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WALKING IN THE

Brenta

WORDS and IMAGES : JANE GIFFORD



In the Adamello-Brenta Natural Park, although the weather in the valley might be grim, a cable-car can lift you above the clouds

AN INVITATION to go trekking in the mountains can come as a daunting prospect when accompanied by pictures of bronzed athletic figures in designer climbing-gear suspended above death-defying drops... so I confess to some apprehension when I first looked from my balcony in Madonna di Campiglio at what should have been a spectacular view of the famous rosy dawn lighting the peaks of the Brenta Dolomites. Although right on my doorstep, the mountains were barely visible through the rain-cloud (*above*).

Woken by bells, I rise quickly from the luxury of my bed at The Hermitage to catch a fading glimpse of chocolate-brown cows being herded through the forest. Silhouetted pines make a romantic if rather damp impression on me, but the weather does not otherwise inspire any sense of derring-do or desire to scale to lofty heights. Downstairs, a Jacuzzi, Turkish bath and beautiful pool beckon, and as yet, nobody has mentioned the words cable and car to me.

The weather continues to be grim but we still make an early start. I look down at my printout of our intended destination, Rifugio Tuckett, and see it is wet. It shows an isolated stone building in a lunar landscape



in the sky. The T now looks more like an E, but I am relieved at least to be standing in the queue for the Grostè cable-car. We have had the rules of mountain-walking firmly drummed into us: wear sturdy boots and a water and windproof jacket; let people know where you're going; don't leave the path or become separated from the group; carry a map and fully-charged mobile phone. We are a party of five: Deborah Dorigoni, our Trentino Rep, elegant in her mountain gear; Roberto Manni our nonchalant mountain guide, looking rather like Bruce Springstein; and we three English 'Brenta virgins', two with dodgy knees, one dressed more for the city than the mountains.

ABOVE THE CLOUDS

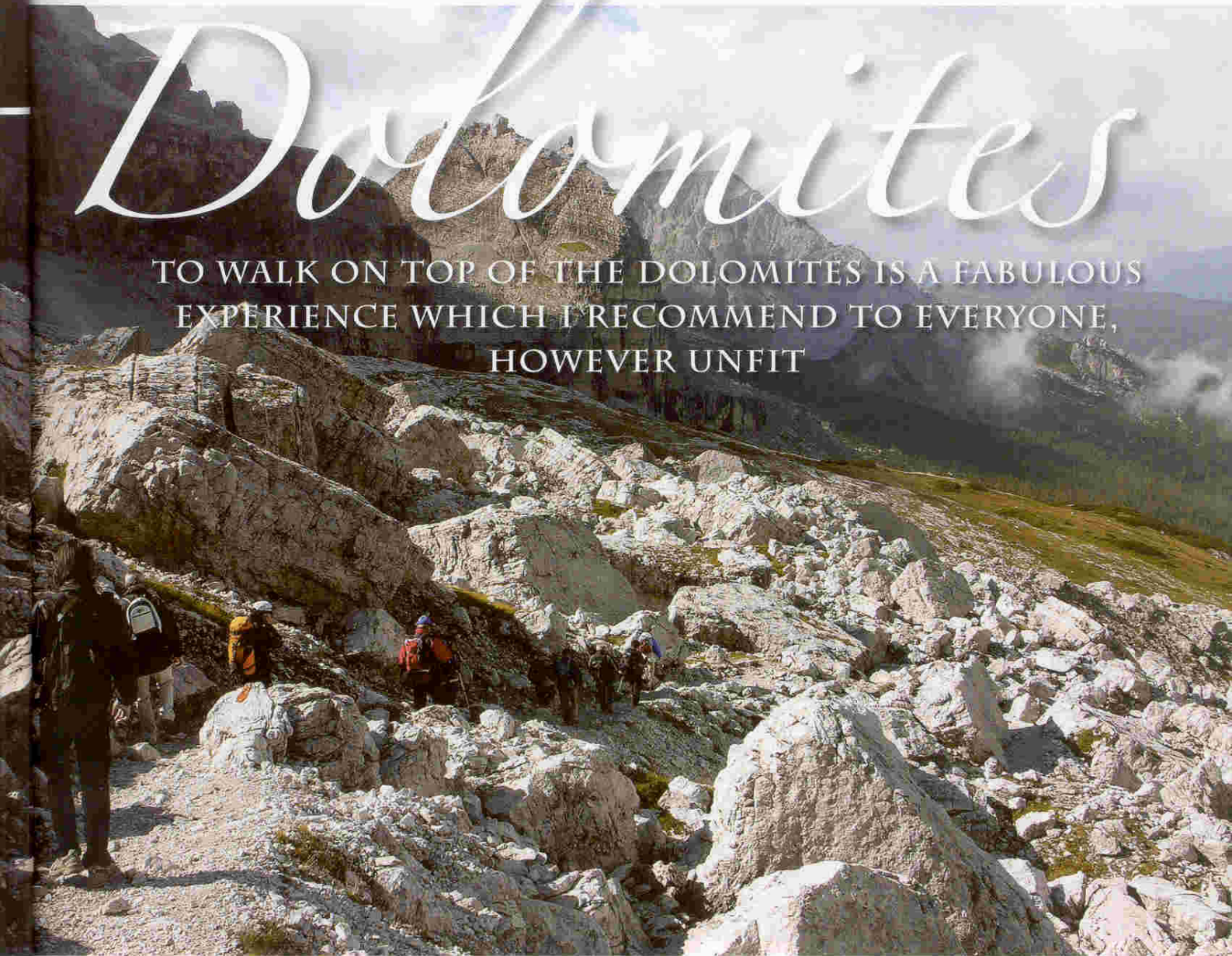
Excitement mounts as the cable-car whisks us up the mountain. To our combined delight, we alight in bright sunshine and learn a valuable lesson which works firmly in our favour for the rest of the day: although the weather might be foul in the valley, the cable-car will often lift you above the cloud. Of course, the opposite can also be true, and the weather can change in moments. But Roberto

