

Zermatt or Bust Feb. 1 to Feb. 12, 2013

By Arlen Isham, TC

It is very early Friday morning, Feb. 1. Sleepy eyed skiers are arriving about 5:00 am at Bush Airport for the long journey to Zermatt, Switzerland. An estimated 27 hours will be used for the bus to the airport, Delta plane from Houston to Atlanta, pick up skiers, Delta plane to JFK in New York, pick up skiers, Delta plane to Milan, Italy, pick up skiers, 4 hour bus to Tasch, Switzerland, short 20 minutes train from Tasch to Zermatt, and then Taxi for luggage to our hotel.

Our group of 34 includes 13 new members from around the country including people from San Antonio, Austin, Atlanta, Philadelphia, and New Jersey. The internet is an amazing opportunity for skiers to search out ski trips and we picked up skiers, who make international trips each year with other ski clubs.

Carol & Pat Croom, and Arlen Isham (TC) have taken advantage of the stay overnight and park free for two weeks at the Quality Inn at the airport.

Tom Huzzey got caught up in lines at check-in and security and missed the plane to Atlanta even though the plane was still at the gate, when he arrived. Delta rerouted him through Detroit and he caught up at JFK. We receive the news that **Faye & Andy Rovegno** will not be joining us at JFK. Andy had a medical issue and they both had to cancel out. Bummer!

Several of the group have gone on ahead before Friday, **Stan Broniak, Pam Smith, Manny Gillio, Ana Martin, Sarah Granbery, Theresa Toward, & Robert & Carol Viktorin** meet us at the Milan Airport to catch the bus. **Chris Urbanczyk and Tracy Vu** are traveling to Zermatt via train from San Moritz after a couple days stay there. **Stan Broniak & Pam Smith** win the award for the last person to show up for the bus.

We arrive one hour early at 6:20 am.. Customs and luggage collection at the Milan Malpensa Airport was smooth. Our bus is rolling at 8:30 am. Saturday morning The drive is through a hilly and eventually mountainous area. We make a quick pit stop just across the border in Switzerland to enjoy some great coffee and mountain views.

Our bus to train transfer is seamless, and we did not loose any skiers as we arrive about 12:30 pm. at Zermatt **Marc**, owner of Astoria Hotel meets us with two taxis to load up the entire luggage for group of 27 and then leads us on a 10 minute walk to the hotel through the town.

Dominated by Switzerland's most famous landmark, the Matterhorn, Zermatt is considered Switzerland's best all-round resort. All the vehicles are electric and along with the lack of cars, gives Zermatt a great sense of tradition. There are 29 peaks over 13,100 ft. With a base elevation of about 5,500 feet and a top lift elevation of 12,500 feet and three mountain areas, Rothorn, Gornergat, and Klein Matterhorn, there is an amazing 7,000 feet of vertical and runs up to 8 miles for us..

We have all the rooms at the Astoria, with most of them having balconies with amazing views. As we check in, we receive a key attached to a small heavy statue about 3 inches tall. Your TC, **Arlen** promptly lost it for two days as it sat on the sink in the bathroom.

About 20 of the group rent skis with a 25 % discount at Azzura Sports, about 130 paces from the hotel. We can store our equipment in a locked room at our hotel.

Ehud Barak, Harvey Heller, Robert Gottlieb, Chris & Tracy arrive in the afternoon completing our group. **Bob Gottlieb** had been visiting family in Switzerland. **Ehud's** ski bag was lost by United and arrived 2 days later (on Monday morning). He had to rent ski, boots and ski clothes and buy some warmers for the first day.

The Hotel Astoria provided our welcome party and beverages on Saturday evening as many of the group met each other for the first time. **Antonio** was our bartender, Maitre de and server all week. Dinner was buffet salad, Pork steak on champignon sauce, served with fried croque6tes and carrots, and desert. Bedtime at 10:00 pm. was a welcome time.

