

Cascade Pass Weekend - July 30-Aug 1, 2010

Sahale Peak (8680'), Boston Peak (8894'), Mt Bucker/N Face (9114') and Horseshoe Peak (8480')
fwb2, dicey and Iron

Time for another three day weekend. Weather forecast was promising, except a 20% chance of afternoon showers and thunderstorm. Well, do the forecasters get it right? We'd been wanting to do a loop at Cascade Pass. Last minute Iron just back from his long Ptarmigan Traverse decided to join us. Cloudy out west and better east. Stopping in Marblemount at the ranger station we met up with a few familiar faces.

We saddled up and started off a little after 8. The switchbacks kept going. Funny, on the way up to have to go down on some of the switchbacks. 1h25m we were at Cascade Pass. On the way up a Very cheerful NOLs group heading out then to Boston Basin. At the pass a group of 3 youths and adult celebrating the last leg of their trip. Great views, warm sun –the start of a great day. Several marmots, a grouse and chicks and near Sahale camp a solo goat. At 11:40a, we stopped at the upper Sahale GI camp for lunch, then kicked step on up swerving right, end of the snow, a short patch of c13 scrambling made more fun by our large multi-day packs to ~40' below the Sahale Summit. Dropped the packs and up to enjoy the views. As we were arriving a team of three tentative hikers were heading back down the Quien-Sabe glacier.

At 2:05 we got our butts back in gear and headed across the Sahale-Boston Col-Ridge. Off the rock, crampons, over rock, more snow finally off with the crampons. We decided we had plenty of time and best to play it conservative (see later in story...). The route followed up over a few bumps on the ridge. Then left around one and right up a pseudo-gulley. Ridge again, when you see many towers ahead there are some hard to see cairns leading direct across the right side (east) to the top of the Boston Glacier and base of Boston Peak.

We took sometime studying the east face and possible options. I walked on the snow further east to see the northerly ridge much more mild and a potential gulley. Dicey picked out a great place to start 50' below the col and we traversed north. I ventured a ledge north and returned out voted by Iron and Dicey –and the overhung narrowing ledge. If it was past class three we knew we were off route. We zigzagged about 100' in from our start and soon the pitch mellowed. I looked up and nothing there –only down. Yee haw!, "hey guys, I only see down from here..." We'd landed north of the summit on the ridge about 250' up from our start. A little dicey ridge walk and we were at the best seat in the house (so to speak). After some of our adventures of late this was a very pleasant scramble. A large aluminum water tight Mazama box held a royal summit ledger. Many familiar names. I'd never realized how popular this summit was. A slight breeze and warm sun. Smoke out east gave shows of steam plumes looking like Stehekin was experimenting with nuclear test. We took it easy, played name that peak. Tried to spy friends over on Logan. Looked pretty empty below. Only spotted three tents in Boston Basin, none on the Inspiration... Where are all the people... oh, it's Friday :-)

On our way to the Boston Col we'd spotted a series of rap stations. Investigating it looked sound and we rapped off the summit. 50m rope left plenty to spare. On the second rap Iron found a cave to hide in to avoid rock fall. The third rap is not necessary given the broad ledges that take you all the way to the snowpack.

Shadows were growing on the Boston Glacier. It was 6:30 and getting time to think of camp. We'd spotted several potential spots. 10 minutes from the col (second flat spot down) we picked a scenic flat spot next to the Ripsaw Ridge (c8080'). Tents on flat snow and cooking/lounging on dark rusted looking rock. And a dizzy view down into Horseshoe basin. It was a relaxed day, entertaining with the fire action out east and the colors deepening on Buckner and Logan as the clear sky sunset... Yawn... sleep came easily.

Day 2:

"Hey, look out the flap",

"Huh"? Oh...

Clouds covered the entire sky with only a sliver far east for the red glow of the soon to rise sun. We'd planned an early start. Hope to get over the N Face of Buckner and able to descend to Horseshoe Basin if the rain did come. We were packed, roped and making our way across the deeply crevassed Boston Glacier by 6:35. The closer to Buckner we approached the larger each crevasse appeared that we passed. Keeping a fairly high road we easily negotiated the traverse in an hour to the base of Buckner's North Face (c7700'). I got the fun of now carrying all the pickets and pro for our ascent. I was also out voted to lead the entire face.

