



Via Ferrata Grade Scale

The original home of Via Ferrata is South Tyrol / Trentino where, during the First World War on the Alpine front between Austria and Italy, many walkways through the cliffs, some of which still exist today, were built as access routes for patrols and supplies. Over the last twenty years, via ferratas have experienced a boom in popularity, especially in the western Alps.

There are a few different grading systems for via ferrata, but the "Hüsler scale" is the main one used in Switzerland. The scale is named after Eugen E. Hüsler, who together with Daniel Anker documented around 100 via ferratas in Switzerland for their guidebook "Die Klettersteige der Schweiz".

| Grade | Route / terrain | Description | Examples |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| K1 (very easy) | Generally well marked, and secured where necessary. Security cables / attachment points comfortable to use. | Good natural steps; where these are missing, hewn stairs, short ladders and iron steps. Any exposed passages are fitted with cables or chains / rope for handrails rails). Experienced mountaineers may choose not to clip in. | Alpbachschlucht, Simmeflue |
| K2 (easy) | Already entering some steep climbing terrain, but the route is very secure. | Steep or vertical passages are fitted with ladders and/or iron steps. Steel cables and chains secure the climber, even in less difficult terrain. Ferrata set strongly advised. | Eiger-Rotstock, Rigidalstockgrat, |
| K3 (moderate) | Longer stretches in steep terrain, climbing sections of grade III, still very well secured. | Some technical climbing, but nothing that requires particularly strong arms. Ferrata set necessary. | Tälli, Graustock, Angelino Monte Generoso, Farinetta 1 |
| K4 (difficult) | Steep to vertical rock, even some well secured overhanging sections. In many cases the route feels exposed, natural steps and handholds are often small. | Steep terrain with continuous steel cables to attach to. Arm strength required. Artificial aids (iron steps, handholds) on hardest sections. The french style "sport via ferratas" are an exception: on some you may barely touch the rock at all, but climb an intricate series of iron rungs, crazy ladders, and even 'spiders webs', with maximum exposure. | Allmenalp, Gantrisch, Tour d'Aï, Echelles de la Mort, Farinetta 2 |
| K5 (very difficult) | Via ferratas in the most difficult and consistently steep terrain. Upper body strength and good technique, as well as good fitness are prerequisites. | Long, persistently demanding and therefore very strenuous. Vertical or exposed terrain may only have cables for safety, but little in the way of artificial steps, these are reserved only for places that would otherwise be impossible to cross. For experienced climbers who are in good shape. | Evolène Abschnitt 3, Greitispitz, Rochers de Naye |
| K6 (extremely difficult) | Via ferrata for gymnasts / athletes with bulging biceps and nerves of steel. | Long sparsely secured gymnastic circuits that require real stamina. Climbing/approach shoes may be useful. Additional security to be provided by rope/ belaying (recommend- | Leukerbadner 2. Teil, Piz Trovat 2, Farinetta 3 |

ed).

Other important factors that constitute the grade:

- Altitude: valley/ low mountain range/ high Alps?
- Terrain style: sheltered by forest/ short steps through alpine meadows/ steep cliffs/ ridges.
- Length and exposure of the route—commitment value.
- Route characteristics: type and regularity of attachment points/ safety cables.
- Ascent plus descent i.e. total route length
- Path used for approach and descent: paved paths/ gravel footpath/ pathless
- Orientation: is it well marked?

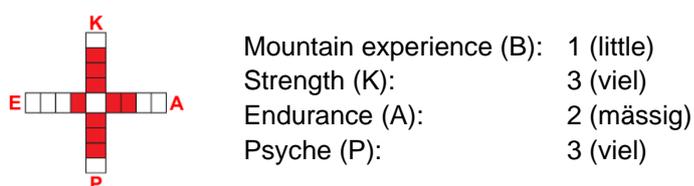
All these factors result in the overall rating from K1 (very easy) to K6 (extremely difficult).

Hüsler's via ferrata cross (HKK)

The 4 skills that a via ferrata climber should have are mountain experience (B), strength (K), endurance (A) and mental resilience (P). The four skills (shown as bars) are specified in the book "Die Klettersteige der Schweiz" and in the SAC Route portal as the "Hüsler Klettersteig Kreuz", and each via ferrata has one. Each skill has four levels (1 = little, 2 = average, 3 = good, 4 = excellent) and is to be used as a supplement to the overall assessment.

It should help to clarify the unique characteristics of your chosen tour: from a short, extremely airy route, to a long, tiring, but relatively easy ridge traverse.

Here's an example, the Allmenalp via ferrata (Overall grade K4)



The term "via ferrata" is used to describe various types of secured routes. In addition to the level of difficulty and the requirements, via ferratas can be divided into four categories:

- Secured foot paths: Paths that are only secured on short sections and are rather easy. Example: Simme flue
- Alpine route: route over firn / glacier and / or unsecured rocky terrain up to difficulty level II. Example: crossing Schöllijoch Topalihütte - Turtmannhütte
- Via ferrata: Via ferrata secured with steel cables; Difficult places are secured with ladders, iron bars or steps. Example: Gantrisch via ferrata
- Sports via ferrata: Like via ferrata, but equipped with special attractions (bridges, rope ladders, zip lines). Example: Gemmi adventure via ferrata