

The Tour de Mont Blanc
The Classic European Hike – France, Switzerland, Italy
Sunday July 16 – Friday July 28 2023 (trip #2331)



(Photo Credit: Erika Bloom and our guide, Malcolm)

OVERVIEW

Join us for the classic Tour de Mont Blanc (“TMB”), a ten-day circular trekking route (plus one rest day) around the base of Mont Blanc in France, Italy, and Switzerland. The trip is rated [6: Strenuous](#) which is the most physically demanding with hikes up to 15+ miles, and over 5,000’ of elevation gain and/or loss on some days (not all days). We have baggage transport most days so our packs will average 15 – 18 lbs including lunch and water. There is no climb of Mont Blanc itself. The classic route is around the mountain and surrounding peaks. The route is fluid, changing some each year and with many “variantes” along the way. We occasionally take cable cars or other transportation, so this trip is not a “Purist’s” TMB for those who feel the need to step on every bit of trail. But, by the end of our 11 days we close the circle and can truly say that we hiked the beautiful Tour of Mont Blanc!

We hike from hotel to hotel or pension or refuge. Typically, we sleep in small villages in the valleys (with one night at back country refuges). We hike up and down high passes or high points most days as we pass from valley to valley. Most of our hiking is on trails, but at times there may be road-

walking, ski lifts, cable cars, buses and/or taxis. It is important all group members be in good hiking condition for this trip. Strenuous terrain (lots of elevation gain and loss), and hiking at a moderate pace for 10 days, with the need to keep on schedule for lodging and logistical reasons, means every group member needs recent multi-day hiking/trekking experience. Over the 10 days, we hike 100+ miles and 35,000'+ feet of cumulative elevation gain and loss – quite a lot of up and down! While some days are less strenuous, we do have some hikes of 13-15 or even as much as 17 (optional) miles, and elevation changes (up and/or down in the same day) of over 5,000 feet. We carry day packs as we do have luggage transfer for all but one night. Typically, our packs will weigh about 15 – 18 pounds – more than a typical daypack, but lots lighter than for a similar length backpacking trip.

Our travel arrangements facilitate a unique exposure to this remarkable area:

- English-speaking guide throughout. Malcolm, our guide, is from England, but has lived in France for over 20 years.
- Custom itinerary based on the classic “Tour de Mont Blanc”.
- One night at Refugio Bonatti in Italy
- Rest day in Courmayeur, Italy to take the Monte Bianco Skyway high speed tram high above the glacier with amazing views to Mont Blanc.

Resources: Kev Reynold’s book “**Trekking the Tour of Mont Blanc**”, published by Cicerone Press, is a great hiker’s reference for this trek. The book describes each daily stage of the trek in detail. While our itinerary varies slightly from his stages, in general we follow his counter-clockwise description of the trek. This book is a great pre-trek read and is also available as an e-book including on the Kindle app for smartphones, which is a great way to bring it on the trek without weighing down your pack. The website <http://www.autourdumontblanc.com/en/> has interesting information and resources about the TMB, including information on some of our huts and hotels.

Daily Itinerary Please note times listed are estimated hiking time. Our time on the trail may be up to 2 hours longer adding in photos, meals, etc. This itinerary is subject to change due to safety, transportation or lodging availability, and unforeseeable circumstances such as weather, natural disasters in areas to be visited, or recommendations of governmental agencies. The leader reserves the right to make such changes as necessary, both before and during the trip. All lodging is subject to confirmation/alteration (it can be difficult to get preferred lodging on the TMB ☺).



Day 0, Saturday July 15 - Depart USA: (usually on an overnight flight to Geneva, Switzerland, often via Zurich). Do not purchase flights until you have been advised the trip is a definite “go”, and have been given specific arrival and departure time parameters.

Day 1, Sunday July 16 - Arrive Geneva, Switzerland airport; Van or shuttle bus transfer to Les Houches, France: Group orientation meeting tentatively at 5 PM. There is a supermarket down the street from the hotel, where you should buy items for tomorrow’s trail lunch and possibly for two days trail lunch. There is a smaller market/bakery in tomorrow night’s village, but it is more limited. If you arrive outside of the group transfer time parameters (because of the flight you purchase, or delays en route), you will be responsible to get to the hotel on your own.

