

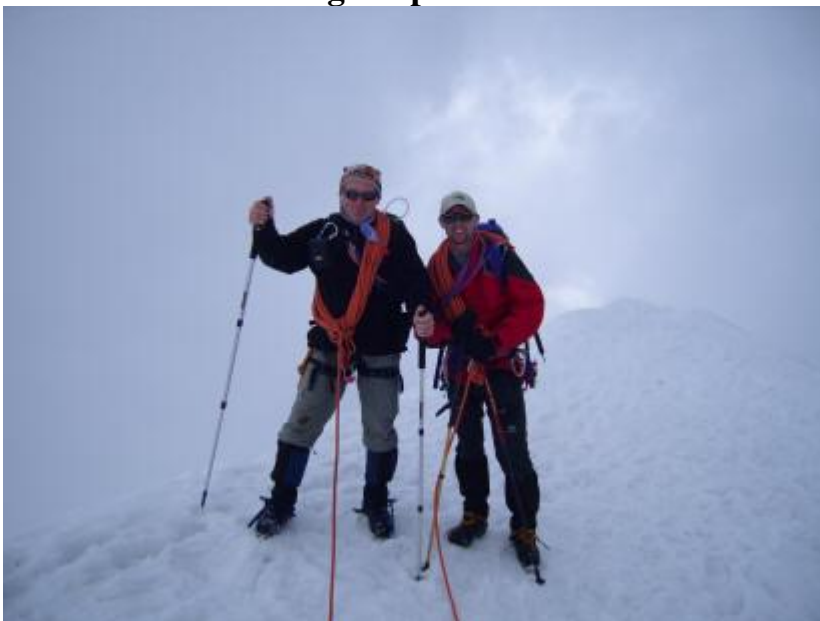
Matterhorn Madness

July 2007

What started out as an 'I've always wanted to climb the Matterhorn' conversation in the pub one Thursday evening turned into reality. Paul Lester, a young, strong marathon running climber, and Mick Burton, a strong fit 54 year young mate of his, set off on their journey. What follows is a summary of their diary:

Saturday 14 July 2007 – leaving Stafford in Mick's van loaded to the gunnels with climbing and camping gear, food and drink. Crossed the channel by Eurotunnel and drove to Bondo in Switzerland via San Moritz.

Sunday 15 July – We arrived in Bondo 26 hours after leaving Stafford, although tired, we were excited with the prospect of climbing the Piz Badile the following day. After driving through Bondo with its cobbled streets, we made sure we purchased a car parking ticket for the National Park at a cost of 6SFr (Swiss Francs). We continued up a rough track for approx 3kms. From the point of parking the van we had a one and a half hour walk to Sasc Fura Hut, which we stayed in overnight. On arrival Paul decided to do a recky on the climb which we intended to do the next morning. After realising that a further rope would be needed, Paul after little deliberation headed back to the van (yes 1 1/2 hours away) to fetch more rope. Mick on the other hand settled himself down to a long sleep.







Monday 16 July – We woke at 3.30am, had breakfast and headed off at 4am to climb Piz Badile north ridge - 3305m. It has a 700m climb with 27 pitches. The whole climb is clearly visible from Bondo. This is a real classic climb. Not as difficult as it looks, it is a smooth steep III, with only 3 harder sections. From the top we descended via the same route (20 rappels). We arrived back at the van at 10pm – 19 hours after setting off. Mick slept in the van and Paul bivouacked (he is the hardy one).

Tuesday 17 July - We rose at 8ish and drove to Zermatt. We set up camp at the Attermezen Camp Site, halfway between Randa and Tash – 10km from Zermatt. This is a good site, ample facilities and plenty of room. We had tried to book this in advance, but there is no need to, just turn up and there will always be space. There are frequent taxis to take you to the centre of Zermatt for 6SFr. That afternoon we reported to the Guide Centre in Zermatt, where we paid in advance for two guides to take us up the Matterhorn the following week. This was not cheap – 998SFr (approx £400) each.

Wednesday 18 July – We took the gondola to Trockenersteg and a steady walk across Theodul Glazier crossing the ski piste to Furgghorn - 3451m. From here to Theodulhorn, - 3469m we climbed the south ridge. We completed both climbs in 4hrs. We stayed overnight at the Rif.del Teodulo CAI.

