

Executive Summary

I think it would be safe to say that the trip went well. We had a good time, the kids were cultured, and everybody was returned safe and sound. A multitude of new experiences for everyone. The real thanks go to my mother and father who introduced me to this hike many moons ago, and to Cheryl for letting me bring the Venturers on our family holiday.

High level schedule

Outbound flight (June 27)	1 day
Paris	3 days
Train from Paris to Chamonix	$\frac{3}{4}$ day
Chamonix	1 $\frac{1}{4}$ days
Hiking	4 days
Courmayeur	1 day
Hiking	5 $\frac{1}{2}$ days
Chamonix	1 $\frac{1}{2}$ days
Return flight (July 15)	1 day

Outbound Flight (Wednesday June 27)

The flight was OK. The departure was a bit late from Allan's house; Sam was the last to show up :) Aidan's mother didn't want to let Aidan go at the airport :) We were early for the flight, so we had drinks before going through security in Ottawa. We showed Calvin what an aeroplane looked like :); it was his first time flying. The tickets said no meal on the Atlantic hop, and the travel agent confirmed this with the airline, and with an 8:00pm departure from Montreal it made sense. So we had dinner at the airport in Montreal. Low and behold, as soon as the plane departed, we were fed dinner! Graval was taken, at the suggestion of Sam's mother, by most of the kids, to help them sleep. However, with all the movies available, nobody got a good night's sleep. The plane arrived in Paris, at Charles de Gaulle airport, about half an hour late, at 9:00am in the morning. The red & white ribbons on the luggage made for easy retrieval from the baggage claim conveyor. No issues going through customs and immigration.

Paris (Thursday June 28)

We bought Paris Visite tickets (unlimited RER train and Métro (subway) travel for three days) and had our train tickets (Paris -> Chamonix) printed. We left the airport on the RER at 11:10am, so there was no time for the catacombs today. We traveled to the train station for the hotel, Massy-Verrières. It turned out to be about a 20 minute walk, mostly up hill, to the hotel. Stew was not impressed as his suitcase did not have wheels. The hotel was quite new and nice, in what appeared to be an immigrant area. I asked the hotel about safety at night, and they said it was perfectly safe to walk from the train station to the hotel as long as we kept to the main roads and out of alleys. Only a couple of rooms were ready, so we placed our luggage in them and everybody got changed into fresh clothes. Walked back to the train station and back into Paris.

We had our first Parisian meal, lunch, at a small café (Le Cercle Luxembourg). Allan asked what the specialty of the day was, and ordered that. The rest, one after the other, ordered "même chose" (the same). After the waiter left, there was a furious outbreak of "what did I order????". Nobody, not even Allan, knew what they were getting. It turned out to be some raw/semi-raw salmon/fish. It was actually really good! Diving right into culture...

After lunch we had a very good walking tour around the Latin Quarter with André, where we met Prisca, one of the Parisian Scouts. During the walking tour, we had some excellent sorbets, and were burdened with some rude, stereotypical Americans who claimed not to see the guide when he was standing on a post, wearing a red shirt with the name of the tour company on it, and holding a handful of pamphlets. They were also know-it-alls; going on about this is where "Simon says" comes from??? Saw a bridge with padlocks, each representing a couple's love (use a combination lock if you are not too sure), the Notre Dame Cathedral, and the brass marker from which all points in Paris are measured. The tour ended in a park at a double sided fountain (with people just sitting on chairs around the pond reading), where we thought we had been told it was the only place in Paris you could walk on the grass. So we sat down, and were promptly kicked off by an angry gendarme!

The kids purchased their first set of postcards and stamps. It was a very hot and humid day, so we went for drinks at a café (Le Gay Lussac). The RER trains worked very nicely. Stew returned to the hotel first, exhausted, but the rest of us stayed around for desserts and more drinks. There was a really crazy man(?) with breasts and a bra, frolicking around next to the café :) We got back to the hotel at around 10-11pm. We didn't know it yet, but this would be our earliest night.

Paris (Friday June 29)

Patrick, one of the French Scout leaders, met us at the hotel at 8:00am. Of course, we didn't leave until 8:45, due to some sleeping in, and some constant forgetting of stuff in our rooms that we had to go get. We also had to finish writing the postcards (many of the kids had never written a postcard, let alone licked a stamp, or posted a letter!). Patrick was very young. In fact, some (read: all) of us thought at first that he was one of the Venturers!

We took a train/Métro to the Catacombs, and while Patrick preserved our place in line, we went to have breakfast in a café (Café Daguerre), at 9:15am. It was an awesome meal: freshly squeezed orange juice, coffee, and melt in your mouth croissants. We learnt that coffee with milk is actually "café-crème". We got back to the line, just in time for the opening; bringing Patrick a coffee and croissant. The line was now stretching around the block. The Catacombs were really neat. There were really billions of bones, and we got to pick up skulls and exclaim "To be or not to be" (Hamlet according to Laura). Nick said he had always wanted to do that :) We found a sign later that said we weren't supposed to touch the bones :(We each had an audio guide, which was nice, but we missed a few of the signs to trigger some of the recordings, and forgot to bring our earphones with us (easier than holding it to your ear).

Then we retook the RER to Versailles. Almost got out at the wrong stop; Viroflay Rive Gauche versus Versailles Rive Gauche! A lot of jumping in and out of the train :) At Versailles, in an open market that was very close to closing time, Laure, another of the Parisian scout leaders, helped us make our own picnic lunch (although it took two hours!). We got baguettes, Rockfort & another cheese, ham, tomatoes, pastries, butter, strawberries, small quiches, cherry tomatoes and cherries, everything we needed for a true Parisian picnic. I was impressed the kids went for strong cheeses after tasting them. Patrick found a tray of mushrooms at an empty stall; it turns out there are often discards from the stalls, and people regularly pick through them for food. We found a patch of grass in the Versailles gardens (one that we were actually allowed to sit on) and took another two hours for our very enjoyable picnic lunch. After the picnic, we walked through the gardens. Seeing as we didn't have enough time to bicycle around, we decided to walk through the palace as there was no entry line. It was very amazing but very overpowering, with room after room decorated exquisitely. It also included some weird things like a helicopter covered in feathers and a huge pair of women's high heel shoes.

