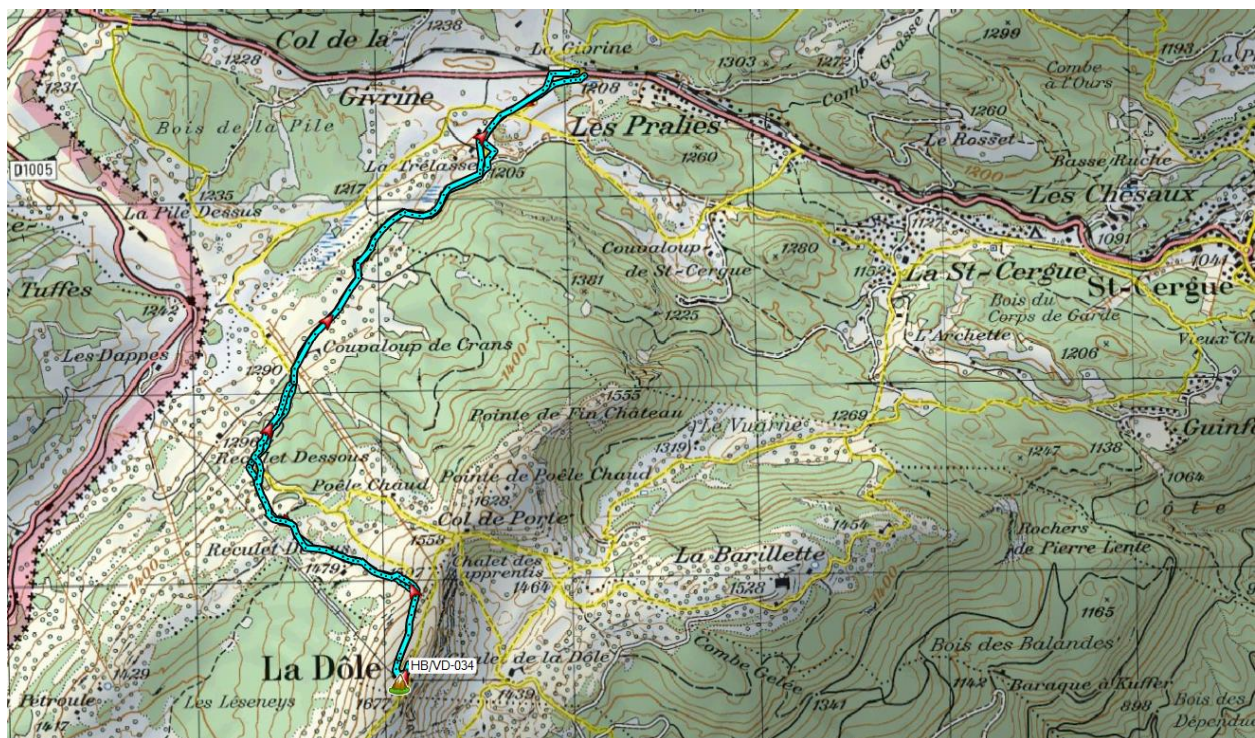


La Dôle HB/VD-034

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Summary: So many options, your choice will depend on conditions. As in previous hikes, most of the work is in the second half. Not a technically difficult summit, but requires some work (unless you take the easy way out).

On this winter day the valley was sunny and very pleasant, whereas the mountains near St-Cergue north of Geneva were shrouded in a heavy layer of fog. It had snowed the night before, making for some beautiful scenery with a powdered-sugar coating over everything. The entire hike up to the summit was 4.9 km, an ascent of 551 meters, and it took 2h17 to get there. It was tough going especially at the top -- not because of deep snow, but because of the steep grades. Even so, when I got to the top it took only a few minutes to recover. I must be getting in better shape.



As noted earlier, there are lots of options. If you are driving, the easy way is to cross the border and go to Les Dappes where there is a chair lift directly to La Dôle (this could be one reason why the summit has been activated so often). I don't read French, so I don't know if you are permitted to ride back down (some chair lifts will not allow this) or if it runs during the summer. In any case, on this day there were perfect skiing conditions and the chairlift was in steady use. If you are a glutton for punishment, don't drive, or like me use public transportation, the best bet is to get off the train from Nyon at La Givrine. This is a "push the button to stop the train" station, but half the train got off at this stop that I didn't have to worry about that.



Color indicating slopes > 30 degrees. The final approach to the summit certainly felt like it was more than 30 degrees, even if it actually wasn't.

From here you again have two choices: approach the summit from the west or from the east. I selected the western approach because of the amount of snow; on this side you can follow prepared trails and ski pistes the entire way up, whereas on the eastern approach you must follow existing snowshoe tracks or blaze your own trail -- hard work. On this day with heavy snow cover there were only sparse snowshoe tracks on the eastern approach, and I also didn't know if they would continue the entire way to the summit. Thus, I opted for the approach using prepared trails.



View from La Givrine -- somewhere in this fog is La Dôle, my destination for the day.



The first waypoint, the ski school at La Trelasse.

For the first stretch to La Trelasse you simply follow all the people going to the children's ski school and the bunny slope. From there to the next waypoint (Couvaloup de Crans, where there is a restaurant catering to the skiers) there is a wide machine-prepared trail with a slight upward grade, and today there was beautiful scenery. I saw more people in just regular hiking boots than on snowshoes. From this point on you continue in the same general direction past the restaurant but walk along the edge of the ski slope -- and watch out for skiers zooming out of the woods on unofficial trails.



Beautiful scenery along the route from La Trelasse to Couvaloup de Crans). Because of the wide machine-prepared trail, most people didn't even need snowshoes.



The second waypoint, the restaurant at Couvaloup de Crans.

This brings you to Reculet Dessous on the Swiss/French border where you are close to the chair lift from Les Dappes to La Dôle. In fact, you can either hike down 125 vertical meters to the chair lift valley station and ride up, or (like me) hike directly up (300 more vertical meters). The stretch close to La Dôle while approaching Col de Porte (the summit station of another ski lift) is somewhat steep, 30 degrees or more -- so if there is considerable snow watch out for snow slides and avalanches. On this day, however, the avalanche rating for all of the Jura Mountains was "1" at most.



From Reculet Dessous at the Swiss/French border you could -- instead of hiking up another 300 meters -- hike down to the chair lift valley station (along the road in the valley). Bring your euros!



The view up as approaching Col de Porte -- parts of this ascent can be steep, so allow yourself plenty of time.

Once you get to the summit, the activation zone is relatively large along the ridge to the north and south, and there are plenty of fence posts and other things to use as a mast support. This day there was thick fog and reasonably strong winds, making for an uncomfortable activation. I kept it short, also keeping in mind the train schedule for the trip home (runs only once an hour).



My station on La Dôle. In the background you can barely make out the great big white sphere that normally can be seen from miles and miles away.

The hike back down went much faster, just 1h25. Just as I was in the parking lot taking off my snowshoes, the train pulled into the station 50 meters ahead of me. I rushed and just made it on board -- but no seat because again it was packed.