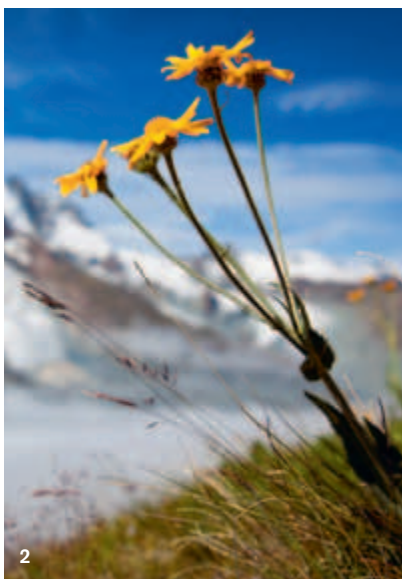


# On the Climate Audio Trail To the Eco Mountain Hut

We hear the stone cairns talk, the flowers bloom and the glaciers melt. The new Audio Trail, set up by the organization “myclimate,” takes us on a tour of climate change as it leads to the New Monte Rosa Hut. The hut itself is a bold example of artistic environmental construction shimmering, while at the same time suffering under a powerful onslaught of visitors.



**1** The route to the hut across the glacier is only feasible for experienced mountain hikers. **2** The leopard's bane is irresistible and apparently a surefire solution to vertigo. **3** Two of “myclimate's” guests – Andrea Kuster, Miss Earth Switzerland, and Maximilian Horster, managing director of Climate Neutral Investments Ltd – take time out to discuss the different chapters of the Climate Audio Trail that leads to the New Monte Rosa Hut.

On this occasion, a small audio player and a set of headphones form an essential part of the hiker's kit. “My stone cairns are pointers to the future. Where are you going?” comes a question in a deep male voice, thick with the Swiss-German mountain dialect of Wallis (known as the Valais by the French-speaking Swiss they share the canton with). This mellifluous voice belongs to a bearded cairn-builder from nearby Rotenboden. It accompanies us for a stretch of the Climate Audio Trail, the hiking route that stretches from a station of Zermatt's Gornergrat cog mountain railway up to the New Monte Rosa Hut. We hear our guide telling us about stone cairns and the significance they have for the Inuit through large headphones. And this traditional Walliser is a genuine enthusiast for cairn-building. Indeed, he informs us that the Inuit call these vertically balanced stones “Nalunaikkutaq,” which are apparently capable of eliminating spiritual confusion ... but the mountain is now calling us. Our thoughts will be ordered by the mountain trail rather than piled-up stones. The voice of the mountain man and the accompanying music interpose themselves between us and the surrounding environment. Yet our feet move almost of their own accord across the rocky ground.

The Alpine backdrop – Matterhorn, Breithorn, Pollux, Castor, Liskamm and the Monte Rosa massif – plays out in front of our sunglasses like a documentary film, until the voices of the Audio Trail narrators ask us to switch the audio player off. The next Audio Station is supposed to be by a particularly striking flower. At the press of a button we find ourselves back in the real world – in the middle of a motley but colorful group that the climate protection organization “myclimate” has invited here for the inaugural walk along the Climate Audio Trail.

## Virtual, Individual and Real

The large headphones aside, the other thing the group shares is a destination: the New Monte Rosa Hut of the Swiss Alpine Club (SAC). The audio devices can be borrowed free of charge at the valley station of the Gornergrat mountain railway. Unlike in a museum, where such devices either switch themselves on automatically or an exhibit sign prompts you to select a specific number, we decide ourselves when and where we wish to hear one of the nine chapters. But for now our focus should lie on the path

ahead of us. The local guide entrusted with accompanying our group points out that the route may be straightforward but also exposed. 300 steep meters (984 feet) below us lies the Gorner Glacier, its surface runed by sharp medial moraines, curved ice structures, minivalleys and the courses of glacial streams. The ice is a brilliant white.

With an hour to go before the crampons have to come on for the traverse of the glacier, we sit down on a boulder by a group of yellow flowers, like the leopard's bane right by us. The process of specialized high-mountain plants being forced out by the "generalists" is well under way. Botanists report that one side effect of climate change is the increasing altitude at which vegetation can flourish. At altitudes of 3,000 meters (10,000 feet) and upward there used to be only 14 types of plants 100 years ago, yet now there are as many as 61! But the specialized high-mountain plants can no longer escape upward from the generalists, and are accordingly dying out.