Sunday, Ski Day one - **Marc**, owner and Boarder extraordinaire offers a mountain tour for our group. About 17 of us take him up on the offer; **Thomas Huzzey, Ash Moza, Sam Engelman, Barry Hardy, Al Dudash, James Espinoza, Ana Martin, Harvey Heller, Manny Gillio, Ehud Barak, Bob Viktorin, Chris Urbanczyk, Ed Gomez, Everett Gerrald, Scott Peterson, Gail Kitowski, & Arlen Isham.** We walk about 10 minutes to the Sunnegga funicular lift, which we later found out we could get to by bus only 40 yards from the hotel. **Marc** thought we would enjoy the walk in our ski boots. YAH, SURE!



This lift is cut through rock in a tunnel all the way to the top.

Even though I told **Marc** that this was a "warm-up" day, he was whipping down the mountain. Our group stays together exploring the Rothorn and Gornergrat mountains until we stop for lunch at Riffelberg. The temperature was about zero degrees F. and the wind was blowing pretty well at the top of Gornergrat, so we had snow blowing around even on a blue sky day. This allowed us to get a great group shot with the Matterhorn in the background.



Some of us had trouble with the electronic lift cards getting the gates to open. Finally the best solution was putting them in our left hand glove or in a pocket on your left hand jacket for those that had those pockets. If you had a phone in the same area, it would also screw things up. These cards also were connected to an internet system so you could access your skiing information for every day, lifts, miles, and vertical feet. Wind closed off the Cervino area today, which proved to be true all week long. No one ever got to go over to Cervino, Italy to ski, but with Zermatt being a huge mountain, it was not a loss.

Lots of socializing before dinner at the dining room bar. No injuries today, but several people did not ski. Dinner was Minestrone soup, chicken breast, served with butter noodles, and broccoli, with a creamy caramel flan.

Monday, Ski Day two - It snowed overnight adding about a foot of snow up on the mountain. We had an opportunity to make first tracks in several areas. It was reported that several people watched the Super bowl from Midnight to 3:00 am. on their computers. The Breakfast buffet was ready at 7:30 am. each day. Early in the week, the group was ready to ski at 8:30. Later, we all decided that 9:00 am. was a more reasonable time. The temperature was better today at about 25 degrees F. and no wind. Sun was out occasionally. We started with about 17 of us again this morning using the bus to the Sunnegga funicular and then up the mountain. Lunch was at Riffelberg for several people. Most of the skiing was on Rothorn and Gornergrat again today. Italy was still closed. Some of the group went over to the Klein Matterhorn area today including **Chris Urbanczyk** who was looking for fresh powder. **Sam Engleman** has a very distinctive ski outfit.

Pat Croom fell and hurt his knee late in the afternoon today. As it turned out, he was done skiing for the week. Ligament damage, but fortunately no ACL or MCL damage. My GPS showed about 34,000 feet of vertical today on 23 runs and a distance of about 50 miles including lift distance. My maximum speed was just over 50 miles per hour.

Some of the group enjoyed the afternoon social at the Sauna with wine and beer. The social at the sauna was a daily activity. Dinner was a salad buffet, lamb loin with gratin potatoes, beans, and mango ice cream desert. The bar was active with a round of drinks on Space City Ski Club.



Tuesday, Ski Day three - The group dispersed in all directions today. Several went to the Klein Matterhorn area hoping to get to the 12,500 foot top on the tram. Wind was blowing about 45 miles per hour at times. The wind finally died down enough to open the "T" bar up toward Cervino, but they were stopping people about half way up which is as close as we got today to Italy. It has been closed all week so far. We got some great close up pictures of the Matterhorn when it cleared. Lot's of flat light today in the afternoon made it difficult to see. High winds at Gornergrat, so we moved back to Rothorn to finish the day. The winds shut down a gondola we normally used, so had to find a different way to get back to Rothorn. It was reported that **Ana Martin** got hit by a skier sometime during the day, but was not injured. It was pretty cool to be able to ski down the mountain within 130 paces of our hotel from Rothorn.

