SUMMER 2025

ITALY & SWIZERLAND

Tour Monte Rosa

165 km route around the Monte Rosa Massif

overview

SUMMARY

We completed the Tour of Monte Rosa in 12 days, starting in Zermatt and going clockwise, with the itinerary including the main TMR circuit plus a full day ascent of the Breithorn from the Theodul Pass. We followed a mix of the classic hut-to-hut stages and stages were camping was possible around the Monte Rosa massif, crossing high passes and alpine terrain with close-up views of Breithorn, Monte Rosa itself and other 4,000 m peaks, and linking Swiss and Italian villages; overall weather was good except for the Breithorn day, which was windy with low visibility, making conditions noticeably more challenging. This resulted in changes of plans for our descent of the glacier into Zermatt the next day.

AIMS

The aims we set out before the trip were:

- To complete a multi-day trek around the Monte Rosa massif, crossing through Switzerland and Italy.
- To summit the Breithorn (4,164 m), a 4000 m + peak accessible via alpine climbing.
- To develop high-altitude trekking and mountaineering skills within a team environment.
- To document the expedition for educational and outreach purposes within Imperial College and the wider mountaineering community.

SUPPORT

We are extremely grateful for the generosity of the organisations who, through their funding, enabled this trip to take place.

Thank you to the Imperial Exploration Board, the City and Guilds College Association's Old Centralians' Trust, the Royal College of Science Association Trust, and the Lord Mayor's 800th Anniversary Awards Trust, without whose support this this challenging and transformative journey would not have been possible.

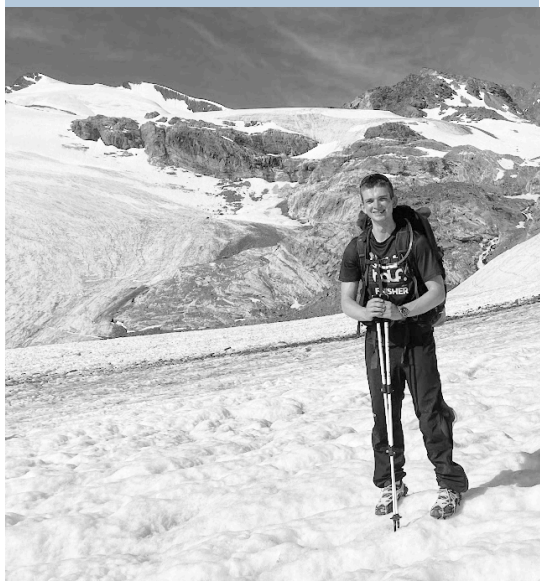
Their support not only contributed towards general trip expenses, but allowed us to put in place the required safety nets to push our boundaries safely - such as hiring professional guides and specialist insurance.

So thank you once again for allowing us to turn our plans into reality, and undertake this two-week expedition through the Wester Alps.

TEAM

team

LUKE MALLET



ROLE: EXPEDITION LEADER
DEGREE: MENG ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONIC ENGINEERING
AGE: 23

Luke has a wealth of trekking experience, from trips in the UK to the Tour de Mont Blanc, Alta Via 1, trekking in Norway, and more climbing trips than he can remember.
As a former president of the Imperial Outdoor Club, Luke found himself in good company on this trip, made up entirely of current and former committee members. Now that he's left Imperial, Luke spends his weekends driving for the Club's weekend trips (as many of us have discovered, you can never leave). Between snatches of driving, he can be found perusing Vinted and Facebook Marketplace, or repairing his growing collection of purchases. This trip, with its foray into alpine mountaineering, has opened up a whole new avenue of equipment to explore: after all, when he's not carrying a loaf of bread for each member of the team, he needs *something* to fill that 85-litre bag with.

