

Big Peak (4500') - snowshoeing

Via East Ridge, Money Creek, Skykomish

March 23, 2011

Gabriel, CarlaS, TomS, MikeH & fwb

Weather – Sun, Little to no wind... felt like spring (temps to 52 in Skykomish)

Sunrise 7:04a, sunset 19:20, moonrise 1:10a, moonset 8:54a (4 days past New Moon)

Forecast for Wednesday was a break in the weather and a predicted warm and sunny day. With the abundance of recent snow where to hike was a question. What would be a relatively safe route to avoid the high accumulations of snow. Another prominent peak perked out interest in the Skykomish area. A small peak of Bing and higher neighbor on the same ridge to the west Crosby. Sounded pretty good... Bing Crosby...

The typical route is up Money Creek road toward Lake Elizabeth with a turn up the gulley south of the summit. Not wanting to be in a southern exposed potential avy gulley and a whim of trying it different our attempt would be via the east ridge.

Up the ridge

Past the houses on Money Creek road. A view of the lower east ridge of Bing showing a cliff band on the ridge. Shortly after the bridge on the right we parked at an abandoned road on the right. 7:38a (c1025') we left Money Creek road north up the abandoned road a short ways (c1226') then a left leaving the road to follow the ridge west. Underbrush became sparse with a lush rich carpet of moss. We dodged the cliff bank to the left (south) and onto snow at c1900'. The trees were pleasantly spaced for nice walking, though thick enough to block the sunshine. An opening brought us into bright sunshine then back to woods. Donning snowshoes and passing old roads starting at c2540' (1.1m, 1h10min), again at c3040' and a fourth time at c3200' (1.5m, 1h41min). In a short bit (1.8m, c3560') the pitch began to increase in steepness.

Bing Ho...

Gabriel had been keeping an eye on the map and the iso-lines looked better more left. As we rose there were cliffs on the right and the snow pitch we were on increased to over 50° (2.0m, c3900', 2h20min). this was steep and a bit of work on snowshoes in the soft powdery snow. At around 4400' the slope leveled in comparison and we continued west along the summit ridge to the summit. Looking around it appeared we had come up the only viable scramble route from the east side. In sparse trees the view was spectacular north to Baring and Grotto and south to Lennox mountains. Far SE Summit Chief and Overcoat had very different cloudy weather. On Bing it was time for a break and after so many cloudy weather days time to take in the blue skies and great views (2.1m, 4500', 3475 ascent, 2h50min from car).

Go west...

Leaving the relaxing summit break our next goal was to traverse the ridge east to Crosby. Hopes to pass Cement Lakes and the re-known Boner Lake. The later seemed to stir some excitement in stupid jokes. Heading down cliffs to the right. Slightly leftish and still west a steep slope dropping into the trees. Ridge veering SWW, drop down steep enough to be much more comfortable for some of us sans snowshoes, then traverse left to the first low saddle west of Bing (2.3m, c4124, 11:03a). Steep slopes to right and left, dodging trees along the ridge then into a steep wall. We waited as Tom blazed a route up and over to the flat running ridge. We could have dropped left then up around, but then would miss the fun of crawling up with the exposure on the north.

A very scenic walk on the flatter rolling ridge rising over peak 4494' then a slight down. An incredible view into the Cement Lake basin and the looming Crosby Mt. Still heading west we ran into the drop of a cliff band and a seemingly impasse (3.2m, c4250', 12:00). Some deliberation and checking possible routes down and into Cement Lakes basin. I walked down a 45° slope 50' then traversed right (north) to the

saddle below the cliff. I waited and could hear voices. While I was descending, conversation regarding the rapidly changing conditions and potential for summiting decided by the time we got to the upper summit block of Crosby the snow would be too warmed and not a likely smart choice to ascend a SW open slope. This was as far as we'd go. Deep inside the thought that it looked possible and such a nice day. The wise choice, the groups choice to call this as far as we'd go and take care getting out in the ever warming conditions.

At the beckoning of the sirens calls above the cliff I returned to find the group lounging eating lunch and making an attempt at a first class sunburn. Hard to believe we spent two hours taking in the views and enjoying being in the open mountains. Much map staring and looking at the terrain in front of us should two potential routes for a winter attempt of Crosby. Further out another round of "name that peak" and more clowning around.

Where's the money

13:50, time to head out. Up the now heavy sloppy snow. Globbs sticking to the shoes. Step, step, click, of the ice ax to knock off a glob. Step, step, step, shoes so heavy... click, click, cleaned and walking on. Gees! So glad we decided to head out. Another couple miles up in this muck would have been a bit more work than desired. The walk on the ridge was a pretty as it gets for a winter hike.

Over peak 4494' and down that steep short cliffy thing Tom blazed up. Talking about it later, Dicey thought we should call Peak 4494 Chandler Peak. Took me a bit, then I hit the sitcom "Friends"... (Chandler Bing). Okay, I got it. She does get good ideas. I liked when she came up with one on our [Sonny Boy trip](#).

Short of the low saddle west of Bing, Tom lead down south slope into the trees (c4260', 4.0m). To Tom, it all goes. To most of us regular humans the steep was not comfortable with snowshoes –though with them off we were sinking...

Let the entertainment begin

At c3460' (4.7m, 14:50) we traversed left into an open gulley, and again re-donned snowshoes. As the snow thinned so did the gulley narrow. Tom vanished below around a corner and above Mike sank in deep. I couldn't hear the conversation well, but it was obvious Mike was cemented in well. Carla to the rescue –well, sort of. She offered her shovel and watched as Mike dug himself out. Seems his snowshoe had caught deep down under heavy snow and perhaps brush. Snow flying and soon we were on our way again exiting the gulley at c2800'. Snow about a foot or so deep. Some sidehilling, log scrambling and an amazing attack of shutter delay took both Mike and I down. Mosses, giant ancient trees, streams, new buds, sunlight streaming through the overhead ranches... When we recovered the others were waiting patiently at the road (5.6m, c1445', 16:05p). More taking it easy and food. No big hurry with the beautiful sunny and warm spring day. We stayed well entertained for the 1.6m plowed road walk, tall tales, mischief and ideas for future trips.

Another outing to remember with a smile. Always hard to pull the plug and turn around so early, but given the conditions best to play on the safe side. And the mountain will be there for another outing. Heck, we had a NWHikers party to attend in a few hours.

Happy Trails!
fwb

Stats: To Bing summit 2.1m, 2h50min, 3475' ascent.

To turn around +1.4m, 2h, +390' ascent

Return 3.6m, 3h03min,

Total 7.1m, 4315ascent, 8h11min total trip time.