

Road Trip

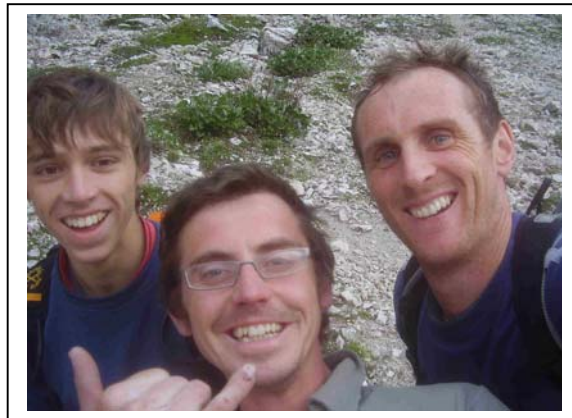
By Adam Hughes

Climbers:

Adam 'Bebbie' Hughes
(Hughes Mountaineering)

Neil 'Geek' McGeachy
(EICA: Ratho)

Jonathan 'Weegie' Stocking
(British / Scottish Junior Climbing Team)



After a conversation with Neil near the end of the winter season about the climbing he has been missing out on by sports climbing and cragging mainly in Britain, we got talking about the dolomites. By the time we had finished we were checking rotas, and had an objective, the Brandler-Hasse on the Cima Grande:

At an apparent E5 (7a+) and one of the most sort after routes in the Alps, it was going to be good. After a few weeks talking about the trip we thought that it would be a good opportunity for Johnny to experience something different. Secretly, it was nice to have another rope gun along. This would be the first alpine experience for both of them, and what a place to start. So, the team was set, the goal an exciting and challenging one and training about to start.

Being the weakest link in the trio I was keen to get as fit as possible after a good winter season. Things started well, straight back on E3 to get the head back in gear and ticking 7b+ as the first sport route of the season. I couldn't have hoped for a better start.

Then at the beginning of April I hurt my back very badly. After going through the usual 'it will be ok in a couple of days' process it was clear it was going to be a little longer. Long story short, four months later, only ten days cragging under my belt, we where in the Dolomites. Good job the other two are fit.

After driving for two days we decided to get the muscles moving on an easy route

and see how we were climbing together as a three. We chose the South Face (Cassin Route) VII- (E2) on the Cima Picola. This is a short route at 300m with some good climbing and excellent situations. The perfect warm up and one I would recommend to people who are thinking of climbing in the Dolomites.



All went well, as we moved quickly up the route with only a little bit of grip at the loose bold sections. Even the decent went well with only one minor rope jam in the six or so abseils down the rubble filled chimney, Result.

Once we had packed the kit away we headed over the shoulder to have a look at the Cima Grande North face. It was just as big as I remembered from my last trip here, and from the look on Neil and Johnny's faces it was a lot bigger than they had thought. With nervous excitement we were psyched to return tomorrow.

Thursday morning saw a 4am start and an excited walk around to the route. We were the first people there and got started straight away. We had a mix of topos that I had found on the t' interweb, all of which were not overly clear about the starting two pitches. I started and thought that I had linked the first two pitches and belayed below a good looking pitch, pretty happy to be on the move. The others came up quickly and Neil took over for the next stint.

After another pitch and a half the climbing was suddenly much harder than it should have been. Even after mine and Johnny's helpful comments to push on and man-up, Neil was back at the belay. It appeared that we had wandered onto the Super Directissima; a little harder than planned at E7.

A quick retreat and a rather bitty chat with another Italian climber and we had the right direction, "over there"! Very helpful. We headed over there but things still didn't go to plan. So we bailed, with the view of coming back tomorrow and going the right way, 'simples'.

A less enthusiastic 4am start and an even less enthusiastic walk back to the route saw us ready to start again. We all felt a little pressure to get up the route



and this made things a bit more focused. Armed with a better sense of direction I ran up the first pitch. The second pitch involved easy but bold climbing that went sideways, down, then up. No wonder we got lost. After this things became a lot more obvious.

We made very good time, block leading and climbing at the same time as two seconds. After what seemed like a very long E5 already, we arrived at the crux section. Johnny did a sterling effort linking a solid 6b pitch into the first 7a pitch. After some hard sustained climbing he ran out of quick draws short of the belay. This gave us all an atmospheric hanging stance.

I took over and did a short section to get us to the main, better belay. From here Neil went into over drive, leading the next three hard pitches. A truly inspiring thing to watch as he power-screamed his way through some extremely tiring sections. Things eased off after this but tiredness and frustration at the never ending final sections caused some entertaining mood swings.

I earned my keep on the last five or so pitches which took in some bold and less solid climbing to take us to the top. With not much daylight left, cloud coming in fast, we needing to descend quickly.

This proved to be a bit difficult. It appeared that only one of us had remembered to bring a head torch. We managed to descend the abseils with the help of a French couple, but with no head torches the down climb sections were too dangerous.



This was the first time I have been benighted, and hopefully the last. After a very long and cold night with much manly hugging to keep warm, the light came back and we could pick our way down the descent. By 7am we had made it back to the car and could finally get some food, but what an experience.

