

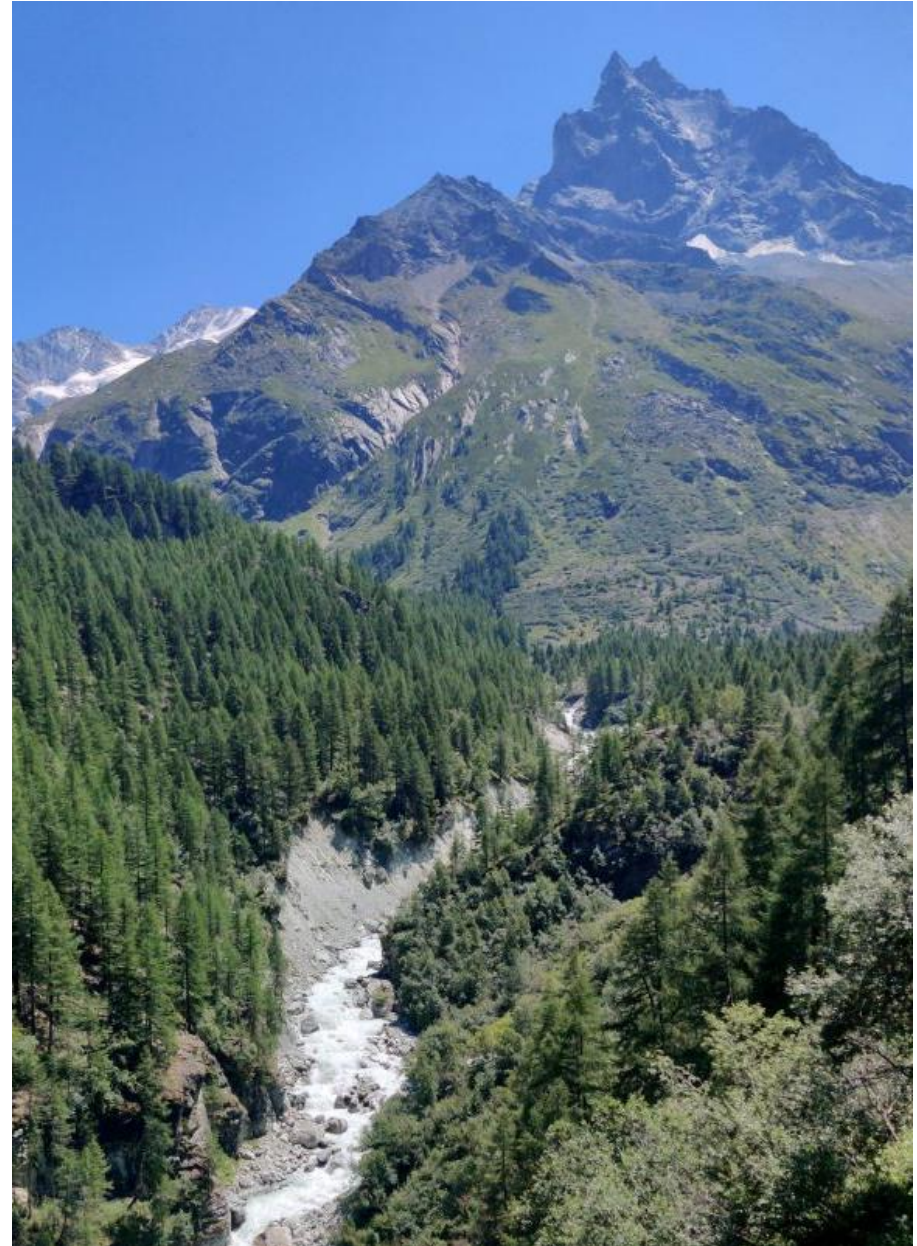
# Traverse of Besso & Blanc de Moming

22-23 July 2024

with Thomi Zumtaugwald and Patrice Biner



We have wondered what it would be like to climb Besso since the 1990s, when we first admired its dark forked summit from the village of Zinal and the hills around Grimentz, in Val d'Anniviers.



