

East Grotto Mt (5560')

South direct from Grotto Township ("The Radenska Route")

Dec 31, 2010

Players: Yana Radenska, Carla Schauble, Matt Burton and Franklin Bradshaw

It all started innocently enough. Yana had an idea for a winter approach to Grotto. Direct from the Township of Grotto -a small logging town east of Baring and west of Skykomish. Driven by all the time and so few even know it is there. Years ago the train station was torn down. And long before that I went to college with a guy that lived there as a sawyer. Kloke has a published winter route that requires snow and goes up several gulleys accessed from a now gated logging road. Not wanting to climb up any gulleys or walk two miles each way up a logging road Yana had the notion to go up a hill east of a bump (now known to us as Matt's knob) then follow a treed ridge to the summit ridge (Klinger Ridge on the maps). From the ridge the north side looked best bet to bypass the east summit and gain access to the NE side of the west summit. None of us knew if the route would go. A trust, Yana gets good ideas and is very good in her routes. We went with it... or did we?

That week I was working at Stevens coaching, on the way home I snapped some pictures of the ridge passing at 40mph. By the time I got home all on the trip had bailed to do Middle Chiwakaum. I checked the predicted temps and MC was to be in the single digits and around 11am temps drop with a wind chill below -11F. Dang! I was cold just thinking of it. West side temp prediction was single digits at night warming to 28F then dropping again at sunset. Still darn cold, but better sounding than MC. I wanted to try Yana's route. I almost just stayed home I was so tired when emails turned around and we were going to give the route a try. Hoping for a success up the ridge to blaze "The Radenska Route", south route direct to East Grotto. We were hoping for West Grotto, but no guarantee with what I was guessing from the weeks skiing experience to be deep light un-packable snow up high. Well, here's the rest of the story...

A cold morning even by Washington winter standards. Temperatures in the low teens and a Yana o'clock meeting (6am) at the stack. Four of us showed (Yana, Carla, Matt and Franklin) for the 40 some mile carpool to quiet Grotto. First question was where to start? Hoping for the end of the logging road and start of the Kloke route. Turning off the highway within a few hundred feet a gate was closed. A few inches of snow so not sure how far we could have gotten anyway. Up the road past the beaver pond we turned left (north) to the second street (east most). Houses lined and no way to do anything but cut through a yard. End of the road a left (west) and at the corner to the west most street a lot with no house filled with blackberry bushes on the NW corner. Yana parked under a tree and we paused not wanting to get cold, yet.

Since I was the instigator to revive the trip into the unknown I carried a 50m rope and slings. Yana and Carla took pickets and we also had crampons and snowshoes. Besides being sleepy and tired from the week of skiing, I was excited about a real adventure with an unknown possibility of who knows what for an outcome : -)

Left the car at 7:45am, elevation guess of 880' and temps in the low teens of maybe the single digits -Brrrr! Over the blackberries covered in a few inches of snow. Heading NNW at a creek follow to the left looking for a way across. I felt like we were on an old road or something of the sort. In a short bit (7:52, 0.1m) a log jamb in the creek. A broken bridge fallen into the creek and some logs close enough to cross. Carla noticed an odd smell, and she was the one with a cold. Good thing it was cold... There was a dead (~24") salmon half in the water and another trapped under a log. This crossing was thus dubbed "Stinky Fish Bridge". A key point for us to find on our way back. We continued north zig sagging over some streamlets

in thin snow on relatively flat terrain and easy bushwhacking til it got thicker as the trees opened to the cleared swath of the high tension power lines (8:02am, 0.7m, 940').

Our thought was eastish and up a depression east of a bump on the map. Matt lead us out of the power line brush heading a bit further west and up a steep route. Much zigging around windfall and brush. Ground just wet and soft enough to coat our ax shafts with a layer of obnoxious brown mud goo. A little ax hacking in some dense spots and soon traversing to the right around the knob at c1880'. We reached the windfall filled and potentially swamp prone saddle with ridge to the north and knob on the south. Three of us made around the windfall and headed for the north trending ridge. Much sign of deer in the area and snow 23" deep. One of us started west and sidetracked south avoiding windfall. After a short bit we stopped. Hey, where's Matt? "MATT!" No response. We waited and could see him coming down from the knob heading toward us. The knob is now to us known as "Matt's Knob". Leading up the wide ridge north dodging windfall and staying right as we came upon rock cliffs. The slope was steep enough for zigzagging. Past the ridge rock cliffs we moved west (left) again to be on the wide ridge crest coming to a small flattish spot (9:45am, 1m, c2300'). Up and still due north a large very flat camp with views west to Index Mt and north to the gulleys leading up the south face of Grotto. Perfect timing for a break (10:08am, 1.1m, c2770'). A little gawking at the views, drink, food and pictures. This spot we would refer to as "Camp 2".

We followed the treed ridge NE with a drop of to a gully on our left. The going was better with the trees opening and the snow now 6-9" deep. Still dodging occasional windfall and some steepening areas the ridge began to narrow. At c4540 (12:20pm, 1.8m) left through and rock notch to an apparent impasse. Stuck in the mood of not losing elevation in the now knee plus deep snow -it'd be a pain wandering in it and having to try climbing back up it (again). Looked like an easy rock passage. I ventured out, not feeling it was safe had Yana put me on belay. Around the corner I could see the ridge was steep rock slabs for a long ways and by dropping west and low we could bypass the rock with mere deep snow wallowing.