After a rest day and some fishing we decided to leave Italy and head to Austria. Johnny had the world cup coming up and needed to do some hard sports climbing to train. He had heard about a valley called Zillertal near Innsbruck, so off we went.

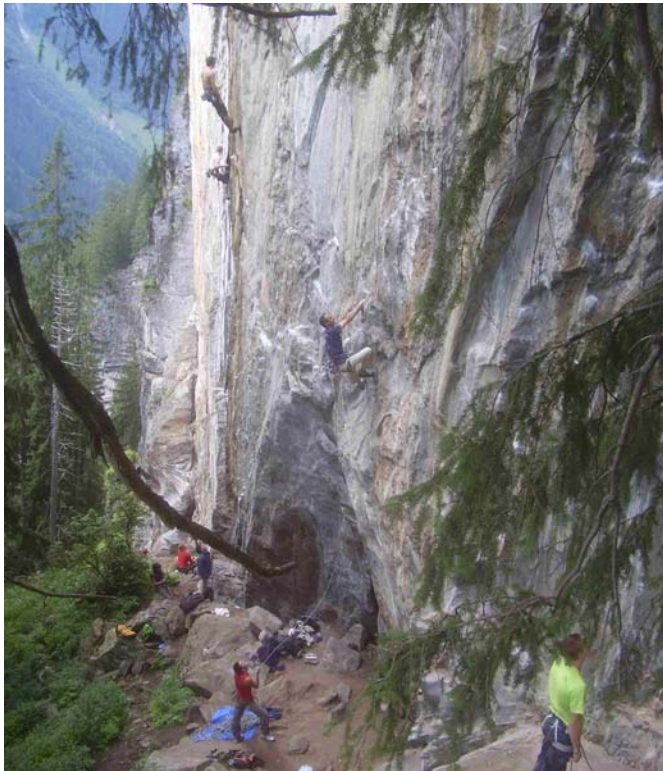


It was a Sunday when we drove over, thinking that this popular tourist valley would have many tourist info offices to help point us in the right direction. NO!

It would appear that they don't do Sunday. After driving around for about three hours looking for crags in this Austrian Mecca of granite sports climbing we decided that another rest day was not the worst thing. Next day we had more luck at the tourist info, but no luck at the climbing shop. Looking through the window we could see all the guide books on the desk, but the shop only opened 3pm to 6pm (what is that all about!).

More frustration and pastries later, we were 30 Euros down but knew where we were headed. It also appears to rain all the time in Zillertal. So, having found some steep looking crags in Ginzling, we finally got on some rock. The climbing was awesome. Due to everywhere being mostly wet, even though the weather improved as the week went on we climbed in Ginzling the whole time. This was no bad thing.

There are many sectors, but we were based in the Bergstation. Sector. Here provided some good routes to warm up on, as well as breaking up the trudge up the hill to sector Sterne. Despite the climbing being very burly and bouldery, we all enjoyed it.



Johnny flashed a hard 7c I was working, and he made very short work of his first 8a+. Neil made a quick ascent of 7c and worked a number of harder climbs. I even managed to on sight a hard 7a+, which felt like something special after the preparation I hadn't had for the trip.

The final day climbing before the drive back saw us doing a little bouldering. With no mats and some bad landing we didn't push things out. It only when you climb on the boulders you can see how this would help on the routes, a good way to get used to the rock and climbing style.

Overall, a successful trip with some excellent climbing in fantastic setting, definitely recommended.

Thanks to my sponsors Edelrid for great kit.

And now a word from the young Weegie:

My First Alps Trip

By Jonathan Stocking

During the summer I headed out to the Dolomites with Neil McGeachy and Adam Hughes with the objective of climbing the Brandler Hasse route on the North Face of the Cima Grande.

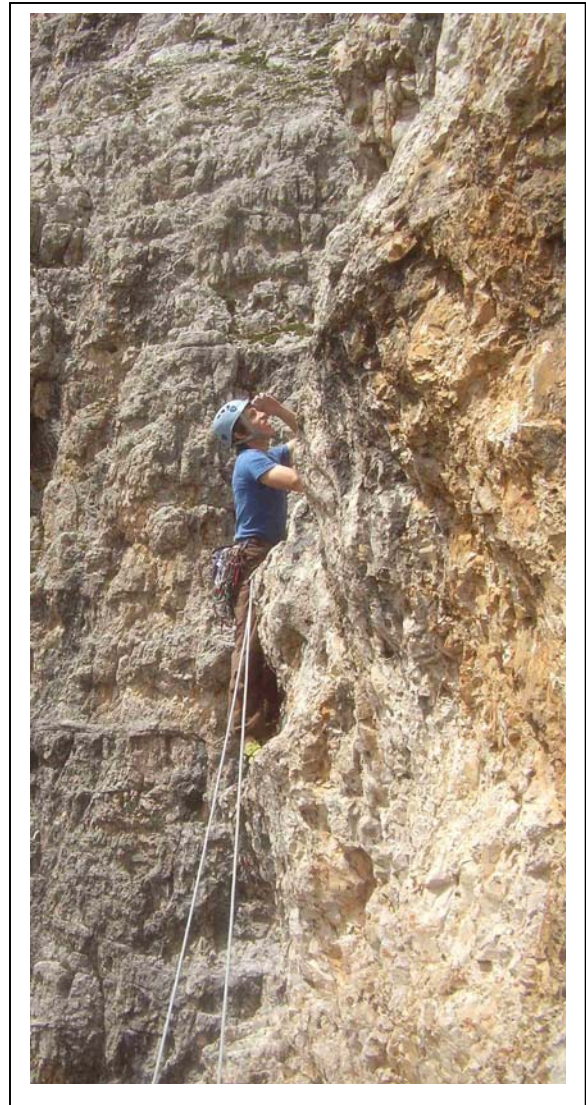
The drive down was epic and we were all really eager to pull on some rock so the day after we arrived we got straight on the South Face Cassin Route, a classic E2 around 300m long. The route was brilliant, a bit loose in places but an excellent warm up for the main objective.