Lodging: Hotel du Bois. Private en suite twin rooms. <http://www.hotel-du-bois.com/en/accueil.htm>

Meals included: Evening meal

Day 2, Monday July 17 - To Les Contamines (France): 9mi, 5hrs, 2200 ft ascent; 4300 ft descent



Refuge de Maige

Walk up the street to the Bellevue Cable car, which we take up to Bellevue (1800 m), cross suspension bridge at nose of Bionnassy Glacier and pass Refuge de Miage before descent to Les Contamines village.

Lodging: Hotel Christiania. Private en suite twin rooms. <http://www.lechristiania-hotel.com/en/>.

Meals included: Breakfast and Evening Meal

Day 3, Tuesday July 18 – To Chapieux (France): 13 miles, 7 hrs, 4600 ft ascent; 3400 ft. descent

A long well graded climb through alpine meadows.

Lodging: Auberge de la Nova, Les Chapieux, shared dormitory, possibly private rooms, shared facilities <https://www.refugelanova.com/en/>

Meals included: Breakfast and Evening Meal



Day 4, Wednesday July 19 To Courmayeur (Italy):

Possibly Two Options:

- 11 miles, 5 ½ hrs. 2700 ft. ascent; 3100 ft. descent or,
- 17 miles, 8 ½ hrs. 3900 ft. ascent; 5800 ft. descent

A short bus ride and then a climb to the Col de la Seigne, crossing in to Italy and down to La Visaille where it is possible to catch a bus to Courmayeur or, for some, perhaps, to hike direct via Plan Chécrouit. There are some small markets and bakeries to shop for lunch/snacks.

Lodging: Hotel Crampon B&B founded and still run by the Grivel family, makers of mountaineering crampons! Private en suite twin rooms. <http://www.crampon.it/datapage.asp?id=32&l=3>

Meals Included: Breakfast.

Day 5, Thursday July 20 A day off in Courmayeur

We'll take the Monte Bianco Skyway high speed, two stage tram <http://www.montebianco.com/en/> which gets us high above a glacier with amazing views over to Mont Blanc (or, Monte Bianco on this Italian side of the mountain!). If the weather is clear, we will see the Matterhorn in the distance.

Lodging: Hotel Crampon B&B founded and still run by the Grivel family, makers of mountaineering crampons! Private en suite twin rooms.

<http://www.crampon.it/datapage.asp?id=32&l=3>

Meals included: Breakfast



On the way to Courmayeur

Day 6, Friday July 21 To Refugio Bonatti (Italy):

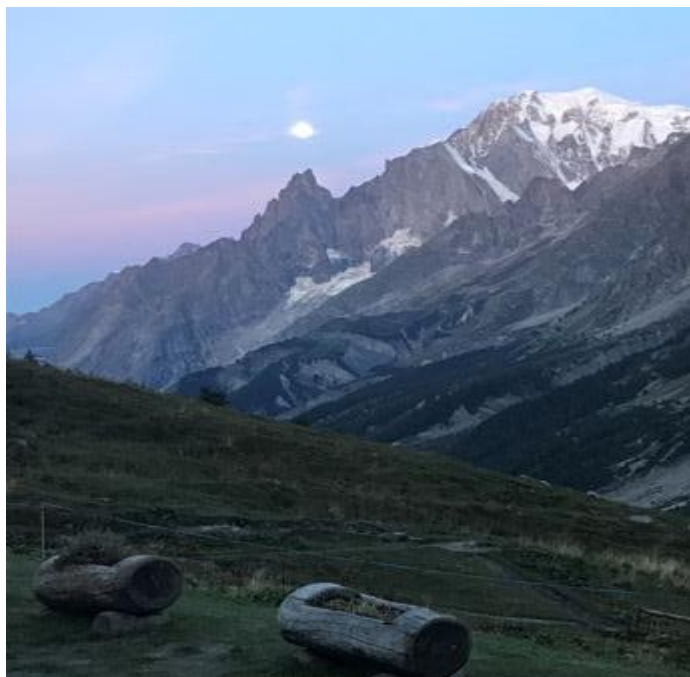
10 miles, 5 ½ hrs, 3600 ft ascent; 2800 ft descent

A short bus ride, then a gentle climb to the Refuge Bertone with great views over to the Mont Blanc massif. We then turn NE up the Mont de la Saxe with time to include a TMB variant to the summit of the Testa della Tronche from where there is a stupendous panoramic view before continuing on to the refuge situated at an altitude of nearly 7300 ft.

