

FOLLOWING A SECRETARY'S ADVICE

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Once when Peter Robinson was staying at Glan Dena, he made a statement that once you have turned forty and want an alpine holiday, Austria is the place to go, as the mountains and huts are at the right height for middle-age. This statement, plus the fact that we had heard that Austria was a fairly cheap place in which to stay, made us choose Austria for a fortnight's meandering last September. Through the long summer days at home we did wonder if we should have stayed in Great Britain, but luck was on our side and we had a rainless fortnight in the Otztal Alps.

It was a family party, ourselves and our son, and we booked return tickets to Innsbruck, whence on the afternoon of our arrival we boarded a 'bus to Solden in the Otz Valley and found a comfortable hotel, recommended by the Solaris.

The following morning we boarded a 'bus up to Obergurgl, followed by a short chair lift ; then we came down to earth and had to walk. We made for the Hochwilderhaus and, not having carefully studied the map, had quite a surprise when we had to descend 1,000 feet after the Karlsruher Hut. On the very steep ascent up to the hut, we met two English lads, who on looking at my bald head remarked : " This is a creditable performance for a man of your age." I must admit I was speechless. We found the Hochwilderhaus moderately comfortable and we got up early about 5 a.m. to climb Hochwilder, but at this hour the hut warden was still in bed.

At about 5.45 a.m. we set out on a perfect morning and had a very fine trip across the Obergurgl Glacier and up to the ice slope just below the rock of the summit ridge. Here we caught up with a fellow countryman who was climbing with a guide. On such a perfect morning I expected suitable salutations from him, but instead, he looked very serious and said : " I say, have you any indigestion tablets." We followed a series of iron rings and wire rope up a rocky ridge to a pleasant summit, but clouds stopped us seeing far into Italy. The return to the hut was without incident.

We crossed the glacier next morning and had a steep pull up to the Ramolhaus. After lunch David and myself went down to Obergurgl for some fruit. The highlight of this excursion was that while having refreshment, David found a jukebox which played both sides of a record for 3d.