Thursday 19 July – We rose at 4am, breakfasted and were out before sunrise to climb the northwest ridge of the Klein Matterhorn – 3880m – approx 4hrs. We had a welcome tea break before walking around the Breithorn Plateau

and up the southwest flank of the Breithorn 4164m, which took 4hrs. We returned to Zermatt via the gondola for a well earned rest at the campsite.

Friday 20 July – We used our van to travel to the next valley – Arolla. Taking the van as far as possible up the track we walked up the zigzag path over the snow field to the Cab.de Bertol CAS – 3311m taking 6hrs.



Saturday 21 July – 4am We started out from the hut. We crossed the Glazier de l'Aiguille to reach the Aiguille de la Tsa east face – 3668m, topping it at 6.30am. Looking up from the base the final 300m is a sharp pinnacle requiring ropes and a steady nerve. We walked back to Arolla to pick up the van and returned to the campsite.

Sunday 22 July – Day of rest. Browsing the local graveyard we noted the majority of headstones bore the words ‘died on the Matterhorn’. This certainly gave us a feeling of trepidation.



Monday 23 July – We took the Riffelberg Railway from Zermatt centre to the Riffelhorn. We spent the day rock climbing on the Riffelhorn – 2925m.

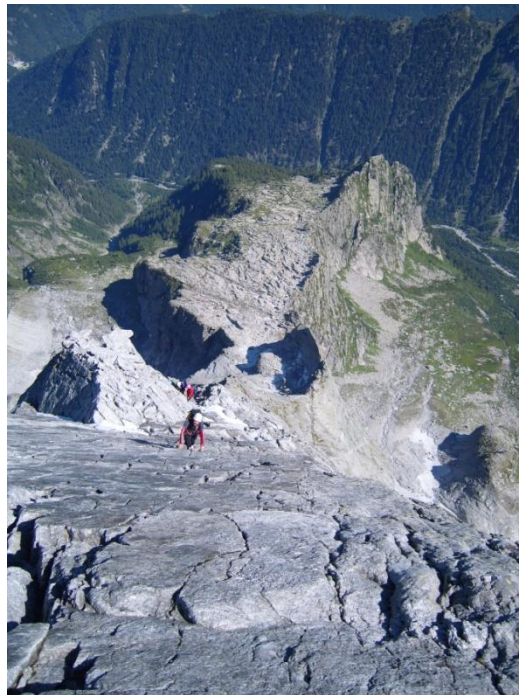
Tuesday 24 July – Day of rest. Poor weather on the Matterhorn overnight prevented us from making an attempt.

Wednesday 25 July – Returned to the Riffelhorn for a further days rock climbing.



Thursday 26 July – 10am we turned up at the Guide Centre in the belief that we would be setting out for the Matterhorn only to be told that no guides were available. We were shocked because we had booked and paid for two guides some 9 days previously. Seeing that we were a ‘little’ upset they obviously changed their minds and magicked two guides for our ascent the following day. This, bear in mind, was planned as our final day in the Alps so it was cutting things a bit fine to say the least. At 12noon we set off via the cable car

and a 3hr walk to reach the Hornlihutte where we stayed overnight. Before bedding down we learned that three climbers had lost their lives that day attempting the summit of the Matterhorn.



Friday 26 July – After a very restless night (noisy neighbours) we rose at 3am, breakfasted and out by 4am to realise our objective of reaching the summit of the Matterhorn. Paul and his guide set off at a fast pace and maintained it throughout. He completed the climb and returned to the Hornlihutte in 5hrs 10mins. Mick and his guide were slightly slower at 6hrs 30mins. Both of us were overcome with relief and satisfaction at achieving all our objectives. We returned to the campsite at 2.30pm. Not much time to rest we made ready for

our long journey home. We set off at 5.30pm to drive to Calais for our crossing at 8.30am on Saturday.



Mick's acknowledgement:

This had been a superb fortnight, excellent weather, wonderful climbing throughout. This was only achievable due to the precise preparation and dedication of Paul in the months leading up to the adventure. The memories

will take Mick into the winter of his life when Paul will be climbing in his



autumnal youth.