.com

Many airlines fly into Geneva from Britain:

TOUR OF THE MATTERHORN

British Airways www.ba.com tel: 0845 722 2111

Easyjet www.easyjet.com tel: 0870 600 0000

jet2 www.jet2.com tel: 0870 737 8282

Swiss International www.swiss.com tel: 0845 601 0956

BmiBaby www.bmibaby.com tel: 0870 264 2229

From America: Swiss International (sharing with American Airlines), Continental and Lufthansa (sharing with United Airlines).

From Ireland: Aer Lingus www.aerlingus.com tel: +353 1 886 8844.

Geneva airport can be found on www.gva.ch tel: +41 22 717 71 11 info@gva.ch

Onward travel to Zermatt is best by **train**. The Swiss railway network is incredibly efficient; timetables and online ticket sales can be found at www.sbb.ch

By train

If you choose to travel out to Switzerland by train then you will not be disappointed by the service once there. It may be worth buying a Swiss rail pass; the Swiss Tourist Office in your home country will be able to advise (UK tel: 0207 734 1921). All the different passes are described in detail on www.myswissalps.com/swissrail-passes



The preferred mode of transport in Zermatt

SAFETY

EMERGENCIES AND RESCUE

Rescue telephone numbers Switzerland 144; Italy 118

Whilst trekking should not be a high-risk activity there are increasing numbers of accidents, even on non-glaciated terrain. This is partly because more and more people walk in the Alps, but it is also a factor of the adventurous terrain that is being accessed by footpaths. Glaciated terrain brings its own objective hazards, but these are minimal on the gentle slopes encountered on the Tour of the Matterhorn. Nevertheless, for all Alpine walking you need to consider emergencies that could arise. If you are well equipped and prepared you will hopefully avoid, or at least know how to deal with, most situations.

Note There are no pharmacy facilities between Zermatt and Cervinia (at least seven days' walking).

First aid

All walkers should carry a basic first aid kit in their rucksacks. However, although the trek described here is multi-day, there are opportunities to get medical supplies if needed or to abandon the route for a few days. In addition there are good and reliable rescue services in the Swiss and Italian regions covered, so the first aid kit can be kept to the essentials:

- plasters
- painkillers
- aspirin
- treatment for diarrhoea
- antiseptic cream
- crêpe bandage
- fly repellent
- antihistamine cream
- scissors
- tweezers
- antiseptic wipes
- wound dressing
- blister kit
- latex gloves
- triangular bandage (or use a scarf or bandana)
- bivvy bag or space blanket (shiny foil)

This kit allows treatment of most emergencies that could be encountered during this walk. Resourcefulness is most useful: for example, a trekking pole can be used to splint an injured arm or leg. However, if a problem becomes serious then you should be prepared to leave the trek. It is not recommended to continue if, for example, you have an upset stomach which prevents you eating properly or risks leading to dehydration, or some form of infection, such as a blister that has become ulcerated. Continuing to hike day after day with an ongoing condition could cause long-term damage.

Potential problems on the hill

As well as carrying the gear it's also crucial to know what to do in the event of incidents that can happen during mountain walks:

Heart attack Everyone should have basic first aid knowledge. Treatment of a heart attack victim goes beyond the scope of this guide but should be learnt at a first aid centre. This is knowledge that hopefully is never used, hence the need for regular refresher courses.

Hypothermia If you are walking in the summer months you would not expect to be at risk of hypothermia, which is generally associated with winter expeditions and high-altitude mountaineering. However, there are a surprising number of incidences of hypothermia each summer in the non-glaciated Alps. In addition, on the Tour of the Matterhorn you are flirting with the high mountains and attaining altitudes of nearly 3500m. In classic summer hypothermia cases the victim becomes very hot and consequently sweaty whilst walking uphill, then cools very quickly, exacerbated by wind chill and tiredness. The same situation can arise during bad weather, when snow is frequent above 2000m even in the summer. The victim's core body temperature drops slightly, and the body's response is to cut off circulation to the outer extremities. Hands and feet become very cold; the victim starts to shiver and to become irrational,

unable to make basic decisions such as stopping to eat and put on warm clothes. Eventually a comatose state is reached, and death will follow quickly.

The best action to take against hypothermia is to avoid it in the first place. When the summit is reached or the wind gets up, put on an extra layer straight away; don't hesitate to change your planned route if necessary. The symptoms of impending hypothermia (sometimes referred to as exposure in the early stages) should be recognised and dealt with as soon as possible: give the victim warm drinks and food and put on clothing; a hat will prevent considerable heat loss. If feasible the walk should be cut short to get the victim down to the valley for warmth and rest. If the situation has already become more serious, with the victim displaying irrational and aggressive behaviour, it is imperative to act quickly. Once the stage of coma is reached the rescue service must be called as the group cannot move the victim themselves. At this stage the victim must be kept warm, insulated from the ground as well as from the elements, and not moved.

