

Part two of the Alpine Arc – Klosters-Andermatt – the Thwarted tour.

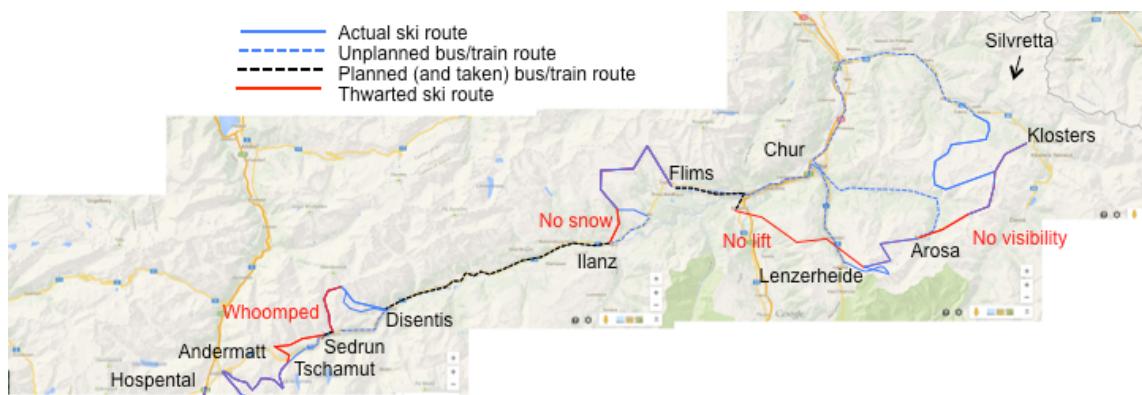
Saturday 23rd March. Klosters. Thwarted by lack of snow.

Having reached the Silvretta Hut last year at the bottom of the glacier above Klosters, this year we started at the bottom of the Klosters valley. Phil, Mark and I arrived in Klosters on the 8:37 train after a night out in Zurich where we had left our excess baggage, fully kitted out with full touring gear (almost). Apart from ice axes (not required), I had no harness (couldn't find it), Phil had no boot crampons (Kathy was bringing them) and neither Mark or Phil had a hangover. After a 2 hour train journey and a change in Landquart, we got in to Klosters to find – no snow. Despite a heavy lift ticket price (CHF70 per day), there was minimal snow off piste and sugar and slush on piste. The weather was windy and clearly a storm was due but no snow fell all day, as we had to cruise round the traverses of Klosters and Davos trying to find a section of the mountain with a fall line and snow on it – a combination that was lacking on either side of the mountain. As we headed back for an early beer and to find the hotel around 3pm having covered barely 10km of skiing on piste, and <5000m vertical in 5 hrs, we were pretty despondent at the prospects for a week of off piste, particularly as anything lower than 1800m was bare – no snow and that meant no way out for most of the tour. As we reached the Adventure Hostel we were welcomed by Wim, the owner, who kindly opened up before the 4pm opening time to let us put our stuff away, and take Phil's advice (if we start drinking early we'll go to bed early). We borrowed his swiss touring maps to pore over the possible routes for the week. By 7:30pm we were ready to grab a fondue and go to bed, when Kathy arrived. We had just about finished a full steaming bowl of cheese and bacon and definitely ready for an early night, when Doug arrived after a five hour drive from Milan, just in time to finish off the fondue, and encourage us into another bottle of wine or beer. More importantly he brought the news that it was snowing heavily all the way from Bellinzona, and the snow had now start to come down in Klosters too. We went to bed, hoping that it would give us enough for the tour.

Sunday 24th March. Klosters-Arosa. Thwarted by wind and snow.

