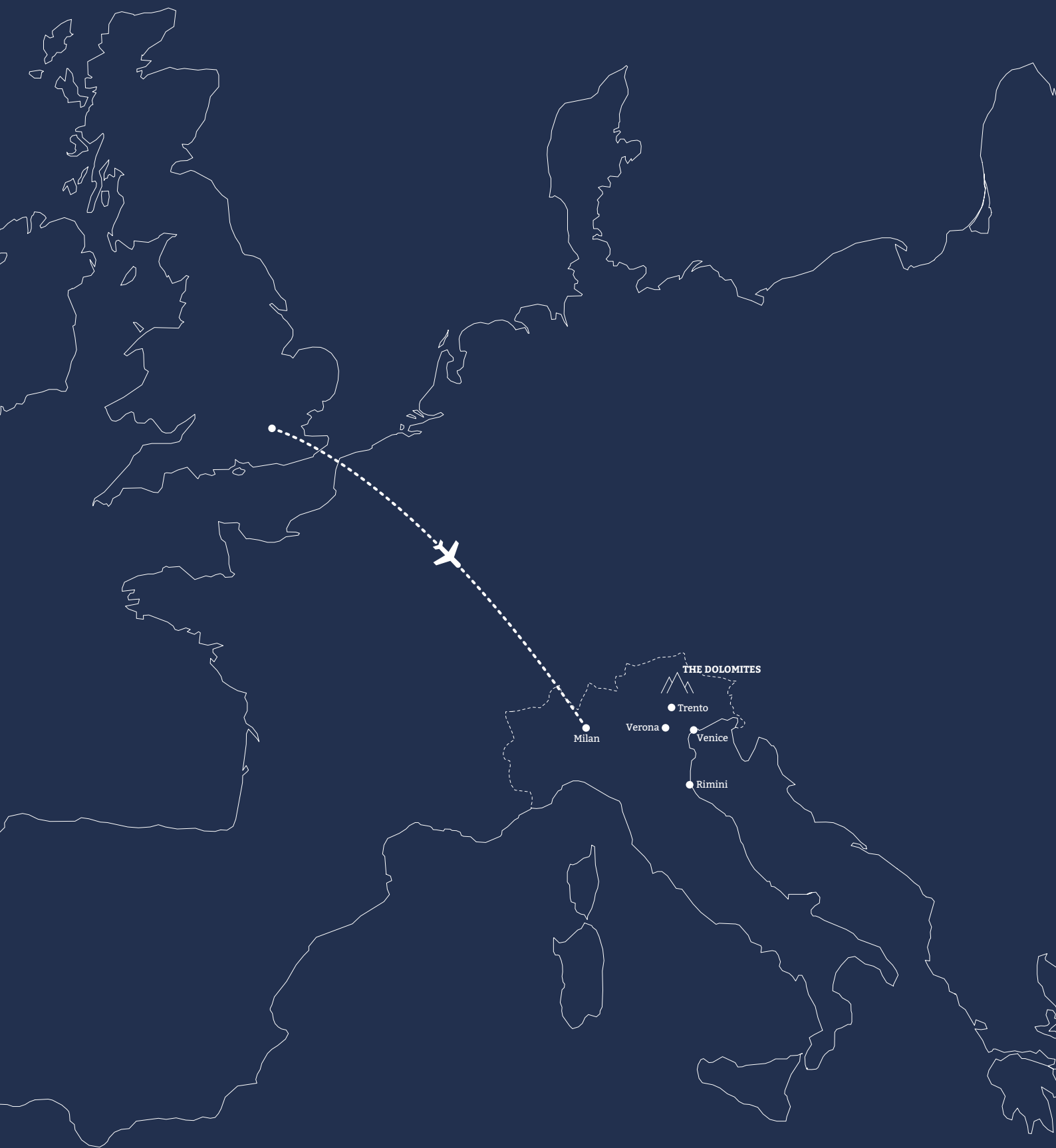


# The Dolomites

*August/September 1977*



Backpacking and Walking in Northern Italy  
with Pete Nightingale



Cover: High up in the Dolomites in the Sella group.

