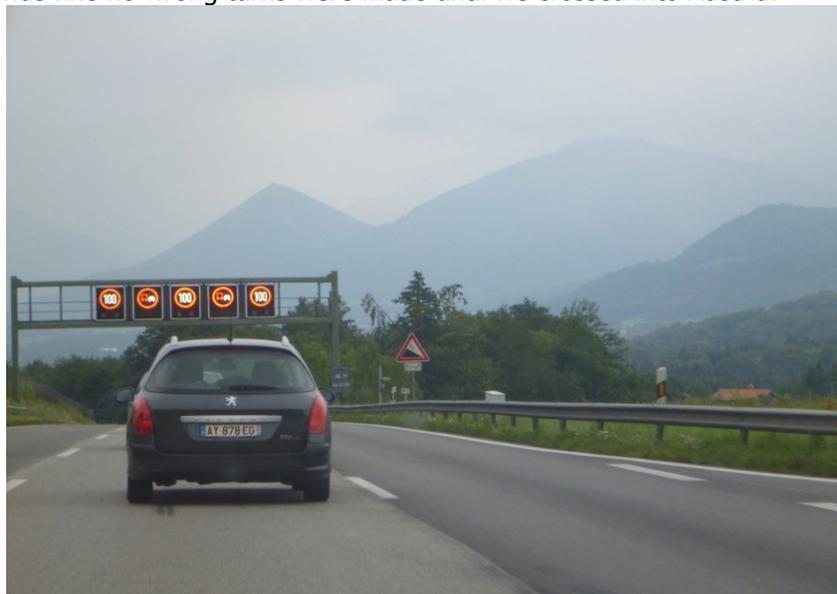


## **Dachstien 2 The return of the Misery**

What can I say about this wonderful expedition? It is both fantastic and awful sometimes even at the same time! Fantastic scenery yet a tiring walk up the hill. Amazing caves, awful rock that is both sharp and loose. Fantastic weather, blue skies sunburn, yet the very next day rain and then snow. Well you get the picture.



Me - Alex Ritchie (BRCC & YSS) and Daniel Jackson (BRCC) were the first to arrive, the first to arrive in-fact for four days. But I am jumping ahead of my self a-bit here, because really the expedition began when we set out on the journey to Austria. The journey we made by car, of a distance of over one thousand, four hundred kilometres. We took it in shifts driving, each stint lasting around 3 hours with plenty of stops along the way, we were in no rush. Everything was fine no wrong turns were made until we crossed into Austria.

