



Switzerland for Dummies: Zermatt - Part 5

by [Lee Lau](#)

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By Sharon Bader, Bryce Borlick & Lee Lau

Maps by **Sharon**. Photos and video by **Lee** unless otherwise noted

Gummelistunggis

Zermatt (and Livigno): Introduction

We left Engadin in the pouring rain as our luck with weather finally ran out as we bussed to the [Mottolino bike park](#) in Livigno, Italy. Unfortunately the weather didn't improve and our spirits sank lower and lower as we watched rain turn to snowflakes and snowflakes turn to drifts over the course of our dinner. But oh what a dinner! The achingly bad news that our week of Livigno riding was being wiped out by the minute was temporarily buffered by deep fried cannelloni, tender lamb skewers, and homemade pasta, all prefaced by the freshest salad buffet that alone would have satisfied us. The care and attention that goes into the food makes Italy a gastronomic heaven and we had just slipped through the gates without so much as a passport stamp. This was the aptly-named [Hotel Paradiso](#) and I can't think of a more comfortable place to hole up for a day or two. We slept late into the next morning with more than a foot of fresh snow waiting for us outside.



30cms of new snow on Sept 19th at Livigno scotched plans to bike for the foreseeable future



The food (and hospitality) at the Hotel Paradiso made it hard to leave

In the morning we surveyed the damage. 30cms at every major resort in the region. As we discussed lesser options like Oktoberfest in Munich, Sharon found fresh webcam images from Zermatt showing barely a dusting. The internet also confirmed that it was only a 5-transfer journey going most of the way across the country - piece of cake on the SBB. It was a shame to miss Livigno, especially with the great hospitality, but the singletrack was calling.

With some recommendations from Wade Simmons and Big Mountain Bike Adventures we found lodging in Zermatt that fit our budget and was also able to accommodate our bikes. Generally speaking, Switzerland is an expensive country to visit despite efforts to devalue the Swiss Franc, and Zermatt is a particularly popular tourist destination, so we expected to pay a little more even in the off season. It is also quite a contrast from Italy where our Euros went quite far for lodging and meals.

At this point I'd like to give a tip of the hat to [Tourism Zermatt](#). At every other place we had stayed Lee had made previous arrangements and had arranged for information and liaison. No such opportunity presented itself with Zermatt as we literally changed our plans with 12 hours notice and initially had no intention of visiting Wallis or Zermatt at all. Tourism Zermatt were exceptionally helpful and forthcoming with information on short notice and for that we are grateful.



Miraculously there was no-one at this little photogenic alpine tarn that I'll call the Kleine Rifflesee

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You might wonder why we had not included Zermatt or any other place in Wallis on our itinerary. The answer is, for a "small" country, Switzerland is actually remarkably big. We had to be selective and had planned to leave Wallis for another time. Travelling from Graubünden to Wallis is not trivial and the journey ate up the best part of a day.

The same weather which cut our Livigno trip short made for spectacular trail conditions and scenery in Zermatt. Local trails can be dusty (legacy of glacial silt & sedimentary erosion). The storm which deluged Engadin merely dusted the high mountains of the Monte Rosa-Zermatt area with snow and made for tacky local trails.



Ho hum - another Zermatt view

For some background and random facts:

- Zermatt is a village of 5,800 people but population swells, particularly in winter.
- It was "discovered" as a mountaineering base by British mountaineers at the turn of the century
- No gas-powered cars are allowed in village limits (they want the views of the mountains to be unobscured by pollution) so you get there by bus and train. It's laid out well for walking.
- The "bike hotel" concept (ie packaged deals of lifts, food, accomodation) does not seem to exist in Zermatt. In general, Zermatt is a tad more expensive than Graubünden-area destinations.
- Even in late September, Zermatt has lots of visitors and accordingly quite a tourist feel; even kitschy at times (not to be judgmental as we are tourists too!!). Put it this way, Zermatt most felt like Whistler too us of all the towns we visited.
- The hiking access points have a lot of people but hikers tend to spread out. Therefore, don't be alarmed when getting off at the Gornergrat and seeing literally hundreds of people. Quite quickly you will find lots of space as you wind your way down the trails



Whether you like it or not this blasted steeple clock will wake you up at 6:45am. Earplugs don't help much.