# The Dolomites

*August/September 1977*



*Bivouac dal Bianco in the Marmolada district.*

## **Backpacking and Walking in Northern Italy with Pete Nightingale**

From a handwritten diary.  
Unedited from the original.  
Ken Heptonstall 1977

## SUNDAY

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Guildford, 2 man canoeing with Pete.

Had fun at a weir until we overturned, scary because we were caught in a circular current.

It was difficult and dangerous to get out of.

## MONDAY

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2hr delay of our plane at Heathrow.

Flew DC9 to Milan where it was 80 degrees.

Walked around a beautiful clean city. 'Dou Cappuccino' with a plate of spaghetti and mince.

Travelled by train at dusk via Verona where we changed to an old fashioned train heading to Trento for midnight.

We then walked around for a bit and dossed on a football field.

Pete got some free booze from a locals house and we got pissed.

## TUESDAY

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Arrived at campsite at 8am, mountains great and steep. A short siesta time before we hit Trento, a very historic town.

Caught funicular up a 1000ft, lovely aerial views of Trento. Saw grapes and peppers growing, masses of tropical butterfly including Peacock and lizards.

Unsettled by my first snake, the first I have ever seen, slithering through the undergrowth.

Signs to beware of snakes everywhere.

Wrote postcards, and chatted with some Germans over tea.

The Germans bought us some schnapps which tasted like wine. Bed.

## WEDNESDAY

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Upped the tent, and wandered mistakenly around Trento with our packs.

Walked 400m up the railway and into Trento bus station 'Autoliner', where we bought a map and phrase book.

The Funicular we were planning to catch was closed.

So we walked through swamp and apple grove and then up a sheer face 3000ft with pack which took 2.5hrs.

We walked another 15km where we had magnificent views of Trento, and more impressive were the Trento range seen beyond.

Legs ache after the climb.

Caught a bus to Menvelo. Campsite £2 per night. Our first views of the 'proper' mountains. Had a shower and pinched two toilet rolls.

## THURSDAY

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Day of rest, bought postcards and grub, went fishing and lost my spinner. Too cold for me to swim. Weather chilly.

Plan route for tomorrow. Read the Poucher guide to the Dolomites.

Met a guy with a Triumph motorbike, backpacking through the Dolomites. Went for a few grappas with him.

## FRIDAY

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Lost in woods for 6 hours, saw massive black snake. There seemed to have been a major landslip and there were snakes everywhere.

Frustrated by lack of footpaths. Had cappuccino in a hut.

Went fishing, had a free shower.

## SATURDAY

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Superb walk with pack, 15km and 6000ft climb to Tuckett Pedrotti.

Great paths, got magnificent views in sunshine, plenty of photos.

Snacks and beers in each hut we passed. 'Bare foot' Pete. Through a glacier.

Spent the night with a Dutch couple, an Austrian couple and a British superman rock 'know all'.

Had too many vinos with a frankfurter and was sick.

Bunk room full of snotty Germans.

## SUNDAY

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It pissed it down all night and day.

We 'potted' about on the glacier and tried an Alpino route on a ledge 1000ft up, which proved too dangerous and we came back.

Wrote cards.

Fed up with sitting around, we packed up and set off over the glacier with full packs and an Irish loving Austrian who was an extremely interesting guy to chat with.

Big accident on arrival at Brenta Tuckett.

Helicopter and stretcher carriers taking injured all the way down to Madonna de Campiglio.

Active walking day and waterfalls. Very heavy rain.

Decided to stay in a hotel with bath. Luxury. Glad we did as it rained and thundered all night.

Had a row in a pizza bar as we were 500 lire short. Served stale bread so we pissed off. £6 per night.

## MONDAY

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Still pissing it down. Instead of doing the 5 lakes walk, the weather made us ascend the 'Groste' via Funicular and long walk in tremendous rain to Lago de Tovel.

