

# Granite-climbing weekend in Bergell (July 2019)

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## GRANITE-CLIMBING WEEKEND IN BERGELL (JULY 2019)

During the “Albigna Alpine Tour and Climbing Weekend” in July 2019, a small group of AACZ members (Christina Zimmermann, Florian Seliger, Elena Borisova, Johann Wäsle, Matija Brumat and two non-AACZ friends) explored the beautiful Albigna area in Bergell. The scenery was stunning: a remote area with wild mountains and sharp ridges. On the first evening, when making plans for Saturday, we were overwhelmed by the huge number of options. Christina and I decided to climb a newly bolted 15-pitch route through the southwest wall of Piz Balzet (“Via del Gipeto”). We found the topo in the Albigna hut, but it is also accessible on the hut’s website.

We started at around 6 o’clock in the morning. The approach was negligible since Piz Balzet is just behind the hut. The first two pitches (3a, 6a) were a bit wet (there had been some rain in the night), so I pulled on some quick draws. Otherwise, it was not too difficult. The fifth pitch was again 6a. Christina led the pitch. I found it much harder than the first 6a because there was a short but tricky slab where you needed to place your feet confidently. I realized that the Bergell granite might be a bit different from the Furka granite I am more used to. But generally, I hadn’t been climbing many slabs this year and didn’t feel comfortable mentally. The biggest challenge was the next pitch (6a), which I had to lead. It starts rather easily, but then you have to climb up a big ramp without any good holds. You need to get your feet up on the ramp and stand up. As the last bolt was several meters below and I couldn’t place any gear, I was really afraid of doing the move. I needed two rests before I dared to move onwards. But suddenly, I was on the ramp and could go on. Later on, there

was another 5c which was really fun – epic granite climbing with athletic moves, which I generally prefer to slabs. Afterwards, we had to do a 40m traverse (2b) and then abseil from the gendarme. After having reached the bottom, we realized two things: First, the clouds had become very dense and we were afraid of being hit by a thunderstorm. Second, we were way too slow in order to finish the route in a reasonable time. There were only five pitches left with moderate difficulties, but afterwards there is still a lot of scrambling and one more abseil before you reach the top. The climbing was however fun and fortunately it did not start to rain. We felt a bit lost in the scrambling part, but we somehow made it to the summit – however, again we lost a lot of time. The descent goes via the normal route, but we suddenly realized that we didn’t have a topo or a description of the normal route. We found some belay stations and waymarks where we started abseiling and sometimes unsecured downclimbing. After the last abseil, I wanted to pull the rope and suddenly realized that the rope was totally stuck – oh no!

It was already dinner time and we were still only halfway to the hut. I tried to pull the rope several times, but it didn’t move, so I started a self-ascent with prusik slings. Christina was waiting at the bottom, unsecured but in flat terrain. She started to freeze because it was still very cloudy. There was however a much bigger danger arising from big loose rocks in the wall that I could kick off easily. They would have hit her, so I told her to move out of the way. After perhaps 30m of self-ascending, which turned out to be very exhausting, I saw that the rope was stuck in a granite crack. I removed the rope from the crack and tried

to abseil carefully so that the rope couldn't touch the crack again.

Back to the bottom, I was confident to finish the day successfully. I pulled the rope – it was again stuck – oh shit! We called our friends in the hut and informed them that we were safe and would come late. We also thought about leaving the rope where it was, but that would have ended all further climbing plans. I was exhausted and my hands were bloody from pulling, but I started another self-ascent. This time, I managed to remove the rope successfully. We put our ropes in the bag packs and continued the descent which now followed a clear path. There was still a short section – maybe in the second or third grade – where I insisted on down-climbing

instead of abseiling because I didn't want to use the ropes again. We arrived at the hut way after 8 o'clock, and luckily we still got dinner.

After the unexpectedly long climbing day, we decided to do a shorter and way easier route on Sunday, together with other AACZ huttlis. This led us to Piz Casnil. On the last day, we went to Spazzacaldeira where we wanted to climb the famous Fiamma. The Fiamma can be accessed via multiple climbing routes. We decided to climb the left-most route "Fiamma Via Süd". This route is a bit hidden, perhaps less crowded, and the way to get there is a bit shorter compared to the routes that are close to the cable car station. The route starts to get exciting after the third pitch. First, there is a short downward climb along a fixed rope.

Christina in front of Fiamma (photo Florian Seliger)



The next pitch (5c) offers interesting crack climbing, but the distances between the bolts are very long. The climbing is exhausting both physically and mentally. I was really happy after reaching the belay station. A 6a+ slab was again challenging. The last pitch was only 5a, but I was tired and needed much more time than usual to get to the top. From the top we had a perfect view to Fiamma. It would have been a piece of cake to get there. However, from what we knew, the Fiamma is quite a mental challenge: only 5c, but slabby and mandatory climbing. We didn't feel good enough for that on this day. It was one of the hottest days of the summer with temperatures approaching more than 30 degrees Celsius down in the valley. We also had a long return trip to Zurich ahead of us. Finally, we decided to skip the Fiamma, descend and take the cable car down.

The good thing is that there are so many options for climbing that we can come back any time, climb other routes – including the

Fiamma – if we feel prepared for it. As I read on a Bergell website: “Every climber has to be on the top of Fiamma at some point in his life”. In the meantime, there is still enough room to improve our confidence on granite slabs.

*Florian Seliger*

Via del Gipeto, 6a, 15 pitches: Very nice and long route with solid rock, bolted, but less so in easy sections, sometimes long run-outs. Some smaller and medium camalots might be helpful. The scrambling parts are easy, but took us more time than expected.

Fiamma Via Süd, 6a+, 8 pitches (without Fiamma): Can be used as a direct access to climb the Fiamma; perhaps less crowded than the routes that are closer to the cable car. Interesting and varied climbing. For us, the crux pitches were the first 5c (crack climbing, long run-outs) and the 6a+ (merciless slab climbing). Camalots are helpful in some pitches.

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## STIFTUNGSFEST 2019 AT THE MISCHABELHÜTTE

As by tradition, the AACZ Huttli met at the Mischabelhütte for the Stiftungsfest 2019. As always, it was a friendly a cheerful event, greatly hosted by Maria and her team. Thanks again! We had the entire “old dorm” for ourselves, which had a nice feeling of traveling back in time: dark, a slight smell of mold, squeaky beds, yet a warm atmosphere.

The touring was somewhat unusual. No team climbed Nadelhorn this year (maybe

everybody went too many times already?). The upper part of the east ridge of Lenzspitze had fallen off earlier in the season and was not yet practicable, so that was no option either (the weather forecast would not have allowed it anyway). Instead, several teams did the traverse from Bordierhütte via Balfrin and Gross Bigerhorn. Noémie, Seth and I climbed up to the Bordierhütte on Friday. The path leading to the hut had been remade. Besides a few (extremely cute)