

**The Julian Alps,
Slovenia
31 August –
14 September
2001**

This was an open meet lead by George and Sylvie Spenceley with the express purpose of climbing Triglav.

George and Sylvie were established in good time a day or two before the main arrivals to check that everything was in hand. Flights from Leeds Bradford, Manchester, Stanstead, Heathrow and Stanstead to brought most on Friday 31st, President and Vice on Monday afternoon to their Wendy House.

Now, the intrepid campers David Smith and John Lovett chose to drive and camp their way to Slovenia, most enjoyably with picnic lunches, restaurant meals at night, fresh coffee breakfasts and cosy tents to sleep in, but thundery rain every night, a little difficulty route finding fines to pay on leaving Austria, and the like. (N.B. John Lovett had not slept in a tent for forty years.) They left Clapham on the morning of Thursday, 31st August and arrived at the campsite Danica in Bohinjska Bistrica, just beyond Bled, on the afternoon of Sunday 2nd after 1200miles.

Our gentle introduction to this greenest of lands had us exploring the deep limestone gorge that leads to the most popular routes up Triglav, the circumnavigation of the Bohinjska lake, starting at Ribcev Laz where nothing as noisy and polluting as an internal combustion engine is allowed to power the visitors' launch shuttling from end to end – it was all electric.



This touching concern for the environment was noticeable throughout our visit.

It never ceases to amaze me the energy of the mature YRC members; walks every day, including quite high mountains, bus trips to further places of interest; I think all the gorges north of Bled were visited. Four members completed the ascent of Triglav, three from the north side. The high and lower huts on Triglav were reached on two occasions, it should be noted, by the oldest members. Mixed weather high on Triglav meant that it was pretty much of a lottery as to who actually reached the summit.



Presidential Palace



Railway station, Bohinjska Bistrica

On an off day the caves at Postojna were visited south of Ljubljana. I for one had never seen such varied formations in such concentration; the train ride into and out of the cave was a thrill, and to think it was a Russian prisoner of war camp in 1915!

The friendliness and service enjoyed in Slovenia made the stay a great success and there were mumblings of a return visit, perhaps to the Trenta valley further west.

On behalf of everyone at the meet many thanks to George and Sylvie for their work finding such a wonderful and challenging region for a meet. George's long term canvassing for a Club visit to Slovenia was thoroughly justified.

The drive home was something else; striking Trenta valley, Cortina, last over the pass to Davos across Switzerland, France to Calais via Langres and the lakes, Fontainebleau, the Chateau, Chartres, the cathedral. All in all a round trip of 3240 miles.

John Lovett and Alan Brown

A second perspective...

Our interest in the Julian Alps started with a chance meeting with a Slovenian girl, Ziva Pecavcor, who was resident in the Tan-y-Wyddafa hut when the YRC arrived for the February 2001 Welsh Meet. Ziva soon grasped the nature of the YRC and together with an offer to obtain mountain stamps, suggested that Bohinjska Bistrica was a suitably remote area for the YRC. This confirmed the area chosen by the meet leader, George Spenceley, who had chosen a campsite and provided what is now a feature of meets, the URL of a web site at Bistrica.

Open meets create certain restrictions on arrangements for some, such as "I am definitely not camping" resulting in a rush to the Internet to find suitable accommodation close to the selected campsite. Yvonne Bush had the skills and style necessary to interpret the information and soon established, in English, a rapport with

one Bastian Potocnik of the Pension Potocnik.

Intuition said that this was the right place and it was located 150m from the campsite. This did not prove critical as five members were in the Pension, three on the campsite and two in the Presidential mansion.

The Potocnik was an excellent choice and became the natural centre of activity. The established rapport continued with Bastian and his wife Anja, who emphasised good service and communication with their guests were their prime objectives. We were supplied with transport, weather forecasts, local guiding information, with no request too much trouble and plenty of local colour. The fireworks we heard when Slovenia won their World Cup Match 2-1 were Klashnicovs! Bastian, Anja, the staff and all other guests spoke excellent English overshadowing our attempts at Slovene.

The meet leader lead off the first day to the Mostinica gorge and waterfalls,

missed the path on the way up, found it on the way down and waited to catch a bus that never arrived. Misinformation from the tourist office but excellent English was spoken there and in banks, post offices, hotels, huts and restaurants making our life very easy. The only reservation with Bistrica was the one-hour frequency of the excellent bus service (except the 1648 on a Saturday).

The Bushes arrived very late without luggage, were kitted out with missing gear and the entire group then away to circle the lovely Jezero Bohinjska (lake), crystal clear, shoals of trout, a kingfisher, a visit to the one month old Vogel Cable Car for information A boring return via the woods, a glance in the church window to see John the Baptist losing his head and a dash for the bus back to Bistrica.

