

# Ötztal 2019

## Heat Wave! What Heat Wave?

by Jeremy Robbins



*An Ötztal dawn looking East from the Mitterkar valley enroute to the Wildspitze Photo J. Robbins*

With record June temperatures in Europe and the United Kingdom, it was easy to forget that the Eastern and Central Alps had had near record winter 2018/19 snow levels, topped up by late snow in May. And so an AAC(UK) trip in July 2019 to the high Ötztal valley, organised and led by Alistair Moffat, which included my younger daughter Naomi and I, found more snow at lower levels and predominantly wet glaciers than expected.

The plan saw the party meet in Sölden, before catching one of the frequent buses, which service the whole valley, to Obergurgl the next morning. A quick coffee opposite the bus stop was followed by a delightful walk through ancient stone pine woodlands, past waterfalls to reach the Langtalereckhütte (2450m).

The next day's weather forecast was for fine weather, and we decided to climb the impressive rock face facing the hut via the Schwarzenkamm Klettersteig en route to the Ramolhaus. Starting at 2410m, this was a straightforward, but highly enjoyable and impressively situated route finishing at 2760m. We had not brought our klettersteig kit, but were able to hire them from Langtalereckhütte, and return them from Ramolhaus via the service cable. We had stashed some of our gear and returned to pick it up before the short descent to the Picard suspension bridge, which provides a crossing where the appropriately named Gurglerferner has retreated, followed by a steep haul up to the Ramolhaus (3006m).

The next morning we were woken early to the sound of yodelling and cheering, the hut being the high point for a mountain marathon race. We set off, very soon on a snow-covered glacier, as we made our way to cross the Ramoljoch (3189m) into the next valley. A long descent was followed by an even longer walk up the Niedertal valley to the busy Martin Busch Hütte, full with groups walking the E5 Alpine crossing from Oberstdorf to Meran.

The next day we soon left the long distance trekkers in the valley, and climbed up towards and across Saykogel (3365m). We had expected a predominantly rocky summit ridge, but found a number of gullies with steep, soft snow and cornices. Having crossed the first, we were concerned at their stability, and so dropped back down a snow filled gully to the SW to regain the lower track into the next valley, crossing a further two rivers before a short climb back up to the quaint Hochjoch Hospiz (2413m).

The next day's forecast was for deteriorating weather, and we set off early to reach the Brandenburger Haus (3274m), impressively sitting on the rocky flank of the Dahmannspitze, set in the middle of a sea of glacial ice covered by soft snow. The wind increased as we donned crampons and roped up to cross the easy-angled Kesselwandferner, and we reached the hut in a near gale. Nevertheless, there were still glimpses of the summit of the nearby Hintereisspitze (3485m), which Alistair and I decided to attempt. A long trudge through soft snow took us up towards the summit ridge, but the combination of a lowering cloud base, strengthening winds and signs of instability in the snowpack caused us to turn back less than 40m short of the summit.

The next day we set out to cross the glacier and climbed the Fluchtkogel (3500m), before descending the Guslarferner to find refreshment at the Vernaght Hütte (2755m). This was followed by a fast scamper around to the Breslauer Hütte (2844m), from where we planned to climb the Wildspitze (3774m), the second highest mountain in Austria, in what was forecast to be good weather.

An early night was only disturbed by an accordion player, serenading us and others, before a 0530 start up the valley on crisp and hard packed snow towards the Mitterkarjoch. We roped and cramponed up before ascending the steep snow filled gully (just about Grade 1) that took us up to the Mitterkarjoch. The Taschachferner glacier on the far side led us up to the summit ridge and a snow and ice covered scramble up to the summit was rewarded with stunning 360 degree views. We returned by the same route, but bypassing the top of the Mitterkarjoch gully on wire assisted rock to the west, in time for lunch at the hut. We then said farewell to Naomi, as she dashed down to the pretty village of Vent, and home for a hen party!



*Naomi in action*

The next day, in deteriorating weather, we ascended the nearby Wildes Mannle (3023m) in a short circular route. Our advice is to approach the peaks clockwise, giving a short enjoyable scramble up, and a longer descent over broken rock which would be a slog to ascend. With the weather closing in, and having achieved most of our objectives, we decided to descend a day earlier than planned to Vent, and from there by bus back to Sölden. Our final day saw low

cloud and drizzle, and so we took a lower circular walk from Wildmoos through scenic meadows and woods up the southern flank of the Windbachtal (which leads up towards the Hildesheimer Hütte and the Stubai valley), returning down alongside the river after lunch at Fieglhütte.

This was my second trip to the Ötztal. Once again it was easily accessible, with spectacular scenery, comfortable huts, fantastic food and reasonable prices, and I am sure it will not be my last visit. Perhaps next time we will criss-cross from the Stubai to the Ötztal and back!



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*We were not the first on Wildspitze summit 3774m*