Lodging: Refugio Bonatti, Aosta valley. Large public dorm rooms w/shared co-ed bathroom facilities, possibly private rooms, shared facilities.

<https://www.rifugibonatti.it/?lang=en>

Meals included: Breakfast and Evening Meal



Moon & Mt Blanc from Bonatti patio (Photo Credit Erika Bloom)

Day 7, Saturday July 22 To La Fouly (Switzerland):

12 miles, 6 hrs, 3100 ft ascent; 4600 ft descent

After descending from the refuge to the road-head at Arnova (small café/auberge with great coffee and cake and bathrooms!), we then hike up to the Grand Col Ferret, the highest point of the official TMB & then into Switzerland.

Lodging: Hotel Edelweiss private en suite twin rooms.
<https://www.fouly.ch/en/>

Meals included: Breakfast and Evening meal.



Day 8, Sunday July 23 To Champex (Switzerland): 10 mi, 5 hrs, 1500 ft ascent; 1900 ft descent.

A gentle day passing through delightful Swiss villages arriving in time to explore Champex..



Champex-Lac (Photo Credit Erika Bloom)



Champex d'en haut

Lodging: Les Glaciers, Champex. Private en suite twin rooms. <https://www.hotelglacier.ch/>

Meals Included: Breakfast and evening meal.

Day 9, Monday July 24 To the village of Trient (Switzerland):
Two options:

14 miles, 6 ½ hrs. Total 2900 ft. ascent; 3500 ft. descent OR
10 miles, 6 ½ hrs. Total 3900 ft. ascent; 4500 ft. descent

An easy day Via the Col de Bovine with a delightful extension along a water channel towards the Glacier de Trient OR we can take the famous & magnificent, but more difficult, Fenêtre d'Arpette.

Lodging: Hotel La Grande Ourse. Private twin rooms with shared bathrooms. <http://www.la-grande-ourse.ch/index-en.html>

Meals Included: Breakfast and evening meal



Trient. Switzerland

Day 10, Tuesday July 25 To Argentiere (France):

11 miles, 5 ½ hours. Total ascent 3600 ft. Descent 3700 ft. OR
via the Aiguillettes de Posettes 11 miles, 6 hours. Total ascent 4200 ft. Descent 4300 ft

Climbing through forest, then stunning views above Col de Balme, the border between Switzerland and France, and then on to the Col de Posettes before an interesting descent to Argentière.

Lodging: Hotel de la Couronne. Private en suite twin rooms. <http://www.hotelcouronne.com/en/>

Meals included: Breakfast and evening meal.

Day 11, Wednesday July 26 To Chamonix: 9 miles, 5 hrs, 3200 ft. ascent; 1700 ft. descent.

A short bus ride to Tré-le-Champ before ascending to the “Grand Balcon Sud” with unforgettable views across to the Mont Blanc massif. Some ladders to climb today and using the Flégère cable-car for descent into the valley.

Lodging: Hotel Gustavia, Chamonix, a legacy since 1890.

Private en suite twin rooms.

<https://www.langleyhotels.eu/en/our-hotels/hotel-gustavia/>

Meals Included: Breakfast and evening meal.



Mont Blanc from Balcon Sud

Day 12, Thursday July 27 To Les Houches: 12 miles, 7 hrs, 2900 ft. ascent; 5800 ft. descent

Our last hiking day we use the cable-car back up to Flégère to continue up to pass Mount Brevent before a long descent back to the village of Les Houches, our starting point and ending point and completion of the TMB.

Lodging: Hotel du Bois. Private en suite twin rooms.

<http://www.hotel-du-bois.com/en/accueil.htm>

Meals included: Breakfast and evening meal



Alpine Meadows

Day 13 Friday July 28 Les Houches: Trip concludes after breakfast

Departure. Van or bus transfer from Les Houches to Geneva, Switzerland Airport. You will be provided time parameters for flight departure, to match our shared group bus/van airport transfer.

Meals Included: Breakfast.

PARTICIPANT PROFILE, GROUP EXPECTATIONS, AND SHARED LODGING

This trip is rated a difficulty of [6: Strenuous](#) hiking which is the most physically demanding. Expect to be active 6+ hours per day for back-to back days. To fully participate in this group experience, you must enjoy strenuous hiking with a lot of elevation gain and loss, as part of a group. Expected group size is 9-11 trekkers plus your AMC Adventure Travel leader and our professional guide. Recent multi-day hiking experience, good physical fitness, and ability to maintain a moderate pace at altitude are important. Our hiking days vary but we have days with elevation gain (and/or loss) over 5,000' and some distances of 15 miles. Although the hotels and refuges supply bedding so there is no need to carry a sleeping bag or sleep sack, still your backpack will weigh between 15-18 pounds including water and lunch.

