

Summits on the Air

SOTA holidays 2020 around the valley of Tannheim

July 12 to 22, 2020

by Markus, HB9DIZ



View down to the main village Tannheim from our last summit Einstein.

To be honest: I know the geography of Austria pretty well since my mother originates from there. But I had never heard of the **“Tannheimer Tal”**, i.e. the valley of Tannheim, before. It’s about 15 years back now that I had read a touristic report and I had known immediately that I had to see this region in one of our next holidays. Now in 2020 we’ve been there already 5 times and still enjoy it for the same reasons we like other Austrian regions like Montafon or Bregenzerwald or the German Allgäu.

The valley of Tannheim is a border region of the Austrian state Tyrol, located close to Pfronten, Füssen and the castle of Neuschwanstein in very south of Germany. The ground of valley lies at about 1100 m.a.s.l. so you can start a mountain hike even in the valley. The valley has already been elected several times one of the top hiking regions in Austria because it offers a broad spectrum for all types of hikers: a valley layer with easy trails connecting the villages and the valley sides, a mountain layer with a big number of located summits offering some real gems and a small alpine layer with summits for experienced ibices.

Being awarded attracts people and yes: we met them on the trails. But I had only two summits on the list that were slightly overcrowded due to the small summit zone and the vicinity to a hiking highway. The net of hiking trails is ample and well maintained and signposted. So, it’s your choice if you like such a setting for doing SOTA. We did, to gain access to the beauties of the region. Nearly all hikes are possible as day trips, sometimes even with two summits when you accept support by the 4 summer chair lifts resp. gondolas. Our hotel was in Grän, well organized for all the corona topics and to be the SOTA base camp, and we needed our car to do the full agenda.

The equipment is still the same: a KX2 with 10 watts output, an EFHW with a 1:64 coupler, primarily for 20 and 40 m, a 10-m-mast “mini” by DX-Wire, an FT2DE for 2 m and APRS2SOTA.

This was the final agenda for our Tannheim holidays:

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|-----------------|------|---------------------------|
| 1. Mon, July 13 | ■ T2 | OE/TI-437, Schochenspitze |
| | ■ T2 | OE/TI-435, Sulzspitze |
| 2. Tue, July 14 | ■ T4 | OE/TL-009, Litnisschrofen |
| 3. Wed, July 15 | ■ T2 | DL/AL-167, Falkenstein |
| | ■ T2 | DL/AL-166, Zwölferkopf |
| 4. Fri, July 17 | ■ T2 | DL/AL-161, Edelsberg |
| 5. Sat, July 18 | ■ T4 | OE/TI-468, Aggenstein |
| | ■ T3 | OE/TI-457, Brentenjoch |
| 6. Sun, July 19 | ■ T2 | DL/AL-049, Kühgundkopf |
| 7. Mon, July 20 | ■ T2 | OE/TI-643, Bschiesser |
| | ■ T2 | DL/AL-046, Ponten |
| 8. Tue, July 21 | ■ T3 | OE/TI-509, Einstein |

The difficulty marks ■ (walking, T1 grade, Swiss hiking scale), ■ (mountain hiking, T2/T3 grade) and ■ (alpine hiking, T4/T5/T6 grade) have been determined based on our research resp. personal subjective local experience and express the highest level met.

Subtitles and positions contain clickable web links.

Day 1

[OE/TI-437, Schochenspitze](#) ■ T2
and [OE/TI-435, Sulzspitze](#) ■ T2

“Two summits nearby a popular main trail” was our starter program for day 1. The trail starts at the top station of the yellow Vogelhornbahn gondola, named also Neunerköpfebahn. The valley station is in Tannheim, the main village of the valley. The gondola saves an ascent of about 700 m, so you start at about 1800 m.a.s.l. You won't be alone on this trail since it leads to the Landsberger Hütte and several other huts and offers tons of beautiful views.



First views of our first summit Schochenspitze (left) from the Strindenscharte col.