The ladies' enjoyment on this and other side trips seemed be measured to words per km, steepness did not seem to affect the rate, which was



judged to vary between 10000 and 30000/km depending upon the number in the group. Unscientific but you get the message.

Thunderstorms forced a number of side trips including Kingfisher spotting on the river, Izviv Bistrice (you can now drive to this beauty spot), Bled, Ljubljana and the Postojna caves.

Weather was unsettled but the offer of a lift to the cable car, gave us the chance to go up and climb Vogel 1922m. Restrictions were in place – return fare – ‘I am not walking all the way down’. Well-marked paths were very useful as the threatened mist descended leaving it bitterly cold on top as we signed the summit book to tantalising glimpses of vast limestone cliffs. There were many paths down to the cable car but we elected to return on the ridge and found the hills almost deserted. Thunderstorms kept us away for a day but we returned in fine weather, on the early bus, to the cable car intending to do Vogel and Rodica 1966m. The ridge from Rodica to Ctna Prst 1844m was so inviting we opted for that. Clean bright limestone with lots of Eidelweiss and gentians lined our way. Past Raskovec 1967m the ridge draws you on but a decision had to be made. Do we drop down the 1300m from Crna prst to Bistrice or return (6 miles) for the last cable car. At Poljansku 189m we turned back to a lot of up and down on the true ridge with excellent footing and situation in glorious sunshine to catch the penultimate car down.

The offer of a lift with John Lovett to Rudvo Polje, a start point for Triglav recommended by Bastian, saw Ian Crowther and I set off for the Dom Planika hut, 2401m and only 1 hour from the summit of Triglor 2864m.

The scenic walk up was all the more enjoyable for a chance meeting with a Slovenian family, father and son. We had not booked but father pulled rank and we enjoyed the new dormitory, sheets, blankets and pillows! Together we considered a late afternoon trip up to the summit but were discouraged as it was in cloud and the morning forecast was good. A missed opportunity – very bad in the morning, hung around with a CPC member, till 10am but no improvement so we made the long slog down (1900m). No chance of staying up as it was now the weekend and the hut was booked by the annual meeting of 100 women!

Father and son confirmed what we had already been told that in Slovenia if you are tired, lost or in trouble come down a recognised path you will be given help. This was tested by others and found to be correct.

Our next plan the seven Lakes of Treglav crashed due to oversleeping and missing the one and only early bus to Slap Savica. Next time we shall hire a car. Having walked up, 400m, to the Slap (waterfall) we were unable to cross the dam at Savica due to engineering work. You can see the handrails and ladders but frustratingly cannot reach them. This forced us down taking more time to the start of a super zigzag path up the Komaraca Cliffs to reach the first of the Lakes. It was a lovely situation with a flock of redstarts to greet us. Despite a rapid drop down at the end of the day we earned black marks as we were late for the Presidential Dinner.

We have learnt a lot about the area and will return a lot fitter.

Alan Linford.

Triglav's Tominsek Route, the Tominskova pot

It always sounds more impressive to report the climbing of a mountain by the north face. The northern approach to Triglav is no exception, though not especially difficult. It is not a continuous steep face but non-the less interesting throughout. Rather it is a series of gullies, terraces, and ridges and near vertical walls.

The expedition comprising the President and two former presidents were chauffeured round to Mojstrana by John Lovett, then along the Vrata valley to Alázev dom at 1015 metres. A few hundred yards beyond this hamlet is an impressive monument commemorating the mountaineers who died in the liberation fighting. It comprises a huge rock into which is driven an enormous piton hanging from which is an equally large karabina about 4 feet in length.

It was from this point our trail started by crossing the dry bed of the Bistrica. The path winds its way steeply through trees and into a rocky gully (Erjavcev graben) and onto the NW flank of Cmir. It is at this stage that the ledges, gullies and faces begin, exposed but well protected by a series of steel bars driven into the rock or by wire hand rails. Good views of the surrounding rock faces and peaks are visible at every turn of the route. The next section joins up with the Prag route up screes and over huge clint pavements. A tiny trickle of water issuing from the rock into a plastic bottle is the spring referred to in the guidebook and is the only available water en route. Has Moses been there before us? Here we met a group of young climbers who had been denied an ascent of the mountain because of new ice on the rocks.

Snow began to fall making progress requiring more care on the slippery limestone. Avoiding what seemed to be bottomless potholes was another hazard. But soon we sighted Triglávski dom na Krédarici at 2151m, a series of well appointed mountain huts and a small church where Mass is celebrated most Sundays. In the evening we were treated to a spectacular display of lighting as the sun dropped behind the neighbouring hills. Tomorrow's prospects were not good there was a good deal of ice in the col between the hut and the mountain proper.