JAMES HOWELLS

ROLE: SECRETARY
DEGREE: MENG DESIGN ENGINEERING
AGE: 23

James feels like he spends almost all of his time in the outdoors, but given a degree and then a job in London, that isn't remotely true. He has been outside a couple of times though, be that at home in Hungary, national parks across the UK, Switzerland or the Italian Dolomites.
In his research of the Tour Monte Rosa route, James realised he wasn't getting what he wanted out of the classic mapping apps, so he painstakingly built his own from scratch. Merlin Maps now lies at the forefront of outdoor mapping technology and has become a major contributor to his personality, along with of his four-day work week.
However, this additional day of freedom was not the only point of envy amongst the group, as we soon discovered James' total indifference to long-distance walking. He reserves his injuries for climbing and the occasional fall from a cliff.

team

LEAH BROER

ROLE: QUARTERMASTER
DEGREE: MENG DESIGN ENGINEERING
AGE: 20

Aside from being a NICAS-qualified climber, Leah has experience trekking in the Slovenian alps, Romania and the UK - as well as several mixed hiking/climbing trips across the UK and Europe.
Since the Tour Monte Rosa, Leah has become the Outdoor Club's next president, and is putting her experience to good use leading the next generation of student outdoorspeople. Like many of the team, she appreciates a good bit of gear - and definitely had the nicest backpack of the trip. Her trekking poles, which came in very handy after a slip leading to a sprained ankle, certainly made an impression by being the lightest ever made. Though next time, she would consider bringing their snow baskets - which would definitely have had a rather more useful impact for the snow-covered sections.

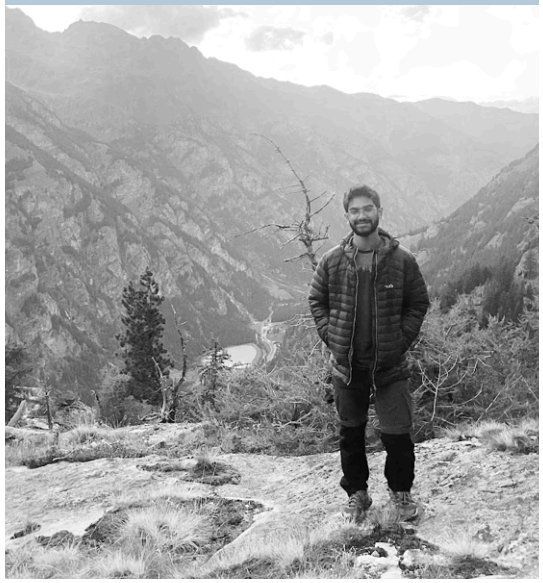
CERI POWELL

ROLE: MEDICAL OFFICER
DEGREE: BSC REMOTE MEDICINE
AGE: 23

Born and raised in the Highlands, Ceri is thoroughly at home in the wind and rain, and the trip didn't provide enough of either for her liking. Bringing more alpine experience to the group than the rest of the us combined made her indispensable, along with her medical background and strategy to motivate tired hikers (lots of snacks).
As if the strain of hiking many hours per day over challenging terrain wasn't enough, Ceri also had the stress of waiting for results to contend with. Luckily, at one particularly scenic lunch spot, she found out that she had passed her Medical Licensing Assessment!
As an avid Strava user, Ceri made sure to wear her Garmin for every minute of hiking for the whole two-week trip - but never turn it on. And when summit day on the Breithorn called for waterproof trousers, Ceri demonstrated impressive adaptability by discovering she could fit into James' - which was especially puzzling since they didn't even fit him.

team

SAMIR AHMED



ROLE: TREASURER
DEGREE: BENG COMPUTER SCIENCE
AGE: 21

Another former (and some might say current) member of the Outdoor Club, Samir brought a wealth of outdoors experience to this trip - mostly gained while desperately trying to get out of London, if only for the weekend. In preparation for the Tour Monte Rosa, he dragged some of the group along the West Highland Way, an experience that left them certain a few thousand metres of ascent were sorely required.
The resident photographer and videographer of the trip, Samir assures his teammates that a skilfully-edited cinematic summary is definitely coming soon. Eyes constantly on the lookout for the perfect shot, he suspects that his focus on the camera occasionally came at the expense of his footing, though fortunately without any disastrous results.
Between job applications, Samir still finds himself looking to the horizon, usually in search of his next excuse to head into the hills.

KRZYSZTOF DYGON

ROLE: EQUIPMENT OFFICER
DEGREE: BSC BIOCHEMISTRY WITH RESEARCH ABROAD
AGE: 20

Be it the Camino Primitivo, Main Beskid Trail, DofE or hiking the Tatras in his native Poland, Krzystof is often to be found in the hills. His skills as a chef really lifted the mood of an evening on the trip - and especially useful was his ability to produce, as if by magic, the correct ingredient from the depths of his backpack - just after the meal had been eaten. Especially impressive was the fact that many of his finest ingredients had been imported directly from the UK, and remained concealed for nearly all of the two-week adventure. Krzysztof is particularly pleased to have been able to spend his 21st birthday climbing his first 4000 m peak!

