

THE "BISSES" OF  
THE VALAIS. SPARKLING  
STREAMS OF LIFE.



ENGRAVED ON MY HEART



## Bisses: Walking Through History



The canton of Valais has a number of walks that are truly special treats among the vast variety of hiking routes on offer: they follow the course of the bisses, water channels dating back many centuries which are also known by their German name, 'Suonen', in the Upper Valais. The bisses draw their water from the glaciers and carry it into the rain-starved valleys. In their heyday towards the end of the 19th century, the 1,800 km-long network of these structures supplied the Valais with precious water so that agriculture could flourish. Nowadays this historic heritage is maintained by many communes, restored where necessary and refilled with water. On this map, we have assembled a selection of walks along the bisses, from fairly short routes to extended full-day tours. Incidentally, most of them do not have too many gradients, so you will not find them particularly strenuous. This is thanks to their builders, who were careful to ensure that each bisse had as few gradients as possible between its water intake and the place where the water would be used. However, a modicum of physical exertion may be needed to reach some of the bisses. You may find yourself perspiring as you follow the paths leading to them. But the effort is worthwhile, because you will experience the history of the Valais at first hand as you walk along amid the glories of nature.

# The Hiking Trails

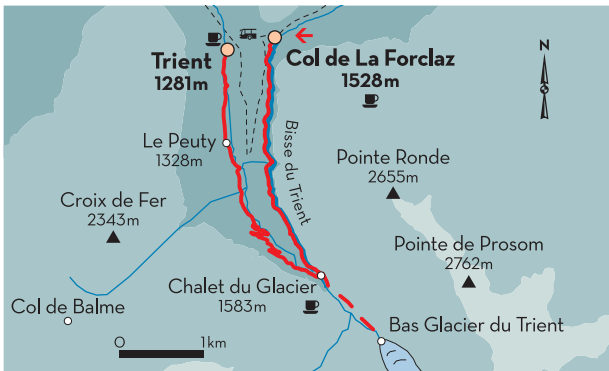


- 1 Bisse du Trient
- 2 Bisse de Saxon
- 3 La Raye des Verbiérins and Bisse du Levron
- 4 Bisse du Milieu and Bisse Vieux
- 5 Bisse de Baar
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# Bisses Overview



## 1 Bisse du Trient \*\*



2h30

9,5 km

3 km

260 m

510 m

National Maps 1324-1344

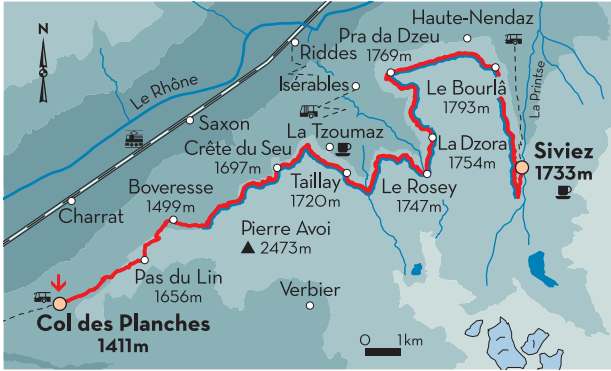
Hiking Map 1:25 000 Vallée du Trient

This path starts from the Col de La Forclaz and crosses the larch forest, affording views of the magnificent landscapes of the Aiguilles Dorées and the Ecandies chain of mountains; it ends on the Trient glacier tongue with its icefalls. Following an old route which was used to transport blocks of ice, this water channel irrigates the meadows and

vineyards of Martigny-Combe. It is still operating at present, as is illustrated by a very interesting and instructive 'learning path'.



## 2 Bisse de Saxon \*\*/\*\*\*



- 8h50
- 32 km
- 24 km
- 310 m
- 630 m

National Maps 1305-1325 / 1306-1326  
 Hiking Maps 1:25 000 4 Vallées -  
 1:25 000 Verbier - St-Bernard

Built between 1865 and 1876, this is the longest water channel in the Valais, at 32 km. It conveyed water from the Printse as far as Saxon, across the forests and alpine pastures of the hamlets of Nendaz, Isérables, Riddes and Saxon with their wooden chalets. Its operation required several watchmen who in turn needed huts and warning

hammers... Maintaining the channel was a very laborious task, so its operation was discontinued. One of its huts, the Bourlà, is still in an excellent state of preservation.

