

TYPE 1 TOURING

Mind-blowing mountains, incredible skiing and bags that miraculously move from one rifugio to the next. It's the treat we all deserve...

WORDS SOPHIE NICHOLSON

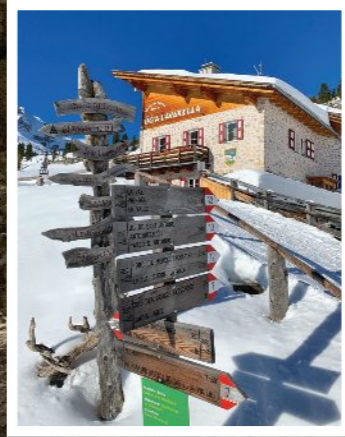
Packed huts. Tiny dormitories. Stinking loos. Snoring room-mates. Average food. Expensive booze. Ah, the joys of multi-day ski touring, eh? If you're the kind of person who returns home from a hut-to-hut ski touring trip looking like you've been on a five-day bender at Glastonbury, it may be time to have a wee change of thought.

What if I told you the whole multi-day ski touring experience could be more about enjoying and less about enduring? What if I shared with you an itinerary where you could experience the life-affirming joys of ski touring while the trip was actually happening, instead of weeks later when you finally locate your favourite spectacles with the rose-tinted lenses? ➤

I'm pretty sure even the most hardcore of you would give up your first born to find out more wouldn't you?
 As it turns out there's absolutely no need to exchange offspring for the info because, having experienced the delights of ski touring in the Dolomites, I'm quite happy to share all the details. In fact, in the nature of paying it forward and being a super ski stoke spreader, it's my job to do so.
 We all know that when it comes to stunning scenery, magnificent food and kick-ass hospitality, the Dolomites are the all-conquering hero of global mountain ranges. Ingredients that not only make it a molto primo destination for resort skiing and all other mountain-style adventures, but ones that translate into maximo touring awesomeness too.
 Having heard many whimsical tales of touring trips punctuated by pizza and prosecco, I made it my mountain mission to break my Dollies hut-to-hut duck. With only a short travel window possible, I needed to find an accessible, circular route with maximum backcountry bang for the days-away-from-the-computer buck, so it was time to call in the local experts at adventure holiday company Dolomite Mountains to help guide me to my high mountain heaven.

THE PERFECT APERITIVO

Day one of the four-day Ski Touring Around Cortina d'Ampezzo itinerary began after a night in the brilliant and bizarrely named three-star Hotel Panda in Cortina itself. After meeting up with the rest of the group (three jolly chaps from the UK and our stereotypically handsome and hilarious Italian guide), we jumped in a car and began to make our way up and out of Cortina to the trailhead at Sant Uberto.
 Vibrating with a combination of excitement, espresso and one too many breakfast brioches, we went through the usual backcountry rituals of checking transceivers, putting on skins and setting bindings into uphill mode. All normal stuff for the start of a multi-day touring trip, except for one fundamental difference. The size – or lack of it – of our packs.
 I have to say, it felt weird and more than a little bit wrong to be giving a duffel bag with all my overnight kit to a driver to transport directly to the hut on my behalf, but hey, gift horses and mouths, eh?
 The morning's skin to the Rifugio Senes took us along a 4x4 track through the Fanes-Senes-Braies National Park. More of a lung and leg warmer than a technical uphill adventure, we covered the gradual 7km and 860m kick-turn-free ascent up the valley to the rifugio at 2146m in around three hours. Once out of the forest and onto the plateau, the mind-blowing potential of the area began to reveal itself.
 After a brief bite of lunch in the sun at the almost-deserted rifugio, we headed back out to get some downhill action. A hit up to the Col de Lasta at 2297m offered the opportunity to get another couple of hundred metres of ascent in the legs and some spanking panoramic views over some of the Dolomites' finest peaks, including the Croda Rossa (3146m), Cristallo (3221m) and Tofana (3243m). The descent was short but sweet with a dusting of powder to build anticipation.