We took the train to Massy-Palaiseau and walked to Laure's parents' house for a BBQ. Grégoire, Axelle, & Romane (Venturers) and Caroline Calés & Marin Potard (leaders) joined us. Grégoire was stereotypical French (striped shirt, cardigan, manners). Marin was a brother of Louis Potard; the fellow I met in the Washington airport last year that started this all off. It turns out there are something like 5-7 kids in his family, all moving up through Scouting. The food (sausages in baguettes) was very good, including the mushrooms that Patrick had found at the market. The presents were well received; we gave them a bottle of ice wine, maple syrup, maple sugar candies, and some Merrickville crests. They gave us a necker and some badges in return. They taught us French kissing (no not that kind!); a kiss to each cheek in greeting. Patrick and Sam played the piano; I have to say Patrick was really good. We played a stepping game: Start with a circle of people, legs apart, with your right foot crossed over and touching your neighbours left foot. One person starts, moving one of their feet to touch one of the feet of the person beside you. That person then needs to move that foot and touch the next person's foot. Eventually it looks like Twister. Falling over means you are out. Fun game! They hadn't thought of how to get us back to the hotel, but they borrowed some cars and drove us (really short journey). As a police car passed in front us, Patrick was heard to utter 'Les flicks!'. We got back around midnight; getting later...

Paris (Saturday June 30)

Sam jumped out of bed and into a wall on the way to the shower. As Lochlan phrased it, there was acceleration, followed by a sudden deceleration :) Patrick met us at the hotel again, and we took the RER to the Eiffel Tower. The lines were too long (four hours), so we went to have breakfast at a café (Café Du Trocadero). We walked to the Arc de Triomphe and got tickets to climb up. Patrick refused to pay the full price and spent ten minutes pretending we were all European and then pretending we were all one family. He just doesn't take no for an answer :) The ticket seller wanted identification that we were the same family and the kids heard this and kept trying to offer up their passports, and Patrick kept shushing them away as they wouldn't back up his story :) We eventually got a group rate. There were beautiful views, and there were some crazy bicyclists in the roundabout. There were lots of chimneys and some roof gardens. Great architecture; we saw La Defense (huge square marking the business district). We walked down the Champs Élysées and into a Luis Vuiton, a Mercedes-Benz showroom, and an electric car store. We then walked through the Jardin des Tuileries and got food for lunch (Rivoli Café) - at 3:00pm. The food was fast, and excellent! Patrick left (he had dinner with his parents scheduled before going off to military school the next day), and we were joined by Caroline.

The tour of the Louvre was interesting (much better than going by ourselves), but our guide went into too much detail. It would have been better to see more things and go less deeply into symbolism. Even I got bored on some of the items, and the kids lost interest about half way through each item. Should have been more items but less depth. The tour company staff member, who worked the tail of the group to keep everybody together did an amazing job. Her comment to me "How do you keep track of all those lads?"; the lads said to me "We have our own personal minder" :) She kept rounding them up when they wandered off and the guide moved on to the next room. The Mona Lisa, however, was not impressive; very small. Lots of sculptures, paintings, statues, and a cool Egyptian burial chamber. We went to a café (Café de la Comedie) for supper, and learnt that lemonade, in France, means Sprite. So to get lemonade, you have to ask for "citron pressé". We found this out when a couple of the lads were served "citron pressé", and it came as raw lemon juice, water, and sugar. They thought the lemon juice was lemonade, and gulped it straight! The look on their faces :)

We then rushed to the Eiffel Tower for the bike tour (we were running late). Half the group took a taxi, half speed walked (we couldn't find another taxi). We got there just in time. The people who speed walked saw some riot police in full gear, corralling a group of demonstrators (no idea what they were complaining about). The people who took the taxi got to see Sam trip over a small railing and land flat on his face in front of a group of French girls, who all laughed at him; he was trying to show off by jumping it :) Aidan did a perfect landing, but then thought the girls were laughing at him! The bike tour was great fun. The bicycles used were different than what we were used to; they were commuting bikes, similar to those used in Amsterdam. The kids cheered when they were told there was going to be very little knowledge being imparted (compared to the day bike tour). They had an amazing time bicycling through the streets, in the dark, with no helmets! There were rap dancers(?) and a guitar player on the bridge where we stopped for ice cream (again! The tour company must get a great kick back); The Seine cruise was good; especially seeing all the Parisians having wine & cheese on the banks. Lots of alcohol, but nobody causing any trouble; different attitude altogether. Saw the Eiffel tower light up and sparkling on the way back (only does it for five minutes every hour). I expected a four hour tour starting at 7:00pm to end at 11:00pm, but it was 12:15am when we got back to the bike office. We used the Métro and RER to get back to the hotel for 1:45am. We were on the last train, and as we were walking out of the station, a gate started coming down on us, and we had to sprint and duck under it. We learned later that had we gotten stuck, we would have had to find a fence to jump as there is no button to open the gate from the inside. Every night, later and later...

Naturally we had more planned for Paris than we had time for. That in itself was not a problem. Commuting between the hotel and Paris, and within Paris itself, took a lot more time than I had envisioned. Even eating took more time than I would have thought; the French don't rush their meals, you can buy a cup of coffee and sit at a table all day. This meant for late nights returning to the hotel and for some rushing during the day. The days started off relaxing, and ended relaxed, but the bit in between was sometimes a bit much. Not getting up the Eiffel tower was unfortunate, but I knew that would most likely be the case going into the trip from the available information (broken elevator until September). Everything else worked out not too badly; I believe we accomplished enough of the goals. All our tours in Paris were organised through Fat Bike Tours; highly recommended. They employ mostly (nice) Americans right out of college. Pretty much everybody we saw in Paris was in very good shape, though there were a lot of smokers. Quite a lot of dogs both inside and out, but no mess on the sidewalks to speak of.

Chamonix (Sunday July 1)

We left the hotel in Paris at 8:00am and took two taxis to the train station (Gare de Lyon) where we had breakfast at a café in the station and met Patrick who was on his way to a military school. I taught the kids how train tickets had to be punched before use. The TGV was nice and quiet but it soon started pouring with rain. The train change at Lausanne went smoothly and we started hearing German once we were in Switzerland. We also met a couple whose wife taught French at Glendon Campus in Toronto and thus knew the Toronto French School (my high school next door). She didn't like French immersion because it didn't teach proper grammar rules, and she had to wind her students backwards and teach them correctly. The Mont Blanc Express offered amazing views of the mountains through from Martigny through to the Swiss/France border. At the border we had to switch to a coach due to train tunnel work. When we got to Chamonix we put the luggage and Stew in a taxi to the hotel and the rest of us walked (it was still raining). Cheryl was already at the hotel, having arrived through Geneva. The Alpy Bus shared transfer from Geneva to Chamonix worked great. The hotel, Hotel les Crêtes Blanches, was really nice, including a two person elevator! The chalet for the lads was sweet! The remainder of the afternoon was spent browsing around Chamonix and shopping. Cheryl purchased sneakers, Aidan a tee shirt, Laura a toque, Lochlan a jacket, and Nick a pair of hiking pants (woman's!). Several of the lads bought knives, as did Heather, and hers was the largest! We met at 7:30pm for supper at Le Bivouac. This is a small restaurant that served mostly local Savoie dishes, and the quality of the food and service was outstanding. They appeared surprised that a group of ten would walk in off the street; they were asking who referred us. After supper the lads watched a soccer game on TV and played cards.

