

Chamonix

*A guide to the best rock climbs
and mountain routes around
Chamonix and Mont Blanc*

**Charlie Boscoe
Luke Davies**

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Cover: Joe Brindley on the striking needles of the *Aiguille d'Entrèves Traverse* (AD-) - *p.281*.

This page: Naoise O' Muircheartaigh on *California Dream* (ED2) - *p.196* - the Envers des Aiguilles.

Photos: Luke Davies

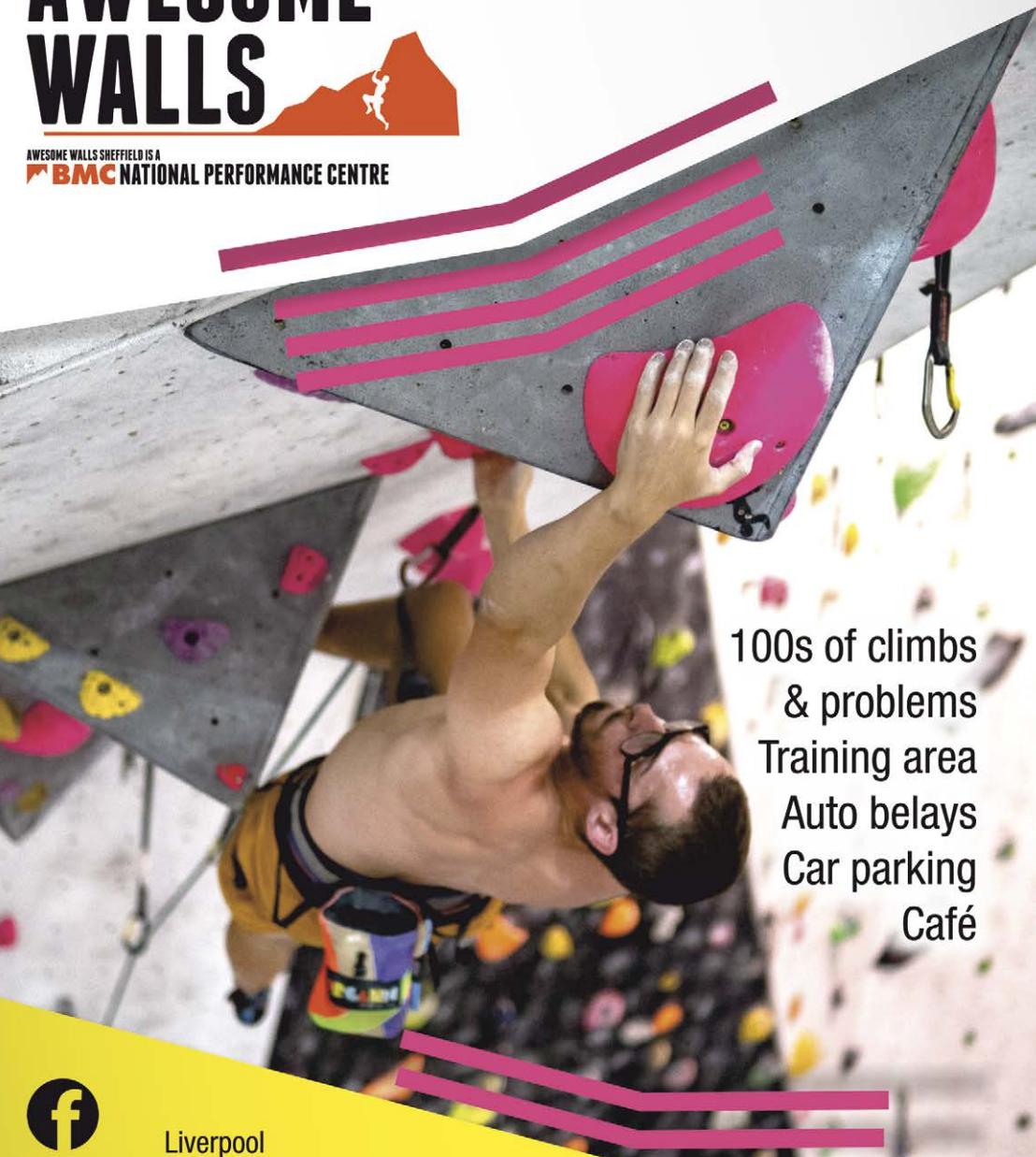
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Gl. d'Argentière
Champou/Nant Blanc
Gader de Talèfre
Grandes Jorasses
Envers des Aiguilles
Plan de l'Aiguille
Aiguille du Midi
Hollornner
Mont Blanc du Sud
Mont Blanc
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AR. Index
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Will Harris on an ascent of the Aiguille d'Argentiere via the *Flèche Rousse Ridge* (AD) - p.99 - going valley to valley. Photo: Luke Davies

Glacier du Tour
Glacier d'Argentière
Glacier de Talèfre
Charpoua/Nant Blanc
Gl. d'Argentière
Grandes Jorasses
Envers des Aiguilles
Plan de l'Aiguille
Aiguille du Midi
Helbronner
Mont Blanc du Tacul
Mont Blanc
Tré la Tête
A.R. - Brévent/Vallorcine
A.R. - Index
A.R. - Vallorcine
Valley Cooging

Lying at the heart of the Alps, and home to their highest peak, Chamonix was always going to be a major alpine centre. It is the place where mountaineering was 'invented' and is home to some of the steepest and most spectacular mountains in the world, all made accessible by an incredible lift system. It all adds up to make Chamonix the 'mecca' of alpine climbing.

Just about every legendary alpinist in history has spent time climbing amongst the stunning peaks of the Mont Blanc Massif; Bonatti, Cassin, Rébuffat, Terray, Whymper, Messner, Bonington, Lafaille and Steck have all left their mark on the range. Today it remains the place that anyone serious about alpine climbing needs to visit to test themselves against climbing's most legendary mountains.

Unusually for an alpine climbing area, the rock quality is mainly excellent across the range (although rockfall remains a major danger in the summer months) so in addition to the snow and ice adventures common to glaciated mountaineering, the Mont Blanc Massif also provides many stunning granite rock climbs. Furthermore, there are a number of superb sport climbing crags in the Chamonix Valley, meaning that this book contains routes of almost every type, from short bolted climbs to the huge 1000m mixed routes and the legendary North Faces of the Alps.

Connor Read on the *The Rochefort Ridge* (AD) - p.277. In the background is the iconic Dent du Géant. Photo: Luke Davies

Mont Blanc was climbed in 1786 by Jacques Balmat and Michel Paccard in return for a financial reward from Genevan scientist Horace-Bénédict de Saussure, who was fascinated by the peak. Nearly 250 years on, Chamonix and Mont Blanc continue to attract those who are drawn to high, wild places. The unique mix of high, beautiful and solid mountains, combined with extraordinary access to them, means that it remains the best alpine climbing destination on earth.

Guidebook Footnote

The inclusion of a climbing area in this guidebook does not mean that you have a right of access or the right to climb upon it. The descriptions of routes within this guide are recorded for historical reasons only and no reliance should be placed on the accuracy of the description. The grades set in this guide are a fair assessment of the difficulty of the climbs. Climbers who attempt a route of a particular standard should use their own judgment as to whether they are proficient enough to tackle that route. This book is not a substitute for experience and proper judgment. The authors, publisher and distributors of this book do not recognise any liability for injury or damage caused to, or by, climbers, third parties, or property arising from such persons seeking reliance on this guidebook as an assurance for their own safety.

Route Inclusion Policy

Deciding which routes to include and which to leave out is one of the toughest parts of writing any selective guidebook. Never is this truer than in Chamonix where a comprehensive mixed and ice climbs guidebook contains over 1200 routes (spread over two volumes); the Aiguilles Rouges, Envers des Aiguilles and the valley crags all have their own comprehensive guidebooks; and that still leaves all the granite rock climbs which are currently documented in four separate books!

Our aim is to describe routes that are (relatively) safe, despite the changing climate and glacial retreat. This means that we have omitted some former classics which no longer see the traffic they used to because of changing conditions or tastes. We have focused on routes which are regularly climbed. This doesn't mean that every route will be busy (in fact solitude will be virtually guaranteed on some) but, if a route is in this book, you can assume that it is still climbed at some stage most years. However, proper research into conditions and weather is still vital; even popular and well-travelled routes are the scenes of plenty of epics for unprepared teams especially when conditions change rapidly.

Our aim has been to create a book that gives maximum benefit to the majority of alpinists. We are confident that nearly all the classic routes in the valley have made it into the final selection, along with some lesser-known gems. The quality and quantity of routes above Chamonix is staggering and this is reflected in the diversity of the climbs we've described. The focus of this book is mainly on popular routes rather than hard ones but higher-grade climbers should still find plenty to go at and ticking every TD+ or ED in here would be a huge project. We have focused on routes easily accessible from the Chamonix Valley itself. This means that even without transport you will still be able to consider the vast majority of routes in this book. There are still some wild and remote areas described (the Tré la Tête basin and the Italian side of the massif for example) but most of the climbs described are accessed from Chamonix itself.

Most climbers who go to Chamonix don't just want to do high altitude snow ridges, or mountain granite rock routes, or just climb in one small area. They want to be able to choose from all types of climbing over the whole area and have a book that gives them everything they need to find and choose the best routes - this is that book.

Route Names

Many of the routes have different names in French, Italian, German and English. We have mostly gone with names used in the Alpine Club guides, or French names. These have been synchronised with the logbook section of UKClimbing.com.

New in this Edition

This 2022 edition of the Chamonix Rockfax has 56 more pages than the 2016 version. It includes a new section for Charpoua and Nant Blanc, the additional area Aiguilles Rouges - Vallorcine and three new valley sport crags. Overall there are 59 extra mountain routes described. Every route has been carefully looked at and the descriptions have been improved and brought into line with the current glacier conditions. There are many new crag photographs as well and an almost completely new set of action photographs. The maps have been enhanced and updated throughout the book.



Luke Davies and Joe Brindley on a morning solo of the Chamonix hamster wheel - the *Mallory-Porter* (AD) - p.242. Photo: Jake Holland

How to use this Book

This book gives wide coverage of the various climbing styles across the whole Chamonix area. It does not seek to replace any comprehensive guide but provides a catalogue of routes at all levels that inspires and informs people of the options available without having to buy a small truckload of books. In many cases this book is all you need for an ascent and this is certainly the case on the shorter climbs and some of the easier mountain routes. If you spend longer in the area then we strongly advise that you buy some of the other books (opposite) which give a wider coverage than we can offer here.

Long Alpine Routes - On longer mountain routes there isn't room to give blow by blow descriptions and photo-tops can have limitations. Complex route lines and intricate details may vary or not be obvious on the concise coverage given here. We advise anyone wishing to climb longer alpine routes to do their research and to make sure they are well informed on recent ascent conditions. We also advise taking additional topos some of which may have more detail than can be shown in this book.

Maps

The maps included in this book should contain enough detail to navigate to and from the peaks and routes described. However, they are designed for locating faces and mountains rather than micro-navigation and a 1:25000 topographical map is still essential, as is the ability to use it.

The French IGN maps numbers 3630 OT, **Chamonix, Massif du Mont Blanc** and 3531 ET, **St-Gervais-Les Bains** are available in virtually every climbing shop in Chamonix and all the routes in this book are covered over these two maps. Kompass also produce a 1:50000 map that covers much of the massif (Kompass map number 85, **Mont Blanc, Monte Bianco**) as do Swisstopo (map number 5003, **Mont Blanc Grand Combin**).



On the *Papillon Arête* (D) - p.228 - above the Plan de l'Aiguille. Photo: Hamish Frost

Other Guidebooks

The books listed here are currently available and all of them offer great coverage of their specific areas, with a few being 'best of'.