## 3 La Raye des Verbiérins and Bisse du Levron \*\*\*



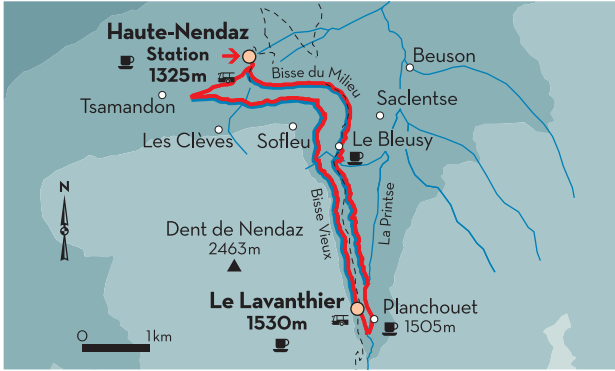
- 5h45
- 21 km
- 13,5 km
- 320 m
- 1020 m

National Maps 1325-1326  
 Hiking Map  
 1:25 000 Verbier / Val de Bagnes

The Bisse du Levron was built in 1465 and it became the subject of some epic legal battles; it drew its water from the Torrent de Versègères below the Chaux glacier at an altitude of 2500 metres; this channel irrigated the entire territory of Vollèges commune. Another source, La Raye des Verbiérins, added its waters to the channel's flow

below the Mont Fort hut. Since 1957 when the Mauvoisin Dam was built, a tunnel from Louvie to the Col du Lin has carried water to Le Levron and Vollèges.

#### 4 Bisse du Milieu and Bisse Vieux \*



- 3h10
- 12,5 km
- 10 km
- 230 m
- 230 m

National Map 1306  
Hiking Map 1:25 000 4 Vallées

The tiered water channels of Nendaz are fed from the Printse. The Bisse du Milieu, which carries water in summer, passes through the center of the resort of Haute-Nendaz and irrigates the Bleusy area and its raspberry beds. It crosses a spruce forest which was partially destroyed by Hurricane Viviane. The Bisse Vieux threads its way beneath

the shade of gray alders, plunges into a dark spruce forest, crosses a rocky ridge where it drops 5 meters and irrigates meadows fragrant with wild thyme and oregano.

#### 5 Bisse de Baar \*\*



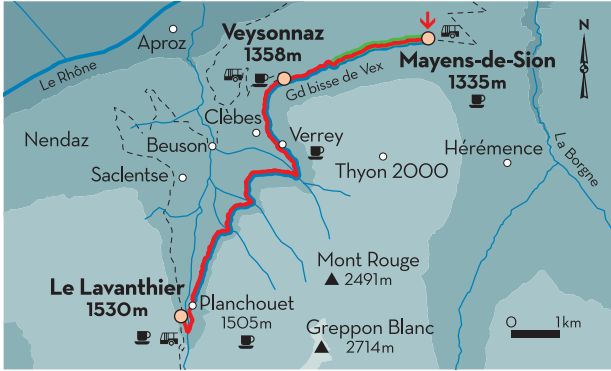
- 3h00
- 11,5 km
- 4,5 km
- 50 m
- 530 m








National Map 1306  
Hiking Map 1:25 000 4 Vallées

Starting in the village of Brignon, the Bisse de Baar passes by steep slopes and a number of vineyards at la Printse. In the dry fields below its course, it is possible to spot several unusual flowers for the Valais, such as the ononis natrix and feather grass. The irrigation channel then crosses fields of apricot trees that are fantastic to see in full bloom

in spring. It passes above the village of Baar before continuing on its way towards Sion through orchards and groves.

## 6 Grand Bisse de Vex \*








-  3h20
  -  11,5 km
  -  10,5 km
  -  210 m
  -  20 m
  -  5 km ↔
  -  21 m
- National Map 1306  
Hiking Map 1:25 000 4 Vallées

The Grand Bisse de Vex, built in 1453, draws water from the Printse at Planchouet in order to irrigate the farmlands of Veysonnaz, Salins, Les Agettes and Vex. It is popular with summer visitors who like to follow its course, especially the section between the resort of Veysonnaz and les Mayens-de-Sion. Even during heatwaves, the air here is

pleasantly cool thanks to the shelter provided by the trees. The forest consists of conifers, mainly larches, whose fallen needles form a thick and soft carpet on the ground.

## 7 Bisse de Salins \*\*



-  3h30
  -  12,5 km
  -  8,5 km
  -  200 m
  -  660 m
- National Map 1306  
Hiking Map 1:25 000 4 Vallées

The Bisse de Salins was mentioned in 1435 and it is still operating; it draws its water from the Printse at Plan Désert, and it irrigates the orchards, meadows and raspberry beds of Beuson, Le Bioley and Salins. During our walk, we pass through a variety of different environments: alder groves on damp ground, a dry meadow planted on a slope which is

heavily exposed to the sun, clusters of sea buckthorn with berries that turn red in fall, spruce forests and raspberry beds.

