

Aku-Petteri Korhonen

Trekking over the Alps



Alta Via 2 in the Dolomites and Dream Way Munich-Venice

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Alta Via 2 in the Dolomites and Dream Way from Munich to Venice

Aku-Petteri Korhonen

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The writer of this book, Aku-Petteri Korhonen, is not young athlete but a middle-aged family man in average shape. Therefore, the travelogues are written from the standpoint of an ordinary trekker, which makes the stories more relatable, whether you have experience of trekking or not. However, ordinary or not, this Helsinki-based traveller has been trekking every year since 2004, so he has gained plenty of experience for assessing various situations. He has written several books describing these hut-to-hut treks in the French, Austrian, Italian and Swiss Alps which have been published in Finnish. He also has experience of trekking in the Polish and Slovakian Tatra and the French Pyrenees.

Welcome to the world of Alpine trekking!

I've written seven books of my treks on the Alps and Pyrenees during 2013–2019. Of the books, *Haute Route* describing my trek from Chamonix to Zermatt has been translated into English. This book describes treks on classic routes, also. The first describes the Alta Via 2 trail on the Italian Dolomites and the other the Dream Way trail over the German, Austrian and Italian Alps from Munich to Venice.

In my books, I provide an account of my experiences of longer hut-to-hut treks on the Alps from an ordinary backpacker's point of view. I've carried out all my treks independently, meaning that I determine the route myself, order the maps and route descriptions, and book accommodations and flights from Finland to the Alps. On this trip also I met a person who was interested in my trek and asked where the rest of the group was. Well, I didn't have a rest of the group, so he asked which tour operator I had used. I didn't have any one of those either. Finally, he asked how on earth did I travel on the other side of Europe from where I was from then. May this book serve as an answer to that question.

When I left for Alta Via 2 in 2015 it was the eleventh summer in a row that I'd been trekking in the mountains, so I'd already developed a certain routine for planning these kinds of trips. What was new on this trek, however, was the destination, the Italian Dolomites, where I'd never been before. On my earlier treks, I had often heard people speak highly of the views and excellent food in the mountain huts thereabouts, so of course I had to go check out if all the talk was true.

Another new aspect this time around was that now my son was with me. He had just turned 13 before the trip. Having him with me

brought new issues to consider, since earlier it was enough to just take care of myself. When traveling with my kid, in addition to practical matters, I especially had to consider how he'd be able to manage the trek in the mountains. He had done some sports before, though, and had some trekking experience also from Tour the Mont Blanc and the Tatra.

From beginning to end, the Alta Via 2 trail is about 160 kilometres long with a difference in elevation of approximately 9,000 metres. But more than these numbers, however, I was concerned about how difficult the trek would be. I hesitated after reading the route description, but eventually decided to leave for the trek anyway with the condition that we'd change plans if it should look like the trek was too difficult. It's always possible to leave the trail, and I'm used to very flexible traveling with no need for an *idée fixe* -type of doing exactly as planned or walking every single metre of the trek. I suppose my idea of trekking could be summarised in that I don't go into the mountains to perform but to have a holiday. We'd travel one day at a time in a manner that would feel sensible at the moment.

This book can be read as a travelogue, but it also provides tips for planning your own trip. I also include some general contemplation on the ways of the world. In the mountains, there's time for such reflection and the mind becomes clearer when the routines of everyday life fall behind, the news feed stops, and life becomes rather simple. But there's certainly a lot to consider and to decide when trekking, especially with a child, and you're faced with new, unexpected situations that you have to solve somehow. However, I haven't felt this to be a problem. On the contrary, it's what makes traveling interesting, an adventure even.

Alta Via 2 runs along the western part of the Dolomites. In the beginning of the trek, we backpacked in the landscapes of Cortina d'Ampezzo and especially near the famous Tre Cime mountain on the eastern part of the Dolomites. This book describes trekking in these breathtaking landscapes also.

In the second part of the book, I give an account of my trek on the so-called Dream Way route from Munich to Venice. My intention was to cross the German, Austrian and Italian Alps from north to south in 2018. We'll begin our journey from South Germany and continue our way to Venice, a pretty straightforward journey basically. Why there? Well, all my treks have been a result of the previous trip, in a way. The previous year, in Austria, someone at a mountain hut had spoken highly of the Dream Way route between Munich and Venice. I thought, why not, let's try it next. True, it is a bit long, over 500 kilometres, but I after doing some research I discovered that it was possible to walk the actual mountain passage in about three weeks.