Awoke to a heavily snowing scene outside after a really comfortable night, a really necessary foot and a half of snow having fallen. It was still snowing heavily as we got our stuff together, waited for Doug to find somewhere to leave his car for the week. We were at the Gotschnergrat cable car by 9:30, but when we got to the top, the connection to Schifer and the tree skiing was closed, which left us with skiing down to the cold slow two-person Schwarzealp chair bringing us back up to Gotschnergrap. We then headed the quickest way over to the trees, which was to take the long, and, in powder, slow traverse, skate and pole across to the Furka T-bar, and up over the Parsennfurgga col down into the Gauderloch valley where the skiing finally gave us some trees and respite for the heavy, windy snow. Once in the trees it was clear that the snow coming down was going to be enough to give good coverage off piste at least at higher altitudes. The long slow Schiferbahn gondola, which is 27 years old this year, but is one of the newest lifts (the Meierhoftalii 6 person chair lift opened in the last year or so, but everything else on the Parsenn side is older) took us up to the Weissfluhjoch, from where a short cable car took us to the Weissfluhgipfel, the peak from where

we were supposed to descend into Arosa. The wind up there was >80km/h and as you get off the cable car there is a brisk hike up to the peak where the restaurant is. The restaurant is excellent and we had a nice lunch with the local asparagus (Spargen) in season. However, it was absolutely clear that a descent on that side was going to be impossible unless the weather cleared, and even then the descent would be treacherous with wind damaged fresh snow loading avalanche prone slopes. Just to be sure we skied down to the bottom of the Hauptertalii t-bar to check out the descent, but it was clearly not going to be possible. We then had to go back down to the Furka T bar to get back over the Parsennfugga, and continued in the afternoon skiing down the backside of the Schwarzhorn, with even the only black run descent still mostly across the fall line. We did dip in and out of the off piste on the way down, but it was windblown, icy and crusty even with the fresh snow, until we got into the trees, at which point the sheltered nature meant nice fresh fluffy powder that could be skied, down the fall line rather than across it. However, the trees down the Obersass do not last long above Schifer, and we were soon back on the slow Schiferbahn. Because the cut through underneath the Weissfluhjoch was still closed, we again took the Furka bar up and then headed down through the Gauderloch, and once we reached the Schifer we then headed down the long slow skinning track that brings you down to Kiblis right down the valley at 810 metres altitude. The snow was getting thinner and thinner, heavier and heavier, but it held out all the way down to the train station. From there we took a train to Landquart, another to Chur and finally the train up to Arosa, where we should have arrived three hours earlier on skis from Klosters if we hadn't been thwarted by the weather. The hotel, Alpina in Litziruti, right by the station, was lovely, and gave us a hearty welcome, and a great dinner, which we took leave of relatively early hoping for a long powder day tomorrow. Summary – Klosters is flat and has runs that don't take the fall line. Slow lifts and poor facilities. Unimpressed.



Map of eastern Switzerland showing where we should have gone, and where we did go. Dotted lines are public transport. The Silvretta hut was where we finished last year.

Monday 25th March Arosa-Flims–Thwarted by lack of lift.

We awoke to two feet of fresh snow and still snowing. Arosa (1800m) is dominated by the Weisshorn (2653m) and the Hornli (2511m), which is linked to

the neighbouring resort of Lenzerheide by a new gondola. After an excellent breakfast we took the train up the 5 minutes to Arosa, and got on the Weisshorn Cable car. After waiting what seemed like a quarter of an hour it took off, and we then switched onto the second cable car. The top was cloudy with more snow coming down, and we put our skis on, but as we did, I noticed Lathy picking up bits of black stuff off the snow – her boot buckle had broken. We skied all the way to the bottom in great nice fluffy powder and she headed off to get her boot fixed while we did laps of the Tschuggen Ost chair, getting fresh tracks on each run down through the trees – perfect for the first run in the snow, but then the sun came and out, and we were getting clear lines in sunshine. After four laps, Kathy appeared with a fixed buckle from the ironmongers, and we skied down to the Hornli chair and up over to Lenzerheide on the new