We aimed for the more remote summit Schochenspitze first since this one has a small summit zone only and would be crowded probably soon. We followed the Neunerköpfe ridge first for about 3 km before we could see the summit for the first time. The track is well maintained and always clearly visible for the remaining 2 km. A zigzag trail finally leads to the summit within 10 minutes. You may

even admire two Edelweiss nearby the summit cross unless they have not been trampled down like a third one just aside. The views from the summit are stunning, we saw e.g. three mountain lakes at different height levels and the Landsberger Hütte.



Last ascent to the summit of the Schochenspitze (left), and the operator at the peak (right). The compromise for using the EFHW was to let hang down both parts of the wire, so this was an Inverted-I antenna instead of an inverted-V. The small summit was very populated.

Doing SOTA on the Schochenspitze is a sort of adventure with a 10-m-mast, but I had no other choice. I set up just behind the summit cross and let the wire hang down vertically. No way to do it better with the stop and go of the crowd around you. The SWR suffered, but I managed to do 9 contacts. A couple from the Black Forest admired the idea of SOTA combining hiking with amateur radio.



View down to the highway to the main trail to the Landsberger hut.



The view back from the Schochenspitze to the second summit Sulzspitze. We took it on the way back to the gondola.

Looking back to the trailhead on the first summit offered a clear view of the second one. The access trail to the Sulzspitze branches off from the same main trail between Strindenscharte and

Gappenfeldscharte and took us about 25 minutes. The summit zone is wide but the summit cross is the only support for a mast. We enjoyed this summit together with a family – no other visitors and a contrast to the first summit.



Left: More space for operating in the summit zone of the Sulzspitze. The summit cross is the only type of support for the antenna mast.
Right: Zoom view to the Leilachspitze, one of the 10-pointers in the core zone of the Tannheimer Alps around the Landsberger hut.

We had to keep in mind that the last yellow gondola would leave the trail head at 1615 hours, slightly earlier than usual, due to corona, so we had to head down soon. A variation would be to do the summits in the reverse order and descent then via Landsberger Hütte to the Vilsalpsee lake. This is a very beautiful hike, but you have to cope with a significant (and therefore long) descent and an additional hike back to the car in Tannheim.

Facts & figures (distances and time are always "one-way", measured in the mentioned direction):

- Activations so far: Schochenspitze: 2; Sulzspitze: 3.
- Waypoint: parking lot of the Neunerköpfe lift in Tannheim: [47.498678, 10.523433](#).
- Hiking parameters of the full tour: ascent 465 m, distance 6 km, 1.75 hours from the gondola top station to the Schochenspitze +25 minutes for the stub to the Sulzspitze.

Day 2

[OE/TL-009, Litnisschrofen](#)

■ T4

This one was my special highlight of these holidays!



The wild side of the Litnisschrofen, OE/TL-009.

We wanted to save the good weather conditions of Day 2 for Litnisschrofen, a steep and rocky summit we could see from the car park of the hotel with a wild front side (and a much tamer backside with the access trail). The last part is a short ferrata with a steel rope and some chains with an elevation gain of more than 25 m, so I knew that I had to master it to collect these 8 points.



The backside with the trail from the Gräner Ödenalpe hut is tame except for the last ascent to the real summit.

Some further research showed that especially good footwork was required and vertigo would not be a major problem here. There is a video of a drone flight over the summit zone on Youtube and even a short display of the track below and above the ferrata on Google Streetview, so I knew pretty well what to expect.



View of the secured section just below the summit. It was funny, but take it slow.

We planned to activate Litnisschrofen together with the Krinnenspitze, a wide and much easier T2 summit just nearby. A chairlift from Nesselwängle to the Krinnenalpe saves some ascent. The first part to the junction nearby the hut Gräner Ödenalpe is an easy mountain road. Most of the further ascent is a solid T2 trail through pine bushes first then along the southern flank to the summit block. The section with the chains was done within 15 minutes. The very last part on the narrow ridge is not secured but viable at a slow pace.



The short and narrow top ridge of Litnisschrofen with the operator waiting for SOTA contacts on 2 m FM.

I decided to give 2 m FM a try but I could collect only one QSO. So I set up the EFHW from the back of the summit cross and could add 8 further contacts to the logbook whereof 2 S2S contacts to another OE/TL activator and to Uli, HB9CGA.