A good attitude, friendly and cooperative manner, and interest in getting to know – and maybe even help – your fellow group members and leaders are key to a great experience for everyone. Our

lodging includes twin rooms with beds very close to each other, large dormitories with no privacy and co-ed bathrooms. We cannot provide guarantees of a non-snoring room-mate, quiet room, etc, so a sense of humor will help tremendously with your trip experience.

When you participate in this activity, you should be in proper condition for the challenges outlined in this prospectus and equipped with the appropriate gear as stated. You should always be aware of the risks involved and conduct yourself accordingly. You are ultimately responsible for your own safety. Prior to your acceptance as a participant in this trip, you will be asked to discuss your capabilities and experience with us. We also request references to confirm your fitness level and suitability for participating in trip activities. This trip is designed so everyone experiences our adventure of the TMB through shared participation in activities and tasks in an organized group environment. AMC travelers are known for cooperative efforts, and expectations are that all participants will be considerate of others sharing this AMC Adventure Travel experience.

LODGING AND MEALS

As mentioned above, you will be in shared lodging. You will be assigned a room-mate unless you sign up with someone. Your room-mate will be of the same gender, unless you agree to share with someone of the opposite gender. Much of the trip we will have twin rooms, two people per room with separate beds and a private, en suite bathroom with shower. However in Europe, usually the two twin beds are pushed right up against each other so it's quite cozy (sometimes you can pull the beds a bit apart, sometimes you cannot). In dormitories, beds or mattresses are also usually right in a row, no space in between beds, with shared co-ed bathroom/shower facilities a short walk away (sometimes even in a different building). We cannot accommodate special requests such as single room, non-snoring room-mate, etc. Bringing ear plugs is a great idea!

Our meals will vary by location/day and by meal.

Breakfasts: Always included. However please note that European breakfasts provided are much lighter than a typical American breakfast, sometimes a problem because of strenuous hikes. Usually there will be cereal, bread and/or pastries, often cheese, sometimes sliced meat. Rarely eggs or hot food. We suggest you look for what is offered that is more filling and has higher protein (for example, muesli rather than white toast) where there are choices. Carry some filling or high protein snacks for a mid-morning pick-me-up (or carry a large lunch and split it into late morning and mid-afternoon trail meals).

Lunches: We are building in the possibility for some group French picnic lunches depending if the group is so inclined and it works out, however, in general lunches are "on your own" and not provided. You will buy and carry lunches yourself. Most days there are bakeries or markets to shop the night prior. As noted in the prospectus, in some locations you may need to purchase enough for two days when we go into more remote areas. In some locations you can order a trail lunch the evening before (more often in refuges than in hotels).

Snacks: You can buy snacks at local markets most, but not all, days.

Dinners: Dinners are provided/included with the exception of two nights where dinner is not included. This is in locations where it may be fun for the entire group or sub-groups to explore local restaurants outside our lodging, on your own schedule and expense. When dinner is included (listed in the prospectus), usually it is a set menu and is included because there aren't many nearby options this time of year. Please note vegetarians and vegans may find dinners lighter on protein than at home, so carrying a protein bar, nuts, or other high protein snack can be useful to supplement. Also, beverages are not included and so are at an additional charge.

Special diets: We have less control over the menu than in some areas of the world. Vegetarian diet can be accommodated, but carrying some protein bars or snacks is a good supplement some days. Strict vegan diet is difficult to accommodate and protein sources other than grains will be difficult. Gluten free diets also are difficult in this land of breads and grains, but can be requested. Any food

allergies or strict dietary restrictions need to be discussed prior to signing up for this trip, to decide whether they can be reasonably accommodated.

SAFETY AND RISKS

Participant safety is a high priority for all AMC-sponsored events. Participants should be aware that there are risks associated with outdoor adventure activities, including but not limited to adverse weather and environmental conditions, remote locations of our trips, and transportation in vehicles or on foot. Aside from any personal medical problems, participants should be aware of the possibilities of bug bites, dehydration, sunburn and other heat or cold related problems. You should regularly use sunscreen, take care to be adequately hydrated and bring water on all day trips.