Crag Climbs in Chamonix (2020)

by *François Burnier and Dominique Potard*

A guidebook covering the sport climbing areas and four bouldering areas in the Chamonix Valley.

Mont Blanc: The Finest Routes (2013)

by *Philippe Batoux*

A coffee table book showcasing the 100 finest routes in the Mont Blanc Massif.

Mont Blanc Granite 1, 2, 3, 4 (2021)

by *François Damilano*

Guides to the rock based routes of the Mont Blanc massif in four volumes.

The Aiguilles Rouges 1 & 2 (2016)

by *Michel Piola*

A comprehensive guide to the Aiguilles Rouges from Brévent to Lac Emossion.

Envers des Aiguilles (2007)

by *Michel Piola*

A comprehensive guide to the Envers des Aiguilles area.

Fiches Granite 1-11 (2018-)

by *Michel Piola*

A series of fold out leaflet topos covering popular granite crags of the area such as the Blaitière, Midi South Face, Chandelle, Dorées etc.

Mont Blanc (2020)

by *Matteo Pasquetto*

Versante Sud guide to the Italian side of the massif.

Snow, Ice and Mixed 1 and 2 (2021)

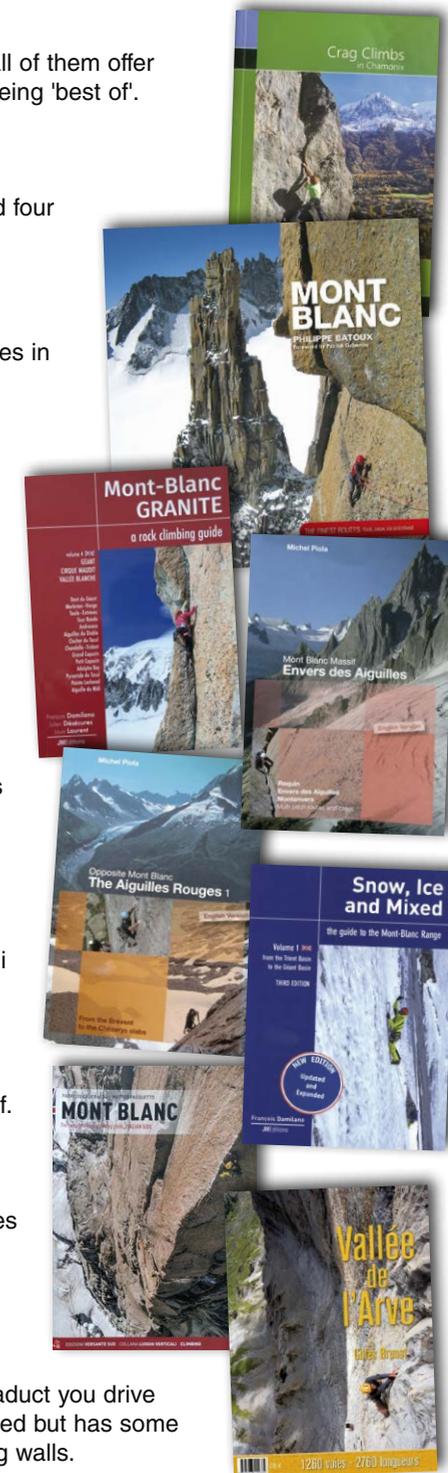
by *François Damilano*

A comprehensive guide to all non-rock based routes in the Mont Blanc Massif.

Vallee de l'Arve (2017)

by *Giles Brunot*

A comprehensive guide to the fantastic limestone climbing in the Arve valley (the valley below the viaduct you drive up to get to Chamonix). This area is often overlooked but has some fantastic sport climbing from single pitch to mini big walls.



Rockfax Digital brings together 30 current Rockfax print publications with UKC Logbooks, adds some digital-only content and presents it in a user-friendly package for use on mobile devices.

ROCKFAX

digital

The heart of Rockfax Digital is the crag and route information covering 'areas' which correspond roughly to the printed guidebooks. The main data is sold by subscription so that you purchase access to everything for a period of time, from a month to a year. Once you are subscribed, you will have everything on Rockfax Digital for the duration - currently 64,000+ routes being added to all the time. You can download the main data and store it on your device so you don't need any signal to be able to read the descriptions and see the topos and maps. There is plenty of free content available without subscription, enabling you to get a really good impression of what Rockfax Digital is like without shelling out any money.

Rockfax Digital is available as an app which is free to download and incredibly useful in its own right. It contains a detailed crag map linked to the UKClimbing crags database with basic information and route lists for around 21,000 crags worldwide. The map also displays all the 4,000+ listings from the UKClimbing Directory of climbing walls, outdoor shops, climbing clubs, outdoor-specific accommodation and instructors and guides, amongst others.



How to Subscribe

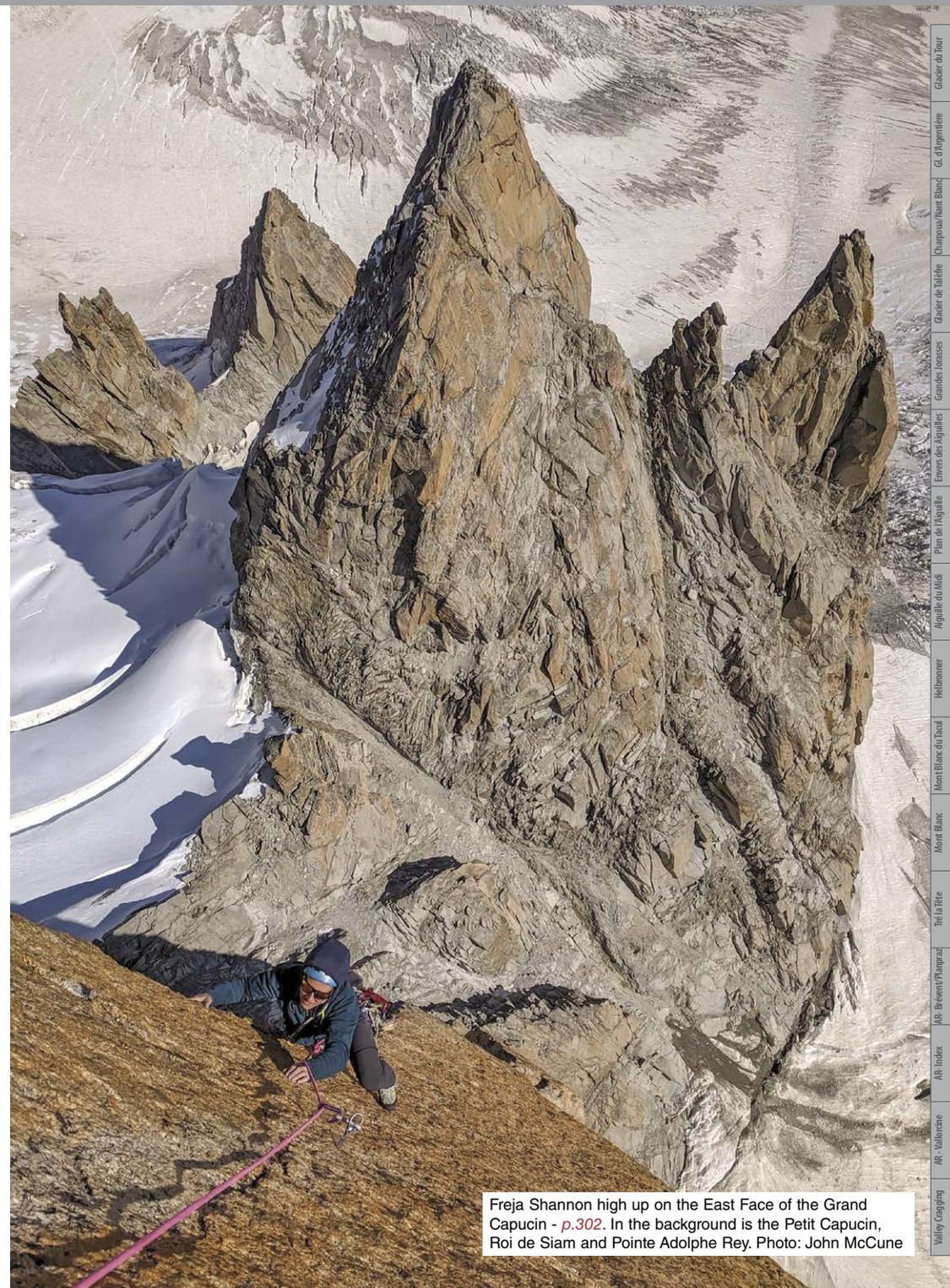
Go to rockfax.digital to find links to download the app and create an account. You can then test the app and use the free content or set up a subscription for full access. Scan the QR code to the right for more information.



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UKC Logbooks

A popular method of logging your climbing is to use the UKClimbing.com logbooks system. This database has more than half a million routes on over 21,700 crags. So far, over 52,800 users have recorded more than 8.5 million ascents! To set up your own logbook just register at UKClimbing.com and click on the logbook tab. You will be able to record every ascent you make, when you did it, what style you climbed it in and who you did it with. Each entry has a place for your own notes. You can also add your vote to the grade/star system which is used by guidebook writers to get opinions on grades and quality of routes. The logbook can be private, public or restricted to your own climbing partners only. Rockfax Digital can be linked to your UKClimbing.com user account and logbook so that you can record your activity while at the crag. To do this you will need a 3G/4G/5G data connection. You can also look at the UKC logbooks to see if anyone has climbed your chosen route recently to check on conditions.



Freja Shannon high up on the East Face of the Grand Capucin - p.302. In the background is the Petit Capucin, Roi de Siam and Pointe Adolphe Rey. Photo: John McCune

Having moved to Chamonix in late 2016, not long after the first edition came out, the book definitely helped give inspiration to what was available and to give a wider context to the mountains surrounding the town. Hopefully this edition will be seen to build on that basis and give others inspiration to visit some of the new areas included that were omitted from the first edition - thanks to Charlie Boscoe and Jack Geldard for their work on this.

Particularly big thanks to all those who I've climbed, skied and biked with over the years, many who are included in pictures in this book, and whom without, I would have not been able to explore so much of the massif and have had such a good time doing so.

Thanks also to those who have contributed pictures or time to help with this edition: Jake Holland, Hamish Frost, Tim Oliver (timoliverguiding.com), John McCune (mccunemountaineering.co.uk), Dan Fitzgerald, Tom Skelhorn, Will Harris (WillHarrisGuiding.com), Matt Glenn and my wife, Lindsey Dolan (who I'm also grateful for tolerating me being away in the mountains so much!) as well as to Alan James for the editing and help throughout.

Luke Davies, May 2022

Climbers on the top of the Dent du Géant at sunset, having climbed the popular *Southwest Face* (AD+) - *p.275* - a rare quiet time on a busy summit. In the background is Mont Blanc, the Brenva Face and Mont Blanc du Tacul. Photo: Tim Oliver

We are grateful the following companies who have supported this guidebook.

Awesome Walls - *p.2*
awesomewalls.co.uk

BMC Insurance - *Inside back cover*
thebmc.co.uk/insurance

John McCune - *p.51*
mccunemountaineering.co.uk

Jöttnar - *Back cover*
jottnar.com

Montane - *p.21*
montane.com

Mountain Equipment - *Inside front cover*
mountain-equipment.co.uk

Petzl - *Back cover flap*
petzl.com

A guidebook serves to both inspire, and to convey a passion for a region. My passion for the mountains that tower above Chamonix is so strong because I've been lucky enough to share them with some wonderful friends. I would particularly like to thank the following climbers for their company, support and good humour on countless Chamonix adventures - Peter Riley, Tom Grant, Matt Livingstone, Tristan Wise, Tom Moores, Phil Ebert, Emma Jack, John Cuthbert and Sharon Wray.

