

Chock Full o' Nuts

Fall
2005

The newsletter of Women Climbers Northwest

Upcoming Trips

Mary Yocom has once again offered her hospitality to host the following trips at her home in Redmond, Oregon. Enjoy dry sunny weather, great climbing and skiing, and of course, Mary's fabulous home cookin'!

Fall Rock Climbing Trip:

October 20th–24th:

Rock climbing at Smith Rocks

New Year's Eve Ski Trip

December 30th–January 2nd:

Enjoy a repeat of last year's memorable New Year's ski weekend. Skiing/snowshoeing at Mt. Bachelor. Come on down, party with the girls, laugh, and get some good turns in as well!

If interested in any of the above, please contact Mary at MYocom6689@aol.com or 541-548-2930

Hut to Hut Ski Trip

I am interested in organizing another weekend hut to hut trip on the Nordic trails in the Methow Valley this winter, sometime in February. The hut will need to be reserved soon. If interested, contact Clare at clarep@drizzle.com or 206-878-0252.

Join the WCN email list!

If you would like to keep in touch with other women to plan trips, or just to discuss a particular issue, join the WCN e-mail listserve.

To subscribe to the list, send a message to: majordomo@scn.org
Keep the subject line blank. In the body of the message, type:
subscribe womenclimb

Adventures of a Denmark-based South African American Expatriot

Editor's Note: *Our favorite South African climber and all-around great gal, Colleen Hinton, and her partner Reg have been enjoying fabulous mountaineering adventures throughout Europe. Colleen and Reg moved to Copenhagen, Denmark in January 2004, due to Reg's offer from Microsoft of a 3 year overseas job.*



Colleen in
Copenhagen

Part 1: The Alps

First stop: Chamonix, France.

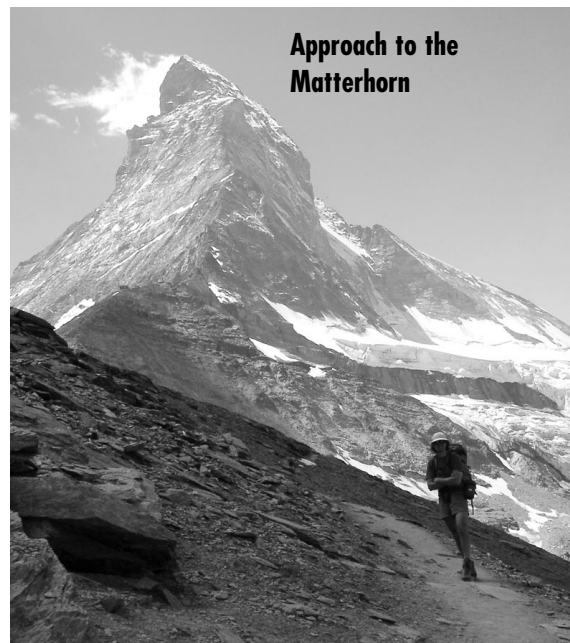
Main climbing goal: Mont Blanc, the highest peak in the Alps (4807m/15,771ft.)

Books we used: Richard Goedeke: *The Alpine 4000m Peaks by the Classic Routes*; British Alpine Club guidebooks: *Mont Blanc Massif*, Vol. 1 & 2.

Since we only had five days in the area, we decided to minimize logistics and maximize climbing opportunities by taking the Aiguille du Midi cable car all the way up to 3842m/12,605ft to camp on the glacier (Vallee Blanche) just a short descent from the cable station, for the full five days. Technically of course, you're not supposed to bivi or camp in the haute montagnes for more than a night, but we had heard that climbers frequently break this rule on the Vallee Blanche, a popular starting point for climbing Mont Blanc.

Though disconcerted by reports that the previous year, helicopters would periodically fly in and evict climbers overstaying their welcome—we opted to take our chances. Of course, there is the Cosmiques hut nearby, but we find the noise, expense, and crowds of the alpine huts to be unattractive in the summer time if there is no pressing need to go light, or no outright ban on camping, like in the national parks. We spent a day in Chamonix getting oriented, shopping for maps and food, checking the weather forecast and planning logistics, and after

continued on the next page



Approach to the
Matterhorn



About the club: **Women Climbers**

Northwest is a nonprofit organization formed in 1983 to promote climbing and other wilderness activities among women. Our roots are in rock climbing and mountaineering, but women of all outdoor persuasions are welcome. In other words, girls really do want to have fun!

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Liability Waiver: Participants agree to assume all risks associated with their participation in events coordinated or publicized by Women Climbers Northwest (WCN).

