

Advanced Skier - Ski Tips for Touring the Three Valleys Black Runs

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We have skied here for 20 years so trust us, you really have chosen possibly the very best resort in the world for advanced skiers. Our team are mainly skiers (although we have boarded too), so although we try, specific snowboarding tips are slightly limited.

It might be a good idea to also download and read the Intermediates sheet which covers many of the **red** runs in the 3 valleys. There are many reds in the Three Valleys that would be classified Black in other resorts. Definitely buy a 3-valley pass. It's worth every cent. You have an unbelievable area of over 600km (375 miles +) of pisted runs to explore without ever taking your skis off.

You can ski every day, all day in sunshine (weather permitting of course). In a one week holiday you need never ski the same run twice. Download a copy of the 3 valleys piste map at www.skimottarett.com on the Local Knowledge page. This article will make far more sense to you when combined with the map. You may then decide to print out these pages and bring them with you. Feel free. Have good read at breakfast in your chalet or apartment, make some brief notes then head off for a great day on the slopes. We promise you that will find all this information very useful.

Between us we have also probably skied every single **black run** and **off piste route** in all 3 valleys and can assure you that there is certainly enough advanced skiing here for all but the most experienced extreme skiers. Just hire a mountain guide or join an off piste ski group and discover all the goodies for yourself. We promise you that will find all this information very useful although for reasons of avalanche safety we will not describe most off our piste routes. These you should do only with a qualified instructor or mountain guide.

However if you do feel confident enough to go off piste without a guide then your best bet is to buy "**les 3 vallees hors piste**". This is an excellent off piste book written by two local mountain guides. You will find it in the local book stores in Meribel.

Also check the skiing page on www.skimottarett.com for tips and contact details for off piste guiding.

Meribel & Mottaret Valley

We have 5 **blacks** in the Meribel valley and the best of these are **La Face** which was the women's Olympic downhill course in 1992 and **Bartavelle**, at the top of Roc de Tougne double drag lift in Mottaret.

Combe Tougnète is a **black** that runs from the top of the Gondola of the same name right down to Chaudanne. This is a fabulous run in new powder as it never gets groomed. The same applies to the "**Les Bosses**" **black run** directly under the Plan de L'Homme chair lift. This 2nd one is worth getting out of bed for if we have had heavy snow overnight. Heavy snow means the top lifts are closed till about 11am but Plan de L'Homme always opens as usual. Eventually **Les Bosses** develops in to a major mogul field. ("Bosses" is French for "bumps")

La Face:

Take the Roc de Fer chair from Chaudanne then the Olympic chair to the peak, also called Roc de Fer (2294m). **La Face** is a very easy **black** early morning if groomed but it gets worn, bumpy and icy later. From this run you also can take the off piste itinerary to either Raffort or ski down to Les Allues village snow permitting. The Olympe gondola brings you back from both to Chaudanne.

Bartavelle: Take the Combes chair out of Mottaret then the Roc de Tougne double drag lift. This is one of the best mogul fields in the 3 valleys.

The other **blacks** in the Meribel valley are **Tetras** by the Altiport and **Grand Rosiere** and **Sanglier** above Mottaret. All three get afternoon sun so new snow does not last long. However after a fresh dump they are wonderful and provide excellent spring snow skiing off the sides of the pistes during March and April.

If you are lucky enough to have a really big fall of snow all the way down to the valley floor then the itinerary through the forest to Brides Les Bains is extremely interesting. This run starts at the Altiport area.

Lunch:

At the bottom of **Bartavelle** is a super little restaurant called Chalet Togniat. It has a self service area or VIP roped off section on the terrace. Reservations essential for VIP section: Tel 04 79 00 45 11

In **Brides les Bains** have lunch at les Cerisiers, just by the base of the Olympe gondola.

In Mottaret use the Zig Zag. Excellent value and super food.