BACKGROUND

BACKGROUND

EXPEDTION OVERVIEW

The Tour Monte Rosa is a demanding 8–12 day circular high-alpine trek of roughly 160–170 km that circumnavigates the Monte Rosa massif, linking Swiss and Italian valleys and mountain huts while crossing high passes (up to about 3,300 m) and varied terrain from rocky trails to glacier approaches; it rewards hikers with close, sustained views of many 4,000 m peaks (including the Breithorn), alpine pastures, and traditional hütte / rifugi, and is best attempted mid-June to mid-September with good fitness, sure-footedness, and readiness for rapid weather changes.

TRAVEL DIARY

Travel Diary

→ 14.9 km ↑ 1,250 m

DAY 1: ZERMATT – EUROPAHUTTE

Day 1 started with a train to avoid a section of the Europa Weg, which had been closed due to landslides. Then, we had a very very hot and sweaty ascent through some damp trees. Once up on the main route, the path meandered high up along a gorgeous valley with amazing views.

James established his love for Babybels early and always made sure to have some on hand.
Further along the route, some interesting tunnels led to some crawling and bag dragging. The sun came out, and we had an incredible afternoon walking through tunnels, over the highest suspension bridge in Europe and finally making it to our bivouac spot. Krzysztof made us a delicious dinner complete with noodle stirring in a bag.

The first of many many water filter stops.

Travel Diary

Travel Diary

→ 14.4 km ↑ 718 m

DAY 2: EUROPAHUTTE - GRACHEN

We woke up to the beautiful views of the Zermatt valley and set off on the descent, knees wobbling with the day two muscle tiredness. Some gorgeous rock features along the way and a handy staircase to avoid having to climb down a cliff face.

More water filtering and stunning views as we came down into Grachen. Luke demonstrated his camera skills before realising the batteries were dead.

Once set up at the campsite we set off to find some food which ended up being a loooong walk up a very steep hillside (so much for rest). Food acquired, back to the campsite for some pesto pasta and salad before a good night's rest.

Travel Diary

Travel Diary

→ 23.3 km ↑ 1,340 m

DAY 3: GRACHEN TO SAAS-GRUND

The day started with a climb up under a ski lift, watching everyone skip the long steep ascent. Did we consider taking the lift? Yes. Did we feel smug about making it to the top without the lift? Yes, but only once we'd caught our breaths and had a snack.

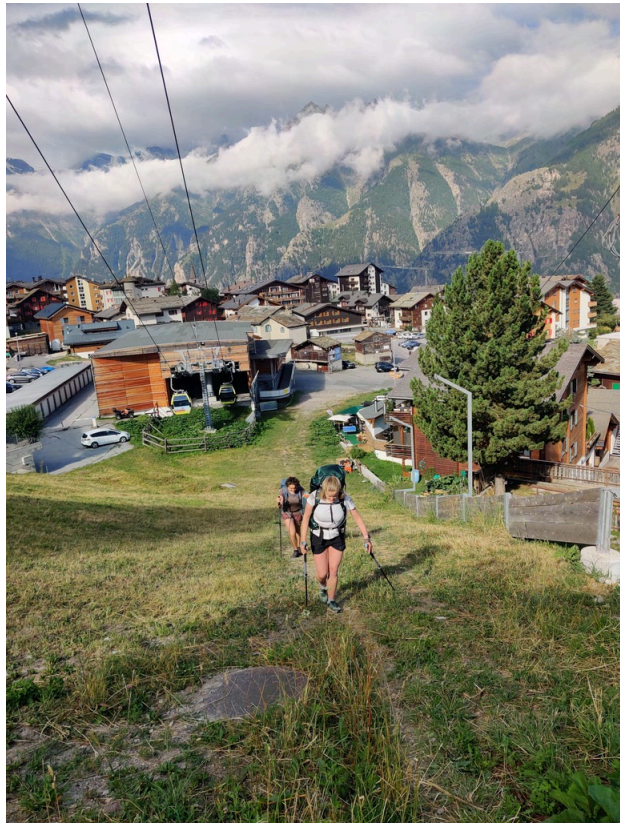
We carried on from the top of the lift and found ourselves on a stunning path, half a metre wide with a 100m drop down to our left. It meandered through the cliffs with jaw dropping views the whole way.

