

MADE TO EXPLORE

THE PASS ROAD

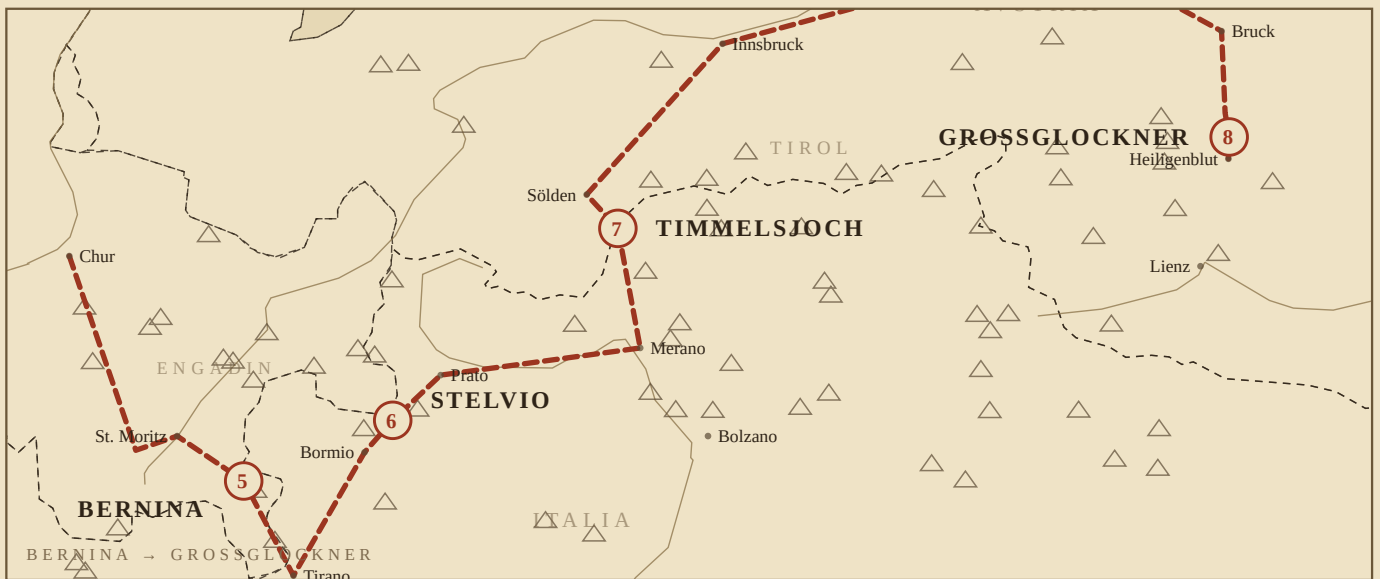
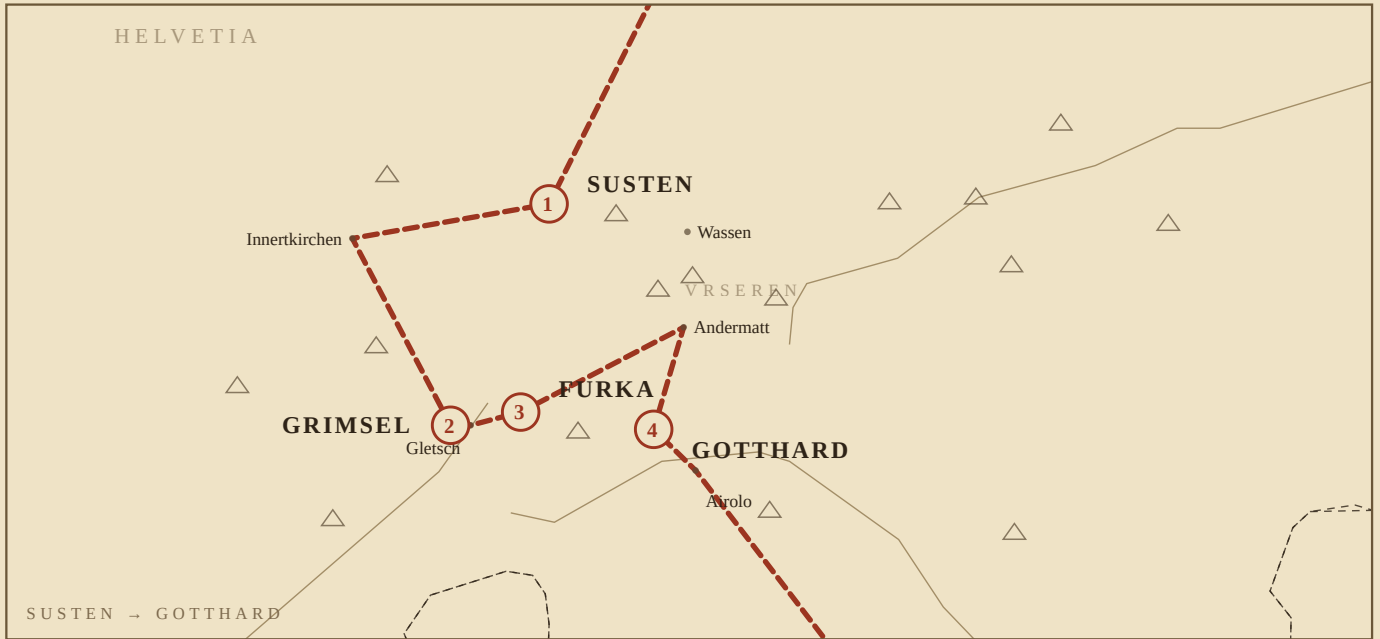
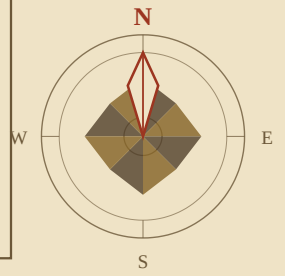
*Eight passes from the Susten to the
Grossglockner, roads built where there should be none*
8 stops · 900 km · by campervan