In addition, I would also like to thank the following people, some of whom have accompanied me on routes, some who have patiently sat and given me the benefit of their knowledge so that every description, line and detail is just right. Whichever category you fall into, thank you for your help: Caroline Mulligan, Nick Taylor, Sophie Headeach, Nora Hanson, Dane Burns, Alastair Lee, Jon Griffith, Ross Hewitt and Ed Docwra.

It also goes without saying that we are extremely grateful to all those climbers who have developed the superb climbs in this book. From the old pioneers of the 1800s to prolific bolters like Michel Piola, their efforts are much appreciated since, without them, we would have nothing to write about!

I also owe a huge debt to Alan James and Luke Davies for their hard work in giving this book such a thorough and aesthetic update.

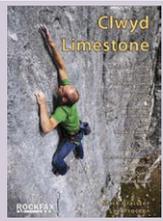
I would also like to give special thanks to Sharon, Holly and Ella, who make every day better. Here's to a lifetime of adventures together.

Loving high places comes with a price, but we never know exactly what it will be or when we'll have to pay. The loss of Liz Daley, Will Eaton, Will Wilkinson and Martin Widén remind me that these beautiful mountains demand respect, vigilance, and a slice of luck. Finally, I thank my parents, who provided me with a loving and happy childhood then watched me disappear off to Chamonix aged 22 in search of adventure. 15 years on, their love and support is unwavering. This book is for them.

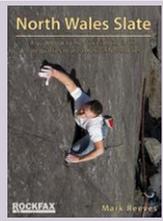
Charlie Boscoe, May 2022



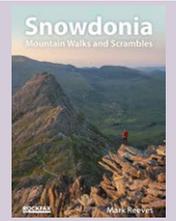
North Wales Climbs
 November 2013
 Digital version date
 November 2013



Clwyd Limestone
 December 2015
 Digital version date
 December 2015

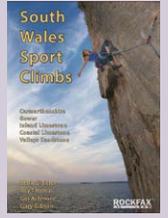


North Wales Slate
 September 2018
 June 2021



Snowdonia Scrambles
 December 2020
 Digital version date
 December 2020

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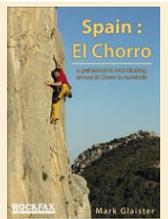


South Wales Sport Climbs
 November 2016
 November 2016



Pembroke
 August 2009
 April 2022
 Major digital update

Digital-only guides
 North Wales Winter 2016

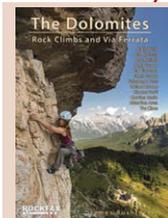


Spain: El Chorro
 December 2018
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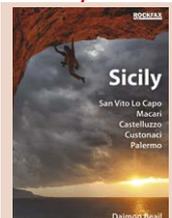


Spain: Mallorca
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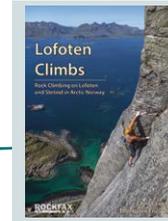
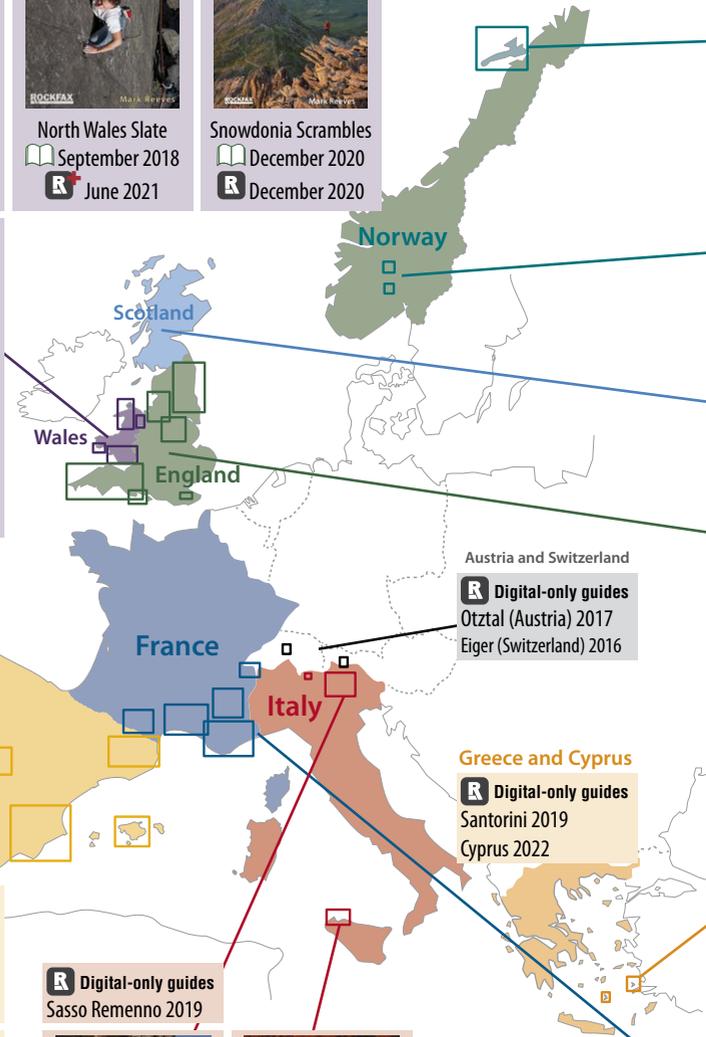
The Dolomites
 November 2019
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Sicily
 March 2021
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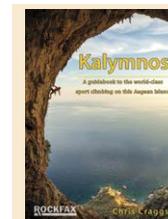
37 titles in print
 16 less than 6 years old



Lofoten Climbs
 May 2017
 May 2017

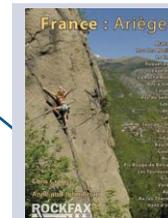
Digital-only guides
 Rjukan 2016
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SMC Digital-only guides
 Highland Outcrops South 2019
 Scottish Sport Climbs 2019
 Scottish Winter Climbs 2019
 Scottish Rock 2020
 Highland Scrambles 2020



Kalymnos
 May 2018
 November 2019

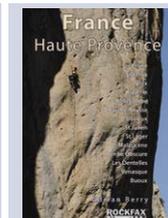
Digital-only guides
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 Maurienne 2021



France: Ariège
 December 2012
 April 2021



France: Lang.Roussillon
 November 2011
 November 2011



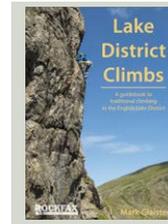
France: Haute Provence
 December 2009
 December 2009



France: Côte d'Azur
 February 2017
 February 2017



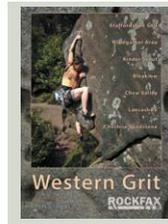
Chamonix
 July 2022
 July 2022



Lake District Climbs
 November 2019
 November 2019



Northern England
 February 2008
 February 2008



Western Grit
 April 2009
 April 2009



Northern Limestone
 January 2015
 January 2015



Eastern Grit
 May 2022
 May 2022



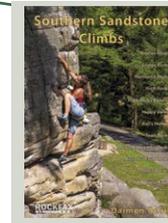
Peak Limestone
 June 2020
 November 2021



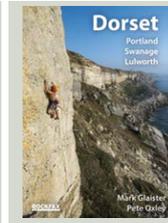
Peak Bouldering
 May 2014
 May 2014



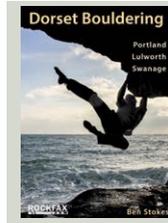
West Country Climbs
 Late 2022
 Late 2022



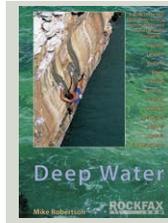
Southern Sandstone Climbs
 September 2017
 September 2017



Dorset
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 July 2021



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Chamonix Logistics



Andy Mackinnon enjoying low stress granite in the sun on the *Bettembourg-Thivierge* (TD+) - p.309. on Pointe Adolphe Rey, Mont Blanc du Tacul. The Dent du Géant in the background. Photo: Luke Davies

Glacier du Tour
Gl. d'Argentière
Chamrousse/Mont Blanc
Glacier de l'Alpe
Grandes Jorasses
Evros des Aiguilles
Plan de l'Aiguille
Aiguille du Midi
Helbronner
Mont Blanc du Tacul
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Tré la Tête
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Glacier du Tour
Gl. d'Argentière
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Glacier de l'Alpe
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Aiguille du Midi
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Mont Blanc du Tacul
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Tré la Tête
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AR - Index
AR - Vallorcine
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Emergency Services

In the event of a mountain incident requiring the assistance of the emergency services:

Dial 112

Be sure to have the details of the incident and a good description of your location.

Travel Insurance

When you travel to an EU country or Switzerland you should have a GHIC (Global Health Insurance Card) which are free and obtained via an online application on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk). A GHIC lets you get medically necessary state healthcare in Europe at a reduced cost or sometimes for free until your planned return home to the UK. The old EHC card is still valid after Brexit until its expiry date.

Personal travel insurance is absolutely essential to cover the potential costs of rescue and repatriation. Depending on where a rescue takes place, you may be picked up by either French, Swiss or Italian emergency services and comprehensive insurance is vital to ensure that you do not end up footing a huge bill for the helicopter.

Rockfax strongly recommends [thebmc.co.uk/insurance](https://www.thebmc.co.uk/insurance)

Minor Injuries

For minor injuries and illnesses, Chamonix has an excellent (albeit quite small) hospital and there is a larger hospital in Sallanches, 25km west of Chamonix, on the way to Geneva. There are also numerous pharmacies in the Chamonix Valley.

Most of the health centres accept the GHIC for emergency treatment and usually just take a copy of it, there will be a small fee though. The same goes for hospital treatment - this must sometimes be paid for and claimed back through your insurance policy.

Rescue Procedure

If you are involved in an incident then give the rescue services (PGHM) as many details as you can. Try to let them know your precise location, grid reference, peak name and route name. It may take an hour or more for the emergency services to reach you so any first aid you can administer is critical. If a helicopter is called to the scene you need to signal to the pilot by standing with your arms up making a 'Y' shape. Once the pilot has seen you, and he looks like he is coming in to hover, move to a safe distance away since the helicopter will either come into land or send a winchman down. The downdraft is considerable so collect all the loose equipment together and get someone to sit on them to stop them being blown away. Do not approach the helicopter unless directed to do so by the aircrew since the rotating blades are extremely dangerous.

Smartphone Apps

If you have a smartphone then download the **EchoSOS** app from the iOS or Android app store. This useful app has an SOS button that will call the correct emergency service no matter which country you are in and send your location using your phone's GPS system. There are also other useful apps that can calculate your OS grid reference from your phone's GPS system - search for **Grid Reference** to find one of these in the appropriate app store.

