

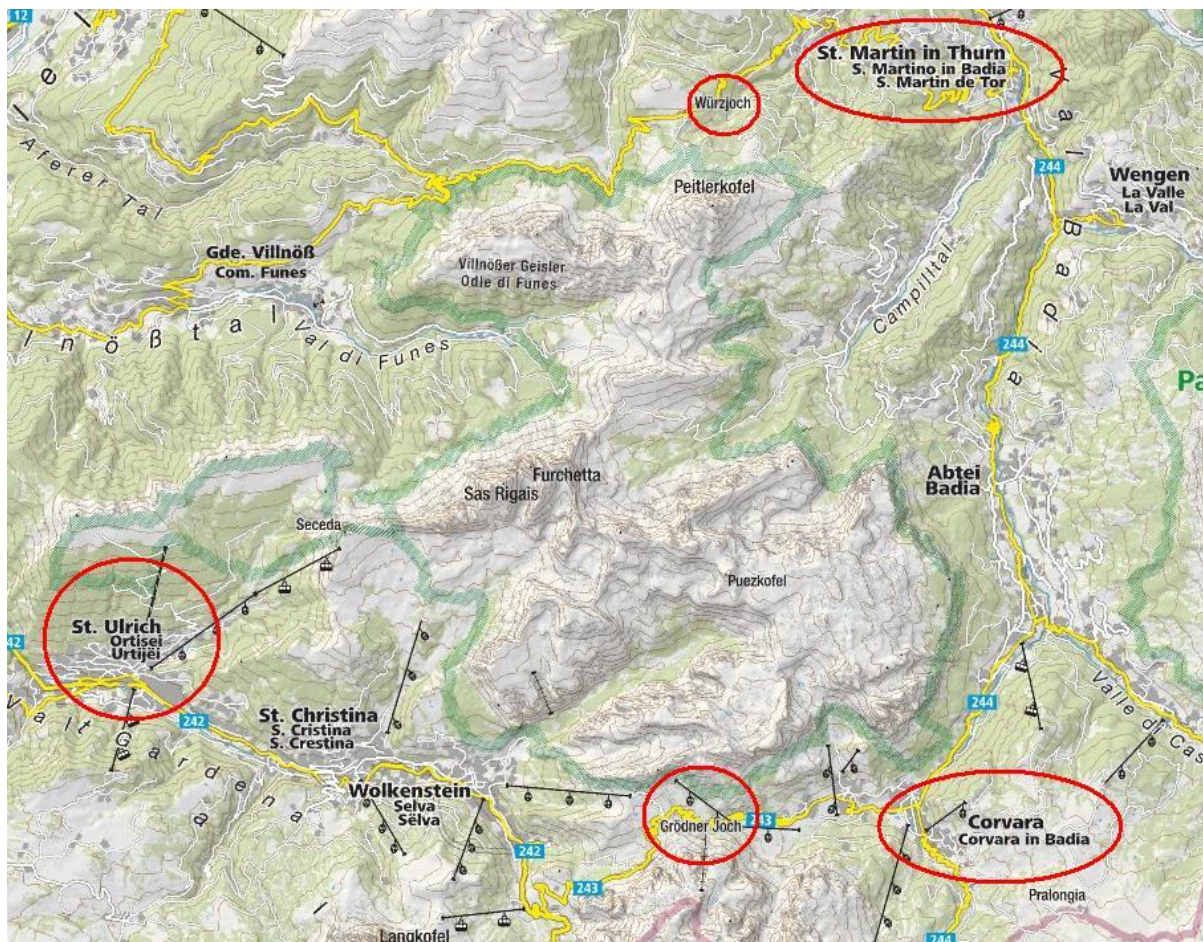
I/AA-319 Mauererberg / Munt Muro (2332 m)

Monday, December 23, 2013
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Summary: The summit is a pleasant, easy activation under almost all circumstances. The challenge is getting to the parking lot. Ascent 470 meters.

