

Trip Report: The Dolomites Corvara**Date:** 24th-31st July 2010**Group:** Mike, Lesley, Jim G, Jim, Jean W, Selina, Tony, Lynn, Hugh, Mari, Lynda, Allie**Route:** See below**Total Distance:** See below**Total Ascent:** See below**Weather:** See below**Saturday 24th July**

The group comes together on Saturday afternoon from 4 different directions-Hugh and Mari had arrived on Thursday from Luton, Les and I had left home on Thursday and driven through a German monsoon, Jim and Jean had travelled up from Verona in the scorching heat and the remainder had conventionally flown in via Milan.

The Corvara set up is similar to Predaces (2008) except that the rooms are much bigger and the meals are slightly smaller (a reasonable trade off). The house wine flows in similar generous quantities.

A sociable first evening was enjoyed by all but the fliers retired early, citing exhaustion or jet lag, with the exception of Selina and Allie (a sign of things to come?). Allie is Selina's buddy and our honorary bumette, having met us on only one occasion previously. Lynda is on her first Dolomites trip and therefore also a Via Ferrata virgin and she is sharing a room with the girls. So in Pedraces we had the boys gay suite but here we have the girls gay suite. No one can accuse us of not being inclusive.

Sunday 25th July

Weather forecast is dry but cool. We decide to revisit VF's from a previous trip. Starting from Passo Gardena, there is Gran Cir (Grade 1A). This is ideal for Lynda and Allie to familiarise themselves with VF equipment techniques etc. This is to be followed by Piz da Cir V (2A).

Tony and Lynn immediately take the lead in the faffers of the week contest by appearing dead last in the lobby rendezvous. We use 3 of the hire cars to Passo Gardena, including Jim and Jean's Fiat Doblo, a cross between a hearse and an ice cream van! Bit of a shambles to begin with as it takes 3 attempts to find the correct route from the car park.

Eventually we head in the correct direction towards the Gran Cir scree gully where we get tooled up.

It is slow progress due to dozens of children and beginners impeding us. Also not helped by Lesley going off course (apparently someone was obscuring the crucial red blob painted on a rock). Mari baled out due to

lack of interest, but the rest of us trudged up to the summit for great views in the sunshine.

Very slow descent trying to pass by the ascending horaces. Back at the scree gully we contour round to the base of Piz da Cir. An interesting scramble, followed by a decent VF lightened the mood despite the queue for the summit cross (5 at a time). We descended in batches and regrouped near an alpine dung heap for lunch. The "virgins" had greatly enjoyed their experience so it bodes well for the remainder of the holiday.

Back to the Chalet Verena by car except for Tony, Lynn, Jim G and Mari who choose shank's pony. The rest of us enjoyed a beer on the girl's terrace.

Monday 26th July

Weather forecast similar to Monday therefore we choose a slightly more difficult VF located at Misurina called Torre Toblino (3B) with 150m of wire. We endured a 1.5 hour drive (not helped by missing the turning in Cortina as per previous visits) but we were rewarded with spectacular scenery in the National Park. The VF was significantly more difficult than Monday's challenge but everyone survived despite the odd wobble (Selina).

The summit was a wartime observation post and the views really are "to die for". The descent is by a 2B VF which used to be the ascent route and this makes for a great round trip. Lunch was taken at the base of the VF where tales of derring-do were exchanged. An hour or so walk back to the car park via coffee / beer at the Rifugio and return drive to Corvara arriving about 18.00. A long but satisfying day out.

The evening meal of spaghetti and meatballs was slightly ruined by Tuesday's weather forecast which was distinctly unpromising.

Tuesday 27th July

A possible very early morning call from Mari did not materialise therefore the Tridentina VF mission was abandoned along with every other high level venture. Jim.G suffering from a mystery virus did not help to lift the gloom and everyone was left to their own devices for the day. Les and I had a not very exciting trip to Bolzano which was not helped by my queasiness (Jim's Bug?).

Tony and Lynn went to Innsbruck for the day.

Hugh and Mari enjoyed a fruitless and expensive ski lift up into the clag and back. The rest of the party had various low level adventures. Jim's virus seemed to be spreading through the group in various guises but

nothing serious was reported. Despite a temperature of 25C in Bolzano, it was only 8C at Passo Gardena and there were still heavy showers in Corvara until the late afternoon.

Excellent forecast for Wednesday so there was much discussion over dinner regarding the choices of VF, split between Ivano Dibona and Marino Biachi (aka Dubonnet and Martini) both starting from Passo Tre Croce (the other side of Cortina) however see Wednesdays diary!!

