

# The Alpine Passes Trail Expedition Report 2025



Owen Brook  
Imperial College London

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
Motivation	3
Objectives & Achievements	3
Team	4
<b>Expedition Overview</b>	<b>5</b>
Weather and Trail Conditions	5
Accessing the Trail	5
Expedition Route	5
Day 1: Travel & Initial Hike	6
Day 2: Over Col De Louvie & Grand Desert	7
Day 3: Col de Riedmatten	9
Day 4: Col de Riedmatten to Les Hauderes	11
Day 5: Rest day	13
Day 6: Villa to Lac de Moiry	13
Day 7: Zinal to Turtmanhutte	15
Day 8: Turtmann to Jungu	16
Day 9: Charles Kuonen Suspension Bridge	18
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>20</b>
Original Budget	21
<b>Equipment and provisions</b>	<b>21</b>
Medical Trauma Treatment and Prevention	22

# Introduction

The Alpine Passes Trail in Switzerland is a total of 695km long with a total of 47,100m ascent and during a 9 days expedition I hiked some of the eastern most part in the Valis alps. I was joined on this expedition by my friend Fabian, a fellow PhD student at Aachen University, who I got to know on a spontaneous hiking trip in April after meeting at a conference. This expedition was a completely different challenge to the Kungsleden trip I completed last year, and was my first time hiking more than a few days overnight in the alps. We were blessed with mostly good weather and the views were some of the most incredible I have experienced, as you will see in the stunning photos throughout.

## Motivation

The main motivation for this particular hike was to gain more experience of multi-day hiking in Alpine terrain, having completed many day hikes and a few shorter multi-day ones in the alps. The location of this hike, the Valais Canton of Switzerland, is home to some of the highest peaks in the Swiss Alps, and some of the most incredible landscapes. The Swiss Alps are easily accessible by train from the UK (and Aachen) meaning the environmental impact of the expedition is greatly reduced, a key goal of this expedition. Through documenting this through the expedition report, I aim to highlight that an expedition can be performed closer to home, without the need of flying.

The main challenge of this trail is the daily elevation gain, with figures of 1300m common throughout. Alongside this, thunderstorms can occur in the Alps during the late afternoon and evening, and adapting plans based on forecasts will be essential. Whilst there are regular opportunities for resupply or the occasional meal at a hut, the water weight will still play a significant part as only the highest streams are safe to filter water from due to the presence of other hikers and livestock. Overall, this represents a different challenge compared to my previous thru-hikes and will build my experience and confidence in Alpine trekking.

## Objectives & Achievements

This hike provided the chance to develop the skills needed for advanced thru-hiking in Alpine terrain, as well as personal development. This ranged from mental and physical resilience when tackling large elevation gains each day, through to a different climate, weather, and terrain. The original objectives were as follows:

- Hike from Trient to Arolla - 116 km and 8500 m elevation gain - with potential to hike further.
- Gain further experience in:
  - thru-hiking in Alpine terrain, including large elevation gain and finding suitable wild camping locations in this environment.

- adaptive decision making factoring in supplies, fatigue and weather.
- Reduce pack weight compared to prior trips to get closer to “ultralight”.
- Training plan which includes continuing running regularly and hiking specific calisthenic exercises.
- Environmental focus - only travel by train and produce minimal waste.
- Engage with fellow hikers and experience some of the culture of alpine huts.

These objectives were largely achieved and the route was adjusted due to public transport and resupply options. Pack weight proved to be a challenge in the first 3 days and further details are provided.

## Team

I completed this hike with Fabian, a fellow PhD student from RWTH Aachen. We met at the beginning of April this year at a conference in London where we quickly made friends. I spontaneously offered to show him some coastal hiking in the UK and we completed a multi-day hike along the Gower peninsula, shown in Figure 1, wild camping for two nights. Since I was the only one eligible for funding, I outline my experience below.



**Figure 1:** Fabian and Owen at the end of multi-day Gower trip

**Owen Brook (22)** is a 2nd year PhD Student at Imperial College London and the expedition leader. Previously he completed his MEng at Imperial as well, and has lots of previous hiking and trekking experience, detailed below.

