

Promotion of Nature Tourism in protected area in southern Val d' Hérens (Switzerland)

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The "Association des Communes du Val d'Hérens" placed an order to the Institute for Tourism Economy Lucerne (ITW) to carry out a research project on the increase of touristic value of points of attraction in the upper Val d'Hérens. The order contained a representation of the current landscape specialities and of the currently existing touristic points of attraction in Val d'Hérens such as Pyramides d'Euseigne, Vallon de Borgne, Vallon de Réchy, Grande Dixence, Ferpècle and Arolla. As a second step potential future ways of touristic use should be shown for the mentioned points of attraction and ideas for an increase of value creation should be shortly described.

The upper Val d'Hérens has several areas of national as well as of international importance.

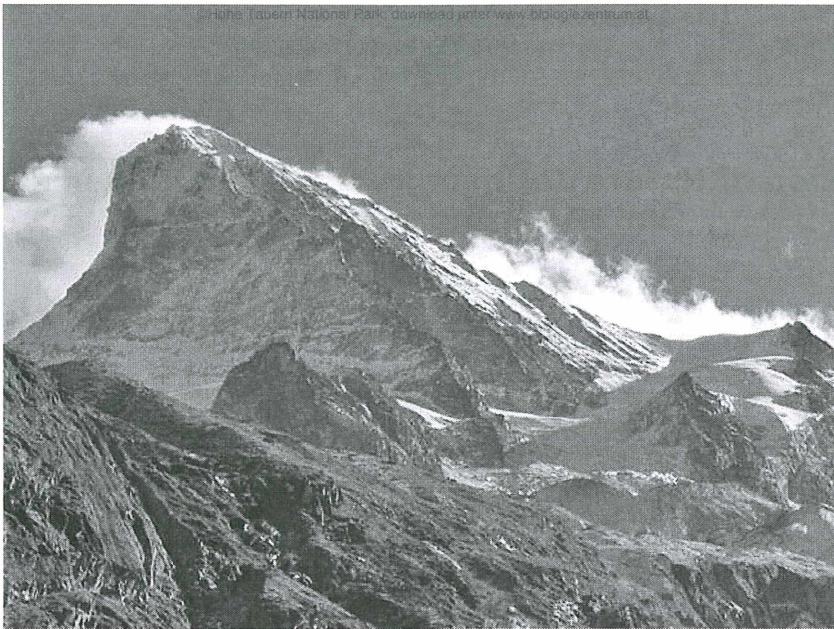
Overall assessment of the points of attraction

	Inventories of the Con- federacy BLN	Invento- ries of the Con- federacy Moors/ Floodplains	Geolog. particulari- ties	Distinctive mountain top, glacier, etc.	Tour. Equip- ment	Unique character	Importance
Pyramides d'Euseigne	3	1	3	2	1	3	National importance
Vallon de Borgne	1	3	2	2	1	2	Regional importance
Vallon de Réchy	3	3	4	1	1	3	National importance
Grande Dixence	2	3	2	2	2	3	National as well as international importance
Ferpècle	4	3	4	4	1	4	International importance
Arolla	2	3	3	3	3	3	National importance

Table 1: Evaluation: 1= minor importance, 2=medium importance, 3= high importance, 4= extraordinary importance

Hereafter the description of ideas for a better marketing of the points of attraction will be shown on the example of Ferpècle.

The area of the Ferpècle basin is part of the Confederacy Inventory of landscapes and natural monuments of national importance (BLN) Nr. 1707 "Dent Blanche-Matterhorn-Monte Rosa." A regional park is being planned. It is a very beautiful and internationally known landscape with huge glaciers. The region gives good indications about the formation of the Penninic Alps. Furthermore there are different states of moraines as contemporary witnesses of the glacial and historical landscape development and a typical high alpine flora and fauna with unspoilt and well preserved Swiss stone pine woods. Partly there is also still a traditional alpine agriculture.



Picture 1: The Ferpèche gorge contains an extraordinary high mountain landscape with the predominant Dent Blanche (4354 m) ("White tooth")

The history of both the **Glacier de Ferpèche** and the **Glacier du Mont Miné** are highly interesting. The development of both glaciers can be traced back through the last 3000 years without any interruption. In 1850 the Glacier de Ferpèche reached down until 1800 meters of altitude. Since then both glaciers retracted, and in 1957 the glacier snouts have separated. In the rear basin of Ferpèche parts of a roman road across the **Col d'Hérens** can still be clearly seen.