## 8 Bisse du Torrent-Neuf \*



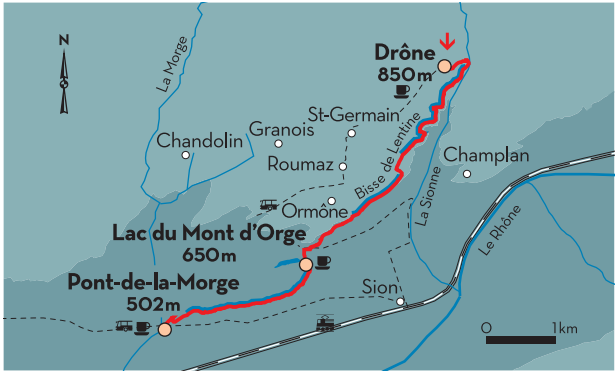
- 3h00
- 9 km
- 4,5 km
- 200 m
- 280 m

National Map 1286  
 Hiking Map  
 1:25 000 Sion - Derborence - Sanetsch

Construction of the Bisse du Torrent-Neuf or Bisse de Savièse started before 1430, and it was to become the most daring venture ever undertaken for irrigation purposes. It was sourced from the Morge, leaving the river's gorge by a very precipitous and undulating route, and it provided an abundant supply of water. Our suggested walk

covers a distance of 2,4 km along an elevated path which has been newly restored. The purpose of this type of refurbishment work is to remind us of the scope of the task undertaken by our ancestors.

## 9 Bisse de Lentine and Bisse du Mont d'Orge \*



- 2h00
- 8 km
- 5 km
- 20 m
- 370 m

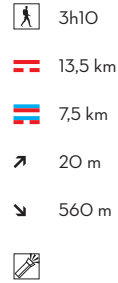
National Maps 1286-1306  
 Hiking Map  
 1:25 000 Sion - Derborence - Sanetsch

The Bisse de Lentine draws its water from the Sionne, whose wooded banks it soon leaves behind to thread its way through the vineyards, affording splendid views of the town of Sion. It irrigates the vineyards of Savièse and supplies water to the lovely Lac du Mont d'Orge and its nature reserve. It has been channeled in concrete conduits

over part of its course. The Bisse du Mont d'Orge, built in 1885, pumps water from the Lac du Mont d'Orge and supplies the southern face of the hill, including the renowned Mont d'Or estate.



## 10 Bisse de Clavau \*\*

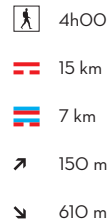
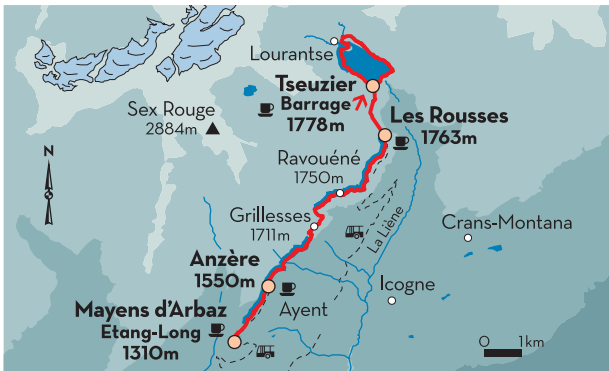


National Maps 1286-1306  
Hiking Map 1:25 000 Anzère

Built in 1453 by the Bishop of Sion, the Bisse de Clavau originates from the Liègne and eventually flows into the Sionne. Surrounded by enormous drystone walls, it is used for spray-irrigation of the vineyards of Ayent, Grimisuat and Sion. The footpath allows walkers to follow the old route with its corbelled structures, overhanging sections

supported by wooden girders and a short tunnel; local produce can be sampled at several stalls along the way.

## 11 Bisse de Sion \*\*

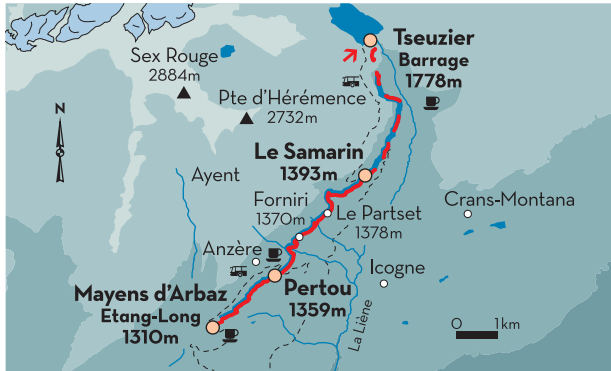


National Map 1286  
Hiking Map 1:25 000 Anzère

Between 1901 and 1903, the Commune of Sion built the Bisse de Sion, carrying water from the Liègne to the Sionne, in order to feed the Bisse de Lentine and the Bisse de Mont d'Orge. The Bisse de Sion draws its water close to the spectacular sources of the river Liègne. At the start of its route, this bisse crosses the Lioran torrent

via a wooden aqueduct. It runs alongside the lake of Zeuzier and leaves the Rawyl basin through a series of tunnels. Cut into the rock, the channel passes over a chasm which plunges 200 metres, after which it adopts a less dramatic route.