The most common way to climb Besso is to traverse it, taking the West (main) ridge to the summit and then continuing along the next ridge to the peak of Blanc de Moming. This makes a giant circuit that starts and ends from the Mountet hut.

Neither of our guides had ever been on Besso, and they were game to tackle the route.



We meet for the usual quick breakfast at Café Zenhäusern in Visp, then pile into a single car.

Driving up the Val d'Anniviers, we notice more building cranes in Grimontz than even last year – the place is booming.

In Zinal (1,600 m altitude), we park just outside the campground. M remembers the site from our last Zinal hike, in the early 2000s, but both the campground and the village have grown noticeably since then.

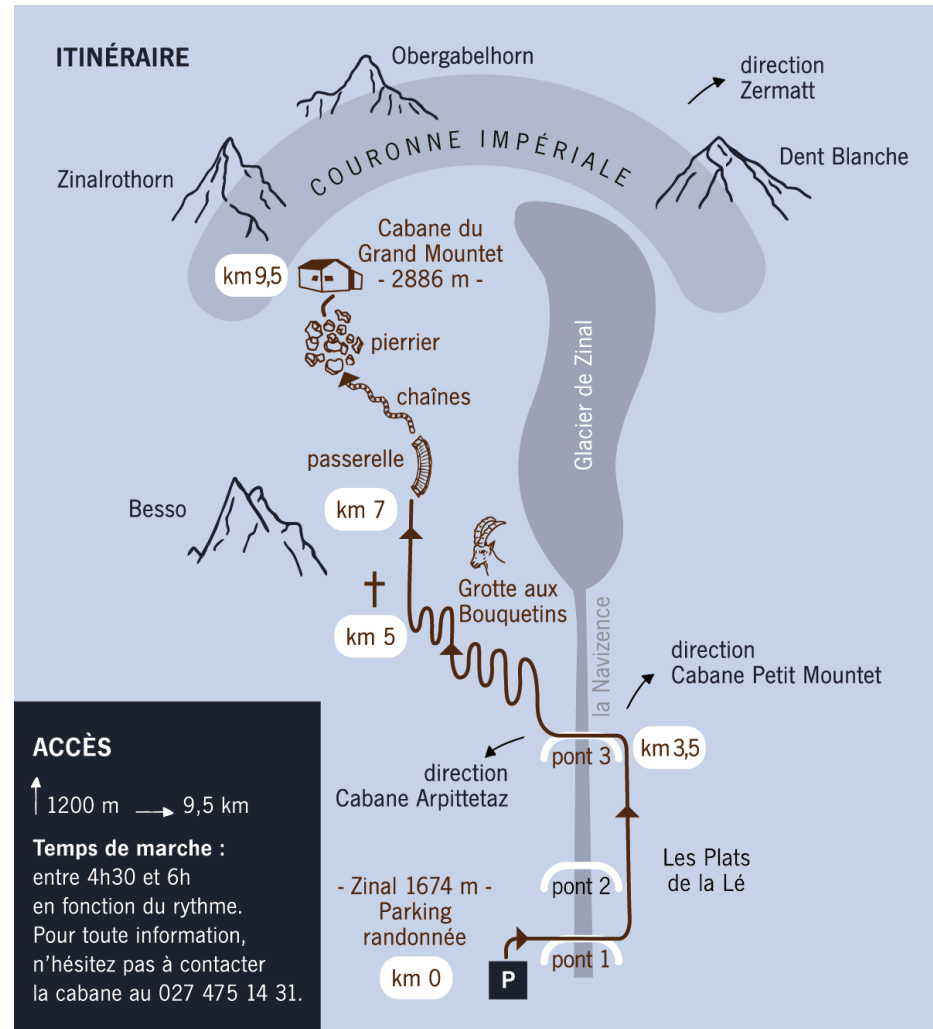


Although it's very warm and sunny, severe storms in early July caused the trail and one bridge to wash out. There's a detour to cross the stream, which adds nearly 1 km to the approach. On the slopes beneath Besso, the trail zigs and zags endlessly upward, the only serious tree shade coming just above the makeshift stream crossing (photo left).



We pass hundreds of Enzian (gentians) – surprising this late in July – and cross a suspension bridge.

