

Täschhorn

4491 m

July 23-24, 2015

Guides: Rüttschi Pollinger and Thomi Zumtaugwald



The peak of Täschhorn (upper X, 4491 m) is 13 meters higher than the Matterhorn! Our 2-day tour started in the hamlet of Täschalp at 2200 m (obscured) and led up a steep moraine, over the lower parts of the Weingarten glacier, up a rock face, then over the upper glacier to the Mischabeljoch bivouac (lower X, 3850 m). The second day, we climbed the ridge line (1.5 km long, 650 m ascent) to the peak and back, and then descended all the way to Täschalp.

Here is a view of Täschhorn (the dark peak) from the other side of the range, taken a week before our ascent. We were standing on the lower slopes of Allalinhorn (3500 m), above Saas Fee.

Our ridge climb from the notch called Mischabeljoch, 3850 m (the X), goes over several towers (gendarmes) and across a portion of corniced ridge (the white stripe) before a final steep step to the summit block.



We've been climbing for over 15 years now with Rüttschi Pollinger (left). Thomi Zumtaugwald (right) has come to know our foibles and our good sides too, over the past 5-6 years. For this tour the teams will be J + R and M + T.



The day begins with a somewhat comical grocery shop at the Coop in Täsch. We should have written a shopping list! Still, after considerable milling around, we manage to pick out a supply of somewhat healthy provisions – that don't weigh too much – for our overnight stay at the bivouac. M discovers the power of the Vanillestange (Swiss-style cannoli with pudding inside).



This view shows the changing terrain of our approach route, from the cow pastures of Täschalp (2200 m, at bottom edge of the photo) to the scree and boulders of the moraine next to the stream, to the jumbled and crevassed Weingarten glacier.

The Mischabeljoch bivouac is just beyond the red arrow. This view also shows well the extended length of the summit ridge (left of arrow) that we will follow tomorrow.





It's cloudy and warm as we start up through the humid meadows from 2200 m, and our t-shirts are quickly soaked due to the heavy packs. Left: M and T on the moraine beneath Weingarten glacier, at 3000 meters. Right: J and R stop for sun cream after 2.5 hours and our first bit of rock-climbing. From this spot, it's another 550 m up to the Mischabeljoch.

Picking our way up the glacier is not difficult technically, but we must weave back and forth quite a bit to skirt crevasses such as this one (about a meter wide).

The weather remains overcast and iffy, but Rüttschi's prediction of thunderstorms at 1430 does not come true - luckily!

The humidity has loosened the ice's grip on the west face of Alphubel, which looms above us. As a result, the high-altitude silence is punctuated by rocks sliding and crashing down on the glacier!





We feel the altitude and the steepness during the last 200 meters of ascent to the bivouac. Jeff's picture shows R close up and M & T negotiating the soft, deep snow beneath the bivouac.

It sets perched to one side of the notch, a well-anchored aluminum box on stilts. To reach the metal-grate "veranda" and door, you have to haul yourself up icy rocks for 3 meters with fixed rope and then climb a metal ladder!



It is some accomplishment just to have completed the 1650 meters and nearly 8 km up from the alp in only 4.25 hours, with 15 kilos of stuff on your back. Rüttschi is impressed that we carried his birthday cake all the way up, and dubs M “Sherpa Marta”.

Here is M on the veranda (constant wind!), with a bit of the Weingarten glacier beneath her - and the outdoor toilet right behind.

J smiles into the camera and into the sunset, with Saas Fee far, far below, in the evening haze.

We look over at the east face of the Mischabel group, a very different perspective from our usual view of these peaks from below in the Saas valley. The rocks at the left edge of the photo are the start of the Täschhorn ridge.

The silhouetted peak is the Lenzspitze, with its grand gendarme also visible.



Ahh, the “hut
ambiance”... We find
the bivouac spic-and-
span and snug, with
its wood-burning
stove. The bunkroom
sleeps 20 in a pinch,
but tonight there are
only 10 of us. Hooray!

