

The Expeditions Fund in the summer allowed me to travel to Chamonix in France, on a 6 day long trip of climbing and alpinism.

A friend and I landed in Geneva airport and took the bus directly to Chamonix where we reached our hostel.

The following day we met our guide, Kenny, a mountaineer with 20 years of guiding experience and 30 total years of climbing experience. He had moved from the Scottish Highlands to Chamonix almost 15 years ago.

Outlining our goals for the trip we wanted to increase our autonomy in the mountains and improve our technical competency. Kenny showed us how to read a number of different weather reports, and that triangulating sources and cross referencing is essential for something as important as the weather. Calculating an accurate 'weather window' where we were unaffected by inclement weather was therefore also important. The weather window must be a period of time that allows ample margins for any unexpected delays. The weather, Kenny tells us, especially at altitude, can dictate survival.

Our goal for the first day was easy but serious climbing, the Lachanel Traverse, a combination of mixed snow and rock climbing, practicing fundamental alpinism whilst at altitude.

We drove through the Mont Blanc tunnel into Italy, which we are told, is referred to as 'the magic tunnel' by many local mountaineers, as the weather is often drastically different on the Italian side. We take the Monte Bianco skyway lift to Pointe Helbronner at ~3400m.

We are roped up, for glacier traverse, a practice my friend and I already know well, but Kenny adds an important detail, showing us how to take additional coils of rope for after the approach, making the distance between us shorter for once we begin the traverse.

The traverse itself is a combination of fun climbing and narrow ridge walking, Kenny calls for 'excellent cramponing', as a fall off of any of these ridges is likely to result in injury and mountain rescue. Kenny also tells us that France has an fee-less rescue policy, and will send mountain rescue virtually free of charge, whereas Italy and Switzerland will send you a hefty bill after being rescued. He jokes - 'If your friend is falling, always push them into France!'

Finishing the traverse, we wait patiently in a queue to abseil off the ridgeline. However a group of guides decide not to wait in the lengthy queue and put in their own protection. Unfortunately a rushed gear placement fails and three guides fall a massive 30 meters, sustaining immediate serious injuries. We witness the French mountain rescue helicopter team appear in a matter of minutes, airlifting the trio off of the mountain in no time.

Kenny is keen to hotline us back to the skyway lift immediately after this, and we move incredibly quickly despite the altitude back to the lift. Day 1 done.

The rest of the trip followed 3 more days of climbing before the weather forced us down into the valley, where we topped up on fundamental rope and protection skills.

Overall we learnt a huge amount and I was able to do this, only with the help of the Expeditions Fund.

My friend, an avid film photographer, took many of the photos I have attached below, others are screen grabs from my gopro.