Mountet hut (2,886 m) is in a spectacular location, but the rewarding view has to be earned - the approach is 10 km, takes nearly 4 hours and has a climb of over 1,200 meters.



Views along the way are dominated by Dent Blanche (left) and Grand Cornier (center).



... But at various points we can also admire the north ridge of Zinal Rothorn, Pointe de Zinal, a very dry-looking Obergabelhorn, and the lower bit of Blanc de Moming. It makes sense that the locals call this the *Couronne imperiale*!

Some 15-20 minutes before we reach the hut, we take a last break at the turn-off for Besso. Funny to think we'll be back here in just a few hours! The last bit of the approach is a lot of boulder-hopping, but most of them are a good size and stable.

The Mountet staff is friendly, and we're grateful for their English! The food is good, including veggie options and some nice cakes.

Outside there is a sunny bench and picnic tables; the young boy drawing mountains in charcoal must be the warden's son.

Thomi, Patrice and some of the climbers spend much time before and after dinner studying the Vier-Eselsgrat on Dent Blanche. The climbers are persuaded to try something easier; tomorrow, they will head for Pointe de Zinal.





J and M are reassigned from a large bunk room on the top floor to our own private room one floor down – hooray! M has time for a mini-nap between our late afternoon soup and dinner. Photo session after dinner – they have a Gartenzweg outside the hut, to greet arrivals.

