

# Discovering Bellwald

Switzerland's Bellwald has a vast array of massive North Shore and big mountain singletrack, all nestled between the snow-capped peaks and larch tree forests

Words Alban Aubert Pics Patrice Schreyer

The downhill track will have you jumping all the way down



All along the way up to Bellwald, through sun, rain and snow, you will see well-maintained fields and craggy wooden cabins. It's miles from the fashion and busy atmosphere of the city, and of more easily accessible bike parks. You are in a different world – a world where it is possible to ride on 100-year-old rails that were handmade by pickaxe. But let's face it – you won't have come all the way to Switzerland to admire the rustic scenery. If you've come this high, your goal will be the chairlift, which will take you higher than 2,000m, and gives you access to all kinds of crazy tracks and parks.

The local farmers always kept their hay in the many cabins you'll see dotted around, and they reached them by small dirt tracks. Today these old tracks are used by mountain bikers, many of them, like me, riding them in 'gladiator outfit' body armour, carbon helmets and high-tech kneepads. »

Some drops are up to 4m high - this is man up territory

There's nothing more refreshing than spring water straight from the glacier

The well-built North Shore threads through the trees

It has everything from big drops to skinnies

# A CHAIRLIFT TAKES YOU TO ALL KINDS OF CRAZY TRACKS AND PARKS

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Bellwald singletrack:  
shaped by farmers,  
ragged by MTBers

### Between the peaks

The mountains here are coated with snow, even in summer. From the centre of the village, I could see snow all around. As I walked through Bellwald's narrow streets, and through the chalets of different ages, I couldn't help but think that these old chalets must have many stories to tell.

The old part of the village is totally integrated with the rest of Bellwald – you walk right through it while walking to the bike park and coming back to your hotel in the evening. And there's nothing like making a short stop at the fountain to fill up your CamelBak – the water comes straight from the nearby glaciers.

But what of the riding, I hear you cry. Well, it's only a 10-minute walk to the start of the chairlift, and a few seconds after that you're in the air at the end of

the village. The view is fantastic and with each metre you rise, you get a new view of this magnificent country. The lift through the larch trees is one of the nicest parts of the journey, but the best has to come yet.

During the downhill ride, I got the real taste of Bellwald's potential. It starts at 2,100m and ends at 1,500m, so the change in altitude is quite dramatic. After a right curve I managed to hit the first jump at high speed. The second is a double – it goes over the small river that brings fresh water to the village. Then there are several consecutive high berms, jumps and high-speed sections.

The track is very well designed and whatever level of rider you are, you will have fun on it. The few sections that require technical skill have interesting chicken lines that you can ride if you're

### TOP THREE BELLWALD TRAILS

Lots of riding to choose from

#### Downhill

The first option is the downhill *piste*. It is well known because it is part of the Swiss downhill cup. The first part is entirely out of the forest and after a curve you have two consecutive jumps, which help give a good rhythm to the whole track.

#### Enduro

The enduro option starts in Bellwald and ends at Fiesch – you can discover all kinds of riding pleasure on the singletrack, which was originally shaped by mountain farmers. There's no steep slopes and it is really fun to get the right lines between the roots and rocks.

#### North Shore

The Bellwald North Shore is very nicely designed. There is a mix of everything – a 4m drop, skinnies and trails that meander between the larch trees.

### THE RIDERS

#### Seb Dassi

Seb has been riding for Vario since 2009. He was the trainer of the Swiss downhill team for two years and he's now in training for the Masters World Championship.

#### Alban Aubert

Alban spends his time discovering riding spots all over the world. He is a bike development consultant for UMF as well as a writer for *MBUK*.

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The downhill piste features one berm after another, after another



not quite up to the tech stuff. There's a North Shore trail running alongside the downhill track, which has many jumps to ride, but they won't be for everyone. I recommend checking all the North Shore jumps on foot first, otherwise you might get a nasty surprise – some of the drops are not far off 4m!

## Getting high on the lows

The best thing about Bellwald is just how much altitude you cover. From the start of the chairlift you can descend more than 1,000m in one ride. Once you reach the end, you can take the postal bus back up the mountain – this excellent transport system can be found just about anywhere in the Swiss Alps.

The part I best liked is the final, high-speed section of the downhill trails – the ground seems to have been created just for biking. One root here, one block there – it is full of small obstacles that allow me to spring up everywhere. When I reach the bottom I just want to get back to the top of the hill! And there are many enduro possibilities too – they are unbelievable, and all very close to the glacier, all well worth exploring. 🌀



The chairlift is a much better way to the top

## BELLWALD BASICS

Where it is, where to stay when you get there

Bellwald lies at the beginning of the Rhone valley, just after Fiesch. It's a two- to three-hour journey from Zurich or Geneva airports. Once you're in Bellwald, the best place to stay is at the Hotel Wannenhorn. It has promotions for bikers, it is quite affordable and the owners are British. Find out more at [www.wannenhornhotel.co.uk](http://www.wannenhornhotel.co.uk). There's a food store next to the hotel, which is handy for picking up food supplies when you're planning to be riding all day.