

What is a Via Ferrata?

by International Mountain Connection

Hi, I'm Michelle Onofrey with International Mountain Connection and in this video I'm going to talk about via ferratas. Have you heard of them before?

This is an actual site of several via ferratas in France. Basically, a via ferrata is a mountain activity where the goal is to reach a summit or traverse difficult mountain terrain using cables and other climbing aids. As you can see with these cliffs, it would be very difficult to do this without some help from climbing aids!

Do you see the people on the cliffs? I'll show you where they are at the end of the video, but I'll give you a hint; there are five people!

To do a via ferrata, you use regular climbing equipment, such as a harness and helmet, but you also use special equipment that is specific to via ferratas. Remember, this equipment is not an option, it's mandatory!

Before I tell you about modern day via ferratas, I'd like to tell you about how they got started.

It's believed that mountain paths with climbing aids have existed since about the mid 1800s. Obviously, these paths didn't exist for the same reasons that we use them today. Before, people used them to get from point A to point B, through difficult mountain terrain.

The term "via ferrata" that we use today actually comes from the Italians. It means roughly "iron path" and it became more well-known during World War I, because there were a lot of battles that were taking place in the Dolomite mountains and soldiers from both sides of the war needed to be able to go through these difficult mountain passages quickly and efficiently.

Ladders and ropes were placed along the cliffs, and handholds and footholds were cut into the mountain or they were put in place using wood or metal so that soldiers could go up, down and to the side on the mountains.

Today, via ferratas are no longer used for the same reasons, however, they do have via ferratas in multiple countries around the world. I have included links down in the description box to show you to show you some of the different via ferratas that are available.

These are the basic climbing aids that you'll find on a via ferrata. Sometimes you'll also find bridges or ladders, and if you're really lucky, you'll find a zipline!

Cables are always found on a via ferrata. They are attached to the side of the mountain. As you can see, the cable continues along the cliff.

When you do a via ferrata, sometimes your hands are on the rock, like this, and sometimes your hands are on metal handholds that have been placed on the mountain. This is a metal rung.

They are about 20 cm wide. Sometimes there are also metal bars like this that are about 1 meter long.

There are similar climbing aids for your feet. Here you can see some rungs. The smallest man made foothold is a flat piece of metal that is about as wide as your foot. If you aren't putting your feet on climbing aids like this, your feet are on rocks.

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So, this is just a short video to introduce you to via ferratas. Remember that when you do a via ferrata, you really need to contact a guide, because a guide can help show you how to use your equipment correctly, and make sure that you're practicing the sport safely.

Like all mountain activities, there are risks that can cause injuries or even death, so please be careful!

I almost forgot! Where were the climbers on the cliff? Do you see them? There are five. Okay, let me give you some help. There's one here and the up a little bit further, there are four people in line.

Stay tuned for the next videos on via ferratas. I look forward to seeing you, and remember, Brian isn't in the kitchen. He's in the mountains!

See you soon! Bye!