**FOR SALE: Thermarest
Ultralight 3/4 length
sleeping pad.**

Excellent condition, barely used, no leaks. I'm just too wimpy to sleep on it any more. \$20 obo. **Call Elaine, 206-762-7405.**

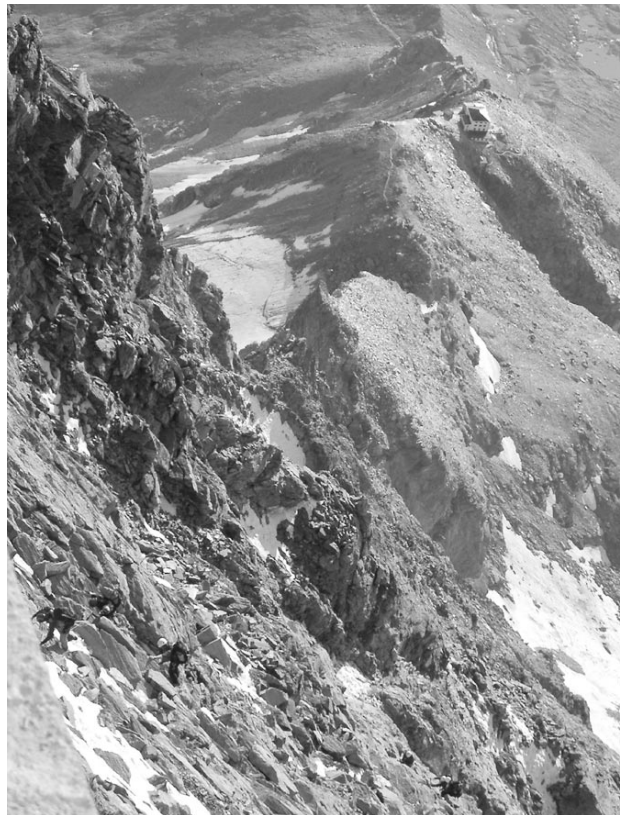
European Adventures, continued

doing a final pack the next morning, we donned our huge packs and paid our ~\$46 with a gulp for a return ticket on a 16-minute ride to gain 2806m/9206ft. (For diehard wilderness sloggers, it's amazing how quickly we embraced the European concept of, as Reg calls it, "buying altitude.")

One of the downsides of camping on the glacier is that because it's an unofficial thing, there is no permit system and no rangers handing out blue bags—leaving campers with the unappealing dilemma of where to answer the call of nature. Of course, there's always the option of taking your own Ziploc bags and dutifully taking your waste down to Chamonix along with your garbage. But doesn't camping within reasonable (shitting?!) distance of the hut and using their toilet for the #2 calls sound much more appealing? We saw a number of fellow campers heading up to the hut, perhaps for similar reasons—undoubtedly not the fairest option for the hut guardian, having to deal with a lot more waste than was paid for. We

tried not to think about what option the previous campers had chosen as we scooped the snow around our tent into our pots for meltwater. Given the large number of campers in the area, it sure would be nice if the authorities developed a more official policy to deal with human waste. But, we grew to realize that the "each-man-for-himself" philosophy is part and parcel of the French climbing landscape.

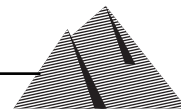
The route we had chosen for our ascent is known as the Trois-Mont-Blanc route, so called because you traverse two peaks to get to Mont Blanc—Mont Blanc du Tacul, and Mont Maudit. The route is designated grade PD+ (peu difficile, snow slopes to >45°). Since our books translate this as "not very hard," does the + upgrade it to the more direct translation, "a little difficult," I wonder? Hmm. This route is described as more interesting than the



Climbing the Matterhorn, Hoernli hut below

standard Goutier Route, and though longer and steeper, it avoids the notorious couloir with extremely dangerous rockfall on the Goutier. (One climber told us it was like dodging balls in a bowling alley; each climber dashing across the short couloir one at a time.) The weather report had sounded as good as it gets in the haute montagnes, so that night we set out around 3 a.m., but after about an hour and a half lightning started to flash. Though it was

continued on page 4



Elaine's and Clare's Fabulous PCT Adventure!

Part 1: The North Cascades

Nine days of September backpacking on one of the most beautiful sections of the Pacific Crest Trail, and only two days were clear and sunny. The rest of the time it snowed, rained, or fogged. Or some combination of all of the above. Temperatures dropped well below freezing at night. In spite of the weather, we still managed to have a great time!

We completed in late September of 2004 the 70 mile PCT section between Rainy Pass (from North Cascades Hwy 20) and Manning Provincial Park in Canada. This is the northernmost section of the trail and its terminus. It was beautiful, colorful, remote, uncrowded, and relatively easy.

We planned a pleasant average of 8.5 miles per day. Sometimes we did nearly twelve, other times merely five. The bottoms of our feet never hurt, which means there weren't too many pounding steep sections. The trail climbs high and stays high, mostly above timberline but sometimes necessarily dropping into wooded valleys below. It travels along the east side of the crest, so weather is usually good—uh, yeah right.