Wednesday 28th July

Jim still had his virus and Mari was a no show at breakfast therefore much dithering and faffing at the post breakfast assembly. Decided eventually to bin all the plans and go for the local option using the Corvara ski lifts. Jim, Jean and Selina opted for the Vallon VF (2B) while Lesley, Lynn, Allie, Lynda, Tony and myself went for Piz da Lech (3B) which had defeated Lesley and Lynn on our previous visit. The weather was great as forecast and on arrival at the top of the second lift we set off in completely the wrong direction. This was soon corrected and we split into two groups, heading for our respective VF's.

The Piz da Lech was very busy so there was a 10min delay before we got moving and all negotiated the difficult 2nd pitch. Progress was slow but sure and all the girls were enjoying themselves. There was a big delay at the foot of the ladders and there was time to reflect on the climb so far. Lynn reflected that she was finding the cables very slippery and it was noticed that her mitts were on the wrong way round!

The nylon grip must have made traction very tricky. That could have explained the huge array of bruises on her arms and legs. After much hilarity befitting a genuine Golden Marmot Award effort we were all set to continue when it was discovered that Lesley's platypus was leaking, so a faff ensued for an attempted (unsuccessful) fix. She was leading up the ladders and water was cascading down onto the rest of us. Just what was needed on a very exposed climb! There were a few wobbles at the top of the ladder but everyone safely passed the test and we assembled at the summit for lunch, the very spot where we had witnessed Jean's award winning Golden Marmot incident on the previous holiday. The descent was uneventful until Lesley tripped over a rock and finished upside down by the side of the path. Pride was broken more than anything else but there were a few bruises to show.

There were apres VF drinks and nibbles on the girl's terrace and then we had an evening out for dinner in Corvara followed by drinks at the Bracun and farewells to Hugh and Mari who were scheduled to leave at 04.00 the following morning.

Thursday 29th July

Dodgy weather forecast produces another big breakfast debate on the plan for the day. Les and I opted for a walk up the Sassongher (2665m) which we had been looking up at from our room all week. The rest, including a rejuvenated Jim G, opted for the ski lift and a high level walk to Arraba.

We summited Sassongher just before the clag moved in for good. There was serious rain and a thunderstorm to accompany us on the return descent through a boulder field via Fontenacia,. Back to Verena for drying out and we discovered a very soggy Cicerone guide book in a rucksack.

Somebody had forgotten to put it in their drybag.

An hour later drowned rats returned from Arraba. It seems that a very pleasant morning walk, with pizza lunches had been slightly ruined by the lack of an afternoon bus service. Hence a slog back along the road in the teeming rain. Tony had been nominated walk leader and naturally was taking considerable flak for not having researched the public transport options.

There was an early assembly for dinner for Jim W to make the Golden Marmot award. There were many contenders but Lynn won easily with her "gloves" incident. After dinner it was off to the Rocky Racoon "Bracun" for Colletts quiz night. It is boys v. girls in the BUMS contest and the boys easily win, however in a cruel twist, the Colletts quizmeister contrives a play off for last place. Lynn knows more than Tony about world cup attendances so boys unfairly take the wooden spoon. The entire BUMS squad are completely legless by the end of the evening but everyone somehow finds their way back to Chalet Verena

Friday 30th July

Major hangovers are compared at breakfast and sadly we say farewell to Selina, Allie and Lynda who are baling out a day early, unable to cope with the 04.00 start on Saturday. There are now only 7 remaining and there is an easy consensus for a gentle yomp from Pedraces to Corvara via various upward ski lifts. The weather was a vast improvement over Thursday (and also on the Friday forecast) and consequently an excellent days walking is enjoyed, including a stop at one of the many refugios on the plateau above Corvara for coffee and apple strudel.

There followed a low key evening due partly to overindulgence 24 hours earlier and partly by Tony, Lynn and JG preparing to check out at 04.00 Saturday morning. A very noisy fireworks display up the valley at Colfosco cannot have pleased the early risers.

Saturday 31st July

Jim and Jean, Les and myself are the last men standing for Saturdays breakfast. It is the beautiful morning we have been waiting for all week. We paid our bar bills and said our farewells before loading up our car with all the climbing equipment (including 7 ice axes). We had brought all this with us for a Marmolada expedition but unfortunately the gear had not seen the light of day.

It has been an excellent week enjoyed by all (hopefully). The rooms were generously large and we have been well fed and wined by Colletts staff. Corvara is a superb central location for Via Ferrata and high level walking.

It would have been even better if the sun had shone all week but you can't have everything.

Mike A