





# **50 MORE MUST DO CLIMBS**

**DIRK VISSERS**

English edition

Author: Dirk Vissers

Proofread by Dave Pegler

Design: ©Brecht Vissers

Cover photo: ©FotoStelvio.com & ©Brecht Vissers

ISBN: 9789465462622

© Dirk Vissers

# FOREWORD

When I cycled up the Col de Peyresourde in July 2001 with a regular city bike and a plain T-shirt, I never thought that 24 years later I would have claimed more than 700 different climbs (let alone write a book about it).

In all those years I experienced countless beautiful adventures in the mountains, met many nice and sporty people and got to know new cycling friends. In this second book about cycling in the mountains I take you to 50 unique slopes and cols throughout Europe.

My first book, *100 MUST DO CLIMBS*, was mainly a hit parade of classics, supplemented with well-known climbs from Belgium and the Netherlands, but also less-known cols that are worth cycling.

Over the past five years, I have mainly discovered Switzerland, where the most beautiful passes in Europe can be found. I was also able to tick off some cols that had been on my bucket list for years, e.g. the magical Puy-de-Dôme, where cycling history was written.

The Col de l'Iséran, one of the highest passes in Europe and the Pico Veleta in Andalusia which still is the highest paved mountain on the European continent.

Additionally, the journey of discovery continued into less-known regions: Oberallgäu, Monts d'Ardèche and the Swiss Jura.

Southern Europe was also an unknown territory for a long time. With the Algarve in the South of Portugal and the well-known region of Calpe, this book describes many Sierras and some of the most beautiful climbs of the Iberian Peninsula.

In addition, I invited ten cycling friends to describe their favourite climb. You can read about their experiences in the second part of this book.

This completes '50 MORE MUST DO CLIMBS'.

This second book is mainly a supplement of the first book. Of course, this book is not complete either. There are hundreds of passes, cols and slopes that deserve to be written about. However, the author only writes about mountains that he cycled himself.

Dear Reader, I hope while reading this book you will also feel the pain and the joy of cycling uphill. Let it be an inspiration for you to go on a journey yourself.

Dirk Vissers  
May 2026

How to read  
the symbols:



Length



Height



Avarage gradient



Max gradient

*Joanne Simpson is the daughter of British cyclist Tom Simpson, who died on July 13, 1967, while climbing the Mont Ventoux during the Tour de France.*

A bike: a two-wheeled vehicle that drives a chain by turning your legs around... Yeah, yeah... until a bump, a hill, or a mountain comes along and you realize that cycling is so much more than just spinning your legs. Cycling is in my genes, already brought to me via the bottle of milk I got as a baby, and I was only a few days old when my first little racing bike was smiling at me. The search for who my father really was resulted in repeatedly riding up that mountain where he never reached the top...

Cycling uphill and looking ahead... never looking back... pacing, controlling your breathing, and focusing on the next meter, not the next kilometer. Planning, dividing and conquering, knowing that you will make it because you can, because you want to, and because you've set your mind to it: I will get up this mountain! And then reaching the top, that final bend or the second-to-last one, or the tenth-to-last one, with that tough percentage... it's never boring and always challenging... and then you are there feeling the adrenaline running through your veins! The victorious shout that sometimes escapes because "yes, I did it!" And tears that often spontaneously well up.

The most beautiful climb will always be that of "my" mountain, "our" mountain, that bare mountain, the mountain that will tell you if he will allow you to cycle up today, but won't let you up tomorrow, even if you had planned it. Cycling is about listening and experiencing: listening to nature, listening to your body, listening to your heartbeat, listening to your legs.


Cycling up a mountain is an adventure, and that adventure is something I wouldn't want, or be able to miss, for anything in the world! Despite our "flat country," I still prefer a little bump, a hill, a bridge, or a real mountain... we go on and about.

