

# The Schladminger Tauern

by John Hardwick



*Hans-Wödl-Hütte above the Hüttensee - John Hardwick*

Despite receiving a 40 year membership badge last year I remain sheepish about my paltry knowledge of Austria and the German language, mainly as my mountaineering forays have been elsewhere. But, in 2017, I joined the summer Schladminger Tauern hut to hut tour.

The tour is a classic of its kind crossing the high passes with views of the highest summits in the range. There are a series of south to north trending valleys and as the tour crosses the range in a generally west to east direction one is never more than a day's walk away from the Enns valley in which the historic town of Schladming is situated. To the North over the Enns is the impressive limestone Dachstein massif; to the south the metamorphic Schladminger mountains.

Historically the range was less popular with the British than the western Alps because of its more modest heights and lack of glaciated terrain. Moreover earlier last century it would have involved an extra day's travel from the UK given its more easterly location. Nevertheless in August when the snows have usually disappeared, lighter packs without ice axe and crampons have their attractions. Other pluses were spelt out by mountaineers in the earlier AAC guide to the Niederen Taueren by Philip Tallantire (Felix Austria series). I found it very different to the western Alps; the paths over the cols are very steep and rocky, at times protected by metal rungs and fixed ropes.

All stages were excellent walks but the highlights were mid tour. Day three was a trek from the Keinprechthütte to the Gollinghütte passing via the oddly named Trockenbrot Scharte, followed by a spectacular high level protected traverse section above the Landawirseehtütte, up to the Golling Scharte and then down the steep block screes to the Gollingwinkel amphitheatre.



*The exposed section between the Trockenbrot Scharte and the Golling scharte - John Hardwick*

The following day was up over the Greifenberg (at 2618m our high point), across the glacially eroded plateau of the Klafferkessel with its many lakes and down to the Preintaler Hütte. During the Würm glaciations, when ice extended over the region, it is believed the summits were left ice free forming a set of nunataks. The nunataks may have served as refugia for pre-glacial alpinists such as the *Saponaria pumilio* we saw here.



*Saponaria pumilio near the Klafferkesse - John Hardwick*

The days comprised ups and downs of up to 1000m and 8km distance and this was without taking in the high summits that would have required a few hours deviation and extra hundreds of metres of climbing. With full packs this would have made the days too long for most of us.

The huts were generally comfortable with good food and excellent *Schladminger Schnee weiße Bier*. The comfort of the hut was determined by the chance of the booking. The first night we were in the upper section of the Ignaz-Mattis Hütte; my floppy hut slippers and rucksack had to be removed to safely ascend the ladder and get through the trap door. The Keinprechtthütte was rebuilt from old mining accommodations. In the 19th century nickel was mined nearby. A tableau outside claims “*das erste Snowboard*” used to transport the ores to the valley. Schladming is the locality for the mineral Gersdorffite (NiAsS) named after the owner of the Schladming nickel mine. We spent three nights at the Preintaler Hütte, one prior to a welcome rest day and another for a day’s adjournment for torrential rain. Some visited the spectacular waterfalls down the Reisach; I only made it as far as the Alt alm for an *Eier mit Speck* lunch washed down with coffee and a few obstlers. Our final night was at the Hans-Wödl-Hütte, named after the celebrated member of the Österreichischer Alpenklub. It is in a beautiful sylvan setting by the Hüttensee.

My holiday ended bizarrely: five days in Salzburg hospital with a detached retina. Maybe a cathartic return one day to do day tours to the summits? Targets would be Hochgolling (at 2862m the highest in the Niederen Tauern) from the Landawirseehtütte and the Hochwildstelle (2747m) from the Preintaler. The H6chstein (2543m) is accessible from the Haus seilbahn that was our return route to the valley. We met a couple coming down from an attempt on this; they had turned back because of the slippery ladders and exposure. The guardian of the Hans-W6dl-Hütte had warned that two people had fallen to their deaths on this the previous week so, while the scrambles to some higher summits are possible without rope protection, sure footedness is essential.

Thanks to Peter Hinds for leading the tour in a professional and considerate manner and to his wife Frances who did much of the organization.