

## **Mt Baker CD/Heliotrope Ridge**

(Grant 10781', Sherman 10160', Colfax 9440')

May 14-15, 2010

Sun, High winds (25+)

With: Nikolia Popov (twodogdad)

### **The short version:**

TwoDagDad and I went up Baker. A few hours up to bivy under the stars (well worth carrying the weight). Up at dawn and skinned up to the Roman Wall, crawled up the wall, Basked in the sun on Grant Peak, snorted sulfur dioxide and views of the crater from Sherman Peak. Dodged crevasses back to kickstep up Colfax and gawk at Lincoln and Assassins spire. With a nice long ski back to the TH and only an 1/8mile walking once off snow to the car. And sunburnt even with SPF 40 three times ...

### **The long version:**

Plan was to do an easy trip up to Colfax and if not feeling lazy visit Sherman as well. As the weekend approached the weather predictions and current weather warmed in town to upper 60's, low 70's feeling like summer. Avy warnings in extreme plus and thoughts of low soft sluffing snow made a jaunt up Baker even more inviting. Others interested bailed for lower mountain pursuits. Last minute twodogdad joined. Looked like we'd be having some good skiing. Worry was perhaps too soft.

Most the way to the Heliotrope TH, tdd realized we were out of gas –oops. Many cars parked short of the TH, we blazed through the snow on the road to park next to the TH. Another group of Father, son and friends headed out at about the same time. With an 8pm start we took the summer route not knowing what the conditions would be like up Grouse Creek. We encountered firm snow c4000' and after some log and creek crossings changed from shoes to boots and started skinning up from c4400' (1.3m, 1h10m). We popped out of the woods c5000 and up the consolidated slope. I'd thought of doing the trip as a light day push, but was convinced a bivy out on the snowfield would be worth the trip. It got dark and we found a bench with a site flattened for a tent at c5950' (2.4m, 1h30m, 2275ascent). A beautiful eve, lights of Vancouver to the NW and stars so thick they were like milk.

We woke late at 4:50 (couldn't hear the watch alarm) and after arranging gear and several visits by a plump mouse started skinning up in the cool dawn. The snow was frozen firm and at many places it would have been good to have crampons. I stopped being greedy for the steep and following near the track did well. There was a nice ski track, but people booting had obliterated them down lower. The route goes up a pitch ten flattens and repeats. We passed small tent cities at 6000', 6800' (2.9m), 6925' (3.1m), 7570 (3.5m) and 7955 (3.8m). With a few breaks to take care of things we past the last tent city at 7:20 (2h from camp). Angling left (east) we could see a string of people heading up the Roman Wall. From our view point it looked darn steep –luckily the flattening effect. To the right The Colfax Ice cliff looked inviting, yet not enough ice. Hopefully with some warm weather enough ice will build to fill and thicken.

The sun finally started to hit where we were walking and warm us as we arrived for a relaxing break (40min) at the saddle below the base of the Roman Wall (c8975', 4.6m, 3h25m, 5300ascent). Crevasses were evident, yet filled in. Looking over to the Deming we could see some large and small openings. I took time visualizing a route back from Sherman (if we made it that far). Well, here goes, it looked like a long way up 1650' of boot stepping with skis on the back (and a 60m rope in the pack, and 4L water...). Builds character right? The wind picked up and the sun beat down. The wind won on keeping it cold and the snow firm. Several groups came down while we trudged up. Most free walking and only two on rope. Funny seeing 5 people on a short rope each 8-10 feet from each other. I was imagining them all dropping into a hole together. Maybe it was more like the rope for young school kids to keep them

together (and drag them along). Near the top of the wall I started seeing pickets that had been left. Odd, the pitch was not very steep (30-40deg). Then a group was coming down with some literally crawling down the hill. I bet they were going to have a long day. My mind wandered and passed by a couple guys also carrying skis. A snowboarder came down and soon the pitch leveled off, WHEW! (c10620', 5.3m, 6h15m) –for those interested at a snail pace over-loaded 2h10m to get up the wall. What a relief to take the skis off the back and skin the rest of the way to the summit mound. Cresting the top it is about ¼ mile to the summit mound. I stopped half way to chat with two guys that had been down skiing the Park Gl. The snow was still too firm. They went off to check west and would be back to wait hoping the sun would warm and soften the snow a little.

Oh, yeah. I stood atop the mound at noon o'clock (Grant Peak). Later than I expected, but that was okay (10781', 5.6m, 6h35m, 7162ascent). More zinc –darn empty... liberal with the 40spf, time for food, candy and relaxing. Had some good conversations, tried to figure peaks, looked around down the east to the Park Gl. Nice top of the world view, I definitely like the NC views looking at beautiful rugged mountains staring you in the face vs the looking down at blobs.