The official route begins from Marienplatz in Munich, after which there are a few even stages before reaching the Alps. We have plenty of flatlands in Finland too, so I don't want to use my holiday walking on level ground. The headline for the article about my previous book in the *Retki* magazine was "Confessions of a mountain aficionado", and that's the way it is, I'm interested in the mountains especially. Therefore, I made my way directly to Bad Tölz from where the mountain passage begins. The route actually runs partly along the same trails as Alta Via 2, and the last part coincides with the Alta Via 1 route. Therefore, the amazing Dolomites mountains that are named an UNESCO World Heritage site are pretty well covered in this book.

This time also, in 2018, I had my son with me. He was 16 years at the time and I 30 years his senior. Traveling with him was a bit different than in the Tatras 10 years ago when he was first introduced to this great summer hobby, a Moomin backpack on his back. The last trip I made with my son was in the Pyrenees in 2017. That time, we spent a little less than three weeks on the GR10 route. Now we were embarking on a route of approximately the same length, but a more challenging one.

Both travelogues end in holidaying in Venice, because many who travel these routes combine their treks with a visit to this marvelous city. Thus, you the reader get to also go on a culture trip exploring the history, churches, museums and other sights of this UNESCO World Heritage site, not forgetting the beaches either. So here you have a trek combined with city and beach holiday, all inside the same covers! Enjoy!

Have a nice armchair holiday!

You can find other books I've written on trekking as well as photos and videos of these and my other treks on my home page: <https://akukorhonenphoto.weebly.com>

In Helsinki on March 2021

Aku Korhonen



I

Trekking in the Italian Dolomites

– Tre Cime and Alta Via 2

First Day of Travel – July 2015

Helsinki - Cortina d'Ampezzo

We woke up early, had to be at the airport at six. The flight from Helsinki to Venice left on Sunday morning, 12th of July. In the plane, there was another trekking group by some tour operator, also. The members of the group didn't seem to know each other beforehand. Personally, I haven't gone on treks with strangers. Not that I've been on group travels either, for that matter. To each his own, and sociable lone walkers on their own. I think the article, "The sociable lone walker", that was published in the *Retki* magazine about my last book was headlined very aptly.

In a way, I completely understand going on group travels, since everything is planned and often also tried and tested beforehand, so you can just enjoy yourself safely without having to constantly think about what to do and when, not to mention choosing and planning the route. On the other hand, for me, this aspect of trekking is an essential part of the trip.

I start planning the trip early in the year by first deciding on the route and booking the flights and ordering the necessary maps and route descriptions. You can't possibly plan everything in advance, however, so there will be unexpected situations and matters to sort out on each day of the trip. Then you'll just have to solve them one by one. This makes traveling a bit of an adventure, which is something I hope to convey through this book, also.

On the plane, there were also families with kids on their way south for a holiday. Behind us sat a young couple with a girl of maybe six years. The girl whined the whole flight, e.g., "What can I do now!"

while dangling from the back of my seat. Not a very relaxing start to the trip. But it's good there are MP3 players.

The lobby at the Venice airport was terribly crowded. First, we checked where the bus stop for the bus going to Cortina d'Ampezzo was. I had booked the bus tickets online a couple days ago. The price for the bus ride was fairly reasonable, 20 euros per person. After checking the bus stop, we went to find something to eat, since we had one and a half hours before the bus would leave. At the checkout, the cashier tried to give me change for 10 euros even though I'd given 20 euros. I wasn't buying it. We had tasty, heated baguettes. From the airport restaurant, we could see the silhouette of Venice.

It was nice to get to the quiet airconditioned bus after the noisy airport. The bus ride was a little confusing start for a trek in the mountains because there were palm trees and corn fields a couple meters high at the beginning of the ride. Half of the passengers (the youngsters) slept, and the rest watched the changing scenery from the bus windows. That's how it was with us, too. My 13-year-old son slept, and I watched the scenery.

