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SPORT

Via Ferrata

Hardcore climbers say they are for softies, but "via ferrata" – climbing trails made secure using cables, metal rungs and even ladders – are on the up and up. Yet despite their appeal to amateurs, not everyone is happy about the steadily growing number of iron paths snaking their way up Switzerland's slopes and rockfaces. Especially those built close to existing rock climbing routes have led to disputes between traditional climbers and weekend adventurers.

Via ferrata are not new. The first routes are thought to have been built in Austria in the middle of the 19th century and army troops expanded a network in the Italian Alps during the First World War



to haul up supplies and position guns. Switzerland got in on the act late, developing cabled routes at the beginning of the 1990s. Their ongoing expansion – the current 40 routes could grow to 100 nationwide – and increasing popularity has spawned what is now seen as a whole new outdoor adventure activity: climbing for novices. Clipped on to a cable running the length of the route via a carabiner, short length of rope and climbing harness, via ferrata are an introduction to the world of the vertical which allow you to enjoy the kind of spectacular settings and exposure normally reserved only for experienced mountaineers and climbers.

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