

# STUBAITAL AUSTRIAN ALPS

19 July- 5 Aug 2009 - Mick Borroff

A select group of members broke with tradition by not having a fixed valley base, instead, mainly travelling hut to hut. They achieved the meet's objective by completing the week-long Stubai Glacier Tour taking in a few mountains en route. Other peaks, passes, klettersteigs, balcony routes and sociable meals featured.

Sun 19th July

After driving across Belgium and Germany, Paul and Mick arrived at Camping Stubai in Neustift and weren't lulled to sleep by an Austrian oompah band performing in the village.

Mon 27th July

Although the mountain tops were covered in a blanket of recent snow, it was a fine day and Paul and Mick took the Schlick 2000 lift from Fulpmes up to the top station below the Kreuzjoch. We selected a traversing route across the mountainside, plodding through lots of wet snow slides, to just above the Starckenburger Hütte, where an easy ascent of the Hoher Burgstall, 2611m, provided a fine viewpoint across to the spiky limestone Kalkkogel range opposite. We descended a short klettersteig to a connecting ridge to the Neider Burgstall, 2436m, and returned to the lift station for a coffee before our descent.

Michael, Helen, Richard and Fiona arrived and we assembled in Neustift for dinner to discuss plans over a pizza and a few beers. Jack arrived from Innsbruck on schedule late that evening following a flight from Gatwick to complete the party.

Tue 28th July

After a day and a half's drive south from Rotterdam the Smith family needed to stretch its legs and a traverse of the Peilspitze, 2392m, behind Serles, from the Kalbenjoch towards the Blaserhütte was undertaken with Mick. This involved taking the new cable car from Meiders to Kappeneck, 1605m, with recollections of the clanking old single chair predecessor which roughly scooped us up eleven years ago.

Forty-five minutes through the forest revealed an expanded set of buildings for the Maria Waldrast spa. Rather than turning immediately right for Serles this time, we tackled the rocky ridge of the Peilspitze, with several chamois spotted en route. Descending through the grassy alp of Kalbenjochmahder, farmers were rhythmically scything the meadow. We dropped steeply into Langes Tal and raced down to the Ochsenalm, 1558m, for a beer accompanied by impromptu Tyrolean yodelling from a walking group. After that we were ready for the heights of the Stubai.

Wed 29th July

After packing sacks in another day of glorious sunshine, we took a taxi up Oberbergtal to begin our main objective - the Stubai Glacier Tour.

Jack and Paul were dropped off at Seduck and walked up to the Seducker Hochalm Hütte where they had an impromptu overnight stay, after deciding the traverse to the Franz Senn Hütte would better await the next day.

After a picnic lunch, the rest of us with big sacks, elected to take the shorter direct route from the Oberisshütte up the hillside, pausing to admire the waterfalls below the Franz Senn Hütte, 2147m.

Thu 30th July

An early start was needed as the guidebook indicated that the crossing over to the Amberger Hütte would be the longest day of the traverse. The stream from the Alpeiner Ferner was followed west over flowery meadows and up over old moraines to its source. We found the glacier's bare ice was running with water and slush. Higher up and onto the snow, we roped up. It was Helen and Fiona's first time roped up on a glacier and they were hoping not to have to use their recently acquired prusiking skills. We steadily climbed the Alpeiner's soft snowfields heading for the Wildgrat Scharte, 3168m, where Rich and Mick kicked bucket steps up the snow-filled gully. Once at the top, there was just enough room on a ledge for us all to eat lunch and take in the view, whilst the gusting wind whistled around us.

After an earthy scramble down the other side, the Schwarzenberg glacier was crossed to a moraine system that descended much further than we would have liked, down to the valley, where tired, we received a warm welcome in the Amberger Hütte, 2135m, after 10 hours on the go, seeing no other parties en route.

Fri 31st July

Another early start saw us initially retracing our steps back up the valley floor, before ascending south to the Sulztal glacier. This was crossed to the Wüttenkarsattel, 3015m, where a mixed descent and some tatty fixed ropes, took us down to the Wüttenkarferner.

This glacier was traversed in a wide arc to end up below a rocky ridge leading to the Hochstubaihütte. Hearing where we had come from, the guardian Florian gave each of us a very warm welcome with a glass of schnapps, later followed by a good dinner! As we went to bed a storm broke and the thunderclaps echoed around us, but most slept soundly again after a tiring 8 hour day.

