

Skiing and Glacier Safety Course
Chamonix Valley

29th-30th January 2024

Guide Andy Perkins
Members Alan McLean
 Duncan Thomson
 Jo Driscoll
 Ian Nunn
 Jon Atterbury
 Jonny Singh

Venue Chamonix/Argentiere

If you've joined a course on glacier safety then there are worse places to be than on the terrace of the Aiguille du Midi (3800m) with a coffee at 9am, inspecting the rivers of ice pouring off Mont Blanc. Guide Andy Perkins took six of us to the Vallee Blanche for an educational adventure in brilliant windless sunshine. After a primer on glaciology and crevasse formation from the safety of the top station we roped up with boot crampons and axes to slither down the arete, transitioned and skied onto the Mer de Glace. The rain gods had hit the Alps the previous week but only below 2000m, above this all was white and the glacier was well filled-in. We enjoyed magnificent scenery and snow conditions following the Vallee Blanche down the Gros Rognon route. Snack and lunch breaks were used to demonstrate basic glacier safety and rescue principles. The end of the run was marked by the dying glacial snout and the dismal prospect of an hour of walking out. The good news was that a new gondola has just been built from the glacier up to Montenvers station. The bad news was that it was due to open the following day so we were among the last punters ever to climb the infernal steps within office hours.

New day, new glacier. We met at Argentiere, again in perfect conditions, for uplift to Grand Montets, with ski skins on from the Bochart chair. Snow was on the bearable side of firm and skinable with ski crampons. We followed several parties over the Col de Rachasses which is a natural break in the Rachasses ridge separating the Lognan mountain area from our target, the Argentiere Glacier. The NE slopes looked benign and inviting but the heavy snow cover concealed the potential dangers of the Glacier de Rognons which cascades down to the main glacier. Andy led us down a safe but tortuous route to the flatter ground. From below we later saw other (non-Eagles) parties above us having difficulties finding the easier ground, free of cliffs and crevasses. The Argentiere Glacier was an excellent classroom to practice with ice screws, snow anchors, basic haul systems and roped glacier travel. We finished in the late winter afternoon picking a beautiful route through the west side of the glacier with a final traverse out to Lognan above some heart-stopping monster crevasses below. The pistes were well filled in and we removed skis 50m from the cars.