LEGEND

- the driving route
- rivers
- stage pass
- tributaries

SCALE — KILOMETRES

0 25 50 75



*Between the Gotthard and the Bernina the route drops to Bellinzona and climbs back over the
San Bernardino and the Julier — two passes without a number, but with 2,000 metres.*

1

SUSTEN

2,224 m — the road built so people would not stand idle

THE PASS

The Susten is the newest of the great passes and the only one built for no reason. Switzerland raised it between 1938 and 1945, in the middle of the war, as a job-creation scheme: it connected nothing that was not already connected. That is also why it is the best drawn — the engineers had time. At the top, the Stein glacier comes down almost to the road.

THE CAMPER

Wide road, open bends, stone parapets. It is the pass to start with precisely because it asks nothing special of a camper. Open from late June to October. For the night: Camping Gadmen, right on the pass road, on the Innertkirchen side.

FREE

The Stein glacier is seen from the car park below the summit, and the path to its tongue is an hour there and back. The whole road is a viewpoint; there is no ticket anywhere.

WHERE TO SLEEP

Campsite · Camping Gadmen, Sustenstrasse, Gadmen · GPS 46.73811, 8.36228

Susten → Innertkirchen → Grimsel, 45 km · ~1 h by camper. You drop into the Aare valley and climb straight back up the other side.

2

GRIMSEL

2,164 m — the pass that makes electricity

THE PASS

The Grimsel is a hydroelectric site that happens to have a road. The Räterichsboden and Grimselsee reservoirs, with their dams from the 1930s and 1950s, have turned the pass into a staircase of water. The road climbs between them over glacier-polished granite, through a landscape unlike anything else in the Alps — lunar rather than alpine.

THE CAMPER

Good road, with short tunnels and avalanche galleries. Parking at the Grimsel Hospiz, on the dam. The descent to Gletsch is steep with hairpins — second gear, engine braking. For the night: Camping Grund, at Innertkirchen, at the foot of the pass.

FREE

The dams are walked across on foot. From the Hospiz you see the lake below and the lake above at once. And at Gletsch, at the bottom, you see where the Rhône glacier started and where it has got to — a century of retreat in a single view.

WHERE TO SLEEP

Campsite · Camping Grund, Urbachstrasse, Innertkirchen · GPS 46.70191, 8.22593

Grimsel → Gletsch → Furka, 15 km. At Gletsch you turn left and climb again immediately.

3

FURKA

2,429 m — the highest and the emptiest

THE PASS

The Furka was built in 1866 for the post and the army, and it has stayed the wildest of the four. At the top, at Belvedere, the closed hotel and the ice grotto are all that remains of a Rhône glacier that a century ago reached the road. Today you see it far above, under a white blanket laid in summer to slow the melt. It is the clearest place in the Alps to see what is happening to the ice.

THE CAMPER

The narrowest of the four passes, with stretches without parapet and postbuses that have priority. A 7-metre camper gets through, but not fast and not on a weekend at midday. Open from June to October. For the night: Gotthard Camping, at Andermatt, at the end of the descent.

FREE

The view of the glacier from Belvedere is free; the ice grotto has a ticket. On the eastern side, towards Realp, the Furka steam railway runs beside the road in summer — seen for nothing, ridden for money.

WHERE TO SLEEP

Campsite · Gotthard Camping, Gotthardstrasse 110, Andermatt · GPS 46.63151, 8.59125

Furka → Realp → Andermatt → Gotthard, 35 km · ~45 min by camper. Andermatt is the crossroads: four passes leave from here.

