

Another in the Summit Sunset Series

Frozen Peak (5060'. Prom 900)

Winter Index Creek NE Ridge approach
via township of Baring, Highway 2.

Jan 19, 2011

Yana Radenska and Franklin Bradshaw

Some quotes from the day:

"Sad when the fastest progress is when we are on the steepest slope"

"You're right, it is much easier when you can't see what you are doing" –After crossing the raging East Fork on a frozen water incrustated 6" dia. Log, with feet almost dangling in the torrent.

You seem to be leaving some holes... on crossing a boulder field.

Wednesday presented an unusual weather window, sunshine, temps dropping to teens in the mountains and very low avy danger forecast after the more than ample rain dump the past week. Many of the ideas I've been working on are multi-day and the comments I've gotten are along, :haven't heard of anyone doing that in the winter. They will wait. On the weekend three of us had a ski tour planned. Then dicey got under the weather. Very rare, now to reset and another option. For Wednesday, I'd now forgo the skis not wanting to run into frozen ice or who knows what I'd find. Some last minute emails on trip ideas. Talking to Yana she was not up for something strenuous and as much vert as Ruby. Now I laugh. Maybe I'm getting the spelling wrong not finding gullible in the dictionary... lol. We both were hoping for a destination on the Mt Loop. The recent road repairs created a closure. Could drive from the other direction... but the extra hour plus and the loss if we couldn't get through... We browsed some great images Martin had posted of the east side of Frozen. It showed an inspiring set of rock cliffs and buttresses, several summits and once up and out of the lower trees a feasible route right under cliffs, up steep snow then south to the summit. I was game having been more concerned with a route up high rather than wandering around the upper mountain after a NW style approach. Yana was more concerned about getting up the Index Creek approach. Maps showed FS roads, then no cliffs on the way. Growing up in the mountains bushwhacking is what we did for fun with my brother when we were in grade school -a demented youth, or just odd sense of fun?

No clue on what we were getting into (except exceptional NW bushwhacking) for the approach so we planned on TH at early daylight rather than in the dark. We parked at the end of the public road –well north a hundred feet to be away from the no parking /tow company signs. Walked from the car at 7:50 heading south around a closed gate (for a "lodge"). At the driveway end a cabin with lights on. The road ended, not at all as the map showing it going on for miles. What to do? Downhill looked like a no go, so we headed up the wet hillside to intersect a small "road", well a road if you had an ATV. Heading south traversing we passed a Y that went downhill. The road we were on switched back NE and we dropped off the road to find the lower road we'd passed earlier. The better way to do this start is though the gate heading south. After a couple hundred feet left up hill. Road will turn south and at the Y go right and down. So, back to where we were. The route had faint resemblance to a road/path of sorts. Not much though. We stayed up from the creek paralleling south following the "road". A washout then later a pinch from the river. Up the hill (to the left) another area with a hint of possible old road heading south. Again wet, overgrown with windfall, trees, Devils Club and Thimbleberry brush. A wide obvious old road –now trenched muddy waterway, angle up from NW to SE up traversing the

slope. This road, beside the joys of superb NW style bushwhacking at its finest lead us the raging East Fork Index Creek a few hundred feet above its joining with the main watercourse.

At the "road" intersection with the flow some small diameter –spindly logs. Downriver a nice wide log high in the air, but alas the log ends part way across. Walking to check it we came across old artifacts – belt wheels, 6: diameter water pipes, drive shafts, sheet metal... After several attempts we ended back at the spindly logs. First a log that narrows and Ys. Then pulling and repositioning a very long downed tree to work with another still attached and a butt soaking hair raising crossing. –Success. We were on our way again after only a 35minute pause (9:26a, 1.1m, c1320, 1h43min). I'd made a comment to Yana that it'd be much easier on the way back –nicer when you can't see doing silly thing like that. The old road continued on the south side of the east fork of the creek. Snow quickly gained over knee deep and road ended. We followed along the main creek, on our right. Too much walking knee deep inspired using snowshoes. Up through the forest and soon a small yellow sign flagging and blue sprayed rock markings denoting the start of the Nat'l Forest lands (10:10a, 1.5m, c1570, 2h20min). The forest took on a marked change. Giant trees (Cedar) more open undergrowth and no wet muddy devils club and salmon berry stinger bush "road" to follow. Along the creek on green moss then up a small creekish thing and out to a snow covered rock field. Some scant slide alder a little up to another field and a view to the basin. Dropped 20' into this wide rock field crossing with only a few postholes. A row of trees followed the curving creek in this flatter area. The creek running at a slower pace than lower. Several log options for crossing, the best still a little "fun" (11:45a, 2.5m, c1900'). Large step, crawl up, entangled snowshoes in wiry brush, over a stump and onto a snow/ice covered large log to safe on snow covered land again. More snow covered rocks and up toward a bump. We could see the ridge before the creek valley (Salmon creek) we planned to follow. From the bump good views of the entire basin and a great time for lunch (12:00, 2.7m, c2020, 4hrs).