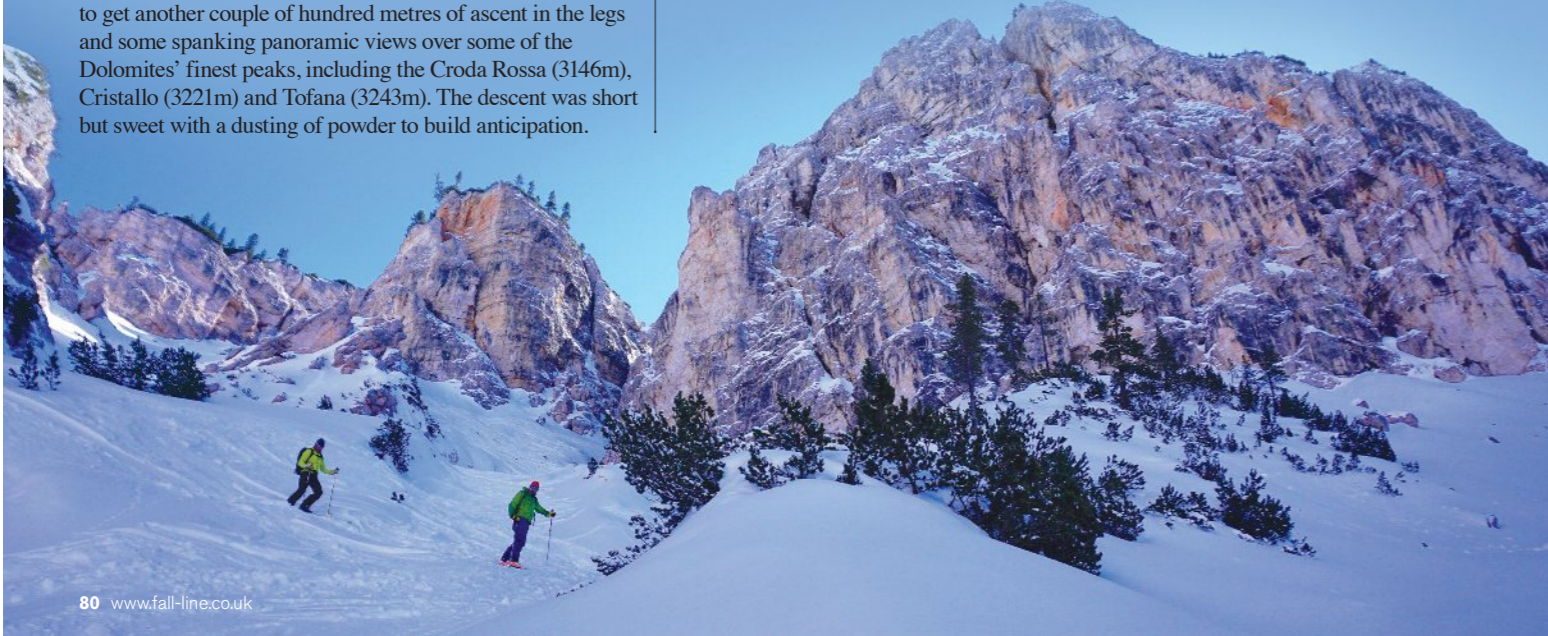
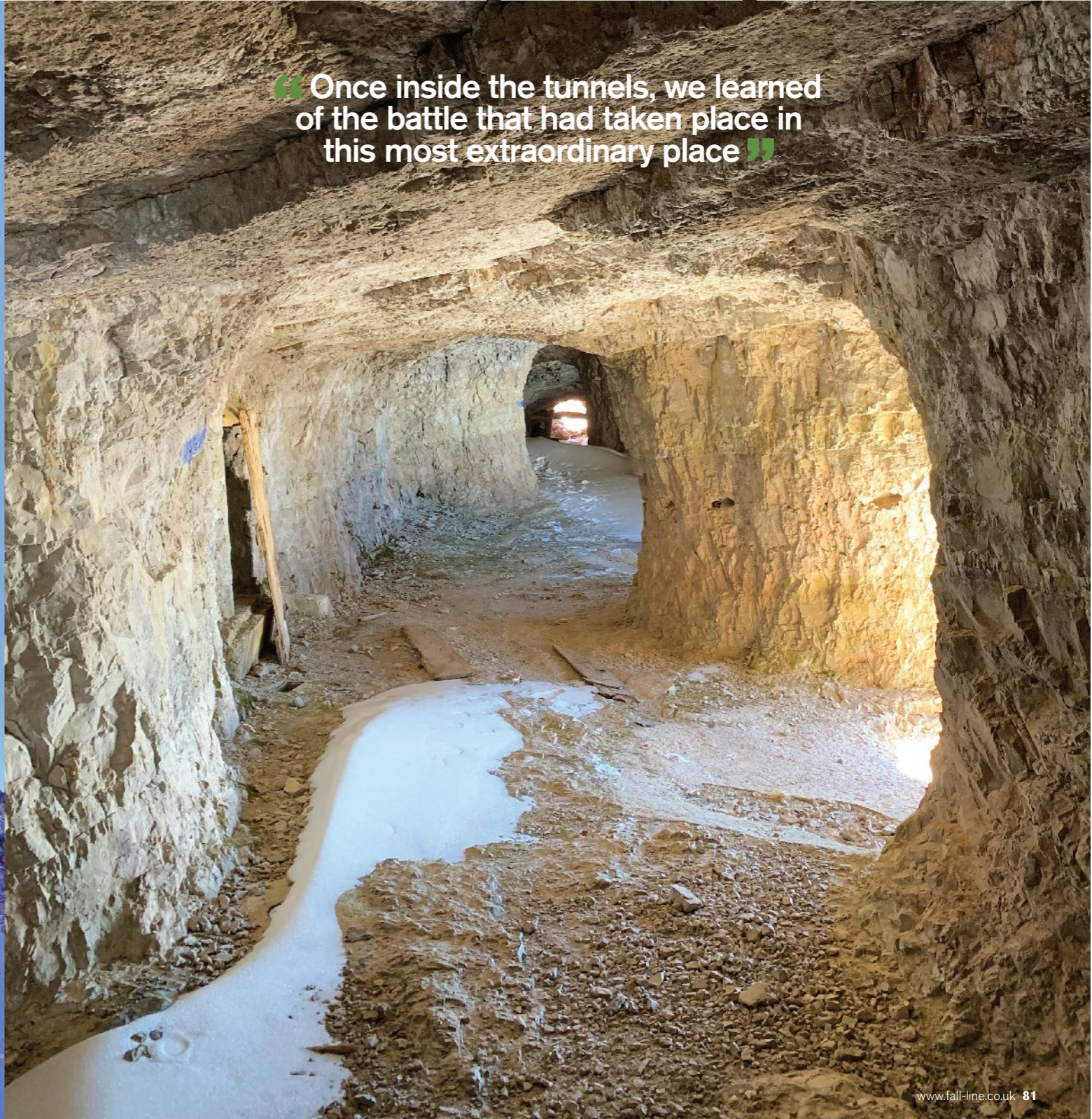
A dusting of fresh pow and the promise of some Tyrolean dumplings back at base? We like...

