

Via ferratas in nature and landscape



What Club Arc Alpin (CAA) says about it

www.club-arc-alpin.eu

The Via ferrata boom

Via ferrata-climbing is recognised as a separate mountain sport and has enjoyed increasing popularity for many years.

The use of Via ferratas have a fixed place both in the programmes of the mountain sports associations of the CAA as well as in the courses offered by private organisers. Via ferratas allow many people to enjoy unique mountain experiences in comparatively extreme landscapes without extensive previous experience.

There are different types of Via ferratas, from traditional fixed routes in exposed terrain to sports routes which are generally established in lower, easily accessible locations for the purpose of sporting experiences.

For some years now a trend of developing new Via ferratas has appeared across the Alps, and this trend seems set to continue in future. This development is primarily the work of tourism circles groups and mountain guides. The trend is heading in the direction of increasingly difficult climbs with many technical installations.

Via ferratas YES, BUT...!

The member associations of the CAA consider Via ferratas and their use to be an interesting complement to mountain sports possibilities. As with all infrastructure in the mountains, however, there are questions regarding their negative effects and limits:

- Via ferratas alter the nature of the local landscape, which loses its original character and nature.
- Via ferratas draw large numbers of visitors and the associated traffic, which can have negative effects in the local area.
- Via ferratas raise new issues of safety, training, personal responsibility and accident prevention.
- There is a danger of a "build up" to increasingly elaborate installations and an uncontrolled "arms race" between competing tourism destinations.

In its 2008 "Mountaineering Charter", the CAA formulated the requirements for new Via ferratas as follows:

Limits should be set for the development of the mountains with technical alpine equipment; the unspoiled high mountain region with its outstanding value in terms of experience must not be subject to development with equipment. The construction of Via ferratas, canyon routes, climbing gardens, etc., should be restricted to areas close to the valley which are developed in terms of traffic engineering and can deal with pollution in ecological terms. The description of routes in guides and topos should be carried out with the necessary consideration for the specific local cultural and ecological features.

The member associations of the CAA have established their own specific positions regarding Via ferratas. They are available for download on the internet sites of the corresponding associations (via the CAA website www.club-arc-alpin.eu).

The Austrian and German alpine associations (OeAV and DAV) have developed a joint list of criteria which we can recommend to Via ferrata project teams as a basis for their planning.

Together with tourism groups and mountain guide groups the Swiss alpine club SAC has developed widely supported guidelines for the construction of new Via ferratas in the "Engelberg Via Ferrata Charter".

Planning of new Via ferratas - CAA demands

On the basis of its charter and the positions of its member associations, the CAA demands:

- **A conservative and regionally-coordinated development approach.**
- **Inclusion of all – including critical – interested parties, in particular alpine associations, at an early stage of the project.**
- **Establishment of new Via ferratas only in touristically or otherwise developed areas or ones which are accessible by public transport or mountain railways.**
- **Strict observance of official authorisation procedures.**
- **Consideration of concerns for the protection of nature and animals in new projects.**
- **No new Via ferratas in isolated, natural high mountain areas.**
- **Mountains whose peaks are only accessible by climbing may not be the subject of Via ferrata route development.**

The CAA and its approximately 1.8 million members ask that all local and regional authorities and tourism stakeholders observe these criteria in the planning and authorisation of new Via ferratas.

Resolved at the general assembly in September 2009 in Innsbruck.



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