Using two axes each and still roped we went up the perfect kick-step able 30 degree slope maybe getting to 35 degree 400' to a 'shrund (c8100'). In places could see where old steps had been kicked. Old steps eroded steps were frozen and not usable. Landing on the flat lip on the right, everyone came up for a brief break. Then we headed left (east) to more continuous snow that steepened a bit to ~40 degree and a little more when we crossed some runnels. Still easy stepping. Under a rock area, moved right across a runnel then up. The slope was narrowing slightly and above looked to pinch off to steeper and rocks. A third of the way up again from the 'shrund, c8530, we crossed a runnel moving left then traversed and stepped left onto rock and again everyone came up. A thing about Glacier and steep roped pitches, a little anti-social in a way. Maybe best to focus on the travel, and always the company of feeling your partners on the rope, pacing as they come to each obstacle and the mind gets to take in the experience of the mountains. On the rock some class 2-3 scramble up ~80' and left onto the eastern upper snowfield. This pitch started out around 30 degrees then steepened to the steepest of the trip at 35-45 degrees. Left closer to a rising snow ridge was lower angle, right under the exposed ridge rock was about 10 degrees steeper. Still great kick stepping, along with many stops to slow the heart. What's up anyway? Oh, altimeter says 8900' and I live at sea level. In 2 hours I was looking across at the Ptarmigan traverse and down to rock of the summit ridge.

Everyone up and knuckles. No rain and we were on top –sweet :) West (to our right) a short easy scramble (50+') we were on the high point of the SW summit. Food and more of the typical summit lounging. No real summit cairn or register. I ventured the dicey traverse to the NE summit. Ridge run, drop down a gully, around a buttress and up. Careful of the rock, I barely touched a sound looking table size rock that settled 10' lower –scary. The NW summit also had no cairn or reg. I took readings and found this summit 5-10' lower than the SW. Returning to the SW summit Dicey and Iron were getting ready to depart. I made a small summit cairn and a new register.

We started off down the dirt/scree of the south side to snow. The pitch was fairly steep (30-40 deg) so we donned crampons. It'd be a long slide for a slip and rocks below... Two of us got a reminder today about hanging pro on the chest and nothing hanging low. Very easy to hook a crampon on a hanging loop... A westward lowering traverse to below Lick of Flame leaving our packs (c8250').

A check at the images we'd brought to determine what was Horseshoe. Traversed west across the base of the summit rock to the far SW (c8350'). Onto rock traverse right 40' then up 10'. A broad vegetated ledge ran SW and NE. I tried the NE that ran to the north ridge. 30'+ below a rock snow covered ledge, went up the ledge left and soon a dead end. Others had been here, old sling material laying on the ground (took the tat with us). We could see a dirt gully and the narrow ledge that runs to the summit. Retracing our steps we went SW along the wide (6'+) ledge and around to a dirt gully. Top of the dirt gully left onto the narrow ledge. The ledge got even narrower sloping downward. Wouldn't be much the last 6-10 feet to walk over and pull up through the small notch. But, the downward slope, lack of good handholds and the exposure gave us pause. We had a rope so why not use it? Again I was voted to head out first. Set two cams (.75 & .5) in some downward facing horizontal cracks as my Jesus Nut. Dicey wrapped a boulder for an anchor and I stepped across –huh, no biggy, but at least I felt safe. A #5 nut fit perfect in a crack above my head. Good thing because I only brought two nuts. I could have relied on the rap slings, but had no idea what they were attached to or their condition. Feeling well protected I pulled up the narrow notch. The edge is very sharp and loose –and narrow. The summit had a small landing the other side, Iron came up followed by dicey –we enjoyed the view for about a minute when

the sky lit up and 14 seconds later a boom. No pictures since the camera battery was toast. Time to get down. Dicey set a quick rap, I signed us into the wet BoeAlps reg briefly saw a few familiar names literally scratched in, and we were ready to get off the summit. Reminder, when you find the middle of the rope tie a temporary knot and biner it to the slings. ;-)

50m got us to the base of the dirt gully and the other side ready to exit. Retraced or steps back to the packs. It was only 1:50p, what to do? Booker if the lightning passed? We got our answer as the sky opened and rain started -we headed down with haste to find a camp. Around 7000' we started looking for a somewhat flat spot. Dropping 6800, 6600, nothing even close. 6400, 6300... gees gotta be something flat(ish). Finally at c6150 Iron found a spot only slightly sloped. About 35 minutes to lose 2100' vert and nestled between a creek and a wet spot we pitched tents -oh so happy we decided to not bivvy. Being creative we used packs and other gear to make a somewhat flat landing. Feet hanging out, rain falling we celebrated the summits and scenery we'd seen and entertained ourselves with reading other trip reports of the same summits and eating as many heavy munchies as we could. I think the little bottle Dicey had brought helped the situation. Around 8:00 the rain subsided and we stood stretching and looking at how to get out. After ready numerous TRs on those venturing to the lower basin we had no inkling of even thinking about that way. The 6450 gully it would be.

Day 3.