Birthday dinner tonight for **Carol Viktorin**. Not sure if she was still 39! Dinner was vegetable cream soup, Braised beef with mashed potatoes, and vegetables, with chocolate mousse desert. More people showed up for the sauna adult beverages before dinner.

I think **Don Ledford** moved out of his ten foot x ten foot single room to an apartment provided by Marc, Astoria owner. It was a nice gesture. All 3 of the single rooms were small.

Rooms 101 & 102 were assigned to singles **Harvey Heller** and **Theresa Toward**. These wonderful double rooms happened to be located over the busiest and loudest bar of all Zermatt. **Harvey and Theresa** said they did not need any vibrating beds, because the music did it for them.

Wednesday, Ski Day Four - Carol Croom, Ash Moza, and Arlen Isham took an excursion by train to Sion. All of us were amazed by the miles of vineyards' along the train route. It is reported that the Swiss don't export their grapes or wine. They drink it all. **Ash** missed the return 3:20 return train. Something about his watch was wrong. Your TC was late providing beverages at the sauna, but the group dived in.

Ana Martin and **Harvey Heller** both were injured today. Skiing today included lots of flat light & some snow as reported to your TC. **Ana** suffered a broken fibula and **Harvey's** was a cracked fibula. Both of them hauled off the mountain, which turns out to be an expensive process. **Barry Hardy, Manny Gillio, Ana** and **Sammy Engleman** did ski in Cervino. In fact, it was in Cervino that **Ana** injured herself. She made it back to the Swiss side, but fell again and that is when they had to take her off the mountain.

Dinner was salad buffet, Valaisian raclette (a famous fired cheese with potatoes, meats, etc), and a fresh fruit salad. After dinner there was a group playing spades. **Tracy Vu** is apparently known as "Saigon Slick".

So what did the people do that did not ski. **Sarah Granbery** said "I did not ski, but I bought a 4 day peak pass and went up all three mountains to Rothorn, Gornergrat, and the Matterhorn glacier. At the Matterhorn glacier, we were able to enter the Glacier Palace and view the natural crevasses and see the different rooms and ice sculptures." One day **Theresa Toward** and I went and the next time, I went up with **Carol Viktorin, Norma Gerrald, Stan Broniak, and Pam Smith**. On the way down we stopped at Trockener Steg for lunch at the Ice Restaurant where **Pam** and **Stan** ordered a pizza of shrimp, pineapple and banana!

Lori Matthews said "I did not ski, I shopped. I toured the mountain with **Sarah Granbery** and her friend **Theresa Toward**, hit some bars on the mountain and in town with them. I also shopped with **Norma Gerrald**. My favorite thing was shopping but didn't get as much done as I wanted because I got sick. Yuk."

Tracy Vu said "I do not ski so I just tag along for sightseeing most of the time. Before we arrived at Zermatt, I went to Davos with **Chris Urbanczyk** one day and he skied there. We went one day on Bernina Express to Tirano (border of Switzerland & Italy). We missed the Glacier Express to Zermatt from St. Moritz, they canceled that route due to heavy snow the night before. In Zermatt, I went sledding a couple days, took train to Interlaken/Grinderwald (hope I spell that right) and went hiking another day. This is my first trip with ski club and you guys are a lot of fun."

Thursday, Ski Day Five - Several people did not ski today. It was a blue sky day with clouds and a temperature of about zero degrees F. again. The wind was low today. Our group skied all over the three mountains in small groups. **Ash Moza, Thomas Huzzey, Al Dudash, Ehud Barak, and Bob Gottlieb** skied together. **James Espinoza, Ed Gomez, Gail Kitowski, & Scott Petersen** were often together. The Atlanta group, **Ken Johns, Sam Engelman, and Barry Hardy** mixed in and out with **Charles Albright, Robert Viktorin, Chris Urbanczyk, & Everett Gerrald**. **Charles Albright** also skied with his newly wed wife of 6 months **Elizabeth**. I think **Elizabeth** also took a lesson one day. As we were skiing down from Rothorn to finish the day, **Ash Moza** fell and twisted his knee.