Soaked on arrival a cafe owner got us a lift to Trieno. With hundreds of buzzing Italian faces glaring at us and speaking little English.

Got on a tour bus. Free ride dropping us off looking miserable and wet (but not feeling that way) up pops a little woman taking pity on us.

She let us sleep in her garage and very kindly brought us down a massive bowl of spaghetti like soup. Very friendly.

We slept on vegetable boxes with our Karrimats on top.

## TUESDAY

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Blisters and tense muscles. Pete's description of "*he felt like he'd been stretched on a rack*" was apt.

I got a sharp electric shock from a light cable mixing with running water in our hosts garage.

Bus to Fondo, where unfortunately there was no campsite.

Italians mucked us about and we ended up in an Alto's bar.

Sat by Lago Foldo in the afternoon.

Did drawing of a picturesque cabin.

We had to put up the tent in a wood marked no camping – a beautiful spot.

The night brought an unforgettable thunderstorm. We were forced to leave the tent after a terrific flash right across the roof of the tent and into the valley.

We were scared the rock face above us might be hit by lightening and come down on us.

So we dossed outside a nearby hotel until the storm was over.



### WEDNESDAY

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Left Fondo by bus after a long wait in a cafe.

The 'Rod Stewart' bus driver dropped us off at 3000ft, and then we went down by funicular into, and onto Bolzano. We were a bit confused as to whether a campsite existed – but we eventually found it in St Moritz.

Had a few Forst beers in a pub. Northern Italy has suddenly become full of Germans – we are now near the border. The Germans seem to sleep in tracksuits which seems strange. Had a swim on the campsite.

### THURSDAY

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Pete's feet were bad. Had an early swim in the pool. Spent the afternoon wondering around – bought the Daily Express – yippee.

Had a sardine Pizza!

### FRIDAY

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Got travellers cheques and had a long day sun bathing by the small pool.

Many many swims, hot weather.

Got some food for our expedition. Ate and got extra supplies of pears from a tree.

### SATURDAY

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A super day. We got up at 4.30am and downed the tent in pitch blackness. And we were 'away' without paying for our 3 nights residence.

Waited half asleep on a bench near Bolzano station, and luckily got a bus at 8 o'clock to Lago di Carezza with fantastic views over to the Latemar mountains.

Decided to get some food after hitching back and forth to Nova Levante. Returning to pick up our rucksacks which we left in a cafe.

Went up the mountain in the chairlift with our rucksacks.

At the top the walking was surprisingly flat.

My god what did we see after that!

An alpine route with our rucksacks which was too dangerous for words, up steep cliff faces, over a glacier with ladders and ropes which were of very little assistance.

I was scared for my life, but turning back would have been even harder.