4

GOTTHARD

2,106 m — the pass that made Switzerland

THE PASS

The Gotthard is the reason Switzerland exists as a state: whoever controlled the pass controlled trade between Germany and Italy, and the cantons at its foot united in 1291 precisely to guard it. The present road dates from 1830, the Tremola — the old cobbled road with 24 hairpins on the southern side — is still there, and beneath everything run the rail tunnel of 1882 and the road tunnel of 1980. Three ages, one mountain.

THE CAMPER

The new road is wide and trouble-free. The Tremola, the cobbled one, is open and can be driven in a camper, but with care: setts, tight hairpins and nowhere to pass. For anyone who wants it, downhill towards Airolo is the right direction.

FREE

The Tremola is driven for free and is the best old road in the Alps. At the summit, the lakes and the wartime fortifications are walked round freely; the museum in the old hospice has a ticket.

Gotthard → Airolo → Bellinzona → San Bernardino → Chur → Julier → St. Moritz, about 280 km · ~5 h by camper. Not a stage, a day's driving over two passes without a number.

5

BERNINA

2,328 m — the pass with a train

THE PASS

The Bernina is the one pass on the route where the train is more famous than the road: the Bernina Express, a UNESCO site, climbs to 2,253 m without a rack, the highest adhesion railway in Europe. The road runs beside the rails. At the top, Lago Bianco, milky with glacier water, and opposite it the Morteratsch glacier, retreating by tens of metres a year.

THE CAMPER

Wide road, open all year, the only one on the route. No trouble for a camper. From St. Moritz it is 30 minutes to the summit. For the night: Campingplatz Morteratsch, at Pontresina, on the way up to the pass.

FREE

Lago Bianco and the glacier are seen from the road. The path to the Morteratsch from the station of the same name is flat and free, with markers showing where the ice stood in each decade.

WHERE TO SLEEP

Campsite · Campingplatz Morteratsch, Pontresina · GPS 46.46095, 9.93445

Bernina → Tirano → Bormio → Stelvio, about 90 km · ~2 h by camper. You drop into Italy, pass Tirano, and climb again into the Valtellina.

6

STELVIO

2,757 m — forty-eight hairpins

THE PASS

The Stelvio is the highest road pass in Italy and was built between 1820 and 1825 by the Habsburg Empire to link Lombardy to Tyrol without passing through Switzerland. The side from Prato has forty-eight numbered hairpins, one below the other, on a thousand-metre wall. It is the road that appears in every list of the world's finest, and the first that earns the place.

THE CAMPER

The hairpins from Prato are tight and narrow, and a 7-metre camper needs the whole road at every bend. It is done, but with patience and with the horn before blind corners. From Bormio it is wider. Open from late May to October. For the night: Camping Kiefernain, at Prato allo Stelvio, at the foot of the hairpins.

FREE

All forty-eight hairpins are seen at once from the summit, from the terrace on the Prato side — that is the picture you came for. It costs nothing. The summit is a camp of stalls; walk past them.

WHERE TO SLEEP

Campsite · Camping Kiefernain, Prato allo Stelvio · GPS 46.62463, 10.59191

Stelvio → Prato → Merano → Timmelsjoch, about 110 km · ~2½ h by camper. You drop to 300 metres and climb back to 2,500.

7

TIMMELSJOCH

2,509 m — the road that stitched Tyrol back together

THE PASS

In 1919 the new border between Austria and Italy cut Tyrol in two. The Timmelsjoch was built between 1955 and 1968 to join it back up, over the mountain, between the Ötztal and the Passeier. It is a toll road and it is designed as a museum: five concrete structures, as bold as the road itself, stand at the viewpoints and tell the story of the pass.

THE CAMPER

Toll road, with a limit on trailers and caravans — campers are admitted, but check the maximum length at the tollbooth. Open from June to October, closed at night. The Italian side is narrower. For the night: Camping Sölden, in the Ötztal, on the Austrian side.

FREE

The five viewpoint stations are included in the toll and are everything there is to see. At the summit there is a small museum in the concrete rock, likewise included.

WHERE TO SLEEP

Campsite · Camping Sölden, Wohlfahrtstraße 22, Sölden · GPS 46.95754, 11.01196

Timmelsjoch → Sölden → Innsbruck → Kitzbühel → Bruck, about 260 km · ~4½ h by camper. The longest stage, down the valleys, to reach the last pass from the north.

8

GROSSGLOCKNER

2,504 m — the first road built only to be looked at

THE PASS

The Grossglockner High Alpine Road was built between 1930 and 1935, in the depth of the Depression, by three thousand workers, and was the first alpine road raised with a declared tourist purpose: it connected nothing, it was the destination. It passes 2,504 m at the Hochtor, through a short tunnel, and ends at the Kaiser-Franz-Josefs-Höhe, facing the Pasterze glacier and the highest mountain in Austria.