## 12 Bisse d'Ayent \*\*



3h00

11,5 km

9,5 km

60 m

530 m



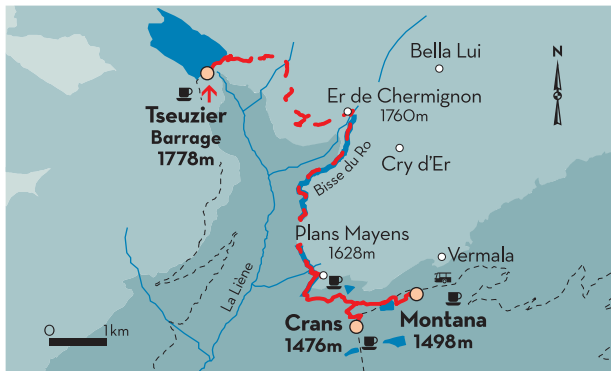
National Map 1286

Hiking Map 1:25 000 Anzère

Built in 1442, the Bisse d'Ayent is sourced from the Liègne; it runs through a varied landscape of pastures and groves of trees with wooden chalets set among them. It brings water to the meadows and vineyards of Ayent and Grimisuat, either in the traditional manner or by spraying, and it ends at the Revouire Pond. Examples of old building

methods have been restored along its course, including corbelled structures in the Liègne valley, girders of the special type known as “boutsets” at Torrent-Croix, and the Follés walkway, built into a ledge at a breathtaking height.

## 13 Bisse du Ro \*\*



3h15

12 km

4 km

160 m

440 m

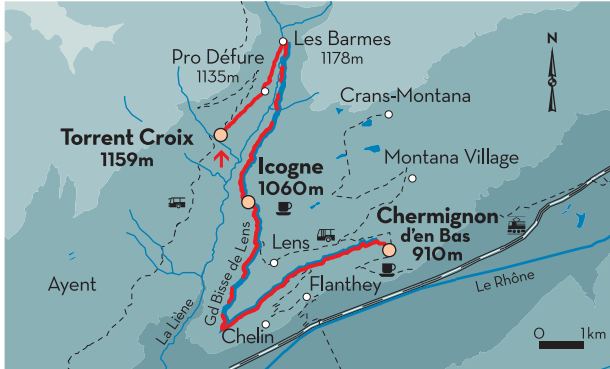
National Maps 1286-1287

Hiking Map  
1:25 000 Crans-Montana / Sièrre

Built in the 14th century, the Bisse du Ro drew water from the Ertine in order to supply a distributor which channeled the supply either towards Montana and Chermignon or towards Lens and Icogne. The upper section is no longer operational nowadays; it has been replaced by a tunnel driven through Mont Lachaux. This path is well developed

for hikers, and the route includes spectacular sections of breathtaking beauty, passing between cliff walls where restored ruins can be seen.

## 14 Grand Bisse de Lens \*\*



- 4h10
- 16 km
- 12,5 km
- 60 m
- 300 m

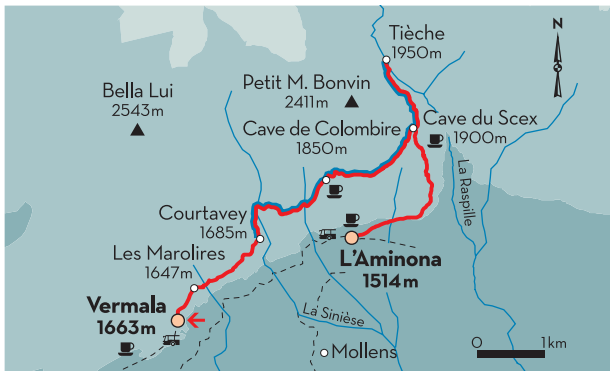
National Maps 1286-1287

Hiking Map  
1:25 000 Crans-Montana / Siere

Built in 1448, the Grand Bisse de Lens or Bisse de la Riouta is sourced from the Liègne; it irrigates the meadows and vineyards of Icogne, Lens, Montana and Chermignon. Passing through countryside of breathtaking beauty, it leaves the river gorges, crosses the village of Icogne in an underground conduit, skirts the Châtelard hill in corbelled

structures which are either concreted or cut into the rock, and finishes at Diogne. A walkway made of wooden boards supported by metal piling has been constructed above the sheer drops.

