

Before the Klettersteig course 2018 by Steve Simkin

“Doubts are traitors and make us lose the good we oft might win, by fearing to attempt...”

Measure for Measure, William Shakespeare

“Do I really have the experience to plan this trek in the Austrian Alps? Will I end up falling off the side of a mountain and never be seen again? Do I have the physical and mental stamina to endure 6-10 hours of hiking for 6 days, with an average ascent of 1000m per day? Do I have the navigational competency to successfully complete this 120km trek?”

The answer to all of the above questions was “yes” but the whole idea was nearly derailed by nothing but personal doubt and fear. The following article will review how my experiences with the Austrian Alps has impacted far beyond blistered feet and hard calves; instead it has had a transformative and indelible impact on my outlook on my own personal and professional development.



Zireiner See, Brandenberger Alps.

Small beginnings:

The opportunity to work in Vienna as part of my Biochemistry degree provided me with a new outlook and a newfound love for the outdoors and

an opportunity to experience its restorative power. This brief article will be interspersed with words and poetry that have helped me crystallize and more effortlessly articulate how the Austrian Alps, and nature in general, has helped me change my outlook on, and experience of, life.

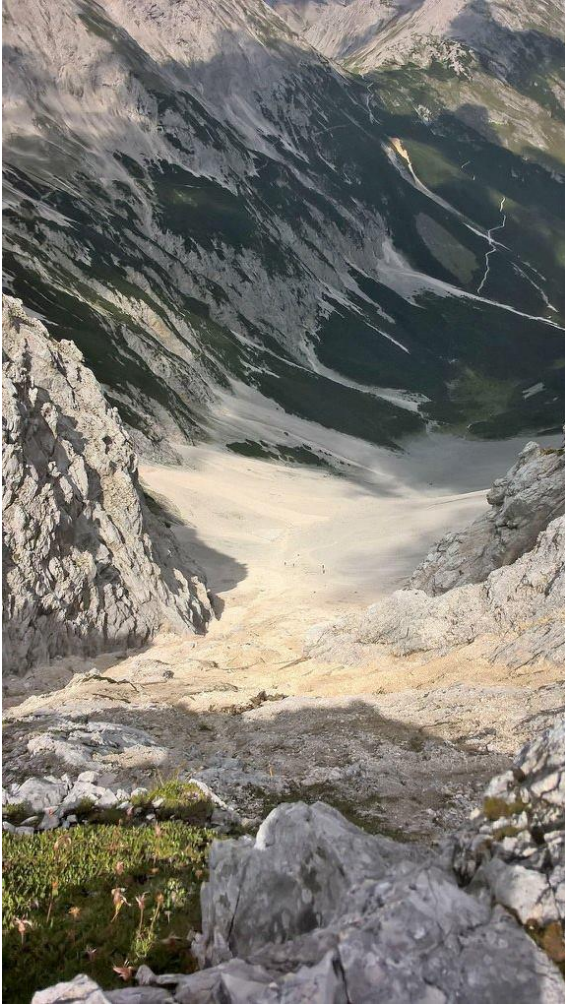
"Its steady cadence, tempering human waywardness...

A grandeur in the beatings of the heart...

With life and nature, purifying thus the elements of feeling and of thought."

The Prelude, William Wordsworth

Poetry for me is an intensely personal affair: it can perfectly distil complex and conflicting emotions that would otherwise be inarticulately or clumsily expressed. It acts as a pressure release valve when adversity or emotional complexity strikes and, like the grandeur and expansiveness of the mountains itself, poetry *communicates* before being *understood*. The long path I have taken to improving my navigational competence, sure footedness, physical and mental stamina has enabled me to further understand the mountains, and all their inherent dangers and joys. However, my mountaineering skills (rope work and trad climbing) have developed at a frustrating pace. As part of the Teach First programme I was placed in the flattest county in the UK, Lincolnshire. As a result, I was a 2-hour drive away from the nearest climbing wall and a 7-hour door-to-door journey to the Lake District (public transport...!). My climbing skills and fitness have dropped off the radar but my commitment to developing my navigational skills and general mountaineering skills (non-ropework related) has seen me use my school holidays to visit the Lake District and has had me planning trips across Patterdale, Glenridding, the Langdales, Keswick and around Ambleside.



The combination of mountaineering and poetry might be an odd one but chance encounters with poetry have somehow helped me refine my understanding and appreciation of the natural world and what it means for us. How getting out there, *going to nice places and doing nice things*, enriches our lives: it cleanses our thoughts; it takes us away from the busyness, the rush, the stresses, the self-criticism, the need to be faster, stronger and better. In the mountains the inessential melts away. We are left with one foot after the other: left right, left right, left right. These motor movements require such focus and concentration when you are carefully placing each foot on slippery rock or unstable scree, all highly exposed; testing the rock above your hand carefully, testing

Stempeljoch,

the rock below with a light tiptoe; caressing the rock to find a suitable and secure handhold; time slowing and focusing centrally on what is there in that moment: the textures of the mountain, the hands, the feet, the infinite expanse of sky above, the ground several hundred (and sometimes thousands) of metres below. Fundamentally, we don't need to explain it, we don't need to put a price or a value on it, we don't need to capture it and share it for all to see on Facebook or Instagram: we breathe it in, we live it and we **need** it.

Poetry and pretension aside, I'd like to wholeheartedly thank the UK Section of the AAC for granting me a bursary that has slashed the price of a £1000 Basic Klettersteig course by around half! I know the course will be amazing and I'm already looking forward to booking onto their Basic Alpine Skills course in the near future.

Finally, please feel free to email me via the AAC(UK) Office. Hopefully I will have the pleasure of meeting some of you on an AAC(UK) course or trip in the near future!



***“For nature, heartless, witless nature, will neither care nor know
What stranger’s feet may find the meadow
And trespass there and go,
Nor ask amid the dews of morning,
If they are mine or no.”***

Tell me not here, it needs not saying, A.E Housman