My son had already hoped to come with me for a couple of years, but the routes I trekked then (Haute Route from Chamonix to Zermatt and GR 5 from Chamonix to Nice) were in my opinion too challenging for someone his age and I hadn't dared to take him along. I've written books also of those treks: *Haute Route - travelogue from Chamonix to Zermatt hike* (in Finnish and English) and *GR5, Alpine trekking from Chamonix to Nice* (so far only in Finnish. It has been appended in 2019, in the newer edition, to also cover the first part of the route from Lake Geneva, i.e., virtually the whole French Alps). When my son had asked to come with me for two years, I had to pay heed to his interest. After a few years, he might not be interested in his

parent's company on holiday anymore. This trip wasn't going to be an easy trek, but my son has grown in recent years and has participated in many sports so I thought his physique could handle it. We'll just take it one day at a time and see how things go.

My son does have experience of being in the mountains, though. Three years ago, we did the Tour the Mont Blanc together. He did well then, especially considering that he was only 10 years old at the time. In the previous couple years, we had done some day hikes in Austria and the Tatra a couple of times, so he knew pretty well what to expect. It did feel nice to be traveling together. You can't take it for granted that your child would be interested in trekking. As for my younger son, I wouldn't bring him along precisely because he is not interested. Maybe he will be later. You should never ruin a hobby by forcing it on a kid.

We arrived in Cortina around one thirty after roughly two hours on the bus. We wandered around the village centre for a while and found the Tourist Information where we received directions to the hotel I had booked beforehand. What was different about this trip was that I had made some reservations in advance. On my previous trips, I haven't booked almost anything in advance, except the flight home. Now I had booked accommodation for the first and last nights, the return flight in three weeks' time and three lodgings at mountain huts, so I had booked about one of three weeks in advance. Maybe one thinks things through more thoroughly when traveling with a child.

In Cortina, nearly all the shops were closed, as they often are after midday in Southern Europe. One small shop was open, however. From there, we bought some snacks. We found the hotel just outside

the village centre a short walk away. The hotel was nice, though maybe past its prime – like me...

We asked the friendly young woman at the reception about the cable car we'd seen along the way. She said it would be open until five thirty. Of course, we had to try it, especially since the weather was so good. The sun was shining, and the temperature was over 30 (Celsius) degrees. At the reception, we also asked for advice for tomorrow's bus routes. We took our backpacks to our room, ate the snacks, and went to find the cable car station. Once there, we found out that we'd have a little less than an hour at the top if we came down in the last cable car. The tickets cost 50 euros. I decided we'd go now so we wouldn't have to try to fit it in our itinerary later or regret not taking the cable car up at all.

A half hour and three cable car lines later we were at an altitude of 3,241 metres (Tofana di Mezzo). The view was breathtaking. The cable car climbs up to one of the highest peaks in the Dolomites. It was surprisingly warm up there, and no wind at all.

A few summers ago, me, my dad and (the same) son visited Hintertux, near Mayrhofen, Austria, where the cable car's upper end station is at approximately the same altitude (3,250 metres) as in Cortina. Then, however, it seemed like it was the dead of winter. We visited ice caves and went alpine skiing on the highest slopes – in July! The weather can change drastically from year to year in the mountains.

In Cortina, you can climb a few dozen altimetres higher from the cable car station, first by ladders and then on a rocky path. A Via Ferrata trail starts nearby. In short, it means a rough and difficult trail, where you have to lean on cables and other climbing aids bolted into rock faces. Usually, a harness and helmet are required. That was also

the case on this trail, which was at an exceptionally high altitude. We had no intention of trying it, nor did we have the equipment for it.

This peak, however, could be reached without any additional gear. Of course, we had to walk to the very summit since it was attainable, and we were so close. I must have a climbing gene. One day, scientists will likely find an explanation for this instinctive urge to climb... From the cable car station, we started climbing the steps at a rapid pace, since we didn't have much time before the last cable car back down. We hadn't yet taken many steps, though, before we started feeling a bit dizzy. An altitude of over three thousand metres combined with a fast ascent from the valley clearly has an effect on your oxygen intake capacity. This is how the elderly must feel when they say they feel dizzy. So, we took it a bit slower after that.

When we were taking the obligatory "we were here" photos, we heard a strange low-pitched sound from somewhere. We looked to the summit, and saw a man playing a three-metre-long horn. It was a surreal situation, suddenly seeing the silhouette of the man and his horn against the sky. The sound echoed surprisingly well from the surrounding mountains. I too made my way up to the summit; my son remained a little lower. The rest of the climb is rather steep with loose gravel. But at the top, you can see without obstructions in every direction. It was a terrific experience.

