

Sunday August 1, 2004
Mettmenalp

Jan-Jan dropped out on Thursday, citing a meeting he had to make with some German prof. He sounded convincingly disappointed. On Sunday Jorge came around a few minutes after 10am and picked me up, he had injured his back while running and wouldn't be able to climb. But Guilia and I could take his car. With my climbing partner list getting shorter and shorter I wondered if Guilia hadn't caught the plague and died or something. But no, she was there and still determined to climb even if these other wusses couldn't come along. She drove and I navigated to Schwanden (near Glarus) and then along a disturbingly narrow mountain road up a side valley. We arrived at the gondola base station, 1100m, sometime around 11.30am. Guilia had to pay for the tickets because I had no cash and the 21st century hadn't penetrated this far up the valley yet. After the gondola dropped us off at 1600m we walked for about 45 min to reach the klettergarten (1850m). The mountain vistas were fantastic, the sun shone brightly and I was about to get some outdoor climbing done for the first time in over a year. Awesome.

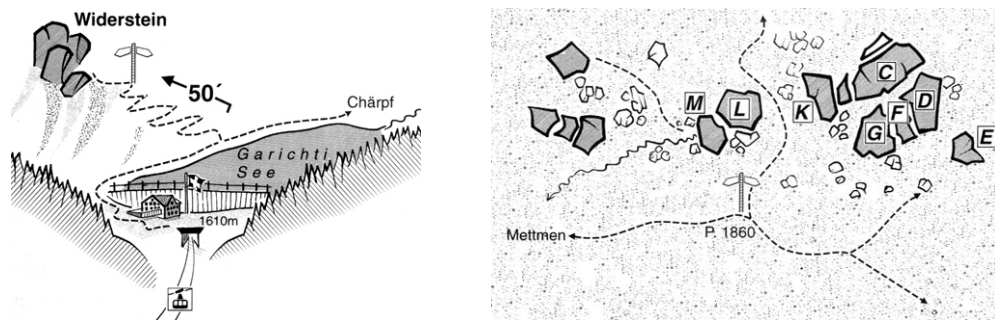


Figure 1. Area map and block layout of the Mettmenalp klettergarten. Reproductions and sector references in this report adapted from the 2001 edition of "Plaisir Ost", a fantastic climbing guide for eastern Switzerland edited by Jürg von Känel and published by Filidor (<http://www.filidor.ch>).

Once we found a nice place to sit down I pointed out where all the different blocks were and got Guilia oriented with the map in the guide. We then spent a little while teaching her how to use my home-made draws (two biners and a two-foot sling) and what she had to do when she reached the top of the climb (i.e. how to properly set up a nice doubly-redundant anchor). It was hot sitting in the sun, good thing we brought the sunscreen and some water along (and my hat!). On block M, the easiest and least precipitous wall, there were a pair of girls running up the left side and a family of four playing on the right side. But in the middle were a couple of free lines, so we went there. We set up and I sent Guilia up *Nachtisch* (3b) which she had no trouble with and had her first anchor set in a few minutes after reaching the top. We pulled the lines and left the draws in place (I forgot to ask her to remove them). I raced up pretty quick and cleaned up all the gear. There was a bad moment when she thought I was on the rope and started lowering me early, I tried to move down to put my weight on the rope. Guilia noticed something was up and locked off, so thinking she was set I tried to sit down and get my weight on the line but there was more slack out than I thought, I went down about 2 metres and when the line caught me it almost yanked her off her feet. She was ok and had no further problem lowering me. As the family on the right side had moved up I decided to send Guilia up *Luftreise* (3b), which follows the arc describing the right side of the block. She did that one well too and this time was faster setting the anchor up top. We pulled the line for me to run up and clean it. Nearby a guide-type was running some paying tourons through some basic rope-craft and he asked if we would be long. I said I would be cleaning up fast and we would be going elsewhere. He seemed satisfied with that.

After we had finished with *Luftreise* we moved around to the southwest side of block L where I wanted to do *Pfefferminz* (4b). We sat in the shade and had a drink while I explained what I wanted to do. I would lead it and then set an anchor to belay Guilia up after me, she would have to collect the draws as she came. Then we would descend either by lowering or abseil depending on how things went. No problemo, good. So up *Pfefferminz* I went, it seemed pretty tricky for a 4b (I can usually hammer a 6a in the gym) but I put it