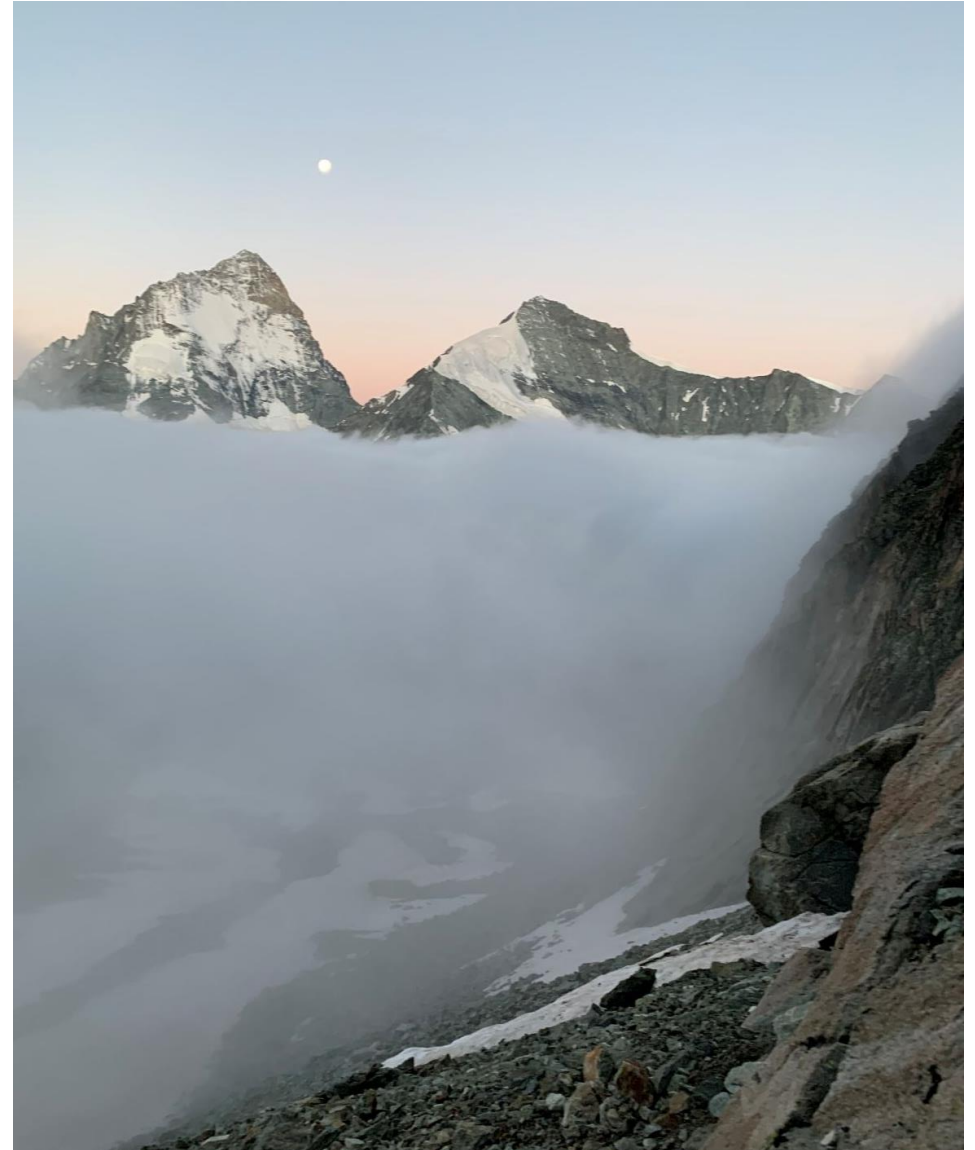


Some hilarity with Thomi and Patrice as we share our rolls of Chocoly cookies that no one can open properly, neither with force nor with finesse.

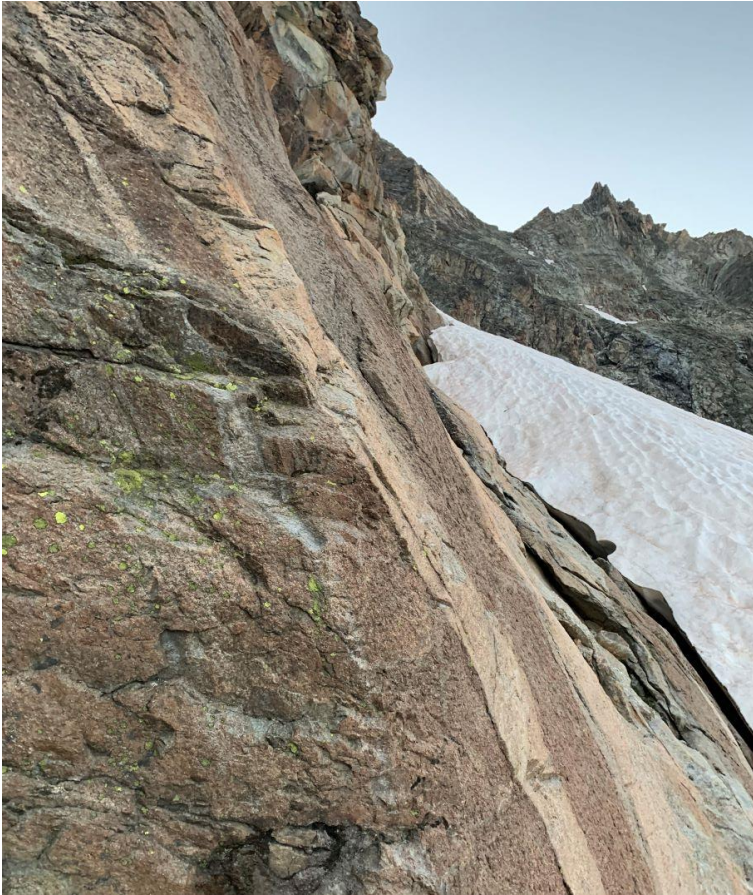


Breakfast is at 04:00 and we leave at 04:30. Turns out we are the only party doing Besso. We had been fearful it would be very popular, but in fact most people at the hut seem to be hikers or rock climbers. We hope for a bit of assistance in the early morning from the full moon, but it has stayed cloudy and foggy all night. The Nebelmeer shown here persists until we are at the summit. (Pictured – Dente Blanche on the left; Grand Cornier on the right.)

On the approach to the ridge, the snow is hard and slippery and then there is loose mud and debris. There are a few too many scary moments in a couloir with falling rock, but then we reach solid rock on the west ridge.



And here we are on that (west) ridge! The climbing is perfect, with pitches of III and IV. Jeff and Patrice celebrate by climbing in Patrice's ultra-cool neon Seil (☺).





