

Grand Cornier

3962 Meters

9-10 July 2023

with

Thomi Zumtaugwald and Patrice Biner

A new Alpine adventure, a new hut, and lots of fun with our favorite Randa guides, Thomi and Patrice.

We have planned a short rock climb / Klettertour as a warm-up, on the day before the actual Hochtour. This allows for a leisurely start, with breakfast at Café Zenhäusern in Visp.

Pictured is Cabane de Moiry, its old and new parts, which will be our base for both the Hochtour and the Klettertour. It lies at 2826 meters, a few km south of the Moiry lake and dam. Grand Cornier (3962 m), our goal, is on the horizon, very foreshortened; it's the highest peak on the centre-left.

The drive from Visp to Grimentz is longer than we remember - and with an impressive number of hairpin turns!



It's a sweaty hike from the car park just beyond the Moiry dam, through meadows, then up a long glacial moraine and then steep, rocky switchbacks to the hut. Cabane de Moiry is booked up full, mostly with hikers of all generations - and boy does this crowd make noise!





After lunch we head to the base of Aiguilles de la Lé (left in the photo), which is not far behind the hut, to rock-climb. It's five pitches to the top. We take side-by-side routes, which join together at the last pitch.

Here we are, showing our stuff (☺).
At least one pitch has a difficulty of 5c!!



In this shot, Grand Cornier is the peak on the far left.
The route we will take tomorrow is not visible.



It's warm sunny weather and we take our time for a break at the top of Aiguilles de la Lé (3190 m), enjoying previews of Grand Cornier and much banter. The Abseils back down are tricky and the loose rock at the base slows us down getting back to the hut. The most important issue raised by these photos is ... Why is Jeff climbing in tights!



Another view of Grand Cornier, still foreshortened.

Our route tomorrow will take us around the left edge of the enormous and seriously crevassed glacier (yikes), then swing back to the right underneath the snowy pyramid, and then up the rock ridge.



At dinner time, the dining room is veeery crowded and it feels like a sauna, due to the western exposure of all those windows.

Our bunk room is also a bit too hot, but we still sleep quite well after the day's exercise.



This nighttime photo is from the hut's website (credit: Marco Volken, 2010)



All right ... it's time to do it, climb Grand Cornier!

We get up at 2.00, have breakfast at 2.30, and are on our way at 3.00.

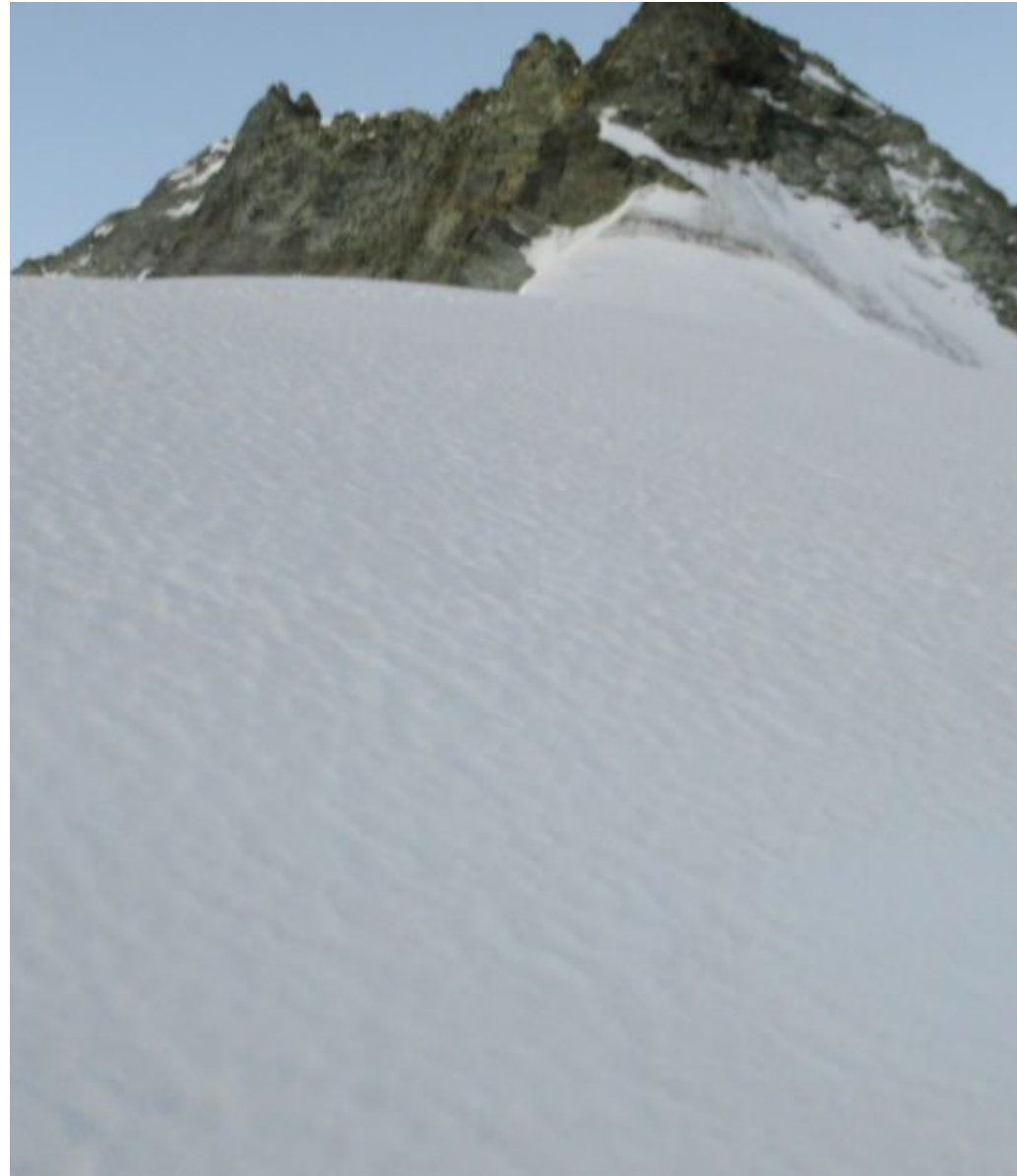
The main reason for the very early start is to get back across the glacier before the late morning sun does a number on the glacial snow and ice. The glaciers are all severely and sadly stressed ...