Dinner tonight was special with SCSC providing two drinks to help prepare the group for the "Awards Ceremony" Our menu was potato soup, St. Peter's fillet served with curry sauce rice, and spinach with Tiramisu desert. We did our group picture just before dinner and we missed **Al Dudash** (on the phone), **Gail Kitowski, & Scott Peterson**, late from perhaps a bar.

Zermatt Awards were various items such as water bottles, hand warmers, boot carriers, SCSC pins, & ski clips. The awards were designed so everyone on the trip received something even if they did nothing. Some people qualified and were nominated for more than one award, but the TC said no double dipping. After voting, the awards were as follows: Missed Plane (**Tom Huzzey**); Last to the bus (**Pam Smith**); Most frozen bras (**Tracy Vu**); Working on the Trip (**Carol Viktorin**); Best photographer (**Don Ledford**); Best Singer (**Antonio**); First Fall (**Al Dudash**); Yard Sale (**Bob Gottlieb**); First injury (**Pat Croom**); Worst injury (**Ana Martin**); No Falls (**Ken Johns**); Most fashionable (**Lori Matthews**); Most wine (**Sarah Granbery**); While skiing most ventilation (**Chris Urbanczyk**); Most beer stops (**Stan Broniak**); Most expensive purchase (**Elizabeth Albright**); Most polite hurler (**Carol Croom**); Most sleepless (**Theresa Toward**); Best card shark (**Tracy Vu**); Most falls (**James Espinoza**); Lost equipment (**Charles Albright**); Most falls in bathroom (**Ash Moza**); Best person on trip to care for injuries (**Manny Gillio**); Loudest snorer (**Bobby Viktorin**); Most wanted person (**Scott Peterson**); Simultaneous injury to both legs (**Harvey Heller**); Most vertical feet (**Everett Gerrald**); Least vertical feet (**Norma Gerrald**); Best happy hour attendee (**Gail Kitowski**); & most mojitos (**Ed Gomez**).

Theresa Toward says "Italian coffees were devine!"



Friday, ski day Six - I (**Arlen**) got out late and everyone was gone, so decided to go over to Klein Matterhorn. As a result on this beautiful blue ski day, low wind, but about minus 20 F. at the top of the Klein Matterhorn Tram, I got to ski to the top overlooking into Italy for the first time. I never saw anyone from our group all day, but enjoyed skiing right next to the Matterhorn on several runs. Finished the day by working my way back to Rothorn.

Elizabeth Albright and Don Ledford arranged for a helicopter ride today, which was supposed to give them a great view of the Matterhorn and surrounding mountains. As it turned out, the windows frosted up and the pilot was less O.than helpful to give them a view out of the one good clear window.

Stan Broniak & Pam Smith went paragliding off the top of Rothorn in -10 degrees F weather. It was exhilarating as we flew over the mountains, nearly dive bombing at the skiers below while enjoying the breathtaking views of the Matterhorn! It was a GREAT way to spend turning "50"! After landing over by the train station, we took the train to the Riffelalp stop and hiked the remaining way to "Ristorante al Bosco" at the Riffelalp Resort to order (and most importantly take a picture) of the Matterhorn-shaped pizzas that are made there

Tracy Vu and Chris Urbanczyk head back home on Friday through Switzerland. **Ash Moza** decides to go to Milan by train on Friday and meet the group for the Delta plane on Saturday morning. There was lots of discussion about plane cancelations, because there was an enormous snow blizzard in the northeast USA. United flights were canceled, but the Delta flights were still scheduled.