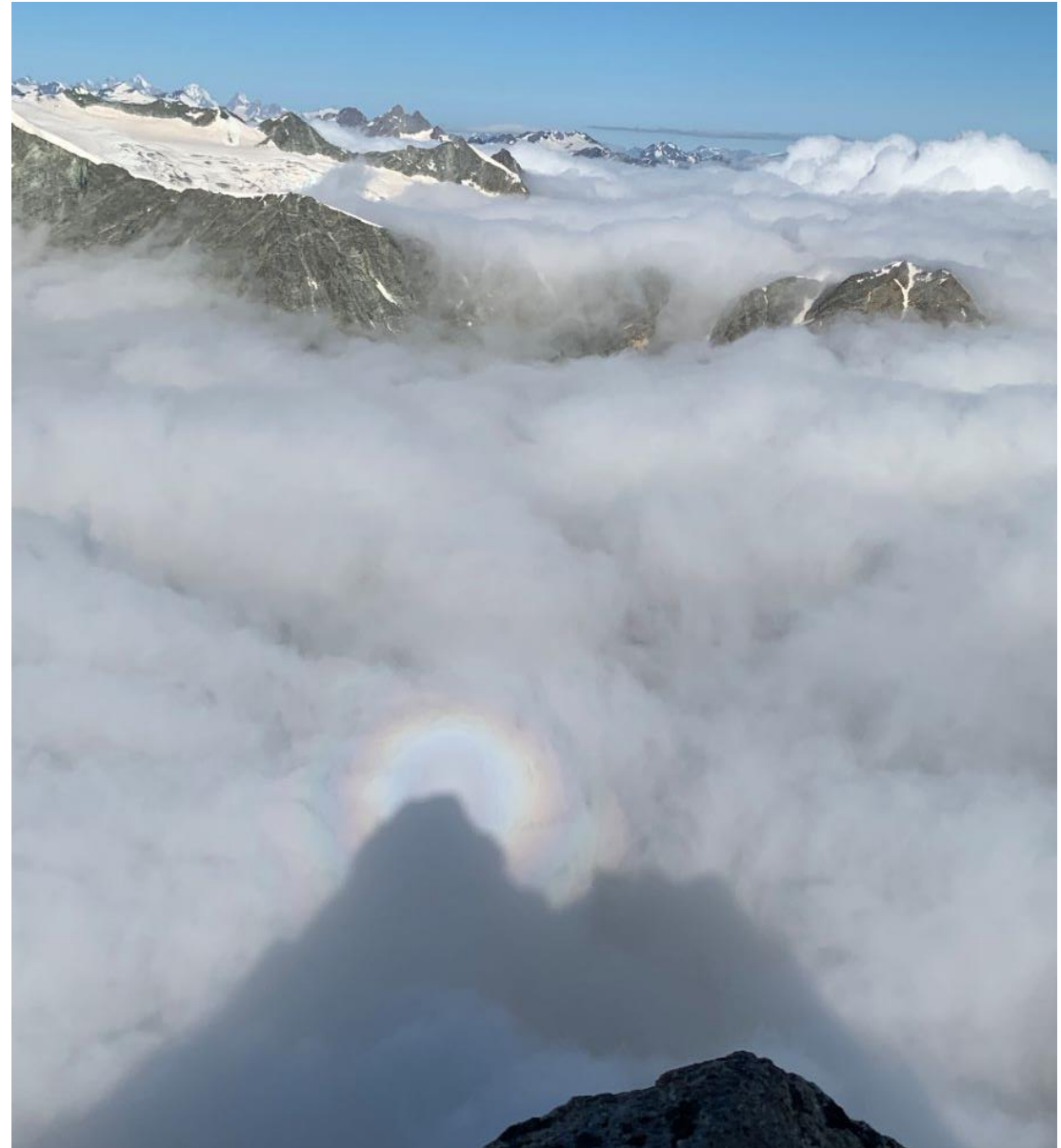
A few very steep moves  
and places without good  
holds, but it all feels cool.

