

Wetterhorn - 3692m

One failed attempt via the East Flank route from the Dossen hut, in company with a large team encouraged us to try again, but from the more normal route.

Another failed rock ridge (Gross Diamantstock) had increased our fitness, but also a little fatigue. Next afternoon after re-sorting gear etc and starting from the appropriately named Wetterhorn hotel above Grindlewald, Gregory and I slogged up the steep path in the afternoon heat. Only about 1200 meters of ascent, with guidebook time of three and half hours.

The walk was ok, with some good views and with handrails in places as considerable drop off edge of path (measured in hundreds of meters).

The Gleckstein hut (2,317m) arrived after three and quarter hours. Not too bad. A dearth of boots and ice axes in the hall was explained by the Gardienne. Apparently every one else was concerned about the weather forecast. So we were alone, apart from a sole Belgium photographer!

After an excellent meal, shared with the Belgium, we were treated to a salt licking display by a herd of Steinbeck on the hut terrace; it seems to be something in the cement.

Good sleep in a well ventilated bunk room, lots of breakfast and leaving hut at 4.40 am with head torches. Another new experience for Gregory.

6.00 am and crampons and ropes for the glacier. Vague tracks still visible from two days previous, despite sun and rain. Quite a small glacier, with a couple of small crevasses.

Crampons off and onto the first rock/slab/scree ridge and up it, moving together. Tricky bit is deciding when to cross a 'shallow couloir' (quote from guidebook) onto the rock ridge proper – the Willsgratli. As often happens, the guide book was somewhat misleading.

The ridge now became steeper with some interesting, polished parts. Gregory was amused by the way that we could almost navigate the route by following the crampon scratches.

We moved separately in view of Gregory's lack of experience, but he/we did not have any trouble, although I did note a very polished and steep slab that I wanted to avoid on the way down !

Two hours later we reached the top of the ridge and traversed across to the snow col south of the summit – the Wettersattel. Crampons on.

Two other people further across on the Col – they had been up the Mittelhorn.

An easy angled snow crest, followed by yet more slabs and loose stones for 80 meters; crampons off.

Then a tricky traverse into the snow gully (crampons on) and the final stretch up to the top. It was about 60 steepening to 70 degrees as we went thru the summit cornice, which had already been breached.

Quite a nice summit, mostly snow and fairly compact; but where was the cross ? Surely not buried under snow. It was 11.30am, so had taken nearly seven hours. Not bad considering Gregory's age (15 years) and lack of experience.

The cloud was building up from the south, but we stayed on the summit eating, taking photographs and taking in the fine views. (Scheckhorn, Lauteraarhorn, Eiger etc), till 12.00 noon

Descent (Gregory first) was fairly slow, taking it carefully down the soft snow. We were still roped, moving together.
The steep snow and gully –even softer
Crampons off; the slabs with loose stones
Crampons on; the snow crest
Crampons off; traverse round onto the Willsgratli.
Then down climbing about three hundred metres; Gregory first to end of the 50 meter rope, putting on a sling as belay on a firm rock, then me 'soloing' down.
Unfortunately it was too 'ridgy' to abseil, which would have been faster if we could have. There were one or two bits which seemed a little tricky and I would have liked to avoid.

As we approached the bottom of the climbing part, the cloud started to surround us. This made finding the vital traverse across the 'shallow couloir' and back onto the scrabbling ridge slightly interesting.

More down scrambling, now moving together, still roped.
Arrived back at the glacier at about 5.30.

Crampons on, then across the glacier, in the cloud, avoiding the big holes.
We then suffered a severe hailstorm which threatened to cover over our tracks. We did not stop to put cags on and got quite wet as the hail turned to heavy rain.

Exit from the glacier was not on the track that we had used that morning. We carried on down, in poor visibility and in the pissing rain but at least with cags, and at last found the path markers. Whew, I had been a bit concerned that we were not on the descent to hut.

Back at the hut at 6.40 pm – 14 hours since setting out !

The Gaurdienne greeted us warmly; she had been watching us come down the ridge until the weather cut off her view.

Large drink of coke, large wad of SFs for hut night, pack rest of stuff in sacks, including wet rope and other gear, then off down the track towards Grindlewald.

On leaving the hut, I had one dry foot and one wet one. After going under three of the many impromptu waterfalls on the path, both feet were soaked.

Two hours down to the Wetterhorn Hotel, with the last 20 mins through the woods using a torch.

After taking as much wet stuff as we could off, we retired to the toilet in the Wetterhorn, to wash off and change.

A couple of beers and Wiener Schnitzel made me feel better.

Not surprisingly, we slept rather well that night !

Summary

A fantastic mountain day on a nice 3,700m mountain. Apparently snatched in a small window of good weather. No one else on the mountain, and therefore no nasty stone fall. Hard enough for interest and not too hard for Gregory's first big mountain. Gregory enjoyed the day and proved very competent on mixed ground of rock, loose scree and snow; and had mastered axe and crampons. I enjoyed sharing this experience with my son.