Once back at the refuge, the full extent of this oh-so civilised touring experience started to become apparent. Think private rooms with mirrors and sockets and comfy beds complete with crisp white sheets and cosy duvets. Immaculately clean, stink-free bathrooms with hairdryers and hand wash. Oh, and of course the presence of the aforementioned duffel bag containing all of one's own clean clothes for the evening, next day and beyond.

PEAKS AND COULOIRS

After a few vino rossos and a comfortable night's sleep, we emerged from our separate slumbers and convened for breakfast at the exceptionally civilised time of 8am. It's a stark contrast to the pressure-laden vibe that absorbs the crowded huts dotted along the more iconic Alpine multi-day itineraries and that suits me just fine. No rushing. No competition. Another espresso? Si grazie...
 A quick repack of the travelling duffel bag and we were on our way once more. Direction: the Val di Fanes and the Rifugio Lavarella via the jewel in today's crown – the Val Dal Sei – an impressive and narrow but not excessively steep north-west-facing couloir.
 Offering fantastic skiing at about 35-40 degrees, the Val Dal Sei is a classic Dolomites couloir – slightly intimidating at the top but not sewing-machine leg sketchy. With no other soul in sight, I dropped in and immediately began to relax as I made those first few turns in the cold snow sheltered from the sun. This was what I came for.
 Back at the 4x4 track again, we had the choice to head to the nearby Rifugio Pederu (1548m) for a wee snack, but opted to crack on in the direction of the Forca Di Ciamin at 2395m. The steady but sustained skin up to the col took a ➤

“Once inside the tunnels, we learned of the battle that had taken place in this most extraordinary place”



couple of hours and we were rewarded with yet more panoramic mountain views all the way over to Tre Cime Di Lavaredo and a fast descent back down from whence we'd came. A wide west/north-west-facing slope with so many options, it offered the perfect contrast to the more considered descent of the couloir earlier in the day. This was full gas time. Let 'em fly.

Back at the track and it was skins on again for the 500m ascent up to the Rifugio Lavarella, another stunning refuge with gorgeous rooms, amazing food and even better beer - it doubles as the highest microbrewery in Europe. Score.

After a few tasty beers, a solid 1400m of ascent in the legs, a massive plate of delicious Tyrolean dumplings and a wedge of tiramisu we were sparko by 10pm.

THE CURSE OF THE SOUTH

With its expansive terrain and seemingly endless lines to go at, you could easily base yourself out of the Rifugio Lavarella or the equally stonky neighbouring Rifugio Fanes for an entire week. But guided group ski touring itineraries sadly do not allow for such glorious curve balls to be thrown, so the penultimate day of the trip saw us sticking to the plan and heading back in the direction of civilisation, the Cortina d'Ampezzo ski resort and the Rifugio Lagazuoi.