The first night, spent in a high alpine basin just North of Cutthroat Pass, proved to be the most trying as far as the weather was concerned. Freezing rain and heavy slushy snow pelted us all night. Elaine's friend Peggy hiked in with us the first day and spent the first night. Elaine and Peggy stayed in a tent that night, while I stayed under Elaine's tarp. I was a little skeptical about being able to stay warm and dry under a tarp, but if I could on this night, I had faith in it for the rest of the trip. As we were packing to head off the second day, Peggy hiked back to the car carrying the tent, stating incredulously, "You're not REALLY taking that, that TARP, are you!?" Elaine held up the tarp in one hand and the tent in the other, weighing them for comparison. Since we were carrying heavy packs with food for 10 days, that was the final clincher!

We had planned a layover day, but would have spent it in our sleeping bags trying to stay warm. So we finished the trip in nine instead of ten days. Still, we had lazy mornings, lounging lunches, long looks at wildlife and scenery—and were in camp by late afternoon.

It was so cold at night that we couldn't have our heads and arms outside of our sleeping bags to read. Since it got dark

around 6:30 pm, we were in our sleeping bags under the tarp by then, and stared at the walls of the tarp for long hours or talked to pass the time until we could fall asleep, sometimes communing with the mice who ran in and out over our bodies. I spent several hours one night telling Elaine the entire plot in great detail of an 800 page book!

We were really looking forward to arriving at Hart's Pass, outside of Mazama. This PCT section is so remote that the road into Hart's Pass is the only road that bisects this section of trail. We started to have fantasies that perhaps there were bathrooms at Hart's Pass and electric hand driers that we could stand in front of to get warm! Alas, when we arrived there, we discovered only outhouses, a primitive campground and no electricity. We did meet a nice older man who was the wilderness ranger and went by the name of Bub. Ranger Bub invited us into his cabin that evening, which was heated by a cozy wood stove. It felt like pure luxury! This trip was the most vulnerable I have ever felt in all my time spent in the mountains. Hypothermia was a real danger, and we were at least a 4 day hike in any direction to get out once we set out on the trail. But, we had good gear and were careful to never let ourselves get too cold, and kept our dry clothes dry.

Wildlife sightings included the usual pikas and marmots (who appeared grossly obese in preparation for their winter layover!) The bird sightings were especially spectacular. Every day we saw groups of female spruce grouse clucking by. We also we saw a male which had a spectacular orange crest above his eyes. One day on the trail, an innocent sparrow landed just in front of me, and was swiftly snatched up and carried off by a falcon. Other sightings included mountain bluebirds and bright red pine grosbeaks. When hiking through the wild and remote Pasayten wilderness, we passed through one of the few areas in the lower 48 where grizzly bears are found. We didn't see any, but encountered many piles of poop. One day I saw the most gigantic footprint in the snow I've ever seen. I'm sure it was a grizzly print.

What we saw of the scenery was stunning, and I would go back and do it again during clear weather. In one spot, the guidebook said something like, "Before you is one of the most impressive views in the North Cascades. To the west, the towering volcanic hulk of Mt. Baker... to the south, the Picket Range..." Our actual view consisted of the equivalent of pulling a white paper bag over our heads :)

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European Adventures, *continued*

some distance away, it seemed a little too close for comfort, and besides, isn't lightning supposed to happen in the afternoons, in the alpine environment?? It seemed unusual, and many parties started turning back. We decided to play it safe and do the same. Inevitably, the rest of the morning (in between naps) was spent second-guessing what the weather was doing up there. We could hear no thunder, but thick clouds drifted in and out, and despite the trail of exhausted-looking climbers returning late in the day, presumably having summited, we decided the summit had probably been socked in and convinced ourselves we didn't miss anything. We prepared for another pre-dawn ascent that night, but awoke to snowfall, which continued for most of the next

we heard lots of parties setting off to climb the big one, and were jolted into further debate about our decision, but remembering earlier advice not to blindly follow the not-necessarily mountain-savvy crowds on Mont Blanc, we rolled over and went back to sleep.

We awoke to a glorious day and set out for our less lofty destination muttering under our breath as we second-guessed our judgment call on the weather/avalanche danger. As we approached the Arete, we began to notice that people were heading for the base of the ridge like ants to sugar. The Arete is billed as a PD+ mixed alpine climb (rock sections no more than 5.5 with one fixed aid section). We had been warned that this can be a very crowded climb, due to the easy grade, short duration (3-4 hours), proximity to the cable car sta-

all the while getting loud instructions about exactly where to place their hands and feet. Guides encouraged their clients to literally climb over and around other parties as if there were no one else on the mountain. To add to the fun, everybody kept their crampons on for the entire climb, given the new snow that had fallen. Our rope was stepped on by cramponed feet at will, not to mention several near-misses of hands and other sensitive body parts.