Our family was spending the Christmas holidays in the Dolomites, specifically St. Ulrich / Ortisei. I did some research and found that because the mountains in the region are so rugged that there are very few SOTAs suitable for wintertime activation. However, I did spot one that was relatively easy and set my targets on AA-319 Mauererberg.

The weather had been unusually warm with little snow in the valleys and not much in the mountains; the ski cannons were working all the time to make artificial snow for the ski slopes. This did not seem to be a threat to my activation.



I was only partially correct. On the night before the activation, there was a steady drizzle in the valley. I departed our lodge in St. Ulrich at 6 a.m. and started the drive east to Corvara, and from there would head north to St. Martin. What I didn't fully realize is that the trip required me to drive over the Grödner Joch, a mountain pass at 2121 m. The drizzle slowly turned into snow, so driving over the pass with its steep hairpin turns was quite a challenge. There was not much more than a dusting on the road, but it was still dangerous. The speed

limit is 60 kph, but I and the few other cars on the road were doing 20 kph at some spots. Had there been much more snow, I would have had to mount chains on my tires.

With care, I did make it down to Corvara and then headed up a valley (Val Badia) to St. Martin. Of course, if your hotel is on the Corvara side of the pass, you don't have to deal with this issue. However, in winter there is only one approach to the parking lot for the summit, and that is through St. Martin. You take a small, windy road up more than 750 meters to Pe de Börz (the parking lot at 1862 m, just below the Würzjoch restaurant). Once again, in the valley there was rain, but as you gained altitude it turned into snow. And again, driving was tricky and in fact at one point I passed a snow plow clearing the road as it was headed down into the valley. Other than that, however, there was almost no traffic at this time of day.

The key point here is that I was dealing with almost ideal winter conditions -- it had been quite warm the last few days with minimum precipitation. Under normal winter conditions this driving would be extremely tricky and chains would be mandatory. As it was, I was driving for roughly 2.5 hours, a full hour longer than I had expected.

Upon arrival at the parking lot, I put on my gear and started the ascent. It consists of two stages: a logging road to the Maurerberg Hut, and from there follow the ridge to the summit.



Parking lot at Pe de Börz.



Logging road to the hut.



The route from the parking lot (left) to the summit. (Source: Schneeschuhtouren in den Dolomiten, Tappeiner Verlag, 2012, ISBN 978-88-7073-648-9)

The snow on the logging road was not deep at all, so it was not necessary to wear my snowshoes. This allowed me to go much faster, and I made it up to the hut in just over 1 hour

(about 250 m gain in elevation). At this point I was also breaking through the fog and found bright sunshine waiting for me. I then put on my snowshoes -- not necessarily needed but convenient to have on -- and proceeded along the ridge, which is another easy, gradual 200 meters in elevation. The ridge is wide enough that there is no real danger unless it is very foggy, and even then the railings provide some protection.



Following the ridge to the summit (summit cross barely visible in the center of the photo).

I was alone on the summit for the entire activation, which was very successful. I spent most of my time on 30m, but I did also switch over to 20m and waited out the pileup to get an S2S with LA1ENA/P.



There is a very high summit cross, in fact so high I was unable to throw my antenna across it. Instead, I affixed my fiberglass mast to one of the support wires. Also note the sea of fog which enveloped the low-lying areas all day long.



The view from the summit almost due south to AA-328, Peitlerkofel / Sas de Pütia (2875m), certainly nothing to tackle in the winter.

I had much more time for the activation than I expected. My winter hiking book estimates an ascent of 4+ hours; given the short amount of daylight I was worried about having time for activation and making it back to the car while it was still light. Hence my departure from the hotel at 6 a.m. and start of the hike at 8:30 a.m. However, even with a leisurely activation, I was back to the parking lot by 13:20 due to the excellent conditions and relatively easy hike. On the way back down, I ran into two other snowshoers -- the only other people I ran into on the trail the entire day. Finally, driving home was quite easy: both the road to St. Martin and then the Grödner Joch were bare and dry.

This would make a relatively easy, pleasant activation under almost all snow circumstances -- if you can get to the parking lot!