down to the outdoors feeling and well-spaced bolts. There was a fold that I didn't really want to try and pull over so I went around it, at the time I told Giulia that it wasn't necessary to follow the rope directissima when she climbed up after me, that she could go left or right as the climb dictated. Boy did I regret telling her *that* one. So I get up the top, set the anchor, lock in my gi-gi belay device (note: this is *not* a gri-gri) which I haven't used in over two years and pull up the slack. For a little while her climbing goes well, but things got a little nerve-wracking in surprisingly short order. At some point she had decided to go left to go around rather than over something. Giulia worked left and then up, and then up some more. Uhoh. She was left of the next draw by about four metres and at about the same height. If she fell she was looking at a long and bruising swing. A tad scary. I thought that she would be ok because she was attacking high 5's in the gym pretty well and this was only a 4b. Right? Well no, not really, because she was pretty scared and then stuck. So after a little bit of urging her to step back down, and she not being able to do it confidently, I decided to literally throw her a line. She was directly below me so I pulled about five metres of spare rope, tied a figure-eight-in-a-bite on one end and lowered that down to her, I tight an overhand-on-a-bite at my end and locked it to the anchor. She grabbed the figure-eight and locked it onto her harness with a locking biner. Safe. She swung across under me to that draw, collected it, and was ready to continue climbing. So I got her to take off the safety line and drew it all up and out of the way again. No problemo. But she was still a bit shaken up. She had some trouble going directly over the next fold, but she figured it out and I kept her tight on the line. After that it was no time before Giulia was up with me and I locked her into the anchor. So now what? Lower or abseil? She seemed less concerned so I suggested we abseil down, something she had never done before. I gathered the ropes, fed them through the anchor and tossed the ends down (about 15 metres), and then I collected all the rest of the anchor gear. The way I set it up she couldn't kill herself if she tried. I set Giulia up on a spiderline (ATC on a sling to her harness) and then set myself up with the same thing just below her on the ropes. I explained how it worked and then demonstrated by going down to a ledge a couple metres down. She followed and seemed to be picking it up ok. So I went down a little further and she followed again. Eventually we were both down and she was happy to be on solid ground again.

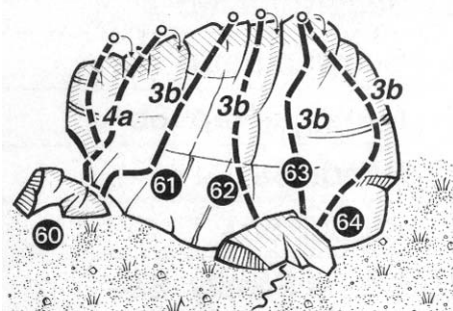


Figure 2. 62 (*Nachtisch*) & 64 (*Lufreise*), block M.

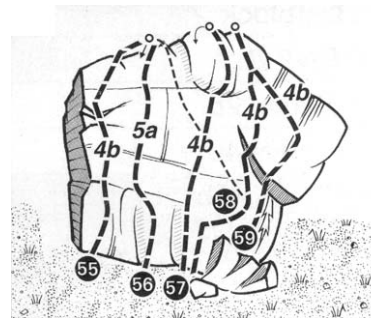


Figure 3. Route 59 (*Pfefferminz*) on block L.

To change the situation we sat in the shade and ate lunch, and generally just talked about stuff and tried to get her back in the leading frame of mind. It didn't take long. After lunch we walked up to block G and Giulia led *Patriotenweg* (3b) with no trouble, even though at 20 meters it was longer and higher than the first two she had led. I also did it and cleaned up, and found that it is actually a pretty nice climb.

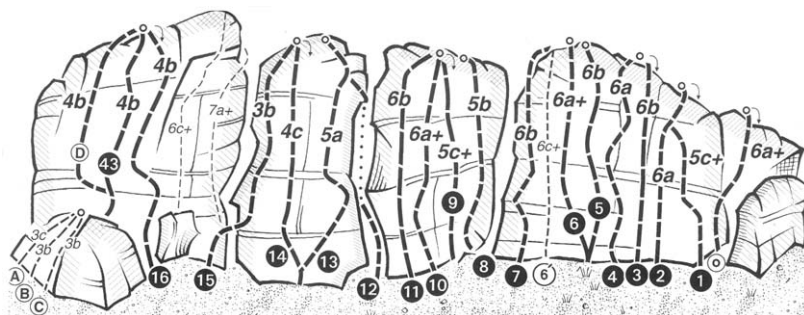


Figure 4. Route 15 (*Patriotenweg*) on block G.

Time was getting on and I didn't want to be too late getting back to Zurich, so we decided to do one more lead each. We marched over to block K and she led most of *Silikon* (3b) although at the top (which was very easy) she wandered right to set the anchor over the top of *Zuckerrohr* (5a). When it was my turn I followed *Silikon* and showed her the bolt she missed and where the anchor should have gone. Still, Guilia seemed to have got her confidence back again.

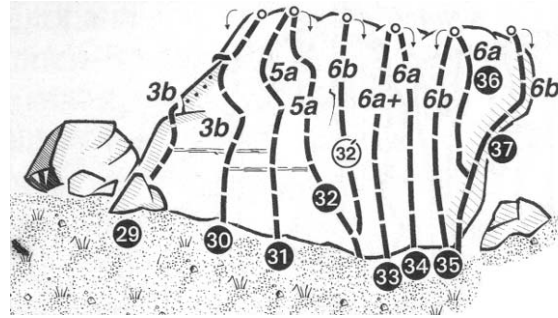


Figure 5. Route 30 (*Silikon*) on block K.

It was almost 5pm, so we packed everything and struggled back down the path (Guilia walked, I struggled a bit until Guilia took the rope off me). Near the gondola is a large restaurant/hut thing so we stopped for Obi (sparkling apple juice) before riding the gondola down to the car and heading back to Zurich.

A good day!