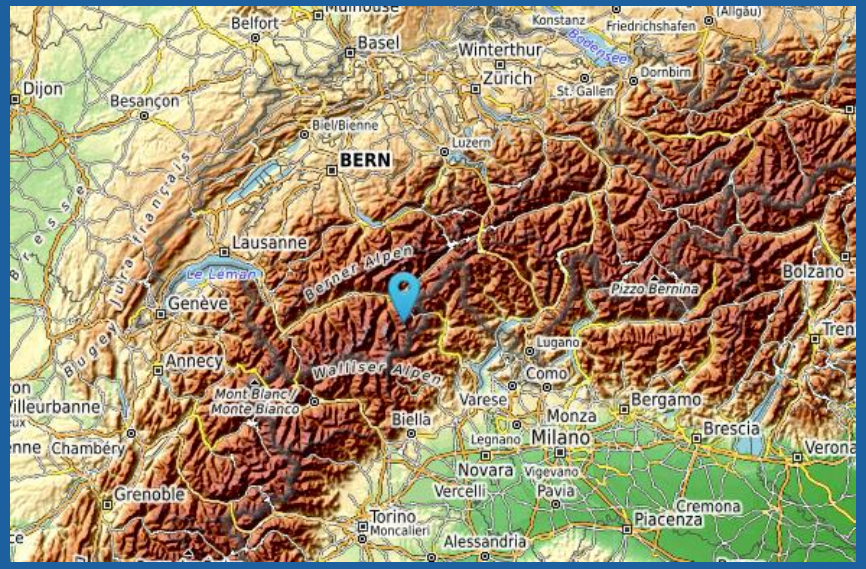

Glacier of the Month
October 2024

mountainwilderness International

TRIFT GLACIER

The Trift Glacier (Triftgletscher) covers the NW flank of the 4,000 m asl Weissmies (4,017 m, Saas Valley, Valais).

In September 2017, the ice masses of a tongue of the glacier began to move downhill by more than 1 m/day, leading to the evacuation of Saas Grund as a precautionary measure. This acceleration led to the break-off of around 2/3 (about 200,000–300,000 m^3) of the endangered ice masses, which were deposited at an altitude of approximately 3,300–3,200 m asl.

Swiss glaciers are melting at an alarming rate, with a 10% decrease in volume between 2022 and 2023, the equivalent of the ice mass lost between 1960 and 1990. The average ice thickness loss is up to 3 m. In the Bernese Oberland and parts of the Valais the situation is less severe (2 m ice thickness loss) as they enjoyed more winter snowfall.

Glaciers are important water reservoirs. They contribute to the supply of water, which is used to generate hydropower. In Switzerland, hydropower stations generate approximately 60% of the country's energy.

In its special report “The Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate”, issued in 2019, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicted that low-lying glaciers, such as those in the Alps and Scandinavia, would lose up to 80% of their mass by the end of this century. In its assessment report published in February 2022, the IPCC named the global melting of ice and snow as one of the top ten threats from climate change.