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UNKNOWN? YES.
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FAMOUS PRO-ROAD CYCLING CLIMBS AND REMOTE ROUGH-STUFF MOUNTAIN TRACKS—THIS REGION HAS IT ALL. A BIKEPACKING GEM.



the Col de l’Iseran in France, the Stelvio Pass—the Ortler Alps’ jewel—is the second-highest paved road pass in the Alps, at 2,757 meters (9,045 feet), and connects South Tyrol to various valleys, Bormio, and routes into Switzerland. Riding the lengthy, meandering pass at a quiet time of day makes for a memorable, challenging experience.

Leave Bormio at dawn for the leg out to Sulden, Madritschjoch, and incredible views of “das Dreigestirn”—the impressive lineup of Königspitze, Zebbru, and Ortler—which is German for “the three heavenly bodies.” The climb is tough; the descent is incredible. If needed, a cable car runs up to the hut. Seeking and continuing on these gravel tracks where the tarmac roads end is where the real adventure lies. Challenging? Yes. Unknown? Yes. Steep? Yes. But the rewards are well worth it. Fred Wright, intrepid cyclist and author of *Rough Stuff Cycling in the Alps* sums up this pursuit perfectly: “A cyclist will often look at a map, see a road running up into the mountains and ending there ... often they need not be discouraged, and that with the

right equipment and variable amount of effort they can go up the valley and over into another valley, then get back on their bike and on their way.” The varying terrain on this Ortler trip is well-suited for an adventure/gravel bike, which is a cross between a road and mountain bike with capable geometries, clearance for suitable tires, and gearing to tackle tougher terrain—as at home on the Stelvio Pass as the Stelvio rough stuff.

After descending back to Sulden, ride the Stelvio back toward Bormio but drop off slightly earlier and head for the gravel around Lago di Cancano and San Giacomo at the head of the snaking Torre Fraele Pass—the exciting finish line of the 2020 Giro d’Italia Maglia Rosa stage. The final, southern leg of the loop involves a special gravel ride up to Rifugio Pizzini in the shadows of the Gran Zebbru, with the Ortler peeking out along the distant ridge.

If you want to continue your exploration by bike, you could extend your trip to include the nearby Gavia and Umbrail passes. This region really is a bikepacking playground. ○