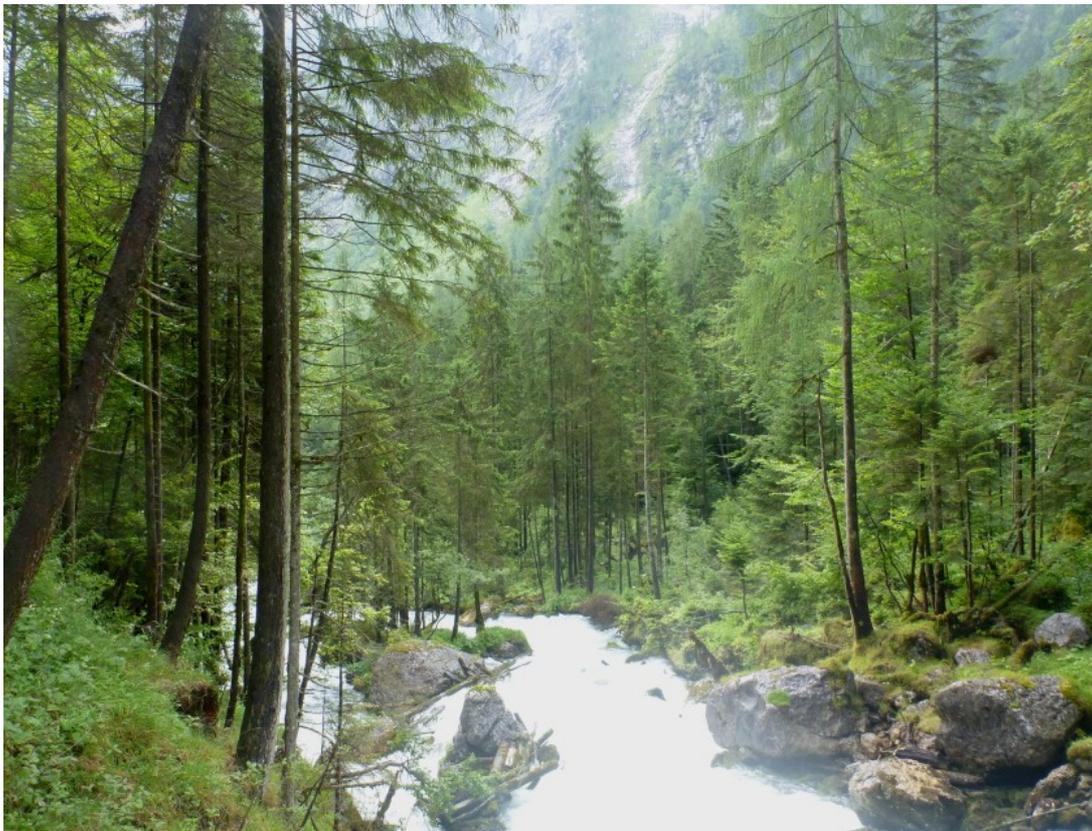


You see I told my SatNav to avoid toll roads so it did. The issue was that all the motorways in Austria are classed as toll roads of sorts. So before we knew it there we were driving through the centre of Salzburg, with me in the driving seat! Thankfully for Dan, this was a blessing in disguise as he just recently realised that his UK sim for his phone did not work out here and he had to purchase an Austrian one, there would be none in Hallstatt so a spot Salzburg saved the day.

Sim purchased we set out to leave Salzburg, the problem being the main road out was blocked by massive road works and our only hope was to point the car in a random direction and try and hit the motorway. This pot luck approach worked, eventually. We finally arrived in Hallstatt in the late evening.

So where to stay then? It would be foolish to attempt to climb the hill in the dark. Sail barn hut? Perhaps, but the cold and dubiously stained concrete floor was not appealing. Youth hostel then? No room at the inn, it would seem. Well try the Austrian caving hut, and see if someone was there who would be kind enough to let us stay? But there was no one, our hopes dashed perhaps then it would be another night in the car then? A prospect I was not looking forward to as last night's experience was very uncomfortable. Then I noticed something really quite important this was not the right building! Fifty feet up the road we were now at the correct place and there were people there. We found the local Austrian cavers very accommodating and they allowed us to stay for the princely sum of just five Euros for the night.

Up at the crack of dawn, we shared a breakfast with our hosts who left us to install some ladders in partially explored system where the entrance of which is at least a two hour walk away from the nearest road, fair play to them.



**The river resurgence from the Herlitz system, the system we hoped one day to connect to. This we passed on the way up the mountain**

We started up the hill, and called the Sailbarn down (A gear transporter) or should we call it a S\$^% barn as it used in more ways then just carrying gear. It also carriers substances, human waste to be precise back down the hill. Unfortunately and rather disgustingly it prematurely emptied some of the contents on the road (just missing my car) and then all over the floor of the hut splattering our kit bags and food bags we had stacked in there! Lovely! Luckily the damage was only a minor splash back, we braved the smell and loaded up.

Up the hill in our daypacks (thankfully stink free) we soon reached the hut that we would be again be calling home for the next two weeks, we settled in and enjoyed the sun. As we drank a beer, Dan's face dropped, he had done a me, he had forgotten something! He had forgot his phone! This phone was our only means of communication with the expedition leader as I was between phones at the time. Furthermore considering all the trouble we went through in getting a working sim for it, we had to see it through. Thankfully I managed to persuade him to retrieve it tomorrow and not today as that would have been foolhardy, the walk is over 3 hours in one direction either all up/down hill depending on direction.



**Pictured is not the route up but it shows the distance.**

The second day Dan set off on his lovely 6-hour return trip down the mountain while I set about getting things sorted such as rigged the training cave and digging out "What Have You Got Pot" (the main expedition cave) from the snow. Only there was no snow, only rocks blocking the entrance. Well no the entrance was actually 20 feet away, I realised quickly I was looking in the wrong spot. Oh well all is fine then. The ropes were also still in there from last year. *I found out later they were left there due to being chased out by floods.*



**The entrance to What Have You Got Pot, you can see why I thought the entrance had collapsed when I was looking at the wrong hole.**

Third day... what did we do? Oh yes more work! We set up the tarp at the hut for the gear store and started to extract some gear from the "pigpen" as it is called in the basement. More like a mouse cage if you ask me! The little blighter's had left their marks everywhere and had eaten into cave food packets to get at the sweet noodles within, it was in a right state! We left most of it for the more lucky arrivals and set about the next important task and set up the shelter for gear and changing at the cave.

By the 4<sup>th</sup> day we were still alone, and decided to take a stroll to the Simony hut, some two hours higher up the mountain, all the while talking about how deep we could get in the cave with just the two of us, 300 meters down? The sudden change in the weather and the thunderstorm later that night reminded us how fickle the weather could be so we scaled down our grand plans.