Courchevel: 1850:

Home of the famous couloirs. These are hairy and are the scene of a spectacular freeride competition every March. Catch the Courchevel Saulire Cable car, turn right as you get out and take your choice. The **Grand Couloir** is the easiest as it is relatively wide. Fabulous in new fresh powder but expect some giant moguls later. To ski the last Couloir in the bunch which faces down to Verdons you will need climbing gear to get in to it. Unless you are extremely proficient club together and take a guide for the day.

Suisses & Chanrossa are two excellent mogul fields. **Chanrossa** is also surrounded by some excellent wide off piste areas. As usual all serious off piste should really only be undertaken with a qualified mountain guide or instructor.

Lunch:

L'Arc-en-Ciel. At the base of Saulire up the steps. Excellent value little family restaurant. There is also a cheaper take away service underneath the restaurant. Reservations: 04 79 08 38 09

Courchevel. Le Praz 1300.

"**Jockeys**" is a testing black run down to La Praz. A fabulous run through the forest when the snow is good. **Jean Blanc** is another steep black route down through the trees. These two are especially good both during and after heavy snowfalls. Note: In early or late season they can both be very short on the white stuff lower down.

Lunch:

Excellent value restaurant opposite the lift station. La Table De Mon Grand-Pere. Delicious food with 2 course lunch. Tel: 04 79 08 41 42

Val Thorens:

Take the giant Cime de Caron cable car for the **Combe de Caron**. This is a black run that always has excellent snow. It's a long run right down to the base of the cable car. There is also a very interesting itinerary over here called **Lac du Lou**. However do not attempt it in bad visibility, as there are numerous dangerous areas in this valley. Again it's best to shell out for a guide who knows the route. This area has fantastic off piste possibilities in all directions. Now there is also a long **black** run "**Combe Rosael**" down the back side to Orelle that used to be off piste.

Lunch:

Lan Marine just below the Cascades chairlift. Great food especially the Coq u Vin. Tel: 04 79 00 03 12. Another choice is Chalet Les Sonnailes 04 79 00 74 28 which is actually in Reberty but accessed from VT. This is a super little restaurant on the **Boulevard Cumin** and has an excellent value daily plat du jour. This is a perfect lunch stop on the way back if you ski the **Lac Du Lou** itinerary.

Les Menuires:

There is an excellent itinerary for good weather at the back of **La Masse**. Tracks are usually easy to follow and lead round to the valley of Lac du Lou. **Dame Blanche** is another testing run down, accessed by the Masse draglift. There are excellent off piste routes from the top of La Masse to Le Bettex, St Marcel and St Martin De Belleville but in the interest of your safety I am not going describe the routes here. They are too tempting but also complicated so it is worth hiring a qualified guide/instructor for these, especially after a new snowfall. Or alternatively purchase the book as mentioned above. "**les 3 Vallees hors piste**". Within this book is every off piste route in the 3 valleys.

Lunch: 3 of the best.

Les Ferme - Reberty Village.

Chalet 2000 - Reberty.

Hotel L'ours Blanc: Excellent a la carte menu. Famous for it's steaks.

Summing up:

So an incredible amount of skiing for **advanced** levels. I can't emphasize enough the value of a good mountain guide for off piste adventures in this area. Having spent 3 seasons skiing with them we learnt enough to know that we know so very little. These guys are real specialists and if you want to push your skills to the limit hire one of them or join the daily group courses. Ski Discovery group lessons from the ESF and the Meribel Mountain Guides office. (all day or half day). Ski Sensations have mountain guides for private groups.

Be Careful: Off piste can be **extremely dangerous** especially in new deep powder or warm afternoon sunshine. Wear a helmet. One 17-year-old English boy sadly died in 2005 of head injuries in full view of Mottaret ski lifts. A helmet may well have saved his life. We also have one friend who was literally scalped by hitting her head off piste on a sharp rock last season. She lived but only just!

So once again we hope you have enjoyed these articles and find them helpful. We welcome feedback. feedback@meribel-unplugged.co.uk