Sat 1st Aug

We awoke to find about 3-4 cm of new snow had fallen overnight and we descended the rocks carefully back down to the Wüttenkarferner glacier, making fresh tracks as we ascended east to the Warenkar Scharte, 3187m, then across the Warenkarferner towards the Bilstöckljoch, 3128m. We were followed by a solitary mountaineer, playing Austrian roulette with the crevasses - at least he was wearing a harness in case he needed hoisting out!

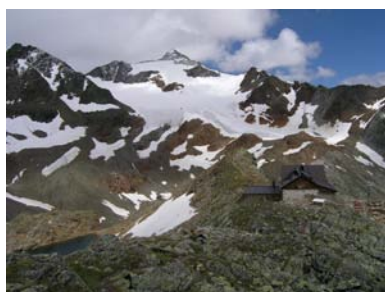
The Bilstöckljoch is the site of a mountain restaurant at the head of the Gletscherbahn cableway and is surrounded by skiing paraphernalia.

Mick, Rich and Michael scrambled up the Schaufelspitz 3333m, leaving Helen and Fiona to enjoy their hot chocolates.



*Mike Smith on the Schaufelspitz*

They didn't need much encouragement to have a second one with us on our return!



Thus fortified we continued across the Gaisskarferner to the head of a rocky scramble leading down to the Hildesheimer Hütte, 2899m.

Being the weekend and sited just below the normal route for the Zucherhüt, we were not surprised that the hut became full, but this was the only occasion where we had to pass climbers asleep on mattresses in the corridor. After dinner, Helen and Fiona decided they would prefer to do the lower level hut-to-hut crossing accompanied by Michael.



*Pfaffenschneid from Hildesheimer Hütte,*

Sun 2nd Aug

A 5.00 am start saw Rich and Mick devouring breakfast to emerge into the cool of an alpine dawn. The tarn below the hut was still as a mirror as we eagerly progressed across the rocks heading for the snow slopes leading up to the Pfaffenjoch, 3212m, where we donned crampons and roped-up in absolutely perfect conditions - hard frozen snow under a cloudless sky.

We had decided to traverse the Zucherhüt, and Rich led up the west ridge of the Pfaffenschneid, 3498m, then across a mixed traverse to eventually gain the large stainless steel summit cross on the Zucherhüt, 3505m, in guidebook time.

*Zucherhüt  
and  
Pfaffenschneid*



The descent down the trade route on the East Ridge was much less pleasant, with the usual confusion of ropes and minor stonefall caused by the multiple parties.

We continued down to the Pfaffensattel, 3344m and ascended the Wilder Pfaff, 3458m, dodging a few rocks dislodged from above by a large German party. Unscathed, we reached the modest metal cross on the top and paused to view the distant crocodiles of mountaineers snaking their way across the beautiful Sulzenaufener, bound for the Stubai's highest summit.

We followed the Germans down the long and splendidly airy rock scramble that comprises the Wilder Pfaff's East Ridge, to gain the snow slopes leading to the Müller Hütte, 3145m. A bowl of spaghetti and a Weissbier were enjoyed for lunch on the hut terrace in the sun, with its spellbinding view over the glacier to the Becher Hütte and range after range south to the Dolomites.

Close to the Müller Hütte is a major crevasse system used as an underground ice-climbing wall (see the photos on the hut web site) which is entered on a winch à la Gaping Ghyll. We enjoyed a superb goulash and polenta dinner, whilst chatting to an English couple from Bath, who had come up on the Stubai Gletscherbahn via the Zucherhüt and Wilder Pfaff.

Meanwhile, leaving Richard and Mick heading for the Zucherhüt, Michael, Helen and Fiona made their way back up the Gaisskarferner to the Jochdoh and the 9 am Bahn down two stages to the Dresdner Hut and the heat of another summer day. Making our way over the ridge towards the Sulzenauhütte it was soon clear that Fiona was moving faster and she decided to tackle the Grosser Troglar, 2902m, on the way. The only difficulty she encountered was when swinging from the klettersteig cable down a steep face, while carrying a sac containing a full glacier kit.

That left Michael and Helen loitering at the fork in the track before heading for the Peiljoch, 2672m. That was when they noticed Paul and Jack marching steadily up the track towards them. Together they lunched among the drystone towers of the Peiljoch, before heading to the snout of the Sulzenaufener and following the tumbling water to the hut. Later that evening a rescue helicopter was working by that snout.