Nonetheless, it may happen on any trip that a trip member is or becomes unable to participate in one or more of the planned activities. Leaders in their sole judgment have the right and obligation to refuse participation in any activity to any group member for reasons of group or individual safety. Illness, injury or lack of proper gear or fitness for a particular activity are examples of some conditions that might result in a participant's being unable to perform one or more activity. Leaders may try to find a substitute activity for the trip member, but this may not always be possible. In some locations, public transportation may be available to the group's next destination, but in other locations this may not be possible. Participants may incur costs of transportation and lodging if they need to skip a section or section(s) of trail due to inability to fully participate in the group hike on any day(s).

Prior to your being accepted as a participant in this trip, you will be asked to discuss your capabilities and experience with us. Please do not be offended by our questions.

Please carefully read and sign the AMC Participant Acknowledgement and Assumption of Risks and Release and Indemnity Agreement.

TRIP PRICE

The trip price is \$4,200 for AMC members and \$4,300 for non-members. Non-members can join and get the member price for \$50 for an individual or \$75 for a family, or \$25 for juniors (under 30) and seniors (over 69). You can join on line at the AMC membership page at <https://www.outdoors.org/join/>

Deposit of \$1,000 is due with application. A check payable to the Appalachian Mountain Club should be sent to: Jeanne Blauner, 509 Neck Road, Unit 4, Lancaster, MA 01523. The balance of \$3,200 (\$3,300 for non-members) is due by February 1, 2023.

Price Includes:

- Lodging, all breakfasts and most dinners (all but two)
- Baggage transfer each day with the exception of day 4 (Chapieux) and Day 7 (Refuge Bonatti).
- Ground transfer from Geneva airport to Les Houches and return (only for those arriving/departing within time parameters given by the leaders)
- Cable car fees and bus fare when part of the group itinerary
- Monte Bianco Skyway high speed, two stage tram in Courmayeur
<http://www.montebianco.com/en/> (weather permitting)
- Emergency medical and evacuation insurance coverage

Lunches, trail snacks, beverages (e.g. coffee/tea, mineral water, alcohol, etc.) and other personal expenses are NOT included with the possible exception of a possible french picnic lunch or two or three, group dependent and interest ☺. The best way to get to the area is to fly to Geneva,

Switzerland. At this time, we estimate that the price for a round trip between USA East coast and Geneva, Switzerland will be ~ \$1,200 - \$1,600. While participant airfare is not included in the trip price, leaders may assist participants in making suitable reservations. At a minimum, participants will be told when and where they must join the group for the official start of the trip's planned activities. Once your air tickets are purchased they are your responsibility – do not make any non-refundable travel plans until told to do so by the leaders.

AMC Adventure Travel trips are run on a non-profit basis. Leaders are volunteers who are not compensated except for their travel costs associated with the trip. The advertised trip cost includes a surcharge, which goes toward the administrative expenses of the AMC Adventure Travel program.

The trip fee includes emergency medical and evacuation insurance coverage, which is required by the AMC. It does not include insurance for travel delay, interruption, or cancellation, or for baggage loss. If the possibility of such problems concerns you, individual travel insurance is suggested. More information about included emergency medical and evacuation insurance, as well as about optional and recommended travel insurance, will be provided to participants in their formal acceptance letters, which will be sent out when the trip has the required number of accepted applicants.

APPLICATION PROCESS

We expect a group size of 9-11 trekkers plus your AMC Adventure Travel leader and our professional guide so 11 – 13 total.

1. **Complete our new AT streamlined online application** [Tour de Mont Blanc July 16 - 28, 2023](https://forms.office.com/r/fS3VZE1Jn1) (<https://forms.office.com/r/fS3VZE1Jn1>)
2. **Send this [Hiking and Group Travel Reference](https://forms.gle/PnkaCiSWQKkE64re8) link** (or <https://forms.gle/PnkaCiSWQKkE64re8>) to two references who can vouch for your hiking ability and group compatibility. (You can copy/paste the link into your email to your references.) If you are an active outdoors person with limited hiking references, please reach out to Jeanne for guidance at 978 202-5606.
3. **Mail your \$1000 deposit check**, made out to the **Appalachian Mountain Club** to:
Jeanne Blauner
509 Neck Road Unit 4
Lancaster, MA. 01523

You will not be “officially” accepted until you have completed the three steps above, and the leader has determined by telephone conversation with you, that you and the trip are a good match. Your check will not be deposited until the trip leaders confirm the trip has sufficient number of participants and will be run as scheduled. Deposit checks from wait-listed applicants will not be cashed until we offer them a spot on the trip AND they accept.

