

Big Snagtooth (8350'), Willow Tooth 8330' via Willow Creek

May 2, 2010

Sun to clouds, summit high cold wind and another summit blizzard

Avoiding the Westside storms –Chapter 2:

Falling asleep near midnight with the sounds of the crowd around the bonfire dissipating and the stars fully brilliant above. Dreams of hiking and the day ahead. What would it hold? Relatively shorter distance and vertical, yet with its own challenges. What about the shoulder boost... We'd be further west, how would the weather be?

The short version : down across creek. Angle right (SE, 140deg tn) staying leftish up past waterfall. At end of basin turn left and up ridge next to gully to upper basin. South (right) corner of basin up easy gully to ridge left of rightmost tower. Follow ridge east to 8000' above alternate ascent gully from upper basin. Turn right from ridge under summit block. Left up first gully. North up gully, under chockstone. Shoulder boost assist onto summit boulder. Return same route.

The Long version:

A lazy morning, some visiting and saying by to the group heading to the BD tour. TwoDogDad surprised us coming back from Mazama with fresh Baked goods –yum :-)

Over 20 cars at the pullout for Silverstar -what a crowd... Pulled out at a pullout for Burgandy spire. Must be a lazy weekend another 8:45 start. Loaded with gear and this time rope and rock pro we dropped down and right from the snow covered boulder field into the woods moving right 200' down to the creek (4100', 5min). Found ski tracks and a wide log covered with snow bridging Willow Creek. The snow was firm, but not great traction. Shortly we donned snowshoes and followed wandering ski tracks SE (~140deg TN). The forest is easy walking with the firm snow cover, yet dense enough to not see direction. A little wandering to avoid the obvious obstacles and a few pauses on the surprise sink holes. The pitch increased as we stay what feels like leftish rising with the waterfall on the right. Somewhere around 4800' we pass the waterfall and traverse the thickly tree basin passing a creek and gully. Near the end of the basin (c54-5500', 1.4m). The going gets steep and the snow stays firm as we tread on the top. Both thankful we aren't sinking deep. We work up on the left side of a gully. The pitch was a bear being steep, then got more interesting when Dicey's snowshoe hinge broke. At c6600 the ridge forms on our left (north) and we traverse right upward to the upper basin (starts at 6845). Time for a deserved rest to check out the route on rocks in the center of the basin at c7100' (2mi,).

A direct route to the peak did not look inviting and the info we had was ambiguous on which gully to go up. The past snow slide activity and potentials gave our best choice the shortest slope (500') far right just left of the right most tower that ends the ridge above. Less time on a steep potential slide hill and a good break to get through the cornice. Off with snowshoes and up and right took us around the cornice and onto the ridge (c7560', 2.2m, 4hr15min). Still sunny, the winds were cold and the weather from Washington Pass looked ominous. Seeing the snow was windblown we ditched the excess weight (snowshoes), donned crampons, had a bite to eat and worked up the ridge (NEE). At c8000' we passed a col with a blue flagged stake –must be the one mentioned in MattB's report. To get a better look we went up Willow Tooth (8330', 2.6m) to look across. Might have been my first mistake. The ice under the thin snow layer made difficult travel. We went down and counterclockwise around the summit block. Hint was to look for the "Hidden gully". First gully did not appear to go. Second gully looked better and further around the corner a ledge with a vertical drop. Back we went to the gully (east) that appeared to go up. And up we went. Mistake two. Behind a buttress we donned harness, rope and rock pro (8150', 6hrs). I drew the straw to lead. Up steep deep snow to the head of the gully and rock. The rock was covered in water ice. We'd heard that from others and in tr's. I cleared the snow and with much work worked up finding occasional pro. This was very slow and tedious. Clearing 8" of snow to expose ice, cleaning soft ice and finding ledges to grab with gloved fingers and crampon points. I was dreaming I had tools rather than a scramble ax, pitons and some stubby screws. Maybe it should have dawned on me this was the wrong gully. –not. Thoughts in my mind were like... what is this like in the summer? And –how did others do this and not mention...? I must be a whim...

Topped out on a ridge with a tall spire at c8327'. Sounded right since the summit is supposed to be 8330 according to Peakbagger.com. Later I found out the peaks for this ridge are mis-labeled on peakbagger. The true summit is 8350' per records. Dicey made good work of the mixed climb. We looked around and the rock east did not look right. Way to spicy and climb to summit it for us today. I lead out NW on a low pitch snow –cornice to right to the peak ahead. Up onto the rock, a deep breath and... darn. Looking NW is the true summit. Very obvious with the rock to shoulder boost from and a cairn on the summit.. Down off this bump and lower to the next saddle. Dicey follows and we try to find a place out of the wind and spindrift. We're both cold from the long time taken to gain the ridge, the winter temps and howling wind. Water tubes are frozen. It's a, let's get up there and out of here. I had tried a likely spot on the east, but no grip with gloves, then fingers froze fast. Something about front pointing in glacier boots... Dicey went for the standard up a rock and shoulder move route. We both thought some sunshine and rock shoes would be nice. I can say after a good day like this, boots on the shoulder aren't comfortable, but whatever it takes.

I could see that Dicey was shivering and it was time to get off this berg. It was getting after 5 and both tired. We headed down the gully south below the summit block. Found a chockstone to go under with a snow pitch below. This was obviously the proper gully (SW gully, good – vs- SE gully, wrong). Playing it safe we did a full rope rap into the snowfield. A little down climbing then plunge stepping out. Dicey headed back to the SW ridge for our descent while I rounded the block and back up the SE gully to retrieve our trekking poles. Not a joy re-ascending the gully. I was happy to finally leaving the summit block at 6:30.

Back the ridge, caught with Dicey, downed a pack of skittles and a bar, chugged water and down we went. Snow to firm and steep (fast) for a glissade (I tried with some success). Working down the gully from the upper basin the snow was soft postholing past knees. We changed to snowshoes (after another repair attempt). Still postholing we made the best of it. Taking no extra risks we followed or track. Half way past the waterfall Dicey had another blow-out. I feel sorry for her limping out waiting for the last hinge pin to sheer. Across the creek on the same bridge up the woods and staying climbers left to avoid the now soft snow and dropping between boulders up to the road. Man, did it feel good to be on the highway. 6 miles and 12 hours, we'd managed back and it was still light. We loaded and got on the road, cleaning up all the left over meals and driving through another snow storm home.

This was a trip that had a little more adventure than normal. Finding the proper gully up the summit block and warmer weather (no rain though) would have been nice. The way up we had beautiful sun at times. Seems as usual at the summit block it's back to winter weather. If you go up, be prepared. Success was due to a little experience and greatly to having a solid and sound partner. Thanks a million Dicey, and sorry about that gully.

Happy Trails (if you can find them),
fwb2

Stats:

6m

4685 ascent

12hr

Gear: Avy gear (Transceiver, probe, shovel –each person), snowshoes, crampons, ice axe. 60m rope, picket, small rock rack. Wrong route could have used ice tools and stubby screws.