

Trekking the GR5 from Geneva to the Mediterranean

Part I: 12–28 August 2016. Trip #1620

Magnifique! Spectacular trans-alpine
trek through southern France

Near Refuge du Col du Palet

Revision 18 on 5 March 2016



ADVENTURE TRAVEL
VOLUNTEER-LED EXCURSIONS WORLDWIDE

Overview

David May, noted authority on the GR5, describes the trail as “The GR5, also known as a Grand Traverse of the Alps, goes from Lake Geneva to the Mediterranean. The alpine portion of the GR5 long distance European hiking trail is without a doubt one of the most beautiful and personally rewarding multi-day hiking experiences in the world... the sheer beauty of Alpine slopes and pastures, flanked by some snow-covered mountains and glaciers, and punctuated by the charm of flower-filled French villages, served up with good food of French hotels and inns, and the camaraderie of French communal lodgings—refuges and gîtes d’étape, (and a few Italian and Swiss ones)—all this with the variety that comes from changing elevations and diminishing rainfall as you move from the lush and green north to the sparse and brown south and to the sub-tropical Mediterranean.”

Trip in Two Parts Over Two Years

The GR5 is part of the French grand randonnées (GR) network of routes. It actually starts on the North Sea coast at the Hook of Holland and heads southwards through Belgium and France to end in Nice. Our itinerary focuses on the Alpine region of the route which can measure anything from 645–725km (400–450 miles), and depending on how walkers structure their route, in excess of 40,000m (131,235 feet) could be climbed. Within this region, the GR5 sometimes splits, with alternative options such as the GR55, GR5B, GR5C, & GR5D.

It generally takes 6–8 weeks to cross from Lake Geneva to Nice. To manage the hike within the typically available vacation time of two weeks, we plan to section hike the trail over two years for two weeks each: 2016 from Lake Geneva to Modane, and 2017 provisionally from Larch on to the Mediterranean. Between these end points, we will generally stay on the GR5, but take as needed alternates to skip familiar or difficult sections, enhance the scenery, and manage lodging options.

Trip Itinerary

Our trek will follow route sections laid out in the guidebook “[The GR5 Trail](#), The French Alps: Geneva to the Mediterranean” by Paddy Dillon, published by the Cicerone Press. We will start our adventure in the afternoon in the town of Geneva, Switzerland and end 14 days later in Modane, France.

To ease our adjustment to European time we will spend the first evening in Geneva. Aside from the travel days of arrival & departure, we will hike every day with a typical altitude gain of 850m (2,800’) and a distance covered of 15km (9.5 miles). We will be outdoors 8 hours per day of which 6 hours is hiking and the balance for lunch and other breaks.

Daily Schedule

A typical day will have us waking up at 6:30am and on the trail by 8:00am. We may pass other huts along the way and indulge in a slice of tarte d’apricots as a lunchtime snack. We aim to arrive at our destination by 4:30PM each afternoon. Almost all huts & hotels have showers. The meals are hearty French country cuisine. Vegetarian options are limited. All lodges serve beer or wine. Dinner is at 6:30 or 7:00pm. Most people are in bed by 9–10pm.

Lodging

We will spend every night in either hotels or mountain huts. Blankets and pillows will be provided. Participants must bring a sleeping bag liner (a.k.a. sleep sack) to be used instead of sheets. Accommodations are typically in a bunk room with 4 to 12 people of mixed gender.

Mattresses are either side-by-side or in two-level bunk beds. Alternatively, we may sometimes have two persons (same sex) per room sharing two adjacent mattresses in a single bed frame.



Daily Destinations

Day 2: Évian-les-Bains. Short warm-up hike in this resort town

Day 4: La Chapelle d'Abondance

Day 1: arrive Geneva for tour museums & water front

Day 5: Chalets de Trebantaz

Day 3: start in Bernex. Hike to join GR5 to Dent d'Oche

Day 6: Refuge de Chésery

Day 8: bus to Lac de Tignes

Day 7: Samoëns

Day 8: Val d'Isère

Day 12: Refuge du Plan du Lac

Day 9: Bonneval-sur-Arc

Part I in August 2016

Day 10: Bessans

Part II proposed for 2017

Day 13: Refuge de l'Arpont

Day 11: Refuge de Vallonbrun

Day 15: last day of hiking out to Modane

Day 14: Refuge de Plan Sec

Our itinerary

All distance & elevation information are approximate based on representative maps.

