

CHARLOTTE BEAUCHEMIN

EXCLUSIVE EXCERPTS FROM THE BOOK

CROSSING FRANCE ON FOOT

A Guide to Hiking the HexaTrek



In the following pages, I invite you to discover four selected excerpts from my guide, *Crossing France on Foot : A Guide to Hiking the Hexatrek*.

Please note that the full book is over 400 pages long and is packed with practical advice, field-tested recommendations, inspiring stories, and tips for preparing for, experiencing, and returning from a long-distance hiking adventure.

This document offers only a glimpse of the full work.

I hope these pages will inspire you to discover more and, perhaps even, set out on your own adventure.

Enjoy your reading!

Charlotte Beauchemin, 2025

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EXCERPT FROM SECTION

PREAMBULE

Charlotte Beauchemin, 2025

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Foreword

Long-distance hiking has given me new perspectives on life, a deep appreciation of the present moment, precious friendships, a renewed capacity for wonder and a great connection with nature.

Having completed several hikes lasting a few weeks over the past few years, the desire to set off on an adventure lasting several months was growing stronger and stronger. While scrolling through my Instagram feed in early November 2023, I came across the HexaTrek. This trail ticked all the boxes: breathtaking mountain scenery, a thriving community, a rich cultural and natural heritage, accessible logistics, and in France, a country in which I'd already loved hiking. I knew immediately that this was the right trail for me, and I set off on it on May 31, 2024.

Today, I can say that the HexaTrek is one of the best experiences of my life. I've grown and changed.

The idea of writing a guide to this hike came to me as I was walking. It was part of a reflection begun in 2023. While giving a lecture on the practice of long-distance hiking, I had noticed that adventurers were often perceived as invincible, without fear or doubt. As someone who tends to be anxious and full of apprehensions, I felt the need to break this image. I wanted to show that it's perfectly possible to be vulnerable and still go for it. I wanted to encourage those who dream of doing so to dare to take the plunge.

On November 7, 2024, two days after returning from the HexaTrek, I set about writing this book. I quickly realised the magnitude of the task.

Fortunately, I wasn't alone: several friends and specialists gave me invaluable help, whether through testimonials, invaluable advice or an informed look at the content.

I'd like to extend my heartfelt thanks to Ana-Diana, Hugo, Edouard, Hermione, Florian, Gala, Alexia, Aubert and Hugo (yes, I have several friends named Hugo!) for their essential contributions to this project.

I'd also like to extend a special thank you to the founders and association of the HexaTrek. Their remarkable work in designing, structuring and publicising this great hiking route across France is a true source of inspiration. Thanks to their vision, today thousands of hikers can experience a unique adventure.

To you, dear readers, I hope this guide will inspire you to make the decision to set off, make your day-to-day management on the trail easier, and above all, live an adventure as rich and unforgettable as mine.



What Will You Find in This Book?

My project was to create as complete a guide to the HexaTrek as possible, enriched with as many practical tips on trekking as possible.

The book is divided into four main sections:

- The first section is dedicated to logistical preparation, to get you off to a good start on the HexaTrek. You'll find plenty of advice on how to organise your departure.
- The second focuses on managing day-to-day life on long-distance trails, with practical tips for better living on the trail.
- A third section details each sub-section of the HexaTrek, with specific recommendations. Probably the most useful during your walk; it can be read as you go along, before each new section.
- Finally, a last section is dedicated to the return to everyday life. Here, I share my thoughts, advice and learning from this great adventure.

This guide is above all practical. But throughout the chapters, you'll also find interviews with hikers from a wide range of backgrounds, as well as first-hand accounts of the HexaTrek.

If you're looking for more trail anecdotes or a more personal account, I invite you to check out my hiking blog, where I share a complete diary of my days on the trail.

This guide is the fruit of my personal experience. It is neither official nor affiliated with the HexaTrek association. I designed it independently, with the aim of conveying an accessible, human and concrete version of this great adventure across France.

I wish you an excellent read... and, above all, a wonderful adventure!