The ascent starts with a short phase of boulder hopping. We then spend two hours zig-zagging up the glacier, which has small but numerous crevasses and an undulating Firn surface – with expected bands of soft snow.

At dawn (6.00) – pictured here - we stow poles.

O.k., now the fun starts. We are at the base of the main, rocky spur of Grand Cornier. We will climb most of the ridge pictured here, from the icy snow to the summit (centre left).

But! The first bit is a tad, um, scary, as we must cross a steep ice-chute – you see it here – using our axes and the front teeth of our crampons. Luckily, it's less than 100 meters wide. (No possibility to stop and take pictures!)





The ridge starts at 3875 m altitude.

Initially, there is some shitty rock (to use a technical term), but this quickly improves. No need for Stirnlampe or Steigeisen – hooray!

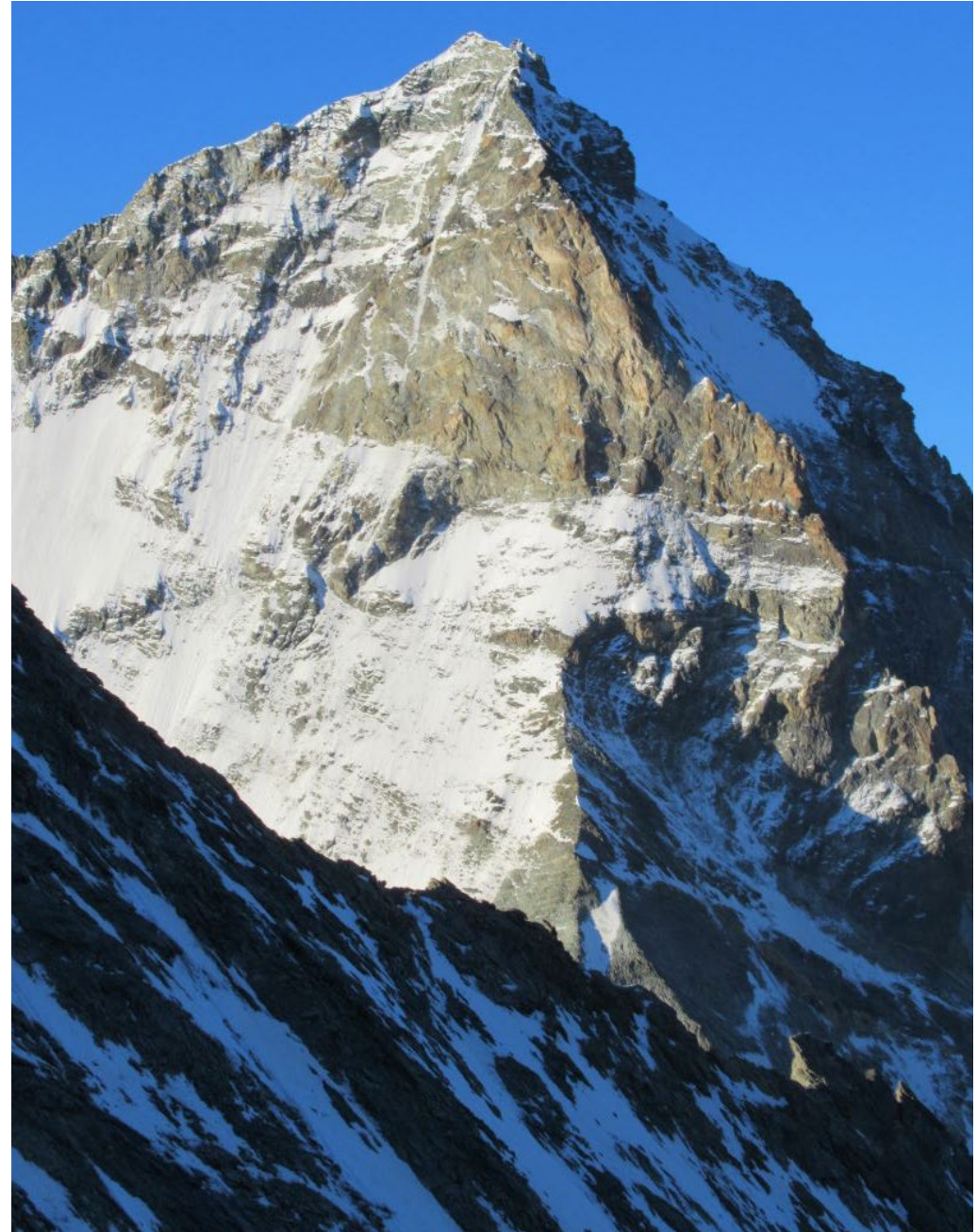
There are a few very vertical passages, a couple of giant steps up, and one low shelf to get stuck under, surrounded by precipitous drops.