The shelter Bricola, the retaining wall, a picnic place and the information panel of the Grand Dixence about the water distribution network are of touristic interest. Furthermore, the valley is remarkable for its native character and because it is free from touristic or other infrastructure. All in all, this is a rather disadvantageous initial position for the creation of value.

But considering the high landscape value of the valley and the more intensive positioning of natural tourism, the untouched character of the landscape is of central importance and of high value. When being exploited more intensely, this untouched character of the valley should remain in the focus. Ferpèche is a counterpoint to the other regions of the Val d'Hérens where settlements and touristic exploitation has made a big progress partially even up to critical dimensions. This „equalisation zone" must be maintained and protected under all circumstances. Nevertheless the tourism shall and will make use of the valley.

Tourism must be made possible with a priority on keeping the valley intact as a natural beauty. The aim is to position tourism in a very careful way in accordance with nature. In respect for the natural conditions no durably installed buildings shall be made. The valley shall still be reached by pedestrians only, using the retaining wall as a starting point.

Glacier park

The glacier world is the centre of the valley. It can be experienced by the majority of tourists as close as hardly anywhere else in the Val d'Hérens. The concept plans a glacier park, which should not be understood as a "park" in the traditional sense of the word, despite its name. In fact the plain between the reservoir and the glacier of the **Mont Miné** should be a zone where the most interesting and instructing aspects of the glaciers are shown, explained and experienced.

Possible ideas could be:

- Glacier retraction and glacier thickness throughout past centuries (Panel with indication of years)
- Types of glaciers
- Structure of a glacier
- Growing and retracting processes
- Glacier and climate
- The situation in which the glaciers Mont Miné and Ferpèche joined

Various glacier types such as hanging glacier and forms such as moraine types made visible on the area

Importance of local glaciers for the water balance system and the reservoir Barrage Grande Dixence

Glaciers and dangers

Furthermore general information about alpine security could be integrated such as:

Alpine dangers

Adequate behaviour in the mountains and on glaciers

Correct communication of accidents/ alpine emergency signal

Chart of avalanche dangers

Evaluation measures prior to a mountain hike

Reactivation of the Cabane Bricola and generation of new all-inclusive offers

The beauty of the valley is most visible in the daytime but it is not limited to it. The experience of changing light conditions in the evening and early in the morning can be communicated specifically. In order to make this possible, it should be checked if the lodging proposition of the Cabane Bricola can be reactivated. If this is possible new and attractive all-inclusive-offers could be created. As a working title, a name such as „Magical glacier night“ could be chosen. This title includes an all-inclusive-offer which could contain the following elements:

Guided walking tour, starting from **La Forclaz** through the glacier plain

Expert explanations about local mountain and glacier world under consideration of the "Glacier park"

A Fondue or Raclette dinner on site

Experiencing of nightfall and wonders of nature amongst others

Conclusions

The tourism economy is very important for the Val d'Hérens. The Val d'Hérens is unable to propose market-relevant special USPs up to now. The existing touristic facilities are to be judged as rather mediocre. There are good exemplary businesses, but then they are scarce. Today's tourist offer is based on a small structured development with a peak in the period from 1975 until 1995. Many tourist offers have grown superannuated and need renewal, and with this goes the need for investment.

The central strengths of the area are natural landscapes and some aspects of the cultural landscapes. But then some of these values are threatened by urban sprawl and by the loss of traditional appearance of the localities. As a first step, the future tourism development needs a clear tourism strategy by the tourism organisations, communities and lead businesses, and performance-related mandates tuned on each other. Local structures must be optimised in order to fulfil future duties in the sense of a common development and tourism strategy. Concepts for development, financing, realisation and marketing must be integrated in the strategic long term orientations.

The authors advise a twofold tourism strategy based on mass tourism for the winter sport business (especially for the northern part of the valley) and nature tourism in summer as well as partially in the southern areas also in winter. Nature tourism should be based on the strengths mentioned above and on projects that are already launched. The currently existing points of attractions should be marketed in a better way. The opening of a regional nature park is the best way to take into account all the aspects of current and future tourism, existing structures and various exploitations in Val d'Hérens. The regional nature park can constitute the primary structure for the touristic development steps. It can be used for orientation. Furthermore it also provides some liberties, as for example the definition of the park perimeter, main content and economic scope of design in order to realise common or individual strategies without jeopardising the overall positioning.

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ZOBODAT - www.zobodat.at

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