

Austria 2014: Expedition Report

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The summer of 2014 was a very exciting one, we planned a fieldwork adventure to the Zillertal Alps in Austria to carry out fieldwork for our IGS projects. With the help of the Queen Mary Expedition Fund I was able to afford to go up into the mountains in Austria for a whole month to not only gather data vital to my dissertation but also learn all about the data collection techniques and the local culture.

I did my fieldwork in the foreground of the Waxeggkees Glacier, one of three retreating glaciers in the area of study over 2400 metres about sea level.

The only accommodation available in the vast and remote valley was the Berliner Hutte, a traditional mountain chalet type building with a magnificent communal dining room and comfortable little rooms which we stayed in. All the food was cooked by the owners of the hut and we were very well looked after for the duration of our stay.

The solid base of having a warm dry place to come back to made some of the slightly less summery weather easier to deal with and meant that we could still work even when the visibility dropped below five metres and it rained for hours on end. Between the bad spells of weather there were long days of beautiful sunshine and getting out onto the mountains to work was easy and very enjoyable.

My personal project involved dating glacial landforms in the foreground of the Waxeggkees Glacier using Lichenometry and Schmidt Hammer measurements, to begin with my first few days of data collection included gathering calibration data from local dated surfaces such as the bridge over the meltwater river and the small farms in the valley floor. I found this aspect of my project very enjoyable because I got to explore the local community and meet lots of people. Next I mapped out my valley using geomorphological mapping techniques, this involved walking all over the valley, right up the precarious lateral moraines and right up to the snout of the glacier itself. The key to good mapping is to try and see every aspect of the ground you're mapping from as many different angles as possible. Once I had mapped as many features as I could from exploration on the ground I started to plan out my Lichenometry and Schmidt hammer data collection, I numbered and colour coded the major moraine ridges that I had identified with my mapping and then worked my way along each taking measurements and samples.

The wider importance of my research is to map out the progression of retreat of the snout of the Waxeggkees Glacier and to perhaps from that draw conclusions about local climate conditions.

Overall the trip to Austria was a success, I enjoyed it greatly and it definitely developed me not only academically but also personally. Thanks go to the Queen Mary Expedition Fund for making it possible.

