

## **Alpenverein-Akademie Ski Touring Day Tours**

**by Josh Towne**

I didn't think I was going skiing this year until I found out that there was a wonderful opportunity provided through my membership of the Austrian Alpine Club. As an experienced resort skier I was interested in getting away from the pistes and into the backcountry and the AAC was offering grants for its young members to travel to Austria for a week's ski touring with guiding and instruction.

Our instructor was Hannes and he led our group of 9 with ages ranging from myself at 18 through to middle aged members, and a whole range of skiing ability and mountain experience. Most of the group had previous climbing and ski touring experience whereas I hadn't but, rather than it being a problem or intimidating, it gave me a chance to learn from them. Hannes made sure that we went at a pace and through terrain that was comfortable but still challenging for everyone.

Almis Berg Hotel in Obernberg im Brenner, Austria was our base. It was a beautiful location deep in the mountains with probably the best hospitality I've experienced. The food was fantastic and we were able to recover and relax in the top floor spa with views of the mountains!

The 5 day itinerary took us on different tours around the local area. After a massive 1.5m dump of fresh snow we left from the hotel's front door on the first day on skis and skinned our way up through the trees. Skiing down was hard work in such deep snow but was something that really improved my powder skiing. On the following days we explored the mountain, sometimes skiing up and other times taking advantage of old lifts, while learning about route choice and risk assessment for avalanches and objective dangers. We learned how to use transceivers for our own safety, but also to search and rescue other skiers caught in an avalanche by burying a spare transceiver and then performing a search to locate it. It is a real insight into how hard this is to do and how important it is to practice every time you go out on snow to make sure that you could quickly get to a casualty who is relying on you in the unfortunate event of an avalanche burial.

I was somewhat apprehensive setting out from Manchester to join the group as I was travelling on my own and didn't know what to expect. The hotel, Hannes the instructor and the other members made me feel most welcome and very much part of the group. Being 'just' a skier wasn't a problem as the range of experience of the group meant that the skiers learnt from the mountaineers and vice versa. I think we all left with a much greater awareness of what is necessary to move safely and enjoyably through the mountains on skis. And we had a fantastic time in Obernberg.

While I was very interested in going ski touring I'm not sure I would have found a way to do it myself. This opportunity from the AAC, which is one of several year round training courses they offer to young members, has given me the foundation to go back in future winters and explore beyond the pistes more confidently and safely.