## 15 Bisse du Tsittoret \*\*



- 3h10
- 10,5 km
- 6 km
- 370 m
- 510 m

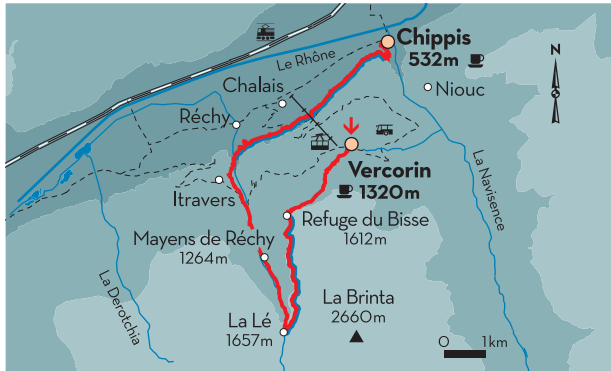
National Map 1287

Hiking Map  
1:25 000 Crans-Montana / Siere

The Bisse du Tsittoret, which was mentioned in the 15th century, carries water from the Tièche to the Noble Contrée region where it is used to irrigate the meadows and vineyards of Venthône, Randogne, Mollens, Miège, Siere and Veyras. Shortly after its water intake, the bisse forms a turbulent waterfall as it drops over a rock wall, as

if it were trying to rejoin the river. Once the waters have been tamed again, they flow through metal conduits leading out of the Raspille valley. Walkers are greeted with striking views of spectacular landscapes.

## 16 Bisse de Vercorin and Bisse de Ricard \*\*\*



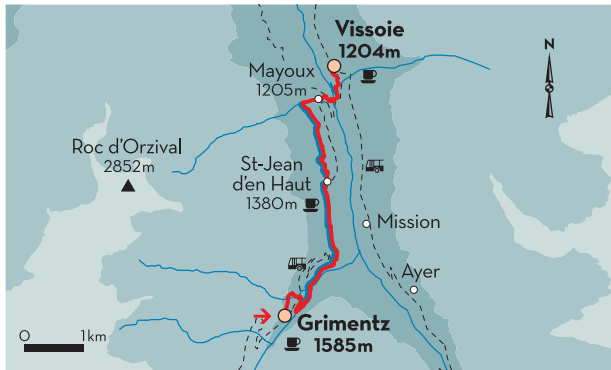
- 5h10
- 16,5 km
- 8 km
- 390 m
- 1180 m

National Maps 1287-1307  
Hiking Map 1:25 000 Val d'Anniviers

The Bisse de Vercorin was built in 1358; it draws water from the Rèche to irrigate the meadows and to drive the water mills downstream of Vercorin. It provides an ideal way of accessing one of the last valleys in this canton which cannot be reached by automobile. Built in 1484, the Bisse de Ricard or Chararogne is sourced from the Navisence; it

irrigates the Chalais hill and feeds smaller bisses downstream on the Rèche. The route of this bisse includes several steep sections.

## 17 Grand Bisse de St-Jean \*



- 2h20
- 7 km
- 4 km
- 80 m
- 460 m

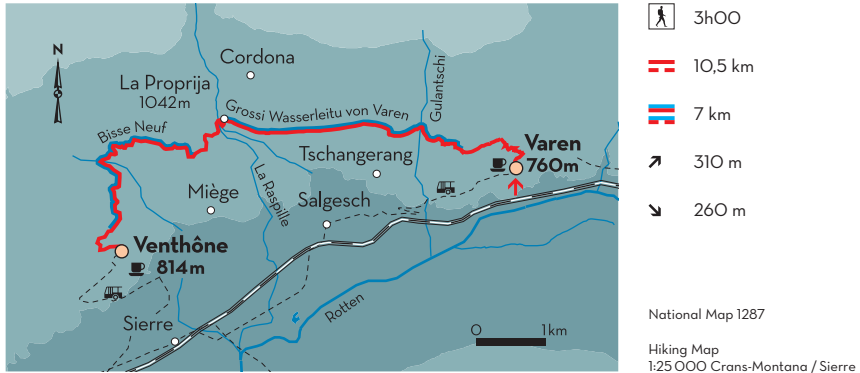
National Map 1307  
Hiking Map 1:25 000 Val d'Anniviers

The long-abandoned Grand Bisse de St-Jean was carefully restored in 2012 using the traditional techniques. The irrigation channel captures water from the Marais stream. It crosses the village of St-Jean d'en Haut and finishes its course at Mayoux. Water outlets for irrigation by sprinkling have been installed in magnificent wooden distributors.

Over most of its course, the irrigation channel has been dug straight out of the ground and strengthened with flagstones or large rocks.