- Kungsleden Expedition 2024 - 8 days trekking in the arctic circle in Sweden.
- Multiple three or four day treks wild camping in the UK and Alps.
- Hiking many day hikes in the Alps, Pyrenees, Lake District, Snowdonia and Highlands, including summiting the Canigou (2784m).
- Confident in navigation and organising multi-day treks.

# Expedition Overview

In this section an overview of the trail conditions and access is provided, alongside a detailed day-to-day report.

## Weather and Trail Conditions

The trail conditions vary significantly, from green alpine pasture in the valleys to somewhat exposed sections with a rope to hold onto or scree. As detailed later, the Col de Riedmatten proved to be particularly challenging although quite short. We wild camped most nights on the trail, with the highest night spent at 1850m in an old glacier. One night the temperature got below freezing and water bottles filled with hot water in the sleeping bag were very much appreciated. In the valley the highest temperature we experienced was 25 degrees. The worst weather was in the middle of the expedition where there was two days of rain but little thunder which was forecasted.

## Accessing the Trail

The trail was accessed by train, taking the Eurostar to Paris and then switching to the TGV service to Lausanne and switching to a local train and bus to Lourtier. The cheapest option for this proved to be an interrail pass and this completely avoided flying, reducing the environmental impact of the trip.

## Expedition Route



**Figure 2:** Expedition route from Lourtier to Jungu (Lac de Moiry to Zinal we got a lift), and the final half day included an extra section.

The original route was adjusted to walk from Lourtier as far along the Alpine Passes Trail we felt was reasonable in the time we had. This was due to public transport options being more flexible along this part of the trail and more wild camping and resupply options. Over the course of total expedition days, including travel to and from and a rest day, we hiked 91km and 7579m elevation gain.

## Day 1: Travel & Initial Hike

The first day started by getting the Eurostar at 6am to Paris, followed by breakfast and a quick stop at a shop to get some not-so-authentic sandwiches for the journey. I arrived in Martigny at around 16:30 and Fabian arrived 15 minutes later, 2 minutes after the last connecting train for the bus to our intended starting point of Fionay left.



**Figure 3:** Starting the hike and the tent spot for the first night the morning after

After assessing our options we decided to take the bus as far up the valley as possible, to Lourtier. We began our hike upwards at 19:00 with what we estimated as packs towards 18kg, which we found to be a completely excessive weight for the steep ascents required. This was in part due to wanting to reduce cost by taking many meal packs and snacks with us, but since resupply was not difficult this was unnecessary, and we soon regretted this!

The start of the hike was very slow and the first flat spots we came across were unfortunately right by people's summer homes. At this point it began to rain and it was getting dark and so we donned rain jackets and headtorches, continuing up in search of a

flat spot. Eventually we had to pitch only one tent in the middle of the trail on a not-so-flat section shown in Figure 3, making for an interesting first night after gaining over 700m elevation. At this point I discovered some very heavy food and a beer I had accidentally left in my rucksack, which was certainly regrettable.

## Day 2: Over Col De Louvie & Grand Desert



**Figure 4:** Grand Combin Massif

We woke with fantastic views of the Grand Combin Massif, shown in Figure 4, and took our time getting ready after a very long day prior. The ascent was slow but brought with it incredible views over Lac de Louvie and lots of sunshine, for which my new sunhoodie was very helpful! Around mid-afternoon we were happy to reach our first pass, the Col de Louvie at 2921m, as you can see in Figure 5.



**Figure 5:** Col de Louvie

We continued down from the pass into the appropriately named Grand Desert, which, as you can see in Figure 6, is the remains of a fast receding glacier. We were shocked to see markers with years indicating how fast things have changed since the 1970s. We were unsure about if we would continue over the next pass and at 19:00 we decided to pitch our tents in the Grand Desert by a small lake and freshwater spring. This proved to be one of the most unique wild camping spots I have ever taken, at over 2800m, and we even met a group of young hikers from Salt Lake City camping nearby.



**Figure 6:** Grand Desert

There are too many incredible photos which were taken to include here but Figures 7 and 8 provide some idea of the incredible atmosphere of camping in a place like this. It is certainly good for the mind!