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EXCERPT FROM THE SECTION ***PREPARING FOR YOUR ADVENTURE***

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Budget

In the following paragraphs, I'll show you the amount of money I spent on the trail in different categories. I used the exchange rate between France and Canada at the time, which was as follows: €1 = CAD 1.5. In the event of a major change in the conversion rate, you can rely on the amounts in euros.

For my part, I don't consider that I was an extreme minimalist in my spending, but I don't think I went overboard either. Taking only a few half-board or Airbnb accommodation, my average expenditure was around **34 euros (~CAD 51) per day** for food, accommodation and hygiene products. If you added in transport during the hike, outdoor equipment that I had to replace and other one-off expenses, the total came to almost **49 euros (~CAD 74) per day**. That's well above the average daily figure given on the HexaTrek website, even for their high budget. This figure excludes my plane tickets and the days I spent in France before and after my trek.

During the trek itself, I spent a total of **€6,607 (~CAD 9,911)**. If I include all expenses, including my plane ticket, the total comes to **€7,900 (~CAD 11,851)**. In total, I spent **161 days in France, 150** of which were **spent hiking**. However, for those who wish to check my calculations in the expenses table, please note that I have based my average daily expenses on **136 days** instead of 150. The reason for this is that when my parents came to visit me for a fortnight, they were very generous enough to cover my daily expenses during their stay. I have therefore removed these days from my calculations so as not to distort my statistics.

Here's a rough breakdown of my expenses. I stress the word 'approximate' because it's difficult for me to be precise to the nearest ten dollars. Sometimes I withdraw cash from the bank and I can't remember the exact breakdown between each category of expenditure to the nearest dollar. However, this will give you a good idea of the breakdown of expenses.

Daily Expenses: €4,650 (~ CAD 6,981)

Daily expenses, including food, hygiene and accommodation, were obviously the biggest item on my tour. We're talking about €34 (~CAD 51) per day. I could probably have reduced this budget slightly, but I wanted to retain a certain amount of flexibility, to be able to afford comfortable accommodation in case of bad weather or to enjoy meals that I liked.

Here are the statistics for my night's stays:

- Bivouacs or free accommodation: 96 nights (64%)
- Paid campsites: 34 nights (23%)
- Guarded refuges: 7 nights (5%)
- Hotels or Airbnb: 12 nights (8%)

As you can see, 64% of my nights were free. With a little organisation, it is possible to increase this percentage, but don't expect to be able to sleep for free all along the trail. In some sections, bivouacking is strictly forbidden, and if you finish your day in a town or village, it can be difficult to find accommodation free of charge.

In the first four sections, I largely opted for bivouacs. However, in sections 5 and 6, I resorted more to paying accommodation, partly because the night-time temperatures became less pleasant. We also

encountered two major storms that forced us to leave the trail and stay in Airbnb accommodation in town for a few days. These kinds of unforeseen events can quickly add up. I therefore recommend that you set aside a minimum budget for these situations to avoid unpleasant surprises.

As far as food was concerned, prices varied depending on whether I went to a small local grocery shop or a supermarket. The main difference between shopping on the trail and in everyday life is that you buy your food in very small quantities so as not to overload your backpack. This can increase the price, but as you are eating more basic food in return, the difference remains reasonable.

At first, I minimised my food expenditure by only buying what was on special offer or at the lowest price. It even took me over two weeks to persuade myself to eat in a restaurant! Over time, I've gradually incorporated little pleasures linked to French gastronomy, but I've remained relatively moderate in this type of expenditure.

However, I spent an average of around €3 to €4 (CAD 4.50 to CAD 6) a day on a good cup of coffee, my daily treat. Over 150 days of walking, this represents a sum of between €450 and €600 (CAD 675 and CAD 800). Looking back, it's an expense I could have reduced. However, it was part of my routine, and this little pleasure had great symbolic value for me.

For my part, the gastronomic aspect was not a determining factor in my happiness on the trail. Eating pasta every evening suited me just fine. However, I know that some hikers choose this trek precisely to discover the quality and diversity of French gastronomy. If you're a gourmet, expect to pay a bit more.