We had heard that Zermatt was about the views. We also found that Zermatt was about the quality of trails. Once we were on the Gornergrat railway we understood what all the fuss was about. As you climb out of the deep valley, more and more glaciers emerge, all crowned by the Matterhorn, not the highest peak in the area, but standing robustly as a solitary watchman at the head of the valley. It's really quite a sight and it's hard to not take a million photos of this Swiss icon.

At this point our credibility is probably on the line if we claim that Zermatt was the best singletrack we've ever ridden, but it could very well be true. The trails leading off the top of the Gornergrat at 3089m were every bit as quality as anything we had ridden in our 3 week stay, but the views were on a whole... 'nutha... level. Right from the get-go we were railing techy braided singletrack - looking down, we saw 3 massive glaciers spilling out directly below us and looking up, the ever-present Matterhorn on the horizon. Much of the alpine was like this and we struggled to find a singletrack that we didn't like, from Mark Twain Weg to the Blumenweg and back again.



Gornergratbahn views

In many of the other Graubünden-area resorts, below-treeline trails have usually been carpet-bombed by cows and then by erosive power of water. For some reason below treeline Zermatt trails seemed to be in better shape even though they are widely-used by hikers and bikers. We found plenty of quality singletracks and even a few hidden loam lines for the taking. Although it was an unplanned detour, Zermatt ended up being the crowning jewel of our trip.



Direttissima: Another trail that offers views of the ubiquitous Matterhorn



The trail cuts high off the Gourmetweg by Findeln and is a loam pumptrack traversing to Zermatt valley bottom

We'll add one more final note and it's a testament to the politeness and welcome showed to us by the people of Switzerland. In particular when we were biking and encountered hikers everyone was friendly and some old folks seemed genuinely stoked to see young people out enjoying the mountains. As we passed one old guy in lederhosen and other vintage alpine gear, we exchanged greetings as he surveyed our gear and flashed us a smile.

Why this particular encounter stuck in memory was partly due to the unusual garb, but also because we could've sworn that we saw something else in his smile. It made me think that maybe we're not so different after all, we just come from different eras. Decades ago, alpine skiing and mountaineering in Switzerland were youthful activities that started a gradual but lasting shift from a hard-working agrarian economy to one based on tourism and recreation. We could imagine this old guy back in the 50's and 60's, hiking these peaks in leather boots, skiing back down on wooden planks, possibly shirking his domestic duties to do so, and almost certainly loving every minute of it. He probably saw the grins on our faces and the exhilaration in our eyes as we flew through these same mountains half a century later, and he probably saw a little bit of himself in us. After all, we're really not that different, both driven less by the activities that allow us to survive, and more by the activities that allow us to live.

...and with that we ended our Swiss trip on high notes.

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"Gornergrat – Trailsurfing in Zermatt". *Filmed by Tom Malecha of Zurich from a weekend of riding in Zermatt.*

Route Descriptions

General note. The rides from the Gornergrat to Zermatt drop approx 1400m. From the Sunegga-Blauherd they drop about 1100m. None of the rides are long (approx 15 - 10km and all go mostly downhill. The routes mentioned here are quite downhill oriented with some pedally sections. There is a ton of more pedally xc climbing routes but we had only so much time to cover it all)

Route: Gornergrat: Aussitschweg - Rinderhorn - Naturweg - Direttissima and **Sunegga/Blauherd: Blumenweg** - [click here for more pictures and video from our blog](#)

Summary: Signed well (although cryptically and inconsistently), it's remarkably easy to navigate Zermatt trails. The main Aussitschweg descent parallels the Gornergratbahn railway and runs west from the highpoint. A series of trails run N from that main descent; the Rinderhorn is the first N junction and we took that to the Rinderalp train station. From there we took some pretty generic roads which were marked as bike trails to the Naturweg singletrack trails following that to Gourmetweg. If you continue on Gourmetweg you will continue on to Zermatt on doubletrack but we recommend taking an unmarked singletrack (see the gps tracks) onto the Direttissima singletrack which is infinitely more interesting.