**Figure 7:** Sunset view looking down where the glacier used to be



**Figure 8:** The Milky way clearly visible in the night sky above the tents in Grand Desert

### Day 3: Col de Riedmatten

We made a start at 9am, climbing over glacial moraine and arriving at the Col de Prafeluri at around 11:00. Along the way we met Tazo, who we would become good friends with on the trail, a hiker from Georgia who had lost his water filter. We offered to share our water but he was insistent not to take any from us! Nevertheless we arrived at the top together to the incredible views shown in Figure 9.



**Figure 9:** Col de Prafleuri



**Figure 11:** Ascent of Col de Riedmatten

From here we carried on swiftly down to the Cabane de Praleuri as we had two more passes left to cover in the day. Once at the hut we had an hour's break before starting the short ascent up to Col de Roux, where we had views of the huge reservoir Lac des Dix. This had a very man-made feel to it and was quite a shock after the previous night's camp.

We descended quickly down to the reservoir, stopping to take a look at an unmanned hut on the way where we took a group photo, Figure 10, and departed ways with Tazo. We got our first and only taste of flat ground, speed walking around the reservoir track, before starting the final ascent of the day up to the Col de Riedmatten. This was the

most exhilarating pass of the trip with significant exposure along the top of a scree field and the final 50m involved use of cables going up a very steep gully, shown in Figure

11. We had our closest encounter with two Ibex and some more views on the way up are shown in Figure 12.



**Figure 10:** Group photo with Tazo from Georgia



**Figure 12:** Exposed ascent and very small top of Col de Riedmatten

We descended swiftly contrasting views of the next valley and pitched our tents at 19:00 at the first suitable spot by a very picturesque stream. Fabian was out taking long exposure photos again and with it being another clear night, the stars made for some fantastic photos, one of which is shown in Figure 13. We took the time to wash in the very cold stream and just soak up all the views whilst eating dinner.



**Figure 13:** Camp on the descent from Col de Riedmatten to Arolla

#### **Day 4:** Col de Riedmatten to Les Hauderes



We rose early to soak up what we knew would be the last sun for a few days and had a very relaxing morning, being greeted by some of the hikers from the previous day as we packed up. We made the descent to Arolla with some great views of glaciers, as seen in Figure 15, and we enjoyed our first coffee at a mountain hotel in Figure 16.

**Figure 16:** Coffee at a hotel in Arolla.



**Figure 15:** Glaciers on descent to Arolla

We continued hiking down the valley and aimed to catch a bus down to a campsite at Les Hauderes before a forecast thunderstorm, passing the somewhat famous Lac Bleu in Figure 17. We descended to the car park at La Gouille at 15:00 and decided to ask for a lift from two Germans women who had a large van. They were very friendly and told us that they had just done a mountain triathlon the other day, which we found very impressive, all the more as one of them was deaf. This is just another highlight of the amazing and inspiring people you always meet when hiking!



**Figure 17:** Le Lac Bleu near La Gouille

We arrived at the wonderful campsite at Les Hauderes, apparently much better than the competitor down the road in Evolene, which Tazo later told us was terrible. There was a full campers kitchen full of fellow hikers, including the group from Salt Lake City we met 3 days prior, due to constant rain in the evening, and we were very pleased to be given some leftover fish fingers and vegetable soup from some parents with a large group of kids. We added this to our huge portion of ravioli pasta, shown in Figure 18, and proceeded to eat for 2 hours, beginning a 24 hour period of eating to catch up on the calorie deficit.



**Figure 18:** A very large dinner in Les Hauderes

### **Day 5: Rest day**

We decided to take a rest day since thunderstorms were forecast and this was largely uneventful, consisting of lots of eating, visiting two local churches and a stroll through the forest. It was almost unsettling not to hike for a day but we chatted with the Mormons from Salt Lake City, and said bye as they began their hitchhiking attempt to get to the next valley, due to the extortionate price of transport.

### **Day 6: Villa to Lac de Moiry**

We began early, getting a 7:30 bus up to Villa to cut 200m of elevation gain and had breakfast once we got off above the clouds. Figure 19 left shows this fantastic view along with a cat who was very interested in our breakfast!



