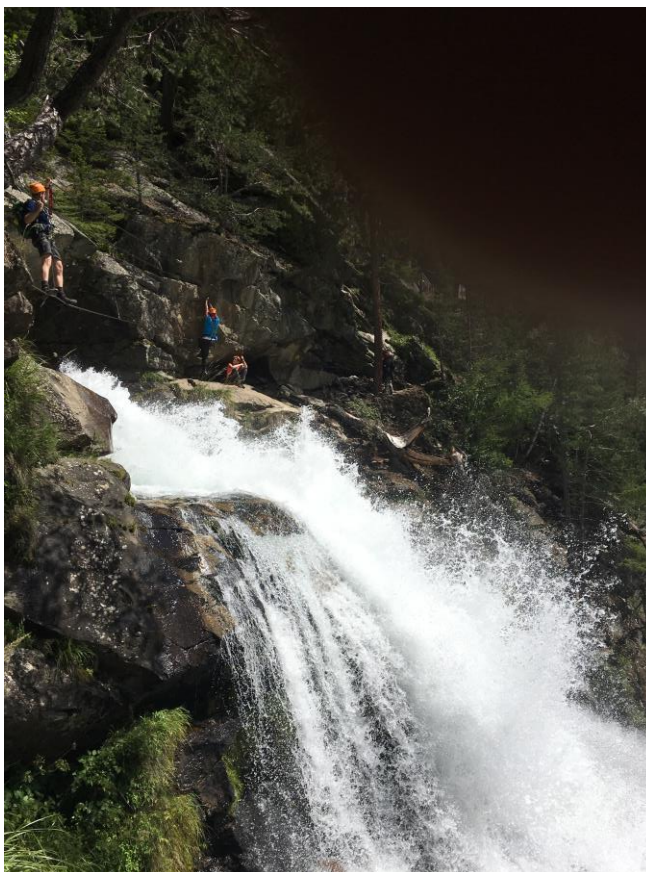


Alpenverein-Akademie Klettersteige training course

by Cheryl Law

With a free week to fill in the summer, and an insatiable quest to spend it somewhere with sun and mountains, I found myself clicking my way through the AAC website until I found that “An Introduction to Basic Klettersteige” fitted my dates perfectly. Within no time at all I had committed my free week to the idea of learning as much as I could about Klettersteige, spending five days in the beautiful mountains near Innsbruck.

I set off to Austria slightly nervous about spending a week with strangers, but I needn't have worried. Our little group of six settled into the wonderful Gasthof Pension Rechenhof hotel, chatting endlessly about everything from our past adventures to the glorious culinary delights that the family-run hotel were presenting us with. We met our guide, Robert Thaler, on the first morning. He turned up in a lovely new ÖAV minibus, checked all our gear, gave us the bits we were missing, and we all did a trial run in the hotel car park! Our group of 6 had varying experience: whilst I have climbed a lot I hadn't done any Klettersteige, two people in our group had and two were complete beginners. None of this mattered though, as Robert had chosen a wonderful route for our first day at the popular Klettersteig Stuibenfall. We were all completely blown away with the enormity and beauty of this staggering waterfall, and it was a good choice for our first day as it was incredibly accessible, with gentle climbing, spectacular exposure, wonderful views, a refreshing spray from the waterfall and a couple of bridges; this included my personal highlight, crossing the waterfall on a wire right under the hiker's viewing platform. The endorphin rush as we stood near the waterfall was electric, and, wet from the spray, with the deafening noise and the huge power of nature, none of us could help but smile!



Stuibenfall waterfall - Cheryl Law

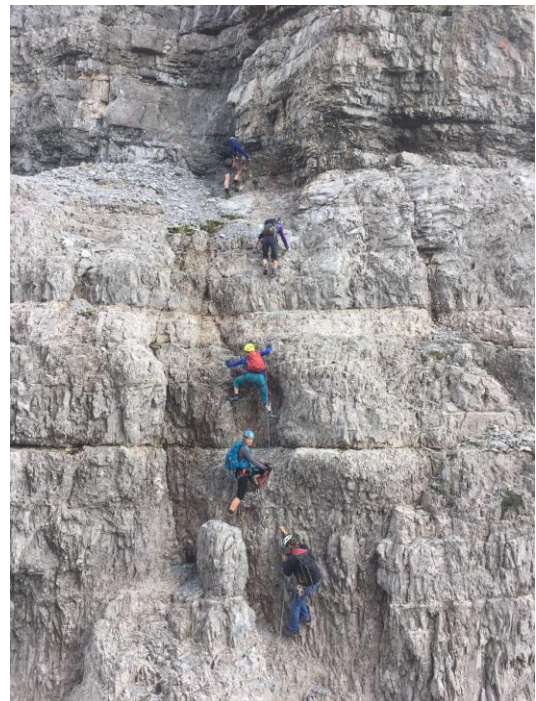
Robert chose a few options for us for the next day. From this point onwards we all had a say in choosing our following day's route. Robert taught us how to read the Klettersteig topos, how to look for tricky bits, what certain words meant, and what the grades were. On our second day we completed the slightly more challenging Klettersteig Peter Köfler, in the beautiful village of St Jodok, and on the third day we tackled the slippery Steinwand Klettersteig. Robert took some time to teach us some useful techniques, such as how to belay each other through tricky sections where the wire is sparse, and also how to prusik on to the wire to help ourselves through harder sections.

This all came in useful when we found ourselves climbing Steingrubenkogel, a beautiful 2633m peak. The hefty walk-in was broken up by a delicious coffee and cake at the lovely Adolf-Pichler Hütte. We were certainly seeing some very different types of routes, this one requiring us to rope up between sections of wire. Scree-running was not on the course description, but Robert gave us some welcome advice about descending scree, or *Schotter reisen* as he called it, on the way down.



Group on Steingrubenkogel - Uliana Kuzmisand

On our last day we went up Erlspitze, a 2400m peak, with another scree walk-in. The Zirler Klettersteig was a bit looser than all the other routes we had completed and some of the rock was crumbly. Still, it was worth all the hard work when we reached the view at the summit, which was spectacular, and marked by a cross with an Edelweiss on it, which left Tish, Rhiannon and I singing "Edelweiss" all the way back down the mountain!



Group on Erlspitze - Uliana Kuzmisand



Cheryl and Rhiannon on Klettersteig Peter Köffler - Cheryl Law

At the end of a thrilling week, we were all happily exhausted, we had seen some spectacular views, climbed hard, learnt lots of technique, tasted the wares of some beautiful mountain huts and had lots of fun. Robert had been an excellent guide and, over a glass of schnapps on our last night, we couldn't stop talking about our fabulous week. With my eyes opened to the wonderful exposure, the phenomenal views and the joys of Klettersteige, I am certain I'll be back.