After nourishment we surveyed our next steps. All directions were down. Up valley was down to the creek that surrounded this bump. A swamp in our direct path. We headed NW around the swamp and after staggering around a little decided to angle up side-sloping to a creek crossing. Sometimes good travel, though dodging up and downhill the windfall. The thunder of a creek went from distant to very close. Soon we were looking down a beautiful waterfall. Turning to look up we realized we were in the middle of it. Back a little and down a ledge in the waterfall and a truly giant log to cross well above the water and in the spray of the waterfall (12:35p, 2.9m, c2190', 4h50min). Nice and wide, yet slippery. Good use of the traction on the bottom of the snowshoes. We both tried to capture the area with images, seeing them they were nice, but didn't truly catch the feel. If we had to turn around this would be a nice spot to remember. On the south side, ducked some large logs and again sidehill, more up with "salmon creek" far on our right. The wet drip stopping as the air cooled and snow hung in the branches (and sometimes landing down the neck).

At c2500 the slope flattened a little. Good thing since some places were low snow and difficult to get up with only a few inches of snow on rock. Yana led us winding around small and giant trees, Views of giant snag steaming in the sun and others we passed in the shade very impressive. The pitch increased again (3.3m, c2950'). Then another "flatter" run (2:10p, 3.5m, c3220'). On the left (south) a wide opening we avoided wanting to work the thinning trees, steeper again. Worked left under a small cliff then up to wide spaced tall trees. As they opened we could see the cliffs and buttress ahead of us and a cliff running right all the way north around the approach. A head and to the right of the buttress a steep gully that appeared the only viable access. Well, there was another to the SW up a steep gully to the summit ridge, but that one would get us on the far south end of the multi peaked summit and then how would we get to the north side? Up toward the buttress then time to change to crampons (2:25p, 3.8m, c3840', 6h45min).

Yana had the absurd observation that it was sad that the fastest progress was as we were going up the steepest spots. I led up the gully, ax belaying. Steep under the buttress then up a short nearly vert area. Where the H%# did the slide alder come from? Entangle and over it still steep we followed a snow flute then exited the gully right (north) to a steep slope with sparse giant trees. Straight up, trying to put in shorter kick steps. The snow with 4-8" fluff on firm below. Perfect for step-kicking. Another option of a steep gully left (SW) or rightish around a rib. Steep, but not nearly like the gully we went right –proving a great choice. Eventually gained the first flattish area north of the summits (3:30p, 4.1m, c4475', 7h46min). Caught our breath, many ops for shutter delay and headed south up and up. A peak loomed ahead. OMG, we have to do that? Nope, that was the northern most summit, another appeared even more foreboding. Huh? I remember it was the second peak from the north. Wheh! Another appeared with a long steepening ramp. Now on the upper flat basin just below the summits we took in the grand views. What a gorgeous place (3:48p, 4.2m, c4650', 8hrs). Wish we'd brought bags so have a night here and more time for the multi-peaks. Looked like fun climbing to be had. Progressing up rolling soft mounds we aimed for left of an island of trees to gain the upper ramp by a shallower pitch and some anchor protection from the large tree island (large trees). Dropped the snowshoes and proceeded, passing the second spire. Yana had a name for it I won't repeat. As we passed we both spotted several fun routes. Later a scramble one on the SW corner. Up the ramp we went, 50' below the summit it got to over 60 degrees, then 20' below the summit a small flat spot. The last 10' on the north side was thin snow and ice on a steep slabbed rock. Gaining the thin (very thin) snowed summit ridge I thought. Hmm, would have been a good place for a rope. Yana had the rope so I offered to lower a cordelette and slings. She declined, but perhaps wished for it a little. Before even topping out she was struck by a massive case of shutter delay. Couldn't even wait to summit, well, her head was above the summit.

