

A final trip to Austria

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At the beginning of July, I travelled to Austria to complete the final portion of fieldwork for my PhD in Physical Geography. This was the third and final trip for our research group, and featured four of us who have travelled to the upper Zemmgrund (valley) every year since 2014. It was our final year of staying at the Berliner Hütte, a mountain hut (although more like hotel) operated by the German Alpine Club (Deutscher Alpenverein). We were again spoiled with warm (and new!) beds to sleep in, hot coffee in the morning, and four course meals in the evening.



Morning view of Hornkees (glacier) from my Schlafzimmer in the Berliner Hütte

This trip was necessary for all of us to finish up personal research projects as part of a larger group effort in understanding the glacial geomorphology and sedimentology of three glacial valleys and landscape evolution since approximately 1800. Two MSc students had stayed on after their BSc projects to extend their work on lichenometric landform dating methods in high-mountain settings and the formation of lateral moraines. My supervisor, Dr. Sven Lukas, and a colleague from Aberystwyth University, Dr. Marie Busfield, finished data collection on an exposure partially excavated by a modern channel. I was able to study another exposure in the valley that constitutes a prominent part of my PhD thesis.

The primary purpose of my trip, however, was to collect ground-penetrating radar data to investigate subsurface sediment in my study area, and to assist one of the MSc students with the same. Unfortunately, technical equipment does not always cooperate, and we were not able to collect these datasets. We were still able to collect important data regarding the sedimentological composition of lateral moraines by excavating representative faces through several of these landforms.



Teamwork required to excavate boulder lateral moraines in the Schwarzensteinkees valley

Unrelated to our research, we had the unique opportunity to witness and take part in a Steinbock re-wilding. Five zoo-raised Steinbock were released to the mountains outside of the hut to promote a healthier genetic line in the region.



Steinbock rewilding in the upper Zemmgrund

Overall, this trip formed an integral part of my PhD research and additionally contributed to my development as a future academic professional. Maintaining research projects in this area has helped create long-lasting projects and has also led to collaboration across institutions. This project awarded me the opportunity to co-supervise four undergraduate dissertation projects in 2014-2015, which then extended to co-supervising two MSc thesis projects in 2015-2016. The experiences of leading and helping students in the field, as well as afterwards during data analysis, presentation, and writing, has awarded me the paramount opportunity to develop my supervisory skills in

preparation for a career in academia. This experience will undoubtedly help me stand out as a candidate when applying for positions at the completion of my PhD.