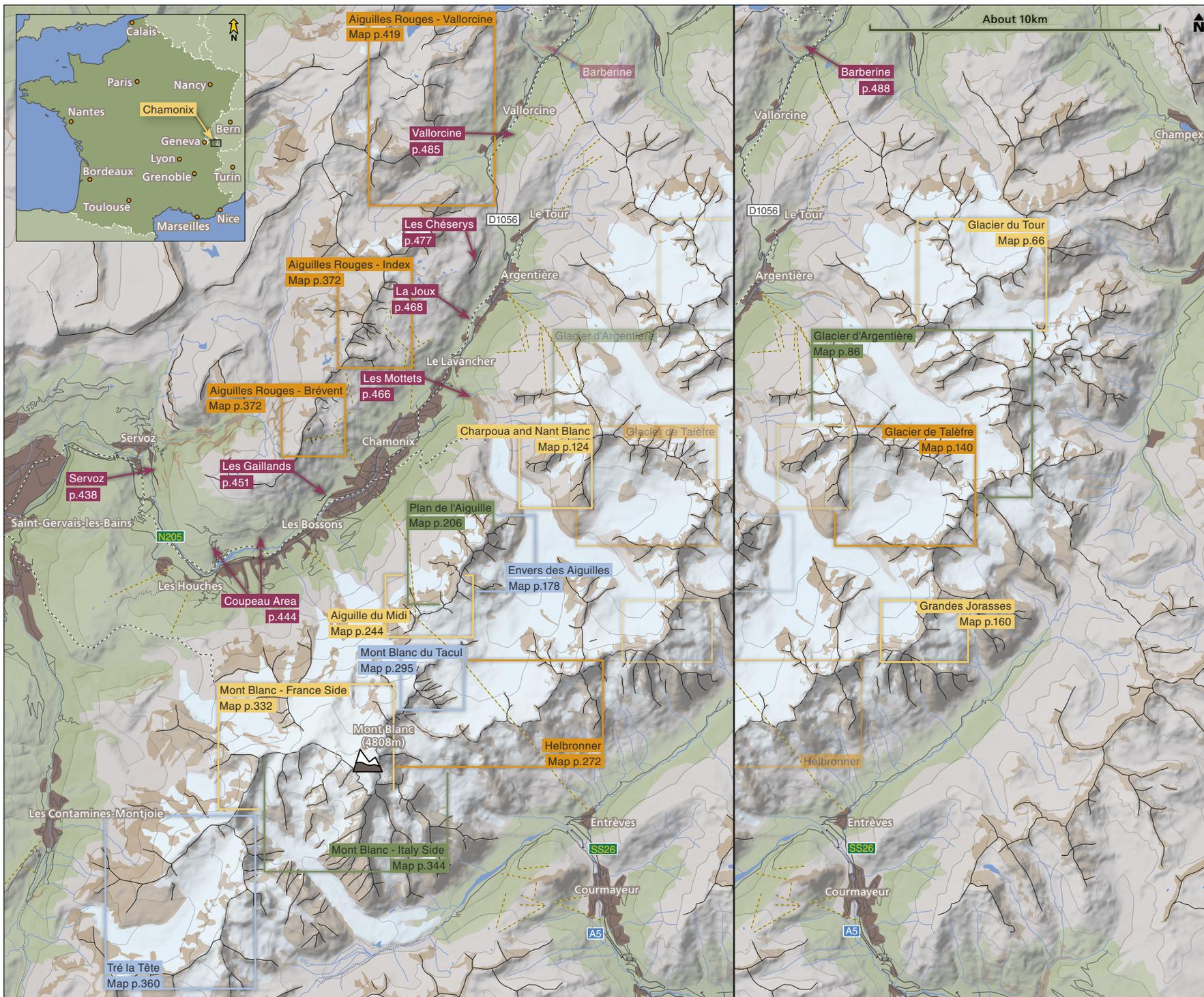


EchoSOS app



Further.
Faster.





Where is Chamonix?

Chamonix is an alpine town located in the Haute Savoie region of France. It has an official population of around 10,000 but this can swell by up to 10 times in the peak of the summer season.

The town, and the huge mountains that tower above it, lie 80km southeast of the Swiss city of Geneva and 170km northwest of Turin. The proximity of these cities make Chamonix a relatively easy town to get to (by the standards of the Alps) and also mean that escaping the mountains in favour of a bit of culture when the weather turns bad is quite straightforward.

The Chamonix Valley runs from southwest to northeast and this guidebook covers the Mont Blanc Massif, the legendary range of glaciated alpine peaks on the southern side of the valley, the rock climbing paradise of the Aiguilles Rouges range on the north side, and the best of the low altitude cragging in the area. The relatively small area covered by this guidebook means that being based anywhere in the Chamonix Valley will allow easy access to every route in this book, whether by car or public transport.

If you do drive, allow the following times for your journeys: **Chamonix to Courmayeur (though the Mont Blanc Tunnel)** - 30 minutes (€48.80 one way, €60.80 return - 2022). **Chamonix to Vallorcine** - 25 minutes **Chamonix to Les Contamines-Montjoie** - 40 minutes

Glacier du Tour
Gl. d'Argentière
Chamonix/Mont Blanc
Glacier de Talèfre
Grandes Jorasses
Evens des Aiguilles
Plan de l'Aiguille
Aiguille du Midi
Helbronner
Mont Blanc du Tacul
Mont Blanc
Tête à Tête
AR - Brevent/Piémont
AR - Index
AR - Vallorcine
Valley Cragging



Joe Brindley entering the Vallée Blanche from the Helbronner. The peaks of Mont Maudit and Mont Blanc du Tacul, with its many satellites, visible ahead. Photo: Luke Davies

When to Go

The range of routes described in this book means that you should be able to climb something in here on any sunny day of the year. The guide below outlines typical conditions but, as with all mountainous regions, weather can be unpredictable and snow can fall unexpectedly at any time of the year.

January - February - Generally this is peak season for powder skiing but some alpine ice routes such as the mixed climbs on the Pointes Lachenal (p.318) and the routes on the East Face of the Grands Montets Ridge (p.112) are possible for those with a tolerance for cold temperatures.

March - April - A great time to be in the Alps. Some of the valley crags will be dry by mid-March and ice is also likely to be found in the high mountains. Much of the south-facing mountain granite will be dry too and can be approached and descended from on skis.

May - Usually quite an unsettled month with insufficient snow in the mid mountain for approaches on skis, but too much for approaches on foot. Valley rock climbing is usually the best option.

June - Often the least settled of the summer months with the rapidly melting of the last of winter snows and unstable weather with regular thunderstorms. If the weather is good, and the nights cold, some of the massif's snow-based routes can be in stunning condition.

July - Early August - The peak of the climbing season, both in terms of temperatures and visitor numbers. With the exception of pure ice climbs, virtually any route could be possible depending on conditions. Rockfall and open glaciers can be big issues so sensible route choice is vital.

Late August - September - A colder and quieter version of July and August. By September the mountains are usually very dry so rock routes are usually the best options and solitude is much easier to find.

October - November - A quiet time of year which often has unsettled weather. When the sun is out, conditions for snow and ice routes can be superb. The valley looks beautiful in autumn, with snowy mountains towering above green and golden trees.

December - Options in the mountains tend to be limited so south-facing valley cragging is the best bet.

| Average Temp °C | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec |
|--------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Chamonix (maximum) | 2 | 5 | 8 | 12 | 17 | 20 | 23 | 23 | 19 | 14 | 7 | 3 |
| Chamonix (minimum) | -7 | -6 | -3 | 0 | 4 | 7 | 9 | 9 | 6 | 2 | -3 | -6 |

| Hours sun/day | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec |
|--------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Chamonix (average) | 4 | 5 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 11 | 10 | 8 | 7 | 5 | 3 |

| Precip. days/month | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec |
|--------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Chamonix (average) | 9 | 9 | 10 | 10 | 13 | 12 | 11 | 11 | 9 | 10 | 10 | 10 |

Glacier du Tour
Gl. d'Argentière
Chamonix/Mont Blanc
Glacier de Talèfre
Grandes Jorasses
Evens des Aiguilles
Plan de l'Aiguille
Aiguille du Midi
Helbronner
Mont Blanc du Tacul
Mont Blanc
Tête à Tête
AR - Brevent/Piémont
AR - Index
AR - Vallorcine
Valley Cragging

Glacier du Tour
Gl. d'Argentière
Champou/Mont Blanc
Glacier de Talèfre
Grandes Jorasses
Ecrins des Aiguilles
Plan de l'Aiguille
Aiguille du Midi
Helbronner
Mont Blanc du Tacot
Mont Blanc
Tête à Tête
AR - Brevent/Plampard
AR - Index
AR - Vallorcine
Valley Grogging

Glacier du Tour
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Tim Oliver approaching the summit of the Petit Dru with most of the massif behind. The Moine and its West Face in the foreground, the Grandes Jorasses in the top left, the Rochefort and Dent du Géant in the centre and, in the far distant, the Tour Ronde, Entrèves and Flambeau. Photo: Luke Davies

Flying

Chamonix is just over an hour's drive from Geneva airport. It is served by direct flights from the UK by BA, Swiss Air and EasyJet. It can also be reached from many other international airports.

Car Hire

Car hire is an option if you intend to drive around, tackle climbs on the Italian side, or do a lot of valley cragging. The comparison site [rentalcars.com](https://www.rentalcars.com) is a useful resource for finding the best deal, but be sure to read the small print or you may be stung at pick-up for various extras and add-ons. Also check if you are allowed to drive in Italy and/or Switzerland. If you hire in the Swiss section of Geneva airport, then you will need a Swiss motorway vignette, which is expensive but means that you can take the motorway. Hiring the car from the French side means you avoid this charge but will have to drive through the centre of Geneva, which can add delays to your journey.

Driving from the UK

Driving your own car is a good choice if you plan an extended stay, or have a lot of kit. It also gives you the option of bailing out to the Provence sport crags should the weather turn nasty. It takes eight hours to drive from Calais to Chamonix if you just go for it, but going via Paris and Fontainebleau is only half an hour longer. These times assume that you will use the toll roads, which cost roughly €80 and are well worth it. The situation mentioned above re Geneva applies for the motorway vignette - avoid the motorways through the city and it will be slow, but you will save yourself some money.

Parking Spots

The parking spots where the main approaches start from are indicated with a precise GPS location. You can either use the number or just point your phone camera at the QR code to open the coordinates direct into a navigation app.

GPS 45.916260
6.870244



Lifts

Use them! Chamonix's mountains are legendary, not only for their beauty but also because they are so easy to access using the valley's incredible lift system. Many an alpine trip has been a flop because tight climbers have tried to save money and wore themselves out walking up to routes instead. When you consider how much your kit, travel to Chamonix and accommodation has already cost, and how precious each day of an alpine climbing trip is, the extra expense of using the lifts is well worth paying for.

Opening Times - The Aiguille du Midi is open virtually all year (it closes for 3 to 4 weeks in November for maintenance). The Helbronner cable car from Courmayeur is open all year but the Panoramique lift which links the Helbronner and Aiguille du Midi is only open in the summer season. The Montenvers train is open from mid December until mid-September but closes for at least 6 weeks every autumn. The Grands Montets is open for the winter season from mid December to early May and then reopens for summer in July and August. The lifts at Le Tour, Brévent and Flégère are all open for skiing in winter and from mid June to mid September for climbing.

Cost - If you are planning to spend multiple days climbing in the valley, then the best option is to buy a Mont Blanc Multipass. This enables you to choose how many days of lift usage you need, and whether you'd prefer the days to be consecutive or non-consecutive. For consecutive days, the pass costs €120 for 5 days, €170 for 9 days. The non-consecutive option is 2 days for €96 or 3 days for €108. The full summer season pass is €515.

The Mont Blanc Multipass don't cover the Panoramique lift between the Aiguille du Midi and the Helbronner or the Italian lifts. The Tramway du Mont Blanc and Prarion gondola are both included.

It is possible to pay for each lift individually. Prices are for a return ticket, one way tickets are roughly 25% cheaper.

| | |
|------------------------------------|--------|
| Aiguille du Midi | €69.00 |
| Plan de l'Aiguille | €35.50 |
| Panoramique | €32.00 |
| Grands Montets | €20.00 |
| Le Tour | €32.00 |
| Brévent | €35.50 |
| Index | €32.00 |
| Montenvers Train | €35.50 |
| Tramway du Mont Blanc | €34.00 |

Prices correct for summer 2022 but tend to creep up a Euro or two every year. Passes are available at the lift stations.

All the lifts in Chamonix are operated by the Compagnie du Mont Blanc.

compagniedumontblanc.fr

Public Transport

One of the reasons Chamonix is so popular is that you don't need a car to get there or to move around once you arrive. The train from Geneva airport to Chamonix is expensive and takes over 3 hours but airport transfers are very reasonable at €25 - €35 each way and take roughly 1 hour 15 minutes.

