

Five days in the heart of the Ampezzaner Dolomites

Autor(en): **Charles, Yoann / Trelu, Yoann**

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FIVE DAYS IN THE HEART OF THE AMPEZZANER DOLOMITES

In February 2020, a friend of ours had the great idea of inviting us to Cortina d'Ampezzo. This excursion to the Dolomites was a first for both of us, and to make good use of it, we decided to take a few days off. Rendez-vous point at Zurich airport and off we go. After a five hours' drive, a festive evening and a sleepy night, we head to the Monte Cristallo massif for our first ski tour. Vivified by the cold of a not-so-early start (10:30am), we cross the rocky gates standing at the entrance of the Val Fonda and start skinning up the narrow valley. All the way up the Val Fonda, we can observe the Canale di Adriana (5.1 E2, also known as Canale Staunies) closing the north end of the valley, perhaps the most famous couloir around Cortina. This long and steep gorge is named after the mother of the early 90s Italian skier Kristian Ghedina. Three other couloirs descending from the Cresta Bianca terminate in the Val Fonda. Later on, a short and steep constriction on the eastern banks of the valley leads us, skis on the pack, to the Circo del Cristallo. From there we discover the Passo Cristallo, the Canale Vallençant (5.2 E3, also known as Canale del Prete) and the Canale Bernardi (4.3 E2, also called Canale Norte di Mezzo), our goal for the day.

From the base of the couloir we notice two skiers climbing in the middle of Monte Cristallo, over a terrain pertaining more to alpinism than to anything we would ski. It turns out that it is one of the most technical tour of the massif, the Canale Innerkofler (5.3 E3), which branches out of the Bernardi's lower section. About halfway up the couloir, we encounter a large pocket of soft, wind-blown snow that would hurtle down the couloir if skied on. We decide not to play the odds, and after a few jump turns

we are gently cruising down the Circo Cristallo towards Val Fonda, and ultimately back to our starting point. With its numerous options for steep skiing and stunning, wild scenery, the Cristallo massif will certainly draw us back to its slopes in the future. This first day in the Ampezzane Dolomiti ends in style with a dinner at the scenic Capana Ra Valles in the Tofane, west of Cortina.

The following day we set our aim to the Forcella Colfiedo, a classic round trip north of the Cristallo mountain. After a long flat section, we gain some elevation by alternating skinning and boot packing in a snow stiffened by the warm temperatures and poor precipitations of this winter. We eventually reach a cirque leading to the Colfiedo pass, crowned by the Croda Rossa and its red rocks glowing in the midday sun. Upon reaching the pass we get caught by a cold breeze and hastily switch to downhill mode. The ski run enters a widening snow field dominated by a typically Dolomitian landscape of steep cliffs and yellow limestone. We then cruise down a hilly snow area to reach the forest and its zigzagging, thigh-burning singletracks leading to the parking lot where we left our cars. While most of the Dolomites have been plagued with poor snow quality this winter, we actually found some of that transformed snow that we usually enjoy in spring.

On Monday February 10th we take a day off from aerobic activities to go skiing at the Lagazuoi resort, featuring a wealth of easy slopes for our less ski-addicted friends. A few of the steeper slopes are worth skiing on account of their length and the beautiful views they offer on the Cinque Torri. And while we are at it, we make the most of this recovery day by

sampling local specialties during a lunch at the Rifugio Averau at the top of the slopes.

For our last day in the Dolomites, we hire local guide Simone Corte Pause to go ice climbing. We are uncertain to find good ice to climb because the weather had been warm and dry all winter, but Simone knows his region well and takes us 8km south of Dobbiaco in Südtirol. The icefall offers two lines, the upper pitches being reachable by foot if the base of the icefall is crowded. The lower section sits at a gentler angle, making it ideal for warm-up or initiation while the upper section is steeper and more featured (WI4/4+). This is a perfect location to improve our ice-climbing technique and to learn more about ice anchors. What originated as a half-day lesson ends up extending way into the afternoon. We benefit greatly from

Simone's knowledge about ice-climbing, as well as from anecdotes about big blockbuster movies for which he was a consultant. A good day is not truly done until you are completely exhausted, so we decide to hit the local gym and burn the last toxins remaining from our overly festive dinners.

As we drive through Austria on our way back to Zurich the following day, we cannot help but make plans for a future visit of the Dolomites. The Canale di Adriana, the Sella group with its renowned Joel and Holzer couloirs, are just examples that illustrate the potential of this beautiful region of the Alps. With so much more to explore and such good food, we will surely be back soon!

Yoann Charles, Yoann Trelu



Bootpacking up the Forcella Colfiedo, with the Tre Cime di Lavaredo in the background (photo Yoann Trelu)