It is also important to note that food in refuges is much more expensive than that available in towns and villages. This is due to the difficulty of restocking supplies in isolated areas. A normal meal can cost around €18 to €24 (CAD 27 to CAD 36). Breakfast costs around €10 or €11 (15 to CAD 16.50), and I've even seen a hot chocolate for €7 (~CAD 10.50)! If you plan to take full advantage of French gastronomy or meals in a refuge, bear in mind that this can quickly increase your food costs.

Finally, having injured my Achilles tendon, another not-inconsiderable expense was the purchase of anti-inflammatory creams, sports bandages, blister dressings, etc. These are expenses that seem fairly small but added together they add up to a considerable sum. These may seem like small expenses, but taken together, they add up to a considerable sum.

Gear Equipment: €675 (CAD 1,015)

Outdoor equipment is a category of expenditure that should not be underestimated. Walking 3,000 kilometres will undoubtedly require you to replace your hiking boots or shoes. I had to buy three pairs of shoes for around €150 (CAD 225) each. On average, I'd say that most hikers use between three and four pairs to achieve the trail.

It can be tempting to try and use the same pair of shoes for as long as possible, but this is a potential pitfall, as it increases the risk of injury. I used my first pair for 1,100 kilometres. Although the outside of the shoe still looked good, the cushioning was no longer effective. This caused me to suffer from plantar fasciitis twice, and I had to stop for several days to heal. As well as the shoes, I also had to replace my trekking poles, buy new charging cables, buy a new external battery (after a

theft), and buy extra warm clothing and spikes because of the particularly cold weather conditions in 2024.

I hadn't anticipated that I would spend so much on outdoor equipment during my trek. These unforeseen events taught me that it's essential to set aside a budget for this category to cover any necessary replacements or adjustments.

Treatments: €335 (CAD 505)

This amount may raise your eyebrows, but I've had to see several massage therapists and osteopaths because of my Achilles tendon pain. In total, I've had four massage therapy sessions and two consultations with osteopaths, at prices ranging from €45 to €60 (68 to CAD 90).

Packages and Subscriptions

This category is divided into three main subscriptions:

Cellular package:

If there's one thing that's not expensive in France, it's cellphone packages! I opted for Free's subscription at around €10 (CAD 15) a month, which includes 140 GB of data in France, unlimited calls and texts abroad, as well as 30 GB of usable data in Europe.

I also paid about €11 (CAD 17) to buy a SIM card. My network was excellent, probably one of the best of the various companies on the market. Of all the hikers I walked with, I was often the one who had the most frequent access to data. So, I can highly recommend this package. To get a SIM card and activate your subscription, all you have to do is go to a Free store.

Garmin InReach package:

I spent around €120 (CAD181) on my subscription to Garmin's 'Freedom' service to ensure my safety in an emergency. This includes activation of the device as well as a monthly subscription to access two-way satellite communications, weather forecasts and the SOS service. Most solo hikers had a satellite communication device. For me, it was an essential piece of equipment: accidents happen so quickly, and it's crucial to be able to contact help even without a cellular network. (We'll come back to this subject in the section of the book talking about safety.)

HexaTrek mobile application:

It was a one-off purchase that cost me around €55 (CAD 82).

Post and Parcels: Approximately €80 (CAD 120)

During my five months on the trail, I twice sent parcels across France to lighten my backpack.

Some hikers sent parcels to each other throughout the hike to pick up equipment or more suitable clothing depending on the season or section. However, sending parcels is not essential, unlike other hikes, such as the PCT, where sending food is often vital.

Train and Bus: Approximately €410 (CAD 620)

Unless you're facing exceptional weather conditions, you shouldn't have to spend so much on transport.

In 2024, the snow stayed very late in the Alps (a record for over 50 years!). I therefore had to adapt my itinerary, covering the sections in the following order: 1, 4, 2, 3, 5, 6. This forced me to make several

return trips by train and bus between sections to get back on track. If you're lucky enough to have better conditions, take heart: you could save more than €400 (CAD 600) on transport alone.