A discussion in the morning with the warden suggested that we should descend to the valley but seeing a mixed group attempting the climb and a few solitary figures moving along the final ridge made us have a rethink. We managed to get together sufficient gear to enable us to 'cowtail' the wire protection should it be prudent to do so. Off we went across the saddle to the prominent circular marker denoting the start of the climb. The climb maintains ones interest throughout, steep rock, traverses and chimneys mark the way forward. Wire ropes and steel pegs ensure that one does not deviate into danger even in mist. Soon Mali Triglav 2725m (Little Triglav) was topped, now only an exposed but safe ridge separated us from Vélike Triglav 2864m (Great Triglav).

En route there are several plaques fixed to the rock, not marking fatalities but memorials to Slovenia's mountain history. One to Marko Pernhart, a painter and mountaineer and poet, one of the first to climb the mountain, another to Jákob Aláz, a Slovene priest and mountaineer. On reaching the summit one is faced by a large cylindrical turret like tower which provides refuge for three or four people in bad weather. This is called Alázev

stolp named after Aláz. We were rewarded by clear views of the surrounding peaks before the mist descended on the mountain. This alpine ascent must be a first for the YRC team comprising three presidents. After the obligatory photograph we descended by the same route as far as its junction with the normal route leading from the Dom Planíka and Vódnikov dom huts. There was much more new snow on this approach but no crevasses.

After a brief stop at the Planika dom hut we set off again heading for Vodnikov dom hut. Soon we encountered Alan Linford and Ian Crowther heading in the opposite direction. John Lovett, we were told, was making his way down to the lower hut. Which hut we did not clarify! To head off John before he left for Bohinjska Bistrica, it was agreed that I should try to stop him. I reached Vódnikov dom perhaps twenty minutes before Albert and Derek but no sign of John. He must have left for the lower hut at Planinska Koca Na Vojah, or so we

imagined. I again set off at speed, but instead of taking the right hand path, I went left as I thought I could see John ahead. I was soon to discover that it was not John and I was well on the way towards another valley. Without a map, John had mine; Derek had his, I could not be sure just where I might be. I went on a little and meet a couple with a map. Clearly I was a long way from the car and John. The route was called the Route Napoleon leading to Rundo polje.

I carried on along an impressive, high level path to Studorski preval 1892m. Then followed an interesting descent through forests to a road. At the end of this path to my astonishment I saw a maroon and silver car parked at the path end. It looked exactly like John's! It was John's car! Had I reached the parking spot that we thought John had used? Was I to take the car or what should I do? God and St Bernard (Patron saint of Alpinists) came to my rescue. I had the car keys in my pocket and there was the large area map in the car, my altimeter indicated the height



of a contour and a road from which I could pinpoint exactly my location. There were two car rugs, ample food and eight bottles of wine in the car. What more did I need? I battened down the hatches and settled down for the night. I was quite concerned that John may have slipped on one of the airy traverses and what my two companions were doing, worrying or thinking, but there was nothing I could do at this stage.

After a reasonable nights sleep and breakfast came one hundred ladies of many different age groups accompanied by a single guide. It appeared that they were to attempt Triglav and guarantee that they were true Slovenians. At about ten I was again amazed to see Bastian's car (the keeper of the hotel where many of our party were staying) approaching with Alan Brown and George Spenceley on board. I think they were a little surprised too. Bastian offered me a lift back to Bohinjska Bistrica, which I gladly accepted. Alan and George were to do the traverse to Vodnikov dom that I had used. It turned out that Alan Linford had recognised that this approach gained much more height than the Planinska Koca Navojah route.

It was a nice ride back and an opportunity of talking to the most, friendly and helpful of hotelkeepers. He had previously given Albert and I a lift after an earlier excursion back to Bohinjska Bistrica and bought us both a drink to boot. I called on Angie, Yvonne and Derek to report my return and was offered a most welcome shower from Angie. Derek had been clearly worried by my disappearance but was consoled by Yvonne who suggested that I would come to no harm, having survived lightening, crevasses, snowstorms and a fall.

Unfortunately Alan and Ian were denied the summit due to more snow and ice, as were George and Alan. Derek and Albert reached the lowest hut in the dark but safe and luckily were given a much appreciated lift back to Bohinjska Bistrica. John may well have been in the hut at Vodnikov dom when we were there or at least in the area. He stopped the night at the hut and returned to his car in the morning meeting the 'hundred and one' group and acted as traffic policeman on the narrow path much to their amusement. I had left my Gortex at Vodnikov dom but Alan and George were able to recover it, identifying it by its colour and a stone from Triglav in the pocket. George Burfitt made a successful solo ascent later in the week in difficult conditions but was benighted in the woods on his return. It was a great mountain day, well worth the effort, despite the subsequent but interesting diversion.

David Smith

Attendees:

The President, Albert Chapman

Alan and Madge Brown

Derek and Yvonne Bush

Ian and Dorothy Crowther

Alan and Angie Linford

George and Sylvie Spenceley

David Handley

John Lovett

David Smith

George and Vivian Burfitt late arrivals