Arriving back at the hut, we noticed there was some extra gear lying around, we had a guest but where was he or she? I ventured across the bar, nope that person was not there, the only person who was not staff was an Austrian woman, most likely a hiker. We sat in the bar that night wondering where was this person? We also built a house of cards out of boredom. We went to bed and found the mystery person sleeping away on a mattress by the window.



On the 5th day the mystery of the missing person was solved when it turned out that the woman I had mistaken for Austrian was in fact Helen, the third person to arrive. It seems that in her groggy state she had also mistaken me for Austrian so she spoke Austrian to me. I did not know Lancastrian sounded Austrian, but oh well.

With Helen acting as Sherpa we set off to go underground, the plan being to check out the ropes and rigging. We dropped down some one hundred or so meters to what is called the tight pitch head, checking the rope and hangers as we went. We decided we could not determine the condition of the knots at the rusty mallons, so we de-rigged a significant amount so we could wash and check the rope back at camp.



**Dan looking happy at the tight pitch head.**

Over the next few days more people steadily began to stream in. The next arrival after Hannah was Aaron from the United States of America. A day later more arrived: Tom, Gaelen and many more. Now the expedition could get going!

However the weather had other ideas, so we could not go underground and were forced to explore the surface finding quite a few unexplored or partially explored holes. Even as the weather improved I choose to explore them rather than go down the main pot, no one had been there, I had to go down them. Thankfully people were easily encouraged to have a look with me.



### **One of the bad days, that bad it stopped raining and started to snow in July!**

First on the list of holes was a big open pot near the main cave, which as far as we can tell had never been properly descended. Tom and me set about rigging this hole. I must state that exploration rigging, is a far cry from the rigging we are used to in the UK, the same general safety rules still apply, i.e. always use a back up anchor, but you are forced to inventive. For instance in this hole we located a suitable rock far back from the pitch head, too far for a sling to be any good, a metal cable was employed, which we then re-belayed to a through bolt anchor on the pitch head. Bolts do not like staying in the rock out there, so where ever possible we employed naturals and deviations rather than re-belays when exploring.



**Tom drilling the wall for a bolt hanger hanging off a wire I had wrapped around the rock, as I handed various tools for the job.**

We dropped down the hole some 15 meters or so to find a second shorter drop past a loose boulder pile, this cave goes it seems. After an interesting pitch head rigging making use of me as a human deviation we dropped down this short drop, rounded a corner under a unsteady boulder and came across a huge void.

"Wait are those ropes dangling down?" We were in the main cave What Have You Got. We were expecting that though, being so close. So it was no disappointment and now the main cave had a second entrance it can now be called a system! I exited and re-entered the now 1 meter deeper system through the original entrance to take photo's of Tom in his precarious position wedged in a sloping rift almost in the ceiling of the second pitch chamber.



Now this had been pushed, other holes were calling me. So over the next couple of days I dropped down several more with a different partner, Gaelen, from Ireland as well as our surface hand Shez. We seemed to spent a lot of time in a hole we named after a sexual disease (I wonder why???). This particular cave was loose and all attempts to rig the drop just beyond the entrance constriction failed. It called for bigger drill, but this meant a two-hour round trip to the hut. I decided to take one last look and climb down the rift near the pitch to reach the floor. The climb was interesting the top 3 meters was tight, before it landed me on a ledge under a boulder that we had just moved there ten minutes previously. Carefully ducking under the rock, I worked my way down a steep ice slope in a wider section that took me down to the floor after several more meters. Unfortunately with the exception of a too small crack in the wall half way up that blew a gale, there was no way on.



**The tight entrance into the new cave, Shez pictured.**



**The ice slope I had just climbed down to reach the bottom.**

With Gaelen looking on this time I crawled into another hole that consisted of a horrible, sharp and loose crawling passage which after some very unstable boulders opened out to wide walking passage. There was also a huge drop, just ahead! What had I found here then? Unfortunately the huge drop turned out to be frozen black mud and it was at this frozen mud sump where the passage abruptly ended. I had also left my camera outside not wanting to take extra bulk with me through the crawl. As part of the ceiling rested on my legs as I exited I decided not to go back in to take photos.

Other holes of less interest were looked at until night started to fall and others came back from a very long walk, one of their number, had pushed them selves just a little too far, but bravely persevered for the hour that it took to get back to the hut.



What with the changeable weather and my thirst to explore new things I did not get as much deep caving in the two weeks I was there, as I expected or indeed may had liked to. But yet I thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

I did also get another look at a cave called Tear Garten a beautiful ice cave with a most magnificent 40 meter entrance pitch into a huge boulder strewn doline. *Pictures below*



**The far wall of the crater.**



**Ice formations in the cave it self**



**The boulder strewn doline as seen from the pitch head.**