*Enjoy every climb ...embrace the mountain and love nature ...enjoy every ride..."*

Joanne Simpson  
(written by Miek Weymeis)  
Destelbergen, Belgium  
May 2026

# 1. PICO VELETA - SIERRA NEVADA - ESPAÑA

From Pinos Genil:  41.600m

 3.375m

 6,3%

 14%

In September 2022, I cycled in Andalusia for the first time. A week of lighthearted cycling with a Dutch cycling organization from Ronda. The vastness of the country took my breath away. The images you see every year at the Vuelta and the dreams associated with it came true.

But the real goal of this trip was to conquer what is said to be the highest paved mountain in Europe.

Shortly before reaching Granada, we parked our bus and set off on what promised to be a long and beautiful day. In mid-September, the temperatures in Southern Spain are ideal: mild 25 degrees Celsius, the orange trees are in full bloom, and the autumn light is clear. The sun shines on the mountains, offering a perfect view.

From Pinos Genil, the valley turns summery green and the path gradually becomes steeper. The climb is over 40 kilometers long, with only the last few meters being exhausting.

The gradient is very even over 30 kilometers, varying between 5 and 7%, which makes the bike ride very enjoyable. Every 1,000 meters of elevation gain are marked with a sign along the trail. To my right, the landscape opens up after a while and unfolds into an endless patchwork of browns and reds. About fifteen kilometers after the start, I see the Embalse de Canales to my left. A large lake, which becomes increasingly visible the higher the road climbs, ultimately providing the most beautiful image of the entire adventure. I notice how quiet the roads are.

After just over 30 kilometers of climbing, the Sierra Nevada ski resort comes into view on the

right. A long, straight road opens up. Here, at an altitude of 2,500 meters, many professional cyclists complete their altitude training and prepare optimally. But I still have to go further.... The last 11 kilometers are traffic-free. The A395 ends here, and to cycle up, I have to pass under the barrier. Pedestrians and cyclists are allowed. The stairway to heaven is wide open...

What follows is a narrow paved ski trail. Soon I'm in a deserted area. The road is still in good condition here, and the gradients are quite manageable. It doesn't get steeper than 10%, although further up there are a few hairpin bends with gradients over 15%. The road winds beneath the few ski lifts through a desolate landscape of rocks and stones. The colors have turned into a dull gray. Unfortunately, the clouds are hanging quite low, which obscures the view a little. Above the 3,000 meter mark, I also feel the thin air rising.