shrugs and says even this doesn't matter because red stripes along the path mean you can never lose your way. Veteran of expeditions to K2 and Everest, he chats pleasantly as we walk and seems genuinely pleased by our obvious pleasure in our surroundings. After an hour or so, Deborah receives a worried call from the Tourist Office in the valley below. 'The weather is worse in Madonna di Campiglio than it's been for weeks. Are you OK?' We are all in fine spirits. Perhaps Roberto's patience becomes a little stretched with the umpteen photo stops we make along the way but he gives no sign of it.

To walk on top of the Dolomites is a fabulous experience which I recommend to everyone, however unfit. As long as you don't suffer from vertigo and can manage the cable-car, you can experience the wonder of these mountain heights. Our chosen route will take the whole day. It is boulder-strewn and steep in places. To us it makes an exciting challenge, but really it is easy-going. After a morning's walking way above the tree-line and the clouds, we stop for a simple lunch at Rifugio Tuckett before beginning our descent. No cable-car any longer for us fledgling *alpinisti*. Still bathed in ➤

Dolomites

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THE RAIN ON THE MOUNTAINS WHICH HAS PROVIDED THE ROMANCE OF WALKING ABOVE THE CLOUDS NOW PROVIDES US WITH GUSHING WATERFALLS

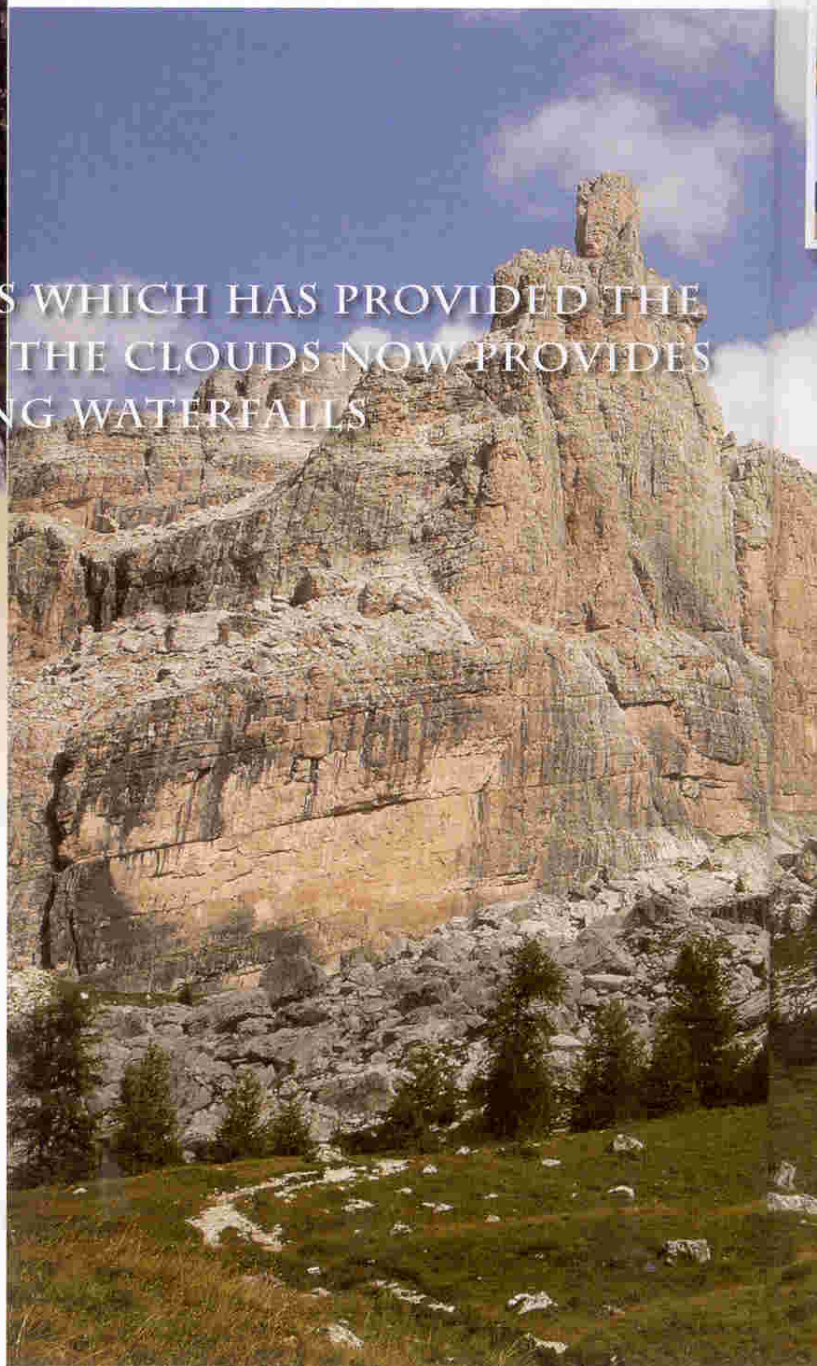