L-R. Mark Phil and Kathy heading for Falera

Urdenbahn gondola linking the two resorts . As we came off the cable car, we spotted a great descent underneath the Urdenfuggli chair – steepish, very deep and untracked. As we started heading for it we saw two guys ahead of us drop into it on our right from above as we rounded the corner into it, and realised that we'd missed the top line. However, it was a sweet untracked powder descent down to the fast modern six person chair. We went straight back up to repeat it, but as we got on the lift, Doug dropped his glove. No problem –we'd pick it up on the way down. This time we took the top entrance in, but I discovered a road across the slope hidden under the snow with a wall the other side, and left my skis behind. After digging them out and getting down to the lift we discovered Doug's glove 20ft above us, as he' dropped it as we came out of the station. Oh well, nothing for it but another trip up and another line down the, still barely tracked slope. This time I avoided the road, but Phil and Mark both hit it with skis up and buried too. We then continued to head further off piste to the right of the worldcup down hill, initially through high alpine terrain and then through a steep tree covered cliff face, and then out across the meadow to the Zeman restaurant for lunch. A total descent from the top of Urdenfuggli of 1055m completely untracked. This was in bounds at 12:00 on a Monday in peak season in 2 feet of fresh powder without seeing anyone else. The plan was to ski down to Churwalden, take the lift up to Windegg and then the touring route down to Feldis, and cable car to Bonaduz, a short bus ride from Flims. However, when we got down, the Windegg lift wasn't running – not enough snow at the bottom apparently. That meant no way up the other side without a 1000m vertical skin up. Since it was gone 1pm there was no way we could get over in time, so we reluctantly agreed to spend the rest of the afternoon exploring the runs at

Lenzerheide and get the bus to Flims. We did a couple of epic runs off the Heimberg through the trees, as the visibility was poor after lunch, and then as the sun came out skied over to the Rothorn cable car just in time for the last lift up.

This is a spectacular cable car that ascends the steep west face of the Rothorn to the peak at 2865m. There are four or five unbelievably steep, but skiable couloirs running down that face, but with touring kit on, and backpacks, we took the run round the back, through the tunnel and across the top of the Plessur valley (which would allow an off piste descent back to Arosa), and then into a less steep, but very deep couloir that dropped us back into the runs underneath the Rothorn. We skied out to the bus stop at the centre of Lenzerheide

in time to get the bus to Chur, and, after a quick beer, another to Flims. We arrived at the AlpenHotel in Flims a short walk from the bus stop, for dinner and bed. In retrospect, Lenzerheide-Arosa was an awesome resort – great skiing, (OK we did see it on a sunny day in 2 feet of fresh), good lines, modern lifts,

Mark coming out of the Rothorn couloir way too fast

good steeps, trees, and little traversing – it ticked all the boxes that Klosters-Davos did not. An outstanding mountain – particularly Lenzerheide, with great off piste terrain, and loads to explore.

Tuesday 26th March. Flims-Disentis. Thwarted by slush.

In an attempt to get the first lift, we were up at them, and walking towards town at 8:30. A 15 minute walk to the lift was interrupted when we walked past a shop selling touring boots on sale. In the middle of these was a pair of boots identical to Kathy's Scarpa's from 10 years ago for CHF90. Considering the broken buckle, worn down outer and unlikelihood of ever seeing these on sale again, we encouraged her to see if they were the right size. They were, and we left her getting the shop owner to sort out



Mark on a break before heading up to the Kleine Apfelstrudelhorn link to Andermatt

replacing the inners and heel riser, while we strolled up to the lift. After a short 10 minute wait a very chuffed Kathy showed up with a new pair of boots and a big smile. She then took us up and around Flims, but again we were thwarted. Firstly, the Cassons cable car was closed, as there was no snow on the chutes that come off it, and secondly the only really good skiing lift, La Siala, was closed for avalanche control. We skied over the lower slopes but found mainly sun damaged and wind damaged snow for most of the morning, eventually getting up the Crap Masegn lift, and taking the high traverse over to look at the run down towards Ilanz, where we were supposed to end up. The high traverse was untracked, but it had clearly not seen as much snow as Lenzerheide, and as it's a predominantly south facing slope, it was pretty bare, so we bore left to Falera, and took in nice long, alpine/tree/ meadow run down to the lift at Falera.



