

Chilliwacks, NCNP Aug 19-22, 2010

NW Spire (aka Easy Mox, 8407, p527)

SE Spire (aka Hard Mox, 8504, p904)

Mt Redoubt (8969', p1649)

Mt Spickard (8979, p4779)

Are we going or?:

For several years I've been hitting road blocks trying to get into the Chilliwacks. A still wild area of rugged un-forgiving mountains and glaciers. Beta I'd read had most groups catching poor weather and riding days out in tents waiting for good days. The rock on the mountains is very friable and spontaneously separates and falls from the peaks. Not a place to be summiting solo. Lining up time off work, weather, trip partners proved a tangled puzzle. This year AndyD and I tried with a group for the first week of August. StefanF and GregK made a quick trip and come our trip thunderstorms and rainy weather... another hold... We narrowed the time we'd spend in the area for a better weather window chance. Again, working around both our work, family responsibilities and weather we waited. Last week a 2 ½ possibly three day weather window on near a weekend. A few days of drying a bonus.

Getting there:

A little late off work The slow rush hour drive north. A scenic route to Sumas and a rock/dirt road with world class potholes. At the end of the road a blocked off yellow bridge. Second road on the left from the end (1.8m from the twin bridges) we worked east. Two creeks and the road closed in and surface more suited for a high clearance all wheel drive. The brush encroaching would also scratch the paint... We parked .9m from the "main road". On a road turn off on the right that is blocked by trees a hundred feet or so on.

Day 1 (a road walk and a forest adventure)

Early morning we walked up the road. 1.1 miles to large flat area with one PU parked "end of the road". The old road ("Last Landing Old Road") continued. Left at the first road option then in 315 yards top off to a right on the road –getting wet and muddy. Shortly before the border (55min from the van) the road transitions to trail and the tangle of new growth opens to a swath of clear cut 40' wide extending east to west. In the middle a silver metal obelisk (#65). The USA side a abandoned and un-maintained moss covered register box. The trail wanders slightly covered with huckleberry brush through a beautiful old growth forest.

The trail is mostly flat then after many miles starts up. 2 ½ hours we reach a cliff covered in a stunning series of waterfalls –both width wise and vertically. Cross stream on small alder, up wet rock assisted by hand lines and sprayed by the water of the falls. A step into a foot of water to assure a wet foot and on up one of the steepest trails past more falls. Trail topped of 3 ½ hours from the van (6m, c4840'). A wooded ridge walk, swamp log walk, U turn left at a flat camp site, meadow walk, along the base of a talus covered hill and a trail along the talus and creek. 4 hours from the car (6.7m, c5050') we left trees to low clouds covering everything including our route.

Map showed a buttress to be east of for a direct line to our camp at 7200'. Across talus, a creek and up another. Left at the base of a buttress, Up a creek and passing two gulleys using a now granite and talus ramp to a flat at c6250 (7.4m, 5h40m). Clouds were thinning a bit to walk around and get a bearing on the area and potential route options for some of the peaks we wished to attempt. We headed up more rock, then onto the Redoubt Glacier bearing to the west end of the east/west Ridge and the gap

between that ridge and Mt. Redoubt. Clouds lifted at times to show views of the ridge and Mt Redoubt, still whispering and hiding most features. The glacier flattens with no open crevasses for about a mile (7h, 8.6m, c7200'). On the southwest end of the ridge we found a flat gravel spot for one tent and set up camp, relax, lunch and plan the rest of the day.

A "quickie" on NW Spire:

Ready for our first peak we head back the way we came rounding and heading east on the glacier along the north side of the ridge on our way to NW Spire. Under a buttress and over a ridge. Down the then right up a snow finger finding easy rock access via a snow clogged area of the moat. Cl3-4 scrambling to the low saddle passing several rap stations. Right on the ridge and to 200' below the summit per guide books and beta. Descended a nasty gully and traversed right around several ribs and up a gully under the summit. Not a good route. A little nervous of the rock after watching a portion of the north wall of SE Spire break off spontaneously –gulp...

At the base of the steeper wall to start climbing we notice an easy way to the ridge. Should have gone within 80' vert of the summit then taken the easy ramp to the base of the wall to climb. The wall is white rotted/hollow rock on left and dark/blackish on right. We'd heard a party took a whipper leading on the white rock –nice to be warned, but the rock looked bad. We went about 20+ to the right setting the belay off the side. Low cl 5 with maybe a 5.5 move up a short pitch to the summit ridge and a rap station. We scrambled the final 30-40' left to the summit to stunning views.

The day was getting old and we spent a sparse 30 minutes on the summit naming peaks, looking at routes on SE Spire and Spickard, checked out the summit register -new from 2008 with a piece of paper from TomS and MikeC (2006). Bummer, I like finding older registers. This year several parties signed in. Stefan and Greg beginning Aug 1, Dave and Melda the 12th (last week), JohnA and EdK on the 16th and AnitraA and AlanK on the 16th. Making five parties (ten people) this year all in a 19 day window.