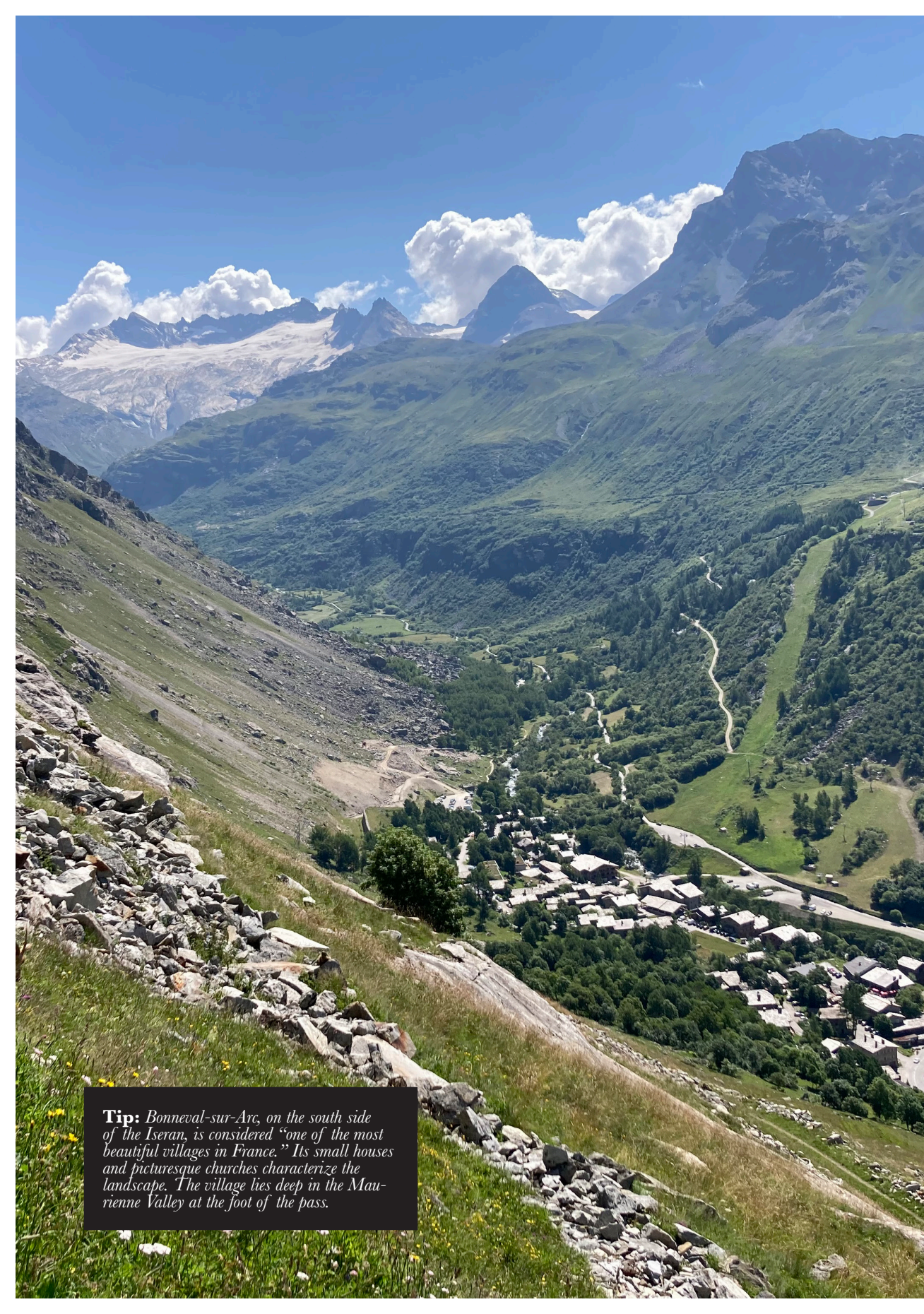
The road surface gets increasingly worse over the last four kilometers, and now I have to balance the bike to avoid bumps. When I turn left a little later, the road changes to gravel. It's all about making it to the top safely with 25mm thin tires. It's a shame the state hasn't renovated this section of road for gentle road users. A wide right-hand bend heralds the final 100 meters. A beautiful finale with a 12% gradient, and Pico Veleta is conquered!

Together with my Dutch cycling friends, we climb the rocks of the small monument and enjoy the moment. If there is a cycling paradise, it lies somewhere deep in Spain. •



**Tip:** The best time of year for a bike tour to Pico Veleta is spring and autumn. In winter, there is a high chance of snow, and in summer, it's often too hot in the valley.

The nearby city of Granada and its historic Alhambra are worth a visit.




**Tip:** Bonneval-sur-Arc, on the south side of the Iseran, is considered “one of the most beautiful villages in France.” Its small houses and picturesque churches characterize the landscape. The village lies deep in the Maurienne Valley at the foot of the pass.




# 2. COL DE L'ISERAN - SAVOIE - FRANCE

From Lanslebourg:

 31.900m

 2.770m

 4,3%

 13%

Is the Col de l'Iseran the highest paved mountain pass in Europe?

Actually, yes, although that award could also be given to the Cime de La Bonette (which lies a little further south).

