

## Allalinhorn (4027 m or 13,212 ft), August 14th, 1996

On Tuesday August 13th we left Zurich by train for Saas-Fee. To actually get to Saas-Fee we took a bus from Stalden and arrived in a quaint but bustling town where no cars are permitted to drive. Saas-Fee is very beautiful and is located in an idyllic setting. The only drawback to this vacation resort seemed to be the proliferation of cable cars and tramways that filled the skies. From here Jörg called up to the Längfluh Hotel (2870 m) and found that space for three was available. So we were off on the first of many of our adventures.

The original plan was to climb Dom and then cross the glacier over the Alphubeljoch to Saas-Fee. Hans Bär was to join us for the climb of Dom but he was delayed due to his business. Thus, the plan was reversed and we were going to cross over Alphubeljoch from Saas-Fee to the Täschhütte. On the trip was myself, Lynn Prebble and Jörg Waldvogel.

We started our hike at about 1800 meters along a small road that followed a glacier-fed stream. Soon we got onto a trail and from here on it was up, steep up. According to my guidebook, due to the cableway to the Längfluh, hardly anyone hikes the trail to the hotel. The flowers along the way were beautiful and we saw some marmots being fed by other hikers. We also saw many Steinböcke (Ibex) along the way. Soon we could see up close the edge of the Fee glacier, and what a glacier it is! Where the glacier ends there are steep blocks of ice as much 50-100 feet tall. Everywhere there is giant crevasses, seracs and debris churned up by the moving mass of ice. I'm sure to the Swiss this is just old hat but I was just amazed coming from a state with no glaciers at all.

The Längfluh Hotel is a pretty interesting place as well. Mainly used for skiing during the winter, during the summer it is perched on a rock prow that divides the Saas glacier. With a large patio and numerous windows strategically located, the visitor has a great opportunity for viewing surrounding mountains and glacier. Unlike the Swiss huts, the food was served cafeteria style and all you could eat. The first plate was truly all I could eat, I rarely see such a mound of food! The wine was also excellent.

We spent the rest of the evening planning the next day's route and having a rowdy card game called Liar's. To make the game even more interesting we decided to call out the suit in Swiss-German. At first we had quick and easy winners but as the evening went on the strategy became much better and we finally ended the evening calling a draw. We decided to awake the next morning at around 4:30-4:45 and leave around 5:30. However, we made the mistake of sleeping by the doorway and needless to say we got little sleep. So our intended early start slipped by about an hour.

The morning sky was cloudy with a low ceiling. We started out from the hotel and almost immediately hit the glacier. Soon we came to the first crevasses and roped up. However, the glacier was fairly flat here and there was no need for crampons. As we went higher we were soon in the clouds and as it became light it was a shame not to see the surroundings. The going was not difficult, however, because we had ski lift pillars as landmarks as well as foot tracks in the snow. We were climbing pretty

much due south keeping clear of the seracs at point 3173 meters. However, we did start stepping across and jumping several crevasses which was still a relatively new experience for Lynn and myself.

Occasionally the clouds parted for brief glimpses of the glacier and surrounding peaks. At one point we could see the top of Allalinhorn and took the opportunity to snap some pictures. We could see another group from the hut working their way towards the Alphubeljoch. This appeared to be an impressive route due to the numerous crevasses that crisscrossed the Fee glacier further below.

The mist cleared enough so that we could see some ski lifts on the slope above us. Soon we were on the ski runs, now this was pretty strange being roped up and walking up a ski run. But the lifts were just opening and we then had to negotiate with skiers flying past us. We decided to climb to the side of the runs. We could see what looked like many other climbers starting out above us. They were probably coming up the same way as the skiers, by the tunnel railway (Metro) to the Mittelallalin.

At one point I thought I was stepping across a crevasse filled with snow when in fact I hadn't quite cleared it. I sank in to my knees and was a little surprised. Soon we merged with the climbers' path from the Metro and turned somewhat west towards the Feejoch. As we approached the Feejoch the angle of the slope steepened noticeably and off to our right we knew the slope fell abruptly. This was a place to be careful! We crossed a few more snowbridges over crevasses and the mist seemed to drop low again.

At one point the visibility became very low and we weren't totally sure when we reached the saddle point between Allalinhorn and the Feejoch. However, everyone seemed to be stopping here for a break before the final summit pitch and we decided this must be it. This was the decision point, do we climb Allalinhorn and then go on to the Täschhütte? We took a few minutes to eat, drink and put on our crampons. Just standing still for awhile soon sent a chill through us all. We decided to skip Allalinhorn and try to cross to the Alphubeljoch.

We ventured out towards the Feejoch with myself in front. The visibility was really poor with a steep dropoff that I knew was on the right and crevasse-looking things everywhere in front. I didn't feel comfortable continuing on and after some consultation we decided to climb Allalinhorn and return to the Längfluh. Because there were many climbing Allalinhorn, there would be an obvious track to follow even with poor visibility. This turned out to be true and it didn't take long to reach the top.

Just below the summit there was a level place with many climbers gathered. From here was a narrow rock/snow ridge leading west to the tiny rock summit. Just as we made it to the summit a window of fog opened up to reveal the Matterhorn, Rimpfischhorn, Täschhorn, Dom, and Alphubel. What a spectacular site! Jörg showed me his route up the Matterhorn and Rimpfischhorn, neither mountain I had ever seen before except in pictures. They were very impressive. Dom was the mountain we would be trying the day after next. We took many pictures as the fog threatened to hide the mountains again.

We crossed back along the ridge to eat at the flatter spot. Though we had failed to achieve one of our original goals of reaching the Täschhütte, Lynn was ecstatic to reach her first Swiss summit. Jörg and I were probably equally ecstatic as well,

especially with the wonderful view at the top.

We made our way down quickly and carefully to the saddle again. Another climber was coming towards us from the direction of the Feejoch. Maybe he knew if the route was good and we could then follow his tracks? Jörg talked to him and he spoke English. He said that he was trying to find the route as well, he had just ventured out and then returned shortly afterwards. A group of Italians came by that were going to do this route. After talking to them I realized that they were no more knowledgeable than we were, maybe less. We decided to follow our newest plan to return to Längfluh. We carefully crossed the steep section back down.

At the ski slopes the sun came out and it was soon too warm to wear all the clothes we had on for the summit. We shed some layers and had another break. As we descended along the ski slopes (which were now closed for the day) we had to frequently dodge the snow cats which were grooming the slopes for the next day. We decided it might be a good idea to practice our pulley system in a safe location on the glacier. This was mine and Lynn's first practice on a glacier and it had been awhile since we had practised together at all. Plus, Jörg was able to observe and learn the set up of a Z pulley.

When we were finished we headed back towards Längfluh. We managed to find an alternate route with larger crevasses to cross. Jörg was leading and when he came to a crevasse that he needed to jump he yelled for the amount of rope slack he needed. At first it was "about a meter" and we thought this was pretty large. Then it was "one and a half meters". These crevasses were pretty big and deep but we worked well as a team and in general I felt quite comfortable. Boy, had I changed since my climb of Rainier! But I was still glad I never heard the words "2 meters please".

When we returned to the hotel we once again had a great meal and good wine. We played more Liars and planned our trip over to the next valley and Randa so that we could start our next adventure up Dom. Allalinhorn was a great climb and a good warmup for Dom. We'll have to go back some day and climb Alphubel and see what we missed not crossing the Alphubeljoch. But, that will be another story.

September 6th, 1996

Denise Snow