Our initial amazement soon gave way to irritation, but when it became clear that no amount of complaining or reasoning was going to help, we eventually settled for the "if-you-can't beat-'em" approach, and spent much of the rest of the climb laughing hysterically. By the time we topped out this otherwise fantastic climb on a long ladder leading directly to one of the viewing platforms at the cable station, to the claps and cheers of amazed and/or horrified tourists, we were already feeling ready to recommend it enthusiastically to any aspiring climber. Over sandwiches on the deck alongside chic sunbathers freshly arrived from Chamonix, we were able to view our intended route up Mont Blanc perfectly. Tomorrow was to be our last shot at it before we needed to head off to Zermatt to bag the Matterhorn.

Been there, done that advice: climb on a weekday, climb in the afternoon (in the absence of thunderstorms!—after lunch, the route was all but empty), climb on a

short rope, don't climb after snowfall if like me, you hate climbing rock in crampons! (too much of a pain to take them on and off repeatedly).

Because the weather forecast was a little iffy for the following day, we left camp at the ungodly hour of 1:45 a.m., under starry skies. We made good progress until about 6 a.m., when we reached a



Reg approaching the summit of Breithorn

day. The forecast was not hopeful for the following day either, and wary of the avalanche danger from the considerable new snow (which this route is known for), we decided not to attempt it that day. Instead, we planned to climb the highly recommended Arete Cosmiques on the Aguille du Midi just above where we were camped, weather permitting. At about 2 a.m. that night

tion and the Cosmiques Hut, and the spectacular exposure and views of Mont Blanc. Being a beautiful Sunday after a couple of days of bad weather, we might have guessed that we would be joined by the hordes. These turned out to be mostly guided parties with often clueless clients simul-climbing behind the guide on very short ropes, being hauled over the more difficult bits where necessary,

bottleneck of climbers at about 4300m/14,108ft, just below the Col du Mt. Maudit. The cause of the bottleneck was an icy section at the top of the steep slope leading to the col. Several parties were using ice screws to set up a belay; others continued gingerly upward without. We didn't have ice screws, and debated whether to proceed. Reg confessed to symptoms of altitude sickness, and we were getting very cold waiting in line for our turn to take on the rimayed section. After at least half an hour of waiting, we made the difficult decision to turn back. I was hugely disappointed, as the weather was fine, we had made excellent time, and I was feeling strong. But one look at Reg's miserable countenance as we made our way back down, and the sounds of his hacking cough, convinced me we had made the right decision and it was not to be, this time. After a nap back at camp, we packed up and headed off for the cable car ride down to Chamonix. Given the numerous warnings posted around Chamonix about car break-ins, we were greatly relieved to find our car untouched with all the gear we'd stashed still intact.

Next stop: Zermatt, Switzerland

Main climbing goal: The Matterhorn, 4478m/14,692ft. Grade AD "assez difficile" or "fairly hard," rock to 5.6, variable snow on summit pyramid.

Book used: Goedeke's book; info from the Mountain Guide office in Zermatt.

Reg and I had hiked in the Pennine Alps in 1988 as beginner climbers, and spent hours on the terrace of the Hoernli Hut behind binoculars, excitedly spotting climbers on the famous Hoernli Ridge. We couldn't wait to return and climb it one day. Fifteen years later, here we were; now much more experienced mountaineers, sadly not quite as lithe or fit, but raring to go. To further acclimatize ourselves for this peak, we spent a couple of days climb-



Reg approaching the summit of Pollux

ing two 4000+m peaks nearby, the Breithorn and Pollux. We were again able to do all this climbing in just 4 days, with our newly discovered and carefully honed mountaineering skill of Buying Altitude. Here's how it works:

Day 1: Objective: Breithorn traverse, 4164m, grade AD (assez difficile, or fairly hard; mixed alpine, rock to 5.5). Order gorgeous weather. Willingly pay \$66 and take the special early-bird cable car (only on Wednesdays!) up to the Kleine Matterhorn at 3820m/12,533ft; stash your camping gear on the glacier nearby, rope up and head across the huge Verra Glacier toward the eastern end of the Breithorn massif. Spend a few hours traversing up and down rock and snow, along the exposed ridgeline connecting the various summits of the Breithorn. Soak up the sun on the main summit, devouring hunks of divine Emmentaler cheese (from happy alpine cows, of course) and fresh Swiss bread, admiring exquisite mountains as far as the eye can see. All of which you want to climb. Head back to your stashed gear, set up camp and dive into your tent for warmth after watching a sublime sunset (Alpenglow included, free of charge).

Day 2: Objective: Pollux, 4092m, grade PD (not very hard, easy rock and steep

snow). Order another glorious day. Start before sunrise and trudge about 4.5 km east on nice, hard snow along the undulating glacier, traversing past the Breithorn, Breithorn Twins, Rocca Nera and Pollux itself. Cross the border into Italy somewhere along the way; sing an aria. From the Zwillingjoch pass, climb the southeast flank of Pollux. Share the route with only one other party of two, from Vancouver, Canada :). Meet numerous other parties on the summit, who have climbed up your descent route to the west. Marvel at the views you don't think you'll ever tire of. Over lunch at the feet of the Madonna statue guarding the descent route, listen to happy climbers babbling in German, French, Spanish, Italian, English-with-various-accents, Japanese, and other unidentifiable languages. Make haste to trudge back across the swiftly softening glacier without post-holing to your waist every ten steps. Back at camp, hurriedly pack up to get the last cable car back to Zermatt at 4:30. Luxuriate in a hot shower back at the campground and after a couple of rounds of your favourite German wheat beer, splurge on a cheese fondue dinner.