Along the way, Leah rolled her ankle and Ceri got to justify her appointment as team medic! After an examination and a lot of tape to stabilise the ankle, Leah was ready for action. Luckily no major damage done.

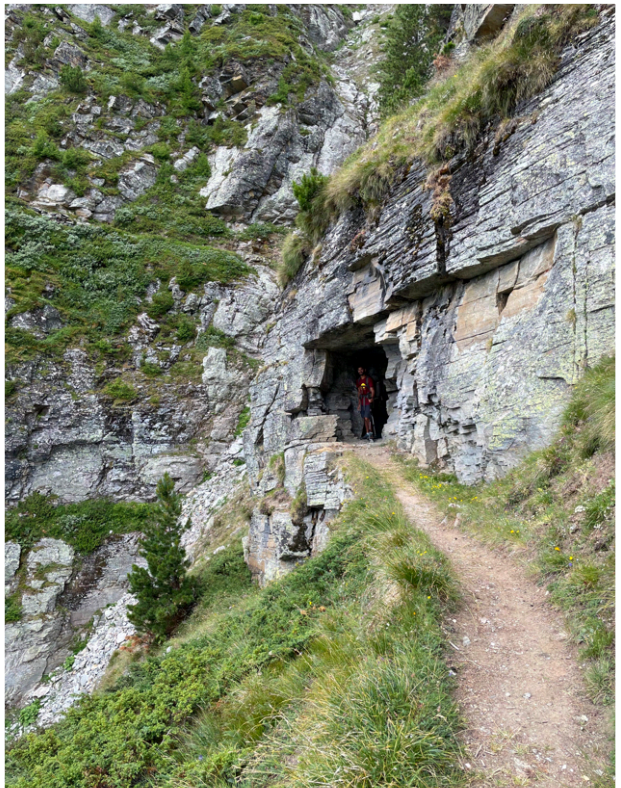
The plan was for a walk to a bivouac high above Saas-Fee, but due to path closures from landslides, a rethink was required. The only way to the Brittaniahutte, our next destination, was via a lift from Saas-Fee. Some handy local knowledge meant we knew that staying at the campsite in Saas-Grund gets you free lifts and transport in the valley. So a slightly longer day followed to get down to Saas-Grund.

The way down to Saas-Grund was a steep and slippy forestry path followed by a few km on road which destroyed everyones knees and feet.

Couscous salad while hiding from the rain filled everyone's bellies.



Travel Diary



Travel Diary

→ 7.22 km ↑ 290 m

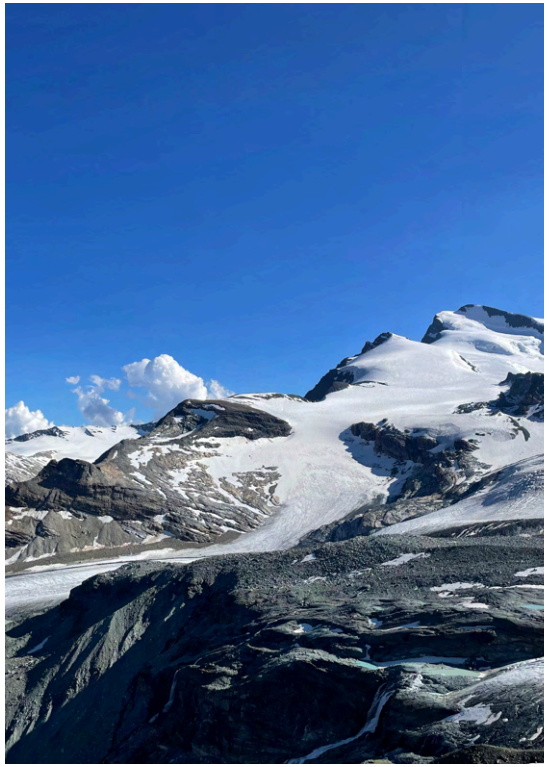
DAY 4: SAAS-GRUND TO BRITTANIAHUTTE

Having to take the lift meant we had a very short day in the end. We took advantage of this by using our free lift passes to travel up a nearby lift to get views of the Monte Rosa Massif.

We then traveled back down and took a bus to Saas-Fee to do some food shopping. Up the lift we went and into the afternoon's sun and snow. Spikes were used for the first time to cross the snow on the way up to the Brittaniahutte. At 3000m, the altitude was definitely felt, especially as we were all carrying enough water for two days given there were no opportunities to fill up at the hut.

