

Vorderglärnisch

Last Sunday, September 24, 1995 I left early in the morning in the direction of Glarus (this was easy since we had just changed back to Central European Time). After an 80 minutes' drive I reached the area of Klöntalersee where I parked the car at the altitude of 1050 meters. The plan was to climb the peak called Vorderglärnisch ("Pre-Glärnisch"), 2330 meters above sea level. On first sight this mountain does not look very attractive since it is almost 600 meters below the main peak of the massive (Glärnisch). However, since in the projection this peak is very close to the main valley, and nevertheless more than a mile above its bottom, it is known as a spectacular point.

Indeed, when I left the car I soon entered an extremely steep and narrow valley which looked very inhospitable, with waterfalls coming down from the sides. It was almost inconceivable that you could overcome it without technical climbing, although the bottom and the cliffs were quite green. On the map the entrance of the valley is merely a mile from the peak, and the elevation gain is 0.8 miles. Already 100 feet above the bottom of the valley the trail was on a ledge with an overhanging cliff underneath. Considering the slippery condition of the trail, I negotiated this spot with extreme care. Continuously I got higher up, and the climb was full of suspense, since you never were able to tell in advance how the trail would take the next cliff. One time, the ledge to be followed was only two feet wide with more or less vertical walls to the right and to the left. Fortunately, this part was secured by a cable like the *vie ferrate* in the Dolomites. Since the trail was still slippery I gratefully accepted this comforting device.

One would not believe it, but after a climb of 400 meters I arrived at a real alp with meadows and a hut; the animals (sheep or goats) supposedly had descended only a few days ago. Their trail must have followed a narrow ledge on the other side of the valley that was not visible from a lower altitude. Incredible, how every green patch is being used! The trail was winding higher up, taking the next steep section by first following another slippery ledge and then circumventing a cliff in a big loop far to the left. The loop was followed by a gulley with cables for safety and another ledge. Clearly, this was a borderline-easy trail, even by Swiss standards. At this point you were at last able to see the saddle which forms the end of the valley at the altitude of 2050 meters. Fortunately, the trail was much dryer up here and fairly easy to walk on.

However, to reach the top we still had to climb 400 meters, mostly on the Northern side of the mountain which is not quite as steep as the valley. I say "we" since I was slowly catching up with a brave party of three people, one of which must have been a child. The last part of the trail followed a ridge for a change, with impressive areal views onto the roofs of Glarus from more than a mile above the city.

I reached the top almost at the same time as my forerunners. They were a father with his six-year old son and his nine-year old daughter. Good children, they were rightfully proud of what they had accomplished! They had left the parking lot only 20 minutes before I did. According to their dialect I judged them as local people.

Actually they were from Glarus, down below, and surely they were equipped with modern technology. The first thing the father did on the peak, was pulling a mobile telephone set out of his pack, and the kids were allowed to talk to their mother. They later told me they had seen a few ptarmigans running away, and an eagle had circled above the saddle when they approached it. To see the wildlife is often the benefit of the first ones coming up!

I had taken 2 hours and 35 minutes to climb the 1275 meters. After half an hour I decided to leave since I got cold. Unfortunately it was cloudy, such that we could only see down into the valleys (which was still spectacular), but not up to the higher peaks. I was thinking of taking another, supposedly even steeper descent directly to Glarus. However, considering the uncertainties of the weather I decided to descend by the same trail. This was not at all boring since I was able to leisurely observe the intricate design of this beautiful trail. I reached the car after two hours, just when it began to drizzle. It stopped again though, so I did not have to worry too much about the family still being up there.

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