

Day tours round Chamonix—2008



The intention was to follow the Haute Route from Chamonix to Zermatt via the Grande Lui variation. Arriving in Chamonix on the 5th April we crowded into Nigel's apartment, which was very cosy with 10 residents. The weather was poor and the forecast worse, so we spent the first day off piste at Le Tour and Vallorcine.

There was a one day window of good weather forecast. A day tour seemed to fit the bill and the magnificent Crochues-Berard Traverse was decided upon. From the top of the Index lift we skinned up towards the Col de Crochues. It was quite busy so the top section was easier on foot. An hour later we assembled on the col and prepared for the descent into the Combe de la Balme. The snow was superb light powder and we enjoyed an exhilarating run under the Aiguille de Belvedere to the foot of the Combe d'Envers de Berard. Three quarters of an hour's skinning saw us on the Col de Berard.



With all the uphill behind us it was time for lunch and a short rest. The prospect of the run in deep powder down the Vallon de Berard soon had us on ski again and swooping down towards Le Buet. It was some of the best powder I have skied and with snow flying over our shoulders; we were all revelling in it. Too soon the cascade de Berard appeared where Jane was waiting with

food and drink. After a beer in Le Buet we shuffled the cars and returned to Chamonix and Chez Lyle.

Day 3 dawned “gloomy with light snow showers”. The plan was to do a short tour then drive to La Fouly to start the Haute Route from there. The Col Cornu lift gained us some height, and then we carried skis up steep slopes to the Col du Lac Cornu. The traverse across to the Col de la Gliere was judged to be avalanche prone, so we skied down the other side before turning right and climbing back up to the Col de la Gliere. By now it was snowing heavily and visibility was hugely reduced. The descent into the Combe de la Gliere was very steep & loaded with wind slab. In the poor visibility we felt our way down the initial slope. Bearing right we found some good snow and enjoyed the run down to the pistes of Brevent. The drive to La Fouly was postponed due to the fresh snow on the roads.

Days 4 & 5 were passed on the pistes of Grand Montets in rain and wet snow. Frustration was setting in, so on day 5 we drove to La Fouly at last, and checked into the Dortoir les Girolles. It snowed heavily all night again so all thoughts of the Haute Route were abandoned. On day 7 a study of the map showed, what appeared to be, a safe route up Dotse, a small peak of 2400m. An excellent skin up the ridge led to the summit and a lovely ski back down to the cars.



It was decided to move to Lourtier, in the Val de Bagnes, where there was a dortoir remembered from years ago. We did eventually find it in spite of a name change to Hotel la Vallee. It was still very comfortable and we enjoyed a fondue, to lay the ghost of the previous visit, when Nigel treated us to a memorable feast, of which I will say no more.

Day 8 was a glorious day so we drove to the top of the Grand St. Bernard Pass. Our objective was Mont Teilliers, a fine ski mountain at 2951m. The approach was up the Combe de Drone and it took about 3.5h to the top. The view was breathtaking and the descent excellent. Although the snow was a little heavy we all hacked it quite well and the rosti dinner was well deserved. Unfortunately the weather now deteriorated terminally so we headed our various ways home, just getting across the passes to

Chamonix while they were still passable. We had made the best of a poor week of weather and what touring we had managed had been very enjoyable.

(Cast: Nigel Lyle, Christine & Dan, Roger & Gregory Gott, Bernard, Josie, Claire & Robert Smith)