Time to go, we'll be hiking in the dark. Downclimb to the summit ridge, rap the climbing pitch and walk up the easy ridge access. We took it slow and careful heading down. Too easy to ease up after a summit and at the end of a long day. From the lowest ridge saddle we downclimbed to the snow and headed west to camp. This time a shortcut passing over the first rib lower (9:00p, c7230') and catching our bootprints back to camp by nearly full moon light (4.1m rt for NW Spire, 9:30p). Dinner and moon pictures then as temps dropped crawled into the sac to read route hints for tomorrow's route.
Day 1 stats: 8.6m, 16h40min, 7628, -2587

Day 2 (or, what are we doing here?)

Brrr! I thought it was summer. Temps below 30 degrees, water pond a frozen layer on it. We slept in and left camp at 7:05a heading south down the rock and traversed east along the long ridgeline at c6800'. A few spots of snow and then the ultra loose scree. The scree made a real fight to get to the saddle of the "Col of the Wild" (the col between NW Spire and Ridge of Gendarmes) (8:40a, c7810'). Right and up through a notch, left gaining the ridge area and right again up cl3 slope. At the c8255 notch (9:35a) we dropped and worked to the left (-100') arriving at the middle of what we found later to be the first gully. Here things got confused not know if this was the gully or if the next or...? On a whim we went up to the cannon hole and traversed right to a saddle looking down into a gully with rap slings. Building an anchor I bent over and the velcored lid of my camera pouch opened... I saw a flash of metal followed by the sound of an explosion some 60-80' below. That was the end of my pictures for the trip. Maybe look for what is left and the memory card on the way back.

A rap into the gully, not sure if this was gully two or three. Beta is enter gully 2 go up a hundred feet and enter gully three hear a filled in chokestone look for rap anchors. Well, rap anchors, but no sign of filled in chokestone. I ventured to the top of the gully at the ridge with rap slings and a gendarme on the left. Looked good. AndyD came up –we took turns to avoid falling rock issues. Hmmm? Maybe on route, maybe not. Next we traversed up and right, to more rap slings. Above and north a tower with rap slings. We again traversed right (seemed right per the drawing in CAG3) 80' to a rib ledge area. Up a chimney behind a detached white flake (hmmm, sounded like the description. Up a thin ledge, then halted. Everything was loose, one touch and rock plummeted. Backing off and a ledge that dropped exposed to flakes. The flakes were large, but loose. 5' past them a very solid fresh crack. This whole spot was fresh rock... I got a cam in and worked up to an overhang eight feet below a notch. Right to some finger cracks and up onto a thin ledge and over to the notch that had rap slings. Definitely was off route, being told over 5.5 is off route and that area was more 5.9 and wasted a lot of time trying different options. Would have been better to downclimb to the belay and try another route. AndyD didn't like the route and I'd by now figured the "prescribed" route. He went down the face and traversed north to the tower with rap slings on it. Not wanting to leave all three cams in the wall, I rapped off retrieving them and joined AndyD at the tower for redo of the pitch. Up left slightly north side and up to the rap station with my pack waiting. Playing safe we belayed up the final gully pitch to the summit (~100').

4:00 summit of SE Spire, We'd made it...! Momentarily vanishing thoughts of the down trip we celebrated. Summit shots, food, drink, pictures... The old brass register had photo-copies of the original ascent entries. Fun to read the history. We were group #31 to summit since 1941 and we'd found out why so few wish to summit this dangerous pile of ... Wouldn't want to be on or near this heap in an earthquake. An hour on the summit and time to start our descent. A single rap to the last belay station. Another full single rap to the tower. A short rap to the gully, a full rap down the gully then downclimb. Cross to next gully west and a 20' rap. I walked up this gully hoping to find the remains of the camera. Found the camera very beatup, memory card had ejected. What are the chances of finding a microSD card? Well, worth a look. I ascended 50', slowly looking, no luck, headed back down avoiding knocking rock down. Something dark to the right. HEY! The memory card –Yippie! Proff it's worth giving a try 😊.

Back down to the next rap station and a rap with another short walk to another cross-over to the next gully west. This was the ascent route others had taken up. Now up what is gully #1 with some remainder snow on the right. Up the face to where we'd stashed some gear and west and up to the notch (c8255'). We followed the easy way back to Col of the Wild, foot sliding down the rock and snow and a slightly higher traverse back to camp at 8:30p. still light and the moon up.

