

The Trail of an Eagle (Lechtal)

By Jacob Cline



Lechtal, Großbergspitze: Frances Hinds

As we got off the bus and walked into the town of Zürs, our eyes lit up as we saw the beginning of our journey. Surrounded by lush green hills on either side and the sky littered with puffy white clouds, we knew this would be the perfect start to an adventure. The sound of latches being undone could be heard as everyone prepared their trekking poles and started up the trail. A smooth ascent with a paved path underfoot was more than a welcome greeting. As the town grew smaller, the true beauty of the Lechtal Alps began. Snow capped peaks, flowing rivers, and thousands of wild alpine flowers filled our vision as we progressed throughout our first day.

Although only lasting a few hours, our hike was just long enough to fill our minds with thoughts of what treasures the next day would hold. Before our legs could warm up, we had reached the Stuttgarter Hütte and were greeted by the local friendly hut dog. Yet we were even more pleased when we saw hot kettles of hot water and warm *apfelstrudel* on our plates.

We awoke the next morning aching to start the hike once more. The trail for the day did not disappoint. An optional peak called the Fanggekarspitze (2640m) was offered for the daring followed by a steep descent into a valley. A quick look from the bottom of the valley showed part of our trail had been wiped away by a recent rainstorm or rockfall. However, this would not deter the daring climbers. As we clung to the cliff face, our feet moved cautiously hoping the scree would not give way underfoot. After this, it was only a hop, skip, and a jump till we set foot in the Leutkircher Hütte. Downing a few drinks to quench our thirst was quickly followed by the thud of our heads hitting the pillow.

The next day started with aching bodies, setting off up a steep trail at first light. After a few hours we met a flock of mountain sheep who crowded in front of us, curious of who we were. A pause, the sound of snapping cameras, and then we were on our way once more. As we reached Kaiserjochhaus we would soon realize that it was one of our favourites. With an extensive menu and comfortable beds, some were sad to have to leave.

The rest of the holiday went by in a blur of adventure and beauty. Some days consisted of clinging to wires and scrambling up rocky faces. At times, it felt as if we were doing more rock climbing than hiking! We had our fingers crossed as we stepped over old wooden bridges jutting out of the rocky walls. Other days included vertical descents down icy walls using a rope, followed by crossing fast flowing rivers with our packs over our heads. However, not all the days were quite as adventurous. Sometimes, we would spend the day seeing who could get the best pictures of the steinbock or testing how much strudel it was possible to consume in one sitting.

Before we knew what had happened, we were already descending from the mountains and into our final valley. Our minds were filled with the adventures and obstacles we had just gone through. Thinking back on the journey, there is no better feeling of accomplishment than taking that final step to reach the top of a mountain. No better feeling than to touch the cross standing tall and resolute despite the whipping wind. No better feeling than placing your name in that book and leaving your mark, your trail, your legacy. Whether you are inexperienced or have been walking the mountains your entire life, the view from the top is always just as breathtaking.



Lechtal - Ros Adams with Vorderer Gufelkopf: Peter Hinds