The reflected light
from the snow outside
is intense; there is
always a pot or two of
melting snow on the
stove for tea/noodles/
soup, and gear drying
on every hook and
line.



Breakfast at 0230 by headlamp is the usual struggle to find any appetite between nerves and nocturnal stupor. We are out the door at 0300 and – for the first 90 minutes - negotiate the boulders and multiple gendarmes with very little visual input on our surroundings.

By the time we reach the most dangerous passage (pictured here) at 0445, it is light enough to remove the headlamps. This section is actually a wickedly corniced edge with one side icy steep and the other rotten and full of holes from other climbers' boots and pick axes.

Concentrate and focus!!



(photo courtesy of Hikr website)

As we approach the summit, we are too busy focusing on technique - and on not panting! - to stop and take pictures. On the summit block (pictured here), the rock is great quality, unlike much of the loose stuff at the start of the ridge.

Thanks to recent sunny days, there is little snow cover, and we can climb most of the route without crampons (the exception being the double-edged cornice). So, we take great care placing hands and feet on rocks that have a thin film of ice that settled last night ...

We have fallen into a steady rhythm and entered the mental zone of "one foot in front of the other". And so, M is astounded when Thomi remarks that the summit is just a couple of steps away!



Well, here we are!

The sun is just coming up, at 0545, as we pose in front of the summit cross. Behind M is the Matterhorn and behind J is the broad side of Zinal Rothorn.

It took us just 2 hours and 45 minutes from the bivouac.

There's no space for a crowd up here, and another party is close behind. So, we climb out of the wind a few meters beneath the summit and sit down for a quick snack.

Jeff takes the camera and captures the sunrise glow around Dom (4545 m), our neighboring peak - which is also the highest in the Mischabel group (next slide).