The operator at the safest place of this summit (left) and leaving the summit zone to the chains and ropes (right), disappearing in a stony sea.

The reduced corona schedule of the chair lift didn't allow to append the activation of the Krinnenspitze, but I had no further thoughts on this since being on this narrow balcony above the rocks was simply great. A woman on the summit was interested in our activity and introduced herself as the daughter of a German radio amateur. Small world! We climbed back through the wall then and enjoyed a sausage plate at the hut.

Facts & figures:

- Activations so far: 2 (would have been a first activation one year ago).
- Waypoint: parking lot of the Krinnenalpe chair lift: [47.485734, 10.601834](#).
- Waypoint: Gräner Ödenalpe hut, junction: [47.469314, 10.574566](#).
- Hiking parameters for Litnisschrofen only: ascent 530 m, distance 4.3 km, 2.25 hours.

Day 3

[DL/AL-167, Falkenstein](#)
and [DL/AL-166, Zwölferkopf](#)

■ T2

■ T2

Three days with instable weather had been announced, so we decided on summits with a good access to the trailhead and shorter trails. We found them on a ridge east of Pfronten, just on the other side of the Austrian–German border: Falkenstein and Zwölferkopf.



The modern castle on the Falkenstein summit is this hotel at the top.

Falkenstein is a funny hill with ruins and a castle-hotel on the top (their slogan: “A royal place of happiness”). The Bavarian king Ludwig had planned to erect a castle like the nearby Neuschwanstein, but the project was not realized due to the death of the king. There is a single-track toll road to a car park nearby the summit (EUR 4, 2020, take coins with you). The road is narrow, so a traffic schedule is in place: minutes xx15-xx55 up, minutes xx00-xx10 down.



Operating from the fence around the closed ruins (left) and view to the second summit Zwölferkopf (right).

The ruins were closed due to renovation work, so I had to set up at the temporary fence. I met there some of the noise described in DD5LP's report on the summit page, but I remembered that worse back in winter 2018. There are many possibilities to attach a mast. I didn't spend too much on Falkenstein since the weather was uncertain with a mix of sunshine and rain clouds. And we needed some time for the neighbor summit Zwölferkopf.



The trail from the car park to the Zwölferkopf summit takes you 30 minutes and is a nice forest track along the whole ridge.

We had taken note of Ed's car park suggestion. There is a small clearance some hundred meters below the Falkenstein car park, just fine for one car. The trail to DL/AL-166 starts there. We had heard from two ladies on Falkenstein that this forest trail was closed due to storm damage but it should be viable quite well now. The trail was really beautiful with some storm wood along the trail, and it was cleared better than described in Ed's report. The ridge is in the forest except for some outlooks to the valley of Vils and the first row of the Alps of Tannheim. Really beautiful! This activation was a quick one with only one band since slight rain had started just after setting up. Two umbrellas kept the equipment and the operator dry, hi.



The view back to the first summit Falkenstein (left) and the weather change, and the operator escaping from the first rain drops (right).

We headed back to the car and to the hotel and had a coffee on their veranda to align with the time window for the way down. Be aware to consider the schedule when driving up or down from in between. We felt like royals for some moments on this mighty cliff, not only because of the bill for the coffee, hi. Real rain had started in the meantime, so a good opportunity to check out the spa of our hotel.

Facts & figures:

- Activations so far: Falkenstein: 35; Zwölferkopf: 15.
- Waypoint: barrier of the toll road to the Falkenstein summit nearby Pfronten: [47.573334](#), [10.590032](#).
- Hiking parameters for Falkenstein: ascent 50 m, distance 330 m, 10 minutes; for Zwölferkopf: ascent 100 m, distance 1 km, 25 minutes.

Day 4

[DL/AL-161, Edelsberg](#)

■ T2

Day 4 was actually day 5 since we had one day in between without SOTA due to rainy weather. We used it for a lazy walk to Tannheim to enjoy a traditional meal and disappear in the spa some hours later. So "nothing on the air" that day – NOTA at its fullest!

