



STORY

SOFT-LAJT ADVENTURE

By Marek Pietrusiak



I've been waiting for the trip for a long time. Not only me. Sławek and Szymon joined. Late at night, we jumped into the car, wearing our face masks and let's hit the road, until the borders are open.

It is still dark at the Polish-Slovakian border crossing, completely empty, completely unreal. We got to Tatranska Lomnica, too soon. It was 3 hours until dawn. What shall we do? I ordered a quick car-nap.

The roller coaster is under renovation, and I was hoping to gain a precious hour of time this way. We started off sharply and it took us 30 minutes to run up to Hrebieniok. The sky cleared up, the sun rose. Autumn in the mountains, one of the nicest.

Our plan was an ambitious route through Chata Teryho, Czerwona Ławka up to Zbójnicka Chata, far behind the ridge rising in the distance. The only question was, what kind of weather conditions should we expect in the high mountains?

We've had breakfast in the Zamkovsky Hut. It's already foggy and humid here. The first snow greeted us above the forest line. The walls on either side of the valley were silver with cold. The trail was empty. With each step, the fog absorbed us more. You couldn't see anything, while in good weather there would be a large rock wall in front of us, with a small shelter, right under the sky. The valley slowly narrowed. Avalanche terrain, full of enormous stones. We still didn't put crampons on, ice axes were still attached to backpacks. Above us, only winter. Winter in the middle of autumn.

My pace has dropped significantly. Maybe the blueberry dumplings weren't the best idea? The comrades were climbing up with more verve. Eventually, we came to the shelter equally gasping.

Behind my back, there was a rock tower and there was a Tatra chamois under a snow blanket. Lonely guardian of the Little Cold Water valley.





The time was pressing inexorably, the day was short, the route was still long ahead. We decided not to go into Teryho. We put our helmets and crampons on. With ice-axes in our hands, we moved on. I lead through the area I knew very well. In winter, however, everything looks different. Finally, we caught the right direction and painstakingly gained height. On a small plateau, we noticed first tourists. They were just doing the retreat. It was late, the snow was deep and there was no trail in sight.

We're having a democracy in our group. Either we are wading into a difficult exposed area, or returning to the car for many hours. We unanimously decided to go further. We moved over the maze of boulders efficiently, and it's getting really steep. We evaluated the situation in the gully. The snow was hardly avalanche. Technically, ferrata on the right, but we couldn't see chains under the ice and snow. So we went up, centrally. In the middle of the wall, before the next damming up, we decided to put on the harness. We took the rope out. This wasn't a joke anymore. There was an ice in front of us, a huge gap below us, and we were out of time.

Szymon passed his mountaineering test with the highest score. He put up self-insurance just below the pass. Sławek went through knots smoothly. I had been already chilled to the bone. My body was refusing to obey. Words were sticking in my throat. It took me so long on these knots. I felt, like I was no longer the age, nor the weight for that. It was absolutely freezing cold.

We rolled up the rope and hopped to the other side of the ridge. Fortunately, there was a short fragment with chains. All that remained, was the arduous journey through the lunar terrain. Sławek lead by looking for the trail. The day was ending.

We were alone in the mountains. Absolutely stunning, terribly lonely, completely silent.

The frost would not let go. It got dark. It was the time to light the flashlights. We knew the way, yet couldn't see the lights of the shelter. that was depressing. Our first thoughts were about camping in the snow.

But then, a bit of rational thinking. The tracks must have led to the shelter! There was no other place. Behind the shelter, there was only the descent into the valley. So it was impossible to pass the hut! It finally emerged from the darkness, only a few steps ahead of us. Instead of shining like a lighthouse, it was hidden completely from the world.

I was drawn to warmth with all my heart, but my head told me to take off my crampons first and shake my clothes off all the snow. Exhausted but pleased, we scrambled into the shelter. Warm tea, hot soup and strong plum brandy. Yummy and good night.



In the morning we were awakened by strong sun and breathtaking, almost alpine views. A quick breakfast, then a photo session. After a while, there was no more sunshine, it turned gray and cold. Quite a traffic on the way up.

Fortunately, we were going down. We were catching every sight and trying to cherish it in memory. The valley was slowly flattening, and winter was turning back into autumn.



You probably don't know Sławek. A stubborn fellow. He had a quick winter bath in a mountain stream. We felt cold, just watching him. Then Hrebieniok, small shortcuts and to the car.

Silence and emptiness suddenly turned into a tourist noise. This is not our cup of tea.

Finally, coffee and cake as a reward for the weekend effort. That went so fast... Delights mixed with sweat and a little fear. However, everything was under full control. Such a Tatra chill-out, in a good company.