After the long snow trek MS is feeling a bit winded; in contrast, JC shows top form in the rock. Patrice remarks “Jeff rennt ja den Berg hinauf.”

Here are M and Patrice at the beginning of the ridge climb.

The whole summit climb is in the towering presence of Dent Blanche (4357 m; right). First, it looks hazy and back-lit; then, as the sun rises, it becomes sharp and clear.

We can't quite see the Bivouac de la Dent Blanche (3540 m); it's hidden at the bottom of the steep descending ridge pictured here.



Yahoo! JC and Thomi arrive at the summit at 7.30, 4.5 hours after leaving the hut. There is only one other party on the mountain, far behind us, so we have the summit to ourselves!



MS and Patrice summit 15 minutes later, at 7.45 – a great chance to photograph the final portion of the climb, as well as the summit views.

Way, way down – beyond the last snow and glacier and over 1100 m beneath us – is Cabane de Moiry. It's just a tiny speck in the photo (top right)!

Thomi shoots a video to scout the way down to Ferpècle by a rarely traversed ridge. That one we'll save for next year!



Astounding summit views! To the west and south, we can see as far as Grand Combin and Mont Blanc (centre left in the photo).





More glorious summit views! From left to right: Zinal Rothorn (close by) and (in the distance) Täschhorn, Alphubel, Allalinhorn, Rimpfischhorn and Strahlhorn.