Day 3: Pack light for the Matterhorn. Take the cable car to Schwarzsee (2584m/8478ft) and hike up to the Hoernli Hut at 3260m/10,695ft. Spend



the night wishing for your tent as a large man snores loudly on the neighbouring mattress about 2 feet from your ear.

Day 4: In keeping with hut rules, awake along with the rest of the hut at 4 a.m. Follow a trail of headlamps by 4:45 to climb the winding route up the lower buttresses of the Matterhorn.

Take a brief break at the Solvay Hut, an emergency bivouac at 4003m/13,133ft. Simul-climb most of the way and try not to freak out about the exposure and lack of protection, nor to think about the 400+ climbers who have died attempting this climb. Be vigilant about loose rock, the movements of other climbers, any signs of weather change; most of all, stay focused on moving as quickly as possible. Reach the summit just after noon and inhale your lunch while trying to wipe a silly grin off your face. Take care to avoid uttering phrases like “really, really tired,” “1,218 metres of pure down-climbing to go” or “you know we’re going to miss the last cable car down to Zermatt,” closely followed by “I couldn’t bear another night in that hut.” Coax your body down, down, endlessly down, with brief diversions provided by a helicopter dropping a film crew onto the ridge, and a parched Spaniard deserted by his fellow climbers, who makes you pity him into giving up most your precious remaining water. Grow really thirsty, while you watch the hut grow closer in impossibly small increments. Arrive at the hut at 8 p.m. with mental and physical fatigue overpowering your elation. Retrieve your belongings from the hut and repack while throwing crumbs of route beta at eager next-day climbers wondering if they’ll look as happy as you this time tomorrow. Force yourself to begin the 3 hour trudge down to Zermatt in the fading light. After 19 hours of near-constant movement, hike your rubber legs into town at 11:45 p.m. looking like something the cat dragged in, just in time to celebrate Reg’s 43rd birthday at a happening late-

night feeding and drinking hole. Feel really, truly happy.

Given the limited time we had in the Zermatt area before Reg had to be back at work, we had only one shot at the Matterhorn—so we were very fortunate that summit day brought perfect weather and a successful climb. Though not technically hard rock climbing, the sheer length of this climb at high altitude coupled with very little protection and a fair share of loose rock, makes it quite demanding. We clipped into all available fixed cables on the upper summit pyramid and more exposed sections of the ridge, but these are anchored only at long intervals, giving one the gnawing suspicion that they provided a false sense of security more than anything else! Constant concentration is required for the entire climb, particularly the down-climb, during which one is more aware of the fantastic exposure of the ridge. The rock and the cables themselves are very polished from the hundreds of climbs this peak sees every year, adding to the general feeling of insecurity. Then of course, there’s always the threat of a weather change—the mountain is the highest one in the vicinity and is very exposed to sudden weather changes. As we had come to expect in the Alps, professional guides who know every inch of the route like the back of their hand were hustling their clients up at a breakneck pace, as everyone wants to get down before potential afternoon thunderstorms—an instant nightmare on this exposed mountain. Leaving at an earlier hour seems like a logical solution to avoiding this danger—but equally dangerous (and somewhat futile) is attempting to climb the lower buttresses in the dark—the route is notoriously difficult to follow on the lower third of the mountain. Guides are restricted to a 1:1 guide–client ratio on the Matterhorn due to the hazards of the route and the sheer numbers of climbers. It seemed that guided parties outnumbered and

outpaced non-guided parties by quite a margin. Everyone simul-climbs using moving belays, as it would be impossible to complete the route in a day climbing one at a time, and everyone climbs on a short rope, lessening the chances of ropes dislodging loose rocks or getting tangled as parties leapfrog each other all the way up. Despite the healthy dose of trepidation brought on by all of these factors—sitting on the summit of the Matterhorn gazing at the incredible 360° view over the Alps was definitely the long-coveted and crowning glory of our trip.