From the hut, we had incredible views of some of the 4000m peaks, and the glaciers used to access them. A yummy and filling dinner later, we were already for sleep.

(A bonus picture of Ceri demonstrating tent loss prevention techniques)



Travel Diary

Travel Diary

→ 21.7 km ↑ 728 m

DAY 5: BRITTANIAHUTTE - MACUGNAGA

Hut breakfast, then down the glaciers. First glaciers of the trip with some amazing views whilst crossing. Tricky boulder fields in-between slowed us down, then back on the smooth flat glaciers. Over a small peak, and down the path towards a sparkling lake.

A long trudge along the lake on tarmac to get back to the nice paths. Up some incredible path that sneaked easily through cliffs that seemed impossible to climb. At the top we made the Monte Moror pass.

The original plan had been to stay at the hut there for the night but due to a storm coming in the following day we decided to press on and get down the valley. And it was a looooooong way down. 1700m of decsent after the 800m we had already done. The valley floor was visible from the summit but just would not get any closer, no matter how long we walked for.

Finally on the valley floor, we quickly found our way to the closest pizza restaurant for a well-deserved dinner. Late arrival at the campsite, but an unplanned campsite meant an extra much needed shower.

Travel Diary

→ 12.8 km ↑ 914 m

DAY 6: MACUGNAGA – BIVOUAC EMILIANO LANTI

Storm was forecast to hit after 12pm this day and we had 10km and 900m of ascent to go and still need to go to the shop which was not on the way. So we split up with Luke and James heading to the shop to get food for the next couple days. Samir, Leah, Krzysztof and Ceri set off early as well to get a head start on the up.

After ambling along a track by a river through a long valley, we crossed and headed up a muggy path that zig zagged steeply up the hillside. Not long after, James and Luke caught up (with the all-important food).

The path opened up on the hillside and transformed into an incredibly well-built path that was raised above the ground to make the going extra smooth. Over the top of the hill, the bivouac appeared out of the mist, set in an amazing bowl of mountains.

We settled in for a long afternoon as the clouds decided to do the same and completely block our view. Many naps and card games later, the promised lightning had never appeared, but we had the torrential rain and banks of cloud rolling in and out of view.

Travel Diary

Travel Diary

→ 16.7 km ↑ 655 m

DAY 7: BIVOUAC EMILIANO LANTI – ALAGNA

We woke up and the cloud had not done us the decency of disappearing. So, into the mist we ascended. Further along the incredibly well built path which raised us high above the boulder fields and scrambling that would have taken 5x as long to cross. Up to the col where we stopped for a quick picture in the wind, before descending speedily down the other side.

We were rewarded the quick descent with the clouds relenting and a view appearing. Further down we met some cows being herded up the path and we were quickly herded off the path to make space for them. Once back on the path, we quickly descended due to the gentle angle and smooth path making it a very smooth walk.

Alagna welcomed us with a lovely campsite for our rest day. Another 45 min walk to find some pizza (it was worth it in the end, despite many protests), then back for some sleep.

Travel Diary

Travel Diary

→ 0 km ↑ 0 m

DAY 8: ALAGNA: REST DAY

We woke up to a lovely drizzle to start the day, but luckily also somewhere dry to sit and eat our breakfast. We then wandered into the town to acquire some ice cream. Some very much required clothes washing was completed and then we even managed a splash in the river followed by yoga.

Lots of relaxing, napping and snacking later, we sorted ourselves and went to sleep.

Travel Diary

Travel Diary

→ 17.2 km ↑ 1,752 M

DAY 9: ALAGNA – STAFFAL

Up again, and this time for the BIIIIIIG ascent (1800m). It started with a trudge through the trees that later opened up into a lovely alpine pasture with little huts and sparkly water. A small reprieve from the ascent as we wound through the high valley before another big chunk of the ascent. This time along a gorgeous river and open hillside in the sun (very warm but luckily very pretty). This is the ascent that never ended with the top never appearing. When we finally made it, we crashed with some lunch and all-important cheese.

After some recovery, including yoga whilst eating lunch with a view, we carried on for the final ascent. Up through the clouds and passed an abandoned refuge, which got damaged in a fire. Up to the top where the clouds disappeared over the other side of the col (and the end of the ascent – phew).