Health Insurance: Approximately €175 (CAD 260)

As I'd just finished my studies, my student insurance covered me until 31 August. So, I only needed to take out travel insurance for the last two months of my trip. With Blue Cross, it cost me around €175 (CAD 260). If you need insurance for a longer period, you'll need to budget more!

Of course, there are ways of reducing your budget and adjusting it according to your means. On this subject, I had the chance to talk to Hugo, HexaTrek 'finisher' in 2024, and to ask him several questions about his hike.

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EXCERPT 1 FROM THE SECTION

ON THE TRAIL: STEP- BY-STEP ADVICE

Charlotte Beauchemin, 2025
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In the Field: Step-by-Step Advice

In this chapter, I'll introduce you to each of the main sections and subsections of the trail. You'll find, for each section, an overview, my favourites, advice on alternative paths, potential difficulties and personal comments.

I did the HexaTrek in the north-south direction. My advice is still valid, whichever way you walk, but sometimes you'll have to reverse it.

The distances mentioned are those indicated by the GPX files and the HexaTrek mobile application, and I have revised them with the new routes for the 2025 season. For some locations, I've also added some GPS coordinates.

Understanding Quotations

First of all, here are the meanings of the different ratings used in hiking:

Quotation	Explanation
T1	Well-marked path. Generally flat or slightly sloping terrain, with no risk of falling.
T2	A continuous, sometimes steep path with a moderate risk of falling.
T3	The path may be discontinuous and not very visible in places. Some exposed passages are equipped with chains

	or ropes to facilitate balance. Expectations of terrain with scree and rocky slopes.
T4	The path is often discontinuous in terms of alignment; the use of hands may be necessary. The terrain is more exposed, with passages of delicate grassy slopes, rocky areas and easy névés, and even glaciers not covered in snow.
T5	A demanding alpine trail, the terrain is more exposed, with fairly easy climbing sections, the possibility of névés and small glaciers.
T6	A difficult alpine trail, often without tracks, very exposed, very steep and with an increased risk of falling, with some climbing passages, glaciers and névés with a risk of crevasse. Not to be attempted without mountaineering experience and specific equipment, such as ice axe, rope and crampons.

The HexaTrek uses ratings from T2 to T4 and, when the level of difficulty exceeds T4, it uses the T4+ rating (not T5 or T6). During my journey, I found that some passages didn't quite seem to correspond to their assigned rating. Sometimes, a T3 rating seemed more difficult than a T4+.

Now let's explore the trail, section by section.

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EXCERPT 2 FROM THE SECTION

ON THE TRAIL: STEP-BY-STEP ADVICE

Charlotte Beauchemin, 2025

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Section 2

At 382 kilometres, Section 2 is the shortest in distance, but make no mistake, it is no less demanding. With more than 22,000 metres of elevation gain, it represents a serious physical challenge. Fortunately, this breathtaking crossing of the Alps (both figuratively and literally) will almost make you forget your fatigue. Section 2 takes you through the Haute-Savoie, the Beaufortain and the Vanoise.

Haute-Savoie

In this section, prepare to be blown away by magnificent panoramas dominated by the majestic Mont Blanc in the background. This iconic massif offers spectacular scenery at every turn. You will cross lush alpine valleys, steep passes and high plateaux, with breathtaking views of glaciers and snow-capped peaks. A firm favourite with hikers, this section attracts countless enthusiasts each year, drawn by famous routes such as the Tour du Mont Blanc.

Not to Be Missed

Bivouac near Lake Darbon (46° 20' 26.8" N, 6° 44' 58.7" E)

After several kilometres skirting Lac Léman, the trail enters more spectacular mountain ranges around kilometre 50. As we briefly left the trail to gain altitude, we were rewarded with a magnificent sunset, alone against the mountains.