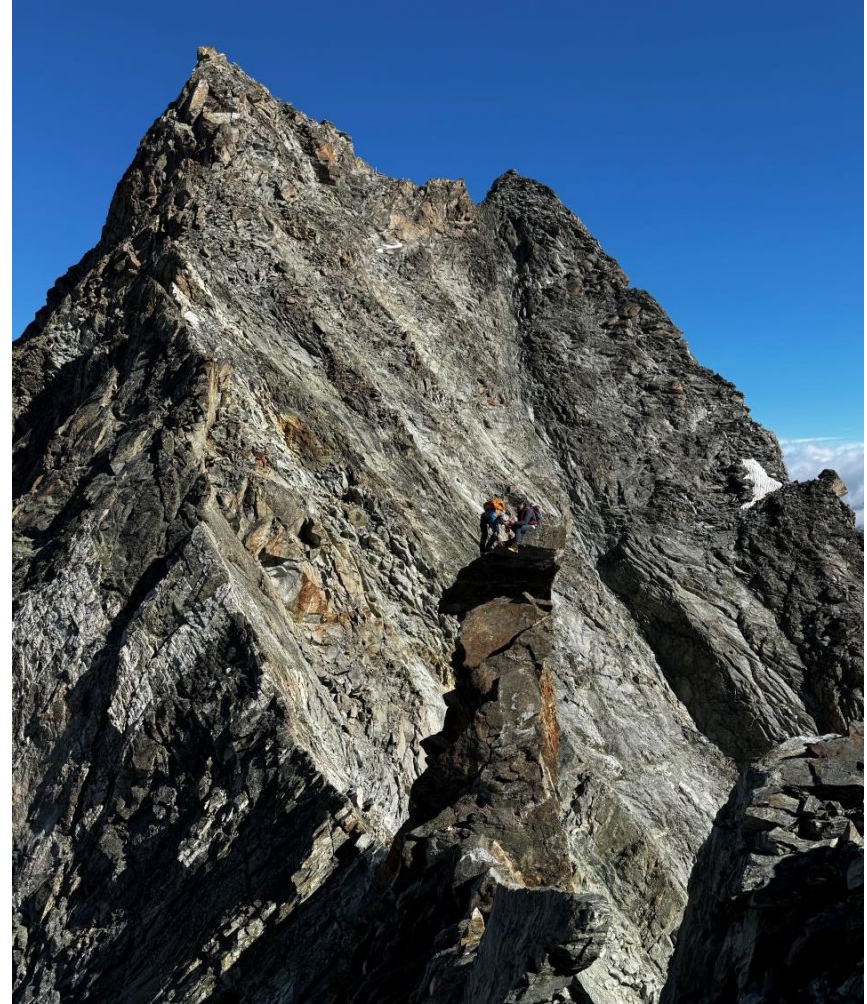


The Besso summit (3,558 meters) feels magical, with views of an extensive Nebelmeer below, and of the surrounding 4000 m peaks in the clear air. On the far left is Horu/Matterhorn, while Zinal Rothorn is on the center right. Bottom right – in the foreground is the ridge to Blanc de Moming that we will soon be traversing!



...and look! Not only is the Besso summit casting a shadow on the clouds below; we look like we're in the middle of a rainbowed sun halo.





The traverse to Blanc de Moming is much longer and harder than expected (photo left). Some of the downclimbing is on loose rock, and several challenging gendarmes must be climbed. Right, Jeff and Patrice on the most striking of them, seen looking back toward Besso.

Martha takes a short break halfway along the ridge to the Moming summit.

By 0930, we can both tell that we've been 'unterwegs' for nearly 5 hours; we are not always concentrating as we should.

This section of the climb has almost no bolts and often no good places for friends/cams.

Later, we learn that these passages 'on a short rope' felt quite precarious for Thomi and Patrice, as they tried to find the route while needing to keep a sharp eye on us.