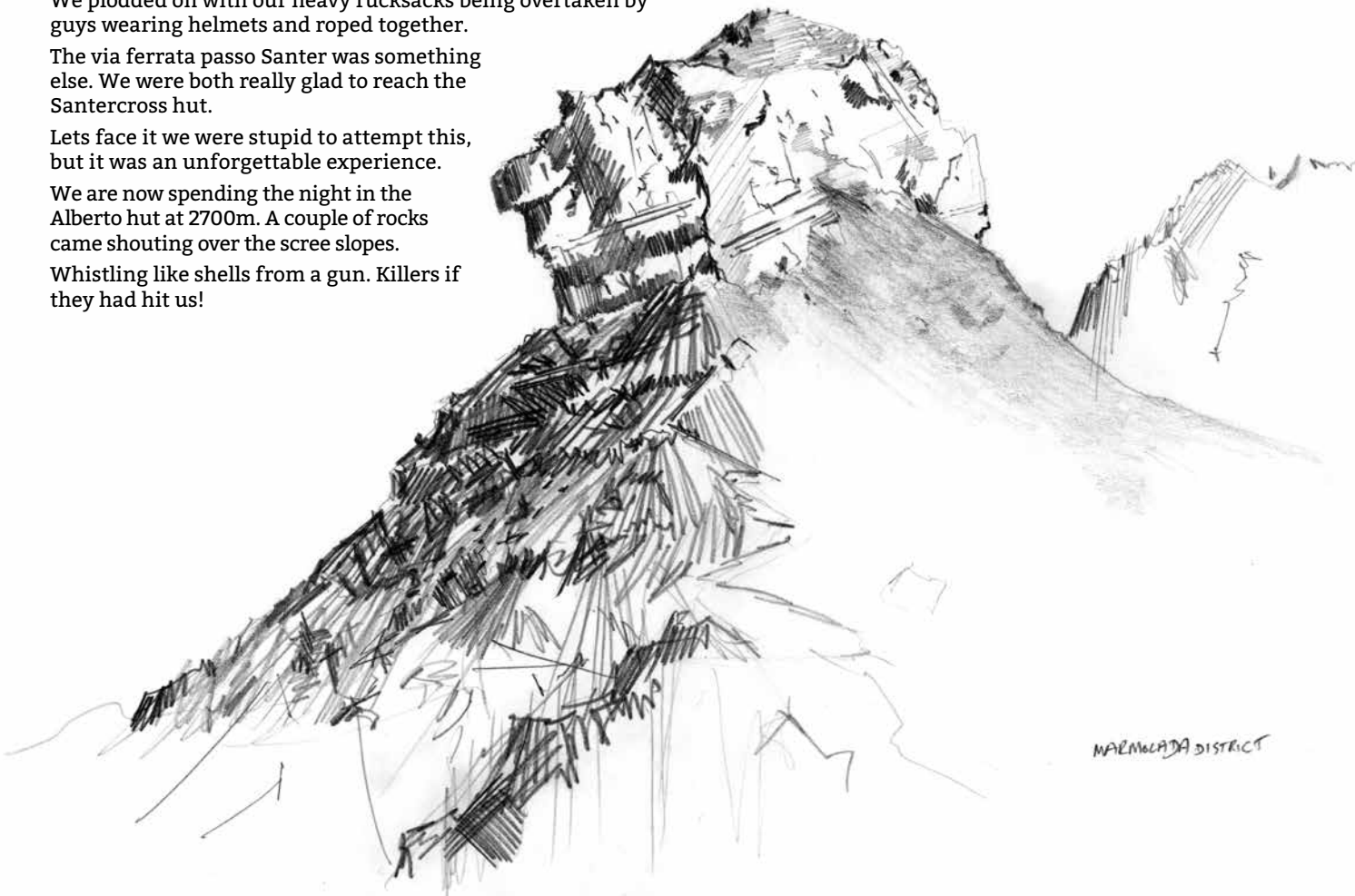
We plodded on with our heavy rucksacks being overtaken by guys wearing helmets and roped together.

The via ferrata passo Santer was something else. We were both really glad to reach the Santercross hut.

Lets face it we were stupid to attempt this, but it was an unforgettable experience.

We are now spending the night in the Alberto hut at 2700m. A couple of rocks came shouting over the scree slopes.

Whistling like shells from a gun. Killers if they had hit us!



MAENGLADA DISTRICT

## SUNDAY

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A super long walk. From the Vajolet hut to the Alberto hut for 9am. Then we left the rucksacks and stormed a very long route at a terrific pace to the Bergamo hut for a hot chocolate.

An excellent day, we ran some of the first bit. Stormed up a long alpine gulley in 40mins.

Up and down all day and past the Tierser hut at 1500m. Using ladders and steps all day.

Great views to complete the entire Rosengarten range.

We then ran down the remaining P50. Across the Molingen scree and bumped into our three German friends.

It started raining a mile from our hut where there was a crabby atmosphere so we left without paying up.

## MONDAY

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My camera was bust again. Went down the funicular and had egg sandwiches at 11am.

On to Canazei by bus, where we are now camped.

Beers and a juke box! Excellent lager and some top singing.

## TUESDAY

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On the Cos funicular followed by a chairlift up to 2500m.

From the top got a superb view of the glacial side of Marmolada.

It was so hot, even at this height, that we spent most of the day sunbathing.

