

Ski Touring in the Tatras 2017

By Jackie Coe

When we told friends that we were going ski touring in Poland, the usual answer was 'I've never heard of anyone skiing there. A quick search on the internet produced the following information: 'The cable car to Kasprowy Wierch (1,987m) is one of the oldest still-working cable cars in Europe. Its construction started in 1935'. So when we arrived in Zakopane, at the foothills of the Tatra Mountains, we wondered what we were letting ourselves in for.

As soon as our group of six reached the cable car station we saw that the 1935 version had been replaced with a modern one, but our guide Piotr marched resolutely past it and led us to the mountain path. We then had to carry our skis for 1½ kilometres through the woods before we found enough snow to ski on. We explained to Piotr that we were mostly senior skiers and that we preferred not to do this if possible, but of course it was not his fault that there was not enough snow! We made our way up through the forest on skis and skins, but the situation did not improve as soon it started raining! A couple of hours later, soaked and dejected, we arrived at a lovely mountain refuge, and were very happy to go in for a warm welcome and a hot chocolate. After this we decided to contour the mountain and ski down again rather than carry on up in the rain, so the first day was a bit short and a bit of a disappointment.



Setting off without any snow: Jackie Coe



Our most unusual transport: Jackie Coe

The next day could not have been more of a contrast! The sun was shining which immediately made everything feel different. We were transported to the nearby Kościeliska valley and this time only had to carry our skis a few hundred yards before we could put them on.

We skinned up, first through forest and then over more open slopes, to a col with a wonderful view into Slovakia. We learnt how the Tatra Mountains form the border between the two countries. The ski down was a delight – challenging but

not too difficult. When we descended there was another mountain hut, but this time we enjoyed our drinks outside in the sunshine, before being transported back to the main road, with our skis, by horse and cart. This was a first for all of us!

During our stay we did two ski tours on the Slovakian side of the Tatras, chosen by Piotr because there were some high level resorts there that meant we could put on our skis as soon as we got out of the mini bus. On the first of these, from Strbske Pleso, the visibility was once again disappointing, but the second one, from Rohace-Spalena, proved to be the highlight of our week. We started with the chairlift. We were not the only people on skins – a lot of younger skiers in lycra were taking part in a noisy ski-touring competition. We were soon above them however and heading up to a col, in bright sunshine. The temperature had dropped considerably and the snow was icy, making the steep kick turns rather challenging. There were a couple of slithers, but nobody went shooting down the mountain. From the col we continued up, carrying skis along the rocky bits of the ridge, till we arrived at the summit of Brestova (1,902 m), where this time we had wonderful view over the Tatras into Poland.



Summit photo - Brestova (1,902m): Piotr Konopka

Before we went home we did get up to the top of Kasprowy Wierch in the new cable car. It was one of those days where it is foggy in the valley but if you go up high enough you break through and look down at the clouds. As we walked along the ridge to the rocky summit we took some stunning photos and enjoyed making star shapes that were magnified in the Brocken Spectres below us. So in the end the mountain that had disappointed us on the first day also provided us with our most magic mountain moment!



Magic mountain moment on Kasprowy Wierch: Jackie Coe

We all made it to the end without any injuries, and we had had some adventures along the way. Piotr had told us many times that we had not seen his local mountains with the best snow conditions, but we agreed we had had a good time. Jacky Rix-Brown (the

organiser of the trip) was the only one who had been to the area before, for walking about 20 years previously. Would we go back? We were not so sure about going back for skiing, but we liked the idea of visiting the Tatras again in the summer and staying at some of the lovely huts where we had enjoyed our drinks.