Morning came, but we didn't move -much. 7:30 crawled out to standing in a cloud. A beauty of its own, but not the best for a summit or finding the way out. We'd canned the side trip to Booker. No way we'd want to be trying to go up over Sahale Camp if the lightning storm started again as predicted. The area smelled of smoke and a trip to Booker would have had very limited views from the thick smoke haze. As we ate and packed the sun started burning off the clouds. Dicey spotted a group coming down the col she'd expected to be the exit. Later looking up they weren't moving -only $\frac{3}{4}$ down the face.

We walked NW out of camp at 8:45a, a slowly rising traverse from 6150' aiming for 6450'. Heather, talus, scree, little creeks and several deep gulleys with steep dirt walls. 20 minutes out at c6200' past one of these gulleys we passed what was obviously the spot MattB had mentioned in his TR. Two flat tent spots scattered with a few large rocks to help it blend in. Hmmm, still could see two people in the same spot in the col, wonder why they hadn't moved. Maybe an accident? Why else would they stay there? Up a rise, another deep nasty steep dirt walled gully, up a wide ledge on a granite slab and at snow. Now from here and up the col. Donned crampons (just in case) and headed toward the now easily visible group of four and the base of the col (c6450'). Bummer, accident. Walking down the steep (30-40deg) snow in just scramble boots a member of their team had slipped. Going into ax arrest kept sliding (tracks visible) all the way into the rocks below. Beat up his jaw and looked to be a few less teeth. I was really bummed and at the same time glad we'd been using crampons even when we thought we could get by without them. The pitch was short and good for kicking, I signaled to the others to come across and started up beside their group as they started roping up. I talked a bit with Josh at the top -looked like they had the situation under control.

Top of the col (c6700') transitioned to rock going up and right (east) up the ridge to a slabby flatter area before the ridge became seriously steeper. On the way to our left some big chunks of snow broke loose -yikes! From the slabby area we again transitioned back to snow (c7075') on a rising traverse to the skyline. 15 minutes at the ridge (7400') we kept heading west past upper Sahale Glacier camp stopping at the ridge near the turn off for the alpine toilet. 11:35, clearish (smoke) east and clouds rolling over the pass from the west. A perfect place to take a good lunch break. The area was pretty empty. Just one group eating and taking off to summit Sahale.

In the hour and a half to get to Cascade Pass we passed over eight groups coming up. Some with full packs and many looking like out to walk around the block at home. Weather went from warm T-shirt to moist marine air with cold wind. Most those coming up were in jacket, hat and gloves. Walking in the cloud had a mystique of its own. Like being in a fairy tale, shrouded mystery and a mood very different from our approach. Near the pass the crux of our trip - the snow covered creek crossing, was melted out and hardly recognizable from our way in.

We came to Cascade Pass (5392') behind a couple coming up from Horseshoe Basin. They'd spent yesterday trying to follow a route that would bring them from the lower to upper basin. They'd had no luck and at one point broke through a snow bridge getting a facial injury. Ouch –too many injuries. The Pass was bustling with people. Sheltered from the wind, but in a cloud and now view. In the 35 switchbacks and hour and ten minutes descending we passed over 31 groups coming up hill. Backpackers, day hikers, kids on backs, Father and young son climbers, a tripod guy not clearing the trail... This IS the Mt Si trail of the North Cascades. An Angry Hiker style map would be appropriate.

At the trailhead it was somewhat warm and no wind. The refreshments in the cooler were still cool and nice to be in no hurry. It was still the middle of the day (2:45p). The injured climber from the col went by –we felt sorry for him, then the rest of their crew, the tripod guy and his not so happy companion. A Forest Service Fire guy with info on the fire and a solo climber that had dodged falling rocks on Trapper Peak (?). Much entertainment while we polished off munchies and brew. Next stop, more food – Marblemount Diner. As we left the diner... "Hey, isn't that the tripod guy?"

A rewarding and great trip, scenery, Marmots, Grouse, goat, all the weather we wanted (and not), four summits, three basins and topped being two great companions to share it with. Thanks guys!

Happy trails (and play it safe),
fwb2

Stats:

Day 1,	6.9m,	+5610,	-1270,	10.5h	Sunshine, warm, light wind
Day 2,	3.7m,	+2040,	-3860,	8h	Clouds, burnoff by 9, 11 sprinkles, 1 thunder, 2 hvy rain, white
Day 3,	6.8m	+1700,	-4020,	6h	Clouds-low, burn off by 8:30, diffuse smoked sun, med wind

Gear:

Crampons (steel), ax and extra ax or ice tool, 3 pickets (not used), 4 screws (not used), pitons (not used), four cams (used .75 & .5), two nuts (used #5), 50m rope, webbing and double slings, brain bucket, rain gear and sunscreen.