The leaders reserve the right to change the itinerary for reasons such as weather, trail conditions, availability of accommodations, group preference, etc.

Day	Destination	Trail Notes	Book Time	Dist [km]	Elev Gain [m]	Elev Loss [m]
Friday 12 August 2016	Leave US on overnight flight to Geneva (GVA) airport					
Saturday 13 August	Arrive Geneva . Check in hostel & meet group	Several museum & walking tour options				
Sunday 14 August	Leave Switzerland to Évian-Les-Bains in France	Train to Évian-Les-Bains. Warm up hike & tour around this resort town	3:00	5.0	250	250
Monday 15 August	Climb to views of Lake Geneva from Dent d'Oche	Taxi to Bernex. Hike to join official GR5. Forested slopes	5:30	11.7	1,359	112
Tuesday 16 August	Ski town La Chapelle d'Abondance .	Forested slopes, grassy fields	6:50	10.5	339	1,506
Wednesday 17 August	Chalets de Trebentaz	Waterfall, rugged path, flowery slope, peaks of Swiss-Franco frontier	3:15	8.0	929	48
Thursday 18 August	Back to Switzerland: Refuge de Chésery	Forested slopes, steep climbs, glaciated Dents Blanches	6:35	14.6	606	497
Friday 19 August	Customs post into France to Samoëns	Winding track downhill, river trail, forest, limestone towers, several villages	6:20	24.9	634	1,953
Saturday 20 August	Transfer by bus to Lac de Tignes (3 hours). Large ski resort at Val d'Isère	High col, zigzag downhill, springs burst from limestone	4:20	8.9	218	481
Sunday 21 August	Bonneval-sur-Arc	Stone steeple, ski piste, steep descent through grassy slope, bridge	4:25	15.2	965	988
Monday 22 August	Bessans	Cattle graze, water cascades, ruins of Le Mollard	5:25	11.4	694	815
Tuesday 23 August	Refuge de Vallonbrun	River, main road, old chapel, steep climb, flowery slope	3:10	8.3	647	44
Wednesday 24 August	Refuge du Plan du Lac	Up grassy track, stone buildings, dairy farms, magnificent views	6:45	19.9	791	701
Thursday 25 August	Refuge de l'Arpont	Views of surrounding mountains, ruins, boulders, more boulders	4:30	14.6	670	728
Friday 26 August	Refuge de Plan Sec	Old farm buildings, rocky ravine, level grassy track, exit Parc de la Vanoise	5:40	17.3	758	741
Saturday 27 August	Modane /Fourneaux	Reservoir, chunky rock, pine, forest track	6:00	17.5	383	1,691
Sunday 28 August	Trip ends after breakfast. Take train to Lyon (LYS) or Geneva (GVA) airport . Depart for US	Plan on afternoon departure.				

Participants

Profile

You should enjoy traveling and be comfortable traveling in areas which are unfamiliar to you. You should recognize that you may find yourself in closer quarters or be less comfortable than you are used to at home. You should make it a priority to help others on the trip and contribute to their having a great time. If you do that, we guarantee that you will have a great time.

This is a strenuous hike geared towards the outdoors adventurer. Since breakfast, dinner and lodging are provided we will be traveling light, with backpacks in the range of twenty-five pounds fully loaded. You should have at least intermediate to advanced hiking skills. While no technical climbing is required, there are areas with narrow trails bordered by steep drop-offs: where appropriate there are steel cables for protection. We may use ladders bolted to the mountainside for short ascents of steep terrain.

How we like to end a great day on the trail



Experience & Risks

Climbing high mountain passes is physically very demanding. Most of our travels will be between 3,400 and 9,800 feet. Although these elevations should not be high enough for properly conditioned people to contract acute mountain sickness (AMS), the combination of physical exertion and slightly lower oxygen levels require that we pace ourselves and pay attention to proper nutrition and hydration.

People wishing to participate in this trip must have previous hiking & backpacking experience, at the intermediate level or higher. Several of the days are long and strenuous. You need to be prepared to commit yourself to keeping in shape between the time you sign up for the trip to the time you depart on it.

When you participate in this activity, you should be prepared both physically and mentally, and equipped with the appropriate gear. You should always be aware of the risks involved and conduct yourself accordingly. We are not responsible for your safety; you are. 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.

The weather is likely to be temperate and sunny, although there is always a possibility of some precipitation. That said, mountain climate is unpredictable and can range from 25 to 75 degrees. Snow can fall in every month of the year.