Did a couple of sketches and had a great lemon tea.

Then we went down and swam in the swimming pool in Canazei – a rip off for 66p.

## WEDNESDAY

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Hitched to Passo Pordoi with a law student. Then got a single to the top of the Sella group, and were very surprised how flat it was on the top – a plateau.

We then set off hiking for 6.5 hours over glacier and scree, in shorts only!

Lots of people on the top where we viewed the magnificent Sella Towers and continued on a ridge to Piz de Sella where our path didn't seem to exist.

We then had a 3hr rock climb which was totally unsuitable.

We set off back, undeterred and rattled down a long path reminiscent of the Lakes.

The first car that came, I managed to hitch us a lift.

## THURSDAY

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By midday we were finally ready for off, after a shower and our usual egg and tomato toasted sandwiches.

Followed a good trail through woods (all footpaths are numbered 601 etc) finally reaching the refuge Contrin.

Maps are often very deceptive and often totally wrong.

We set off from Contrin up a very tedious and tiring path with full packs.

But on arrival at the ridge we got some terrific long distance views of forthcoming ranges.

To our left was the famed South wall of Marmolada (a training ground for top mountaineers).

It is 3000ft of sheer rock. The difficult route we were told is reputed to take a week.

We spent the night sleeping at 2704m in my first 'Big di Bianco' (bivouac) which was terrific – in the col of passo Ombretto.

In this tiny red hut with 9 fold out bunk beds and a small table for emergencies – we are currently eating and looking forward to using the blankets to keep us warm.

Its been getting very chilly in the night of late. Made tea from glacial melt water.

## FRIDAY

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Some krauts joined us during an early morning snowstorm.

They took photos of us. It was cold and they shared some juice with us and were enlightening company.

We made our way down a long valley to the facilities and we pitched tent just off the caravan park and had a good sing song.

A quick walk to Marmolada funivia who told us there were no buses – so we had a rather large beer to compensate.

## SATURDAY

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Left in really hot conditions, many skiers were going up the snow face on the North side of Marmolada. Tried hitching but to no avail. Told that the bus from Caprilla to Cortina (after 9km of walking) was only once per day at 8am. The nearest campsite was another 10km away, so we set off walking again. After 7hrs of walking we finally got to the lift, only to find the campsite closed. I was dizzy after walking so much. Bumped into some Germans who took us to another bus stop – where again, the bus did not turn up. We were feeling stropy, and very very cold. Cortina was still 15km away, so we set off again. Luckily we hitched a lift. Had a massive pizza and beer on arrival. Found a campsite around 10pm, in total pitch black we pitched the tent. One helluva day.

## SUNDAY

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Lounged around in very hot conditions. Had teas and pear sandwiches. Walk in the late evening. Did a sketch of the tent.

## MONDAY

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We have decided to go to Rimini. Looked around Cortina in the morning. Bought a Sunday Observer for 50p – a luxury item. Walked up to the lake which was abundant with trout, but unfortunately not deep enough for a swim. Pete's ice axe went clean through the flysheet. Bought a toothbrush £1.50 as have lost mine and elastoplasts. Pete's boots went sailing down the river – a great laugh!! He's had enough of them.

## TUESDAY

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Spent 12hours travelling South by bus and then train from Cortina to Ferrara where we were thrown off the train because we wouldn't pay the extras. Money is getting a bit short now. Sandwiches on the train. Finally got to Rimini about 4pm on a beautiful afternoon. Took a bus to a campsite right by the sea. Very warm so went for a swim, followed by a beer on the promenade. The night became very windy and hundreds of midges blew into the tent. Jukebox and stories in the evening with an American.

## WEDNESDAY

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Killed all existing ants and midges and enjoyed an early morning lemon tea on the seafront. Trains whizz past our campsite. Nose now peeling. Walked the full length of the beach in Rimini and sat and watched gulls on the Belvedere. Bought shampoo and sunbathed in the waves.