An early 4am start saw us at the bottom of the route before the hordes came along. I was a bit apprehensive as I didn't know what to expect. Here I was a wee lad from Scotland standing at the bottom of one of the most famous routes in the region, I was so psyched.

Adam stormed up the first pitch and we followed. After a few more pitches it was Neil's turn to lead. Very quickly he realised that the pitch he was on was way too hard to be E5. Adam and I didn't believe him so a bit of encouragement and heckling pushed him on; but the holds ran out and the pegs were rubbish so he down climbed the whole pitch.

After a bit of debate and studying the vague Topo we had we realised it was an E7 called Super Directissima we were on, so we baled and abbed back down to the ground confident we wouldn't get lost the next day.

Another 4am start wasn't that appealing and we were all very reluctant to get up. A quick bowl of porridge and we set off to rip it up on the Brandler



Hasse. We sped through the first five or six pitches but there was a lot of added pressure as there were four teams on the route.

We were climbing very efficiently and confident we would make it off the mountain before it got dark. The crux corner system hung over us and I was first to climb one of the crux pitches. I set off, powering up the corner until I dislodged a huge block straight above Adam and Neil's heads. My head was shot but I just pushed on to the top.

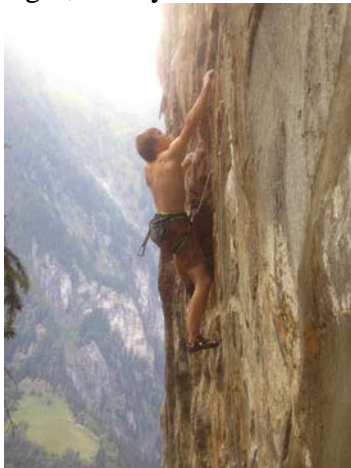
To make matters worse I was at the wrong belay at the top of the pitch so three of us were hanging off two bendy pegs and a 'cam.

Neil saved the day and pushed through the other crux pitches, which was very inspiring to watch. These involved some horrible off-width cracks and loose spikes lodged in cracks. We managed to get out of the corner system and on to easier ground. Even though the climbing was easy the pitches were very run out and loose which spiced it up a little.

You find really strange bits of gear on these pitches like bits of wood jammed in pockets and wooden stakes jammed in cracks with a peg wedged in the side of it. Adam fired through several of these pitches taking us to the 'ring bang' which we new our decent route was on.

Tempers were frayed because of the pressure we were under to get down before dark, but we had to push on. We traversed the ring band to the South Ridge but by the time we got there it was dark and we only had one head torch so getting down that night wasn't going to happen.

We managed to do a couple of abseils with a French team but that was about it, so a cold night was spent on the rock. It definitely put hairs on my chest – it was freezing. We started heading back down at around 5am, down-climbing and abseiling into a gully that lead us to the scree slopes which were a very welcome sight; finally we were off the mountain.



The weather started to turn bad so we had a rest day then headed for Zillertal, an amazing valley in the south of Austria famous for its sport climbing. It took a bit of effort to find but we eventually got there to find that all the crags are hidden away in forests so we had to wait until 3'o'clock to get a guide from the climbing shop it was totally worth it: the place is mind blowing.

It takes a bit of getting used to; the rock is granite and has lots of weird side-pull and press moves. I jumped on a 7c called Tannen Judas, I was psyched for the flash but didn't take enough clips up with me so I had to get lowered off – it was gutting but I got it second go.

Neil and Adam also had a go but Adam was a bit wasted after his impressive on-sight of Chef Gontier 7a+ which turned out to be very hard. The next day I decided to get a project on the go so I tried an 8a+ called Little Sister and managed to tick it 3rd go which I was really happy with.

Neil ticked the 7c and had a tickle on a 7c+ that looked impossible. Overall the trip was a success; we ticked the objective of the Brandler Hasse and climbed some other amazing routes along the way. I'll definitely be heading back to Zillertal sometime soon.

Find out the whole story from Jonathan at the Climbing Rocks Festival at EICA: Ratho on the 10th October 2009, where he will be giving a slide lecture as part of the festivities.