Altitude sickness It is unlikely that true altitude sickness will be encountered on the Tour of the Matterhorn as mostly the trail remains around and below 3000m. Whilst people may sometimes think they are feeling the effects of the high altitude, altitude sickness is really only encountered above 3000m.

INFORMATION

ZERMATT

Zermatt is a town of contrasts. Dominated by the Matterhorn, it is nowadays assured a place high on the wish list for many people travelling in the Alps. Just seeing the Matterhorn is a must for anyone with any interest in natural beauty.

With the advent of European travel in the 18th century the people of Zermatt quickly became aware that in the mountain they had a potential goldmine, and since that time the town has developed in line with the huge commercial success of the Matterhorn's image. However, if all you do is arrive in Zermatt by train and walk down the main street, jostled by shoppers, to the background sounds of whistling stuffed marmots and the jingle of cowbell keyrings, you will miss much of the charm of the town.

'Zermatt' means 'to the meadows' ('zer', to; 'matt', meadow). However, 500 years ago Zermatt was still called 'Prato Borno', a name given in Roman times, meaning 'cultivated field'. Very little is known about the early history of the region, but Roman artefacts and coins dated between 200BC and AD400 found at the Theodulpass attest to the fact that this was a most important and strategic crossing place at that time. Local documents recount how in 102BC General Marius came over the

Theodulpass and on over the Col d'Hérens to crush the Teutons.

Zermatt has been a settlement since ancient times – apparently as early as AD100 there was a scattering of tiny dwellings there – but until about AD1100 there was no real central settlement. For centuries it was a place of trade and exchange between neighbouring valleys. Zmutt, situated just above Zermatt – today just a small hamlet with a good view and nice restaurants – was in those days the last place en route to the Theodulpass, and thus an important spot with its customs post, inns and guiding service for the passage to the col.

It would seem that the climate began to change as early as the 12th century, and gradually the Theodulpass became impassable for parts of the year. The village that had existed there was abandoned. The 17th and 18th centuries – known as the Little Ice Age – were particularly cold, and the glaciers advanced right down to the valleys. The passage of the cols became impracticable, even in summer. Life was almost impossible in the high villages and many people moved away from their Alpine origins. Evidence of this lies in the fact that in the Middle Ages, to ensure good weather, the villagers of Zermatt had made a vow to send seven Zermatt men over the Col d'Hérens to Sion

every year to pray. This was possible over one long day. By the 17th century this had become a very dangerous undertaking, and in 1660 the local Bishop gave them dispensation and the men just had to go to Täsch to pray instead.

Early in the 1800s climatic conditions began to improve, and for the first time foreigners came to visit the Zermatt Valley. As first they were greeted with hostility and mistrust, but gradually the villagers began to set up inns for these travellers. The first official inn in Zermatt was the Hotel Mont Cervie, which had three beds, and which later became the now renowned Hotel Monte Rosa, run by the famous hotelier Alexandre Seiler. By 1812 there were on average 10 to 12 visitors a year.

Until the carriage road was built from St Niklaus in 1858–1860, Zermatt could only be reached on foot or by mule along a rough path. Yet many illustrious visitors were attracted to the unique experience of the town, amongst them Englehardt (whose books did much to publicise the valley), De Saussure, Ruskin, G.D. Forbes (a renowned cartographer and naturalist), as well as the most talented alpinists of the day, including Edward Whymper. Many came out of curiosity, to study, explore, reflect and climb.

The Matterhorn was a big draw: as one French author put it, 'Le Cervin n'est pas quelque chose, c'est quelqu'un' and he was right. There is only one Matterhorn – and there is nothing else quite like it.

Gateway to the Matterhorn



End of extract from
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The classic peak of the Matterhorn has inspired adventurers for generations, and this 145km Tour of the Matterhorn takes trekkers to the most stunning viewpoints from which to marvel at this spectacular summit. The tour, described anticlockwise from Zermatt, crosses six valleys and takes the walker past more than 25 peaks surpassing 4000m, visiting both the Swiss region of Valais/Wallis and the Italian Valle d'Aosta.

- Route divided into seven stages, over about 10 days, with alternative routes and ideas for shorter walks
- Background information on getting there, safety in the mountains, the region, alpine life and culture
- Illustrated with clear maps and colour photographs



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