The next day was still rainy, but we expected a dry window in the afternoon. We decided on giving Edelsberg a try, a well accessible summit between Pfronten and Nesselwang with a shorter access in the German Allgäu region. I had already been there once in winter for SOTA at $-10\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$. The lady at the ticket desk was surprised to sell us return tickets only 90 minutes before end of business but she did it. "Tomorrow would be a much better choice" she said. But we had other plans for Saturday.



A pavilion with benches is located at the top of Edelsberg.

The Alpspitz lift runs on two sections and they mix gondolas and chairs on the same rope. No joy with a wet chair, so we waited for the next gondola. The rain had stopped just now, and I started my personal engine on level 4, so I was up on the summit in less than 20 minutes. There is a pavilion at the top, so me and one end of the EFHW took a seat on the small bench just inside. The other end of the inverted V was somewhere out in the bushes. The harvest was a dozen QSOs with 2 S2S contacts, one to the Black Forest and one in French, home to HB9.

Facts & figures:

- Activations so far: 15.
- Waypoint: parking lot of Alpspitzbahn in Nesselwang: [47.618183, 10.498513](#).
- Hiking parameters from the top station of the Alpspitzbahn lift: ascent 170 m, distance of 1.2 km, 20 minutes.
- ["A glimpse at our winter holidays"](#) – Edelsberg in a winter dress in February 2018.

Day 5

OE/TI-468, Aggenstein
and **OE/TI-457, Brentenjoch**

■ T4

■ T3

This Saturday provided a blue sky, bright sunshine and one of the top classics in the region. Mt. Aggenstein was the first view of the day from our hotel room when we had opened the curtains in the morning. I had the secret wish in four holidays so far to stand there once – on the top. The second summit Brentenjoch was a good offer on the way back and a serious check of our personal fitness.



View to the Austrian side of the summit zone of Aggenstein with the access trail from the Bad Kissinger Hütte, seen from the Sulzspitze.

There are several trails to this border summit. E.g. one from the valley from the big car park in Enge. Or another one from Pfronten via Böser Tritt or a further one just nearby on a spectacular zigzag trail from the north. We started from the top station of the Füssener Jöchle gondola, a lift not far from our hotel in Grän. Our trail had a nasty element: the net ascent is only 120 m, but there is a descent of 280 m first into a side valley, followed by an ascent of roughly 400 m.



View from the trailhead Füssener Jöchle to the descent zone and to the summits Aggenstein (left) and Brentenjoch (middle).



Lovely views to the south from Bad Kissinger Hütte down to the valley of Tannheim with the villages Haldensee (top) and Grän (bottom).

The first 4 km are a well-maintained premium trail through the timber line zone to the Bad Kissinger Hütte, a big mountain hut well visible from the valley. It's an excellent base for the last part to the Aggenstein summit. We passed the hut to save time and had timed our lunch for the summit. A straight T2 trail leads to a T3 zigzag. It unites with the trail from Germany just below the summit and goes then over the rocks straight to the cross.



Yeah – you won't be alone on this hike, neither on a Saturday nor on a beautiful day with bright sunshine!

There must have been hundreds of hikers on Mt. Aggenstein on that day. The summit is really very popular and also well viable since solid ropes secure the last part of the track. There is a constant up and down, but the views are really marvelous. I had seen that a group around Mario, DJ2MX, had activated on the secondary peak since there is a pipe on it that can be used as a mast support. It was a good decision, there were much less hikers on this peak. Some hikers showed interest in my activity.



On the ropes just at the top. There is no traffic light system here so far, hi.



Some audience on the secondary peak with the good mast support (left) and lots of Edelweiss just some meters beside the trail (right).

Phew – done, I said to myself back at the Bad Kissinger hut. Still no hut today since I had a second summit on the agenda and the tight corona schedule of the gondola in mind, saving a further descent of 2 hours. There is a T4 trail on the western ridge to the Brentenjoch, but we took an adjacent trail through the pines. The trail was straight and actually easy but it should be cleared once resp. now with a saw. It's not an official hiking trail. We finally smelled of pines when we reached the official track from the Vilser Jöchle to the summit. This final is steep and you can see the summit cross of Brentenjoch from far, but it won't approach quickly. The trail is a bit rough in parts so I was a bit exhausted when reaching the summit.



