

Travel & Outdoors

WISH YOU WERE HERE

It's the wheel deal in the Alps



When summer comes to the mountains, it's time to move off the piste and on to the bike trail, as quick learner **Nan Spowart** discovered

Summer skiing was phenomenal, paragliding was incredible but what I wasn't expecting was the thrill I experienced from a mountain bike lesson.

Holidaying in the French Alps with glorious scenery all around me, I first suffered the humiliation of being demoted from our group lesson – because my family are all miles better than me – then the high of actually learning a few skills and building my confidence.

As living proof that you are never too old to learn to ride a bike, it made me wonder why so many people often pay willingly for ski lessons but grudge forking out when it comes to mountain biking.

It is embarrassing to admit, considering how bad I am, but I have actually been mountain biking in Scotland for years, mainly because the rest of the family love it and I don't want to be left out.

I was never good, but as I've grown older I've become even worse and now have to walk down many sections of the trails, although I can usually cycle up to reach them.

We have tried mountain biking abroad before but never had a

lesson until arriving at the summer playground of Les Deux Alpes. I have to say it was a revelation, not just for me, but also my daughter and son who enjoyed brushing up their already considerable skills thanks to Arno, their guide.

As for me, I progressed in just one hour from not being able to ride any of the obstacles on the basic skills section to completing the whole course – maybe not with much finesse but it was still a huge confidence boost. I've even got the video to prove it, taken by my patient instructor Benjamin from Bike Infinity.

I still wasn't good enough to try out many of the downhill trails at Les Deux Alpes but the rest of the family sampled a good proportion and found them every bit as enjoyable as those at Les Gets and Morzine, which have become a bit of a must-visit for mountain bike enthusiasts.

These resorts are closer to Geneva airport but it is a bit of a puzzle why more Scots don't make their way to Les Deux Alpes in summer as

The Alps somehow look even more impressive in the summer



Top and above – it is hard to imagine anywhere better to work on your mountain biking skills

it is a fantastic place for a holiday, particularly for families as there truly is something for everyone. And there are not many places where you can ski in the morning then swim in a lake in the afternoon under a hot sun.

Blessed with a glacier starting at 3,600 metres, Les Deux Alpes offers the most extensive summer skiing in Europe and it really is fun to try it for at least one morning.

Donning salopettes and walking to a ski lift on a warm day does feel a bit surreal but once up high, zooming down snowy slopes with the Alpine peaks providing a magnificent panorama, it is an exhilarating feeling as well as a superb way to brush up on basic ski skills. There's an excellent snow park too, with different areas to suit all abilities. What's more, the Alps somehow look even more impressive in the summer as the lack of snow cover defines them

clearly against the azure sky. It is also a great time of year to try paragliding and spiralling upwards on the thermals is an adrenaline rush that's hard to beat. My heart was in my mouth at first as we took a running jump off the mountain but I was flying in tandem with Patrick of Air Ailes Parapente who has 25 years of experience and his obvious expertise soon put me at ease. Before long we were soaring high in the sky like eagles, looking down on the valleys and picturesque hamlets with the mountains stretching out for miles around us.

It is a beautiful area with Ecrins National Park nearby. The very pretty traditional village of Venosc at the edge of the park can be reached by gondola from Les Deux Alpes or around half an hour by car.

From there and nearby St Christophe there are fantastic walks in scenery that must rank as amongst the most beautiful in the world.

On one afternoon we walked from St Christophe to Le Puy, a tiny hamlet high in the mountains which can be reached in an hour or so by way of a little footpath bordered by Alpine flowers.

Here the big excitement was an adder hiding underneath a stone and next day, while walking in the national park, we saw a fox sniffing round a family of marmots who, once they spotted him, rent the air with