

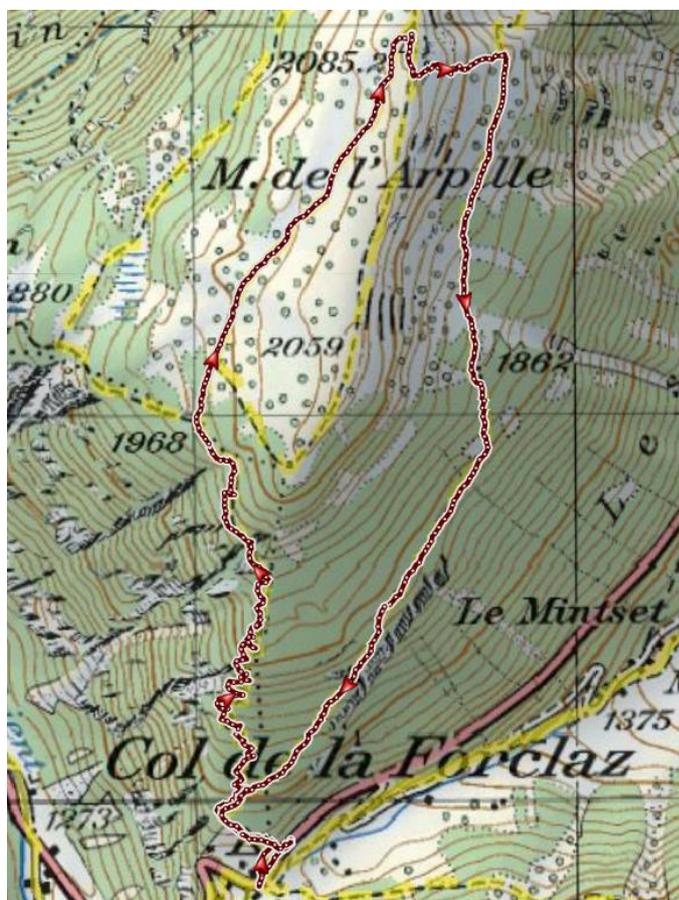
Summits near the Rhone Valley, September 2013

Paul, HB9DST

Hans PB2T was in Geneva on IARU business and had a free weekend, and he wanted to know if I was free for some activations. I was, did some research in my hiking books, came up with a list of possibilities and booked a room for Saturday in Martigny so we had two days for possible activations.

VS-112, Mont de l'Arpille

We took advantage of the nice weather on Saturday to activate VS-112. Hans picked me up at the Martigny train station and we drove up to Col de la Forclaz. That's very fortunate because the very earliest bus connection I could catch would get me there at around 2 p.m. -- almost making this an overnight SOTA. There was adequate free parking, and we hiked up about 580m, which took just less than 1.5 hours.



There are two primary ways to get there. Going up we took the western route, which is steep for the first 2/3 and moderate for the last stretch. We came down the eastern route, where the incline is spread out more evenly along the route, except for the section nearest to the summit, where it is quite steep. However, the western path is very rocky most of the way, and it's all in forests. The eastern route is about the same length, has better footing (far fewer rocky sections) and the scenery is much nicer. So anyone activating this summit, I recommend the eastern route. Note, there is a signpost where these two routes merge about

15 minutes north of the parking lot; the yellow sign says the route to the summit is to the left (western route), whereas the white sign also points out that the eastern route exists.



Although the orange hiking sign says go northwest for Mont de l'Arpille, you can also go northeast to get to there as indicated by the white sign.

The activation area is nice and large with some nice views. I had 35 QSOs, mostly on 40m with three S2S contacts. Hans started on 20m using his KX3, and on his first contact got a contact from the US.



The activation area is quite large, which is good because this summit is popular with hikers.

After a well-earned post-activation beer, Hans drove me to my hotel in Martigny. We then had an early dinner to plan our activation(s) for the next day.

VD-022, Berneuse

Rain came through on Saturday night and on Sunday everything was very wet with some lingering showers and plenty of fog. We knew we it would not be safe to attempt most of our planned activations in the area, so we looked for some where we could ride up most of the way.

We found one in VD-022, Berneuse. Hans picked me up at the train station in Aigle and from there we drove to Leysin. There we took a gondola to Berneuse (CHF 22.00 round trip), and the mountain station, which is just a stone's throw away from a restaurant. There was a reasonably strong chilly breeze with intermittent rain. I found a sheltered area under a stairway, and Hans set up in the shelter of a glass wall on the terrace. Despite the poor conditions, I managed more than 50 QSOs, but didn't work any S2Ss (although I heard some weak ones and couldn't break through the pileup).



HB9DST underneath a stairway protected from the wind and rain, PB2T on the terrace.

If the weather had been sunny and dry, we would have probably also activated VD-014, Tour d'Ai (2.5 km, 1 hour 45 minutes, 303 meters elevation). It involves a steep grassy slope, and we knew even before we got to the cablecar station that VD-014 would be impossible on this trip and would have to wait for a later day.



"The two towers of Leysin": The sharp peak to the left is VD-014, Tour d'Ai; to its immediate right is VD-045, Tour de Mayen. Those two along with Berneuse (VD-022) should be possible if you get an early start in the morning.

VD-023, Rochers de Naye

We got back to Hans' car at roughly noontime. Given the weather, the only realistic option remaining was VD-023, which is at the top of a cog railway run that starts in Montreux. Not only was Hans a bit chilled, he was also put off by the CHF 60.00 fee for the cog railway (you certainly can't blame him! -- how much is one particular SOTA worth when there are so many?), so he dropped me off at the Montreux train station and continued on to Geneva. I walked through the station to the track where the train was scheduled to depart and just as I got there I saw it start to pull out. Damn!! Now I have to kill an hour. Then the impossible happened -- the driver stopped the train so I could get on! With my GA, the round trip fee was CHF 25.00. It turns out Hans made a wise decision. While the weather at lake level was

starting to clear, dark rain clouds were covering all the peaks. To be concise, it was just downright miserable. Dense fog with sight of about 20 meters. Constant drizzle and at times heavy rain. At least, though, the temperature was well above freezing (7 deg C) and I had more than enough clothing.



What a lovely day for an activation... (VD-023)

The train ride up takes about an hour. From the train station, there's a 15-minute hike up about 70 meters on an easy T2 trail designed for tourists. Up top is an observation platform. On a nice day the views must be spectacular and this platform must be extremely crowded (good place to use a loop antenna, except for the radio antenna that is right there, which makes it almost impossible to tune a loop). On this day, though, I had it all to myself for the entire activation, which I made quick due to the steady rain -- only 17 QSOs, a number of them after I announced QRT but they just kept coming. "Well," I thought, "I'm already wet, so what's a few more minutes? I'll work this last batch of stations but won't call QRZ? or CQ."

Again, if the weather had been nice, there's the option of activating VD-025, Pointe d'Aveneyre, I'm guessing about 2.5 hours hike including a steep final approach to the summit. Another day...

In fact, there are many other summits in the area that look very interesting. For instance, Pierre Avoi (VS-231) is this tower of rock looking over Martigny. It looks impossible, but (according to my hiking books and some hikers we spoke with) it's quite feasible from the back side with some ladders and chained sections at the very top. When there's a stretch of good weather next year, I'll return to this area, for sure, for a stay of two or three days.