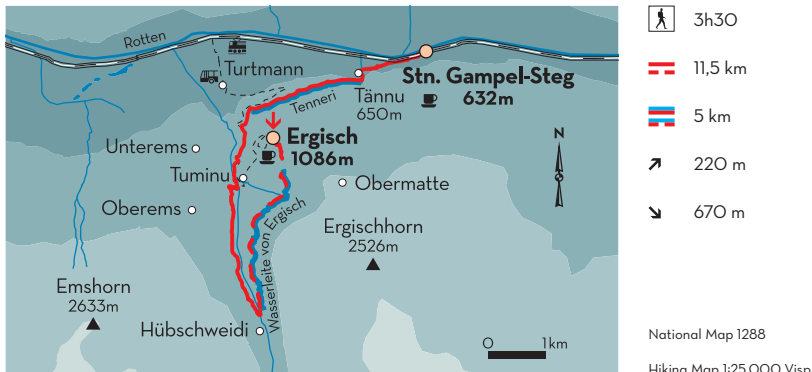
## 18 Grossi Wasserleitu von Varen – Bisse Neuf \*\*



The Grossi Wasserleitu or Bisse de Varen is sourced from the Raspile; it crosses a glade and runs through the huge rock slabs of Blatte to water the meadows and vineyards of Varen. The Raspile forms the boundary between two language areas, and it shares its waters among the neighbouring communities; the Bisse Neuf also takes water from

this river to slake the thirst of those living on the Venthône hills. Walkers can enjoy fine panoramic views across the Rhône valley from both sides of the valley.

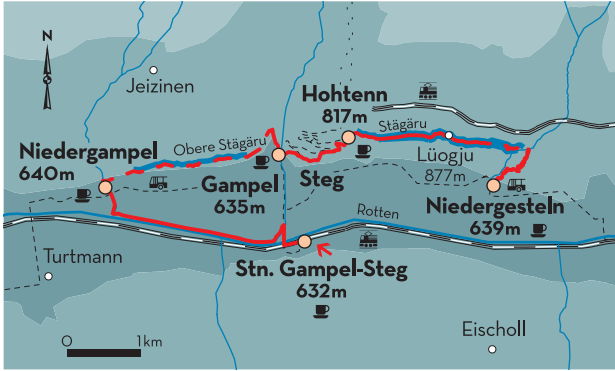
## 19 The Ergisch Water Channel and the Tenneri \*\*



By comparison, the Ergisch Water Channel is a youngster among these waterways (known as the Suonen). According to contemporary witnesses, it was built between 1920 and 1925. Forced labour was used to hew the channel bed out of the rock under extremely difficult conditions, and to add pipes and wooden gulleys where necessary. The

channel's audacious construction makes it very popular with hikers. Water from the Turtmäna feeds the channel at 1300 m. The Tenneri is also sourced from the Turtmäna at an altitude of 900 m. It carries the precious water to the Weiler Tännu.

## 20 Upper Water Channel - Stägeru - Lüegjeru \*\*

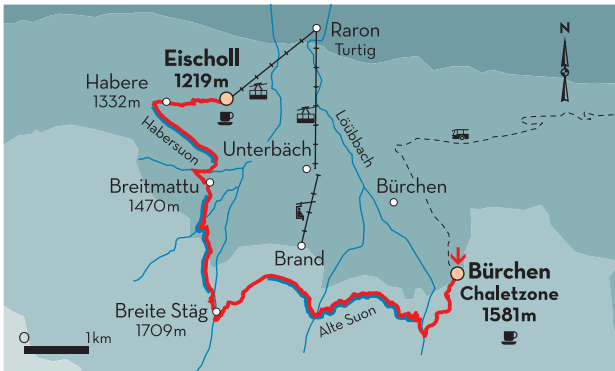


National Map 1288  
Hiking Map 1:25 000 Lötschental

Built in 1900, the Upper Water Channel of Gampel takes its water from the Lonza at a height of some 700 m. In 2005, the Commune of Niedergesteln built a suspension bridge and a metal stairway to provide an access route that is dry underfoot in order to descend below the roaring waters of the Jolibach stream to the Stägeru’s water intake at

900 m. Part of the Stägeru was channelled into the Lüegjeru, because its former intake fell victim to a storm. Reports of the Stägeru date back to 1552 and the Lüegjeru was probably constructed in the 17th century.

## 21 The Old Suone - The Old Eischler Suone - Habersuon \*\*



National Map 1288  
Hiking Map 1:25 000 Visp

Zeneggen, Bürchen and Unterbäch jointly operate the Old Suone (or Alte Suon), also known as the Ginanzerin. Bürchen acquired the water rights back in the 15th century, but Zeneggen only obtained them after the drought that followed the earthquake of 1855. The Old Suone is fed by the Mühlebach stream at about 1880 m. A little further

down, at 1700 m, Eischoll has the right to 4/13 of the volume of water from the Mühlebach, according to a court ruling in 1952. The water is conveyed in the Old Eischler Suone (or Alte Eischler Suon) which is known as the Habersuon further to the east.

