

A Tale of Two Tours ...

By Graham Willoughby and Paul Marginson



Floitenkees Glacier Approach 2 - Graham Willoughby

“The plan’s gone to rat shit....”. The plan was a good one; the Zillertal Classics, crossing over from the Rucksack Route into Italy at the Schwarzenstein Hut and knocking off the Großer Möseler and Hochfeiler. Now all ten of us stood looking at the Floitenkees Glacier, or rather what was left of it, trying to pick a new safe line over to the Trippachsattel col. It was only day 4 of the Senior Zillertal tour and this was always going to be the crux. “....let’s retreat to the Greizer Hut and make a new plan”. As if to reinforce Allan’s decision, moments later there was a tremendous roar from Westliche Floitenspitze when a colossal rock fall cascaded rocks, snow and ice down the glacier, just where we would have been crossing.

Back in the hut a new plan was hampered by poor mobile reception. Whilst Allan’s solution was to speak ever more loudly in his unique pigeon Lancastrian German it became clear booking ten places in popular huts over the weekend was a non-starter. It was then that we became two teams, senior and junior.

We parted at Ginzling, the five ‘juniors’ heading for Italy with the intention to pick up the original route by hopping over via the Edelraute Hut to reach Nevesjoch Hut. The plan was to eventually all meet up at the Hochfeiler Hut. This is Paul’s account of their tour.

Leaving Pfitscherjoch Haus we were down to four, as Jim had suffered the mountain boot equivalent of a tyre blow out. This nearly became three as Alex took a dive off the track to be caught in vegetation as we contoured towards the Hochfeiler Hut.

Hochfeiler Hut is set in forbidding rock terrain, perched above the much-reduced glacier. The welcome was cursory, and we slept in steerage, a cavernous downstairs dorm with nocturnal rumblings of another thirty people. Despite heavy rain the hut steadily emptied to ascend the Hochfeiler, at 3510m the Zillertal’s highest peak. Once the rain ceased, we followed suit. The ascent is steep, on slabby rock and loose ground, but not technically demanding. The famed snow arête leading up to the summit has disappeared, leaving a decaying cornice on one side. The summit tantalized, with fleeting views to the south and some blue sky overhead. But the reputedly stunning view northwards never materialized.

Heading eastwards, with a tricky descent of unstable moraine, a glacier crossing and re-ascent via fixed ropes and pitons, we realised that we were too late to reach Nevesjoch Hut. Instead we

were submitted to a ticking off at the Edeltraute Hut for not booking ahead. In the morning three of us headed for Hoher Weißzint (3371m), whilst Alex opted for the Napfspitze (2888m). For the ascent of the former, we took the SW ridge: cloud was still on the tops and we were unsure about the exit from the alternative route up the glacier. Once on the ridge, 1.5km of fierce scrambling along a jagged skyline ensued. To our relief the cloud lifted, and we could see that the glacier rose to meet the ridge at a shallow dip before the summit. The top afforded spectacular southward views, but that northern vista remained stubbornly veiled. Descending via the glacier, we finally put the rope to use.

The next day's planned attempt on the Großer Möseler was thwarted by thunder and torrential downpours. There was nothing for it but to fester in the finest of huts. Thereafter we worked our way back to Bichl via Gasthof Stein in Pfitzerjochtal and the Olperer Hut. The second day rewarded us with a sumptuous daybreak panorama of that elusive northwards vista - albeit from the west.

Meanwhile back in the hotel at Bichl, near Mayrhofen, hut availability was again shaping the seniors' plan. Instead of picking up the trail at Pfitscherjoch Haus we had to drop further into Italy, to the small village of Stein and stay at a really old guesthouse where everything creaked, including Mrs Overall the proprietor. Notwithstanding, this 'hut' was subsequently voted the tour's best.

Dawn broke the next day with a thunderstorm and an equally gloomy forecast. Another change of plan; with little chance of climbing Hochfeiler there was no point in keeping to the rendezvous with the juniors. Instead we opted for the easier Landshuter Europa Hut to the west that straddles the border. We reached it after a wet, cold, windy climb. The next day was better for our descent to Dominikus Hut by the Schlegeis dam. But the rain returned in bucket loads for the next day's long climb from the Ginzling valley to the Gams Hut. We were finally rewarded on the last day with excellent weather and views for our descent and walk back to Bichl and the final rendezvous with the 'juniors'.

Thanks, as always, goes to Allan Hartley for organising the senior tour and for his perseverance under adversity.



The rock fall - Graham Willoughby