



The month of July, 2019 had two meets. The “official” meet took a few members of the club to Chamonix in the French Alps, while the ‘unofficial’ meet had a more domestic, stay-cation feel, at the CMC Hut in Llanberis. This report will outline some of the adventures had by members who travelled to Chamonix.

The original participant list was long, plans were grand, but as family and work commitments bumped some, and other, more exciting and exotic plans seduced others, the club meet attendees list was reduced to 2 members and 7 of their significant others. Lexie and I travelling straight after work on Friday by car and ferry, through the night, to arrive for lunch in Chamonix and to set up camp. We were joined on Sunday by Sonia and Max who flew via Geneva, and later Floyd, Alex, and their family friends who drove via Brussels.



Sunday and Monday was hot; perfect for gentle transit recovery days and “acclimatizing” to the altitude and temperature of the French Alps. We simply wandered around town, shopped for supplies, and partook in the consumption of copious amounts of ice-cream. Floyd took his party on a little excursion to Lac Passey in an effort to escape the heat, while the Gallahers dared to tip their toes into the mountain streams feeding the L’Arve. I, naturally, used this down time to do a few easy trail runs.



Monday evening was spent celebrating Floyd’s birthday with a macaroon cake and magic candles which never blew out!



Tuesday was to be the first big mountain day, but as this meet had turned into a more sedate family affair, the 4000m vertical ascent / descent in a day was made easy by a 4 day (consécutive) Mont Blanc Multiday Pass (more on that later), and a ride on *Téléphérique de l'Aiguille du Midi*, and the *TC Planpraz*. The view, thanks to the amazingly clear weather, was worth the extravagant expense of the passes.



Wednesday morning started early, with Sonia and myself trail running from Argentiere to Chamonix for some breakfast and the intention of heading back up to Aiguille du Midi station (to make use of the 4 day pass), but were turned off by the crowds and one-hour expected wait. Instead, the club re-grouped in Le Tour and caught the Charamillon up to Col de Balme, and then walked over the Swiss border to Lac de Catogne where the old and weary settled down for a few hours of high-altitude Cosmo Jazz, whilst the younger ones used what possibly could be the last remaining snow in the area as weapons of war!



After a few hours of sitting and doing nothing, and now jack of uplift / downlift short-cuts, Lexie and I ran back to Le Tour via the Aiguillette des Posettes, while the rest of the gang decided to make use of their down-lift passes.





Floyd and his gang had an early start on Thursday morning, and made their way up to the Aiguille du Midi station on the first cable-car of the day, while I went for another run.

Later in the day, in an effort to escape the 35 degree heat, everyone headed back down to Lac Passy for some relief, until the afternoon rain storms, lightning and wind made it just about unsafe!



Friday storms were forecast, but nothing short of divine intervention, was going to stop the Gallahers from chasing down and seeing stage 19 or the TDF. They jumped into the car at 7:30 and made the three hour trip to Tignes via Moûtiers and Bourg-Saint-Maurice. Sure enough, after a sunny, hot start to the day, and a generous handout obtained from the TDF caravan, the storms arrived! The Gods must not have wanted a French yellow jersey this year, nor did they want me to see any elite cyclist. The heavens spat ice, snot snow, and clawed away part of the mountain on which the world's premier cyclist were about to pass over; denying Alaphilippe the chance to regain his lead, and preventing the Gallahers from chanting endless "allez allez allez". C'est la vie. Il y a toujours l'année prochaine!



While the Gallahers spent the rest of their day dodging landslides and post stage traffic congestion, Floyd and his troupe enjoyed a day by Lake Geneva, escaping most of the rain and storms.

Saturday - Market day in Chamonix, and a small but expensive mistake!

One of the pull factors of getting Mrs Gallaher to come and join onto a meet was the promise of shopping and amazingly fresh mountain produce. The markets didn't disappoint!



Another pull factor to visiting the Alps was that we would be able to use uplift via a four day multipass (non-consecutive) to save on effort reaching higher routes. Unfortunately, plans to visit the Mer de Glace by train was scammed when we were told that the pass,

which was purchased at the automatic kiosk five days earlier, and used only use for two days, was **not** a non-consecutive pass, as we had thought, and had expired 1 day ago! Ouch! 340 Euros for two days lift for a family of four. If we had purchased a two day pass, it would have cost around 200 Euros. The ticket box operator at the multipass office was slightly sympathetic, and advised that to receive compensation, one must email the office to make a case. Several minutes later, said email was sent with the plea to refund at least 140 on the grounds that the automatic machine didn't give an option to purchase the non-consecutive pass!

