



Massif, and its highest point, Dufourspitze (4,634 m/15,203 ft), dominate the head of this valley, although the best panoramas of Monte Rosa don't reveal themselves until after you have climbed out the other side. These are the Pennine Alps: the core backbone of the main chain and some of the most dramatic mountains in Europe. The GTA takes a cunning route to the east of the watershed, linking old unpaved mountain roads and ancient passes through the forested heights toward Alagna Valsesia. Since the trail often crosses the grain of the land, from village to village with a high col in between, the rhythm can feel tough at times. But there is a brief change of pace upon entering the beautiful Val Vogna, and you can spend a while gently climbing through woodland before taking a little longer at height, following ridge-lines into the Gran Paradiso National Park with frequent views of Gran Paradiso itself (4,061 m/13,323 ft), a dramatic glaciated peak of the Graian Alps.

It is soon back to the up-down-up of col after col; however, the trail gradually makes its way further south, passing the mountain Rocciamelone (3,538 m/11,608 ft), whose ascent is an optional bonus track. About 90 km (56 mi) after the village of Salbertrand, the GTA enters what many say is its finest stage. After visiting the source of the River Po at Pian del Re, the GTA climbs past Monte Viso, also known as Monviso (3,841 m/12,602 ft), the highest and most magnificent peak of the Cottian Alps. Although this ice-clad



“Due to the fact that the trail veers away from popular tourist locations, the experience often feels startlingly unencumbered—just you, your backpack, and hundreds of kilometers of mountains.”



- ↑ The GTA leads through quiet landscapes featuring small communities, making this trail a good choice for the lover of solitude.
- The Alpine pink, or *Dianthus alpinus*.
- ↗ A typical mountain village scene high in the Alps of Italy.
- An inviting place for a midday paddle.