We stood on the summit at 4:32p (4.35m, 5060', 4280' ascent, 8h42min) in awe sunset approaching and the sky changing with the deepening hues. This summiting right before sunset was showing its rewards. Cameras purring, panos, zoom ins... name that peak, OMG, look at those colors, Looking over at Index, Baring, Grotto, Lennox, Red... Spotting many of our previous routes and remembering shared summits. The sun began to fall behind the western ridges and I was wondering if I'd run out of film (memory card). Dug for the register but no luck. Some rocks as a cairn on top of the summit boulder, but no sight of Fay's register. We left a note in a ziplock baggy under the cairn and rigged to rap off. As we were checking out eh rap we both looked up to see a totally amazing sight. The full moon was rising showing just an upper growing sliver on the north flank of Baring. As we stood "Frozen" it grew, higher and round, large in the way a freshly rising moon is larger than life. Red glow brightening and rising. We waited as it shone it's full light. A perfect timing. Sunset and ten minutes later a full moon rise.

We hung out on the summit til after 5:30 (1730). Considering Sunset was supposed to be at 1648hrs and an extension due to being on the summit we saw the last of it at 1658, figure enjoying the growing dusk (typically last 30 minutes)... it was getting dark. Eventually we made two raps to above the spire in the middle of the ramp then plunged down to our snowshoes with deep shadows in the growing brightness of the moon. Sitting on our packs out of the wind, we enjoyed a dinner and took in the views. Amazing how bright with only the moon lighting the snowscape. We left our crampons on as we descended basically our same route down. From where we'd put on our crampons (c3800') we veered right (south) down the north side of the large basin amongst the tall trees intersecting our up route and following back to the waterfall (7:47p, 5.8m, c2150', 11h 38min). good thing we'd left the crampons on. The water spray from the waterfall formed an ice crust on the log. A sketchy downhill plod to the safety at the end of the log, through the shallow water and angle up the hill to again intersect our route in.

Back at the Index Creek Basin we bypassed the hump found our large log to cross the creek (8:14p, 6m, c2015, 11h 52min). This time not as much entanglement with the snowshoes on our packs. We followed our route through the sketchier part of the boulder fields and at the spot we'd scrambled up the big boulder "up" from the mossy woods we took a direct route cutting a little distance from our creek follow wander. As usual we seemed to just be going on and on. Past the NF boundary (9:20p, 7m, c1500', 12h55min) off with the snowshoes and more food. About a third of a mile with a good share of postholing to the frozen water crusted small log cross of Index East Fork Creek (10p, 7.4m, c1300', 13h 44min). Yana agreed after crossing that not being able to see the crossing due to it being dark was easier.

We now had a "road" to follow. Overgrown, windfall, mud and 3-4" water in most places. It angled down toward the water and at a Y we joined an old road that traversed without an elevation loss. When it ran out we continued a few hundred feet then down to intersect the next old small, easy to miss ATV track wannabe. This bypassed a washout we'd ascended on the way in. Mud, water, wet brush, darkness, we were close and didn't care. So far a great trip and we were back nearing our beginning.

The ATV track turned to little road that angled up intersecting another even better road. We'd bypassed the spot we had missed this Y and dropped through the woods to find the ATV track. We followed this road past a stored monster 4 wheel drive PU. Lights from the cabin we'd seen in the morning below. A turn left (west) downhill past some personal stored property and intersected a very well maintained road. Which way to go? A left took us south and soon we could see a house with lights on. Mabe the morning cabin? Turned around to the north and shortly after the road we'd turned from the gate we'd past in the morning and in a hundred feet Yana's car (11pm, 8.6m). Whew! Good thing it was there and not towed. We'd moved to a spot without a "Tow sign", but still wondered. We'd completed the trip in 14h30min. A long very rewarding day. Great to share the adventure of an unknown trip. And the bonuses of the sunset and moonrise, waterfall, giant trees...

Thanks Yana for the last minute idea. Now the question. Will I be as gullible again? :)

Stats: 8.6m, 4380'ascent, 14h32min

Gear: headlamp, snowshoes, trek poles, crampons, Ice Ax, 50m rope, cameras

Thanks!

Happy Trails (if you can find them :)

fwb