

Lizumer Hütte Ski Adventure, Feb 2019

by James Severance

The plan was to assemble Monday at the Wattens train station in Austria for a group taxi ride to the ÖAV Lizumer Hütte, high in the Tuxer Alps. Through the magic of social media, four members were able to make contact en route and meet for tea and coffee in Innsbruck. A fifth member was collected at the Wattens train station, and the sixth awaited us at the Lizumer Hutte. The Austrian Army keeps the road to the Hütte open in the winter, to access high alpine terrain for occasional winter field training exercises. But getting there was still not without difficulties. From a parking area about halfway to the Hütte you must skin the remaining distance or, in our case, transfer to a highly modified “taxi” — a passenger van complete with wooden bench seats, extra high clearance, and chains all around, for the slow, noisy, lumpy-bumpy final push to the Hütte over the snow-packed road.

So, there we were, the A-Team, as assembled by Dan Morgan who single handedly did all the heavy lifting by conceiving, planning, and leading this ski adventure.



The A team, minus one - Jim Severance

After settling in, the first order of business was transceiver practice, an essential skill in the event one or more members are caught and buried in an avalanche. Equally important, and usually completed over dinner, was a review of the next day's avalanche bulletin (available daily at [5:00pm](#)), a discussion of potential hazard mitigation options, and a briefing on our following day objective(s) with a Plan-A and a backup Plan-B.

On Tuesday, after a bit more transceiver practice, off we go on a "shake-down" tour ascending about 500 meters to a col and on up a rocky ridge to the top of a small unnamed point on the skyline NW of the hut. A beautiful sunny day, perfect for working on our sunburns.



Louise - ridge running - Jim Severance

On Wednesday we angled up to the NE to turn the corner of Graue Wand for our first glimpse of our primary objective, Torspitze. As we drew nearer, it looked as though we would have to boot-up the final windswept, rocky section to the summit. However, Dan was able to piece together patches of wind hardened snow, as we wound around and through the rocks to the broad summit. After all that work, our reward was a stiff cold wind in our faces as we skied down the wide, wind-hammered north ridge. Lower down the ridge narrowed considerably, necessitating a bit of ridge running in ski boots. Then, with skis back on, we made a hard left turn in the direction of the hut.

It's Thursday already, and Dan has planned a real tour de force with a circumnavigation of two peaks, Lizumer Sonnenspitze and Lizumer Reckner, and an ascent of a third peak, Geier, thrown in for good measure. A big day, with lots of up and down and well over 1000 metres of climbing. And just when we thought we had this thing in the bag, we came to what turned out to be the crux of the route, an exposed traverse beneath a rock wall and around a corner. Fortunately, by this time, the sun had softened the snow a bit enabling us to hold an edge. And after seven hours we returned to the hut THT — tired, hungry, and thirsty. An even better day! At dinner that night, the avalanche bulletin was forecasting a winter storm for the following day with reduced visibility and elevated avalanche hazard. Sure enough, on Friday it snowed all day and was very foggy. We attempted to ascend some low angle, super safe slopes just NW of the hut but, after 250 meters of skinning upwards in the fog, we called it quits. We did a quick snow pit analysis, then played follow-the-leader in the thick fog as we slowly descended in the direction of the hut. Despite our best efforts we missed it but did come across the access road which we followed uphill to the hut.



The crux traverse - Jim Severance

It's Saturday. It's our last ski day but the day dawned bright, sunny, cold, and with 10-12 cm of fluffy new snow at the hut, and more higher up. Powder runs were on tap for the day, as Dan led us uphill on the east side of the valley and on to Torjoch. Once there we reversed course and, with the best snow of the trip, we just had to yo-yo a couple lines before returning to the hut. Another good day!

It does take everyone to make a ski outing special, and this one was very special. A thank you to Dan Morgan for organizing/ leading this ski adventure, and for all the hints and tips he dispensed throughout the week to make ski touring just a bit more fun, efficient, . . . and safer, too.