Undeniably the most frustrating day of the trip, we skinned up through tantalisingly cold north-facing powder to the top

Ski, drink, eat, repeat...

of the Forcella Del Lago (2545m) – a steep pass that sits in between the Cima Scotini and Cima del Lago – to be met with an absolutely epic view over the Cortina Dolomites. But no snow.

The impossibly blue skies and warm temps we'd experienced throughout the trip so far had stripped the south-west-facing couloir almost bare. So it was skins on packs time for the most bizarre experience of walking down an epic ski line at the same time as folks heading in the opposite direction were about to lay down fast and fresh turns in untouched powder on the other side. La dolce vita? Meh... not so much.

With no descent-induced adrenaline to fuel the final skin up to the Rifugio Lagazuoi, the last part of the day definitely felt like a slog and things took a turn for the real world again when we finally arrived at the refuge only to find that our epic travelling duffle bags were not quite as rapid as ourselves.

Undeniably the busiest and most touristy of the huts, the Rifugio Lagazuoi may not have been my favourite stop on the trip but boy did it redeem itself when it came to sunset. Cue oh-so many Insta-bangers.

And yes if you're wondering, the bags did eventually turn up, which was a relief. I'd become rather used to having a pair of jeans for evening wear and a big wash bag full of toiletries... shh, tell no-one.



“ I began to relax as I made those first few turns in the cold snow sheltered from the sun. This was what I came for ”

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LIVE. SKI. REPEAT.

“ If the pandemic has left you feeling somewhat depleted, you simply have to get your Type 1-fun seeking backcountry booty to Cortina ”



WAR AND PEACE

Our fourth and final day in the Dolomites was a real memory-maker from start to finish. You can extol the benefits of morning yoga all you want, but if you're looking for an epic start to the day, I'd take waking up at 2752m to watch the sunrise in the mountains any day of the week.

With yet another grandissimo Italian breakfast in our bellies, we ripped down the first section of the empty red piste in the direction of the Passo Falzarego before nipping off to the side, putting on skins and climbing gradually up to access the Travenanzes valley. A wild and remote place yet minutes from the busy ski resort, we traversed round the top of the valley in the shadow of the Lagazuoi Grande range and in the direction of the stunning Tofana di Rozes.

This was to be a journey of a different kind. Today was not about finding fresh powder or steep couloirs, it was about immersion in the landscape and history of the area.

Our goal was to find the Castelletto war tunnels located at the foot of the immense Tofana, where the Italian Alpini troops and Austro-Hungarian Kaiserjäger faced off in a long mountain battle in the First World War. After a steep skin and bootpack we found the tiny entrance into one of the tunnels, left our kit outside and crawled in. Once inside, the tunnel opened up and it was easy to stand and walk around as we learned of the battle that had taken place in this most extraordinary place.

At the end of 1915 the Italians devised a plan to dig a long tunnel that they would fill with explosives to blow up the Austro-Hungarian troops located higher up in the mountain. Work started in winter and by June 1916 the Italian soldiers were within metres of the top of the Castelletto, just underneath the Austro-Hungarian troops.

At 3.30am on 11 July the mine, with 35 tons of explosives, was activated and a gigantic cloud of smoke, dust and debris rose in the sky above the Italian front. The explosives had

Dolomiti touring goodness, here we come

done their work, but the initiative ultimately failed as Hans Schneeberger – the officer of the Kaiserjäger at Castelletto – and 10 other soldiers survived and succeeded in repelling the attack by a number of Italian soldiers, who ended up killed themselves when they entered the crater that was full of carbon monoxide that had been created by the explosion of the mine.

The Austrians retreated 500 metres downstream and set up a new defensive line. Status quo. The tragic futility of war.

We crawled back out into the bright sunlight and back into the present. Our journey was nearly complete. As we made our way back down through whoop-making spring snow, the mountains gave way to meadows then forests, the scent of spring grew stronger and before we knew it we were back at the base of the Cinque Torri lift system. Job done. Sad times.

The bottom line is thus – if the Covid pandemic has left you feeling somewhat depleted, you've had enough of the struggle and fancy skinning your way to sweet ski touring utopia this winter, then you simply have to get your Type 1-fun seeking backcountry booty to Cortina for some Dolomiti touring goodness. It's the treat we all deserve. *Fall Line*

DO IT

To reach Cortina d'Ampezzo, fly to Venice then take the Cortina Express bus that takes two hours, from €50 return. Dolomite Mountains (dolomitemountains.com) offers a six-day, five-night Ski Touring Around Cortina d'Ampezzo trip from €1590pp (based on a group of six), from December to March, including accommodation, meals, luggage transfers and guiding. An adult day pass for Cortina d'Ampezzo costs from €60, or from €64 for a Dolomiti Superski pass. dolomiti.org



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