

Walk 22 (Valais): GREAT ST-BERNARD PASS

See also photograph page 52

Distance/time: 12km/7.5mi; 5h10min




Best period: June/July to September (the rest of the year the pass is covered in snow up to tens of metres deep)

Grade: strenuous, high-level circuit via three passes, only to be undertaken in fine weather conditions. Ascent 1050m/3445ft; highest point 2754m, lowest 2346m

Equipment: hiking boots — and best to take your *passport!*

Refreshments/accommodation: only at the Hospice du Grand St-Bernard on the pass (rooms, dormitory; € 027 787 12 36; www.gsbernard.ch)

Transport:  from Martigny

to the Great St-Bernard Pass (transfer in Bourg-St-Pierre), or  to Orsières (transfer in Sembrancher), then  to the pass (Jun-Sep only, three buses/day, journey time about 1h30min). : drive via Martigny (exit 22 off the A9 motorway) through the Val d'Entremont on the old road right up to the pass (*don't* enter the long tunnel which bypasses the Great St-Bernard Pass and which is open throughout the year); parking area on the pass. **Shorter walk:** **Lacs de Fenêtre** (4h, grade as main walk, but ascent of 770m). Follow the main walk to the 2h-point, have a picnic, then return the same way.



The stunningly beautiful Lacs de Fenêtre

The Great St-Bernard Pass (2469m; Col du Grand St-Bernard in French, Colle del Gran San Bernardo in Italian) connects Switzerland and Italy and is the most ancient pass through the Western Alps, travelled by pilgrims, traders and entire armies — from Julius Caesar to Napoleon, who crossed the pass into Italy in 1800 with 40,000 men. Napoleon's bill with the hospice was not settled until 1984, when French President Mitterrand made a token gesture (see plaque in Bourg-St-Pierre). A hospice on the pass for travellers, founded almost a thousand years ago in 1049, is still operational.

There is a museum and a kennel for the famous St-Bernard dogs (open daily June-September). This is a fantastic hike above the tree line: lakes and mountain passes amidst majestic scenery in an historic setting.

From the hospice on the **Great St-Bernard Pass** (2469m), facing the lake, take the path running just above the right-hand side of the road behind the hotel. You cross the Swiss-Italian border and pass a statue (**Plan du Jupiter**; **10min**). Continue on the trail, crossing the road (**15min**). Descending, you cross the road once more (2358m, **30min**) shortly before a farm (**Baou**).

Now you begin the ascent to the first mountain pass: about 15min after the Baou farm, keep right at the fork. Once on the pass (**Fenêtre de Ferret**, 2698m, **1h30min**), you're back in Switzerland. From here you descend to three sparkling lakes, the **Lacs de Fenêtre**: go between the first two lakes and skirt the third lake clockwise. After the third lake (**2h**), keep

right and start climbing to the second pass, the **Col du Bastillon** (2754m, **2h45min**). From here there is a magnificent view west to the roof of Europe — Mont Blanc at 4810m, while Grand Combin (4314m) rises to the east and the Lacs de Fenêtre shine below you.

Wander downhill. Ten minutes below the pass you have a choice: *either* continue down the waymarked trail for another 30 minutes and then fork right (**3h25min**) to tackle the steep 1h ascent to the Pas des Chevaux (**4h25min**), *or* take the narrow trail (*not waymarked*) forking off right, which reaches the Pas des Chevaux more directly.

From the **Pas des Chevaux** (2714m) return to the **Great St-Bernard Pass** (**5h10min**).