Chamonix (Monday July 2)

Still raining and cloudy on the Monday in the morning, so Cheryl & I let everyone sleep in until 9:00am. We went for breakfast by ourselves at Hôtel le Chamonix (for old times' sake; where we last stayed), and brought back hot chocolate and croissants for the kids. After breakfast Stew went off by himself, bought a knife, and found an internet café to check his email. The first wash & fold laundry was closed, but the second one (Cham'Laverie) was good. Four baskets of clothes were dropped off. Given that the Aiguille du Midi couldn't be done due to the cloud, we considered canyoneering, hydrospeed, and rafting, but settled on indoor climbing in Les Houches. Took a bus to Les Houches (Bellevue) to go to Mont Blanc Escalade. Had an ice cream in Chamonix while waiting for the bus. Walked downhill to the climbing building. Really nice place, with some absolutely impossible overhangs (that some women were doing!). Nick was the only one who tried the hardest route, and he only made it about 10' up the 60' route. All the kids climbed except for Laura. Nick taught Heather, Lochlan, and Aidan how to lead climb. Great service; the lady in charge even lent Nick her personal chalk bag. Cheryl and Laura returned early to Chamonix to pick up the laundry. We left at 6:30pm, and caught the bus just in time to be ready for dinner in Chamonix at 7:30pm. Tonight supper was at Restaurant La Calèche; a little more upscale with a cool animatronic polar bear inside the entrance.

Hike Day 1 (Les Houches to Les Contamines, Tuesday July 3)

We left the hotel at 6:45am and arrived in les Houches at 7:00am. We were short a few stamps, and the tabac did not have international stamps, so we bought 2 x Europe for each card and crossed our fingers. We then went to a pâtisserie for breakfast where they had no coffee. The lady said the coffee places are all run by teenagers, and thus don't open early :) At 8:00am we took the cable car up to Bellevue. Unfortunately it was very foggy, but at least there was no rain. We departed Bellevue at 8:20am. The suspension bridge over the glacier torrent was cool, especially when the kids jumped up and down to make it resonate! This bridge has been replaced several times over the years, but my mother tells of crossing it on her hands and knees :) We saw our first bouquetin (ibex) at the top of Col de Tricot, as well as a stone arch and a cross. We arrived at Refuge du Miage between 12:00pm and 12:40pm. The kids played in a glacier stream, paddling, making dams, etc; this was on their list of things to do in the alps. For lunch we had local dishes (Fondue Savoyard, Savoyard plate, omelet etc.) with syrop à l'eau. Dessert was blueberry & raspberry tart and coffee. There were pickup lines on the sugar cubes: "Is it not déjà vu?", "Rendez-vous à _____" :) We departed at 2:45pm and arrived at Les Contamines at 5:30pm. We had half the building to ourselves in the basement. We had drinks on the patio and Cheryl fell asleep. Supper was delicious. We had salad, baked salmon with spinach, cheese, and cake. There was a Swedish couple (physiotherapist) and an English man at the table. The Swedish blonde sat down next to Allan :) The kids went off to see when the shops opened in the morning for clothes shopping and groceries (the grocery store opened at 8:00am and the sports store at 9:00am).

Hike Day 2 (Les Contamines to Refuge du Col de la Croix du Bonhomme, Wednesday July 4)

We had breakfast at 7:00am and Cheryl and Stew left first. We bought lunch food, as well as hiking poles for Heather, a tee shirt for Allan, and a muscle shirt for Sam (wishful thinking :)). We left Les Contamines at 9:30am. The initial climb out of Notre Dame was very hard, up an old Roman road (vertically set stones). We arrived at Refuge La Balme 12:15pm and had sandwiches of baguettes with saucissons and cheese. Cheryl and Stew left at 1:00pm to get a head start. Heading up to Col du Bonhomme, the lads took a side trip up a huge hill just before it. They said it was a murderous climb, but worth it; they collect rocks and built an inukshuk at the summit :) There was a small shack at Col du Bonhomme for taking refuge in bad weather, however we had great views. Sam adding a carving of "Merrickville Scouts" to the inside of the shack; it is a tradition in there. Took a photo of a group of Israeli guys for them. Heather got her pace and started exploring off trail at the end. We made it to Refuge de la Croix du Bonhomme at 5:00pm. We had drinks and cake to tide us over until supper, which turned out to be not so good. The beef bourguignon was great but the polenta was disgusting; the cheese was good and desert edible. The lads and Heather played cards, while Stew and Laura chatted non-stop with a Belgian family. Heather found the hiking much more enjoyable after she gave up trying to keep up with the lads, and just went at her own pace. This refuge is supplied by helicopter and porters, and had a wind generator for electrical power. The kids got into the habit of having their shower upon arrival, or sometimes in the evening. Often in the refuges, the showers don't open until 5:00pm and hot water is limited (all solar). An army patrol was staying the night; complete with weapons! Nick went and chatted with them, and found their packs were at least twice as heavy as ours. Cards by candlelight in the evening. Ordered a picnic lunch.