We then took the Sunegga railtrain and the Blauherd gondola and descended via the Blumenweg. This is well signed;once you're on the trail its intuitive and logically leads you downhill to the Direttissima singletrack and back to Spiss where we rode back to Zermatt. Fantastic views of the Weisshorn and Mettelhorn group predominate. Trail gets a bit repetitive (bench-cut straight-aways to tight switchbacks) but then gets interesting at the bottom and then of course the fantastic lower below-treeline singletrack makes it all flow.

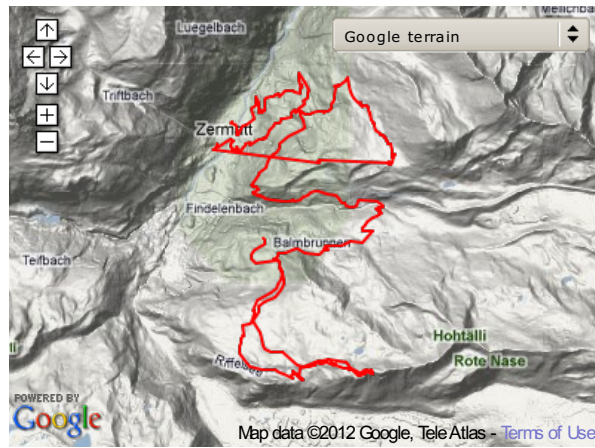


Aussitschweg : Railing the trail coming off the Gornergrat down to Riffelberg



One of the Zermatt bike trails that was worth riding, the Rinderhorn connects Rinderalp and Riffelberg

Zermatt - Gornergrat: Aussitschweg - Rinderhorn - Naturweg - Direttissima; Rothorn: Blumenweg at EveryTrail



Route: Gornergrat: Aussitschweg - Mark Twains Weg - Arvenweg and Gornergrat: Aussitschweg - Weg der Stille (Kelle to Grunsee) - Naturweg - Findeln/Findelback - Zermatt [click here for more pictures and video from our blog](#)

Summary From the Gornergrat station proceed as if doing the main Aussitschweg descent. Marks Twains Weg is the second N junction (after the Rinderhorn junction). I can't say enough about the quality of this trail. It was benchcut. It was flowy. It had jawdropping views, It was interesting as it ducked in and out of terrain. It had periods of technical challenge but then areas to recover thereafter. In short it had it all. The Arvenweg is picked up below treeline and cuts across under the Gornergratbahn for a fantastic singletrack descent back to Zermatt. Our GPS track shows also an out-and-back that we did on the hiking/biking trail to the MonteRosa hutte that we did purely for the views. And it was so very very worth it

Weg der Stille starts off at the Gornergrat but instead of continuing on the Aussitschweg descent cut N to the small unnamed alpine tarn at 2950m and pick up the trail. To be honest, its nothing special. Steep, switchbacks with rocky waterbars at the apex so you should mellow out your speed. Beautiful views but that is the bare minimum expected of Zermatt trails. Abrupt, jerky trail without much flow that makes you wonder how it is possible to make alpine singletrack boring. Fortunately the below-treeline singletrack heading back to Findeln/Findelback and then to Zermatt has quality.



Aussitschweg with a Monte Rosa view



Just an out and back but offering stunning views of the Dufourspitz group and glaciers

Zermatt Gornergrat Mark Twains Weg: 14km; 1400m ; Gornergrat Weg der Stilleat EveryTrail



Route: Gornergrat - Lower Traverse - Arvenweg and Sunegga/Blauherd - Abenteuerweg - Gamsweg [click here for more pictures and video from our blog](#)

Summary: From the Gornergrat station proceed as if doing the main Aussitschweg descent. The Lower Traverse is the third N junction after the Rinderhorn junction. Note that its NOT marked on the bike map (keep in mind that we said the bike maps are not that useful) but it is marked on the hiking 1:20,000 scale topo maps so that turned out to be a useful purchase. This Lower Traverse (we called it that because we have no imagination) is at least as of the same quality as the Marks Twains Weg and is a do not miss trail. Amazing quality and quite unforgiveable for it not to be marked on the bike maps. We finished off with a fast Arvenweg rip back to Zermatt.

