



Gross Geiger from Postalm, Ober Sulzbach Tal.

THE GROSS VENEDIGER, 1963

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While visiting the Bregaglia and Bernina in 1962 with the Solaris, we discovered that middle age in mountains had advantages at huts. Grey hairs certainly were an advantage at the Albigna Hut. The guardian described in a recent M.A.M. Journal as the Albigna Dragon reorganised the sleeping accommodation to find us comfortable beds. We admit that some members of a kindred club who had youth on their side and full heads of hair were banished to sleep in the mule house. On descending from Piz Bernina, Frank and I called at the Marco e Rosa hut for a drink of tea, and long before we had time to put our parched lips to a cup, several Italians had asked the question that we were getting used to, "How old are you?"

In 1963, Muriel and I decided to try to find an area suitable to middle age, and a further consideration was that we should be only our two selves. With this in mind we travelled to Innsbruck and made our way up the Zillertal to Mayrhofn, where to our surprise, on arriving at the railway station, we saw a timetable for the Llanfair-Welshpool light railway. In common with other alpine districts, Austria had poor weather during August and several times, during very bad mist, rain and high wind, the local mountaineers would suggest that we should feel quite at home in such conditions; they said, "It must be like England at sea level". The Zillertal we found crowded; the Berliner Hut has the largest dining room we have ever seen in an alpine hut. At first we thought it was perhaps an old shooting lodge, but we were told that it was built by the German Alpine Club to show the Austrians what could be done. We decided to go down to Mayrhofn and seek a quieter area to the East by taking a post bus over the newly opened high pass which starts at Zell-am-Zillar and crosses the high pass of Gerlos and Gerlosplatte and then makes a fine descent into Krimml, which we found full of visitors to see the famous falls of Krimml. Going down the Oberpinzgau valley for a few miles to the village of Wald, we found an unspoilt and quiet village which we made a centre and starting point for our visits to the Gross Venediger.

The Gross Venediger is a delightful area, in the Province of Salzburg. The main summit, the Gross Venediger (12,008 ft.), is part of the Tauern range. The huts are situated a long way from the villages and this makes them too far away for crowds of day excursionists. While looking at the hut registers we were surprised to find records of very few English visitors. The area of perpetual snow is greater than that of the Gross Glockner group which is separated from the Gross Venediger group by the Felber Tauern pass and the Granatspitz Gruppe.

At Wald we had an experience of Austrian hospitality. After staying the night in a chalet kept by two dear old ladies, we set out

in the morning and had only gone a few yards away from the house when one of the ladies called us back. She was holding two rolls of bread in her hand and said, "You have paid for these, take them with you". Most of the long valleys that lead up to the huts are nature reserves and the flora and fauna are preserved. These valleys are completely unspoilt; we found more birds in the area than in the Western Alps, but the flora was not as varied as most of the Western Alps.

We walked up the Ober Sulzbach Tal on what was one of the few fine days. After the tree line there is a fine view of the Gross Geiger, an elegant cone shaped mountain which is prominent at the head of the valley. The glacier which flows off this peak into the valley is marked on the map "Turkische Zeltstadt". This name puzzled us. F. S. Smythe in his book *Over Tyrolese Hills* says that it was possibly in commemoration of the Turkish invasion of Austria in 1683. An article in *Les Alpes*, March 1964, says, "Nous arrivons en vue de la Turkische Zeltstadt (la ville des tentes turques) qui n'existe d'ailleurs plus sur la carte". Situated with a fine view of glaciers at the head of this Ober Sulzbach Tal is the Kursinger Hut, which is large and comfortable, and in good weather a number of peaks can be reached from it. After the good weather coming up to the hut, we had unsettled rain and wind ("the English weather"), and we only did the Kees Kogel, 3,291 metres. The next day we decided to cross the Ober Sulzbach Glacier to the Warnsdorfer Hut, a very pleasant glacier crossing. The Warnsdorfer Hut is pleasantly situated with grand views of the Reichen Spitz Group, but more impressive is the Dreierherren Spitz towering above the hut, the North face of which is one mass of ice. The name Dreierherren Spitz comes from the fact that in the old days the boundaries of Tyrol, Salzburg, and Gorg met on the summit.

The following morning rain lashed down so we decided to make for the valley, and on enquiring from the guardian how far it was to transport, we were told 22 kilometres. It was a long plod down the Krimmler Tal and on the way we passed the Krimmler Tauernhaus, a fine old XVIth century building, now a restaurant.

After being valley-bound with two days of continuous rain, we decided in view of the weather to spend our last four days visiting huts, and to see some of the Eastern side of the Gross Venediger. This time we went up the Habach Tal to the Thuringer Hut. This valley is narrow with steep side walls, which gives it the appearance of a Norwegian valley. Again this valley is a nature reserve of the Province of Salzburg and the views above tree line are very fine. There is a choice of several peaks from the Thuringer hut, or you can cross to the Neue Further Hut. On the day we did this our luck held, for no sooner had we entered the hut than a thunderstorm broke out which lasted several hours. As we set out in a damp mist next morning, the guardian warned us of a huge rock fall on the route to the

Sandegentörl, and with very careful route finding we found the right crossing to join the St. Poltner Westweg. Just as we crossed the col, the mist lifted a little and we saw a wonderful view of snow peaks and glaciers. One could spend a grand time on this side of the Gross Venediger; there are a number of huts, some hard to get at, but in beautiful situations. There are very few people about, for in the nine hours on our traverse we only met three people. Careful route finding is needed, for the route is not always obvious. On our way to the St. Poltner Hut we had grand views down the valleys to the South of the High Tauern Mountains. The St. Poltner Hut is in a lovely position on the col of the Felber Tauern Pass, which is the divide we have already mentioned. For those members who like a high traverse there is a long trip by the St. Poltner Ostweg which crosses the Granatspitz gruppe and finishes in the Gross Glockner Group.