## 22 Bineri and Eggeri \*\*



- 4h00
- 14 km
- 9 km
- 290 m
- 290 m

National Map 1308  
Hiking Map 1:25 000 Grächen

Grächen, with its four water channels, is renowned as a real Mecca for Suone enthusiasts. This region has the lowest precipitation rates in Switzerland, with 50 to 55 mm per year, so artificial irrigation is indispensable. It is impossible to date the Grächen water system with any accuracy. The first written records date back to the 12th century. All

the Suonen are fed by the Riedbach stream. The Eggeri, probably the oldest of them, draws its water at 1840 m while the Bineri has its intake at 1738 m.

## 23 Niwärch - Gorperi - Undra \*\*



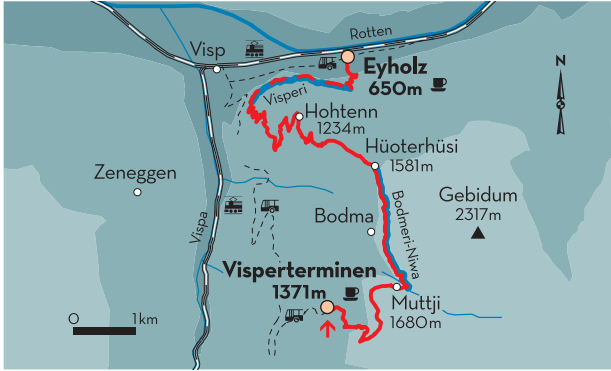
- 4h30
- 14 km
- 8 km
- 480 m
- 480 m
- 

National Map 1288  
Hiking Map 1:25 000 Visp

The southern acclivity is exposed to exceptional amounts of sunshine. Agriculture was impossible in this district until the water channels were built. Under extremely difficult conditions, the water was diverted from the Baltschieder Valley through about 20 Suones. The Niwärch (built in 1381) has its source at 1300 m, the Gorperi (built in 1640)

at 1220 m and the Undra (built in 1377) at 1100 m. The numerous tunnels - through which hikers can also pass - lend this valley a wild and romantic ambience.

## 24 Bodmeri-Niwa - Visperi \*\*



- 4h00
- 13 km
- 4 km
- 330 m
- 1055 m

National Map 1288  
Hiking Map 1:25 000 Visp

The Bodmeri-Niwa was built in 1915 to replace the older Niwa channel. Above the irrigation channel in the hamlet of Hüoterhüsi there still stands a hut that offers refuge for the channel attendant. The Visperi was mentioned for the first time in 1521. It flows into the Gamsa and serves to irrigate vineyards. An unusual natural spectacle can be

observed along the irrigation channel following a forest fire in 2011. Colourful flowers have taken root again, providing a marked contrast to the scorched remains of the trees.

## 25 Heido \*\*\*



- 5h20
- 17,5 km
- 5,5 km
- 610 m
- 650 m

National Maps 1289-1309  
Hiking Map 1:25 000 Visp

Some academics trace the name "Heido" back to the expression "Heidenleitung" or "Heathen Channel" (Pre-Christian), suggesting that this Suone was built in the Roman era. The first historical mention of the Heido dates back to 1305, but there are only a few written records of this sort before this date in the Valais. The Heido draws its water at

the far end of the Nanz Valley and conveys it to the Gebidum Lake, nowadays used not only for agricultural irrigation but also as a storage reservoir for firefighting purposes.



## 26 Nessjeri - Obersta - Stigwasser \*\*



- 4h00
- 13 km
- 7 km
- 170 m
- 1080 m

National Maps 1269-1289  
 Hiking Maps  
 1:25 000 Aletsch - 1:25 000 Visp

First mentioned in 1477, the Nessjeri begins at 2140 m near the Kelchbach stream. At first, it runs at an almost imperceptible incline across a rock balcony located diagonally opposite the Aletsch Glacier; then it plunges down into the valley via Nessel, as a frothing stream. Stigwasser and Obersta, mentioned for the first time in 1521

and 1684 respectively, are both sourced in the Gredetsch Valley near Mundbach at altitudes of about 1300 m. In 1932, dangerous sections of the Obersta were replaced with tunnels, giving the area an ambience of adventure.