THE CAMPER

Toll road, wide, designed for coaches — the easiest pass on the route for a camper, and the most expensive. The toll is per vehicle, per day. Open from early May to early November, between the posted hours. For the night: Nationalpark Camping Großglockner, at Heiligenblut, at the southern end of the road.

FREE

Everything on the road is included in the toll: the viewpoints, the exhibitions, the Pasterze. From the Franz-Josefs-Höhe a path goes down to the glacier on foot, and the marmots sit beside the car park and ask for nothing.

WHERE TO SLEEP

Campsite · Nationalpark Camping Großglockner, Heiligenblut · GPS 47.03697, 12.83907

End of the route, at Heiligenblut. Salzburg is 150 km away, Villach 100, and Venice 300 to the south.

THE ROUTE IN BRIEF

Distance	~900 km
Driving time	~16 h in all, without stops
Recommended time	10–14 days
Numbered passes	8
Passes in all	11
Highest point	Stelvio, 2,757 m
Direction	west → east
Best months	Jul–Sep

GOOD TO KNOW BEFORE YOU LEAVE

The high passes open between late May and late June and close in October, depending on snow; the Timmelsjoch is also closed at night.

Switzerland requires a vignette on motorways, not on the passes; Austria has a vignette, and in Italy motorways are paid at the toll booth.

WHEN TO GO

Ideal: July–September. All the passes are open, the snow has left the road and the nights are bearable at 2,000 metres.

The window: the high passes open between late May and late June and close in October, depending on snow. The Grossglockner and Timmelsjoch have fixed dates; the others are announced day by day.

Avoid: July and August weekends on the Stelvio and the Furka — the motorbikes come in their thousands and a camper in the hairpins is their obstacle.

Winter: the route does not exist. Only the Bernina stays open. The rest lie under snow from November to June.

TOLLS AND VIGNETTES

Switzerland: a vignette, compulsory on motorways, not on passes. You pay it anyway, because you reach Andermatt by motorway.

Italy: no vignette; motorways are paid at the barrier. The Stelvio is free.

Austria: a vignette for motorways. The Timmelsjoch and the Grossglockner are private toll roads with their own charge, paid at the booth, per vehicle — for a camper under 3.5 t the rate is the car or motorhome rate, depending on the road. Check the table beforehand.

All three alpine tolls are paid separately from the vignettes and none replaces another.

WHERE YOU SLEEP

There are campsites in every valley at the foot of the passes: Innertkirchen, Andermatt, Airolo, St. Moritz, Bormio, Prato, Sölden, Heiligenblut. Up on the passes you do not sleep — it is forbidden or impossible, and cold in any case.

Switzerland tolerates a night in a camper in car parks outside villages where it is not expressly banned; cantons differ. Italy and Austria are stricter in mountain areas. On this route there is no point: the campsite is down, an hour from every pass.

A night at 1,500 metres is cold even in August. Heating on, water drained if frost is forecast.

Booking only in August at St. Moritz and Heiligenblut. Elsewhere you find a place.

THE CAMPER AT 2,500 METRES

The brakes Descents of 1,500 metres are done in second gear, on the engine, not the pedal. An overheated brake stops braking. Pull over halfway if you smell heat.

Length A 7-metre camper gets over all eight passes. Above 7.5 m, the Furka and the Prato hairpins on the Stelvio become a real problem. Trailers are banned on the Timmelsjoch.

Fuel Fill up at the bottom, in the valley. There is no filling station at the top, and consumption doubles on the climb.

Weather Passes close temporarily for snow, and it snows in July too. Check the road status on the morning you leave, not the evening before. A closed pass means a day's detour.

Gas and altitude Gas bottles work normally at 2,500 m. The stove boils water more slowly, that is all.

Will a 7-metre camper get over all eight passes?

Yes. Above 7.5 m, the Furka and the Prato hairpins on the Stelvio become a real problem. Trailers are banned on the Timmelsjoch.

When do the Alpine passes open?

The high passes open between late May and late June and close in October, depending on snow. The Grossglockner and Timmelsjoch have fixed dates; the others are announced day by day.

What tolls are there on the route?

The Swiss vignette, the Austrian motorway vignette, plus separate charges for the Timmelsjoch and the Grossglockner, which are private roads. The Stelvio is free.

How do you descend a pass safely in a camper?

In second gear, on the engine brake, not the pedal. An overheated brake stops braking; pull over halfway down if you smell heat.

THE RULE OF THE ROAD

*“None of these roads was built to be beautiful.
They were built from fear, from hunger, from pride, or to keep men busy.
That they are beautiful is an accident, and it is the one thing you do not pay for.”*

Documentary check: September 2026. Places, hours and conditions change — check them before you leave.