

Zemmgrund, Austria 2014

Expedition Report

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Introduction

With the help of the Queen Mary Expedition Fund myself and three other Geography students were able to undertake an expedition to the Zemmgrund Valley in the Zillertal Alps region of Austria. This expedition allowed us to carry out research for our undergraduate dissertations, focused broadly around glacial and proglacial geomorphology. The fund allowed us to pay for part of the accommodation bill at the Berliner Hütte, which was our base of operations for the month long expedition.

The hut was located quite a way up the valley and could only be reached by a three hour hike from the nearest bus stop. During the initial hike up we were accompanied by weather that tested the limits of our waterproofs, leaving us thoroughly soaked by the time we arrived.

This didn't dampen our spirits, however, and the following day we immediately set out to start work in the stunning scenery that surrounded the hut. All three of us had prior experience working in the mountains, but we were still a little bit unsure about what to expect in this new environment.

Fieldwork

We each had different projects to complete which required working in pairs, splitting our time between working on our own projects and assisting with each other's. This arrangement had the benefit of allowing us each to see much more of the surrounding area than we otherwise would, alternating between river work in the valley floor and sedimentological analysis high up in the distinctive moraine ridges that are found within the three sub-valleys that feed the Zemmgrund.

My project involved examining the effect of glacial fluctuation on the three rivers which flow out of the three glaciers; one for each sub-valley. I investigated flow rates of the river with the aim to pick up the diurnal signals of the glacier as melt rates increase in the warmer daytime



temperatures. I additionally looked at the historical shift of the river channels, which involved extensive mapping of the valley floor and any dry or extinct channels that were evident.

Most days began with a 06:30 wake up, with enough time for breakfast, to make lunch and to collect the kit that we would need for the day. We would then spend the whole day out in the valleys, before returning at about 17:00. The very mountainous terrain in the area required significant climbs and descents with every walk (my GPS accounted for 15km of vertical walking over the month!) which meant we were always exhausted having finished a day of work.

Downtime

On our days off we took advantage of the fantastic location and explored some of the areas that we didn't reach with our fieldwork. These mostly involved significant hikes up to the nearby peaks and ridgelines, encountering lots of wild-grazing sheep and horses, rock scrambles and waist-deep snow around the high-level glaciers, which was a real novelty for July! No matter where we went, we were always rewarded with spectacular views over the valleys.

Overall Experience

The expedition has proved invaluable for my dissertation research, whilst at the same time opening my eyes to the stunning landscape of Austria. It far exceeded my expectations in every way, and I am very grateful for the opportunity to experience this extraordinary landscape. With that in mind, I recognise that it would not have been possible without the generous help of the Queen Mary Expedition Fund