**Figure 19:** (left) Breakfast with the cat, and (right) Fabian enjoying a tea in the rain

We decided to take the closer Col de Torrent, diverging from the official Alpine Passes route, and as we began the ascent we noticed we were going a lot faster uphill than previous days. We estimated the packs probably weighed 4kg less each, and in combination with a rest day we were feeling rather good. We reached the top around 12:00 but there were little views to be had with clouds and light rain all around. We stopped to make tea on the way down despite the rain, see Fabian enjoying the warm brew in Figure 19 right.

Once we reached the Lac de Moiry the weather was not improving, so going up and over the next pass did not appeal. We managed to catch a lift to Zinal, with an ex-banker from the UK who was hoping to do some mountaineering but had given up, and was glad for the company. Once at the small campsite in Zinal we were reunited with Tazo and we went to the local swimming pool and sauna which had a significant discount for those at the campsite.

## Day 7: Zinal to Turtmanhutte



**Figure 20:** The missing shorts!



**Figure 21:** Views of the Zinal valley

We woke to the first sun in 3 days and I soon discovered my shorts were missing. We retraced our steps and we found them in the middle of the road, completely soaked, with the moment shown in Figure 20. The ascent was truly fantastic starting in pine forest, see Figure 21, slowly turning into alpine pasture and wild blueberry fields.



**Figure 22:** Inquisitive locals!

Progress was fast and we soon reached Col de la Forcletta, and the default language switched almost immediately to German in the Turtmann Valley. We decided to again diverge from the route to camp up near the Turtmannhutte to experience some of the hut culture. We sat outside cooking our dinner with an incredible view and were soon joined by some locals who were very inquisitive about our dehydrated meals, shown in Figure 22. This was apparently very new for them as they usually made fondue on

their trips - what could be more Swiss! We went inside for a beer and hot chocolate, and chatted to some locals but they were not quite as friendly as those who we met on

previous days who were also wild camping. Perhaps some bias here but I think people in tents tend to be the most friendly hikers you can meet.

### Day 8: Turtmann to Jungu



We woke the next morning with frozen tents and some of the most stunning views of the trip, even without getting out my sleeping bag I had a great view of a glacier, shown in Figure 23.



**Figure 23:** (left) View from my sleeping bag and (right) view of Turtmann Glacier  
We even managed to catch a view of the famous Weishorn group, see Figure 24, which we knew some people from the hut were climbing.



**Figure 24:** Part of the Weishorn group

We began the hike to the final pass of our trip, passing along the upper sides of the Turtmann valley over some quite challenging terrain with the path often disappearing in the undergrowth, and little other people around. We reached the Augstbordpass at 13:00 and took the final of many pass photos, seen in Figure 25.



**Figure 25:** The final pass of the trip, the Augstboardpass.



**Figure 26:** Huge boulder field

Only once we started our descent did it begin to set in that this was our last full day of hiking and how quickly the time had passed, especially since we were now in a very regular routine and our bodies were in the rhythm of the trail. As if a final goodbye from the trail, we were treated to a 1km stretch over a bolder field, see Figure 26, that took a long time to hike over. We rounded the corner of the hanging valley slowly coming into the main valley that lead to Zermatt and the Matterhorn, and what a view we had. Figure 27 does not do it justice but we really had a sense of the true scale of the mountains since the valley below is very deep.



**Figure 28:** View into the valley leading to Zermatt.

We descended swiftly to catch the only cable car of our trip down into St Niklaus and then the train to a campsite in Attermenzen where we met Tazo again. Unfortunately this campsite can only be described as quite an unpleasant experience. It was the most expensive of the trip, and vans & tents were packed practically on top of each other. I did not sleep much at all due to the noise late into the night. We would recommend future expeditions to stay clear of this valley as it is overpriced, very few shops, and overall is probably a case of overtourism. We did however have a nice pizza and beer after walking 20 minutes to the closest restaurant, and laughed about how we should have wild camped again at a perfect spot we saw earlier.

### **Day 9: Charles Kuonen Suspension Bridge**

Although we had not originally intended to hike on the final day, the weather forecast was good and we didn't want to stop. We rose early to complete a half-day hike up to the longest pedestrian suspension bridge in the world, an opportunity not to be missed. We gained almost 700m elevation in an hour and a half and were rewarded with fantastic views shown in Figure 29. We had 15 minutes to take in the view and then one final speedy descent was in order to make our train, with just enough time for a final photo at the station in Randa, Figure 30.



