

The WEF is over and the sport holidays will start

The WEF is over and February heralds the start of the sport holidays and the British half term which is looming fast! With wonderful pistes and the hope of more snow and sunshine it will be good to see the village and mountain bustling and buzzing again. There are many long standing guests of Klosters (and residents) who are passionate about their annual off piste skiing weeks with their favourite guide, but some are more intrepid explorers than others and take every advantage to explore further into the surrounding mountains and valleys. I hope you enjoy reading the following account of Rupert and Serena Prest's adventurous climb of Piz Kesch last April.

Clair Southwell

Prest Tour to Piz Kesch

On 7th April 2009 at 6 am, Rupert and I set forth from our cosy flat in Klosters to venture into the unknown. Our aim was to climb Piz Kesch (3,418 m), and after a couple of false starts in previous years, the conditions were perfect – it was almost pitch dark, but the sky was clear and it had frozen hard during the night. So, weighed down by our rucksacks, we staggered out to our car, and drove off to meet our guide at the far end of the Sertig valley. The preparations had been nerve-racking in themselves – a couple of days before, my conversation with Jann (guide) had been as follows... “You will need ze crampons... (yes) ...and ice axes... (OK) ...and a harness (HELP!) and ze ropes” (NB no mention of food, spare clothes, sponge bags or any other treats). Anyway, in fear and trepidation, we eased ourselves out of our warm and comfortable car-seats, pulled on our touring boots, clipped on the skins, and set off (vertically uphill). We zig-zagged our way in Jann's footsteps for the

first hour, and then we were allowed our first pitstop (a fairly tortuous affair as it was arctically cold, and there were no rocks to hide behind in sight!) Conversation was pretty limited as we puffed our way up, desperately pretending that Jann was going at the perfect pace ... but then, a small miracle took place. The sun suddenly peeked over the top of the mountain, and we were bathed in warmth – hallelujah! – AND it was time for breakfast. Utterly exhausted, we collapsed in a heap, took off our rucksacks and tucked in – typically, Jann nibbled at a little bag of dried fruit and nuts, whilst I ate an entire tupperware of Bircher muesli, and Rupert munched his way through a couple of ham and cheese buns. After 20 minutes of paradise, we were gently urged back onto our skis, heaved on our bynow-slightly-lighter rucksacks, and off we set again. Jann was brilliant at managing expectations, and after a couple of wretched false summits, we were finally at the top of our

first climb – it was nearly 12 o'clock.

The ski down the other side was magical – perfect spring snow, beautiful sunshine, and we swooshed our way to the bottom in about 20 minutes (good value?) Then it was uphill again – but this time, we had the Kesch Hutte in our sights, and we shot up at high speed (even Jann was impressed!) The hut was modern, clean, brilliantly heated, and huge – it slept 100 at full capacity. We were shown into our “dorm,” which had 14 sleeping bags on the floor, each about 2 foot apart – no sleep for me, I thought. There were a couple of Austrians and a couple of Swiss already in residence, so Rupert and I bagged our spots as far away as possible and then we went downstairs and tucked into a delicious (and hugely deserved) lunch. In my naivety, it had never occurred to me that our skiing day was over by 1 pm – the snow was too dangerous to ski after then – but thank God I'd brought my tapestry and Rupert had a good book,



Serena and Rupert Prest with the Piz Kesch in background.

so several hours were spent tating and reading, as bedtime was a LONG time away! Jann befriended lots of our fellow companions, who were a different breed to “normal” skiers – they were very lean and fit, they all had beards or goatees, and they spent a LOT of time studying maps and planning routes. They also (as Rupert and I discovered to our detriment) had very envy-inducing drop-down compartmentalised wash bags, full of the necessities of life as well as first aid kits – and all we had brought were toothbrushes and toothpaste! They all had silk inner sleeping-bags (we didn't), as they knew the hut duvets and pillow-cases were only washed once a season (we didn't); they all had flannels and towels and soap (we didn't), as they knew there would be no hot water or showers (we didn't). So after an interesting communal sparrow in freezing water (thank God I'd managed to collar a tea-towel from the kitchen), we dressed back in our (smelly) thermals, and popped into bed. Lights out at 10 pm (just like boarding-school), and the next thing I knew it was 6 in the morning.

Today was THE day to conquer Piz Kesch – my back was pretty sore, so after a lot of complaining (on my behalf), Jann relieved me of my crampons (phew!) – and needless to say, we were the last to leave the hut. But the climb up was glorious... we felt on top of the world, far away from the hustle and bustle of ski resorts, and all we could see was

mountain after mountain, peak after peak. As we went up, the mist and cloud rolled in and swirled around the peaks, and we felt lucky to be alive. We did have to stick on crampons, harnesses and use ropes, but the route up the steep part was well trodden and the conditions were perfect – so the “technical” part of the climb was relatively easy. The feeling of euphoria at the top is hard to describe – we celebrated with lots of photos, swigs of sloe gin and bars of chocolate. Climbing back down the steep section was rather harder, but once back on snow, we had a perfect run down and got back to the hut at lunch-time once again. The afternoon followed a similar pattern, but this time we had a dorm to ourselves for the night – HURRAH!

Our third – and final – day was utterly magical – we never saw a soul, we found some beautiful fresh, untracked powder, we climbed over two passes, and we ended up on a fabulous spring snow slope down to the village of Zuoz in the Engadin valley. From there we made our way back to Klosters by train, feeling fit as fiddles, hugely exhilarated and bursting with health. And guess what? We've booked in for 2010, hoping to climb the Slivretta and Piz Buin ... but with the benefit of hindsight, we will DEFINITELY be better prepared for mountain hut life! If anyone wishes to do the same, please don't hesitate to ring me for some practical advice...

Serena Prest



Serena and Rupert Prest with Jann, the guide (left) on the top of Kesch.



On the climb.