

# Breathtaking Beauty in the Dolomites

by Sue Boardman



*Steve and Sue on top of Heiligkreuzkofel - Graham Willoughby*

**Having enjoyed our first mountain hutting experience last year with Tony Cooper, my partner Steve and I eagerly booked for Tony's Dolomites Sexten to Fanes trip in July. Each day we encountered spectacular and breathtaking scenery and had excellent views of the magnificent mountains that make up the unique splendour of the Dolomites.**

We were a group of 11 and left Brixen YH on our first day by bus and train to Moos. We had a fairly tough climb of 900m up the valley to the Zsigmondy-Comici Hütte (2224m). Next day started with clear blue skies and sunshine. An early lunch taken at the Dreizinnen hut gave excellent views ahead of the iconic Tre Cime/ Drei Zinnen. Making for the Rifugio Auronzo, we passed close by the Tre Cime enabling us to fully appreciate their enormity and splendour.

Day three took us down through woodland to Lake Misurina followed by a 50 minute climb to our destination, the Rifugio Col de Varda in the Cadin range where we arrived for lunch, followed by an afternoon exploring the range above it. On day four it was back down to Lake Misurina and by bus to Cortina where we stayed for two nights in a town centre hotel. While there Steve and I climbed from Cortina to the top of the M. Ciasa Dio (2362m). Others in the group explored the Cinque Torri, an open air museum of WW1 fortifications.

The Col Drusie cable car out of Cortina started our sixth day before walking to the Rifugio Dibona. An afternoon excursion took us up a 500m ascent to the Rifugio Giussani. Most continued up to the Tre Dita (Three Thumbs), a viewpoint on the Tofana di Rozes. The views from this point were some of the most dramatic and stunning of the trip.

Our day seven destination, the Rifugio Lagazuoi, was a 700m climb away, being visible towering in the distance for some time. Steve and I opted to don our head torches and descended the WWI tunnel there. In the evening as a thunderstorm developed, we watched the spectacular growth of clouds, lit with ever changing colours from a setting sun.

The following day we were soon able to see what looked like an impossible scree path, initially traversing the base of a cliff before somehow climbing 500m up the side of it. A steep but switchbacked path led to the col. On the way we were fortunate to see examples of the rare endemic Devils Claw. We then headed down to the Fanes Hütte, our accommodation for two nights.

Our day walk from Fanes followed a rising path through woodland before crossing limestone pavement. Arriving at the lip of the deep Val Badia valley, we had stunning views down into it with mountains on all sides. A group of us headed for the nearby Heiligkreuzkofel (2907m). After a tricky final ascent over scree we were on top - the highest altitude Steve and I have ever reached and we were both exhilarated to be there.

On our final day we walked down to the Rifugio Pederü, whence buses and a rail journey took us back for our last night in Brixen. I would like to thank everyone on the trip for their company, warmth and friendship and to Tony for his organisation and planning of a wonderful experience.



*On route for Zsigmondy-Comici Hütte - Steve Clark*