

# Silvretta ski tour 2018

by John Marjot and Annabel Hurley



*Leanne and Andrew Mills on Swiss Austria border col*

The 2018 AAC(UK) Silvretta tour, was led by Gerry Kenny, from 3 – 8 April this year. Seven AAC(UK) members from the UK and Eire, two ropes, deep amazing snow with wonderfully sunny weather. Six days, seven glaciers, three mountain summits, six cols and 60 km of skiing, five warm, happy, cosy and welcoming huts with excellent menus. A great team of competent skiers, mostly young and all enthusiastic. A real adventure treat in an Austrian mountain range recognised for some of the best ski touring routes, and most accessible high summits, in Europe.

On 3 April we left our pension in Galtür and skied in the resort of Ischgl for the day but, because of high winds, were not able to use the new lift to Piz de la Gronde to begin our ski tour. We therefore skied to Gampen in the Fimbartal arriving at 1630, and were towed to the Heidelberger Hütte.

On 4 April we skinned in cloud to the Kronen Joch at 2980m to be met by a strong cold wind. The slopes beyond the Joch were covered in deep snow, and led down to the Jamtal Hütte. We practised transceiver use near the hut in the late afternoon.

Quiet, but well trodden, un-skied deep snow, on gentle glaciers, in which we carved perfect tracks. Andrew and Leanne volunteered to competently and safely lead the descents. Welcoming beers at the end of the day, and hearty breakfasts eaten before early morning starts to avoid the late morning and afternoon sun on steep south and east facing slopes. Mountain summits under clear blue skies with magnificent panoramic views of the Swiss, Italian and Austrian Alps, and a seemingly unending vista of steep and jagged snow-plastered saw-toothed ridges and peaks.

On 5 April we skinned up the lovely Jamtalferner, and over the Ober Ochsencharte col at 2997m. A bag drop a little higher allowed us to ascend the Dreiländerspitze 3197m. We skied the Vermut Gletscher down to the lovely Wiesbadener Hütte.

Ski ascents to cols whose own summits appeared to merge with the blue sky horizon, and over which the summits beyond gradually appeared as if rising out of the glacier snow. An iced lake to skate across on the last day of skiing, and snow all the way down to Wirl in the late afternoon when everyone else seemed to have left the mountains to ourselves. Choughs flying above rocky peaks accompanying and delighting us in the late afternoon sunshine. Sound alpine basement rock to climb on, and secure footholds on the snowy ridges with vertical, airy and long drops to the snow below. Welcoming sound belay points on the popular routes to the summits, and the summits to ourselves as Gerry judged exactly when we would be last up and therefore last on top with the Silvretta mountain range laid out below us alone.

On 6 April we skinned up the wide and beautiful Ochsenal Gletscher to a bag drop below Piz Buin. Gerry and Dermot confidently led up a steep snow slope, a snowy ridge, a scramble up a rock, and then a snow, chimney and finally a wide gentle slope, which led us to the summit of Piz Buin 3312m. We descended, and skinned to the Fourcla Del Curfim col, then down on to the La Codera glacier, and then up to the Silvretta

Pass at 3003m. The following 5 km ski down the enormous untracked Silvretta Gletscher to the Silvrettahütte was superb.

An avalanche danger of two in the mornings, rising to three in the afternoons. An acceptable risk with thought and care taken to ski well apart, assess the snow conditions, and plan a route to avoid the higher snow-laden 30 degree slopes that bore the scars of previous avalanche activity. Bag drops below the summits, and crampons fitted to ease the climbing. We allowed ourselves only brief refreshment stops to enable a steady progress all day, and to be able to enjoy a suitably early finish when skis and boots could be discarded for comfy hut shoes, bodily rehydration, and a chance to just rest.

On Saturday 7 April an early start allowed us to crampon up to the top of the Rote Furca col before the sun had softened the snow. We skied down to below the Klostertaler Hütte, which was closed, and then skinned up to the Litzner Sattel before a short descent of the Litzner glacier to the amazing Saarbrucker Hütte, half buried in the snow.

An incredible, unrepeatable experience and such a unique privilege with images, events, scenery and people burnt deep into the memory forever. Real tiredness at the end of a long day and the opportunity to be asleep by 2100. The welcoming staff of the Pension Tuerscher in Galtür, and the Wombat Hostel in Munich, the lovely smiling faces of those serving in the Wiesbadener Hütte where we were served at table as if we had been royalty. Train and plane and bus timetables that worked like clockwork, and the amazing organisations that lie behind what we can so easily take for granted. Weather and avalanche reports prepared with professionalism and experience that we come to rely on so much in the mountains these days. We seem to travel alone in the mountains, but in fact such adventures are predicated on the network of humanity that keeps us there, fed, warm and safe.

On our last day we climbed back to the Litzner Sattel and then, in bright sunshine, skinned to the summit of the Sonntag Spitz 2882m. We skied deep snow that led from the summit down steep slopes to the frozen lake behind the Bielerhöhe dam, a beer at the hotel there, and a ski and skate down the Kleinvermunt Tal to Wirl, and the bus back to our pension in Galtür. Absolutely fabulous.

James Aitken, Annabel Hurley, Andrew and Leanne Mills, John Marjot and Dermot O'Dwyer would like to thank Gerry for his impeccable organisation, leadership, care and sense of adventure.



*Silvretta 2018 - Wow*