sunshine, we follow the path from Bocca di Tuckett into Vallesinella through forest and meadow to Rifugio Casinei. Over a drink, we decide that despite aching knees and the prospect of walking in dense rain-cloud and fading light, we will nonetheless follow Roberto's suggestion and make a two hour detour to some waterfalls... that's how much we are enjoying our first day's trekking. We are hooked. Vallesinella falls are really springs issuing straight from the rock, fed from above by rainwater and travelling through a network of fractures and caves within the Dolomitic limestone. During the winter freeze or in summer drought, they often disappear. Our timing is perfect. The rain on the mountains which has provided the romance of walking above the clouds now provides us with gushing waterfalls.

SPECTACULAR SURROUNDINGS

The Brenta Dolomites, a unique limestone landscape of dramatic pinnacles, turrets, massive rocky outcrops and boulder-strewn slopes, comprise the eastern part of the Parco Naturale Adamello-Brenta. The Adamello-Presanella Massif to the west is a completely contrasting granite terrain of lakes and weathered tors known as 'The Kingdom of Water and Ice'. The Park's remit is 'to protect the natural and environmental characteristics of the area; to promote scientific study and the use of natural resources by the community; and to safeguard and enhance the natural, cultural and human resources of the territory'. It extends over 620 sq km with 700 km

of marked trails to explore, including many mountain-biking trails of varying difficulty. There are twelve hundred species of flora for the keen botanist to discover. Gentians, wild crocus and edelweiss abound, along with an estimated twenty-five million trees.