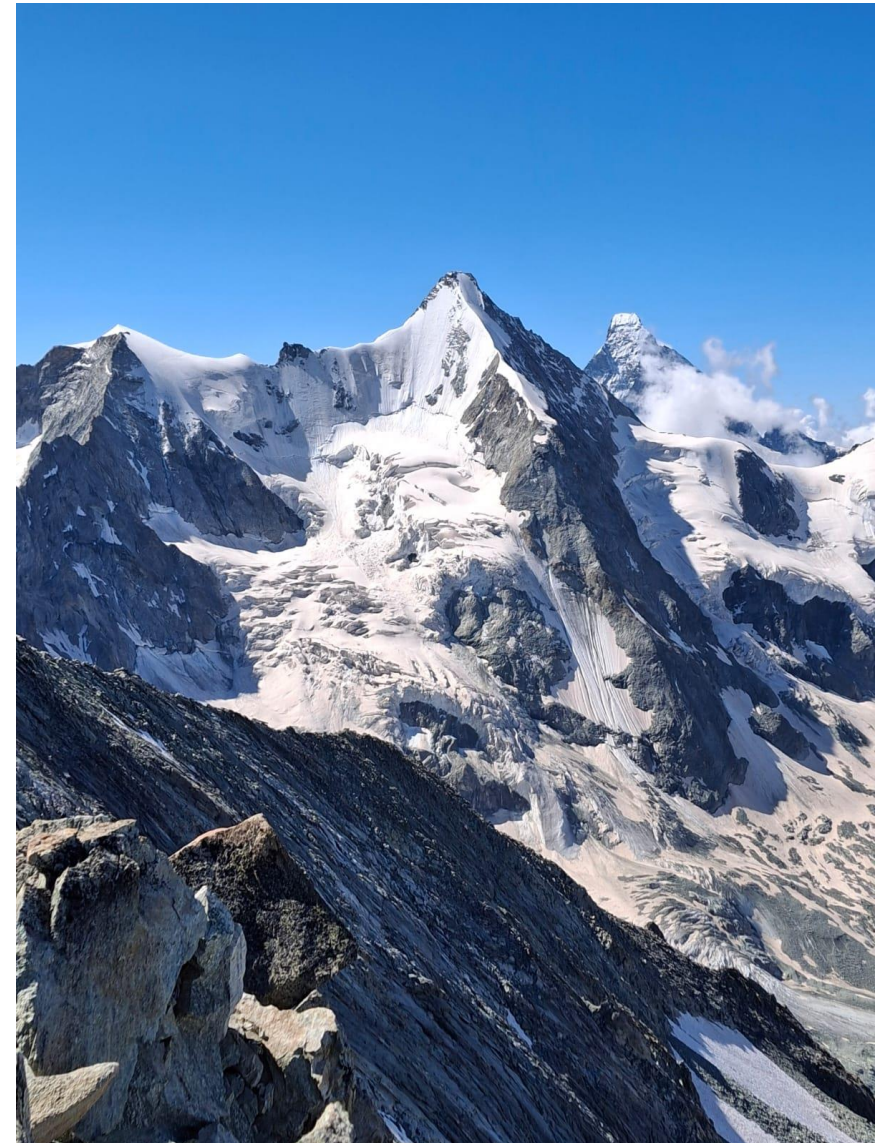
It is a happy moment when we reach the rocky north summit of Blanc de Moming (3,660 m)! From here, we can see just a short descent in scree and then a gradual snow ascent to the south summit some 10 meters lower in altitude — marked by a giant Steinmann. This tour suddenly looks like easy ski tour territory (☺).



After amazing views of Weisshorn and Bishorn from the Besso ridge, now, from Blanc de Moming, we see Obergabelhorn (middle) and Wellenkuppe (left) up close, with good'ole Horu peeking around from behind...

The long descent to the hut begins with countless tight turns and then the switchbacks become longer, above the Mammouth climbing area.

No snow cover here, just a lot of loose scree and tippy boulders – a real workout for tired knees and hips. M manages to snap her pole by getting it caught in a crack.



We arrive at the Mountet hut at 12:45, 8 hours and 15 minutes after departing. Nice work! Most of the guidebooks indicate a roundtrip of 10 hours.

We agree on an abbreviated lunch stop, and we almost stick to that plan, leaving the hut at 14:00. Lunch order: 3 Rösti plus one Tagessuppe. (Are we in a rut?) There is some serious talk about the climbing skills we still lack, but there's also some clowning around at the lunch table and that post-Hochtour glow.



