

Alps 2003

Itinerary details and route descriptions

I hope by now you've received your map copies, and will be better able to follow the routes!

Day 5 Saturday 30 August
Griesalp to Kandersteg via the Hohtürli (2778m)

No peak today ..the pass will probably be enough!

Crossing the Hohtürli, or 'high doorway', is one of the great walks of the Bernese Alps. It's a famous route used by generations of mountain folk as well as by walkers and mountaineers crossing from the Kiental to the Kandertal and vice-versa. It's also the highest crossing on the Alpine Pass Route (Section 9) and will probably be our most demanding day. It's a lofty, wind-scoured saddle on the north-projecting ridge of the Blüemlisalp, with the Blüemlisalp Hut perched 60m above. The Lonely Planet Guide to Walking in Switzerland has a good description of the route ...

Distance:	15 km
Height gain:	1370m
Height loss:	1600m
Likely time:	7½ hours

We'll retrace the descent route of yesterday as far as the bridge over the Gamchibach, then follow the right-hand path signposted 'Blüemlisalphütte', winding up through the trees beside a cascading stream to meet a surfaced road. Short-cut steeply over the high alpine pastures of Bundalp, passing the Sennerei Schneider berghaus before reaching the Berggasthof Enzian at Oberi Bund (1840m, 1h10min, refreshments).



The Hohtürli from the east



The Hohtürli from Bundalp

Head 500m up the road, then turn off right on to a marked foot track. This quickly cuts across the grassed-over slopes, then begins climbing steeply up a badly eroding ridge of old moraines, eventually connecting with a rocky spur. The strenuous ascent continues along the left side of this ridge .. in many places ladders or stairways with fixed cables provide assistance .. finally

arriving at the tiny platform of the Hohtürli (2778m, 4 hours). We'll probably visit the Blüemlisalp Hut 60m above to enjoy a refreshment with the views?!



The Hohtürli pass



The Hohtürli from the west

Descend in spirals around to the right through loose talus, before following a narrow shelf past icefalls at the lower tip of the Blüemlisalpgletscher. The path leads on along the crest of a high moraine ridge left by the receding glacier, with a murky meltwater lochan visible below, then drops down rightwards through the first wild flowers, to reach Oberbärgli (1973m, 5h30min).



Walk down a short way to the edge of a precipice where the magnificent emerald-coloured Oeschinensee comes into sight, and climbs down by stepways safeguarded by cables. Continue down and bear right to cross a footbridge, after which a well-cut trail begins a traverse of the lake's steep northern sides. Across the Oeschinense, sheer cliffs adorned with waterfalls drop down from the towering glacier-clad peaks directly into the lake. Frequent resting benches along this stretch are ideal for contemplating the outstanding natural scenery.

The way leads down to a tiny cove with a pebble beach where walkers may be tempted to go in for a dip (in glacier melt?.. you must be joking). Head a short distance on around through lovely tall stands of spruce to reach the hotels at the lake's western end (1593m, 6h30min, refreshments). From here, the upper Kandersteg-Oeschinen chairlift station can be reached in about 20 minutes if anyone wants to shorten the day.

Continue down left along the dirt service track, picking up a trail off right just as you pass a high waterfall coming down from the Dolderhorn. This leads along forested slopes above the Öschibach, before coming on to a sealed road just down from the lower chairlift station. Follow this a short way round to the left to arrive in Kandersteg (1176m, 7h30min), where we're booked in to the Hotel National. The phone number there is 0041 33 675 1085 ... unusually, they don't have their own website, but they're listed at www.kandersteg.ch/english/plan/unter_hotel.html .