Down through the rocks, and onto the big ski tracks. Then, a final steep and slippy path until we reached our camp spot for the night. A lovely nearby river allowed for a wash.

Travel Diary

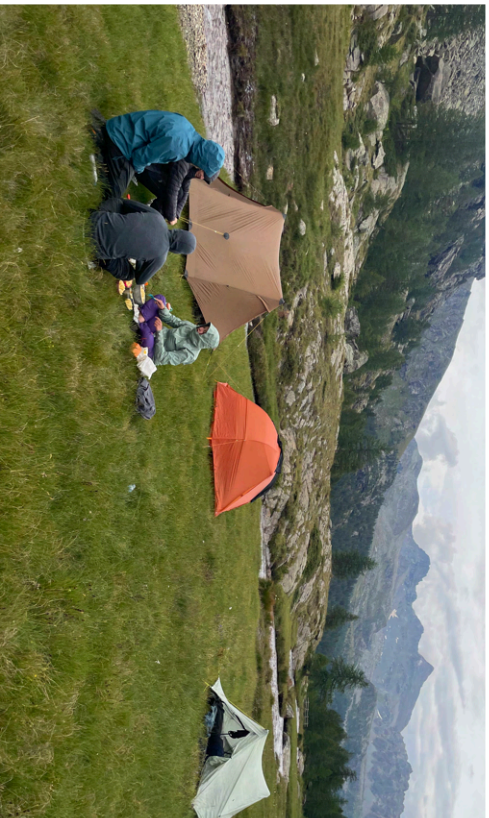
→ 17.9 km ↑ 1,188 m

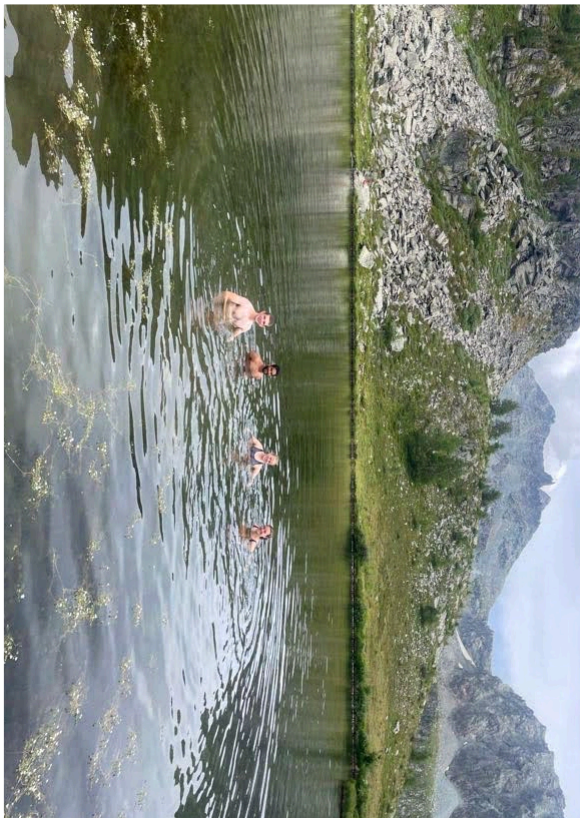
DAY 10: STAFFEL – RESY

Down into the village for the last shop until Zermatt. This meant 5 lunches and 3 breakfasts, which in a small village shop with limited supplies meant 5kg of cheese is required. Off we went with our bags a little heavier than before.

Up a big track for the first half of the ascent and then into a smaller path which wound its way up a ridge to a gorgeous alpine lake. Over the col and down through the rocks and pastures. A quick stop for a swim on the way. Through the lower valleys and final little ascent. Mosquito repellent mode activated (hoods up and zips to the top).

Travel Diary





→ 9.49 km ↑ 818 m

DAY 11: RESY – RIFUGIO GUIDE DEL CERVINO

Another early start to avoid incoming storms. Everyone got wet feet in the first hour due to long grasses and overnight rain. After a quick climb we popped out in these massive high alpine valleys that stretched for miles in the sun. We meandered passed isolated farms and abandoned buildings before appearing next to glistening alpine lakes.

The final ascent looked down into the wild valleys before we popped over and saw the matterhorn for the first time of the trip! (We did lose sight pretty quickly as the cloud took it). Down through the very built up ski resort area to the lift. Lift up to the hut, and into summer ski paradise – our highest point so far at 3400m.

