

Overview: Chamonix Technical Vertical Kilometer

The Chamonix VK route is exposed and technical. Only attempt it if you feel comfortable on steep ground. If at any point it feels too challenging, turn around and descend. Attempt this route only during fair weather. If the weather deteriorates, turn around and descend.

Some trail runners choose to use trail running poles on the route. If you are used to using them, we recommend them — but only if you can easily stow them on your pack or vest, since you will need both hands higher on the course. If you have a watch that indicates vertical climbing, bring it along and watch the 100-meter increments tick off!

0km

Place du Triangle de l'Amitié

 FOOD  WATER  BATHROOM  TRANSIT ELEVATION 1030m

Start in the middle of Place du Triangle de l'Amitié, in the old village of Chamonix next to the tourism office. Run up Rue Place du Triangle, halfway around the roundabout, then up Rue La Mollard, one of the steeper sections of the entire course.

Go left at the “T” when you meet the Brevent/Plan Praz lift. Take the next right, onto Chemin de la Pierre à Ruskin. After a few hundred meters, the road brings you under the lift. Run the road until you’re directly under the lift, then look for the trail heading uphill on the left.

Following in Footsteps

As part of the International Skyrunning series, a “VK,” must gain exactly 1,000 meters in less than 5 kilometers. So, the operative adjectives are short, steep, and challenging! Perhaps no VK route is as famous as Chamonix’s. Climbing 1,000 meters in just 3.8km, the route was first raced in 2011, and has since become popular with both valley residents and visitors. It is raced each year during Chamonix’s Skyrunning races in late June. The records for the course are France’s François Gonon with a time of 34:07 and Chirstel Dewalle with a time of 39:50.



.9km

Start of the trail, under Plan Praz lift

ELEVATION 1160m

Switchback up the slope. You’ll be directly under the lift for fully 600 meters of climbing. Avoid veering off on hiking trails that periodically cross the route from both left and right. The footing here varies, and includes some short sections of loose scree, other times some loose till. As you climb, the trail gets slightly rougher, with some large steps up. You’ll skirt a landslide, eventually crossing it higher up at an exposed spot. You may notice occasional orange arrows and faded 100-meter increment markings, more visible near the top.

2.9km

Start of Technical Section

ELEVATION 1750m

At 700 vertical meters, the route heads into technical terrain, with a wide range of aids installed on the route, including wire rope, steel railings, rebar “staple” steps, steel platform steps, and even a ladder. Stow your poles if you have them — you’ll want both hands for the technical sections. For the next 200 vertical meters, the route alternates between technical sections and gentler running in the woods to the right of the Plan Praz lift.

In the last 50 vertical meters, you’ll reach the Plan Praz lift building. Look for orange “KV” markings spray-painted in several locations with arrows. The route here follows several sets of staircases, then transitions to the access road next to the lift building. Run up the gravel road about 200 meters, and you’re done! There is no marked finish to the route, but if the weather is fair, the finish line comes on the service road next to the steep field, where you’ll see paragliders launching themselves for flights above the Chamonix valley.



3.8km

Happy Accident

The creation of this famous VK route was accidental. When the Planpraz gondola was replaced in 2009, an emergency evacuation path was created beneath it. Initially this trail was fenced-off, but it was impossible to stop determined runners from heading up it. In the end, the town council decided to get the maintenance team to improve the trail, and it was officially opened.



Plan Praz lift

🍴 FOOD 💧 WATER 🚻 BATHROOM 🚶 TRANSIT ELEVATION 2030m

Congratulations! Enjoy a drink or tart at the nearby café, and then descend via the Plan Praz lift (last descent is usually 5:00pm in the summer season). If you find yourself at the summit and the lift is closed, climb on the service road to slightly above the VK finish, and look for a path that switchbacks steeply downhill. This trail, known as les lacets, or laces, will take you back to Chamonix. We recommend not descending the VK route.

Route Option

Harder

Distance: 26km/16.1mi

Vertical: 1300m/4300ft

To extend your trail run, descend the switchbacking route, known as Les Lacets, described above, back to Chamonix. For a longer alternative, continue climbing up the service road on which the VK finishes, then in a few hundred meters, follow signs to the right to Flégère. This route, called the Grand Balcon Sud, offers dramatic views of the Mont Blanc Massif, as it rises and falls, mostly above treeline. At Flégère, you can take the tram down to Les Praz. From Les Praz, you could get the bus back to Chamonix, or you could run the flat 2.5km to loosen up your quads after the tram ride: Come out to the main road and take a right. Run for five or so minutes along the road, through Les Praz and then turn left along the wide path next to the stream. This riverside trail brings you to Chamonix center in about a mile.

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