Wanting to mix it up we then took the Sunnegga/Blauherd lifts up to the start of the Panoramweg and hiked up 300m to the Abenteuerweg (recall that the Rothorn gondola was closed for maintenance so we couldn't take it). The Abenteuerweg is scary and exposed. It's a naked ridgeline of singletrack lined with rocks on either side and the trail surface itself is decomposing sedimentary rock. Pretty high-consequence mistakes can result if you miss. The top half was (for me) less than 60% rideable.

The bottom half was rideable with a lot of "Inversion Riders" style behind the saddle crawling and lots of nose wheelie trials moves. It gets quite a bit easier as you intersect the Gamsweg and then of course becomes the usual cherry Zermatt below treeline singletrack.



The Abenteuerweg was technically the most difficult trail we rode in our Swiss trip

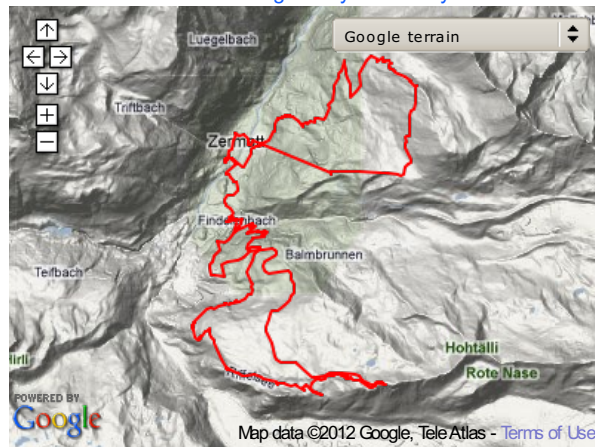


Made up the "Lower Traverse" aka Lambsweg name for this unmarked trail that shoots off Mark Twain Weg



Yet another classic view of the 'Horn

Zermatt - Gornergrat day 3 at EveryTrail



Switzerland for Dummies




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3. [Sequence Saturday 3](#) 28416 reads
4. [Scott Beaumont signs with Yeti Racing UK](#) 26514 reads
5. [Movies for Your Monday](#) 24549 reads
6. [Dan Atherton rides the GT Sanction](#) 22639 reads
7. [Greg Watts Injury Update and Fundraiser!](#) 19370 reads
8. [Chris Akrigg: Step by Step](#) 17298 reads

29 Comments

Score Time

 [bont](#) (Dec 7, 2011 at 7:16) +5  
 “ Not only Zermatt has fantastic singletrails!
 Wallis = Singletrail Paradise! Best lift infrastructure and best trails you can find in Switzerland!
 If I would come to Switzerland for biking holidays I wouldn't go to any other place!!




 [leelau](#) (Dec 8, 2011 at 10:14) +1  
 “ Very glad we did not miss it

 [mtnbker395](#) (Jan 15, 2012 at 1:39) +8  
 “ Mountain biking in all of it's disciplines is such an amazing sport. The riding, the obsession, the people. But even if you didn't like any of those things it takes you a lot of beautiful places in not a lot of time. no gas (if you choose 😊), no disturbance, no boring moments. I love my sport 😊.

 [caste1200](#) (Jan 15, 2012 at 11:15) +2  
 “ if you like more freeride stuff, bex is on option with really steep sections!!




<http://www.pinkbike.com/video/229194/>

[Reply]




 [brooce](#) (Jan 15, 2012 at 2:35) +2  
 “ I've been there few years ago, unfortunately without the bike. I've seen few mountainbikers going down the hill... and since then it's my dream to come back again with my bike, to ride these trails! The scenery is unbelievably awesome! 😊




 [egorka](#) (Jan 15, 2012 at 2:39) +2  
 “ same with me, mate.

[Reply]

 [Shibuyakid](#) (Jan 16, 2012 at 0:23) +1  
 “ pity that zermatt refused to host the DH world cup, that the gomagrathahn is still not 'bike friendly', and that you can't find a decent bike shop. Despite all the natural wonders the swiss bike scene is still small and very inward looking!!!
 For a bike park you have to go to Mottolino (almost at the italian border) or to lac blanc (in france). Switzerland is still a little too much conservative to fully offer all its possibilities to the bikers...not to mention that the locals almost never speak english...