Part 2: The Dolomites

For the next summer adventure I traveled to the Dolomites for some solo climbing. Once part of Austria, the Dolomite region in Northern Italy has a strong Germanic cultural influence, which is a great benefit to those of us who understand German but no Italian—most information is presented in both languages. Besides the fantastic natural beauty of its gleaming limestone pinnacles, this is one of my favorite mountain places due to its multitude of “via ferrata”—direct translation “iron way”—allowing safe solo climbing. With just a harness, slings and carabiners—one clips in to steel cables drilled into the rock at various intervals, trying not to think about exactly how far down the last anchor was :)—did I mention a helmet? While the extensive hiking trails, ski lifts, fully-serviced high altitude huts and via ferrata ensure that those seeking a wilderness experience will be sorely disappointed—the easy access and convenience that these phenomena afford do allow a great deal of climbing to be fitted into one’s available time. And of course, there’s always the wicked fun to be had calling your more-responsible-half sitting at his desk at Microsoft, from a different mountain summit every day. I visited five different areas or “groups,”

each with its own character and attractions. Of course I had my trusty car, which helped a lot; and for accommodation, I mostly camped up in the mountains or in campgrounds in the valleys below—but sometimes I stayed at mountain huts, in national parks where camping is not permitted. The huts are really luxurious by camping standards—three course meals, wine and beer, a warm bunk bed...and if you remember your ear plugs, a decent night's sleep despite your snoring hut companions.

The guidebook I used, *Via Ferrata: Scrambles in the Dolomites* was translated from the German original. While I didn't find it too outdated (and found its quirky English quite entertaining!) there are several more recently published English guidebooks available. The a-through-g grading system used in this book goes from 'a' being for sure-footed hikers, 'b' for experienced hikers free of vertigo, on up to 'e' requiring 'additional climbing ability,' ending in 'f' and 'g' requiring 'good' and 'excellent climbing technique on vertical rock,' respectively. This book (as well as newer books) strongly recommends the use of a KISA (Kinetic Impact Shock Absorber, made by Camp) to greatly improve safety on via ferrata. These are readily available throughout the Dolomites. A chest harness is also recommended, as are sturdy gloves. A warning about the availability of maps: I found that I could only get maps for the area I was in, in any given town. You had to go to the next area to get the relevant maps—frustrating for those of us who like to plan ahead! I felt completely safe traveling and climbing alone in the Dolomites—but sad to say, among the hordes of people I encountered, I never once saw another woman climbing alone, and saw maybe one or two parties consisting solely of women. If the admiration of some of the men I met was a little patronizing (particularly older Italians), they were generally so sweet and friendly

that it was easy to take from whence it came. I guess the Dolomites might be the only place on earth I'll take the professed hand of an Italian (or Spanish) man to assist me off the final step of a via ferrata I've just ably managed on my own, with a smile and a thank-you :).

“I felt completely safe traveling and climbing alone in the Dolomites.”

Tofana Group

This group is within easy access of the Dolomites' main resort town of Cortina d'Ampezzo. The Via Ferrata Ettore Bovero (grade e) on Col Rosa, 2166m, cannot be beaten in terms of convenience, if you happen to be staying at Olympia campground—the trail to the base of the climb leads directly from the campground! Albeit short—the rock climbing section only accounts for about 1 1/2 hours of the 5-hour roundtrip from the campground—this is a great, airy route, described in my guidebook as “a steep and sharp little route on excellent rock.”

Sexten Dolomites

This group, in the northeastern Dolomites, is dominated by the world-famous Tre Cime de Lavaredo, three massive obelisks aptly called the Three Chimneys. In this area, Austrian and Italian soldiers faced off during World War I, from paths and tunnels they blasted out of the steep rock towers. Some of the original tunnels and ledges have been recreated into Via Ferrata and are just fascinating. I can't imagine how the soldiers survived winters here; the tunnels are cold and dank enough in the summer.

Since the Tre Cime lie within a national park, I studied the map to find a place I could hike up to and camp with a free

conscience, outside the park boundary but close enough to access several different via ferratas as day trips from my high camp. I found a beautiful spot, at a lake in the bowl of a cirque. Next day I combined via ferratas Schartenweg and De Luca-Innerkofler (both grade d) to make a round trip via the summit of Paternkofel (2744m), which has a splendid view of the Tre Cime. The following day I did the Alpinweg (d), named after the Alpini soldiers who pushed this improbable route through these steep mountains. Much of the route follows a contoured path blasted out of the sheer rock faces and is really spectacular. You traverse a number of snow-filled couloirs, so an ice axe and crampons are necessary. I did the detour up to Sentinella Gap to get a view east to the Vallee Popera—which entails some climbing rather than the “sure-footed, vertigo-free” walking required by the Alpinweg. This made for a long day (about 9.5 hours), but well worth it when you get to the Gap which is literally just that, with thousands of feet falling away beneath you to the green valleys below. Of this via, my quirky guidebook says: “a ‘high rock route’ where dolomitic scenery is hardly to be bettered in scenic uniqueness and force of experience.” Huh?