Bivouac near the La Haute Bise restaurant (km 78.5)

At the summit of the Col de Bassachaux, the La Haute Bise restaurant kindly allows hikers to bivouac on their grounds after 5 p.m. You'll find drinking water, lovely flat pitches and picnic tables, with sublime views at both sunrise and sunset. When I stayed there overnight, I met around ten other hikers.

Take a lunch break on a ridge (46° 09' 36.2" N, 6° 47' 33.3" E)

A few kilometres after the Col de Coux (km 91.7), you begin a magnificent ridge walk. About thirty minutes later, you'll reach an ideal spot for a lunch break: a picnic table set right in the middle of the path, offering a breathtaking view of the mountains. It's hard to imagine a better place to pause for a snack or a meal.



Spend the night at the Refuge du Folly (km 105.7) (46° 06' 10.7" N, 6° 46' 19.7" E)

The Folly refuge was the first staffed refuge I stayed in during this major crossing of France. Having suffered from food poisoning the day before, I mustered my strength to reach it – and the welcome was exceptional. You can spend the night here for the modest sum of 17 euros (2024 rate) and sign one of the guest books, all against a spectacular mountain backdrop. The owners love welcoming hikers, especially those undertaking the HexaTrek.

Bivouac at the summit of Cheval Blanc (km 142) (46° 03' 06.8" N, 6° 52' 21.5" E)

Of all the HexaTrek, my bivouac at the summit of Cheval Blanc was my favourite. Rarely have I witnessed a view as spectacular as the sunrise I saw there. For me, it's a must see that I wholeheartedly recommend – if the weather conditions are favourable when you're there. Don't hesitate to shorten your day's walk if you can sleep up there. To give

you an idea, it mattered so much to me that I only walked seven kilometres that day. Sometimes it's worth setting aside distance goals to experience unforgettable moments. Make sure there are no thunderstorms or strong winds during the night, as you'll be very exposed to bad weather. However, you can still give it a go if only mist is forecast. Personally, visibility had been forecast to be almost zero in the morning, but I woke up to perfectly clear skies. I'm not saying you'll necessarily have the same luck, but sometimes the conditions work in your favour. Bring warm clothes: it was among the coldest nights I've ever had.



Bivouac at Lacs des Chéserys (Km 165.7)

A word of warning: if you're not interested in bivouacking among dozens of other hikers, this may not be the place for you. I've included it on my 'must-see' list because it offers an exceptional view of Mont Blanc and allows you to take spectacular photos from the Lacs de Chéserys. Please note that since the summer of 2024, it has been mandatory to book

your spot online to limit the number of people bivouacking each night. Here's the website to book: Bivouac.



Take a day off in Chamonix and eat a good fry-up and a hot dog at the Cool Cats restaurant

Even though Chamonix isn't officially on the HexaTrek route, it's worth the detour, whether for a well-deserved rest day or a few hours' break. If you're hungry, I recommend the Cool Cats restaurant in Chamonix, which serves chips with a multitude of toppings and the most filling hot dogs I know. Chips with truffle mayonnaise and Parmesan? Go for it!

[General Advice and Comments](#)

Stagger your stages on the Tour du Mont Blanc section to avoid crowds

By this point, you've already been on the trail for several weeks, enjoying the peace and quiet of nature. Suddenly, as you round a bend, you're confronted by a huge crowd: hundreds, even thousands of hikers sharing the same path. You've just reached the shared section between

the HexaTrek and the Tour du Mont Blanc (TMB). To reduce this congestion, I suggest staggering your stages in relation to those of the TMB. In my case, instead of following the classic stage between the village of Les Houches and Contamines-les-Joies, I set off in the afternoon and stopped at the bivouac area at Miage. This way, I encountered fewer hikers over the following days and didn't have to walk in single file.

Don't worry if your daily mileage drops compared with Section 1

In Section 2, the positive and negative gradients increase significantly in relation to the distance. Whereas you might have covered thirty kilometres or more per day towards the end of Section 1, your daily average here may drop to around 15 or 20 kilometres. Don't be discouraged – this is perfectly normal.