Cancellation will not be allowed to raise the cost to the other participants or to the leaders. If you cancel after the trip is declared a go, then the minimum cancellation fee is \$200. If actual costs (expenses already incurred on your behalf, and any unavoidable future expenses that will be incurred as a result of your registration and cancellation) are higher, they will be assessed instead, unless another acceptable participant can be substituted.

Terms, Conditions and General Information

Please carefully read the AMC Adventure Travel Terms, Conditions and General Information listed below which can be found at [Adventure Travel Trip Information](#) under the “Trip Resources” tab:

- Cancellation Policy
- Leaders’ Right to Change Itinerary
- Leaders’ Expectations of Participants
- Trip Price
- Passports and Travel Documents
- Safety
- AMC Activity Rating System

AMC MISSION AMC Adventure Travel trips are run in a manner supportive of and consistent with the conservation, recreational and educational principles and mission of the Club. Trip leaders encourage participant conduct consistent with Leave No Trace environmental and conservation principles and local regulations.

QUESTIONS If you have questions, please contact Jeanne at the phone number or email below.

TRIP LEADER – JEANNE BLAUNER



Jeanne has been leading outdoor adventures for over 40 years for AMC and Sierra Club among other groups. Jeanne is a backcountry leader with the AMC Boston Family Outings leading hiking, camping, canoe, and winter trips. Jeanne is past Chair of AMC Boston Family Outings and former Boston Chapter Membership Chair. She joined AMC Adventure Travel in 2014 and has led AT trips to the Jungfrau region in Switzerland, Machu Picchu, Morocco, New Zealand, and Fiji-Tonga. In addition, Jeanne has led over 30 national & international weeklong Sierra Club trips since 1980 including the Dolomites in Italy, the Dordogne region in France, and the Austrian Alps. Jeanne can be reached at: 978-202-5606; jablauner@comcast.net, 509 Neck Road Unit 4, Lancaster, MA. 01523

GUIDE

Malcolm, our guide, is originally from England, but has lived in France in the Pyrenees over 20 years. Malcolm is a UK Certified Mountain Leader who has been leading groups since 1994 and delights in showing people the areas he loves. Malcolm speaks fluent French and has an insider's knowledge of the best hikes, local flora and fauna, and the area history and customs. Malcolm will join us at the start in Les Houches and stay on with us until the end of the trip, breakfast Day 14 in Les Houches.



Photo Credits: Unless stated otherwise, photos are with permission of our guide, Malcolm.

Partial Gear List (Final gear list will come later)

Required Gear

- broken-in waterproof hiking boots
- at least 2-3 set of hiking socks with liners
- non-cotton shorts (or long pants if you prefer) and shirt for hiking
- day pack, pack cover, and whistle
- waterproof wind and rain gear (tops and bottoms) [you may want to consider a light rain jacket for days with good weather forecasted and a heavier one for days when rain is predicted]
- wool sweater, or synthetic pile/fleece jacket
- long underwear top and bottom
- hat for warmth, and gloves or mittens

- polypropylene, Coolmax, Bergelene or other synthetic extra layer clothing
- sunglasses and sunscreen
- hat or bandanna for sun protection
- Tevas, Crocs or other non-hiking footwear
- headlamp or flashlight with fresh batteries
- unbreakable bottles or hydration bladder (at least 2 liters total capacity)
- waterproof pack liner and/or pack cover
- high-energy trail snacks
- toiletry kit and ear plugs
- sleeping bag liner (a.k.a sleep sack) and camp towel for refuge (blankets are provided)
- microspikes
- personal first aid kit (leaders will have group first aid kit; your personal kit should include **all** your medications and foot care items (eg. moleskin to be prepared for hot spots to prevent blisters)

Optional Gear

- casual clothing
- gaiters
- hiking poles
- knife
- camera
- batteries/recharger/adaptor plug
- swim suit (eg. *Hotel du Bois, Les Houches* has “big indoor heated swimming-pool & sauna”)
- 1/2 litre Thermos flask (for a cup of tea whilst out in the mountains. Terribly British, but perfect for our mid-morning “elevenses” break when people say wistfully “I wish I’d thought of that”)!)