

KlimaGuide: The yodeling iPhone application for the Swiss Alps

ANYONE FROM THE SERIOUS HIKER TO THE CASUAL WALKER

visiting the world heritage site in the scenic Jungfrau region of Switzerland can now learn about climate change in the Alps with the use of an iPhone “app” called KlimaGuide. This electronic trail guide with zoomable topographic maps is pre-installed on special iPhones, which can be rented at Swiss tourist offices for 15 Swiss francs (CHF, or about U.S. \$15) per day. The interactive features are intuitive and allow the user to choose from seven different “climate” hikes in the Bernese Oberland.

The hikes range from 2 to 3 miles long and are generally *wanderwegs* (easy hiking trails) with gradual elevation changes of less than 1,000 feet. The global positioning system (GPS) in the iPhone tracks the user’s location and sounds a Swiss yodel as the hiker reaches the next point of interest along the interpretive climate path. For each trail, the KlimaGuide highlights six to seven vistas related to the various climate topics, such as *gletscher* (glaciers), permafrost, avalanches, rockfall, tourism, and skiing. The audio tracks of two to three minutes each are the appropriate length for a short science-learning pause as hikers take in the spectacular alpine scenery: the Eiger’s infamous Nordwand (north face) and the 13,642-foot-tall glaciated Jungfrauoch. There are also personal behavior suggestions on how hikers can reduce their carbon footprint, with examples like rail travel, energy efficiency at home, and lowering consumption. Included on the



rental iPhone is a bonus video about the environmental research station located on the summit of the Jungfrau. The main emphasis is on the geologic sciences, with only a small portion on flora: the alpine flower selector. A shorter version of the guide is available for download onto personal iPhones for about \$10.



The project is a collaboration of the University of Bern, two local communes, a software developer, and the Swiss energy company BKW FMB. Glaciologists worked with experienced climate journalists on the topics for about a year, and the actual audio-video production took about nine months. KlimaGuide launched in summer 2009, but at the initial price of 20 CHF (now \$20), only 300 individuals rented the phones. The lower price of 15 CHF (\$15) may increase usage.

As “cool” as this new media device is, especially for tech-savvy youth, it seems that a natural extension would be a traditional (less expensive) printed version of the presentation. Since social science research indicates that many people trust their friends and acquaintances for climate change information, such a booklet could be a useful outreach tool that wanderers could take home and share with friends.

See www.jungfrau-klimaguide.ch for more details.

—Joe Witte, broadcast meteorologist, Washington, D.C.
(joewittewx@yahoo.com)