Day 2 stats: 3.4m, 13h20m, +/-2780vert

Day 3 –is it going to rain? And peaks and camp moving:

Saturday, the day the weather could change midday. We got an early start to get in what we could before any wetness and all the time hoping the forecast had changed for the better. 5:50a we headed west for Mt Redoubt. In less than a half hour we were a vertical wall (c7790') we crawled over to access the lower south basin of Redoubt. Dropping down about 150 feet and west to the second gully. South below the snow plenty of green and a lake. We both wondered if Matt had taken a dip in it. Up the gulleys snow finger then veering left to a saddle/ridge (7:00, c8175'). From here we were at the base of the upper basin. Loose rock with evidence of a path we went up and to ending on the left side to the base of a ramp that rose to the east ("Freeway Ramp", 7:32, c8586'). A right turn east up the ramp

gaining 80-100' and two gulleys on the left. Either one goes and both join together. Another 30' the rap ends with some more serious climbing to continue. We opted to scramble the second gulley to the notch (7:53, 8910') –some rap slings. From the notch a right along the wall to another chimney/gulley that visibly leads to the cannonhole (c8960'). Sticking my head out the cannonhole it's some serious exposure –yikes!

An immediate left and up the final short c13 pitch to the summit and we were on top of Redoubt 8969'. Still chilly morning air with nice sun to relax in. The usual checking out views and peaks. And reading familiar names in the register. 40 minutes on the summit and we headed down. We rapped a half pitch to the cannonhole then another from it down. You could make it both raps in one stretch, but would have a hard time pulling the rope. Since the rope was out we did a full length rap down the gulley then downclimbed to the Freeway Ramp (9:00a). We retraced our steps with a few deviations back to camp (10:19a, 4:30m rt).

Time to move camp:

We packed up camp to move it to Ouzel Lake. We retraced our tracks north across the Redoubt Glacier back to the flat rock ledge (40min, c6230'). A great vantage point to scope out the route. Plan to head up from the lake toward the Silver Lake Col veer right south to the basin west of Spickard and up the pocket glacier rounding to the south slope and up. First down to the lake to drop the overnight gear. Thin high clouds were forming and we hoped the weather change would hold off til at least tomorrow. Across the outlet stream and east heading toward the col. Loose talus to walk up like steps. At c6700' veer right to more talus and snow. At the snowfield under the waterfalls we donned crampons and headed to the right up onto the pocket glacier. Above the falls a left to the east wall and then right to the saddle (1h45m, c8000', all to avoid crevasses and glacier ice).

We contemplated Solitude on our right. After the last few days of loose rock it was intriguing, but not enough for an ascent. A descending traverse SE to the second gulley for an easy route onto the south face of Spickard. Looks like the first gulley would also have gone. The south face was snow covered up to what looked like black teeth. Up a gulley to a notch/trench that slowly ascended right. When it ended we headed up again (c13) to the false summit and behind it the true summit 8879' (3h10m from camp).

For a change we descended the NE ridge (c14) to the glacier. Rapping into and out of the giant Bergshrund. Then some zig zagging to avoid glacier ice and crevasses taking two hours to get to the col west of Silver Lake. Travelling across the glacier we passed some measurement stations from Oct 04'. The Silver Lake area looked like a nice place to return to. For now we were looking at black clouds to the west. Contemplating a late tag of Custer was quickly interrupted by rather solid drops of moisture. Time to bail and head down. 50 minutes of talus scrambling and we were back at camp. The rain mellowed a little while we cooked and ate dinner. We both hoped that the weather would pass and tomorrow would give a chance for a few more summits.

Day 3 stats: 6.8m, 8h50min, +3383,-5511

Day 4, welcome to summer in the North Cascades:

2AM, I heard the rains increase and get heavy. 5AM still raining. We'd wanted an early start if we had a chance at Custer Ridge. 8AM still raining... 7:30 rain letting up. As we packed the clouds cleared enough to show sucker holes. Hmmmm, should we give a go? Then the upper slopes showed fresh snow. Neither of us felt like thin snow on rock so we headed for a wet walk out. North side of the outlet had a trail. At the trees we followed our approach route out. Path through the flat area, down a wickedly

steep trail, past the falls and into the old growth forest. Amazing how much water a huckleberry bush can hold. Coming in I'd hardly noticed them, on the way out they had me soaked. The Washington forest walk was again breathtaking -even with the rain. Past the boarder the scenery changed to recovering-overgrown from clear cut. We spent some time admiring a truck abandoned in the trees.
Day 4: 7.5m, 5h8min, vert +504, -4856.

BTW, the road looked different, yet just as potholed on the way out. In Abbotsford we stopped at Costco for a cultural shock and getting the loose rock memories out of mind. Very odd going from isolated wilderness to the madhouse of mega consumerism. I think I'll take the wilds of the mountains.

We managed 4 summits in three days. The weather window held a little longer than predicted. Beautiful terrain, shared with a good trip partner I'll be returning via another approach, but have no plans to go up SE Spire again.

Happy trails!
fwb2

Trip stats:

Totals: 50h38min, 27.6m, +/-17,868vert

Gear: helmet, crampons, ice ax, 60m rope, small rack (4cams -.3, .5, .75 & 1; 4 nuts -4, 6, 9, 11), slings 4 dbl, 3 single, picket, a screw would have been nice -can't pound a picket into glacier ice.