

Welcome to the Gemmipass Eco Hike. This hike will take you from Kandersteg, all the way to lake Daubensee and up to the ancient Gemmipass. Along the way you will see some of the many wonders that make up the Alpine environment.

Safety:

This hike is in an Alpine Environment; extreme weather conditions are possible, the group should be well prepared for all types of weather. Please note that these route descriptions are not a replacement for map reading. Always carry a map and know how to use it. Maps are available for hire from Reception. The group leader must ensure that a Route Card has been filed in Reception.

Info:

Sunnbuel Cable car Return tickets (buy at KISC Reception):
SFr. 10.40 / 20.80 (child / adult)

In this booklet you will find that *hiking route information is in italics* whereas information about the area is in normal text.

Enjoy your hike!



government could fix the current borders.

From Gemmipass you can look down into the resort of Leukerbad, and on the next page is the legend about its first inhabitants. Today Leukerbad is probably most known for the thermal bath and spa facilities.

The Berghotel Wildstrubel is situated right on the edge of the pass and offers stunning views over the alps. The current Wildstrubel Berghotel was opened in 1998, but unfortunately the old hotel has simply been left to ruin next to the new one. Of course the alpine environment is hard for humans to build in, but one wonders if there is a better way to deal with buildings



The view of the alps from hotel Wildstrubel



the surface. Further and faster erosion is then caused by the surface run-off water, and a vicious erosion cycle is started. **Whenever you are hiking, please stick to the footpaths to prevent erosion from getting worse.**

Trees are the best plants for preventing erosion and also have many other properties which are useful for humans. Without forests many parts of Switzerland would be uninhabitable. Apart from preventing erosion, forests protect many places from rock falls, landslides and avalanches. Despite this there was large scale deforestation in the 1800s, mostly to make space for agriculture and for logging. Many forests in Switzerland also suffer from different illnesses. A good way to judge the health of a tree is the state and/or number of leaves.

From the cable car station the path descends moderate slopes to the Spittelmatte plateau in about 15 minutes. The route to Gemmipass follows the valley, that opens out in front of you. Cross the Spittelmatte plateau (1872 m) along the wide even track (route 10).



The Ueschinengrat with Gällihorn sticking up and scree slopes below

3. Farming in the Alps.

You should be able to see various cows and maybe other farm animals around on this Plateau. Compared to the intensive agriculture in the rest of Europe, farming in the alps differs a lot.

Firstly, the scale of the agricultural operations here are distinctively smaller. In the winter, the farmers live in Kandersteg but as spring and summer progress, they move to higher altitude up into the mountains like this farm. The reasons for moving are mainly weather related due to the extreme seasonality – in winter snow covers most of the hillsides and avalanches create danger so the village proves more suitable. As snow starts to melt, grass starts to grow. In higher regions, the grass is exposed to more sunlight so photosynthesis

7. Hotel Schwarenbach

The first Schwarenbach Inn was built in 1742 but was destroyed the year after in an avalanche. It was rebuilt at a more sheltered location. The Inn was where travellers over the Gemmipass could stay, but it had a reputation as a den of thieves and murderers. This was mainly due to a play called "the 24th of February" which took place at Schwarenbach. In reality just one person has been murdered at the hotel, in 1807. Famous people such as Alexander Dumas, Guy de Maupassant, Picasso and Lenin have all passed this way and signed the guest book at Schwarenbach.

Schwarenbach is also one of the mountain huts to visit if you want to achieve the Hüttentest Award. More information about this can be obtained from the Front Office.

While at the hotel take a look at the surroundings. Have you noticed the power cables? They are examples of a human impact on the alpine area. Together with roads, houses and cable cars they help to make the mountains accessible and habitable for humans, but seeing these lines and towers one may wonder if there is a better way?

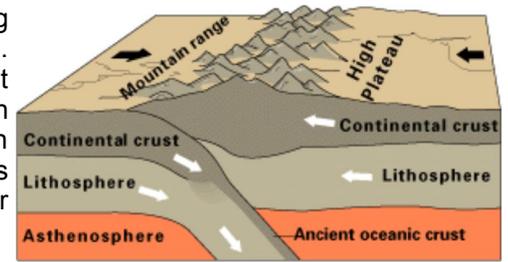
There is still lots of life on your hike. If you have not yet seen the Alpine Chough you will most likely do so when reaching the Gemmi pass. The Chough is a very social bird and you will perhaps even see it trying to get food from you. Other animals you may see are Marmots and if you are extremely lucky the very rare bearded vulture. All of these animals are pictured earlier in this booklet.

From here the track (route 15) goes first west around the bowl next to the hotel Schwarenbach and then climbs gradually to the south between rocky crags.



Power lines on the way to Gemmi Pass

The uplifting process is still going on, but it is equalized by erosion. In fact, if the uplifting stopped it would only take about 3 million years to wear the alps down totally. In geological time that is similar to the blink of an eye in our lifetime.



Look back again at Altels. This is a mountain with a fair bit of history. On 11th September 1895 the biggest avalanche recorded in the alps came down into the valley where you are now standing. With a speed of 200 km/h about 5 million m³ of ice crashed down the mountain. That is about 2000 Olympic swimming pools full! The avalanche killed 6 men, 169 animals and caused vast destruction of the forests. There was so much ice, that it took around two years for the ice fully melt. You can see where the avalanche fell from in white on the photo below. After the wetlands you will see a memorial stone set up in memory of these men. Lots of the rocks which make up Altels fell down too, and so after this avalanche Altels was no longer the tallest mountain in the area, as it lost so much of its rock mass in the avalanche.

If you turn and look back the way you came you will see a ski lift. In winter this is one of Kandersteg's ski areas. After Austria, Switzerland has the most complete network of tourist transport facilities in the world, and this includes 1,200 ski lifts. As you can imagine, skiing, as well as tourism in