## THURSDAY

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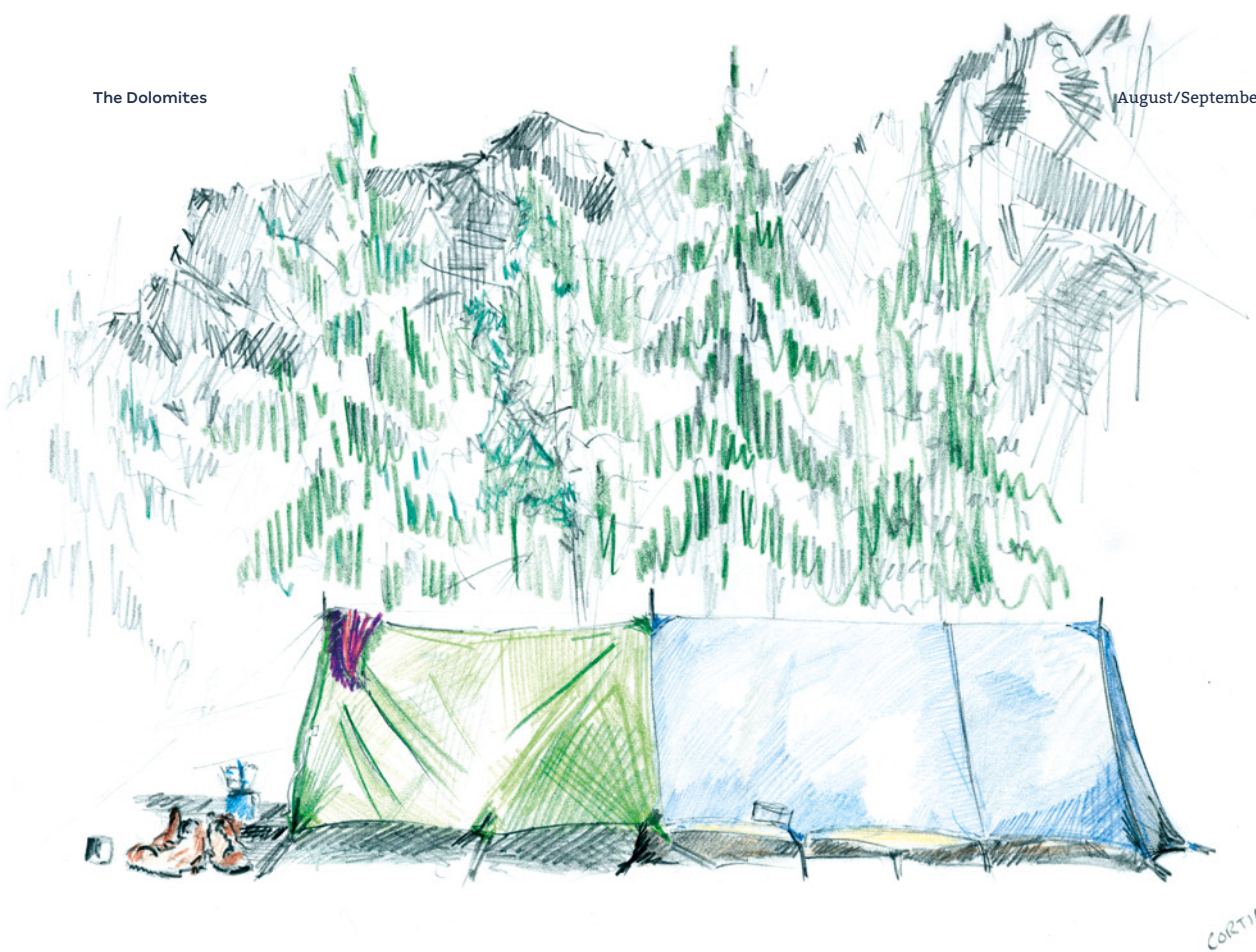
Sunbathed until 4pm. A big Italian kicked our gear about on the beach because we had sat in his spot. Before we scared him off!! Went into the old part of Rimini for a super pizza Calzone with beer followed by a grappa and then to see a film Sinbad and the Sabre Tooth Tiger at the luxurious cinema. We stayed up later than we had done all holiday, until midnight. Ice creams on the way back to our tent.