Once in the Chamonix valley there is a train from St Gervais to Vallorcine. For climbers wanting to visit the crags of Barberine there is a further train which carries on from Vallorcine to Châtelard. There is also a regular bus service from the train station at St Gervais to Les Contamines-Montjoie, where the routes in the Tré la Tête chapter are approached from.

There is also a good network of buses serving all corners of the valley, from Les Houches to Le Tour. Up-to-date bus and train timetables can be found at the Chamonix Tourist Office.

For routes approached from, or descending into, the Italian side of the massif, it is possible to get a bus through the Mont Blanc Tunnel to Courmayeur. Further buses can be taken to the valleys of Val Veni and Val Ferret, where some routes begin and end.



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Glacier du Tour
 La Dargentière
 Champoussin Blanc
 Glacier de l'Infirmité
 Grandes Jorasses
 Evros des Aiguilles
 Plan de l'Aiguille
 Aiguille du Midi
 Helbronner
 Mont Blanc du Tour
 Mont Blanc
 Tré la Tête
 AP Brévent/Pléney
 AP Index
 AP Vallorcine
 Valley Grogging

Tim Exley on a stunning bivvi near the summit of the Dru after climbing the *American Direct* (ED1) - p.128. Photo: Luke Davies

Camping

There are numerous campsites in the Chamonix Valley that cater for tents, caravans and campervans. Generally these are fairly cramped but the facilities are good and always clean. Each person, tent and car is charged individually so prices can add up but camping remains the best value accommodation in the valley. Expect to pay something in the region of €5.50 - €9 per person, €7 - €10 per pitch and €3 - €4 for an electric hook-up per day. Prices vary between low and high season (July and August). Campsites are indicated on the maps and unlike the old days, wild camping in the valley is no longer permitted.

Hotels, Hostels and Apartments

For those not keen on camping, Chamonix has plenty more on offer. There are several hostel-type options with shared bathroom facilities, and these cost €21 - €25 per night for a bed in a dormitory. There is also a large selection of hotels, from (relatively) cheap and cheerful options costing roughly €100 per night, right through to 5-star luxury choices. The various hostels and hotels are accustomed to walkers and climbers and often have a boot room where you can dry out kit or leave muddy boots.

There is also a large selection of chalets and self-catered apartments ranging from single room studios costing roughly €400 - €600 per week to enormous chalets which may be out of most people's financial range.



Glacier du Tour
Gl. d'Argentière
Chamonix/Nant Blanc
Glacier de Talèfre
Grandes Jorasses
Evens des Aiguilles
Plan de l'Aiguille
Aiguille du Midi
Helbronner
Mont Blanc du Tacot
Mont Blanc
Tête à Tête
AR - Préventif/Pianpraz
AR - Index
AR - Vallorcine
Valley Cooging

Glacier du Tour
Gl. d'Argentière
Chamonix/Nant Blanc
Glacier de Talèfre
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Valley Cooging

Refuges 

Refuges (or 'Rifugios' - in Italian) are mountain huts which offer full board accommodation in dormitory rooms. Generally refuges are warm, dry and welcoming but fairly basic. A sleeping bag is not required as blankets are provided, but a thin sleeping bag liner is sometimes expected and ensures a more pleasant night in the highly likely event that the hut blankets are a bit grubby and threadbare. Generally you can choose to stay 'demi-pension/mezza pensione' (half board) which will usually be a set three course meal and a basic breakfast; 'petit déjeuner/ con prima colazione' (bed and breakfast) or 'seulement nuit/solo pernottamento' (bed only). In some refuges half board is compulsory. Breakfast is served at whatever time you request but often this means that the guardian leaves breakfast out for you the night before rather than getting up to serve you. In refuges offering only a bed, a cooking area is provided and there is sometimes running water. Prices range from €13.50 for just a bed through to €90 for half board in some of the most expensive French and Swiss refuges. Any bottled water, drinks or snacks will be extra, as will a packed lunch, which is offered in most places. Credit cards are not universally accepted so taking cash is the best option. A membership card to a European alpine club gives roughly a €10 discount on half board or bed and breakfast. It is advised to book refuge places in advance but if you do turn up last minute, you will rarely be turned away. Most refuge guardians speak some English but, if you are struggling, any tourist office in the Chamonix Valley can make reservations for you. Any huts mentioned in this book but not listed here are unmanned and reservations are not required. Almost all staffed huts have a very basic winter room which do not require a reservation and will be open in low season, whenever no guardian is present.

The following is a list of the staffed refuges in the areas covered by this book.

- Glacier du Tour**
Refuge Albert Premier+33 450 531603
Cabane du Trient+41 277 831438
- Glacier de Charpoua**
Refuge de la Charpoua+33 667 250866
- Glacier d'Argentière**
Refuge d'Argentière+33 450 531603
- Glacier de Talèfre**
Refuge du Couvercle+33 450 531694
- Grandes Jorasses**
Refuge de Leschaux+33 636 953264
Rifugio Bocalatte+39 165 844070

- Envers des Aiguilles**
Refuge d'Envers des Aiguilles
+33 450 531603
- Aiguille du Midi/Mont Blanc du Tacul**
Refuge des Cosmiques.+33 450 544016
- Helbronner/Mont Blanc du Tacul**
Rifugio Torino+39 165 844034
- Mont Blanc**
Refuge du Goûter.+33 450 544093
N.B. The Refuge du Goûter can only be booked online at refugedugouter.ffcam.fr
Refuge Tête Rousse+33 450 582497
Refuge de Nid d'Aigle+33 450 477623
Refuge des Cosmiques.+33 450 544016
Rifugio du Gonella+39 165 885101
Rifugio Monzino+39 165 809553
Refuge Durier+33 689 532510

- Tré la Tête**
Refuge des Conscricts+33 479 890903
Refuge de Tré la Tête+33 450 470168
- Aiguilles Rouges**
Refuge du Lac Blanc+33 450 534914
Refuge de Loriaz+33 652 536973

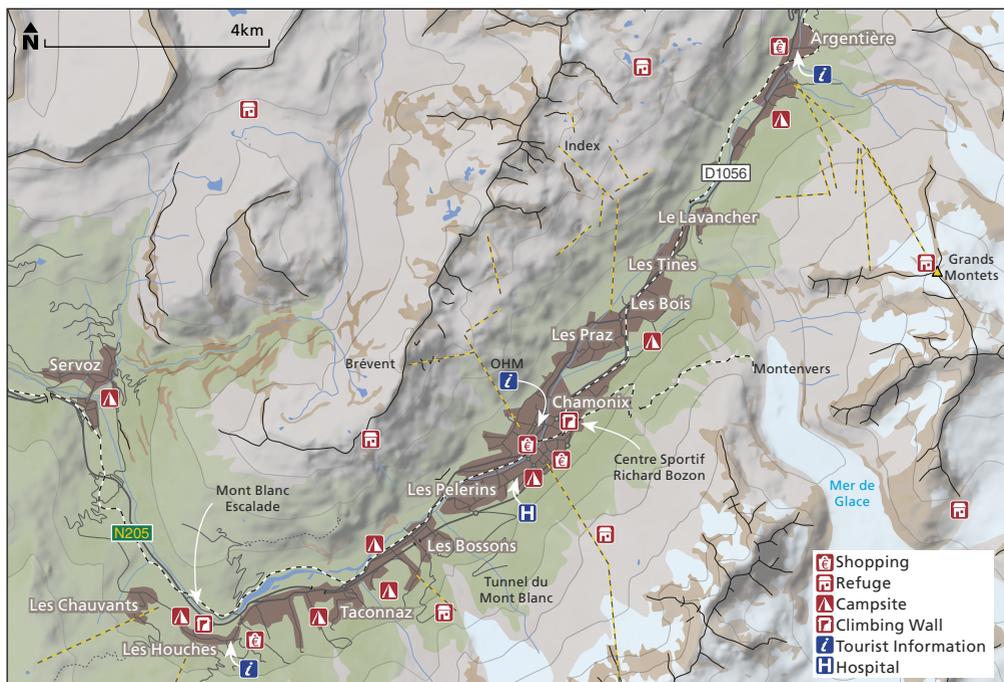
Being able to see spectacular alpine sunsets are one of the great perks of sleeping up high in the mountains. Photo: Luke Davies

Bivouac Shelters 

Bivouac shelters are generally little more than a metal shed with some bunk beds and a small area to cook in, but they do provide convenient and well-located shelters. Most have blankets and as such a sleeping bag is usually not required, though you may be glad of a sleeping bag liner. You do need to take your own cooking equipment and food. There is no reservation system for bivouac huts so they can often be full; turning up early is advised if you want a bed in a popular hut in peak season. When full there are often DIY bivvy locations nearby.

Glacier du Tour
 Gl. d'Argentière
 Charpoua/Mont Blanc
 Glacier de Talèfre
 Grandes Jorasses
 Envers des Aiguilles
 Plan de l'Aiguille
 Aiguille du Midi
 Helbronner
 Mont Blanc du Tacul
 Mont Blanc
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 Valley Gougny

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 Gl. d'Argentière
 Charpoua/Mont Blanc
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 Plan de l'Aiguille
 Aiguille du Midi
 Helbronner
 Mont Blanc du Tacul
 Mont Blanc
 Tré la Tête
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 AR - Index
 AR - Vallorcine
 Valley Gougny



Tourist Information

Chamonix, Les Houches and Argentière all have tourist information offices which provide excellent information on shops, services, accommodation and events. They will also help you book a refuge if your French isn't good.

Chamonix Tourist Office

+33 450 530024

Les Houches Tourist Office

+33 450 555062

Argentière Tourist Office

+33 450 540214

Supermarkets

The Chamonix Valley has a selection of small supermarkets and, for those with a car, there are several large supermarkets in Sallanches down the valley westwards. Chamonix also has some pleasant, if a little expensive, specialist shops selling various local meats, cheeses and wine.

Opening Times

Most shops, supermarkets and services close for an extended lunch break, usually from around 12pm to 3pm. On Sundays, virtually every shop is closed so stock up on Saturday! Restaurants, bars and refuges are always open on a Sunday.

Climbing Shops

If you like gear shops, you'll enjoy Chamonix and its surrounding villages. As well as a number of brand-specific shops there are numerous large outdoor shops selling everything you could need for an alpine trip.

Chamonix - Snell Sports

Chamonix - Technique Extreme

Chamonix - Decathlon

Chamonix - Ravanel

Chamonix - Alplib (a book shop with an excellent selection of maps and guidebooks).

Argentière - Hurycana Sports

Sallanches - For those with a car, the huge Decathlon Mountain store and the comprehensive Aux Vieux Campeurs are well worth a few hours of a rainy rest day.



Tim Oliver and Jake Holland climbing the *New Piola Route* (TD+) - p.375 - on the South Face of the Brévent. Photo: Luke Davies

Walking

The walking in Chamonix is superb and offers views of some of the world's best known peaks. The paths are well signposted and there is a good network of mountain huts to provide refreshments and accommodation.

Skiing

As much as Chamonix is famous as a hot spot for climbing and alpinism, it is arguably more famous for its skiing. From Dec - May there is world class skiing to be had on and off the lift systems from the pistes to 'the steeps'.

Paragliding

For a different perspective over the mountains, paragliding is an interesting option and can be easily organised in Chamonix. Take off options are numerous, with Brévent and the Plan de l'Aiguille being the most popular.

Road Biking

With only one bike-friendly road into and out of the valley, Chamonix is not an ideal road biking venue in itself. However, those with a car can drive to some stunning areas nearby, particularly the Aravis range to the west of the Mont Blanc Massif. For road biking in the valley, going from the MBC pub on the outskirts of Chamonix town centre to the Col des Montets makes for a good time trial course.