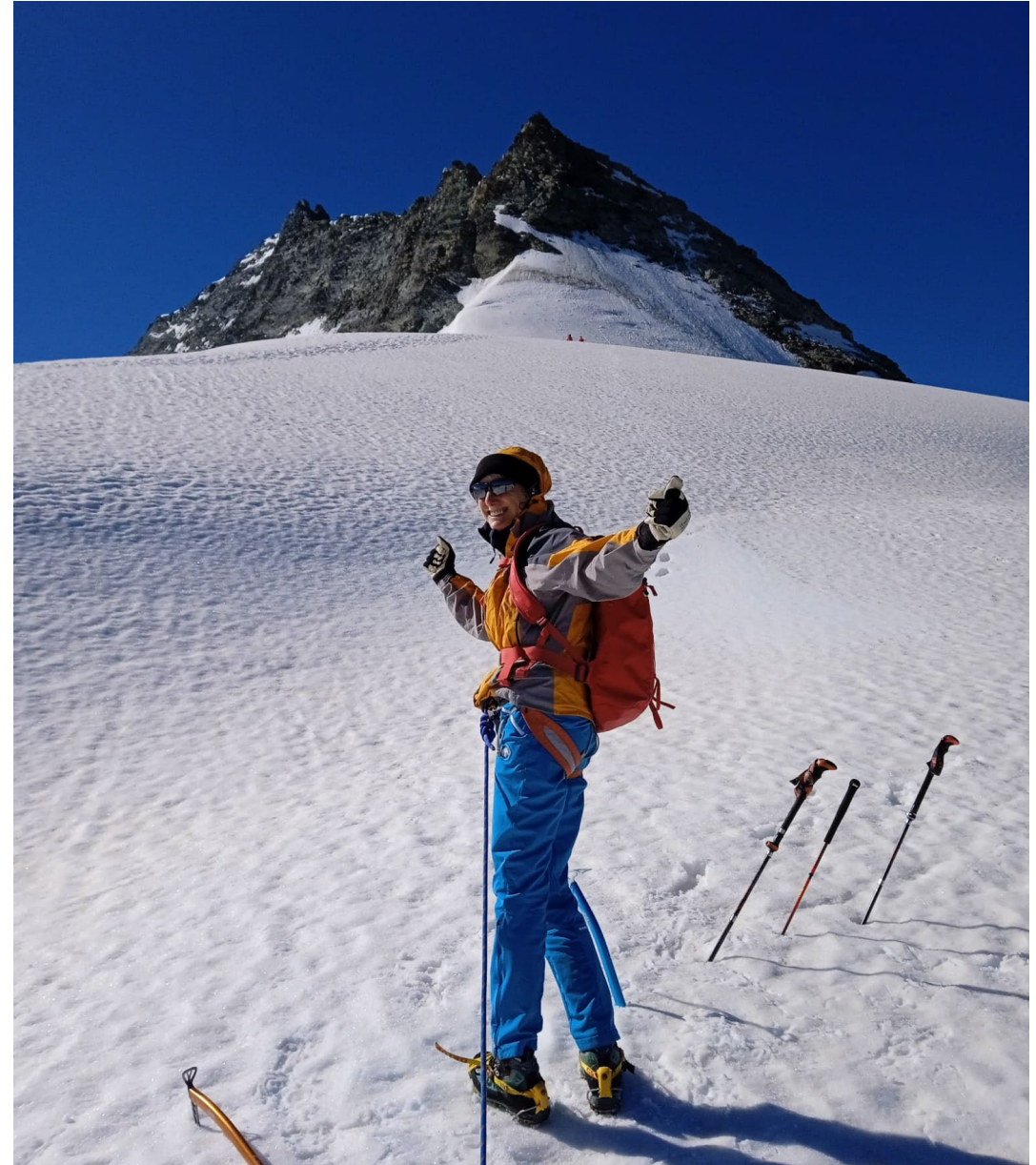


Still more amazing shots from the summit: To the left and in the middle are Zinal Rothorn and Obergabelhorn. Wow.

Still more (☺):
From left to right,
Liskamm, Castor, Pollux,
Breithorn, and THAT
mountain – Horu / the
Matterhorn.



We need just 90 minutes to downclimb and Abseil the rock ridge, and to cross through the ice chute. Jubilation!!! Thirst!!! Once we're on the snow again, we take a standing break. Chocolate bars blunt our growing hunger.



Initially, we descend the glacier in Steigeisen / crampons and it goes quickly, but then, after we switch to boots the surface gets progressively softer and we sink up to our knees or worse. Toes and knee joints start to ache from the sliding and lurching.

Still, from the base of the rock ridge, where we picked up our poles, we only need 2 hours to get back to the hut.





Here's the view back up to the summit; this photo was snapped just as we reached the hut. It's only 11.30. This means the tour 'hut-to-hut' was 8.5 hours – a super time for us!

We have to endure a long wait for lunch at one of the terrace's picnic tables, but the company is great. When the food arrives, it too is awesome: yummy Rösti and soup.

Pounding down the trail to the carpark, in the scorching sun, JC and MS feel a bit (!) tired – but very happy!

On the way back to ‘base camp’ (Saas Almagell!), we snooze in the car, listening to Thomi’s GOAT track.

When we get to Visp, it is hot – the thermometer at the gas station reads 36 C.

Temporary relief is provided by ice creams, but then it’s time to part ways.



Grand Cornier - July 2023, Tour Stats

Distances

Moiry carpark to hut: 2.5 km

Hut to ridge base: 6 km

Ridge base to summit: 1.5 km

Total round-trip, Hochtour: 15 km

Ascents and Descents (including small ups and downs along the way)

Hut climb: 500 m

Hochtour: 1150 m

Total ascent/descent, Hochtour: 1650 m

Times needed

Moiry carpark to hut: 2 h up, 1.5 h down

Hut to summit: 4 h 30 m

Summit to hut: 4 h

Total time 'on our feet' for the Hochtour: 8 h 30 m