Mon 3rd Aug

The next day, the lower party had a similar manoeuvre from the Sulzenauhütte over the next ridge to the east. As they passed Grünausee, marmots whistled echoing alarm calls in response to a dog on the path. The less direct crossing was chosen to take in the subsidiary summit of the Mairspitz, 2743m. The scrambling route maintained their interest on both sides of the ridge and at its double col. There, having not met any other English parties all week, they came across another Sheffield family whose lad was a Scout in the pack Fiona had recently visited. It was their first visit to the Alps.

Arriving at the Nürnberger Hütte, 2278m, they rejoined Mick and Richard.

Meanwhile, high above the Sulzenauhütte, another fine day for mountaineering was developing as Mick and Richard ascended up the snowfield heading for the Southwest Ridge of the Wilde Freiger, 3419m.



After a brief stop at the summit cross marking the Austro-Italian border, they crossed briefly into Italy and back to inspect the ruined customs hut on the Signalgipfel, 3392m. A long descent down snow slopes led to a rocky descent to the large Nürnberger Hütte.

Shortly after, the rest of the party arrived and were joined by Mick's wife Hilary, who had walked up from Ranalt, on the return leg from a holiday in the Dolomites with niece Sarah. After another excellent dinner, we all watched the lightning of a thunderstorm further down the valley and later listened to the rain.

Tue 4th Aug

After a leisurely breakfast, we descended back to civilisation under a cloud-covered sky, but fortunately avoided any rain. We stopped for refreshments at Bsuechalm, just allowing enough time to walk to the road to catch the bus back to Neustift. Jack and Hilary decided to run part of the way.

We all met up later that evening at the Hotel Cappella in Neder for a very enjoyable final dinner.

Wed 5th Aug

Jack left to catch a plane from Innsbruck and Hilary departed to begin her drive back to UK with Sarah.

Everyone else decided that a via ferrata was in order and after some fetching gloves were purchased, took the Elferlifte from Neustift and headed up to the recently extended Elferspitze klettersteig. This was a new experience for Paul, but a good time was had by all negotiating the cables, stemples, climbs, descents and traverses that thread their way through the limestone towers and pinnacles over the Elferspitze, 2505m, to the Zwölferneider Sattel. After a welcome ice cream at the Elferhütte, we watched a few parapents take off and circle effortlessly on their way back to the valley floor. We returned more prosaically on the lift.

Thu 6th Aug

A final fling saw Richard and Michael taking tandem parapent descents from the slope above the Elfer Hütte down to Neustift. They were following in the flight path of David Smith on the previous meet there, though couldn't compete with his maturity on taking a maiden flight.

With a last day in the mountains, Paul and Mick drove to the head of Stubaital to Mutterbergalm and took the Stubai

Gletscherbahn to the first station beside the Dresdner Hütte. From the hut, a new path was taken over a col below the Egesengrat taking a largely contouring route around to the Mutterberger See and then down through the forest and eventually back to the cableway car park.



Fri 7th Aug

Then for the Smiths, it was back north with stops for cycling by Lake Constance, investigating a French caldera and leisurely beers at delightful historic Brielle, just a few miles from Europoort Rotterdam. We all slept soundly on the ferry back to Hull.

Mike and Paul drove back via a tour of Alsace and the Ardennes to arrive in Dover, welcomed by a torrential downpour that lasted until we arrived in Cambridge.

### **An alternative view from Jack Short & Paul Dover**

Mick Borroff made a wise choice in selecting Austria for this year's Alpine meet. It enabled several parties to do their own thing whilst meeting up at intervals. Paul Dover and Jack Short elected to stay in the Stubai valley at the Pension Tina in Neder, having arrived there by various means of transport involving planes, trains, buses and motor car. This proved to be an excellent choice of Pension, with Tina Pfurtscheller being very amenable to us staying several days in the huts and only charging for the days when we were in the Pension. We also enjoyed good value dinners across the road at the Hotel Cappella.

Tue 28th Jul

The first day after Jack's arrival we intended an easy day to get our bearings, and walked along the river path to Milders and then up to Forchach where there is a delightful restaurant serving Apfelstrudel which became Paul's lunchtime passion!

Being suitably refreshed the walk continued towards Barenbad through the woods. Unfortunately the path deteriorated rapidly and vanished repeatedly among numerous slides of avalanche debris and fallen trees. This turned an easy day into a nightmare of battling through undergrowth and slippery roots on a steep slope in thick rotten vegetation and trees, involving a long descent to the valley.

Eventually we survived to reach the track in the valley and the welcoming Restaurant at Barenbad. A walk back along the track required deviations around the workmen, who were repairing the extensive avalanche damage and

installing major new services which had required the building of a temporary road.