Dinner at the hut enjoyed by all!!

Travel Diary

Summit Day

→ 7.70 km ↑ 381 m

DAY 12: BREITHORN DAY!!!!

Krzysztof's birthday today! After breakfast, we suited and booted for our Breithorn day. The weather had really closed in and even at the hut we could see less than 20m away. Our guides arrived and advised it should be possible, but we would have to take the lift up part of the way to help get us up there a bit faster - before the worst of the weather.

Once off the lift, we followed our guides along the ski area where we could barely see the person in front of us, let alone a path to follow. A layer of snow covered everything after the previous night's storm and the guides told us this was winter conditions.

Summit Day

Once connected on the rope, we snaked our way up the hillside, putting our crampons on for the steep section to the top. Our guides were excellent, and made sure we were all able to keep moving and comfortable on the terrain. They were also patient and knowledgeable. We zig zagged up the steep terrain and made our way onto the summit, where the cloud lifted. We finally got to peer at the view and were treated to some sun!

Back down the steep side we went, glad of the crampons. Then, crampons off as the clouds came back and the visibility disappeared. A speedy descent down through the ski area passed some impressive crevasses, and back to the hut for lunch!

Back at the hut we celebrated Krzysztof with a birthday he should remember for many years to come.

Summit Day

→ 10.68 km ↑ 113 m

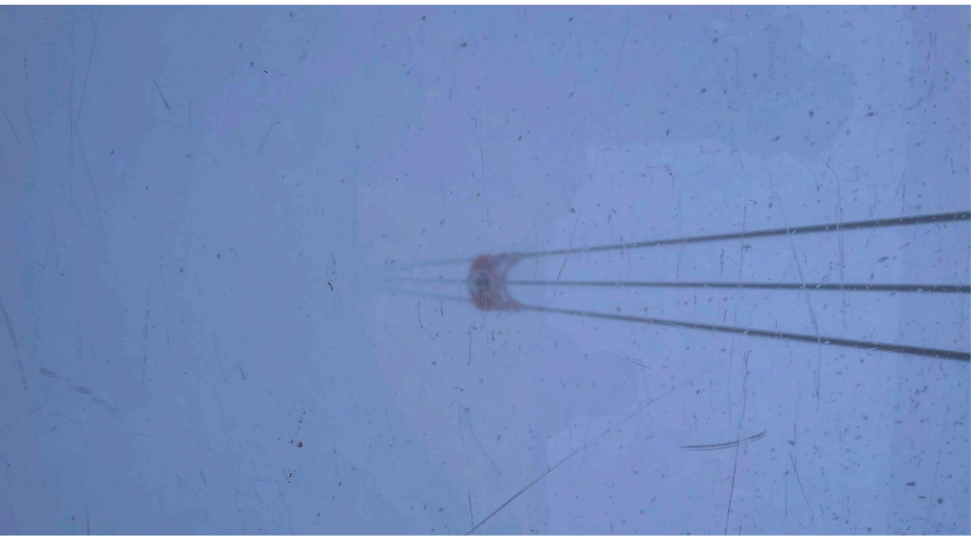
DAY 13: RIFUGIO GUIDE DEL CERVINO – ZERMATT

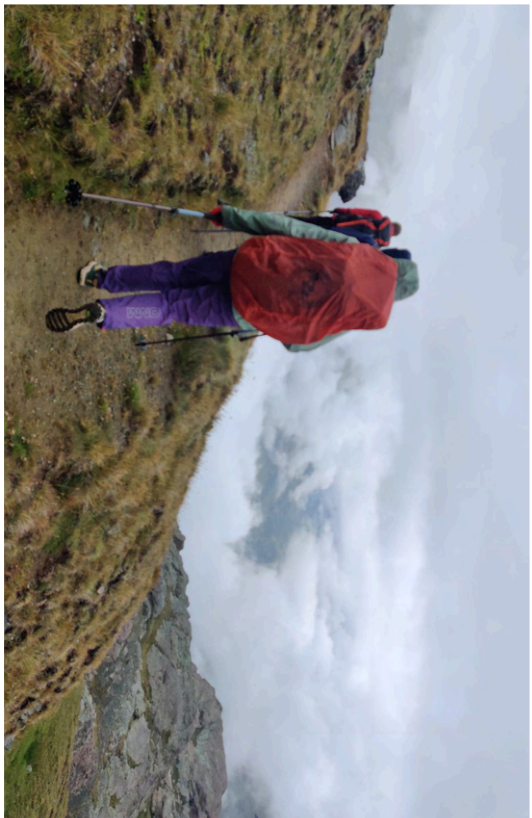
A shaky forecast the night before already had us nervous about crossing the Theodul glacier the following morning. But when we woke up to white out conditions it was looking a lot worse than expected. We waited around for a possible clearing in the clouds, but with no indication this would happen and the weather due to worsen throughout the day, we made the decision not to cross the glacier. Instead, we had to take the very expensive lift down to avoid it. Through the dense fog it travelled with even worse visibility than the previous day. Once down off the highest of the mountain areas, we had more of a walk through fog until we appeared below the clouds.