Mountain Biking

Mountain biking is a fast growing sport in the Chamonix area and whilst not as famous as its nearby neighbours, it is becoming a destination in its own right. Les Houches and La Tour provide access to numerous downhill trails all summer and there is also an excellent network of cross country tracks. Chamonix town centre has a number of mountain biking shops and bikes for hire.

Museums

For those with an interest in the history of alpinism, Chamonix is an excellent place to indulge your passion. The Alpine Museum, Guides Office and, morbid as it may sound, Chamonix cemetery are all worth a visit to pay your respects to the pioneers.

Wet Weather Options

With a huge range of outdoor shops, museums and nice cafes, passing a rainy day in Chamonix is rarely a problem. For those with a lift pass, getting a workout on a rainy day by hiking up to a cable car station and then descending on the lift is a popular option, albeit not a particularly restful one.

Swimming

There is a large public swimming bath in the Centre Sportif Richard Bozon with an indoor and outdoor pool - map p.34. Down the valley on the way to Sallanches is Lac de Passy - an outdoor swimming lake. Take some beers and a barbeque for a full relaxing day out.

Indoor Climbing

Finally for those who don't want to go a day without training, there are two climbing walls open to the public in the valley. There are other indoor walls but these are for members only and require an application process.

Mont Blanc Escalade (+33 450 54 76 48)

In Les Houches, this is a popular lead climbing wall, with 14m routes. There is also a very small bouldering area. Map p.34.

Chamonix (+33 450 53 23 70)

Part of the Centre Sportif Richard Bozon, this small bouldering wall is well located but can be busy at peak times.

More Information

The web site Chamonix.net has a lot of options for all sorts of activities throughout the year including canyoning, rafting, kayaking, via ferrata and golf.



Luke Davies enjoying nice powder conditions in the Aiguilles Rouges - skiing is a great complementary activity to climbing in the winter and a pretty essential skill for those wanting to climb in the mountains in the winter months. Photo: Jake Holland

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Chamonix Skills

Giulia Monego on the summit slopes of the Aiguille Verte after a solo of the *Couturier Couloir* (D) - p.111 - and before paragliding back down. Photo: Jake Holland

Part of the appeal of alpinism is that it is a test of so many skills beyond just climbing. Route selection, gear choice, complicated approaches, lengthy descents and objective dangers all have to be considered, as does the physical and technical capability of a team. Here are some of the things that can catch people out and a few ideas about how to prepare for an alpine climbing trip.

Fitness

Alpinism requires higher levels of all-body fitness than rock climbing because it involves covering lots of terrain over a long period of time. On a typical alpine climb the day starts early, often with a multi-hour walk in mountain boots. Then follows a long and technical climb, a tricky and potentially dangerous descent, then finally another long walk. Factor in that you will carry a rucksack and likely be at more than 3000m above sea level for much of the time. All this after a night spent in a mountain hut which was unlikely to have been a vintage night's sleep, and certainly a short one, and the challenge becomes even greater.

Any form of cardiovascular exercise will help to prepare for an alpine trip, but walking or running uphill is the most effective. Gym work, in the form of lifting weights is also beneficial and for those lacking access to a gym, body weight squats, lunges, pushups and pull-ups are all excellent and simple ways of improving strength.

Ultimately, the best way to prepare for an alpine trip is to replicate it by linking together multiple rock climbs or scrambles and doing plenty of walking in between them to give yourself some long days out. The mountains of North Wales are great in this respect, Tryfan and Cwm Idwal in particular offer lots of options to join relatively easy routes with walking sections to create excellent long days. The Lake District and Scotland have plenty of similar options.



Joe Brindley approaching the characteristic Demi-Lune of the *Kuffner Ridge* (D) - p.288 at sunrise. In the distance are the *Gervasutti Couloir* and *Rébuffat Gully* on the *Tour Ronde*, and behind are the *Aiguille de Toule* and *Marbrées Traverse*. Photo: Luke Davies

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Gl. d'Argentine
Chamonix/Mont Blanc
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Ecrins des Aiguilles
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Tré la Tène
AR - Brevent/Planpraz
AR - Index
AR - Vallorcine
Valley Grogging

One of the most important alpine skills is the ability to move quickly at all times. Get up early, walk in quickly, climb quickly, descend quickly and walk back out. Climbers who dawdle and take in the view, or faff over gear on easy pitches seldom make good alpine climbers, especially if they end up blocking a route for other teams.

Moving Together

Moving together means both climbers climbing at once, with the leader placing runners and the second removing them, and taking belays only occasionally to switch over or re-gear. Many climbers are nervous about moving together but when done correctly it is a relatively safe way of covering moderate ground very quickly. Provided that there are a couple of pieces of good protection and never more than a few metres of slack rope, a fall is unlikely to be disastrous (and better than an unroped fall). That said, if protection is unavailable, or very poor, consider moving unroped since you are doubling your chances of a serious fall with two of you tied together if you have no decent gear in place. When moving together, having roughly 30m of rope between climbers is usually about right, though more or less may be appropriate on certain terrain. Extending runners will reduce rope drag - which can be the cause of much friction, both literal and social!

Route Choice

The dangers associated with alpinism make route choice even more vital than in most climbing areas. The key to making good decisions is to gather the maximum information about routes and conditions that you can, and to be honest about the ability of you and your partner.

Leading HVS rock climbs wearing rock shoes, clipping solid gear every few metres and taking plenty of time over it does not translate into leading an HVS alpine pitch quickly in big boots, with limited protection and carrying a rucksack! If in doubt, aim

low. Coming away from an alpine trip with half a dozen easier routes in the bag is far preferable to going home with a list of glorious failures on tougher climbs.

You should also take account of current conditions when choosing your route - see weather on p.47

Route Finding

Route finding in Chamonix is generally not as tough as in some alpine areas because the routes in the Mont Blanc Massif usually follow prominent features. That said, locating the correct descent and navigating across glaciers, often by headtorch, are complete skill sets in themselves and can be the toughest part of an alpine route. Understanding where and how crevasses form is essential and can be learned partly through reading about glaciers, partly through common sense and mainly by spending time travelling in and analysing crevassed terrain.

One issue to be aware of is that there are many hard routes in the Mont Blanc Massif that we have not described and that you are likely to find fixed gear when climbing in the area, from pegs to bolted belays, which are part of a line not included in this book. Seeing gear does not indicate that you are on the right route and blindly following a line of pegs or bolts is not a good idea. Knowing what a specific grade should look like on the rock is an important skill. You need to be able to make an assessment of where the route is likely to go based on the grade you are supposed to be climbing. This can only be developed by gaining experience on a specific rock type.

It is worth spending some time studying your proposed route from a distance, committing the route line to memory and mentally marking key features; an obvious-looking line seen from the ground is nearly always less apparent once on the route. Similarly, taking time from a hut, or lift station, to study and try to understand that subtleties of a glacier will most likely make your approach and return much easier to navigate.

Abseiling

Although most climbers can happily make single abseils, doing multiple abseils quickly and safely is a very different skill and a vital one. As a rough time guide when descending, completing one abseil every 10 minutes is about right and allows for more accurate planning and time management (ie. if a descent requires six abseils, then you should aim to complete these in one hour). The 10 minutes is based on the assumption that the abseil anchors are already in place; if you have to build your own then it will take much longer. Both climbers should be busy with rope management and preparing for the next abseil for the whole time during a descent. If you are not, then you are not efficient enough!



Tom Seccombe abseiling into the depths of the Cunningham Couloir on approach to climb *Vent du Dragon* (TD) - p.262 - on the Northwest Face of the Aiguille du Midi. Photo: Luke Davies

In addition to the normal climbing dangers (falling off), alpinism involves a whole host of other potential dangers which need to be understood and managed if an acceptable safety margin is to be maintained.

Glacier Travel

When travelling on a wet glacier (one that is snow covered and is not simply blue ice) then roping up correctly is essential, as is carrying, and knowing how to use, a full crevasse rescue kit.

For reasons understood only by the protagonists, certain glaciated parts of the Mont Blanc Massif (particularly around the Aiguille du Midi) seem to have been deemed safe enough to walk around on unroped by some climbers, possibly due to the sheer number of people travelling on them. Given that the Pointes Lachenal near the Aiguille du Midi is so named because legendary French alpinist Louis Lachenal died in a crevasse fall nearby, the stupidity of not roping up should be obvious. Numerous crevasse falls occur on well-travelled and long established paths across glaciers.

Learning and refining crevasse rescue skills takes time but it is vital. Before an alpine trip, get plenty of practice holding simulated crevasse falls, setting up different anchors and hauling systems and prussiking up ropes. For some real life practice it is highly recommended to take the Montanvers train up and walk down to the Mer de Glace which (in its lower section) is a dry glacier and provides a perfect spot to try out different systems and equipment. The scenery isn't bad either!

Bergschrunds

Bergschrunds are large crevasses which separate the edge of a glacier from a mountain and no matter how innocuous they look, they deserve respect and a cautious approach; looks are often deceiving. On some routes, such as *Petit Viking* (p.101) on the Pointe du Domino near Mont Dolent, crossing the bergschrund is widely recognised as being the crux of the route!

Crossing bergschrunds ('rimayes' in French) is best done by one climber being 20m or so downhill of the bergschrund and belaying their partner as they approach and cross the gap. This climber should then build a belay above it and bring up their partner. Crossing the bergschrund can involve a large step and/or climbing some difficult soft snow. Bergschrunds change quickly with weather and conditions so take care when dealing with them.

Seracs

Seracs are large blocks of glacial ice which are formed as glaciers move downhill. They can often become overhanging on steeper ground, at which point they are liable to collapse and fall, causing devastation to anyone caught below. Passing under seracs can sometimes be unavoidable and the best way to minimise the danger is to move as quickly as possible. Take a short break before going under them, drink some water and have a bite to eat and then keep going once underway.

Probably the best known areas of seracs above Chamonix are on Mont Blanc's *Trois Monts Route* (p.335). These have collapsed with disastrous consequences several times in the past decade but it is worth keeping in perspective that thousands of climbers pass safely under them every year.

Jon Gupta climbing high on Pointe Médiane on the *Arête du Diable Traverse* (D) - p.299 - on Mont Blanc du Tacul. Photo: Luke Davies



Rockfall

Rockfall danger is increasing as the earth's climate warms up. Snow and ice-filled faces and couloirs are the main areas of danger so be aware of what is above you, and how the weather will affect its stability, when climbing on or below these features.

Generally, rockfall danger is lowest during the night when temperatures are below freezing, but if there is no overnight freeze, rockfall is a constant danger during the day and night.

There are two key ways of minimising rockfall danger - correct choice of route and getting up early. In the height of summer, the best option is to simply avoid routes with the potential of rockfall danger.

All the routes in the Aiguilles Rouges, many of the granite rock climbs, and just about any route which follows a ridge throughout, should be safe even in hot conditions, so avoiding snowy faces and couloirs shouldn't limit your choice too much.

If there is a good overnight freeze, and you do a route which could have rockfall danger, getting up early is always advised. It is far better to be already above a potentially dangerous area and waiting for the sun to come up than below a dangerous area, desperately racing to beat the heat! A good example of this can be seen in the Grand Couloir on Mont Blanc's popular *Goûter Route* (p.339) which can be extremely dangerous in the middle of the day but relatively benign in the dead of night when all the loose stuff is frozen solid.

Weather

Many routes are committing to the point that retreat is extremely difficult if not impossible. Choosing a route which fits the weather forecast is essential because being stuck high up on a long climb when a thunderstorm arrives is extremely serious. The weather in the Alps often deteriorates in the afternoon (particularly in early summer) so if the weather forecast is predicting a possible thunderstorm later in the day, pick a route that will almost certainly not take more than a few hours. Even if there is no thunderstorm forecast, keep a close eye on the weather and only commit to continuing to climb when the sky is clear.