## FRIDAY

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Swim. Generally a crap day. Italians can be the most ill mannered, impatient, temperamental, ignorant lazy good for nothing race I have ever come across. Their timekeeping is non existent. "*They are greasy fat wops*" says Pete. My knee is now hurting. Winkle pickers are in fashion here! We have also just seen a bunch of gypsies reverse a caravan into a tree and knock it over.





#### SATURDAY

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Left campsite at 5am. And caught a very slow train to Bologna, and from there onto Venice where we stood up the whole journey on a very crowded train.

Went and booked into a Pensione (8000 lire). Went to San Marco famed for its arches, and then went to see the latest James Bond which was in Italian.

#### SUNDAY

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Very boring after our escapades in the Dolomites. The streets in Venice are just jammed and people are getting ripped off everywhere.

We now have hardly any cash. There are few free museums. Went to a Holy Mass with incense flying everywhere.

This place would be beautiful without so many people. Yanks everywhere.

Watched some glass blowing by an artist and saw three gondolas roll over.

Went to see an Italian porn film in 3D, which we both knew would be dreadful – but not much else to do.

#### MONDAY

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Travelled from Venice to Verona with its superb architecture and famous arena.

Visited a theatre and decorative churches.

Decided to stay the night as the weather was lovely and hot.

Hotel 6000 lire per night. The usual yarn with Italians, we waited ages for the restaurant to open at 6.30pm as indicated.

It didn't open so we went elsewhere.

Had a couple of vinos and a gigantic Calzone pizza and 'grosse' beer which we didn't realise was actually two steins.

Went to the cinema to see a British war film and sat in the balcony.

#### TUESDAY

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Travelled from Verona to Milan.

#### WEDNESDAY

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Flew home after 32 nights away.



*Late evening sunset.*



*On the Sentiero delle Bocchette during heavy rain and cloud.*



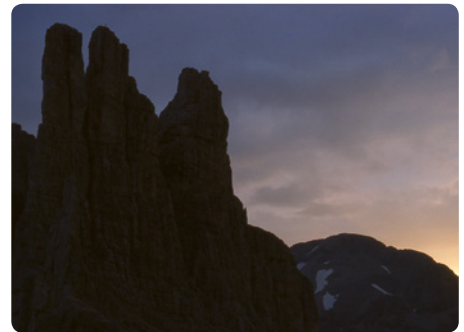
*A lovely mountain pass through Rosengarten.*



*Climbing the Santer pass in the Rosengarten district.*



*Santer pass in Rosengarten.*



*The Vajolet pinnacles in Rosengarten.*



*One of the many mountain hostels, typical of the high level walking. This one is Rifugio Preuss.*



*German mountaineers starting their ascent in Rosengarten.*



The massive peak of Marmolada, in the Sella range.



Typical route signposts in the Sella range.



Our rucksacks still showing our baggage tags.  
This view is from the Passo Ombretta.



En route with plenty of routes to choose from.



Pete striding out in the Marmolada district.



Early morning, having spent the night in the Bivouac dal Bianco.



Pete with full pack high on the mountain pass.



View above the cloud from Bivouac dal Bianco.



*Walking in sunshine.  
The gaiters were for protection against snakes.*

*Footnote*

We were very conscious whilst in the 'Dolomiti' of the difference between the spellings of words in different countries.

Maps varied considerably, dependent on whether they were in Italian, English or German. We used all three.

Examples include Funivia (Funicular), Ombretta (Ombrettola), Venezia (Venice). My captioning is, as written at the time.

Also, the currency was lire – not euros as it is today.

I clearly jump around in my diary from metres to feet and from kilometres to miles. I still do this today.

There was of course no mobiles or emails – so it was postcards and paper maps.

We carried cash only and travellers cheques.

The photographs were taken on 35mm transparency and recently converted to a digital format.