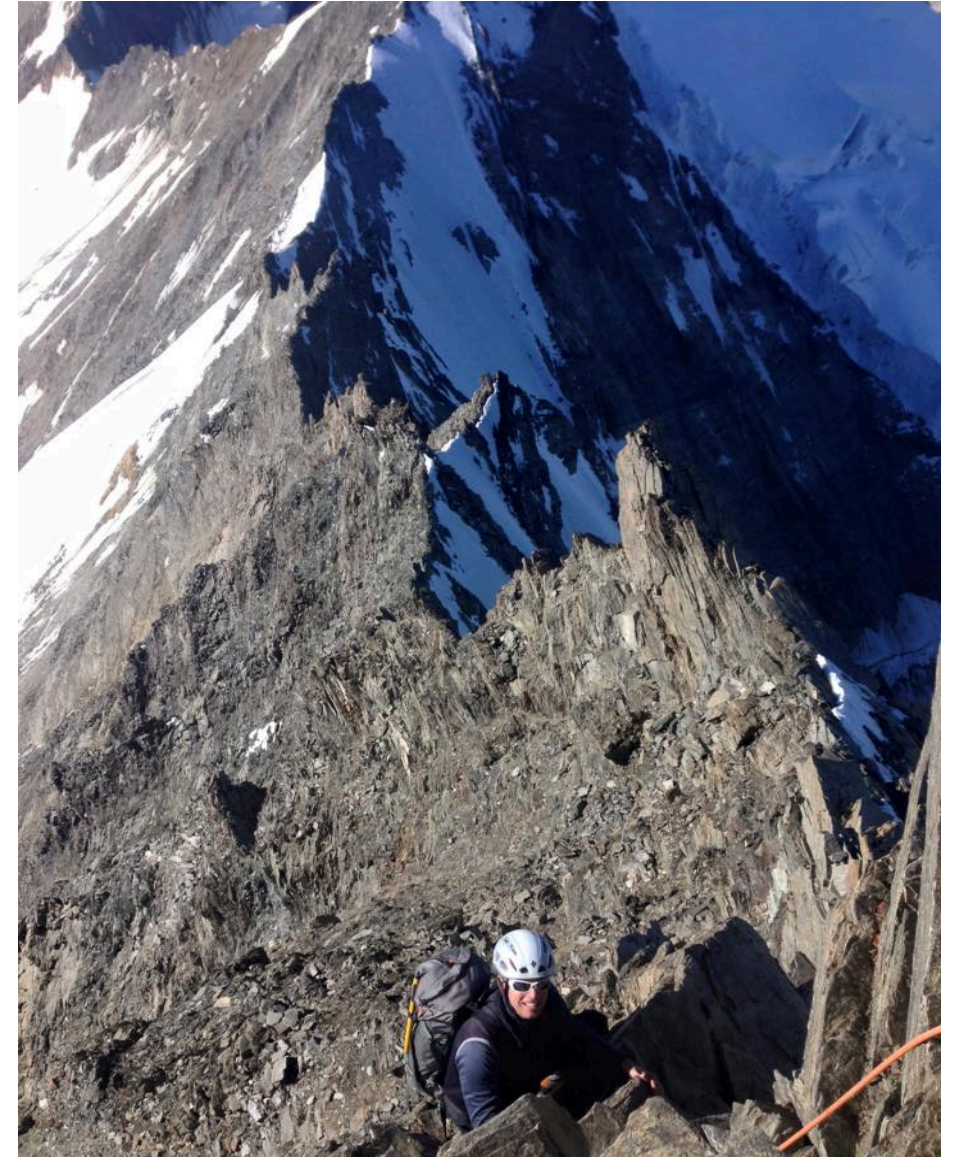


Here is Jeff's view, from the summit down over his own boot and backpack to the entire ridge line we have just climbed. The treacherous blue ice is visible on the rocks in the foreground.

You can follow the ridge line past the crux corniced section, over the series of gendarmes to the snowy notch of the Mischabeljoch – where we had started in the wee hours of the morning. Beyond the notch, the ridge rises again over mixed snow and rock to the domed summit of Alphubel (4206 m).



On the way back down the ridge, we stop more often to take photos - there's daylight now! Left: a look back up toward the summit, as morning clouds sweep in and around it. Right: the jagged, narrow feel of the ridge in this section, in a photo taken by Thomi 2 days earlier.



Here's a great shot from the lowest of the gendarmes, showing the bivouac on its perch. The Saas Valley is to the left; Täsch and the Weingarten glacier are to the right.

Thomi & Martha negotiate the final bit ahead of Jeff & Rüttschi. M's concentration and rhythm are slacking as her stomach growls – “feed me!” After 5 hours of exertion, it's time for more than candy bars or bites of a sandwich.





Here's the reverse view: From the bivouac, we look up to the gendarme and watch Jeff and Rüttschi descend the last steep section, picking their way around tippy rocks and sliding in the rubble. The photo above is the detail of the thumbnail on the left, where the climbers are circled in red.

We enjoy an hour of rest inside the bivouac, drinking hot tea and devouring sandwiches. Discussions of our ambition vs. our ability ... and our frustrations ... each tour has its own surprises.

As we head down to Täschalp, the sunshine is brilliant. Beneath the glacier and after our final rock climb, we remove the harnesses and ropes and walk free ... but first a final look around at the beautiful surrounding peaks. Does “Horu” (Matterhorn) need an introduction?

A wonderful end to an amazing tour!!



Täschhorn tour stats:

Hut climb (to Mischabeljoch bivouac): 7.8 km, 1650 m up, done in 4 hours 15 mins.

Summit climb: 3 km round-trip, 650 m up/down, done in 5 hours 15 mins.

Descent from the bivouac: 3.5 hours, including multiple stops to rehydrate, change gear, rest sore joints....

Total ascent/descent: 2291 meters

Total distance Roundtrip: 18 km