After an hour and a half relaxing we decided to head down SW to check out Sherman. Peeling the skins it was nice to be skiing. Took several turns to get used to the snow, heavy pack and altitude. We skied to the saddle on the west side next to five snow machines. The skiers that had been on the Park were leaving to go around the corner. On the back of his sled he'd brought a large duffle... Soon to be flying down the mountain via para-foil.

The west saddle is on the edge of the crater wall looking directly into a large vent hole. Steam rising, sulfur smell and the sound of boiling water. More time to gawk... ...2pm. We wanted to stay high for our traverse back to the Roman wall, so we booted it inside the crater wall going counter clockwise to a broad area then up a ridge to a viewpoint looking into the crater and the summit. As far as peaks, I think Sherman is better than Grant for views. How awesome looking into the crater with steam jets blowing, noises, bubbling water hidden under plume of steam smelling like sulfur dioxide... A very real volcanic experience I'm glad we didn't pass by. It made the trip more than just another high summit with snow, glaciers, views and skiing (hey, aren't those good enough?). Oh, stats Sherman Peak 10160', 7m, 9h20m, 7703ascent. Picture and more gawking. Far below I could see a long line of people walking up the lower Easton and a giant tent city. The flying guy said he'd past a Mountaineer group (EvBCC Snow 2 trip).

In 25 min skis were back on and heading back towards the Roman Wall. We traversed slowly and dodged around crevasses. Next to the wall got in some turns in great spring snow, then a crawl up and over (c9190') and skied to the base of the Roman Wall (c8990', 8.15m, 9h35m).

Not sure of the conditions, left the skies and took crampons and started walking up Colfax East. There was windblown under a thin crust. Sometimes stepping into fluff knee deep. Hmmm, fluffy, not stuffy. Worked to the left ridge for less wind deposit and leveled off just below Colfax E. Being so close I crawled up the steep very short bit to stand on the summit, then down, around the south side heading west. Dropped to the saddle (c9200') and up the left side of Colfax. The middle and right had break lines and possible a shrund forming. Topping off the view to Lincoln and Assassins Spire was breathtaking. Clouds whispering around. So stark and shear. What a great view point -looking down the Easton and Coleman and up the Deming, Grant, Sherman... (9440', 8.6m, 10h25m, 8250ascent).

Returning to the base of the Roman wall saddle tdd had dug a pit to protect from the wind. The day was getting old and now time for a payoff of skiing to pick up our bivy gear. We skirted east around a covered crevasse and then skied along the bottom of Black Buttes. We hit beautiful corn and soft snow.

Passed the high tent city with people milling around then left back along the wall and down passing a new large tent city parked against the wall at c7100'. Skirting west we topped directly above our camp for a sweet 1000' face. At the bottom a group from Vancouver Island were digging in for a cozy camp. We'd stowed stuff in tdd's bivy sack and covered it with snow. Found out the REI bivy sack is not water proof. Luckily, it is downhill from here with the wet shoes and gear.

6:15p, 11.6 miles of fun and 8370 ascent, now time to get back to the TH. Two options. The summer trail had hard snow and trees and traverse, windblown logs and... We were too low, but... maybe we could do a high traverse and get to the winter route Grouse Creek and snag some more turns closer to the car. Guess which we selected? High traverse it was, a mile of it, around a few basins, over a ridge, skirt a nasty looking avy strewn hill and over a last ridge to walk 40' of dirt/grass to the gulley (c5350', 12.6m). YeeHAW! Thick glop, but we had a good time. Hill flattened and we followed the west side of the stream skiing to c4050' before taking off the skis. Some easy bushwhacking a creek to right on a small ridge, drop NNW to a creek cross then North less than an 1/8 mile through open woods to the trail behind the outhouse. 7:30p, only a hundred feet to go, but had to do it on skis :-)

We loaded up and crossed our fingers we'd not run out of gas. The snow had melted significantly to where most the cars were parked -I counted over 21 cars parked. BTW, no gas in Granite you have to make it to Maple Falls. Did we make it or did we run out... ?  
Can't you guess, it was our lucky day.

It was a great day in the mountains. Much better than expected. Twodogdad was very patient and we took our time making it a very relaxed day, enjoying the spring weather and awesome views.

Happy trails!  
fwb2

Stat: 13.75m, 8400ascent (eve hike 2.4m2270'; day hike 11.35m, 6130vert).

Gear used: Skis/skins, harness/glacier gear, Avy (probe/shovel/transceiver), helmet, crampons, ice axe, sunblock.

Gear hauled and not used: 60m rope, pickets.