

CHAPTER TEN

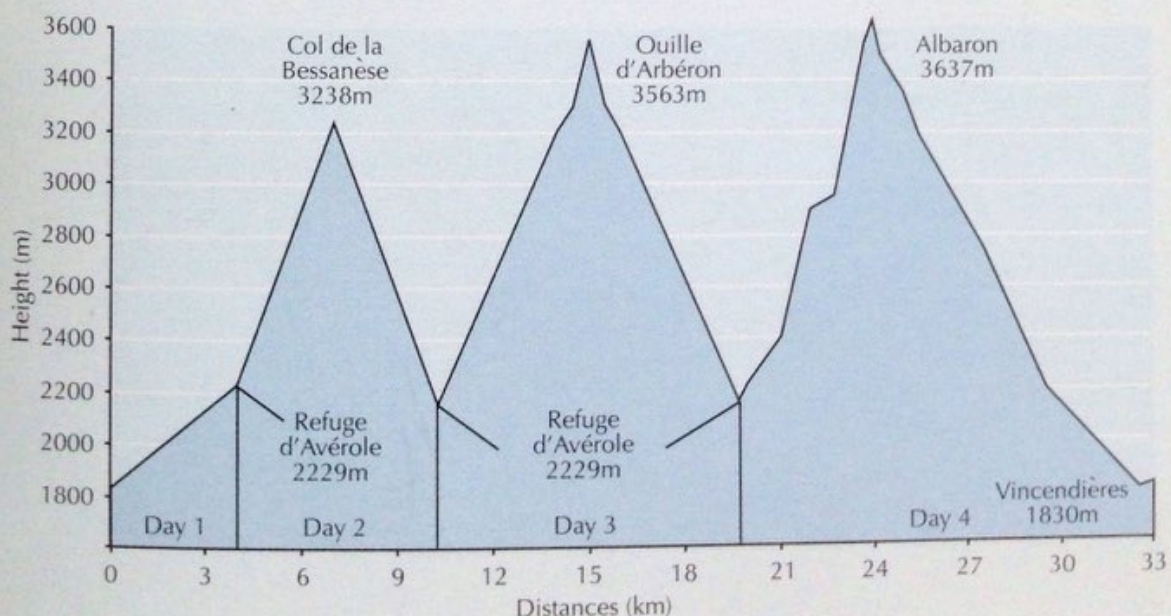
Avérole

INTRODUCTION

The popularity of the Avérole Valley with ski tourers is demonstrated by the size of its hut. With 88 places it has the highest capacity of all the huts in the Maurienne Valley. (The Refuge de l'Arpont has 94 places in summer but only 24 are accessible during the ski-season). The short answer to the question 'Is this popularity justified?' is a quite resounding 'yes'. The Avérole Valley has been blessed with an extraordinary number of summits and cols that are easily accessible on skis.

The entrance to the valley is guarded by two very imposing summits, the Pointe de Charbonnel to the south and the Albaron to the north. The Charbonnel is a magnificent summit to do on skis but the climb is very long (almost 2000m) and a certain amount of luck is required to have good snow at the bottom and safe conditions higher up. Following the road up the valley, through the hamlet of Avérole, the eye is continuously drawn to the imposing north face of the Bessanèse, one

Tour Profile: Avérole



of the few major summits that cannot be skied. Most of the other summits, however, are hidden in the twists and turns of the terrain above the Avérole Valley.

The Refuge d'Avérole is situated on a small knoll, just above the confluence of three valleys. These three valleys split again, higher up, to form a number of small combes. The largest of the three, the Lombarde Valley, continues south from the hut for 8km, finally ending at the Pointe du Fort. The first 5km of the valley are relatively flat, rising only 500m, making the approach to the summits at the head of the valley rather long and tedious. As this long approach puts off the vast majority of people, peace and quiet are guaranteed even at the busiest times of year.

The valleys to the south-east and north of the hut are much shorter and provide more interesting skiing. This chapter has three objectives: the Col de la Bessanèse as a relatively short but interesting introduction; the Ouille d'Arberon as one of the highest and best skiable summits to the south of the hut; the Albaron, which is quite simply an all time alpine ski-touring classic.

The best snow conditions are generally found at the end of the season, when the road is open as far as

*Skinning up
to the Refuge
d'Avérole (Day 1) –
the Bessanèse in
the background*



Vincendières, but this is also a fantastic area to visit at the end of the winter, when the long approach from Bessans adds to the wilderness feeling.

ACCESS

From Chambéry, follow the A43 motorway or the N6 *route nationale* to Modane. Continue along the N6 to Lanslebourg, and then take the D902 to Bessans. Go through the village and park at the Bessanaise holiday centre. Bessans is approximately 1¾hrs from Chambéry. From mid-April onwards, the road is open as far as Vincendières, about 4km from the Bessanaise.

SNOW CONDITIONS

The touring season runs from March to the end of May, or even the middle of June in a good season. This area is often subject to easterly or south-easterly winds (The Lombarde) as well as the prevailing westerly and north-westerly winds associated with Atlantic depressions; wind-slabs can be a danger on almost any slopes, especially early in the season.

MAPS

3633 ET Tignes/Val d'Isère, 3634 OT Val Cenis

RESORT SKIING

The best resort skiing is to be found at Val Cenis. There are 70km of pistes, mostly blue and red. Val Cenis also gives access to some good tours, for example: The Pointe de la Ronce (3612m, quite difficult), the Pointe du Lamet (3504m, difficult, 150m at 45°), The Signal du Petit Mont Cenis (3162m, quite difficult, 500m at 35°) and The Pas de la Beccia (2717m, easy).

Bonneval has a few ski-lifts but the ski-area is much smaller than Val Cenis.

Bessans is a world-renowned cross-country ski area with 80km of trails.