[Post-script: after a few days, the author received a reply, granting said refund - hurrah!].

After a morning of gorging, the Gallahers caught the train, this time a free train thanks to the Carte d'Hôte - guest card) up valley to Vallorcine for a nice walk back to Argentiere via Col Des Montets.



Sunday - Farewell to Floyd and iking the Aiguilles Rouges

Sunday morning saw an early departure by Floyd and his gang who were headed back to Belgium, while the Gallahers explored the Aiguilles Rouges trails leading to Lac Blanc and back down to Chamonix. This particular route is one of my favorites of the region, as it affords non-stop, uninterrupted views of the north-western aspect of the Mont Blanc massif. Along the trails, one

encounters a series of ladders to support rapid, almost care-free ascent enabling the by-passing of some relatively easy scrambles, which I used only to by-pass the endless queue of overburdened TMB trekkers.



Lac Blanc didn't disappoint. With patches of snow and a real high altitude 'mist'ique about it, our warm breath must have contributed to a general dispersal of the obscuring cloud to expose the majestic massif on the opposite side of the valley.



From Lac Blanc, it was a lovely mostly down hill stroll to Chamonix with better-than-imax quality views.



Monday - Saturday - Bye to Sonia and Max, while Shane and Lexie fast-pack the TMB

Monday morning was spent strolling around down-town Chamonix and playing on the bob-sled, before taking a quick drive to Geneva to deposit Max and Sonia off at the airport. Lexie and I drove back and set up the smaller tent not far from Les Houches. Our plan was to spend some daddy-daughter time fast-pack the full Tour Du Mt Blanc route in 4 days. We set off at the traditional start at Les Houches, and made our way with a rapid ascent to Bionnassay, then descent to Les Contamines for morning tea. Next was the slog up to Col du Bonhomme, where lunch was served. The sky became a bit threatening, so we high-tailed it at a comfortable pace, progressing down to the refuge Les Mottets. At the end of the first day we had travelled some 41km with 2600m climbing.



Day 2 started amazingly clear as we headed into Italy via the stunning Col de la Seigne. Before too long, we had descended into Val Venny, before the trail dragged us back up again to pass over the ski-resort above Courmayeur, until it saw fit to spew our now heavily exhausted bodies into a nice little Pizzeria restaurant in the middle of town for lunch.



The afternoon started well, until we headed out the door of the restaurant and re-gained the trail out of Coumayeur. The slog up to Rifugio Bertone is perhaps the hardest sectional slogs of the TMB, made worse with a belly full of pizza and beer! I guess that's why most people choose to end their day in the town, but not us. We needed to complete this in four days, so we trod on, past Rifugio Bonatti, where the light drizzle made for pleasant relief from the temperatures earlier in the day, and allowed for our clothes to be cleansed of the now solid layers of accumulated salt. As evening approached, our plan of making it into Switzerland, therefore crossing Italy in a day, was scampered due to the 3000m of ascent and 43km already endured that day. The thought of another 1000m up and 10k progress wasn't appealing to Lexie, so we opted to bunk for the night at the awesome Rigugio Elena.



Day 3 started with what I believe to be the best, although still lung-busting, ascent of the TMB. The climb to Grand Col Ferret starts immediately from Elena's door, and consists of manageable and scenic zig-zags up, making most of it runnable, especially as it was the first thing in the day.



Once the col is attained, you pass into Switzerland, and immediately, as a runner, it feels as if you have entered an unrestricted Auto-bahn. Needless to say, the descent down to La Fouly was super-speedy and very enjoyable, if a little taxing on



Lexie's knees. The next few hours were spent enjoying the lush greenery and forests of Val Ferret before those bastards of the trail gods sent us back up-hill again, however this time depositing our now smelly feet into the cool waters Champex-Lac, where lunch was served





courtesy of the local Spar. The rest of the day was fairly straight forward, with a few ups and a few downs (terrain wise, emotionally it was fantastic) until we arrived at our final night's Gite at Col de la Forclaz. Day three ended up being a very comfortable 43k with only 1800m ascent.

Our final day took us back into France, up via Col de Balme, Col des Montets and then along the Aiguilles Rouge, staying high all day until Le Brevant and Tete de Bellachat, where the sun sank into the mountainous western horizon, and we descended into Val d'Arve and Les Houches, completing our fast-fack trip around Mt Blanc in 4 days; totalling 171k and 10000 m climbing. Would I recommend it? Definitely, and if you are going, can I come too?