Marmolata group

From the Tre Cime area I drove southwest to the town of Falcade. I stayed at Camping Eden, a welcoming and relaxed campground where droves of families from Venice had settled in for the summer. To my dismay, my car had started making spluttering sounds on the drive, and I asked the campground owner for a recommendation of a mechanic in town. Next day, he took me to his mechanic, served as translator (the mechanic didn't speak a word of English and my Italian is pathetic), and brought me back to the campground, where I took a rest day with my nose in “Addicted to Danger” by Jim



Wickwire—a page-turning climbing-vacation read, no matter what Nancy Kim had to say on the subject in the *Women's Adventure Journal* :). Later I was taken back to my car, and paid all of 10 Euros for the repair! I'm not sure exactly what was entailed, but broken translation appeared to indicate simply a dirty ignition cable. Regardless—the car remained splutterless until its big service in Germany 10 days later.

nels. Plaques along the way describe various strategic points and battles, making for a fascinating tour through an open-air museum. This is an easy via ferrata, more like hiking along a ridge with some exposed bits than climbing, with fixed ladders in place when there was any climbing—and consequently, not a deserted route by any stretch. I barely bothered clipping in to the cables where they existed.

flowers and then scree, where I found a herd of mountain goats who watched me curiously as I harnessed up for the climb. I don't know why this climb carries the same grade as Bepi Zac—by comparison, it's consistently vertical and has brief moments of slight difficulty. The summit bears the usual shrines to Our Lady etc., as well as the biggest cross I had seen until I climbed Germany's highest peak (I guess the Germans are not to be outdone). The scenic hike down to Forcella Negher Pass on the other side of the peak as a detour to the regular descent route makes for a perfectly lovely round trip.



Cross on the summit of Cima dell'Auta Orientale

Marmolata, the highest peak in the Dolomites at 3344m/10,971ft dominates the scenery in this area. I would have loved to have climbed it, but since it is glaciated and I was climbing solo, I was out of luck this time around. Instead, I did two day trips: the first a traverse along Cima di Costabella (2762m) on Via alta attrezzata Bepi Zac (c). Another focal point of the First World War, here the Austrians and Bavarians tried to hold back the Italian Alpini trying to force their way north into the Val di Fassa. About 2,000 men were lost to rockfall and avalanche alone, and the route along the ridge is scattered with remnants of gun placements, barbed wire, trenches and tun-

There are various escape routes to shorten the 8-9 hour round trip, but I went as far as possible, to the last gap before the next big peak, Cima del Uomo, before heading down the nastiest bit of the whole route—a very loose scree slope all the way down to the bell-jangling cows in green meadows below.

My second chosen route was the Via ferrata Paolin-Piccolin (c) on Cima dell'Auta Orientale (2624m). In contrast to yesterday's route, I didn't see anyone at all until I reached the summit, where I met a guy who had climbed up the easier route on the other side. The approach to the climb is really gorgeous, through forest then meadows with wild-

Pala Group

This group in the southern Dolomites is quite rugged and less crowded. Since most of it lies within a national park, I stayed at a campground in the village of Imer, to the south. (I could also have stayed at any of the several huts up high to avoid ascending from the valley each day, but I was on a budget :) The area is known for heavy mist, and was true to form during my stay. I managed just one outing before the rain set in, a round trip after hiking up to the Pradidali Hut at 2278m, combining Via ferratas del Porton and del Velo (d). A thunderstorm began just as I was on the exposed final traverse on del Velo, something that makes me quake in my boots around all those steel cables! Luckily I was only about 10 minutes from the hut and I finished in record time to get to hut haven till the storm passed. The views I did get during sun breaks throughout the day were breathtaking, and apart from at the hut, I saw very few people (possibly more weather-related than anything else!).

Brenta Group

From the Pala group I headed west to the Brenta Group, which is separated from the rest of the Dolomites by the broad north-south Adige River valley. Bolzano is the largest urban center in the valley and not worth visiting in my

opinion, but Trento to the south is a beautiful town steeped in medieval history and surrounded by vineyard-covered hills, with plenty of sights to fill a couple of days and feed your Italophile yearnings. Fond memories of my previous visit prompted me stop here to spend a quiet Saturday afternoon meandering the pedestrian streets and squares with the other tourists, licking the most enormous cone of Italian ice cream I could find.

From Trento, it's a beautiful drive to Madonna di Campiglio, the main town in the Brenta. The Brenta group is extremely popular, not least for its showpiece via ferrata, Sentiero delle Bocchette. The description in my guidebook reads: "a unique climbing path system of ropes and brackets leads over ledged walls, smooth monoliths and bizarre towers—a Dolomite world of coral, which was raised up out of the primeval central ocean 200 million years ago...[this route] pulls out all the stops of Brenta superlatives..." I decided to tolerate the crowds and see what most of them had come for. This area too falls largely within a national park, and the approaches to climbs are generally longer than elsewhere in the Dolomites, making day trips from the valley floor difficult. So, I blew the budget and planned a 21/2 -day round

trip, overnighting at huts along the way. Based on my limited sampling, Italian huts were not only cheaper than French and Swiss huts, but had better food and accommodation to boot (even flush toilets!)—and of course, the joy of going light cannot be overstated! All I carried was my via ferrata kit plus crampons and ice axe, a change of clothes, and lunches for both days (in addition to the remaining 10 essentials, of course—the Mountaineers' rather than WCN's!). The huts were full, but people were generally considerate and everyone was having such a good time, it actually added joie d'vivre.