Cost

The final trip cost will be adjusted in accordance with the best final arrangements we can make and currency fluctuations. Any savings we achieve, as well as any cost increases, will be passed back to you. Our cost estimates are conservative, and so a refund is considerably more likely than a price increase.

Cost is \$2,300 per person shared occupancy for AMC members. Non-members can join for \$50, and get the same price.

Deposit of \$1,000 is due with application. Balance of \$1,300 is due by 1 April 2016.

Includes:

- ✓ Fifteen nights of **lodging**.
- ✓ **Breakfast** and **dinner** for the entire trip, starting with dinner on 13 August through breakfast on 28 August.
- ✓ **Bus & ferry** transport as scheduled part of the itinerary.
- ✓ **Emergency** medical and evacuation insurance coverage.

Does not include:

- **Airfare**. The trip leaders will advise you as much as you need and will facilitate group travel. At this time, we estimate that the cost for a round trip ticket between the US East Coast and Europe will be in the range of \$1,000–\$1,500.
- **Lunches, beverages, & incidental expenses**.
- Local **transport** between arrival airport & beginning of trip.
- Local **transport** between end of trip & departure airport.
- **Insurance** for travel delay, interruption, cancellation, or for baggage loss. If the possibility of such problems concerns you, individual travel insurance is suggested. The AMC has a recommended vendor whose material will be sent to you if your application is accepted.

Registration

We expect a group size of 12 people, including the 2 leaders. This trip is likely to fill quickly. If you are interested, you should apply as soon as possible. When registration is complete, we will send all participants the names, addresses, and phone numbers of all those going on the trip.

To apply, you must complete and submit:

- Application
- Confidential medical form
- Acknowledgement and Assumption of Risk and Release form
- Supplemental Medical Questionnaire (optional)

[Download them directly from our web site.](#)

Mail these forms and a deposit of \$1,000 payable to the Appalachian Mountain Club to Stephen Cohen, 2802 Arbor Drive, Apartment #2, Madison, WI 53711.

You will not be accepted and your check will not be deposited until the leaders have determined by telephone conversation with you that you and the trip are a good match. The final balance of \$1,300 is due 1 April 2016. Deposit checks from wait-listed applicants will not be cashed until a spot is available, the applicant is accepted onto the trip, AND they confirm their continued interest.

Participant cancellation policy

Cancellation will not be allowed to raise the cost to the other participants or to the leaders. The minimum cancellation fee is \$200 once the trip has been declared a go. 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 they can be applied toward another acceptable participant.

Trip cancellation policy

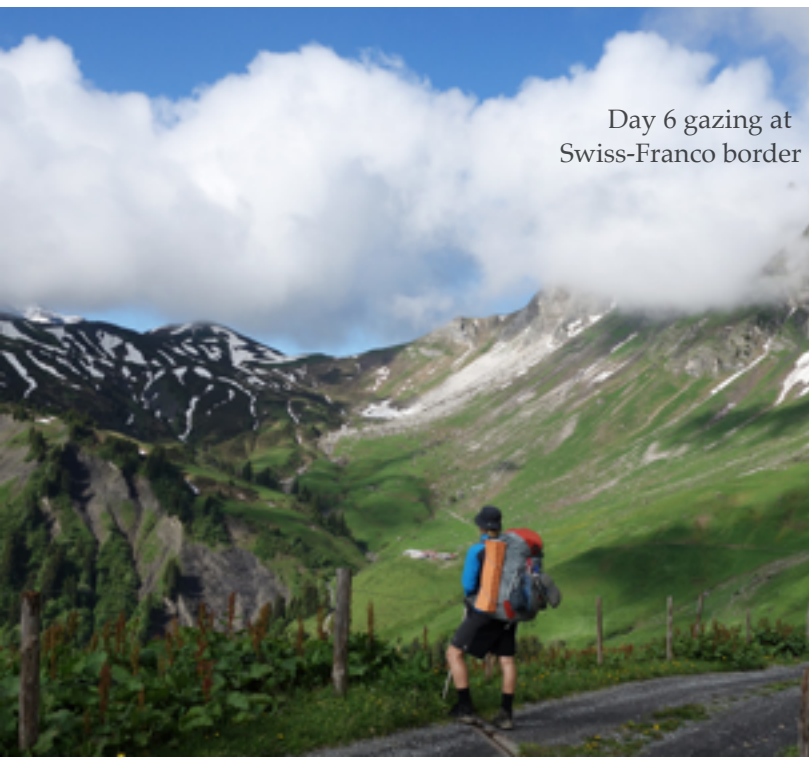
In the unlikely event that the trip is cancelled, everything you have paid to AMC for this trip will be refunded in full.