Hike Day 3 (Col de la Croix to Les Mottets, Thursday July 5)

Breakfast was not so great; we had refuge bread, honey and very sweet jam, weak coffee, and hot chocolate made with powdered milk. Cheryl, Stew and Heather left at 8:00am, everybody else at 9:00am. At Col des Fours, Heather was waiting for us and we took a side trip up to Tête Nord des Fours. Col des Fours, along with the Fenêtre d'Arpette is the highest point on regular route (2665m), but Tête Nord des Fours took us up to 2756m. Afterwards we did some wicked sliding on the snow descending about 700m in 6 minutes. The lads said "we are so happy you made us bring rain pants!". We caught up with Stew and Cheryl and ate our not so good picnic lunch from the refuge. We kept going downhill and Allan tried Cheryl's poles which helped his knee a bit. When we got down to Ville des Glaciers we bought some cheese but we couldn't do the cheese making tour because they only make cheese in the morning and evening (7:00pm). We arrived at Les Mottets at around 2:00pm. We then had snacks; they ran out of blueberry tart so only Allan and Heather had some but everyone else had crème caramel. Nick and Sam went rock-climbing above the refuge but Nick pulled out a big rock and almost crushed himself so they stopped. Calvin had banged his knee taking a shortcut towards Ville des Glaciers. The kids played cards (President again) during the afternoon and we had some really good hot chocolate. We found out that they don't rent out donkeys anymore to carry rucksacks up the hill, though they had a couple in a paddock. The original toilet and shower stall were still there (that Allan & Cheryl saw naked women jump out of 20 years ago!), but they were no longer in use. Several new, and nice, buildings built since Allan and Cheryl were last here. Supper was delicious and the guys kept complaining that they were full because they had made the mistake of filling up on the stew that they thought was the main course. There was still rice, potatoes and beef, plus cheese and dessert. There was also a woman playing an accordion. A guided tour had their luggage delivered by taxi; and picked up in the morning. That takes all the sense of accomplishment out of the hike IMHO. Ordered a picnic lunch. We found an outlet for charging camera batteries and went to bed early.

Hike Day 4 (Les Mottets to La Maison Vieille, Col Chécrouit, Friday July 6)

We had a better breakfast at Les Mottets. Aidan's snoring kept some of the lads awake in the cow barn during the night. We departed at 8:00am (7:30am for Stew and Cheryl). As we crossed the border into Italy, there we stopped at a little museum in an old border post building. Well the adults stopped, the kids had run on ahead on the other side of a small hill, and we made them drop their packs and walk back up :) Nice little place, with a map of the route; "That's what we will be doing?" :) We stopped for lunch at 12:00pm just below Rifugio Elisabetta. The lads had a shower under a glacier waterfall, another item on their to do list, although Nick wimped out (or maybe he was the smart one). The picnic lunch was much better. We saw lots of alpine flowers.

We arrived at La Maison Vieille, staggered, between 4:30pm (the lads) and 5:30pm (Stew and Cheryl). It was a hard day, but it was normal length. We had snacks and drinks at the bar. Arranged transport for the next morning, to take Stew, Cheryl, Allan, Laura, Heather and our rucksacks down to Courmayeur, since the cable car was not going to be running until July 14. As there was not enough space for the ten of us in the vehicle, the lads were told they would have to hike down to Courmayeur. We saw mules carrying luggage for the guided tours, and there were lots of donkeys at La Maison Vieille. We also thought of doing the Aiguille du Midi from the Italian side of the mountain, but the last cable car to the top is out-of-service for the next five years. The tarts in the refuge were delicious, as were the finger foods. The lads went out to play Frisbee. The showers were good (warm) but there were only squat toilets (barring one real toilet that was hidden in the back). The decorations in the dining room were unique, to say the least; eclectic might be a better description. The supper was extremely good, but again, the kids thought the pasta was the main course and requested seconds, before realising that there was more food coming. No wonder the waitress was surprised when we asked for more spaghetti :) It was really good spaghetti though. Meat, dessert, and fruit followed. Cheryl said the Italians are big into fruit; good luck or something. Cheryl cringed with the heaping plate of spaghetti that Lochlan demolished :) We should have brought clothes pegs as they would have helped with doing the laundry; it kept blowing away. Bedtime was about 9:00pm. There were many people snoring during the night. At one point, Cheryl got up to poke Allan to stop him from snoring, but then realised that it was coming from a different bunk. There were also two cats with kittens, and the cats had fun sleeping on the kids. Sam was playing with the cat in his bunk.

Hike Day 5 (La Maison Vieille to Courmayeur, Saturday July 7)

We got up at 7:00am and had a delicious breakfast of cereal, bread, coffee/hot chocolate, and fruit salad. The lads set off downhill at 8:30am, and at 9:00am the rest of the group took the shuttle with the luggage. The shuttle was a Land Rover, one of the older models with no seatbelts in the back (poor Heather). The weather was clear, and we could see the summit of Mont Blanc. The lads arrived at 9:45am, not long after the shuttle did, mostly because what was supposed to be a one hour and 50 minute hike, they did in less than an hour by running down the mountain! We checked in at the hotel (Le Bouton d'Or) and the lads did their laundry in the bathtub. The lads hung their laundry up to dry on their balconies and on the roof (at the front of a three star hotel!) Upper class hotel, so it had bidets; another complicated explanation to the kids :) I think Sam was the only one to try the bidet; I think he said it was exciting :) We went out for gelato and ice cream, then for pizza for lunch at Ristorante Pizzeria du Tunnel. We were on the second floor, and the headroom was only about 5' 10"! The pizzas were way too large, although Aidan, Lochlan, Sam and Calvin finished theirs. Lochlan was the only one who did not appear sick afterwards. The rest of the pizza was taken back for lunch on the trail the next day. There was more ice cream in the afternoon (how could they manage it?). Bought and mailed another set of post cards.

Laura and Cheryl were sick and in bed almost all day. However, we all went to a free concert featuring Lindsey Sterling and The SIDH that afternoon. The lads were most impressed with the violinist (Lindsey Sterling), and not only her music! They knew of her from YouTube. At one point, Sam and Nick even stood up and gave a standing ovation. She did do a good moonwalk and limbo while playing. Laura found a YouTube video of this concert, and it shows the back of our heads :) The lads also got cricks in their necks from watching a high school girls' soccer team walk by; later on we saw them trailing them :) The weather was beautiful all day, and the stone houses and stone roofs were amazing. Allan visited a really cool cemetery; amazing stone crypts. When the lads got back from a walk, some of their laundry had blown away. Calvin had to fashion a fishing line, made of paracord, a flip-flop for weight, and a safety pin, to get his boxers from another person's balcony below them. That all sounded safe, but I heard later about dangling Calvin out of the window by his toenails to do the fishing :) Supper at Le Vieux Pommier was extremely good, though there were lots of language problems with ordering. "Lamboni" for dessert turned out to be a tiny bowl of raspberries with sugar and lemon slices! Something they could easily have in Canada. There was such a startled look on Aidan's and Lochlan's faces; they had been expecting a more complex (and bigger) dessert. I was cracking up with laughter, and all Aidan could say was "It's not that funny"; which of course made me laugh all the more :) We brought Cheryl back a tomato salad for supper. Stew purchased a pair of hiking poles.