There are two parts to the Sentiero delle Bocchette; I hiked up to the Tuckett Hut to spend the night and

start from the north with the Bocchette Alte (e), and on the second day, from the Alimonta Hut, I continued south with the Bocchette Centrale (d), finally hiking back to the trailhead at the Vallesinella Hut just outside Madonna di Campiglio. The route is a high-alpine traverse following an average altitude of 2750m, and is indeed spectacular. Though purists will shudder at this almost completely man-made climb, it does allow vertigo-free hikers to sample the thrills of rock climbing. From the Alte section I livened things up a little with a detour to climb to the summit of Cima Brenta, the second highest peak in the Brenta at 3150m/10,335ft. There are no fixed cables on this climb (the book recommends a rope), and though it's mostly a steep scramble with a few tricky sections, the route also has much loose rock and a couple of route-finding challenges, perhaps making it a little sketchy as a solo climb for some—but a calculated risk well worth it to me. I encountered only two other climbers on Cima Brenta, but back at the Via Alte path, ropeless parties tethered to the steel cable gazing wistfully up at the route peppered me with questions, swearing to come back with a rope someday.

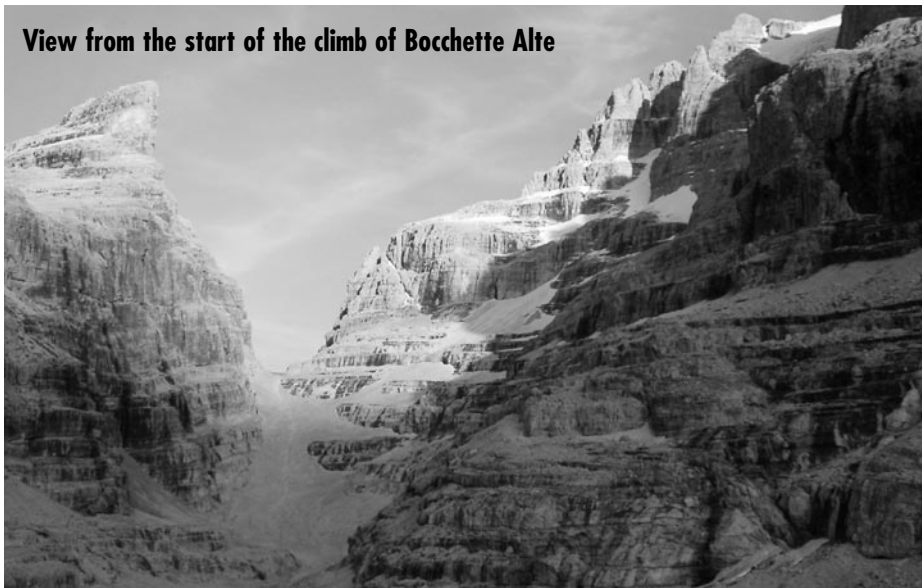
Stay tuned for further articles about my European climbing adventures!

—Colleen Hinton

View from the summit of Cima Brenta



View from the start of the climb of Bocchette Alte



PCT Trip, *continued*

We saw many PCT through-hikers who had started in the spring in southern California. Most of them could hardly wait to end their trips. They were soggy, chilly—and very fit! Their bad-weather warmth strategy consisted mostly of getting wet and not stopping. They walk 20 or even 30 miles in a day, going extremely lightweight, beginning at dawn and sometimes walking after nightfall. No lounging about lakes for these folks! Almost none wore rain gear, but we did see a few wearing skirts made out of dark green garbage bags. They wore sneakers, not boots, in the snow. Nine of them banded together for safety, since they didn't have warm gear and were "taking care of each other." We concluded that the goal of PCT through-hikers is not so much to be in nature enjoying it (since it all must pass by in a blur), but to set and complete the goal, and be able to say they did it.

Transportation was relatively straightforward. At the end of the trip, we hopped on the Greyhound Canada bus that

stopped directly in front of Manning Park Lodge (where we checked in the previous day, showered, laundered, and had a very nice meal for a reasonable price). We rode to Vancouver BC and boarded an Amtrak bus (you can also take the train) back to Seattle.

The guidebook we used was "The Pacific Crest Trail—Oregon and Washington." It has detailed notes and maps. Use it in conjunction with a good map. If you've ever thought of doing this trip, I highly recommend it.

Note: We were told that it is now a felony to walk FROM Canada into the USA. Homeland security and all that. Canada doesn't care if you do it the other way around, but US Customs does not like it. A wilderness ranger, whose duty it is to walk the trail, told us he'd been hassled crossing back into the USA while in uniform. Check the Canadian and US Customs websites if you're planning to do this trip.

—by *Elaine Powers and Clare Parfitt*

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