### Glacier in Motion

From the Gorner Glacier onward, the trail to the hut is marked white-blue-white. Alpine experience and equipment are now de rigueur. In earlier years, one could happily have ascended without crampons until mid-August. But this year the heat of the early summer sun has already melted all the snow from the ice. For the first steep pitch on the hard ice we attach the crampons to our shoes and reach gratefully for the thick cable guide rope installed by the hut warden.

Formerly, recounts a voice on the Audio Trail, the path used to lead almost directly upward and over the glacier to the hut on the other side. Today, however, the route first leads sharply downward and only then upward across difficult moraine scree and rock to the hut. For the Gorner Glacier is now melting away, just like all the other glaciers in Switzerland.

Despite their rapid retreat, the great masses of ice in this striking mountain landscape retain their overpowering aura. By comparison, our small band of hikers feels tiny. Wooden poles mark our route. Ice crystals crunch and crumble under the soles of our boots. The sun is full on our faces. We leap across a glacial stream that disappears gurgling into a fissure in the ice just a few meters away. The ice is in motion – a crackling sound comes from nearby, while else-

where a fragment of rock topples over with a great rumbling sound. Gratefully, we make use of the steps that our mountain guide has hewn into a narrow strip of ice – while noting the gaping cracks to both left and right.

And just before we abandon the glacier for the last stretch of the trail to the hut, our glance sweeps upward over the edge of the moraine to the steep 300-meter vertical climb that lies ahead of us. There on the horizon, nestling snugly on a bed of ice between the Dufourspitze and the Liskamm – both of which lie over 4,000 meters – lies the New Monte Rosa Hut, sparkling in the sun.

### High-Tech Wizardry and Teething Issues

The New Monte Rosa Hut, built in collaboration with the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology to mark the latter's 150th anniversary, is much more than a shelter for summiteers. It is a futuristic workshop for sustainable construction, energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy. Behind its aluminum facade is concealed an insulation layer that is 30 centimeters (12 inches) thick. The signature feature of the hut is an ascending spiral-shaped stairwell that is actually nothing other than a huge ventilation shaft. Controlled ventilation ensures that heat cannot escape so easily into the outer environment, thereby keeping the interior temperature constant. The goal of the hut energy concept is for the building – constructed at a cost of 6 million Swiss francs (5.9 million US dollars) – to be 90-percent self-sufficient in terms of energy consumption. CO<sub>2</sub> emissions per overnight visitor are anticipated to be reduced by two-thirds compared to the old Monte Rosa Hut. Solar-generated electricity and warm water are stored with the assistance of countless batteries and a large isolated water tank.

Impressive as all this may look, the hut has had (and continues to have) a number of teething problems since it was opened in March. The flood of visitors – no less than 5,000 people visited the building in the first half of the season, the same figure that had been expected for the season as a whole – threw the ingenious waste water purification system out of kilter. Water is indeed the great linchpin of the hut's operational system. Geologists had promised it would be waterproof. The cavern in the prehistoric rock behind the hut instead turned out to be leaking. The cave subsequently had to be sealed with a film. **Bernard van Dierendonck**



The audio devices for the Climate Audio Trail can be obtained free of charge from the valley station of the Gornergrat Mountain Railway in Zermatt (subject to a deposit). Alternatively, the Audio Trail can be loaded onto a mobile phone at a loading station. To obtain the Audio Trail in full, go to: [www.klimahoerpfad.ch](http://www.klimahoerpfad.ch)

The trail to the hut is marked and only feasible for experienced mountain hikers. Crampons are essential once the glacier's snow covering has melted. Three hours should be allocated for the hike from the Rotenboden Station (similar length of time for the return journey). The season lasts until the end of September. In winter the ascent is not marked and is only accessible with touring skis (open from mid-March).

Information and reservation of hut accommodation: [www.section-monte-rosa.ch](http://www.section-monte-rosa.ch)

General information: [www.neuemonterosahuette.ch](http://www.neuemonterosahuette.ch)

In 2007, Credit Suisse donated 25,000 Swiss francs from the Jubilee Fund to the SAC to support the hut's construction. In 2009, it entered into a partnership with the "myclimate" organization.

Mountain guide: [www.alpincenter-zermatt.ch](http://www.alpincenter-zermatt.ch)



Sensational pictures of the Climate Audio Trail and audio files can be downloaded through this QR code (Launch the free BeeTagg Reader on your smartphone, take a picture of the code and a link will be obtained.)