Day 6 (Courmayeur to Rifugio Bonatti, Sunday July 8)

We woke up to rain. Stew, Cheryl and Laura took the bus to La Vachey and then walked up to Rifugio Bonatti as Cheryl and Laura were still sick, and Stew was tired. Breakfast was absolutely delicious and the kids were not sure if they were having dessert or not! Lochlan took us on a little detour at the beginning of the day (an extra 100m climb!), but when we got back on the right path, we found that it was not as hard a walk as we thought it would be. There were a few showers while we were climbing to Rifugio Bertone and one going up to Mont de la Saxe, but then the weather cleared and we had beautiful views of Mont Blanc as well as other mountains. The high route along Mont de la Saxe, is one of the best portions of the whole route, and we got clear blue skies just when we needed them. We had cold leftover pizza for lunch and some cat eaten cheese, and earlier on at Rifugio Bertone we had some saucissons. Lochlan forgot his hat at Col de Sapin and when he went back for it, he found that Allan had left his rain jacket too. As Lochlan said, it's a good thing for me that he's forgetful :) Also, when the lads were running down into a valley, Lochlan stumbled and took a tumble; just got the end of it on video! Just before the refuge, the lads lay down on the grass for a nap in the sun; Heather and Allan continued on down to the refuge. Arrived at Rifugio Bonatti at 4:00pm; Cheryl, Stew and Laura arrived much earlier; there was actually a bus stop for the Bonatti trail head. We had tart and drinks in the afternoon before suppe; blueberry, as well as pear/chocolate. Supper was very good. We had salad, pasta, potatoes and cake. The kids played cards in the afternoon and again after supper (outside). It was a very beautiful refuge, built 15 years ago, and it is powered by hydroelectricity. The water comes from 200m up and there is a turbine just behind the building. There are always ice cold, crystal clear, clean streams for filling water bottles, unlike the wilderness in Canada. The refuge was cash only. Ordered a picnic lunch.

Day 7 (Rifugio Bonatti to Champex, Monday July 9)

We had a good breakfast at 6:30am. Stew departed at 7:00am and the rest of us at 7:30am. Cheryl and Laura were going back to Courmayeur and were going to catch up to us at Forclaz as they were still sick. It was a nice walk up to Refugio Elena even though it was longer and higher than coming up from the bus stop at Arnuva (like Cheryl & Allan did on their last trip). There were clear blue skies and when we reached Elena we stopped for drinks and chocolate. The bar was exactly like Allan remembered it, except I had thought the roof tiles were slate when in fact they were cedar. Stew caught up to us just as we were leaving. There were large groups of Italian school children hiking up and down the Col Ferret, all with hiking boots. We got to the top of the Col Ferret (Swiss border) and had lunch - a good one from Bonatti - and then made our way down to La Peule where there were a lot of cows. Unfortunately there was no ice cream there, but there were some really neat yurts for sleeping with straw beds. It was a balcony walk along the side of the valley. There was a fellow with a line trimmer clearing the sides of the path; only in Switzerland! We found the shed in the next valley that Allan and Cheryl came across when coming out of the fog (they had gotten lost) on their last trip. We then made our way down to Ferret for the bus. We could have made it to La Fouly but it would have been a rush and we preferred a more relaxing pace. We got to Ferret at 2:00pm and we then had two ice creams (Heather found a really refreshing lime flavour) each while waiting for the bus. Stew caught up again at the bus stop.

We took the 3:30pm bus to Orsières, and left our luggage in the bus as it would be the same one going to Champex 45 minutes later. We did some grocery shopping for tomorrow's lunch, and Lochlan and Allan had some really good passion fruit yogurt as a snack. We also split one of the chocolate bars that were supposed to have been for tomorrow's lunch. We saw Allan and Cheryl's electricity store where they had bought a clock on their last trip. We took the bus, the St. Bernard Express, up the mountain going around hairpin turns and stopped outside of the Au Club Alpin refuge. We arrived at 5:30pm and found that we had the 3rd floor and a separate room all to ourselves. The only down side was the stairs, all the way up again! We went for milkshakes (frappé) at La Cabane and they were 8CHF (=C\$8) each! It was a moment to remember because Lochlan was offered a Euro to suck up a fly through a straw from his milkshake glass. He went to do it, probably thinking that it would fly away, or get stuck in the straw, but it went right up the straw into his mouth! He then spat it straight out onto Sam :) The fly actually flew away; so no flies were harmed :) There was a nice sports store, that was also very expensive, that had some nice Scarpa approach shoes. The refuge was right on the lake and we had dinner (6:30pm) on the terrace next to the water. We had a very good meal that included potage (soup), chicken, pasta and chocolate pudding. After dinner the kids wrote and mailed their last set of postcards and then played cards in the lounge; Allan learned how to play the card game President (also known by another name...).

Day 8 (Champex to Col de la Forclaz, Tuesday July 10)

We had a nice breakfast consisting of percolated coffee; granola, yogurt and bread (not refuge stuff). Stew left at 8:15am via the Bovine route and the rest of us left at 8:30am for the Fenêtre d'Arpette. We bought sausages for the lunch sandwiches and then then started the long, hard climb to the Fenêtre which became so steep that it was almost like you were actually climbing near the end. Heather was very tired, almost the opposite of the lads. We met a group of adults from Ireland; "The Irish are coming!". It was hot and sunny to start, but there was a very strong wind and a bit of rain at the top. We had to put on rain pants, rain coats and in some cases fleeces to keep warm. We saw a weasel jumping around; it was very fast and hard to keep your eye on. We had lunch, and then started the decent (very sketchy at the beginning). Short chocolate break on the way down. Near the bottom, we stopped for ice cream at a buvette. On the way to the hotel, there was a long irrigation channel and we saw a working water driven model trip hammer. The lads got distracted having stick races in the channel; I have to say, a fruit fly would distract those lads :) We arrived at Hotel de la Forclaz at 4:30pm and found that Stew, Cheryl and Laura were already there. We had milkshakes on the terrace that were a bit cheaper (CHF 7.50) and better than the ones at Champex. Afterwards the lads found a climbing wall and tried (unsuccessfully) to chat up some girls. Supper was very nice; we had soup, cauliflower, chicken, ratatouille (vegetables), fries and ice cream. We ordered a picnic lunch for tomorrow and you could pick from four different types. The kids played more cards after supper. What was interesting was the number of families taking their kids for a hike in the mountains. Totally different mindset than what you would find in Canada. It explains why a buvette can make a go of it in the middle of nowhere, and why everybody is in such good shape.