Wed 29th Jul

The entire party took a taxi to the end of the valley we had laboriously traversed the previous day. Paul and I had previously decided to alight at Seduck and take the panoramic route from Hoch Seduck to the Franz Senn Hütte whilst the others took the taxi to the Oberisshütte at the end of the valley. Unfortunately due to a late start with the taxi and an exhausting 770m climb to the Hoch Seduck we arrived at the Seducker Oberisshütte, 2249m, at the same time as a thunder and lightning storm. This persuaded us to stay the night there, despite the only food available being a bacon omelette!

Thu 30th Jul

As we were now 3 hours away from the Franz Senn Hütte and a further 5 hours to our next intended Neue Regensburger Hütte we decided to stay at the Franz Senn Hütte, 2147m. This is an excellent hut with meals, accommodation, and all mod cons to suit 140 people. Short walks up the Hinterberg! passed the rest of the day, with Paul continuing up to the snout of the Alpeiner Ferner.

Fri 31st Jul

We walked along the Stubai Höhenweg and Paul went as far as the Schrimmennieder Basslerjoch at 2830m. As we had to return to the valley for that evening at the Pension Tina, we returned to the Franz-Senn for lunch and descended by the direct route to Oberisshutte and the 4.30 pm taxi to Neustift and thence to Neder.

Sat 1st Aug

We planned a day in the valley, so we took the Elferlifte from Neustift and walked up to the Elferhütte, 2080m. From here there is a panoramic route running above the Pinnistal and eventually down to Karalm, at the base of the footpath to the Innsbrucker Hütte, 2370m. However time and energy were too short for this excursion, so we stopped for a snack at the Karalm restaurant and returned to the lift via the valley and lower panoramic path, and thence back to Neustift.

Sun 2nd Aug

An early bus to the road terminus at Mutterbergalm and the Stubai Gletscherbahn lift to the middle station got us to the Dresdner Hut, 2302m. This saw us on our way once again on the Stubai Höhenweg to the Peiljoch, 2676m and over to the Sulzenauhütte, 2191m. On the ascent and to our surprise we saw in front of us the Smith family (minus Richard) waiting for us to catch up and we all continued together. The Sulzenauhütte was another excellent hut although we had to share it with half the German army who were there on Alpine manoeuvres. I hope the other half were in Afghanistan helping our boys.

Mon 3rd Aug

This was the day we were due to meet up with the remainder of the Stubai Glacier party, so it was onwards and upwards to the Grünausee, 2330m, and the Mairspitz,

2781m, via a tricky cleft in the rock leading to the ridge. By then we were like the Pied Piper leading a procession of Italian children up the best route.

On the ridge was a family from Sheffield who knew the Smiths and a short rest was called for to catch up with local gossip.

Further down we could see the Nürnberger Hutte, where we joined up with Hilary and the earlier arrivals, Mick and Richard for a large dinner of goulash.

Tue 4th Aug

A three hour walk down to the main bus route at Ranalt and we piled into the local bus to return to the Pension Tina, and an excellent dinner party at Hotel Cappella to celebrate.

Wed 5th Aug

An early start for the bus to Innsbruck and plane home to Gatwick concluded an excellent and enjoyable YRC meet. Jack Short & Paul Dover

Conclusion

There are now numerous klettersteigs in the Stubai valley to augment the more familiar mountaineering and walking possibilities and it is a very friendly location. The Stubai Glacier Tour was an excellent traverse, with its six days of mountaineering and can be strongly recommended to those with glacier experience. We were blessed with fine weather and thus avoided any forced stopovers. The lower level hut-to-hut tour (the Stubai Rucksack Route) which skirts below the glaciers, would also make a fine two-week outing.

As many members will testify, Austrian mountain huts are superb and very welcoming. We took half-board and were very well catered for - there was really no need to bring any food other than the odd lunchtime snack. Breakfasts comprised cereal/muesli with yoghurt and fruit salad, breads with ham, cheese, sausage and jams, washed down with tea/fruit tea. A lunchtime sandwich could also be taken. The three course dinners were generally excellent.

Mobile phones were very useful to keep our three parties in touch, so that appropriate rendezvous could be made. The updated 1:25000 Alpenvereinskarten mapping was superb and we verified that the grid could be read with our GPS handsets set to WGS 84.

Participants

Mick Borroff  
Paul Dover  
Jack Short  
Michael Smith  
Richard Smith  
Helen Smith (G)  
Fiona Smith (G)  
Hilary Tearle (G)



*Crossing the Wüttenkarferner below the Hochstubaihütte*