## 27 Trusera Suone \*



- 2h00
- 5,5 km
- 3 km
- 230 m
- 180 m

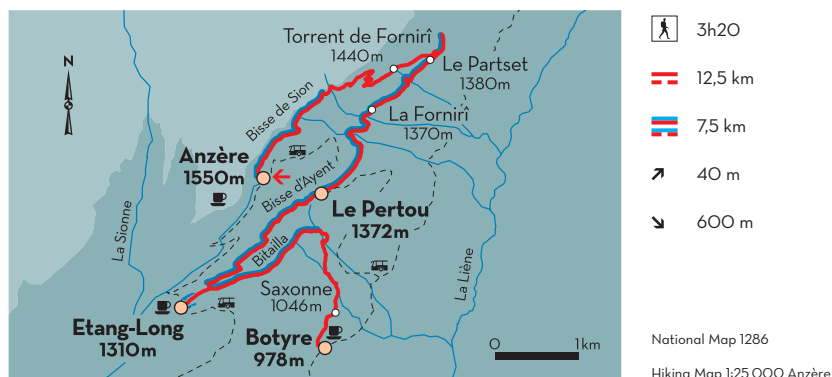
National Maps 1269-1270  
 Hiking Map 1:25 000 Binntal

The Trusera is the most easterly Suone - or irrigation channel - of any significance in the Valais. First mentioned in a purchase document dating from 1499, it draws its water from the Milibach stream in the Rappental valley. The irrigation channel was out of use between 1994 and 2006, but was later restored by numerous helpers at great

financial expense. For the most part, it runs through shady forests, serving to irrigate herb gardens in the Binnackern area. During the blooming period, various types of native orchid, including the red hellborine, adorn the footpath.



## ★ The “Bisses” museum and the museum path ★★






Enhance your knowledge about the “Bisses” after having walked along them. At the new “Bisses” museum, you will learn about the history, construction and socio-cultural meaning of these old aqueducts. In the garden of the museum, visitors can try out watering with the system of a wooden channel and a special type of wall. Why not combine a visit of the museum with a pleasant marked hike along three “Bisses”, where you can discover




the wooden channels of Torrent-Croix or the distributor of Bitaille.

### Le Musée des Bisses








1966 Botyre/Ayent  
[www.musee-des-bisses.ch](http://www.musee-des-bisses.ch)  
[secretariat@musee-des-bisses.ch](mailto:secretariat@musee-des-bisses.ch)

# Legend

-  Snacks and Refreshments
-  Cableway
-  Gondola Lift

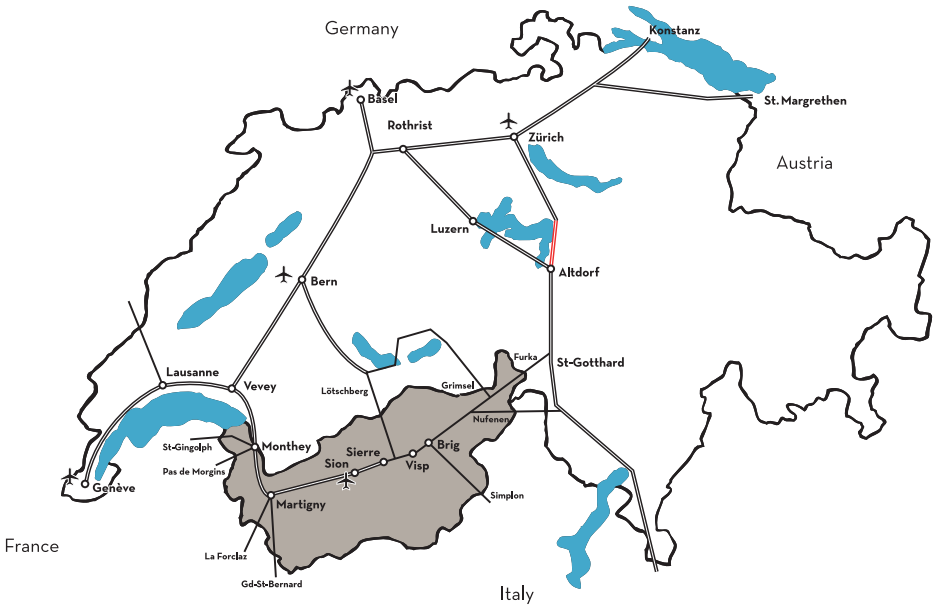
-  Chair Lift
-  Bus
-  Railway

## Degree of Difficulty

-  ★
-  ★★
-  ★★★
-  ▼ Slight Risk of Vertigo
-  ▼▼ Strong Risk of Vertigo
-  → Start of the Hike
-  ♿ Wheelchair-accessible

-  Duration of Hike
-  Torch Recommended
-  ↗ Ascent in Metres
-  ↘ Descent in Metres
-  Total Length of Hike
-  Length of "Bisses"
-  Hiking Trail
-  Mountain Hiking Trail

 Place with Public Transport Link



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