The Park is home to thousands of chamois and deer, in all, fifty-one species of mammal, including the Alpine brown bear *Ursus arctos*. By 1996, the bear was, however, facing extinction. Project 'Life Ursus' released ten bears in the park between 1999 and 2002. One wandered up into Germany and was shot. Another had a narrow scrape with a motorist. The driver reported it to the police and was considered far too drunk to be on the road. Luckily for him, someone had heard of the project. Bear and driver escaped unharmed. Today there are around thirty



bears happily roaming the Park but there is no need to fear their presence. Even as a keen bear-spotter, you are extremely unlikely to encounter one. If you are lucky, you might come across signs of their presence: tracks, raided beehives, perhaps a half-eaten animal carcass. Farmers are compensated for any lost stock and the draw of the project as a tourist phenomenon far outweighs any costs.



STYLE SETTERS

The Brenta Dolomites took off as a fashionable destination for the intrepid rich of Europe from the 1850s onwards. John Ball, who founded The Alpine Club of London, was credited with establishing the first safe route to the summits above Madonna di Campiglio in 1864. Meanwhile, Quintino Sella (1827-1884) Italian industrialist, scientist and politician, founded the Club Alpino Italiano. However, the British continued to hog the limelight – in particular Francis Fox Tuckett, (1834-1913), a modest and exceptionally talented Quaker businessman from Bristol who was a prodigious climber, mountaineer, explorer, inventor and >

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mapmaker. He refused the presidency of the Alpine Club of London due, he said, to business commitments, but he nonetheless found time to bag 269 peak ascents and the crossing of 687 mountain passes. Tuckett and British geologist, Freshfield were the first to climb Cima Brenta (*below*), the highest peak in the Brenta Dolomites.

Popular with fellow Alpinists of all nationalities, Tuckett received the Italian order of Knight of San Maurizio and San Lazzaro from King Vittorio Emanuele II. Rifugio Tuckett was opened as a hostel on 20th August 1906. A second refuge has since been built next-door, dedicated to Quintino Sella.

Locals will tell you the main reason why they were not first to be recorded making these early ascents is because they did not have the money for such costly expeditions. During World War One, known locally as the 'White War of Adamello', Italians suffered a far harsher forced encounter with these mountains entrenched as soldiers on the summits at heights between 2500m – 3500m. *Vie ferrate*, metal ladders hammered into the sheer rock face, allowed them to move about the gun emplacements. They suffered terrible losses in brutally extreme exposed conditions. The iron ladders remain as a reminder of their ordeal. They are still used, and you can follow a 'Journey of Remembrance' along marked trails to military sites within the Park.



LOCAL HEROES

Since these harsh times, the Italians have made a more triumphant mark on their mountains, with men from the 1930s like dashing pilot and World War Two hero Giorgio Graffer and Gino Corrà, both climbers from Trentino, making daring and dangerous ascents of many of the Brenta peaks; and Bruno Detassis, known as the 'King of Brenta', who opened up routes to the summits which, even with today's modern equipment, are still considered a challenge. More recently, local hero Cesare Maestri from Madonna di Campiglio, dubbed the 'Spider of the Dolomites', has grabbed the headlines. A spirited and controversial figure in his youth, he has invented many new climbing techniques.

Today, the majority of visitors to Madonna di Campiglio are wealthy Italians, so there is no slacking on style in the region's hotels and restaurants. In winter, they ski. In summer, they explore. For those with less of a head for heights, there is still plenty to do. You could spend days just floating in the pool in the 'Wellness

