

Snowshoeing Improvers' Course 2020

Dachsteingebirge

by Kevin Thomas



On our way to the Simony Huette – Kevin Thomas

The course, undertaken by four veterans of the beginners' course held in February 2019, was indeed a step or two up from the initial course, which was also partly sponsored by the AAC(UK). Lessons from the beginners' course were reinforced and longer, more challenging trails were undertaken. This course was one of the first to be arranged through the new partnership between AAC(UK) and WELTbewegend, an Austrian outdoors activities company linked to SektionEdelweiss.

The location, starting at the relatively luxurious Krippenstein Lodge and continuing at the more basic, but *sehr gemütlich*, Simonyhütte, was blessed with perfect conditions for snowshoeing. Getting to the Dachsteingebirge from nearby Salzburg is straightforward but meandering, taking about 2 ½ hours by bus and train. The snow was dry and soft and deep enough for making new trails to surrounding summits and the weather was unusually dry and sunny for 5 of the six days we were in the mountains. We soon recalled how much more physical effort is required for snowshoeing than for summer hiking, especially when making new trails across soft snow. Rob, our genial Dutch guide, was especially keen to help us explore and make new, safe, trails off the beaten track and to point out the different animal tracks – hare, fox, ptarmigan etc.

Summer hiking trails disappear under snow, so the usual maps are of limited value. We did find long stretches of groomed pistes made for skiers and some skidoo tracks (skidoos are the main means of supplying some huts such as the Simonyhütte in winter). However, Rob was keen to emphasise that snowshoeing is about exploring beyond the prepared paths, so he made sure we developed good awareness of snow conditions beyond the essential avalanche safety issues.



Starting off for the Simony Hütte - Kevin Thomas

We got a lot of practice in ‘reading’ the snow and slope conditions, of devising good lines for snowshoeing to nearby peaks and were required to take our turn in devising and leading new trail sections. Given the hard work of taking the lead on a fresh trail, we learned too about alternating leadership and walking the new trail in ways that reduced the exertion required from those further back. We had an intensive session on using our avalanche rescue kit and on the art of digging snow to rescue a victim – extremely hard work! Rob clearly has a deep love for and knowledge of snow, how to assess its condition, spot possible avalanche indicators, etc. and we came away with a much deeper appreciation of the stuff.

We also had a lot fun. Pratfalls in snow are rarely damaging, except to the ego and we had plenty of pratfalls, some of them intended, as when we slid down some of the longer and steeper snow slopes; good fun but inelegant so we won’t be circulating those photos.

We all counted this a roaring success and a promising start for our new relationship with WELTBewegend. If you are considering learning to snowshoe, come on in, the snow’s lovely!



Near the top of the Hallstaetter Glacier - Kevin Thomas



Relaxing at the Simony Hütte - Kevin Thomas