Weather/Avalanche Forecasts

Chamonix is well served with weather forecast websites. The best known is chamonix-meteo.com but chamonix.com/meteo (where the avalanche bulletin can also be found in winter), yr.no and meteoblue.com are also excellent. Amalgamating different forecasts is advised as there can be some differences. The weather forecast (and avalanche bulletin in winter) are posted every day outside the Office de Haute Montagne (OHM) in the centre of Chamonix.



Tim Oliver swinging round into the sun on the Petit Dru after a winter ascent of *The North Face* (TD+) - p.126. Photo: Luke Davies

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Gl. d'Argentière
Chamonix/Valent Blanc
Glacier de l'Alpe
Grandes Jorasses
Ecrins des Aiguilles
Plan de l'Aiguille
Aiguille du Midi
Helbronner
Mont Blanc du Tacot
Mont Blanc
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Chamonix Climbing

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Tom Seccombe on the fantastic cracks of *Sale Athée* (ED1) - p.134 - Aiguille de Moine. Photo: Luke Davies

Gear

Outside the Aiguilles Rouges and valley cragging chapters, there are no routes which can be climbed entirely on fixed gear. As such, a rack of gear is necessary to climb most routes in this book. The size and nature of the rack required for each route depends on the ability of the team, the difficulty and nature of the climbing and the length of the route. Judging what to take and what to leave behind is an important skill for an alpine climber and can only be learned through (often bitter!) experience.

Runners

Several pages could be dedicated to the discussion about which runners are required for alpine climbing. As a general rule, the granite above Chamonix is well featured and swallows climbing protection. The uniform nature of most of the cracks means that cams are more useful than wires. On harder rock climbs it is often better to take a double rack of cams than one set of cams and a set of wires. Indeed, having a set of wires on a granite rock route can often be a giveaway that you are not a local! Most of the cracks in Chamonix are at least finger-sized so a micro-cam or two can be handy.

Ropes

Trad - Deciding whether to take one or two ropes is often one of the toughest calls in alpine climbing. The decision will depend on the nature of the climbing (does the route wander or is it fairly direct?); the technical difficulty of the route and what the descent entails. One rope wins for simplicity and weight but two offers the possibility for longer abseils and reduces the potential for time consuming rope drag issues. A single and a tag-line can work well for longer alpine routes offering simplicity and low weight (or a potential bailout option on routes that go up and over).

Sport routes - A single rope is recommended for sport climbing in the valley. Some routes require a 70m rope but you will get by with a 60m rope for most of the pitches.

Ice Axe(s)

All mixed ice climbs described require technical axes - a hammer and an adze. Many of the ridges and longer mixed routes require at least one axe for negotiating the snow and ice sections. Regard the axe symbol (above) shown with the routes as a rough guide but please use your own judgement as to whether you need none, one or two axes on a given route.

Slings

Slings are light, quick to place and have many functions, so take lots of them. Some tat should also be taken for equalising and backing up abseil anchors (don't be afraid to take a knife to some of the stations and clear out old tat).

A set of prussiks is mandatory for the many abseil descents and for potential hauls and rescues. A belay plate that can operate in 'guide mode' is advisable to assist with moving quickly, and doubling up as an abseil device. Finally a good number of longer extenders is advised to help keep rope drag to a minimum.

Shoes

For all routes outside the Valley Cragging and Aiguilles Rouges chapters of this book a pair of B2 or B3 mountaineering boots is advisable to approach and descend from your climb. Mixed and lower-grade rock climbs can also be done in these boots but for technical rock, a pair of rock shoes will be required. Given the length of the routes, comfortable rock shoes are a better choice than tight, high-performance ones.

Bivvy Gear

Some routes, such as the *Tournier Spur Direct* (p.107) on Les Droites and *Peuterey Integrale* (p.355) on Mont Blanc, are so long that a bivouac is essential for most people. If you are planning to bivvy on a face you will need other gear such as extra warm clothing, or a sleeping bag, extra food and plenty of water. For shorter routes the decision about whether to take bivouac kit can be a tough one. The old adage that, if you take bivvy kit, you'll need it, is still true today but going fast and light carries its own risks as well. As with gear and rope selection, experience and judgement is required to make a well-informed decision.

Other Gear

The scale of the routes above Chamonix means that you will need a rucksack on most routes. One certainty is that, if a route requires crossing a wet glacier at any stage, then full crevasse rescue kit and the ability to use it is vital. Carry some extra food and water in case of emergency plus a small first aid kit. A lightweight windproof/waterproof layer is advised and a knife for cutting old tat out of the way. A headtorch for each climber is essential. Crack gloves can be particularly useful for the coarse granite climbs. Poles for the steep approaches and descents.



Freja Shannon on the upper section of the *Contamine Bastien* (TD+) - p.132 - Dru - South Face. Photo: Luke Davies

Alpine Grade Table

| Sport | Alpine Grade | | UIAA | USA |
|-------|--------------|-----|-------|-------|
| 1 | | | I | 5.1 |
| 2 | | | II | 5.2 |
| 2+ | PD- | | III+ | 5.3 |
| 3a | | | IV- | 5.4 |
| 3b | PD | | IV | 5.5 |
| 3c | | | IV | 5.6 |
| 4a | | | IV+ | |
| 4b | | | V- | 5.7 |
| 4c | AD- | | V | 5.8 |
| 5a | | AD | V+ | |
| 5b | D- | | VI- | 5.9 |
| 5c | | D | VI | 5.10a |
| 6a | TD- | | VI+ | 5.10b |
| 6a+ | | TD | VII- | 5.10c |
| 6b | | | VII | 5.10d |
| 6b+ | | | VII+ | 5.11a |
| 6c | ED1 | | VIII- | 5.11b |
| 6c+ | | | VIII | 5.11c |
| 7a | | ED2 | VIII | 5.11d |
| 7a+ | | | VIII+ | 5.12a |
| 7b | | | IX- | 5.12b |

Alpine Grade

The Alpine grade takes into account the overall seriousness of a route, not just the technical difficulty. Even if a route is well within your technical level, the glacial approach and objective dangers can make it a much more serious proposition than it would otherwise be in a smaller, non-glaciated range.

Alpine grades are the standard grading system for the Mont Blanc Massif, where most climbing protection is hand-placed and/or contains fluctuating levels of fixed protection (pegs or bolts).

This provides an overall grade, based on the length, difficulty and seriousness of the climb.

- F - Facile (easy)
- PD - Peu Difficile
- AD - Assez Difficile
- D - Difficile
- ED1 - Extrêmement Difficile
- ED2, ED3 and upwards

Commitment Grade

The first line of most route descriptions has a commitment grade, a route length and a rough climbing time. The Roman numeral commitment grade refers to the overall seriousness of the route, which is determined by the route length, overall difficulties, difficulty of the approach and descent, the level of objective hazard, the difficulty of retreat once on the climb and the time it takes an average team to complete it. This should not be confused with UIAA grades.

- I - Short route with easy access.
- II - Short or medium length route with easy approach and descent.
- III - Longer route or longer approach and more difficult descent.
- IV - Long route with more difficult approach and a more complex and lengthy descent.
- V - Long route in a more remote area. Difficult approach and descent, often done over multiple days.
- VI - Very long and serious with a difficult approach and descent in a remote area will often take multiple days.

Alpine Technical Grade

The technical grade refers to the hardest section of climbing on the route. For predominantly rock climbs, sport climbing grades are used with each pitch. On predominantly mixed terrain or ice, technical grades from 1 (easy cramponing or mixed scrambling) to 7 (steep, sustained and extremely technical climbing) are used.

Sport Grade

Sport grades are used for single and multi-pitch sport climbing in the Brévent and the Chamonix valley crags.

Colour Coding

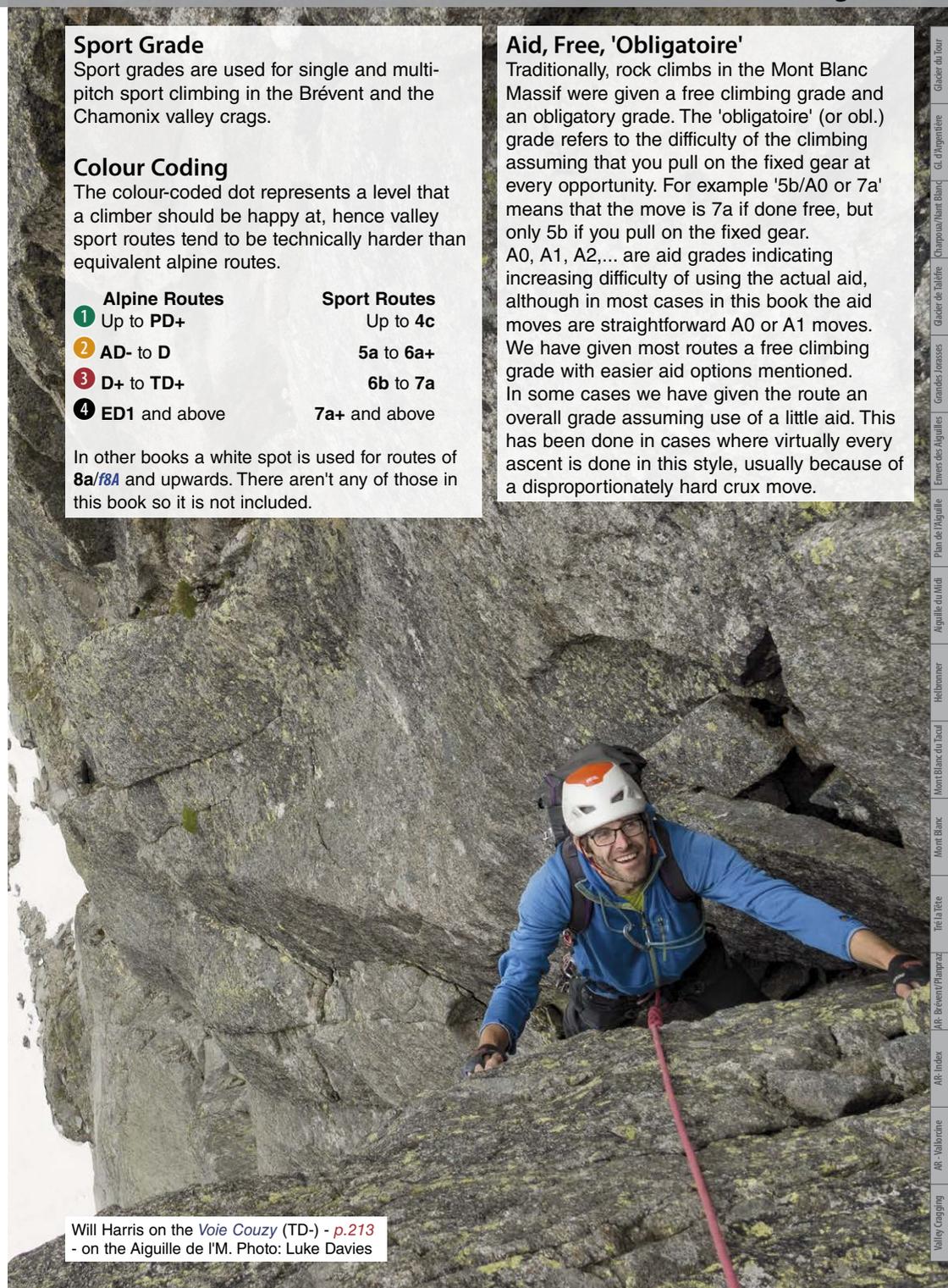
The colour-coded dot represents a level that a climber should be happy at, hence valley sport routes tend to be technically harder than equivalent alpine routes.

- | | |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| Alpine Routes | Sport Routes |
| 1 Up to PD+ | Up to 4c |
| 2 AD- to D | 5a to 6a+ |
| 3 D+ to TD+ | 6b to 7a |
| 4 ED1 and above | 7a+ and above |

In other books a white spot is used for routes of 8a/f8A and upwards. There aren't any of those in this book so it is not included.