In July 2021 I unpacked my bike under a steel blue sky. My starting point is Lanslebourg, somewhere in Eastern France, not far from the Italian border. Today I'll ride two passes over 2,000 meters. Later, the Col du Mont Cenis, but first, the monster climb to the high Iseran pass. From the valley, the first two kilometers are a fast, steep climb with a 10% gradient. Beyond Lanslevillard, the gradient drops to a pleasant 3 to 4%. The D902 runs through a wide valley, which, after leaving Chateau Queyras, can be compared to the southern slopes of the Izoard. The largest village in this gentle cycling valley is Bessans. The green slopes are a little misty due to the heat. After 19 kilometers, I make out the village of Bonneval-sur-Arc on the left, also considered one of the most beautiful villages in France. I remember this place from the summer of 2000, when we drove here in the rain and arrived at the summit of the Col de l'Iseran in the snow. Today, 21 years later, it's midsummer. I decide to stop later on the descent to Bonneval.

After a left turn, the climb really begins. I quickly gain height through a series of hairpin bends, and Bonneval lies deep in the sunny valley. The view of the highest peaks of the Vanoise National Park is unique and makes me feel like an eagle circling somewhere high above. The Alps shine in all their glory on this beautiful summer day.

The pass gets a bit higher and provides rock formations, rivers, and waterfalls. I'm always amazed at how much height you can gain with a few consecutive hairpin turns.


I've already passed the 2,000-meter mark, and the world of true high mountains is here. The gradients are quite manageable, but occasionally the road still climbs above 11%. After a good 32 kilometers of climbing, I reach the famous chapel and the souvenir shops that adorn the summit. Up here in the mountains, there's a pleasant and friendly atmosphere, and people patiently queue up for a photo at the sign that displays the name of the pass and the pass's altitude. A descent north to the famous Val d'Isère ski resort is possible, but I turn around because Bonneval and the Col du Mont Cenis await me.

The Col de l'Iseran is one of the most beautiful passes in the Alps and far beyond. •

# 3. OBERAARSEE (GRIMSEL-PASS)- WALLIS - SCHWEIZ

From Oberwald:  18.300m

 2.303m

 5,1%

 11%

Man is an insignificant being in the overwhelming nature of the high mountains. The climb to Lake Oberaar, which I did by bike in September 2023, is definitely one of the most beautiful mountain experiences ever. I'm running out of superlatives for this climb, and I can only warmly recommend everyone to cycle up the Grimsel Pass themselves and take the side road to Lake Oberaar at the top. I guarantee you'll be amazed.

It's pretty chilly when I leave my base in Ulrichen. It's ideal for a short mountain climb.

From Oberwald, the climb is steep at over 9%, and in front of me, I see the road to Grimsel Pass. Far ahead, the trail winds up the mountain like a snake.

I'm always amazed at how human being can build such roads.

After an 8-kilometer climb, I reach the turnoff in Gletsch, with the Furka Pass to the right and the Grimsel Pass to the left.

The road winds its way up numerous serpentines with varying gradients, then climbs again to an 11% gradient, which flattens out to 6% in the bends.

The view of the Furka Pass is phenomenal.

Continue straight ahead for the last 1,500 meters to the top of the pass and the small lake.

Just past the sign for the top of the pass, a small signpost on the left points the way to the Oberaarsee.

A narrow road where traffic alternates between one direction and another. This mountain road is indescribably beautiful. The view to the right of the Grimselsee is indescribable and can be admired like a single, large postcard stretching for several kilometers. I'm completely alone on the road, no noise, nothing. On the entire last 6

kilometers of this goat trail, I barely encounter five cars...

Only birds chirping and the waterfalls accompany me. If there is a cyclist's paradise, it is here on the way to the 2,303 m high Oberaarsee.

The climbs are mostly easy. Then there are short sections of 4 to 12%, followed by short descents. The highest point of the route is at almost 2,400 meters.

The last few kilometers are a steep descent to the mountain hut and the Oberaarsee itself.

Here I am. It's barely 7 degrees. I put on some warm clothes and cycle leisurely back down the road.

I descend on the other side of the Grimsel Pass, all the way to the reservoir that lay below me from a bird's-eye view just half an hour ago. •

**Tip:** *Switzerland doesn't have to be expensive. With a little research, you can easily find affordable accommodations.*