**Figure 29:** The world's longest pedestrian suspension bridge



**Figure 30:** Finishing the expedition at Randa after 91km and 7579m elevation gain

## Conclusion

This expedition was a truly fantastic experience and pushed me significantly beyond my prior experience. Although my experience on the Kungsleden the year before certainly helped, this was an altogether different experience.

Along this part of the Alpine Passes Trail the paths were largely well trodden and the terrain underfoot generally not challenging, although hiking boots are definitely still a requirement due to the pack weight. The weather was mostly exceptional, not too hot and little rain other than two days. We did not experience any real thunderstorms despite them being forecast and we always made sure we were at lower elevations in this case anyway.

In an effort to save some money we took 6 days worth of dehydrated food and many snacks, and in addition I found some rather heavy extra food packs in my bag after the first day. As a consequence the estimated pack weight of 18kg at the start was excessive and presented a physical challenge in combination with extended climbs in the first two days. There was not really any need to carry this much food and when doing these elevation gains it is definitely better to pay a bit more to resupply, even if you are in expensive Switzerland. Hiking along a much more flat trail like the Kungsleden makes things a lot easier with regards to pack weight. On a similar expedition I would say that a pack weight of 15kg would be the upper limit of what is comfortable.

There was almost no routefinding to do as all the trails are very well marked in the Alps, and finding springs was not too hard but you do have to plan these in and keep some water in reserve and many water sources can be polluted by livestock. The views along the trail were almost always incredible and the wild camping was amazing. The trail was not too busy considering we were sharing some of it with the Haute Route but the trail never felt isolated or away from civilization with a road or train station only ever half a day's hike away and almost constant phone signal. Being able to have a warm shower at a campsite sometimes was also quite a luxury. The combination of these factors made the mental side of the hike easier than the Kungsleden but the pack weight and elevation in the first few days was certainly more difficult physically.

Overall, this expedition was an incredible experience with some of the most unique wild camps and passes I have hiked across, and challenged me in a completely different way to the Kungsleden. The people we met along the way were really friendly and I was surprised with how willing other visitors to Switzerland were to give us a lift or share food. My thanks in particular goes to the Exploration Board for supporting the expedition financially and to Lorraine in particular for the conversations we had before departing.

## Original Budget

Table 2 outlines the planned budget for the expedition. Due to not having any food at huts nor buying an SAC membership I was able to come in about £100 under this budget.

Table 2: Budget

Item	Cost (GBP)	Cost (CHF)	Quantity	Total (GBP)
Train London to Martigny	190		1	190
Train Sion to London	190		1	190
Martigny to Trient		6.30	1	5.70
Arolla to Sion		11.90	1	10.75
Night in a campsite		20	2	36.12
Lunch / Dinner at Hut		30	4	108.35
SAC Membership	35		1	
Resupply in at grocery store	30		2	60
Food Packs	180		1	180
Food during travel etc	50		1	50
Gas	15		1	15
Maps	50		1	50
Insurance	40			40
<b>Total</b>				<b>935.92</b>

## Equipment and provisions

A non-exhaustive list of items is provided below.

### Clothing:

- 2x Base-layers - long sleeve and t-shirt
- 2x Mid-layers - thin jumper and gilet/thicker jumper
- Long walking trousers - avoid ticks and mosquito bites
- Waterproof coat and trousers
- Cold weather gear - thick gloves and hat and additional thermal layers.
- Sunglasses and wide-brimmed cap
- Sun hoodie
- 3x pairs of walking socks

### Hiking and Camping Gear:

- Lightweight two person tent - MSR Freelite 2
- Waterproof hiking boots - worn in beforehand
- Lightweight walking rucksack around 50L

- 2x small hand warmers
- 2x 500ml water bottle
- Water purification tablets and filter
- Mosquito head net
- Torch
- Electrolyte powders - to keep salt levels high
- Pair of walking poles each
- Closed toe sandals

#### **Cooking equipment:**

- Jet boil gas stove - very reliable and efficient.
- Small gas bottle.
- 1x long sporks
- 1x lightweight mugs for warm drinks

#### **Sleeping equipment:**

- Sleeping bag rated to at least 2 degrees
- Thermal sleeping bag liner - extra warmth and hygiene
- Lightweight blow up sleeping mat with sufficient R rating for lower temperatures

#### **Navigation/electronic equipment:**

- Compass
- Paper and digital maps of trail and waterproof cover
- Satellite messenger device - used to get location and for emergency contact.
- 1x Power Banks

## **Medical Trauma Treatment and Prevention**

This section outlines the first aid equipment taken and the risk assessment set out before the trip.