The trail is a bit rough and quite steep (left). Summit zone of Brentenjoch with a view back to the first summit Aggenstein.

The summit is a great and wide balcony with good views also to the pre-alps and the flatter regions in the north – and to Mt. Aggenstein where we had been before. The activation went well on 20 and 40 m with 18 QSOs. We packed up quickly and headed down and back to the gondola station. And yes: the earlier mentioned descent of 280 m is now an ascent and the last element of the check of our personal fitness. We reached the top station at the Füssener Jöchle 15 minutes before the last gondola and were back at the hotel after further 30 minutes. What a day, for us at least! And Aggenstein is mine now – cool!

Facts & figures:

- Activations so far: Aggenstein: 14, Brentenjoch: 7
- Waypoint: valley station of the Füssener Jöchle gondola: [47.505007](#), [10.563272](#).
- Hiking parameters from the top station Füssener Jöchle to Aggenstein: ascent 390 m and descent 280 m, distance 5 km, 2.5 hours; from Aggenstein to Brentenjoch: descent 220 m, ascent 280 m, distance 3 km, 1.75 hours; from Brentenjoch back to Füssener Jöchle: descent 400 m and ascent 250 m, distance 3.3 km, 80 minutes.

Day 6

[DL/AL-049 Kühgundkopf](#)

■ T2

The main plan for Sunday had been a hike to the Gaichtspitze. This solitaire summit is located at the southeastern exit of the valley of Tannheim. The easier access is on the eastern backside from the Hahnenkamm gondola nearby Reutte-Höfen. Unfortunately, the gondola service was closed due to disputes between the owner and the municipality. So we had driven in for nothing. We therefore chose a backup summit just at the opposite end of the valley of Tannheim: Kühgundkopf, a border summit to the German Allgäu region.



One of the most popular views of the valley of Tannheim seen from the top station of the Wannenjoch chair lift with the children's paradise.

The Wannenjoch chair lift in Schattwald brought us to the trailhead just at the summit station. Smugglers are their topic, so we took the Smuggler Trail to the summit. The trail is well viable and not steep. We saw families and all types of hikers. The border ridge offers really great views to many of our summits so far and down to the German villages of Oberjoch and Bad Hindelang. We took a break there to enjoy this scenery. The final portion of the trail is a T2+ up-and-down, done in 12 minutes. There is no summit cross, only a big border stone.



Operating at the top, the main border stone supported the antenna (left). Maps are not always very accurate (right), but I was at the top!

The Wannenjochbahn had a corona schedule, too. So, we had to keep in mind the time for the last chair since we had started the hike after 1300 hours only. We took the opportunity to check out the trails for the hike of the next day, and this was promising!

Facts & figures:

- Activations so far for Kühgundkopf: 13.
- Waypoint: bottom station of the Wannenjoch chair lift: [47.512582, 10.459180](#).
- Hiking parameters from the top station of the chair lift: ascent of 300 m, distance of 1.9 km, 55 minutes.

Day 7

OE/TI-643, Bschiesser
and **DL/AL-046, Ponten**

■ T2

■ T2

Bschiesser and Ponten are two summits on the same ridge around a sort of a mountain funnel south of Schattwald. They are neighbors of the summit of yesterday, so we started the day again with the Wannenjoch chair lift and the first portion of the trail to the Kühgundkopf but branched then off to the south. There was construction work on the track, and this new border trail to the Bschiesser from the north is a real premium trail over pastures, through stones and over the last rocky part, and all very well viable. Actually, the local name of the summit is Bscheisser; this doesn't sound very friendly since you could translate it with shitter, hi, but this one has different linguistic roots.



View to Mt. Bschiesser (left) and its access trail.

I chose a place at the end of the small summit ridge to build up my EFHW antenna on the 10-m-mast. The bands were busy, especially 20 m, and this activation provided the highest number of contacts of these holidays. I was informed then that the construction work with the helicopter was continued now on our summit, so we ended the activation and admired the pilot and his skills.



Operating out of the pines on the Bschiesser ridge (left) and view to the next summit Ponten and the trail from here to there (right).