Day 9 (Col de la Forclaz to Tré-le-Champ, Wednesday July 11)

We had a decent breakfast, but they were a bit stingy on the orange juice. Allan paid for the bill using the remaining Swiss francs, then his MasterCard. There was a 3% surcharge on the MasterCard. We tried to help a lady at the hotel who could only speak Spanish, but Heather could only understand something about a purple t-shirt; Laura had already departed. It was very foggy, but only on the Bovine side. We walked back up the path to the buvette, then up the mountain to a rock ramp to Les Grands. The ramp was in much better shape, than when Allan & Cheryl went up it with sections missing. We had a snack from lunch at Les Grands and met a family that was staying there for a week. We looked for a camera lens that Allan lost twenty years ago. We found the location but couldn't find the lens - not much of a surprise. We crossed to Col de Balme over several fields of snow. It was very windy at Col de Balme, with the winds gusting to 84km/hour. The kids tried to sit on the terrace, but were chased away by the grumpy old lady! We had lunch, and then Stew and Cheryl took the low route to Tré-le-Champ, while the rest of us took the high route over Aiguille des Posettes. It was a stiff climb up and the winds were 64km/h but it was very pretty. I kept up with the lads during this climb and I asked them at the top if that made up for the bike tour; not a chance they said! They are still a little sore over that :) The lads found a crack/cave at the summit of Aiguille des Posettes and climbed down in it. Calvin jumped over it. It was a long, hard walk down. We had left Forclaz at 8:30am and we arrived at Auberge La Boerne at 4:30pm. We had awesome chocolate cake for a snack. The place is eclectic and unique! The bedrooms were small and all shapes and sizes. It was an absolute fire trap, being made of entirely of very dry wood. Even the "No fires permitted" notice had a wooden slider to cover the sign :) Supper was pretty good (potage, shepherd's pie, cheese, and apple sauce). Afterwards the lads floated flipflops down a stream then played cards.

Day 10 (Tré-le-Champ to Lac Blanc, Thursday July 12)

It was quite hot overnight in the rooms, and the breakfast was OK. We left Auberge La Boerne at 9:30am and arrived at Lac Blanc at 12:30pm. It was a medium effort hike. We had lunch at the Refuge du Lac Blanc; delicious sausage gratin and omelets. On the way there, we passed a couple of lakes, on which the lads skipped rocks. We also had to climb up numerous ladders, which was fun but not too exciting. The lads (except for Nick) took a plunge into the glacial waters of Lac Blanc, even though it was freezing cold, both outside and in our room. They dived in, and did an immediate U turn! We relaxed in the afternoon around the lake in the sun. The lads did a bit of free rock climbing. 5:00pm found us eating "tartes aux myrtilles" and playing cards. We saw "cow pants", a girl we had seen previously on the hike wearing black and white pants that were spotted like a cow. A helicopter also made two trips above our heads to bring up gas and food. Sadly, there were lots of house flies in the dining room. The lads and Allan made a game of who could kill the most. Extra points were given to people who could take out two in one shot. Speaking of bugs, we were not allowed to bring our rucksacks up into our rooms, to avoid bringing in these "punaises", Bugs that go from refuge to refuge in people's packs; bed bugs I think. It was a beautiful location, but not much as a refuge; there was one small storage heater that did not do anything at all. During the night, it dipped below 5 degrees, and it was very windy. However, Aidan did spot herds of ibexes and brought us all out to see them. Generator for power, but it is turned off as soon as it gets dark, and thus no power for lights when they are actually needed! We were served food in our dormitory building rather than in the main building; this made for eating in the cold, but we had the place to ourselves.

Day 11 (Lac Blanc to Chamonix, Friday July 13)

Breakfast was in a cold dormitory and dining room. We walked down to the Flégère cable car. The difference was amazing. At altitude, it was cold and drizzling. In the valley, it was windy but warmer. We met Rob, the climbing guide who took Sam and Calvin rock climbing, doing one and two pitch climbs, as high a difficulty level as 5.10. The rest of us caught a bus back to Chamonix. Our rooms weren't ready yet, ~10:30am. We moseyed around Chamonix for the rest of the day. Cheryl, Allan, Laura, and Heather had crêpes for lunch at *Bar Creperie La Ferme* and deemed it a good place for supper. Crêpes were the last of the foods on the list to try. The climbers got back around 5:00pm. We did a lot of present and souvenir shopping. Sam, Heather, and Aidan all bought posters of the mountains; Aidan, a snow globe for his sister, Lochlan, chocolate for his father; and Sam, a bottle of wine for his parents. Sam fought Nick for the top bunk in the chalet, trying to get his own way even though Nick got there first. We had crêpes for supper at *Bar Creperie La Ferme* that were extremely good. We also checked out the restaurant for Saturday night and watched the climbing competition. We only saw the difficulty course in use, not the speed trial. A Canadian came third overall in the men's section. Percussion band *Les Commandos Percu*, with fireworks in the evening. Really cool. It was Bastille Day on Saturday, but they weren't the kind of fireworks as we would expect on Canada Day. Nine climbers were killed on Mont Blanc today by an avalanche.

Chamonix (Saturday July 14)

Allan and Cheryl woke up at 8:00am to rain. They both went out and had breakfast at a patisserie, bringing back the kids croissants, croix de savoies, bananas, and orange juice. The rain stopped but it was still partly cloudy. We were hoping to go up the Aiguille de midi around lunch time, but high winds (80 km/hour at the summit) kept the tram closed. The kids finished getting all their presents. The large 3D map that Allan & Cheryl brought back last time is no longer available, there are just smaller versions now. Heather went paragliding. The winds were too high at Plan Praz, but she went to Les Houches. She got a video of the flight. We then had supper at Restaurant L'Impossible. The food was good, but the service terrible; they forgot Laura's starting course three times and tried to serve other people their main course first. There were a lot more people in Chamonix now, and the kids observed that before they were mostly fit hiker types, but now there were a lot of fat people. Sam/Lochlan/Nick each spent their last ten Euros on ten scoop ice creams! They took the last ten scoop cones in the shop. Aidan was responsible and only had five scoop :) They had to switch cones half way through as they were tired of their flavours :)

Return Flight (Sunday July 15)

We had breakfast at the hotel. The lads were late, so they were rushing. Aidan's parents picked him up and the shuttle arrived on time and worked great. Had to dress Lochlan's foot at the airport. We didn't have any super long waits in the airports. Good food on the flights; Swiss milk chocolate on the hop to London. Lots more movies. Texted Sam's mother and during the final approach into Ottawa, and she was waiting for us (arguments with traffic control officer notwithstanding). Allan's mother arrived later on. Stew took Lochlan home, and Sam's mother took the rest of the lads. After we exited the customs hall, we noticed somebody with a sign for the Esprit kayak keener program; picking up participants I guess.

