

Abernathy North Ridge –cliffed out.

May 29, 2010

Short version:

Avoid the weather with an Eastside trip. Main goal Gardners with potential of Abernathy from the NR. Would be a slower relaxed trip. Interesting raging creek crossing, 9.7 miles to camp at 5700'. Wildlife in camp and an attempt on Abernathy from the North Ridge... fail on reaching a summit and a success on amazingly beautiful scenery. Clouds, sun and above freezing temps.

Detailed version:

Spring weather is upon us making calls for trips more difficult. Seemed the state was to be drenched in one way or another. The Eastside had a promising forecast of low precip potential Saturday (.1" or less early then Sunshine Sunday and 50+% precip Monday. Then there was looking at the precip and freezing levels during the week. All our options were out mainly due to higher angled slopes needed to summit, new snow accumulations, potential avy issues... Bummer... Well, I'd not been to the Gardners and I'd read of the possibility of Abernathy via the North Ridge. Sounded like a good time to check it out. Most everybody has already been to all three of these peaks and was invited to join with Kim and Rainie the wonderdog.

Headed out Friday flowing with the holiday traffic. Morning breakfast at Java man and to the TH. Skies grey, yet dry. Loaded the pack, ax, crampons, snowshoes, tent... Rainie with her sleeping pads, booties, kibbles and cookies. The Wolf Creek parking lot was empty and damp from the previous days rain. Very different hiking the eastside with a muddy trail. The trail loses 200' towards the creek, up and down again. In 2.5m, 1h came to the raging North Fork Wolf. The creek was swollen and raging, the ford was too deep and fast moving. Upstream a large wet log angled up and across, the end not reaching the bank. Hmmm, not inviting looking. Wet slippery, how to even get to it without being washed. Roamed upstream a few 100 yards. Not marked (cairned on the west side) was a large log with branches pruned. Obvious the route and well used. A little more a challenge being wet. A butt scoot across with an overweight (48lb) pack –fun? Walked back over to retrieve Rainies pack. She had no issue with her built in claws and was wondering why us pansies were taking so long.

Back on the trail it was fairly flattish, downs and ups, nice scenery following the roar of the river and several creek crossing –easy with boots, but wearing shoes I didn't want to get them wet. At about 6.4m (c4400') were patches of soft snow on the trail. Changed to semi-plastic boots –clomp, clomp, clomp... at about 7 miles fork in the trail, left going to a nice camp area and the South Fork Wolf Creek trail. Shortly the trail cleared of snow and opened to an old burn. Then the trail became more a running 2-3" deep creek. A few more windblown trees maybe a dozen by now. A little rise and views of Abernathy, Wolfs Head and Gardner meadows. 9.3m the start of the meadow –hard to really tell 'cept flatter and postholing in the snow that started at 5650'. At 9.3m a large tree (not burned) the trail goes under and a flat tent spot. Postholed another .2m across a creek and another clump of trees and a good dry flat spot with fire pits. Can't figure fire pits under a tree. What are people thinking? Nobody around and a sweet spot, creek near for fresh water, dry flat tent spot, view of Gardner and our own zoo. While setting camp a porcupine rambled over and climbed a tree ten feet away. Pretty cool watching as it watched and sniffed...

After a break we headed west across another creek through the woods and up the hill north of Abernathy lake. Snowshoes helped, though kept postholing and breaking through next to buried logs. Over looking the covered lake, I headed off solo traversing and rising west. I weakness in the cliffs east of Abernathy proved steep with a large cornice at top. The suggestion of going up the end of the basin and up a slope didn't look safe with the steepness, soft snow and the signs of sluffing. I gained a ridge north of the basin (c7250') and followed it up and down. A fairly steep ridge to the north south

intersecting ridge (c7760') and a left. The sun had been making occasional breaks in the clouds and Abernathy having its own private cloud. Now heading south on the ridge the cloud lowered. Everything white. The ridge was narrow and fairly level at 7700', I poked my trekking pole sides and front to help with something more than all white, progress was slow and I til hadn't seen the summit or upper slopes. About 2.3m from camp, basin on left, valley on right and cloud lifting south I came across mining remnants. Some sort of ridge top crank system. A reminder of the mining activity of the past... About 200 more feet along the ridge, snow cleared from the rocks. Looking down was over a 20' vertical drop. Not a good way down without a rope. West a steep gulley –very steep with ~70deg wet loose snow – not a go. East a vertical drop. Going back way to steep on the east to get around. Back up the rock I sat and watched. The cloud cleared then covered then cleared showing the north slopes of Abernathy. Darn... cliffed out –bummer... Looked like even if a go past here I'm not sure if the slope further up would be a go with these soft snow conditions. I just sat there and stared, summit 500' up and only a 1/3 mile away... I gave the mountain a nod to return another day, turned and walked away. Near the east end of the ridge I stopped again and studied the approaches. Several options but none worth the risk today. The walk back to camp was enjoyable. Groans of trees rubbing and wind whistling. The burned trees painting a picture so different the green. Naked and showing textures and the sprouting of new life. West end of the meadow a group of six from Olympia were setting up camp. They planned on heading up N. Gardner at 5am. Back to camp 5 hours (camp to camp)for the Abernathy attempt... and the porcupine was gone. Food, drink and a cozy sleeping bag and hoping for a good route in the morning. Today was a good day in the mountains. Nice river walk, diverse views f forest , burns, green and dead naked trees and patterns. Cool hike and warm drying sun. An adventure of a little known route, great views and the second time seeing a porcupine in the wild.

Next chapter... Gardners...

Stats: 9.7miles to camp, 4.7 miles to ridge north of Abernathy. 7036vert ascent.
Gear: ice ax, snow shoes, sunblock...

Happy trails
fwb2