The first meters on the connecting ridge to the Ponten summit are quite steep and a bit slippery, so I had to be very careful. But we were soon at the lowest point and then ascending to our next summit. This rocky block is something special and the very last meters of the trail are laid in a perfect way into the rocks. I let hang the EFHW out above the abyss at an angle of about 30 degrees and was asked soon if I was fishing. But there is also a signpost for a more traditional antenna fixation. The summit cross is not at the top and on a narrow sub-summit. The views to the backside of the Tannheimer Alps and the Allgäuer Alps were simply stunning!



Some tourists and the ibex type of a SOTA antenna on the top of Ponten, seen from the summit cross . . .



. . . and the backside with the operator. I had to use APRS2SOTA for spotting since there was no mobile coverage at this place.



Looking back to the first summit Bschiesser and the Allgäu and Bregenzerwald mountains in the background



SOTA is not only looking at SOTAwatch and the display of the transceiver but also looking at other things – 200% analogue! Beautiful!

The viewing took too much time, so we could not take the same way back via the chair lift. The alternative was the descent of about 900 m to the valley via Stuibler Sennalpe. This was a health check for our knees, but we managed it in 2.25 hours. Our car was one of the last ones on the car park of the Wannenjoch lift. Ouch, we slept very well that night!

Facts & figures:

- Activations so far for Bschiesser: 5 and for Ponten: 11.
- Waypoint: bottom station of the Wannenjoch chair lift: [47.512582](#), [10.459180](#).
- Hiking parameters from the top station of the chair lift to Bschiesser: ascent 500 m and descent 100 m, distance 3.3 km, 80 minutes; from Bschiesser to Ponten: descent 155 and ascent 185 m, distance 1.4 km, 60 minutes; from Ponten to the car park of the Wannenjoch chair lift: descent 900 m, distance 4.2 km, 2.25 h.

Day 8

[OE/TI-509, Einstein](#)

■ T3

Most of you will know one or more of these masterpieces of a hiking trail winding up in a wall, taking profit of all possibilities of the terrain to gain height. Einstein is such a summit. You won't believe at first sight that a solid trail leads through the southern wall. The Einstein is a solitaire summit, surrounded by several valleys, and has no connection with the famous Albert Einstein.



View from the car park in Tannheim to the village Berg and Mt. Einstein in the background.



The villages in the valley of Tannheim are traditional and really beautiful.

It took us nearby 2.5 hours whereof at least 30 minutes for the last few hundred meters to the summit. Our tour was sort of a pain for us in the first part since it was hot in the valley und humid and the track is exposed to the south. We took a break all 20 to 30 minutes, and I had several thoughts to stop the hike and turn back.



Left: The trail through the wall is a masterpiece. Right: last section below the summit, it's steep and rocky and takes its time.

But the Einstein summit – more of a pulpit than a balcony – was worth the effort. It's one of the best places to overview the valley of Tannheim from Schattwald to Gaicht and therefore the perfect

summit for the last day. We could see all alpine SOTA summits of these holidays (and many more!) and took home a beautiful souvenir.

Facts & figures:

- Activations so far for Einstein: 14.
- Waypoint: car park Tannheim: [47.501326, 10.516850](#).
- Hiking parameters: ascent 710 m, distance of 3.3 km, 2.5 hours.

We could not realize all SOTA ideas due to weather conditions, switched priorities resp. lack of further (holi)days, hi. Backup summit were the Sorgschrofen peak and the Reuterwanne near Jungholz, an Austrian exclave. I regretted that I could not visit Sorgschrofen, since this is a funny and spicy summit with hundreds of rock towers and a trail in between and since 4 country border lines meet on the summit, 2 times Germany and 2 times Austria.



Meeting the locals around Tannheim. Always say hello – you'll never know if this is your boss in your or the cow's next life!

Even this SOTA trip created a healthy appetite for more in the region. Maybe in the Allgäu region or around the Ammergauer Alps. It seems that these border regions attract me.

And we didn't only do 12 hikes, but we enjoyed the regional culture and cuisine, too. Our hotel "Sonnenhof" in Grän was a little paradise for us. All hikes provided a healthy appetite for their excellent dinners, the spa and their comfortable beds.



Goodbye – until next year! Stay safe!

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