Our remaining adult beverages were set up on the second floor to be consumed. A nice group gathered to socialize. Our final dinner was a salad buffet, fondue chinoise with potato chips, and Cassata ice cream. In addition, we celebrated Pam Smith's 50th birthday. Signs were all over the hotel. We thanked our staff and prepared for our trip home. Wake up is 2:15 am.

Saturday, travel day - twenty five of us catch the taxis from the hotel to the train at 3:00 am. **Al Dudash** is suddenly missed. We send back a taxi for him and find him walking to the train station. **Ken Johns, Ehud Barak, Harvey Heller, & Bob Gottlieb** are traveling back through Switzerland. **Ehud** is going to Israel to visit family. It was noted by our group that two young men (not our group) were completely stoned on the train and spent 15 minutes trying to roll a joint. All twenty five make the smooth transition to the bus for our 3-1/2 hour drive to Milan's Malpensa Airport. Note to travel planners. There is nothing open for a pit stop in Switzerland and Italy from 4:00 am. to 7:00 am. The bus front door also would not close, so it was freezing. The driver's attempt to use a small piece of twine left a 3 inch gap. I (**Arlen**) finally got the driver to stop and he used a 20 foot piece of rope from my back pack to close the door.

10 of us, **Carol & Pat Croom, James Espinoza, Ed Gomez, Sarah Granbery, Carol Viktorin, Al Dudash, Everett & Norma Gerrald, & Arlen Isham** transfer to a bus for our extension to Genoa, Italy. We later found out the Delta flight was not canceled, but even though the flight arrived at JFK on time, **Charles & Elizabeth Albright, Lori Matthews, & Tom Huzzey** were not allowed to get on the Delta flight from JFK to Atlanta. From **Tom Huzzey** "The problem in New York City was with Delta's luggage delivery. We arrived on schedule. Our luggage was the last to be delivered. My suitcase was literally the last one on the carousel. Even then, I could have made it because I made the luggage check in counter with a little over 60 minutes. The problem then was that the Delta luggage check in people were slow and by the time I got to the counter there was only 50 minutes left. The whole experience with Delta was pretty bad." From **Lori Matthews** "No, they said that there was 30 minutes before door close and they also said that they had a strict rule of having the luggage at baggage claim 60 minutes before boarding. Mine, **Tom's, Elizabeth and Charles**, our luggage was very late coming down the bin, and then we had to wait through the long lines to go through customs. I think that Charles said our flight arrived on time. We waited for over 30 minutes for our luggage and then another 30 minutes before we got through all the customs stuff. When they gave us the bus vouchers to go to LaGuardia, the bus left as we were coming out of the airport, so we had to scramble to try to find a cab and then he had to go pick someone else up, blah blah blah, so that put us at about 5 minutes to spare to get all checked in LaGuardia. Once we go on the plane in LaGuardia, we had a small window to make our connection in Atlanta. The jet way was frozen to the plane, which caused a 30 minute delay. They were able to make up some time, but landing in Terminal A and then having to leave from Terminal B, that make is a serious time crunch too.

The Genoa, Italy extension went well. We arrived about 11:30 am. to our hotel Modern Verdi, which allowed time for a nice walking exploration of the old city in the afternoon. On Sunday, **Carol Croom, Al Dudash, James Espinoza, Ed Gomez, Everett & Norma Gerrald, & Arlen Isham** took the train east to explore a beautiful area called "Cinco Terra". We were doing great on the trains until our return. At one point, everyone was dozing and someone pounded on the train window. The train was not going further. We had to get off and get on a different train. **Pat Croom** took a taxi to the museums. A very rare snow blizzard on Monday plus everything being closed minimized activities. We enjoyed a final dinner together at a Pizza restaurant that we found on Saturday.

Our return on Tuesday to Milan and then back to Houston was uneventful compared to the Saturday group. Most of us managed to end the trip with just a few Swiss Francs and Euros.

This was a great group of people on the Zermatt trip. As Trip Coordinator, I appreciated how they interacted and made the trip enjoyable for everyone including helping with the injured as they traveled home.