French Scouts

The French Pionniers (their name for Venturers) were really nice to us. From the first day they met us, they had somebody with us at all times, right up to the point we boarded our train for Chamonix. Prisca, one of their Venturers, was great the first day, as it must have been quite scary coming to meeting a group of people nobody had ever seen before. Patrick, one of their leaders, was absolutely awesome; the kids adored him. Like all their leaders he was young, maybe 22, so he acted the giddy goat a lot, but was the ultimate in a role model. I.e. offering his train seat to an old man, and helping an old lady around the top of the Arc du Triomphe. Laure was perfect picking out food for our picnic at Versailles. And hats off to Caroline for organising everything on their side. Our kids didn't get as much out of meeting their kids as I hoped, since their actual interaction time was quite limited, and there was the language and cultural barriers to overcome. Things were just starting to get going near the end of the BBQ. Well worth the effort though. Their kids couldn't come out more as they were right in the middle of their exams. They said nearly all their leaders are younger than 26, it's part of the family culture to volunteer in organisation like Scouts and to help raise each other's children. I asked the lads who they would prefer as a leader; Patrick or me; they declined to answer :)

Common Equipment

The small selection of common equipment we brought worked pretty well (first aid kit, repair kit, laundry detergent, maps, route cards, etc). The repair kit got used more than I expected, with the glasses kit being used, and the sewing kit a couple of times. Calvin made a belt for Lochlan. The first aid kit was emptied of blister packs, mole skin, band aids, and medical tape; needed more of this stuff. I underestimated the toll on people's feet. It was a regular field hospital in operation every morning :) The kids didn't do laundry on the trail as often as expected, in fact they really only did it in Courmayeur. Laura and Heather did it at least once more; at Les Mottets. The SPOT satellite messenger worked perfectly fine in Europe. We had trouble using it in Paris as we were often inside a building, and I also left it behind at least once in the hotel. I wanted to set off half way across the Atlantic, to get a dot there on the map, but I was worried what people might think of me playing with a device with blinking lights on a plane in this day and age; so I decided discretion was the better part of valour. I had thought about carrying a GPS to record our actual path and elevation, which would have been really neat, but I decided it wasn't worth it in the end. The selection of small/medium/large Ziploc bags were definitely worth bringing, I think every single one was used. The altimeter was handy to track our climbing progress; it was astonishingly accurate.

Route

The route cards worked brilliantly and the cardstock held up fine, even in the little bit of rain we had. Much nicer having just the necessary information at hand than having to flip through a book with small print all the time. Should have included though all the information on which mountains/etc could be seen in each direction; people were more interested in that than I thought they would be. Also, a couple of elevation charts and topographical map excerpts on them weren't quite reflective of the route we took; that caused a little confusion. In general while we had a different kid leading each day, the routes were so well marked it was hard to get lost (though Lochlan managed it!). It was good to have all the variants in the route cards; some of them were used. The guide book and large topographical maps were used a few times; well worth having, especially if we did get lost (or had a snow fall). The staging worked perfectly I think. No day was extraordinarily long, and the two short days were expected, and were done to achieve nights at specific refuges.

First Aid

Nothing too major here, which was nice. Lochlan gashed himself nicely on the foot coming out of the glacier lake at Lac Blanc. But after a couple of days of dressing and antibiotic ointment, it seemed to be healing nicely. Sam did a head butt into the wall at the Paris hotel while bouncing out of bed to try and get to the bathroom first! Dosing him with acetaminophen and ibuprofen kept the head ache down to a dull roar, and he didn't seem any the worse for wear (i.e. no sillier than normal). The biggest problem we had was Cheryl and Laura coming down with some type of intestinal bug in Courmayeur. With needing a toilet every half hour, they weren't fit for hiking for a couple of days (they took a bus/train to catch up with us). A little bit of sunburn, mostly on Calvin :(Aidan covered himself with so much sunscreen he looked like a ghost!

Personal Equipment

People's personal gear worked out quite nicely. A number of folk had done some shopping at MEC just before we left, and that paid off. Aidan and Lochlan looked so sweet in matching shirts :) Rucksacks were weighed at the beginning, and they came in at 20-22lbs; right on the money. Aidan had the heaviest load, he wanted more spare clothes; but he's the athlete of the year :) At the end of the hike they said they carried just about the right amount. They figured they should have had one complete set of clothes for the day, another for the refuge, and a third for sleeping. I myself wish I had carried a second pair of trousers for use at the refuges; unlike the kids who wore shorts day and night, I found it cool in the evenings. I believe Sam's statement was that once he switches to shorts, he doesn't go back to trousers until snowboard season starts :) Rain jackets, rain pants, toques, and gloves were all used. The kids said they appreciated the hiking boots, they indicated they didn't know the trail was going to be as rough as it was in places. I lost track of how many times I heard "I didn't know we were going to do/see this" :)

Culture

The intention was to immerse the kids in the European cultures from day one, and not let them up for air until the plane landed back in Ottawa. They were under strict instructions that they couldn't eat or do anything remotely resembling anything back home. After about six days, one of the lads mentioned that I hadn't been joking :) But they said they appreciated it and felt like they were really absorbing stuff. Everything from sidewalk café's for breakfast, to eating local dishes, the people we met, the activities we did (e.g. picnique), etc. The kids liked France so much; there were quite a few questions and discussions about studying and working there. The amount of culture in Paris is amazing. It is said that their cultural budget is more than the GDP of many small countries. Everything that is built considers form before function; things need to look good and make a statement, not just perform a function. The overall attitude is that life, and the enjoyment thereof, takes precedence over absolute profit.

While the food was great, the after effects are not so well taken care of, with squat toilets galore and toilets that look normal but have no seat. At La Maison Vieille the showers were even installed over squat toilets! But at a restaurant in Courmayeur, there was an automatic hand washer: You stuck your hands in a hole, water was sprayed, then soap sprayed, then water again :) At Lac Blanc there was a pineapple shaped lump of soap on a rod sticking out of the wall that you twirled in your hands.