Fresh tacks on the descent down into Andermatt

Along the way we met a local who had taken a similar route a little ahead of us. There was very little if any snow by the time we got to Falera which is at 1200m, 500m higher than Ilanz, so it was clear that we wouldn't be able to make it out that way. We took the lift up, which is an odd chair – your skis go into a ski rack on the side of the chair, and you go up in your boots. The local man we'd met, a 35yr resident of Flims and in his 70s, explained that he was going paragliding and that he would regularly paraglide all the way to Disentis for a coffee. Since the link between Flims and Disentis is the only bit of the trip that wasn't going to be skied on our tour across Switzerland, we thought that this had to be the way to complete the tour – but not today! La Siala was open in the afternoon, so we spent it hunting for decent snow – without success – wind blown, sun damaged crap was all we could find. Flims/Laax is a perfectly decent resort for the family, but it's way too flat, too south facing and too boring for me. Was happy to get to the bus and head down to Ilanz where we caught the short train to Disentis after a beer break. In Disentis we stayed in a closed hotel – the owners away on holiday, but the local Pizzeria doing the honours for dinner and breakfast. Tried to find a pub to watch the Manchester Derby, but not happening, and without shoes couldn't go far.

Wednesday 27th March. Disentis-Maighels. Thwarted by Whoomp

The plan today was to take the lift to the top of Disentis, take the Piz Ault pass over and ski down to Sedrun – take a short (5min) train to Oberalpass, and ski down to the track to the Maighels hut-which is then a couple of hours skinning to get to. We got started well at Disentis (free lift pass for the guide!), but with a lot

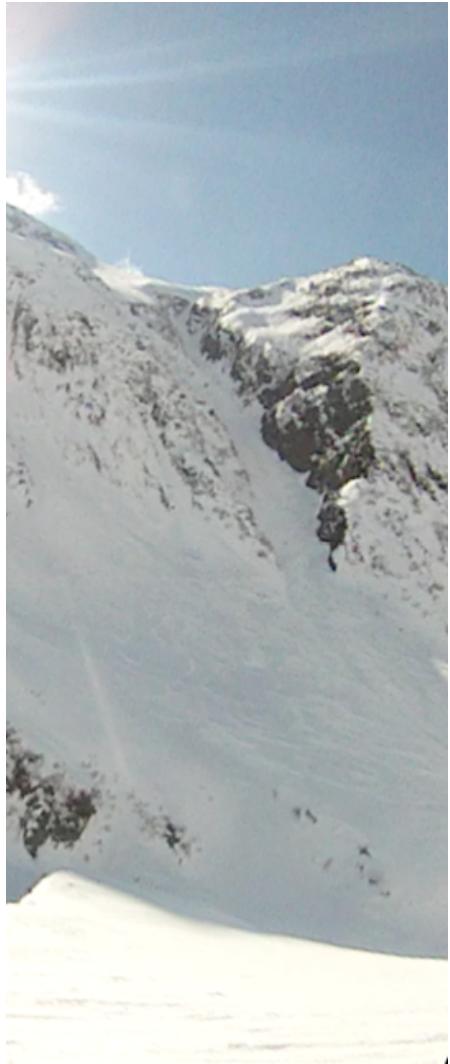
of cloud around. Bought a lift pass that gave us the option of a single up (and get money back at the top), or keep skiing. Took four lifts to get to the top, but as we got off the top lift we were in cloud, with visibility poor. We decided to ski for a bit before attempting the skin over the pass. This would involve some ladder climbing at the top, but Kathy had been chatting with a local guide who had given her another route if the top one was closed, or visibility was bad. We skied some nice powder runs, with much better snow than at Flims – but the Dadens lift needed for the lower climb was closed until 11:30. We skied a number of runs around this area waiting for the Dadens lift to open, and eventually, when it did we took it up, took a single run down and then put skins on. It was snowing lightly, but visibility was reasonable. Kathy did say she wasn't sure we would make it over, but we started a brisk skin up with Kathy going first, then me, Phil and Doug. As she got to a slightly steeper section she asked us to spread out to make reduce the risk if a slide hit. Then when she was almost at the top, and I was half way up I heard a very loud "Whoomp", sounding like a bomb had gone off in my hood. I couldn't see anything moving, but I yelled out to Kathy "Where was that" and she immediately yelled back, "Dave, move, NOW!". I had skins on, was still going up and was free heel so, just tried to lean back on my heels and slide forward. It seemed very slow, and Kathy was yelling "Phil did you hear that? Get off that slope" Phil was skinning across, but wasn't on the steep part. Both he and Doug had heard it but quite faint. Once I got out of the fall line, Kathy caught up with me. She told me that she had felt and heard the whole slope drop a couple of centimetres, and it was right underneath me. However, there had been no slide – the Whoomp had been the unstable