 [raph11](#) (Jan 16, 2012 at 1:59) +4  
 “ U tell a lot of great lies here 😊

 [inversedotch](#) (Jan 16, 2012 at 4:52) +1  
 “ Like Raph said, so much lies there..
 I live in the center of the Wallis Valley. With less than 1 hour of car i can access the following bike park: Anzère, Crans-Montana, Verbier, St-Luc, Champéry / Les Portes du Soleil, Châtel (France), Morgins, Leysin, Dorénaz, etc... And of course you can do single tracks everywhere.. So no, no need to go to Mottolino or Lac Blanc to ride..

 [leelau](#) (Jan 16, 2012 at 8:18) +1  
 “ That's totally the opposite of my experience there. Although I never rode in the Oberland but only rode in Graubunden and Zermatt in the Wallis. Friendly locals were the norm




[Reply]

 [leelau](#) (Jan 17, 2012 at 11:04) +2  
 “ Not very friendly news from the Bemese <http://www.ride.ch/site/index.php/kanton-bern-will-singletrail-verbot-fuer-mountainbiker.html>




 [simda](#) (Jan 17, 2012 at 11:25) +1  
 “ It's a real shame! Graubuenden opens the hiking trails for mountainbiker while berne makes us criminals.

 **leelau** (Jan 17, 2012 at 11:52) +1  
“ Yah I don't understand why this is different. I know the cantons all do their own thing but notice Bernese Oberlanders get shafted. All the guys who comment on how hikers are not the best attitude are Basel or Bern located people. What does this say? My german is not good enough to read it <http://www.trainet.ch/>


[\[Reply\]](#)




 **davidstuartkelly** (Jan 15, 2012 at 5:39) +2  
“ This is one of those places all Mountain bikers should visit, the riding and scenery are simply breathtaking.




[\[Reply\]](#)




 **dacieralmeida** (Jan 15, 2012 at 18:26) +1  
“ Cenário deslumbrante. Um sonho! Great landscape. It is a dream! I expect ride there.




[\[Reply\]](#)




 **caste1200** (Jan 15, 2012 at 11:15) +2  
“ some free ride in switzerland 😊!
<http://www.pinkbike.com/video/229194/>

 **inversedotch** (Jan 15, 2012 at 12:51) +2  
“ Why go to Bex when we have everything in Wallis. 😊
<http://www.pinkbike.com/video/226183/>

 **caste1200** (Jan 15, 2012 at 14:56) +1  
“ based on your comment on my video, i guess you already saw the video, now you know why you have to go! 😊 cheers

 **caste1200** (Jan 15, 2012 at 14:59) +1  
“ and i walso love anzere! but bex is pure freeride




 **leelau** (Jan 15, 2012 at 20:36) +1  
“ See -that's the dilemma for North Americans. There are so many places to ride. I know its stupid but I've never heard about Bex and Anzere. We have 3 weeks in Schweiz and Italy next summer and its already fully booked. But thank you for opening my eyes.

 **caste1200** (Jan 16, 2012 at 14:32) +1  
“ just get in contact with some locals

[\[Reply\]](#)

 **peelman** (Jan 15, 2012 at 1:59) +2  
“ I'm going!.. That's all there is to it, I'm going... 😊




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 **TheTrailSailor** (Jan 15, 2012 at 6:06) +2  
“ Unbelievable! Thats what mountainbiking is all about!

[\[Reply\]](#)

 **zenis** (Jan 15, 2012 at 17:00) +1  
“ Swiss wait 4 me, coming soon




[\[Reply\]](#)

 **Karpiel073** (Jan 15, 2012 at 5:38) +1  
“ It looks totally surreal. How i'd love to go to Switzerland.

[\[Reply\]](#)

 **marconi** (Jan 15, 2012 at 19:01) +1  
“ Thanks for posting Lee. Looks like a great trip !

[\[Reply\]](#)

 **GermanyFreeride** (Jan 15, 2012 at 1:16) +1  
“ Traumhaftes Panorama!

[\[Reply\]](#)

 **wakaba** (Jan 16, 2012 at 9:53) +1  
“ Yep, world's best.

[\[Reply\]](#)

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