

## Trail Verbier St Bernard



Held last weekend on the 9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> July in the Swiss Alps, this was a well organised event with 3 different distances – the X-Alpine 100km full route from Verbier to Verbier which includes some very steep climbs and exposed high ridges, and total ascent of 8,400m. The Traversee 64km route from La Fouly to Verbier over 3 major cols and a total ascent of 4,500m, and then a much smaller route of 30km and 2500m of ascent for both walkers and runners from Liddes to Verbier.

I did the Traversee and would recommend it as a good warm up for anyone doing the UTMB as it certainly gives you the climbing and the altitude (highest col 2715m). Both the X-Alpine and the Traversee carry points for the UTMB (X-Alpine 4, Traversee 2).

The day was really hot, top temps of +30C with very little breeze so very humid, with lots of snow still lying on the first Col de Fenetre – tricky in trail shoes so best method of descent was on the arse! They had put safety ropes up on the descent from the second col as its very steep with snow and rock falls. I stupidly got very dehydrated going up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> col, the Col de Mille, as it's a long south facing ascent in the full sun and I hadn't fully recharged at the feed station in Bourg St Pierre. So that meant a long 30min stop at the col feed station to recover and rehydrate, and shovel in salt and painkillers to try and stop acute cramping. Once recovered the long descent down in to the Bagnes valley and the village of Liddes was very tiring on the legs and knees but I managed to run most of it and overtake a few people! The training descents down Cheviot paid off!

A 10 minute stop at the checkpoint, again to drink coke and eat salt and hoola hoops, before the long, dreaded, hideous final climb up the never ending steep 1200m ascent to La Chaux, above Verbier. This was by now basically a line of broken bodies crawling up the mountain – after 2 interminable hours of constant uphill struggle I reached the final checkpoint at 9.45pm just as darkness fell. Again, a brief 10 minute stop for coke and more hoola hoops and I ran out of the checkpoint with headtorch on for the final descent through the forest and into Verbier. This section was actually enjoyable as its all downhill and the forest in the pitch dark lit up with fluorescent markers was great, also the temperature was bearable by now. My legs managed a final sprint down the street into the finish. I finished at 11pm in 13 hours, 229<sup>th</sup> out of 1000 starters and very chuffed to be 4<sup>th</sup> v50 amongst all those Swiss mountain girls! Am on a long rest now!



I'd really recommend this Traversee route for anyone contemplating an Alpine ultra – relatively small entry, very well organised, well marked non-technical course and fabulous scenery. No, am not planning on doing it again!

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