Crampons will probably be useful for this section

The 2024 season was marked by exceptionally slow snowmelt. The founders of the HexaTrek even recommended not tackling sections 2 and 3 until early July. Although the trail became passable around that time, crampons were required for several stretches. If you don't want to carry them in Section 1, you can wait until the start of Section 2 to assess conditions and, if necessary, buy them in Thonon-les-Bains.

Beware of the weather

In Haute-Savoie, the weather can change rapidly and isn't always as forecast. Check the forecast regularly throughout the day, as conditions can shift quickly. There are also more exposed sections in Section 2, so exercise caution.

Expect higher expenses than in Section 1

Section 2 passes through more touristy areas, particularly around Mont Blanc, where prices are often higher. Whether for accommodation, food, or campsites, you'll find that costs can quickly escalate – especially in mountain refuges and restaurants. If you're on a tight budget, plan your supplies in more accessible villages and opt for bivouacs, checking the regulations carefully. Above all, avoid buying groceries in Chamonix, where prices are very high. Even the locals shop outside town to save money.

Research accommodation in advance

The growing popularity of the trails around Mont Blanc and in Haute-Savoie sometimes leads to limited availability at refuges and campsites. Make sure to book ahead if you plan to sleep or eat there, especially during high season, to ensure you have a spot for the night.

If your gas canister is nearly empty, take advantage of your stay in Chamonix to buy a new one

Until the end of Section 2, it can be difficult to restock gas supplies. It took me several days to find a place that sold camping gas, and when I finally did, there was only one canister left.

[Alternative Routes](#)

Les Dents Blanches, rated T4+ at kilometre 94.4

This alternative route is shorter than the standard path, but don't be fooled – it's far more technical and physically demanding. According to the mobile app, it's one of the most difficult variants on the HexaTrek. It includes two particularly challenging sections: the Pas au Taureau and the Pas de la Latte. Although it may be tempting to reduce mileage by

choosing this route, ensure the weather is favourable before attempting it.

Personally, I had to skip it due to the risk of thunderstorms on the day I planned to go. I spoke to two hikers who attempted it during storms and hail; they told me they genuinely feared for their safety. If the weather is clear and you're confident with cables and chain-assisted crossings – and not overly afraid of heights – this variant could well be worth the effort. It's a good shortcut, but bear in mind you'll need to use your hands in places and may also need a short, fixed rope for safety.

Lake Anterne at Kilometre 134.1

This is an emergency route allowing you to avoid difficult sections such as the Frêtes du Grenier and Cheval Blanc. It's recommended in bad weather or for those afraid of heights. Personally, I followed the classic route. Here's some advice to help you decide:

- **Check conditions at the Refuge du Grenairon:** located right at the junction between the classic and alternative routes, this refuge is the perfect place to ask for up-to-date information. The owners know the mountains well and can guide you, though their storm predictions can sometimes be unreliable. My friend received incorrect advice and nearly got caught on the summit of Cheval Blanc during a storm. Weather forecasting can be tricky, but they can give you reliable details about snow cover and trail conditions.
- **Some hikers have tackled the classic path despite a slight fear of heights:** although the classic route may be daunting, it's still accessible. I met a hiker who took it despite being mildly afraid of heights, and she managed perfectly well. However, if your fear of heights is strong, the alternative route might be safer.

- **Expect a steep descent after Cheval Blanc:** for hikers heading SOBO, the descent after the summit of Cheval Blanc is steep but equipped with chains for safety. Late-season névés may still be present, so crampons might be necessary. (For advice on crossing a névé safely, see the section dedicated to that topic!)
- **Your efforts will be rewarded with incredible views:** the regular route allows you to bivouac at the summit of Cheval Blanc, which the mobile app describes as one of the finest bivouac sites on the entire HexaTrek. From the summit, you can admire the stunningly colourful Vieux-Émosson and Émosson lakes. After gazing at Mont Blanc from afar, you'll enjoy a refreshing change of scenery as the massif draws ever closer to the Lacs de Chéserys.