The long descent continued, and the weather improved as we descended down the mountain. Soon, it felt like a fever dream when the thick clouds swirled around us and blocked everything from site.

Down on the valley floor, we even saw some sun whilst we snacked on the very last of our food. Back at the campsite in Zermatt, we settled in for a feast on our last day.

Travel Diary





Travel Diary

→ 10.7 km ↑ 874 m

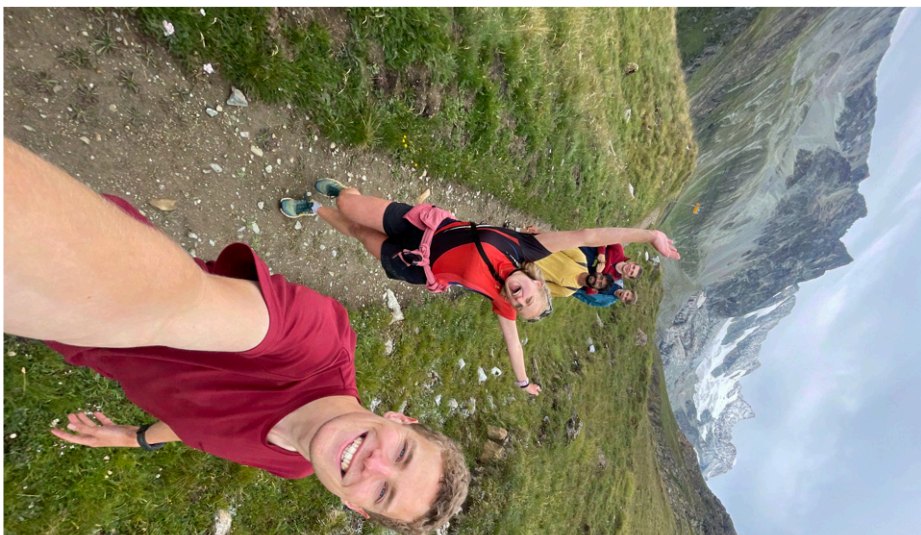
DAY 14: UP TO TRIFT AND HOME

Final day and final picture as a group before Leah disappeared for an early train.

The rest of us had some time so we headed up a hill for a bag-free walk, that was well worth it. We got the best views of the Monte Rosa we had had all trip, with barely a cloud in site.

Luke learned to always check the tent is empty before taking it down (especially check for a missing Samir). Krzysztof got a well-deserved nap on the train to the airport.

Travel Diary



CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

The end of our two beautiful weeks in the Alps was a bitersweet moment. On one hand, we'd all have to go back to regular life, without majestic mountain views. But on the other hand, we'd just completed a gruelling two-week tour of one of the most beautiful parts of the world, learned a huge amount about ourselves, and gained new mountaineering skills. Not to mention the improvement in physical fitness!

It felt to us like a huge achievement - and one that would not have been possible without the generous support of the university that brought us all together. From the nursery slopes of Snowdonia, where many of us learnt the ways of trekking from each other and our predecessors at the Outdoor Club*, to the summit of the Breithorn, it's hard to understate transformative impact the Imperial Exploration Board had on the trip.

The learnings of the trip will help the members of the team who are still studying in their leadership of the Outdoor Club, and the simple but effective lesson that no planning is ever meticulous enough (missing information about closed paths, or being forced to rearrange due to bad weather) will stand us all in good stead - not only on future trips outdoors, but as an analogy for life as a whole.

*Some Outdoor Club equipment was donated by previous Exploration Board expeditions.