Aid, Free, 'Obligatoire'

Traditionally, rock climbs in the Mont Blanc Massif were given a free climbing grade and an obligatory grade. The 'obligatoire' (or obl.) grade refers to the difficulty of the climbing assuming that you pull on the fixed gear at every opportunity. For example '5b/A0 or 7a' means that the move is 7a if done free, but only 5b if you pull on the fixed gear. A0, A1, A2,... are aid grades indicating increasing difficulty of using the actual aid, although in most cases in this book the aid moves are straightforward A0 or A1 moves. We have given most routes a free climbing grade with easier aid options mentioned. In some cases we have given the route an overall grade assuming use of a little aid. This has been done in cases where virtually every ascent is done in this style, usually because of a disproportionately hard crux move.



Will Harris on the *Voie Couzy* (TD-) - p.213 - on the Aiguille de l'M. Photo: Luke Davies

Glacier du Tour
 Gl. d'Argentière
 Champoussin Blanc
 Glacier de Talèfre
 Grandes Jorasses
 Evens des Aiguilles
 Plan de l'Aiguille
 Aiguille du Midi
 Helbronner
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Route Timings

Climb times are given for most routes other than pitched rock climbs. These times are a suggestion of what the average ascent time is from the bottom to the top of a given route. It doesn't include the approach time to the crag nor does it include descent time and you need to factor these in when calculating timings. Pitched rock climbs aren't given timings since these can vary from team to team. As a general rule allowing 20 to 30 minutes per pitch is a good target to aim for. Please keep in mind that the times given are approximate but conditions change and being slightly outside a suggested time is not necessarily a disaster. However, if you are consistently slower than the suggested times then consider whether your fitness, acclimatisation and climbing skill are suitable for the routes you are attempting.

Route Lengths

In addition to a grade, routes are also given a length. Virtually all route lengths refer to the vertical height gain. For some routes, such as traverses, which climb and descend repeatedly, a vertical route length is not a useful way of suggesting how long a climb will take and is also difficult information to interpret. In these cases we have given the routes approximate horizontal distance.

John McCune climbing up to the junction of the *Rébuffat-Terray* (TD) and *Beyond Good and Evil* (ED2) - p.225 - on the Aiguille des Pelerins - after climbing the lower part of the latter. Photo: Luke Davies

One of Chamonix's great strengths as an Alpine climbing destination is its position in the centre of the Western Alps. This means that, if the weather is not conducive to your chosen style of climbing in the local Chamonix valley, then there is often other areas within a couple of hours drive that might provide a good alternative. Here are some suggestions of other places to consider.

Arve Valley

Chamonix's best kept secret is the fantastic limestone sport climbing in the Arve valley. The crags can be anywhere from 20 minutes drive to an hour away and are a good option if the weather is bad at altitude. The climbing style here is pretty old school and can feel hard for the grade for newcomers. There is a large number of crags but some standouts include the single pitch crag of Bionnassay above St. Gervais, and the mini-big walls of Maladière, Vuardes, Tours d'Areu and La Balme that all provide adventurous multi-pitch routes. For those that feel that way inclined, the nearest dry-tooling crags are also found down here at La Fayette and the Zoo.

Aosta Valley

Often the weather on the other side of the magic Mont Blanc Tunnel can be very different. Aosta Valley has many fantastic sport crags within an hour's drive, and a few multi-pitch ones a bit further afield, mostly on great quality gneiss. Valgrisenche is a particular hot spot in a fantastic alpine setting and a range of high quality sport crags such as La Mecca and Gare Est. A bit further on, the large Paratone at Machaby provides slabby multi-pitch adventures that end up a perfectly situated Agriturismo for lunch. For those looking for alpine adventures, or an alternative to Mont Blanc, then Gran Paradiso - Italy's highest peak - can be a good option here. In the winter months, reliable ice conditions can almost always be found in Aosta in the world class water ice destination of Cogne.

Martigny Area

Beyond Barberine and Gietroz, the road weaves its way over the Col de Forclaz and down to the Swiss town of Martigny. Around the Martigny area are a range of sport crags, both single and multi-pitch such as Dorénaz and Ravoire (see free app 'Les Carnets d'Escalade'). For those looking for more mountainous adventures, the Miroir de l'Argentine boasts long multi-pitche routes and a ridge traverse. A quick drive up to the Champex lift system also gives access to the far side of the Mont Blanc Massif and some brilliant granite climbing on the Petit Clocher du Portalet and around the Cabane d'Orny.

Valaisian Alps

For those looking for more Alpine options, if the conditions aren't conducive to what you are looking for in the Chamonix area, then the alpine climbing bases of Zermatt, Saas Fee, Arolla and Zinal are all less than 2.5 hours drive. This can often be a good option for snow routes later in the season as the mountains, on the whole, are higher so often the glacier conditions hold out better and there are more options. Due to the much poorer quality of rock found in the Valais, the routes tend to follow ridgelines so there isn't a great deal of technical rock-based routes in the summer months.

Orco

For those looking for alternatives to the granite trad climbing found in the Envers and other areas of the massif, then a 2.5 hour drive south to the Piedemonte gets you to the Italian crack climbing mecca that is the Orco valley. The valley features a range of single and multi-pitch crags all with immaculate smooth granite and the beautiful Refugio Pontese offers brilliant mountain routes behind the Gran Paradiso massif.



Will Harris enjoying sport climbing in the beautiful Valgrisenche, Aosta Valley. Photo: Luke Davies

F to PD+
up to 4cAD- to D
5a to 6a+D+ to TD+
6b to 7aED1 upwards
7a+ upwards

| | Total | | | | F to PD+ up to 4c | AD- to D 5a to 6a+ | D+ to TD+ 6b to 7a | ED1 upwards 7a+ upwards | | Approach | Best Season | Summary | Page |
|---|---------------|-----|-----|-----|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|---|----------|--|---------|------|
| Glacier du Tour | 18 | 15 | 3 | - | 9 | 6 | 3 | - | | | An excellent area for low/mid-grade alpinists, the Glacier du Tour provides a range of superb snow and mixed climbs on moderately high peaks. | 64 | |
| Glacier d'Argentière | 44 | 30 | 14 | - | 5 | 9 | 23 | 7 | | | When it comes to long, classic ice and mixed climbs, the Glacier d'Argentière is likely the most densely packed valley in the world. There's some decent rock too! | 84 | |
| Charpoua and Nant Blanc | 10 | - | 10 | - | - | - | 5 | 5 | | | An aspirational area featuring the stunning pinnacle of the Dru and its surrounding rocky bastions. Huge routes in a dramatic, remote-feeling setting. | 122 | |
| Glacier de Talèfre | 10 | 6 | 4 | - | 2 | 6 | 2 | - | | | Home to several classic alpine ridges, some excellent rock routes and a couple of good snow climbs, the Glacier de Talèfre is a mid-grade mecca. | 138 | |
| Grandes Jorasses | 10 | 5 | 5 | - | - | 2 | 4 | 4 | | | A legendary peak and one of the most impressive mountains in the Alps, The Grandes Jorasses is home to long, serious and amazing alpine climbs. | 158 | |
| Envers des Aiguilles | 33 | - | 33 | - | - | - | 19 | 14 | | | One of the best (and best known) areas for granite climbing in the Alps, the Envers provides relatively safe and extremely high quality rock climbing. | 174 | |
| Plan de l'Aiguille | 33 | 11 | 22 | - | - | 7 | 21 | 5 | | | An area with just about everything an alpinist looks for, from short and un-committing granite rock routes through to huge 1200m mixed lines. | 204 | |
| Aiguille du Midi | 16 | 6 | 10 | - | 1 | 2 | 10 | 3 | | | The focal point of Chamonix climbing, the Aiguille du Midi is home to some legendary rock and mixed routes, from easy ridges to high-grade rock climbs. | 246 | |
| Helbronner | 19 | 12 | 7 | - | 3 | 14 | 2 | - | | | As well as an extensive range of fun low/mid-grade alpine climbs, the Helbronner is also home to two stunning, wild climbs - the <i>Brenva Spur</i> and <i>Kuffner Ridge</i> . | 270 | |
| Mont Blanc du Tacul | 40 | 22 | 18 | - | 1 | 9 | 18 | 12 | | | A mountain with just about everything, from splitter granite cracks to long, alpine ridges, stunning ice climbs and mixed routes of all grades. | 294 | |
| Mont Blanc - France Side | 3 | 3 | - | - | 2 | 1 | - | - | | | Mountaineering was 'invented' on Mont Blanc after it was climbed from the French side and repeating this feat rightly remains a highly coveted prize. | 330 | |
| Mont Blanc - Italy Side | 7 | 4 | 3 | - | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | | | For those looking for a tougher way of reaching the top of Europe, the Italian side of the mountain provides wild and remote routes of all grades. | 358 | |
| Tré la Tête | 5 | 5 | - | - | 4 | 1 | - | - | | | The Tré la Tête is a perfect place for low-grade alpinists, combining as it does remote mountaineering, beautiful summits and stunning views. | 370 | |
| Aiguilles Rouges - Brévent and Planpraz | 60 | - | 4 | 56 | 2 | 19 | 37 | 2 | | | For those wishing to avoid the seriousness of alpine mountaineering, Brévent offers a selection of brilliant rock climbs, most of which are fully bolted. | 392 | |
| Aiguilles Rouges - Index | 42 | - | 18 | 24 | 5 | 10 | 19 | 8 | | | The Index is a great place to climb bolted and traditional multi-pitch routes and it has one of the finest mountain views in the world as a backdrop. | 418 | |
| Aiguilles Rouges - Vallorcine | 18 | - | 8 | 10 | - | 2 | 13 | 3 | | | The quiet side of the Aiguilles Rouges has bolted multi-pitches accessible from the valley as well as the stunning Perrons - maybe the best rock in the Rouges. | 434 | |
| Valley Crags | Servoz | 27 | - | - | 27 | 5 | 13 | 8 | 1 | | A sunny, west-facing roadside crag with a good set of sport routes in the mid-grades. Some multi-pitch offerings. | 438 | |
| | Coupeau Area | 30 | - | - | 30 | - | 8 | 17 | 5 | | Two great crags on the Coupeau hill side. Coupeau is a great venue for hot summers days and Roc Dement for those looking for a bit of steep crimping. | 444 | |
| | Les Gaillands | 106 | - | - | 106 | 23 | 66 | 16 | 1 | | A set of popular buttresses with easy access and lots of routes. A great place to get some multi-pitch practice in but the lines are confusing as it is over-bolted. | 450 | |
| | Les Mottets | 3 | - | - | 3 | 1 | 2 | - | - | | Three long routes that are easy to reach and are good for getting used to long days and moving together. | 466 | |
| | La Joux | 41 | - | - | 41 | 8 | 18 | 10 | 5 | | A beautifully situated crag with some good, mostly single-pitch routes across the lower and mid-grades. | 468 | |
| | Les Chéserys | 25 | - | - | 25 | 3 | 22 | - | - | | A set of high quality multi-pitch bolted climbing with no lift access required. Magnificent views and relatively easy grades make it a good place to start. | 476 | |
| | Vallorcine | 27 | - | - | 27 | 11 | 13 | 3 | - | | A nicely-located west-facing slab with a good set of single and multi-pitch routes. Can get crowded with groups. | 484 | |
| | Barberine | 63 | - | - | 63 | - | 15 | 39 | 9 | | A vast hillside with a series of long multi-pitch routes connecting the quality sections of rock, plus a great set of harder routes on the Zone area. | 488 | |
| Totals | 690 | 119 | 151 | 420 | 86 | 246 | 271 | 87 | | | 'Best season' may vary considerably for certain routes - check route pages. | | |