After that, we took the last cable car to the valley, where we noticed old pictures from the Cortina Winter Olympics in 1956 on the side of a house. They were similar old-style black and white photos than the pictures in Kisahalli which was built for the 1952 Olympics in Helsinki. The place in Cortina was an ice rink used in the Olympics. To our surprise, it was open. There were skaters inside, probably tourists.

Most of them were worse skaters than primary schoolers in Finland. But we also saw a few good figure skaters practicing.

The ice rink has unusual stands made of dark wood. Somehow, it fits that particular ice rink well, even if it looked a little strange in the eyes of a Finn. To my understanding, they have filmed a scene for the James Bond film *For Your Eyes Only* in the Cortina rink. In it, three ice hockey players try to tackle Roger Moore. Naturally, it doesn't end well for the bad guys. I think the legendary downhill skiing scene from the same film was also filmed in these landscapes.

Then we walked downhill on the pleasant pedestrian street and decided to have pizza. My son asked about the ingredients of one of the pizzas on the menu. I've never studied Italian, though I have tried to learn quite a few other languages with mixed results. A lack of Italian skills didn't bother this young man, though, because he ordered the said pizza the name of which we couldn't even pronounce. I still don't know what was in the pizza. It looked like mashed vegetables, but my son managed to eat it, nevertheless. As for drinks, I ordered white wine and my son iced tea, they cost 28 euros in total.

When it comes to prices, I've tried to state quite precisely what we ate and how much it cost, because I'm thinking these kinds of details may be useful in planning your own travel budget. The same goes for the costs of accommodation and other essential purchases. I write about the food also because it's an essential part of traveling, especially when in Italy.

After the pizzas, we returned to our hotel and I rearranged our backpacks. I had brought my son's smaller 33-litre backpack as carry-on luggage and packed in it items from the bigger backpack that would be more difficult to replace if the larger baggage would be lost.

My son's backpack weighed approximately 5 kg and mine ten kilograms more. Add to that one litre of water for my son, 2-3 litres for me, and the snacks. In total that made for approx. 20 + 4 kilograms. Too much, I know, but it is what it is.

We did carry some unnecessary items as far as trekking goes, such as four books, but I gladly carry the books until I've read them, then I throw them away. There's always several hours of time between arriving at the hut and dinner, so there's time to read. Though nowadays, much of that time is spent writing these notes. I had, for example, brought a brick of a book (around 500 pages) about Austrian history; Simon Winder's *Danubia*. In the morning at the airport, I had asked my son if he had brought enough reading. He picked a Steve Jobs biography from the book kiosk, which he then carefully read several times. It was an interesting book and provided something to talk about along the way for several days.

To provide some background information, I didn't have a smart phone with me which gave my son the opportunity to think of lots of quips about historical times. Maybe I should update myself into the 21st century in that respect. I could download lots to read on the phone and it could prove to be very useful while trekking, in other ways too, since every once in a while, you have to check something. But then again, I might easily end up using it too much. I think that detaching yourself from work and your everyday routines – which is one of the best things about this kind of longer trek – wouldn't work so well, if you would browse email and magazines online on the trip. And since I don't use social media, either, I didn't have a need to follow posts or make them myself of, for example, the events of the trip. May this whole book serve as a post about my trekking trip. This way, detaching yourself from everyday life serves as an excellent way

Take a leisurely trip over the Alps!

This book describes (Aku-Petteri Korhonen's) experiences on two longer hut-to-hut treks in the Alps. The first trip is in the Italian Dolomites, in the rugged landscapes of the Alta Via 2 trail. The trek is over 150 kilometres long with an over 8000-metre difference in elevation. Before embarking on said route, the writer walks in the landscapes of the famous Cortina d'Ampezzo and Tre Cime. The second part of the book describes an even longer trek on the so-called Dream Way route that runs from Munich to Venice over the German, Austrian and Italian Alps. So you will get a glimpse of plenty of different sights and experiences.

These travelogues give you a good taste of what hut-to-hut treks are in practise. What adds colour to the stories is that the writer and his teenage son are making these treks together.

Aku-Petteri shares his personal experience and bits of sound advice for planning and carrying out a trek. He also gives you tips on how to handle the, sometimes surprising, situations you are likely to face during the trip and what you need to consider when trekking with a child. His experiences and mishaps are sure to help you with planning your own mountain treks. Both trips end in Venice exploring the sights and beaches of this incredible city.

All this together makes for an interesting trekking, sightseeing and beach holiday, all in the same package.

Have a nice trip!



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