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>> Visit www.italymag.co.uk/map-of-italy for location detail

details

information

Tourist Office **Madonna di Campiglio, Pinzolo, Val Rendena Via Pradalago 4, Madonna di Campiglio.** Tel: (+39) 0465 447 501 For a fantastic range of maps, guides and all other information the following sites are useful; www.campiglio.to www.pnab.it www.dolomitibrentabike.it www.pinzolo.to

where to stay and eat

MOUNTAIN HOSTELS

Rather than walk down each day, plan your route to eat and stay overnight in the mountains. Simple food and accommodation in stunning surroundings: **Alimonta:** Tel (+39) 0465 440366 – **Boch:** Tel (+39) 0465 440465 **Brentei:** Tel (+39) 0465 441244 – **Casinei:** Tel (+39) 0465 442708 **Grostè-Graffer:** Tel (+39) 0465 441358 – **Lago delle Malghette:** Tel (+39) 0465 440814 – **Lago Nambino :** Tel (+39) 0465 441621 **Tuckett:** Tel (+39) 0465 441226 – **Viviani Pradalago:** Tel (+39) 0465 441200

MADONNA DI CAMPIGLIO

Bio-hotel Hermitage & Restaurant, Stube Hermitage (4 star)
Via Castelletto Inferiore 69, Madonna di Campiglio. Unbeatable view and Wellness Centre. First class accommodation with the Maffei family. 2003 awarded *Qualità Parca* for making minimal impact on the environment in terms of recycling, building materials and energy consumption.

Tel: (+39) 0465 441558 Web: www.biohotelhermitage.it

Hotel Bertelli - Wellness Centre & La Taverna 'Il Gallo Cedrone'
(4 star) **Via Cima Tosa 80, Madonna di Campiglio.** Fabulous food and charming service. Excellent wine cellar. The welcome hors d'oeuvre is a feast in itself. Hosted by the Masè family since the 1930s. Tel: (+39) 0465 441013 Web: www.hotelbertelli.it www.ilgallocedrone.it

Val Rendena & Pinzolo, Casa al Campo. Excellent local food and accommodation with the Tisi family on a working organic farm in the countryside. Tel: (+39) 0465 500290 Cell: (+39) 3385008438 Web: www.casalcampo.com

getting there

BY CAR: A4 from Milan - Verona, exit Brescia Est

A22 Bolzano – Modena, exit Trento Centro or Roverto Sud

BY TRAIN: FF.SS Trento- Brescia BY BUS: Links - Trento, Milano, Brescia

BY PLANE: Airports: Milano-Linate, Milano-Malpensa, Bergamo-Orio al Serio, Brescia-Montichiari, Verona-Villafranca, Venezia-Marco-Polo

festivals

Madonna di Campiglio: Compleanno dell'Imperatore.

The Emperor's Birthday, 18th August: an historical revival of the Habsburg Court. Pageantry, parades and music

Val Rendena: Dance Theatre Festival, 29 June – 6 July

Festival dei Antichi Sapori, late September

I Giorni dei Funghi 29 Aug–14 Sep. Guided walks with a mushroom expert. Collect and identify mushrooms and learn to prepare and cook them at Hotel Bertelli with chef Vinicio Tenni

For more information including news and weather visit www.italymag.co.uk/italy/place/trentino-alto-adige



Centre' at the Hermitage, admiring the tasteful décor and stunning view. The hotel has been run by the Maffei family since 1899. Situated on the edge of town, it's a favourite hideaway for celebrities. Juventus have their summer training ground close-by. Game is the local speciality but there is still plenty to enjoy for those of a less meaty persuasion. I love the ambience and inventiveness of the menu at Il Gallo Cedrone, in Hotel Bertelli, especially their version of the traditional dish *cassunziei*, (beetroot ravioli) served with lavender-flower mousse and spinach salad.

LOCAL SPECIALITIES

Wines and cheeses from Trentino are generally excellent. A great place to enjoy them is for Sunday lunch with the Tisi family at Casa al Campo, a restaurant on an organic farm closeby in Val Rendena (*below*) near Pinzolo. Everything served will be local, most of it produce from the farm. It will be packed, so book first. Pinzolo is an interesting old town famous for the sixteenth-century fresco on the Church of San Vigilio, *La Danza Macabra* (*above*) - a reminder from the Baschenis brothers that death comes to us all, no matter how grand. The tower dates from the beginning of the tenth century. Next-door, a World War One gun commemorates those who fell in 'The White War'. The people of Val Rendena and Pinzolo have Celtic roots stretching back more than two thousand years. Here they did not espouse the feudal system. This was the domain of the knife-grinders. 