Language

French was the predominant language throughout the trip. It was surprising how limited the knowledge of English was in all of the countries. While most people spoke at least some French, most only spoke Pidgin English at best. Our French was better than their English. This shows the value of speaking multiple languages, even in today's age. All the kids were told to speak French at all times when communicating with the locals. Sam was quite proud of how much he was able to accomplish in French; though his accent is painful to hear :) But Lochlan was the amazing one, coming over not being able to rub two French words together, but at every meal, as we translated the options, when he had made his choice he always asked how to say it in French, and then placed his order in French (<blah>, s'il vous plait). We even taught him some common "phrases" :) Luckily he never used them, or he might have gotten his face slapped :) Lochlan said he didn't feel as lost as he thought he would, he evidently got to understand some common words so as to get the gist of some conversations. A few French people complimented me on all the kids trying to speak French, and I am convinced we received much better service for it. They said very few English people try and speak French, and that it was refreshing to see our kids working at it. Though Laura and Heather said that people had trouble with their accents, and Nick got quite upset when French people would switch into English when talking with him :)

Food and Meals

The food was impeccable, right from day one. Except for the high altitude refuges, where the quality wasn't up to standard, though it was plentiful and filling. That's also where we learnt of what we now call "refuge bread". Dark, heavy bread. One never knew what would come when coffee was ordered. The closest to our coffee was "Café crème", but even it didn't always seem to come with milk (or cream), and was sometimes in a little cup, and other times in a large bowl! Hot chocolate was really good (just "chocolat" in French); quite different than the North American version. Coffee and hot chocolate were often served in what we would call a soup bowl (with no spoon!) At Rifugio Bonatti, the hot chocolate was closer to syrup than a regular liquid. Cheryl was amazed (astounded?) at how much teenaged boys eat. The piles of food Lochlan polished off made her feel quite sick :) We found that even after a good lunch on the trail, the kids needed (wanted?) a snack when they got to the refuges to tide them over until the standard 7:30pm supper. The ice cream and sorbets were to die for in France and Italy. The milk shakes (just "frappé" in French) weren't that great, and were extraordinarily expensive, like everything else, in Switzerland (\$8!). We ate our way through pretty much everything on the "to do" list; with the exception of Raclette (potatoes and cheese) as one restaurant said it wasn't that exciting compared to other local dishes we should be experiencing. Swiss chocolate and French pastries, need I say more? Whenever Cheryl makes a meal now, I tell her whether it is Parisian quality or not :) Chocolate and pear pie, while sounding like a weird combination, is really good.

Weather

We can't complain about the weather. While we missed the Aiguille du Midi, at both the beginning and end, due to cloud and high wind, the rest of the time the weather was good. Some low lying cloud and drizzle on the first day, and the odd shower after that, but cloudless blue skies when we needed them the most for view of Mont Blanc: Out of Courmayeur along the Mont de la Saxe, and the last evening at altitude at Lac Blanc (that was very picturesque). There was enough rain, and the weather changed quickly enough (rain to blue skies in a morning), that the kids now understand why I insisted upon rain paints. They were glad of their gloves and toques at times too. Overall it was just the right temperature for hiking, not too hot and not too cold.

Animals

Unlike my previous hikes here, we had wild animals all over the place. Specifically there were herds of Ibex (or Ibou in Calvin speak). We saw them in the mist at first and then again in broad daylight. They weren't afraid of humans, and would let you approach right to them. Aidan was the best Ibou hunter! The term "Ibou" came from Calvin pulling a fast one on Lochlan, telling him that he had read that in Stew's animal book as the plural for Ibex. However, he had only meant Lochlan to hear that, but some of the rest of us overheard and of course trusted Calvin implicitly! I think one of his objectives was to destroy his image of sensibility :) We also saw numerous marmots and a leaping weasel. The only thing we really missed seeing was a Chamois. Lots of birds for Stew too; complete list below.

Financial

The accounting reconciliation has not yet been completed, but should go out in the next week. My gut feel is that we did fairly well, except on the food/meal budget when eating out. The food was more expensive than projected, and the kids ate more than planned. Also, the kids were supposed to pay directly for any extra snacks/drinks themselves, but it turned out that the refuges preferred to keep a tab for the entire group (it was less work than taking cash payments all the time). So those costs got bundled into the group account. Also, when everybody was stopping for a snack, for example an ice cream, it was a lot more efficient to make a single payment, rather than having ten people each trying to count out Euro change. We took over €6,000 and CHF1,500 and this was enough to pay for all the refuges & extras along with using a credit card where that was accepted (in the towns). There was enough cash to sell some to the kids as needed rather than them having to withdraw additional money using the ATM and incurring the resulting transaction fees. Only a couple of the kids spent any Swiss Francs, everything was too expensive, and that was provided out of the group funds.

Photographs

A selection (some 2,400) of photographs from the trip are on the website (<http://1stmerrickville.ca/venturers/pictures/2011/2012-06-27/index.htm>). These come from the collections of Allan, Stew, and Laura; those from Nick and Sam remain to be added. I will be distributing a DVD with these photographs, as well as the videos that were shot. Next will be a YouTube video/slideshow, and I plan on making available a photo book (details TBD).

Hiking Route

Day	Date	From	To	Accommodation	Duration
1	July 3	Les Houches	Les Contamines	Chalet Club Alpin Français	9:30
2	July 4	Les Contamines	Col du la Croix	Refuge de la Croix du Bonhomme	7:30
3	July 5	Col du la Croix	Les Mottets	Refuge des Mottets	5:00
4	July 6	Les Mottets	Col Chécrouit	La Maison Vieille	8:30
5	July 7	Col Chécrouit	Courmayeur	Hôtel Le Bouton d'Or	1:00
6	July 8	Courmayeur	Rifugio Bonatti	Rifugio Bonatti	8:00
7	July 9	Rifugio Bonatti	Champex	Gîte Au Club Alpin	10:00
8	July 10	Champex	Col de Forclaz	Hôtel du Forclaz	8:00
9	July 11	Col du Forclaz	Tré-le-Champ	Auberge La Boerne	8:00
10	July 12	Tré-le-Champ	Lac Blanc	Refuge Lac Blanc	3:00
11	July 13	Lac Blanc	Chamonix	Hôtel Les Crêtes Blanche	

Birds Seen by Stew

Common Name	Scientific Name
Black-billed Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>
Plain Swift	<i>Apus unicolor</i>
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>
Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>
Eurasian Collared-dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montanus</i>
Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>
Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>
Alpine Accentor	<i>Prunella collaris</i>
Alpine Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax graculus</i>
Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>
Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>
Common Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
Alpine Swift	<i>Apus melba</i>
Common Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquatus</i>
Lammergeier	<i>Gypaetus barbatus</i>
Common Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>
Common Redpoll	<i>Carduelis flammea</i>
European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>
Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>
Winter Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>
Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>

SPOT Check-in Map

