

Chokwich East Ridge (Point 4555', Prom ~150')

Mt Loop Highway, Access for winter from Darrington

Feb 20, 2011

Carla Schauble, Mike Helminger, Eric Eames, Eric Johnson and Franklin Bradshaw

Sunrise 7:06a, Sunset 5:34p, Weather – bright sun, clear skies.

Planning –almost:

For several weeks Eric had been looking at trips and one option was a copy of a trip Fay had done last spring past Darrington near 3 o'clock rock. I can't pronounce it –"Ulalach" and maybe Squire peaks located SE of Whitehorse Mt. All I could find on conditions was the road (Frog Creek Road, FSRD 2060) was open and "unknown" the condition. Weather was forecast for sunny and previous weeks had roads okay to 2000' –we only needed to get to c1700'.

Let's go:

Five of us met taking two cars. Pulling off the Mt Loop immediately there was snow on the road. We made it to c1100' with the snow over a foot deep. We could continue with chains on, but we all decided it would be a push to go five more miles in deepening snow to gain the extra 600' to the trailhead. After hearing of the TR from Hulksmash rescuing a group and another incident of a Subaru and entire SAR team getting stuck we opted to reduce our risks and go for something more "approachable".

Re-planning?

Ideas here and there, much recent personal information from everyone in the group (roads, closures...). Final was to head south on the Mt Loop Highway ("MLH") and look at Forgotten via the East Ridge. Heading south there was less and less snow. What is this about Darrington being a snow magnet? Past the Sauk River Road, across the bridge and a right, over another bridge to a gate with a very "non-inviting sign". Gulp, they sound serious. On the map it shows a road and buildings with a trail through the area. Eric's GPS gave a reading of heading north for a half mile then up the ridge after crossing the creek (Swift Creek). From the map it looked like we could circumnavigate around the community. We weren't really sure how they'd feel about five hikers with packs parading through their area after that sign...

Off we go...

All packed, thinking we knew where to go, we left the Westie and truck at 9:10a (c1250'). Darn that seemed like a late start! Heading west counterclockwise around (working right) we skirted the edge of the community. Irritating, but easy bushwhacking. Over some little creeks without any swimming. Past a giant open community area. Up a little hill and a right on an abandoned overgrown logging road. Working right to be north. Over a ridge, working to head north. Stopping seeing a ridge ahead. Stumbled on black water pipes paralleling a creek. A relief of an easy clear trail following up the creek... A little fun along the way at a few of the hose bibs. How many trips do you get water on tap in the forest?

Crossed the creek(still no swimming) and started heading up the obvious ridge. A little later, Raising3hikers checked his GPS. A comment that it wasn't working. Maybe blocked signal? It indicated we'd not crossed a creek. Heck, we'd crossed a creek... (10:00, .7m, c1530). Up the slope with a thin covering of snow, weaving to avoid windfall we gained the ridge, followed it. At a spot where ahead it was cliffy and steep we stopped for a break (10:51a, 1.1m, c2626'). I had a large map. It showed a creek cross and ridge. R3H, checked his GPS again and noted, "hey, we're not on the right ridge". "What!" Boneheads, we had just walked assuming since we went over a half mile and crossed the only creek on the map... LOL! We'd gone west not north! DUH!, a real Homer moment. Compass hanging at our sides and none of us had checked. Big reminder in the deep woods and Bushwhacking check the compass all the time.

What to do?

Well, what to do? Drop down 5-700' and go north for the ridge to Forgotten? Or see how this ridge goes? Consensus was to give a try at the peak between Forgotten and Twin Peaks via this ridge. On our way up some entertainment on what to call the peak. Later we found the peak is named Chokwich.

Shortly after our break, Mike donned crampons. Stiff winter boots allowed decent kickstepping, but with his cue we donned ours. Much easier going up with spiky traction, steep, then mellowing as the trees opened to more a glade feel. Eventually we caught up with a waiting Mike and at c4060' (12:35, 1.6m) to the south end of the flatter ridge a great view spot sweeping east through south to west. Yes! Peak in clear view, Sloan looking extremely impressive, Foggy, Cadet covered in white. West (ish) an impressive peak with steep cliff sides. Was thinking, good thing we aren't going to that... LOL, we were.

Up and over a high point (c4254), down a little and ahead looking to cliff out right and left. Closer a ramp from left to right. Mike provided great kicksteps. Another cliff area on the right and left. I explored and found a slope to cross. The snow was deep and steepness proved a challenge. Shortly we made the final easier up to a high point at 4555'.

Now what?

We needed to head west, but the ridge narrowed to very thin corniced. No way walking out on it, and at its end it dropped out of sight. One step off the ridge right or left we prove an extremely fast decent... -not. If we were to continue we'd have to backtrack, drop to the south and head up the east basin under Chokwich. Once to its cliffs, then what? Head south across a large avy trap to a gap in the south wall? Too steep due west or to round it from the north. Nothing looked appealing in these conditions. It was 1:30p (2m, 3393' ascent). Gauging, the task to gain the summit block let alone any chance or circumnavigating it and possibly summiting it was going to take too much time. No sunset summit for this one. The bushwhack back would not be appealing in the dark. We opted to relax on our high point and enjoy the views and day. It was nice to be in such a beautiful spot with such impressive scenery surrounding. Chokwich to the west, due north the southern cliff face of Forgotten, Yes! Far east, in the face view of the west face of Sloan, Bedal, Foggy... And topping it off, bright sunshine and clear skies to see far north to Baker, Whitechuck...

Time to head back.

After a relaxing break and lunch we followed our track back. 30 minutes to the view spot, 1h15min to our morning break spot for another break. The weave through the lower ridge was as challenging down as up. With an inch of snow, just couldn't get a glissade in (lol). 1h37min, 1.3m we reached the creek (not swift creek) and followed the trail out to the community ("Bedal"). Above the community (4:41p, 1.8, c1365') we left the easy trail to mossy undergrowth and bushwhacking counterclockwise. The moss was amazing. As lush as being on the west side of the Olympics. Devils club, alder, vine maple, Salmonberry, and all sorts of thorny things. A few ferns and loads of moss. Did I mention the thick moss? Earlier on the ridge we'd heard 4 rifle blasts. Still wondering, were our cars target practice? Arriving at the cars (5:10p, 2.1 from ridge, 4.1 overall, c1250) a relief –no bullet holes. No sigh of traffic and the community gate still open.

Great company and wonder if EricE will think twice before joining on a trip again ;) A shot from the hip day, of making a hike of one that we couldn't get to. Well, we thought much better than 10 miles of road walking. No skis, no snowshoes. Though we lugged them all the way up –the snowshoes. A beautiful day for an exploration and now we know much more about the eastside of Chokwich and how not to get to the East Ridge of Forgotten than we did before.

Oh, and to not let up on checking the compass bearing.

Happy turns and trails!

fwb

stats: 4.1m, 3408ascent, 8hrs.

gear: probe, shovel, transceiver, ice ax, snowshoes (didn't use), compass –underutilized.