Retracing the long route back to Zinal requires some mental doggedness. Martha tries to mark shorter, doable segments, to counteract fatigue.

As we look up at Besso during our circumnavigation of its base, it's hard to believe the mountain is not higher than it is. The towering dark ridge that we climbed – rising from right to left – to the summit is impressive.

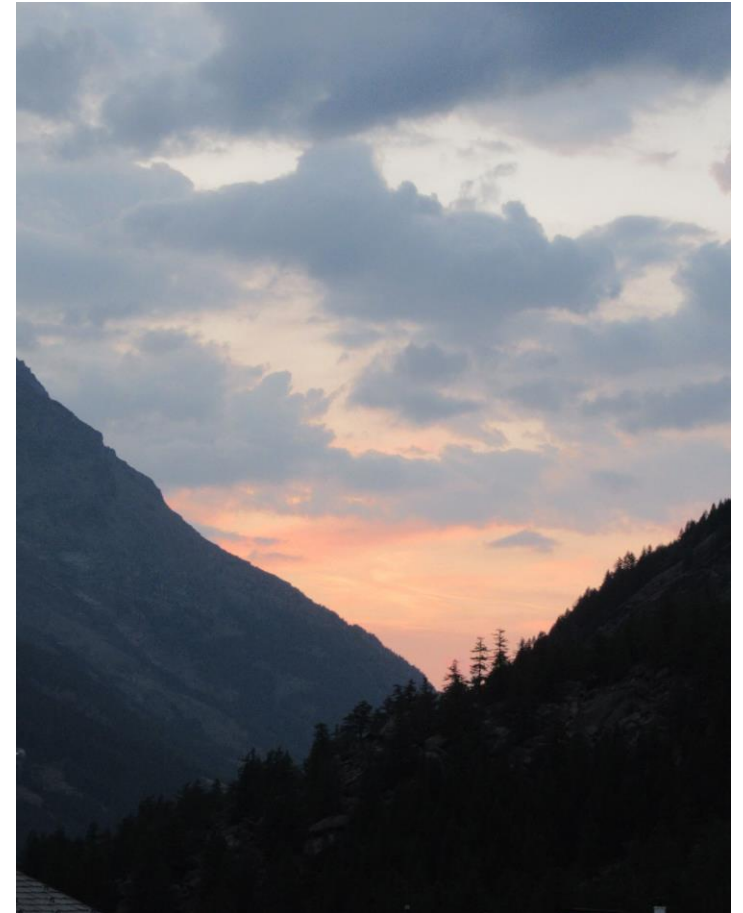
It gets hotter as the afternoon wears on, and we get more thirsty and more numb ... Patrice & Thomi get ahead of us repeatedly. After the washout area and the temporary bridge, we still face the final 2-3 km walk on a dirt road to reach our car. We are done just before 17:00; hooray. This adds up to a long, hard return of just under 3 hours.



It's a pretty silent drive home; the only activity in the back seat is Jeff and Martha rehydrating, massaging achy toes and dozing. Thomi keeps awake at the wheel with the help of Fanta, ice cream, candy, his favorite music playlist and snuff.

At the Visp train station, we and our guides part company, and we take quick stock: hey, no blisters, no serious sunburn, and no injuries. On the drive back up the valley to Almagell, a stop for coffee and snacks in the air-conditioned Migrolino is needed; finally, we pull into Almagell just after 19:30.

What a day 😊).



# Key Stats

Hut approach - 11 km distance one way (schematic map and Thomi's step counter say a bit less).

Hut approach altitude gain – 1,350 m, including ups/downs along the route.

Hochtour roundtrip distance, hut to hut - 6 km.

Hochtour altitude gain - 950 m, including ups and downs.

On day two, including the Hochtour and the return to Zinal, we climbed up 1000 m and descended 2,350 meters. Round-trip distance was 17 km.

Hochtour key times: leave hut 04:30; Besso summit 08:15; Blanc de Moming summit 10:35; hut 12:45.

Total Hochtour Roundtrip Time: 8 hr and 15 mins.