layer in the snow collapsing as I skied over it, but it hadn't slid. There was no way we were going up through more avalanche terrain, so we had to head back in bounds, and so we skied all the way down to the village, where we grabbed a sandwich and got on the 30 minute train ride to Tschamut. Once there we got off the train and put our skis on on the platform and skied down through the grass and rocks to the winter road, the Via Alpse, which was snow covered, and closed. We put skins on and skinned up along a fairly flat track for about an hour where we met the descent from the Oberalpass that we had been heading for before being Whoomped. From there we started to ascend a bit more steeply as the visibility deteriorated. The path was well marked but it was still hard to see, but



Kathy gets first tracks (as usual) into the Guspis

with a couple of breaks we rounded the corner to see the Swiss flag flying from the hut. After deskinning and dropping bags, we had a welcome cup of tea and a beer. The hut was very friendly, providing hearty warm food (best polenta I think I've ever had), and too much nice wine (including a white Merlot, and a red Veltliner!). When we crashed out at 9:30 it was probably the soundest sleep I'd had all week.



Le Giraffe couloir, a "must do" at Andermatt viewed from the Gefallenstafel. The skier coming down it is the little black dot just before the couloir ends on skier's right.

me and took the key out of the door and left it by our room. Phil and Mark were locked out, and ended up sleeping on the floor in the garage – a cold hard night.

Friday 29th March. Andermatt-Hospental

**Thursday 28th March. Maighels-Andermatt.
Not Thwarted At All!**

Awoke in the morning last as everyone had assumed I'd gone downstairs. Grabbed a quick breakfast, repacked and was out of the hut by 8:10 on a beautiful morning in the mountains. Weather was fine, the sun was shining, the mountains were beautiful. Skied down a couple of hundred metres back down the path we'd come up and then put skins on to ascend over the pass to Andermatt. The peak we were heading for was above the Fil Tuma, but we couldn't find out the name so we christened it Der Kleine Apfelstrudelhorn. The skin up was about two and a half hours and crossed the Rheinquelle Tomassee, said to be source of the Rhein. The lake was beautiful, and with one slight wring turn, we were at the top by 11:00 for a quick sandwich, and then with a slight traverse along the ridge, into a series of long open powder runs down to Andermatt and a proper long, swiss lunch. Once we got to the accommodation (Guesthaus Willy), which was basically a series of rooms with food at the hotel over the road, we unpacked, dried stuff out, and took some time to grab some sleep.

After dinner Kathy and Doug went back to their rooms, and Phil Mark and I went out to a local bar where the locals were country dancing, and I called it a day about 1:30, telling Phil and Mark that I'd leave them the key in the door. When I got back I put the key in the door and went to bed. Not a good plan. Someone obviously came back after

Doug was somewhat bemused to find Mark opening the garage door at 7:30 in the morning with Phil not happy, claiming I'd locked him out. No long term damage done but it took them a while to warm up. After breakfast we headed up the Gemstock, and then off the back into the powder. A short ski down into the Schwarzbachfirn and we put skis on and skinned up half an hour to the Gafellenlucke, the col that leads into the Guspis – the route down to Hospental. This lead us into a long, beautiful powder run all the way along into the Balmensstafel and eventually to the road that goes over the gotthardpass. We skied down the road to Hospental where we grabbed lunch of Gulaschsuppe and beer, and then hopped on the train back to Andermatt and back up the Gemstock. This time we didn't skin up but kept going down the Schwarzbachfirn into the long Gafallenstafel, where afternoon slides had brought down snow on both sides of the valley, so we stayed in the valley bottom and down to the unmanned Vermigelhutte. Just underneath we saw a skier coming down Le Giraffe couloir off the back of the gemstock – an awesome looking run that has to be tried. A quick stop there and then we poled along the traverse – about 5km with a total vertical drop of about 200m – hard work in the sun, and with snow failing. We got back to Andermatt at 3:50, for a final beer before catching the train back to Zurich.