Participants are responsible for their own airline tickets & other external expenses. Most airlines no longer give refunds for cancellations; instead, they issue coupons for a future trip with an administrative charge and an expiration date. Trip cancellation insurance is advised—policy information will be supplied to all participants.

Disclosure

AMC Adventure Travel trips are run on a nonprofit basis. Leaders are not compensated except for their travel and administrative costs associated with the trip. A program fee is assessed toward AMC Adventure Travel Excursion program and administrative expenses.

Trip itinerary is subject to change depending on weather conditions, rider abilities, road suitability, and leaders' judgement of other circumstances.



Day 6 gazing at
Swiss-Franco border

Leaders



Steve Cohen

Steve leads hikes for the Hiking/Backpacking Committee of the AMC Boston Chapter. He has been a participant on many major excursions in the last ten years including trips to Alaska, the Smoky Mountains, Maroon Bells (near Aspen, CO), Grand Tetons/Yellowstone, Tour du Mont Blanc, Escalante Canyons (Utah), and rock climbing in the Dolomites (Italian Alps). In the last few years he led AMC adventure travel expeditions to the Dolomites, the Jungfrau region of Switzerland, Patagonia, the Austrian Alps, the French Pyrénées, Greece, and the Haute Route (Chamonix to Zermatt) among other destinations. He lived in Germany and Switzerland for four years and has a good command of both the French and German languages. Steve can be reached at 617-997-6861 or scohen1234@gmail.com.



Rami Haddad

Rami has been an AMC leader since 2008. He leads the annual AMC [bicycle trip to the White Mountains](#). He travelled throughout the Alps region on several trips for hiking, bicycle touring, sight seeing, & Ironman Switzerland. He has been on extended trekking & bicycle tours through the Pacific Northwest, Pacific Coast, Rocky Mountains, France, & Germany.

Contact Rami at 425-922-0454 or mdxix@me.com.



Day 4 Col de Bise



Required Packing List

- Passport. Tourist visa not required for US citizens. For other citizens, check with the Swiss & French embassies.
- Broken-in waterproof hiking boots
- At least 2-3 set of hiking socks with liners
- Non-cotton shorts (or long pants) and shirt for hiking
- Backpack (aim for 35 liter)
- Sleeping bag liner (sleep sack)
- Waterproof wind and rain gear (tops and bottoms)
- Wool sweater, or synthetic pile/fleece jacket
- Long underwear top and bottom
- Hat for warmth, & gloves or mittens
- Polypropylene, Coolmax, Bergelene or other synthetic extra layer clothing
- Sunglasses
- Hat or bandanna for sun protection
- Sunscreen
- Sandals to wear in huts, which do NOT permit the wearing of hiking boots outside of the public areas
- 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 (many huts do not supply soap or shampoo)
- Camp towel (many, but not all huts supply towels)
- Ear plugs
- Personal first aid kit (leaders will have a group first aid kit)

Optional Packing List

The following is a long list of optional items to bring. Use it as a reminder of additional items that can make your trip and rides more comfortable.

- Casual clothing for use in a hut
- Gaiters (for rain)
- Hiking poles
- Whistle
- Knife
- Camera
- Batteries/recharger/adaptor plug
- Pillowcase

SOS Six

The standard Alpine distress signal is six whistles, six calls, six light flashes, six piles of rocks, six smoke puffs—that is six of whatever sign or sound you can make—repeated with one minute pause between them.

In **Switzerland** call mountain safety and rescue at 112 for general assistance, 144 for ambulance and 1414 for helicopter rescue.

In **France**, 112 is the universal emergency number.



Electricity

The electricity current is 220V, 50Hz.

Switzerland

Swiss sockets are recessed, three holed, hexagonally shaped. They are incompatible with US & European plugs.

Look carefully when you buy an [international adapter package](#) to make sure it includes this shape.



Adapters with two prongs will work. However, unless the housing has the hexagonal shape, it will not fit inside the socket.

France

French sockets are similar to the ones in Switzerland, except that the casing is round rather than hexagonal. They are not compatible with each other.

The French adapters are common in most kits that are available in the market.