Whilst I hope to not encounter any serious medical issues, due to the isolation of the trail it is important to be prepared. In a severe incident medical evacuation is possible but may take a good few hours to arrive, and so warm layers and the tent also are important medically to keep a casualty warm and out of the elements. Table 4 details a basic medical kit we will take to deal with and prevent any issues on the trail.

Table 4: Basic medical equipment

<b>Item</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Usage</b>
Paracetamol 500mg	25 tablets	Mild pain relief - eg headaches
Ibuprofen 200mg	25 tablets	Mild pain relief and anti-inflammatory for musculoskeletal injury
Loperamide 2mg	20 tablets	Antidiarrheal medication
Dioralyte	6 sachets	Oral rehydration salts for dehydration
Antihistamine Cream	20g	Relief of itching bites
Antihistamine Tablets	25 tablets	Prevention of allergies and relief of bites
Hydrocortisone Cream	15g	Treats inflammation of bites / skin conditions from sweat and backpack rubbing.
Tick remover	2	Check each day for ticks
Mosquito repellent	1	Apply in particularly bad areas
Blister plasters	20	Apply on "hot spots" to prevent bursting
Sunscreen SPF 50	250ml + resupply on route	Apply each day, even with cloud cover
Crepe and compression bandages	Various sizes	Support minor strains
Triangular bandage	1	For broken/strained arm
General Plasters	Various sizes. Lots	General cuts and grazes
Gauze, 8ply, 5x5cm	10	Absorbing blood and cleaning wounds
Surgical tape, scissors	1	Cutting and fixing dressings
Tweezers and safety pins		
Alcohol wipes	20	Cleaning wounds
Burn gel sachet 4g	5	Relieves pain and prevents infection
Foil blanket	1	Heat retention in case of hypothermia
Whistle	1	Signal for help

In case of more severe trauma, eg. a broken ankle or severe blood loss, the emergency services will have to be contacted using mobile phone, which is commonplace in the

Swiss Alps. In the absence of a phone signal, one person will walk back to the nearest available spot. This is considered a standard practice in the Alps and use of satellite devices is not considered necessary.

Once the operator has been contacted the following information will be shared:

- Name and nationality
- Nature of injury and how many people involved
- Location and terrain
- Phone number

The equipment, training, and procedures will equip me to not only deal with any emergencies I have myself and with Fabian, but help anyone else on the trail as well.

## Risk Assessment

Table 5: Risk Assessment

<b>Hazard</b>	<b>Cause</b>	<b>Control</b>
Minor Trauma	Trip, Bites, Burns	Avoid walking over dangerous terrain and in poor weather conditions. Use mosquitos nets and repellent generously. Treat with appropriate medical equipment and request help if needed. Do not wait.
Major Trauma	Severe accident	Avoid walking when tired and in dangerous conditions. Keep aware of location, and contact emergency services. Insurance covers evacuation if necessary.
Hypothermia	Prolonged exposure to cold and wet conditions	Wear suitable layers, do not delay use of waterproofs. Seek shelter and adapt plans if conditions change. Call for help immediately
Sunburn	Prolonged exposure to high UV levels	Apply SPF 50 sunscreen, wear long sleeved clothes and hats.
Dehydration	Not drinking enough water	Drink at regular intervals, and refill throughout the day when crossing streams.
Heat Exhaustion	Over exertion in high heat	Take regular breaks, and do not walk if dangerously hot.
Severe Blisters	Wet or poorly-fit footwear	Wear-in boots properly and ensure footwear are sturdy and fit well. Perform

		river crossings in closed-toe sandals.
--	--	--