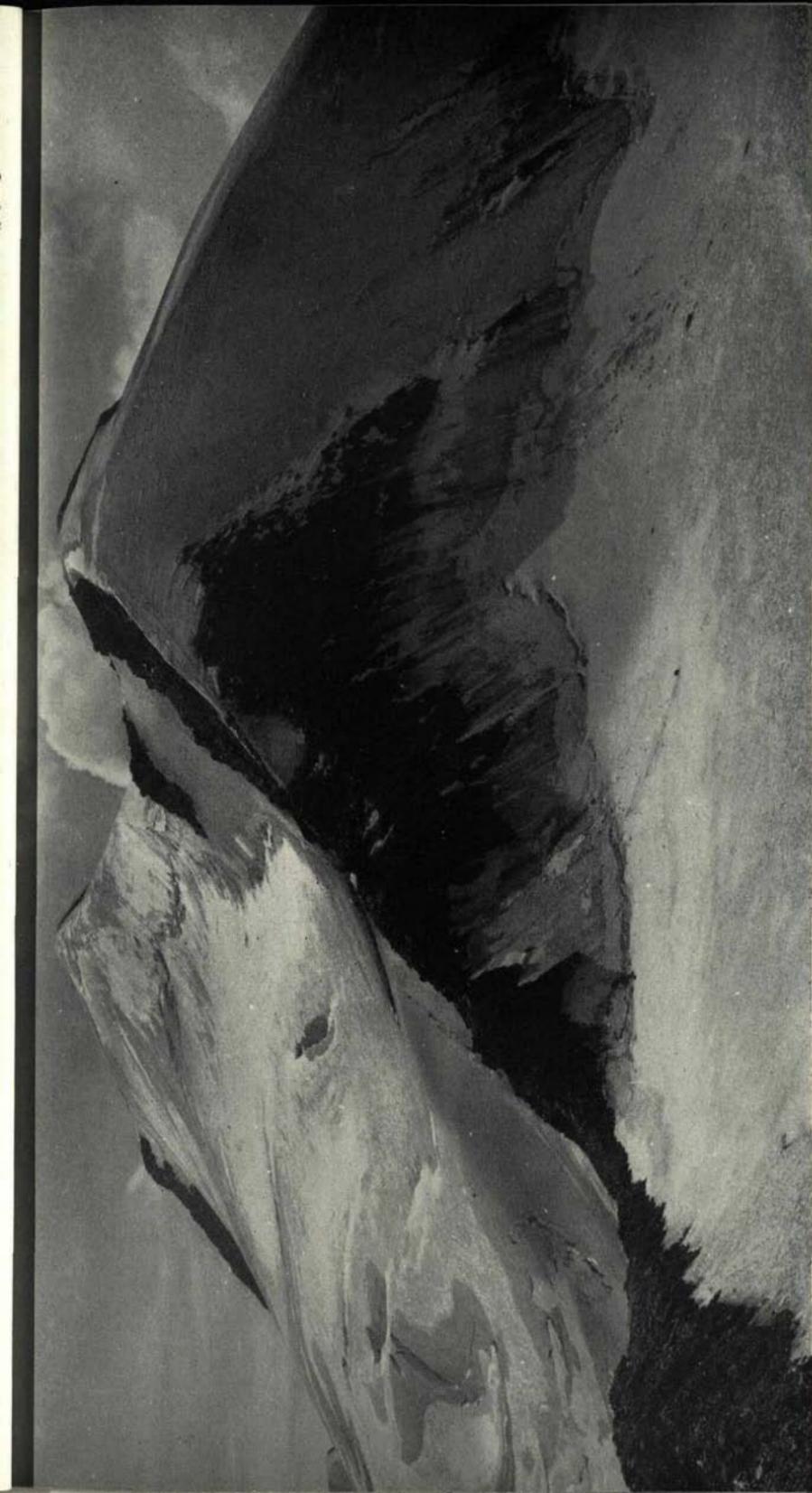
We next attempted the Schalfkogel. It was a perfect morning when we set out ; steep ice and snow led to the Firmisjoch, followed

by a rough loose ridge, but we failed to reach the summit due to steep exposed hard ice. On arriving back at the hut the guardian, ever anxious to speak English, asked us if we would like blue cabbage with our evening meal. Our next hut was the Neue Samoar at the head of the Nieder Tal. To reach this we crossed the Ramoljoch and down an easy glacier the Spiegelferner, followed by a long trudge, crossing the river at a very impressive snow bridge. This hut is new and well equipped, more like an hotel. There is a young lady at a reception office, a spacious dining-room, and David even found a power point for his electric razor.

The following morning we thought the weather was breaking ; slight rain and heavy mist shrouded the hut, but we walked up the Kreuz Spitze and on reaching the summit the mist cleared, giving good views. From here we moved up to the Similaun hut on the Italian side of the frontier ; actually it is a very old inn and not a C.A.I. hut. Here we enjoyed wonderful wine and food. Our next objective was Similaun the following morning. We set out in perfect conditions, hard frost, a clear sky and good visibility. On the top there was a very keen wind as we stood and recognised in turn the Brenta Dolomites and the Ortler. We had a delightful descent to the hut, and thence down the Nieder Tal to the village of Vent—a delightful place. Being September we easily found accommodation in an inn.

Next morning when we set out for the Breslauer Hut the shadow side of the valley was white with frost. By a steep trudge we reached the hut and after a meal prospected the route for the following day, our last in the mountains. This proved to be a most enjoyable climb to the summit of the Wildspitz whence we had magnificent views in all directions, seeing clearly the whole of the Dolomites, the Ortler, the Bernina, the Glarus Alps, and in the far distance the Oberland. On our descent we met a German party, with a guide, at the bergschrund. They beckoned us over and the German said : “ We have time, I have no air, puff-puff,” and he looked it.

We can recommend the Otztal for a family holiday. The huts and hills are in the right proportions for middle-aged parents and not too experienced offsprings.



Schafkogel

P. Wild