

The Top of the Stubai Alps

By Thue Pontoppidan



Thue, Marcin, Max and Alex on Sonnklerspitze: Thue Pontoppidan

On 30 August 2016 five AAC(UK) members (Marcin Gwizdon, Barbora Rybarova, Alejandro González, Max Coldwell and myself, Thue Pontoppidan) arrived in the Dresdner hut (2308m). After enjoying the afternoon sun for some time we took our equipment to a rocky area and practised some basic crevasse rescue procedures.

The following day we headed for the Hildesheimer hut (2899m) following the direct route via Eisjoch. Even though walking in a closed alpine skiing system is not the most inspiring thing to do, it provided an excellent warm up on easy terrain: the snow fun-park proved a fine place to practice crevasse rescue in a safe environment.

On 1 September we checked the weather forecast anxiously as this was the day of the “Grand Tour” across Wilder Pfaff (3458m) to the Müller hut, hopefully with a side trip to Zuckerhütl (3505m). Luckily, the weather was reasonably clear and calm and the forecast good so we left the hut around 7 am. We headed up the left side of the Pfaffenferner, passing a few chamois and a broken mountain ski from the fifties(!) en route, roping up at the firn line shortly before the Pfaffenjoch. We continued to the Pfaffensattel, crossing the upper reaches of the Sulzenauferner on the way. After negotiating a nasty, partly open crevasse we deemed the weather fine by British standards(!) and went for the Zuckerhütl summit by the normal east face route. The route was great scrambling (Diff/UIAA II) on dry and reasonably solid rock albeit quite exposed at times. On the top the view was fantastic. We went down roped up using running belays and fixed bolts as well as a few friends/hexes. After coming up the west face of the Wilder Pfaff



Max, Marcin, Alex and Barbora on Zuckerhütl: Thue Pontoppidan

we started the descent along the east ridge (also some Diff/UIAA II on good rock) down to the Müller hut in really foggy weather. The word “eerie” was heard more than once. We arrived in the Müller hut (3145m) mid-afternoon more than ready for a beer and relaxation!

The next morning, the late season glacier scenery with its reddish morning sun in pure “Kaiserwetter” amazed us all. The huge Ubeltalferner (only about 20% snow covered) with its open crevasses, icefalls and surrounding peaks was a true mountaineering heaven. We took the classic route to Sonklarspitze (3450m) heading up the east face (somewhat easier than Zuckerhütl) continuing to Hohes Eis (3388m) next to a beautiful, partly glaciated lake. Having forgotten our towels, we skipped the morning swim and headed on to the tempting but scary north face of the Schwarzwandspitz (3242m). We reached the bergschrund just below the ridge to the right of the summit and found the remaining route to the ridge to be pure ice. After leading some 20 meters on 40-degree ice, Marcin deemed the rock ridge dangerously loose and I lowered him down to the rest of us. Early summer with more snow is probably the time to climb this summit. We went back the way we came and enjoyed beer and snacks in warm sunshine on the south facing terrace of the Müller hut admiring the route of the day from the distance!

Saturday morning was our extra day in equally beautiful weather. We did some lead/top-roped ice climbing on the glacier outside the hut and practiced self-arrest on a perfect slope nearby. Around midday we crossed the Ubeltalferner to Becherhaus (3198m) on a rocky outcrop some 45min away – just for a beer! Upon return to the Müller hut we warmed up to the closest thing I have ever been to an alpine hut party ending around midnight as *Hüttenruhe* was relaxed this evening!

Early Sunday morning we were on the glacier again. We had to go early as the weather would deteriorate by midday, and headed for the Sulzenau hut. Leaving the packs in the junction between the Wilder Freiger summit route and the route from Ubeltalferner to Fernerstube (Lübecker Weg) we “bagged” the fifth and final summit on the trip, the Wilder Freiger (3418m), after an awesome ridge scramble to the summit. We enjoyed the views of sunny Austria and the clouds from Italy slowly creeping towards us. Going down the Fernerstube glacier (passing a deep and scary glacier mill) we reached the Sulzenau hut where Marcin and Barbora continued down. The rest of us stayed in the hut and went down next morning.

It was a fantastic tour in an amazing alpine area with great huts and, not to forget, great company. It is highly recommended!



Barbora and Marcin on the final ridge to Wilder Freiger: Thue Pontoppidan