Matt and Carla lead off down the westward gully to blaze a trail in the deepening light snow. I returned to Yana and we followed there track, losing less than a hundred feet north the back up the ridge NE. Now the ridge's west wall was getting steep and quickly caught up to join the wallowing duo hip deep in snow. We took turns kicking, crawling and pulling ourselves up to regain the ridge. Hopes of the wind packing or shallower wallowing. When one would stop leading and take a break the slope was steep enough and snow deep enough to just lean forward and rest. It was a little sad passing Yana standing there looking ready for a nap :)

On the now narrower ridge we stopped in glorious sunshine to give snowshoes a try (1:10am, 2m, c4800'). Seemed like a good idea since with boots I'd already been sucked into some rock gap holes. We tried... Oh, how pathetic. It was two steps up three back, chesticle deep and slipper as oil on a rock slab. Max energy and progress in inches, this was the snowshoe wallowing zone. And it was not going to do and so close to the summit ridge. I even tried putting my ax under Yana's shoes for her to stand on going up. It had worked early under Carla's boot, but here the snowshoes just plane were not the answer. I gave up on the snowshoes and used them in one hand and ax in the other to pull myself up the ridge.

At c5150 (2:00am, 2.1m) we were below a bump to our right on the summit ridge (Klinger Ridge). A little talk about the time and if anyone wanted to turn around. All said they wanted to continue and were prepared for a late exit if needed. We started a traverse NW past and notch and started across a steep open field to go around the ridge bumps. My thought was to make a direct approach up the ridge and over the false summit. Not a sure thing. We could be cliffed out and stopped, don't know. I was out numbered and followed the option of going back to the notch (2:20pm, 2.15m, c5240'), dropping and traversing the shallower bowl on the north. I followed as Matt went one way and Yana another hip and deeper in deep snow. At the flatter area I donned snowshoes and could make decent, labored progress. This route could

lead us to the west summit by dropping to another lower bowl and over and around a ridge to another field.

Time was late and given the progress I thought I would be happy with an ascent of the east summit. There was a steep ramp on the south side leading to the summit block. It looked like it might go. If nothing else I wanted to go til I came to an impasse –whether terrain or time. I set a track zigzagging up a steep hill weaving trees and made it back to the ridge west of the field I was crossing earlier (2:55pm, 2.2m, c5225). I slowed pace, some food and Matt and I lead on the rolling ridge crest. Off the ridge and up an open face. We all traded breaking trail. Then Matt seeing a summit block close turned on his turbo charger leaving dust in his wake leading the last bit to 20' below the summit. Views all around and if we had several more hours a easy route traversing across to the west summit. With the deposited snow on the north side and hanging on near vertical summit rock with shallower pitch below. Matt slung a tree for an anchor and belayed me out. I kept the snowshoes on to pack a path. Didn't want to slip between the snow and rock with no idea what the summit block looked like sans snow. About 30m out over and small ridgelet I stood on the high point –Grotto East (3:58pm, 2.4m, c5580, 4802' vert ascent).

All the summit boulders aimed east so none good for an anchor. I buried my ax and tied off the rope for the others to use as a safety line. Matt came up, followed by Carla and Yana bringing up the rear. We were all on the summit as the sun began to set. Golden colors and shadows painting the surrounding mountains. Impressively striking Baring due west with the gnarled peaks of Gunn and Merchant mass just north. South the ridge with Palmer and Index in the blinding area of the setting sun. The Mountain Loop peaks north, Glacier, Chiwakaums, Stuarts... All out wishing us the end of a beautiful day and the end of a stellar year scrambling and climbing with good partners surrounding me. I was standing there over a half hour, too long and getting cold. Still the thought was powerful and striking.

I clipped into the safety line, a look around and left the summit. Silly the safety line? No, I tripped and made a weird frozen squawk that had even me laughing. Matt and I booked down the ramp to get out of the wind. Sinking deep with only boots on I found a few buried tree wells. Downhill in snowshoes is not a great idea with a lack of traction. An ice crust gouging and trying to cut at upper thigh. At the ridge I donned snowshoes, the going was much easier. I blazed a path to connect to the route I'd started across the steep snowfield. Just past out of the wind with a view I relaxed to eat a smoked ham and frozen tomato sandwich watching the deepening tones of the last dusk of 2010. Carla joined as we waited for the others. We know that they would stop in a protected spot to grab a bite and prep to descend.

Once everyone was together we booked following our route up. Tiring, yet fun and fast the speed and progress going down. Waited again at our snowshoe follies spot then down again into the dark sparse trees. Under the rock cliff ridge to our left, snowshoes off and up to the notch to enter the wider ridge. The down kept going relentlessly. It seemed forever. How long would it take to get to Camp 2. To sit, grab another bite. Some steep areas to take care in. snow too shallow and trees too dense to safely glissade. Gees! On and On... At 6:30pm I reached Camp 2 (3.5m, c2750'). I sat on my pack ate, sipped a little from my water bottle. I'd severally underestimated the water needed. Nearly ran out on the way up and the snow I'd put in the bottle just turned to thick slush. Didn't even melt with the bottle stored inside my jacket. A big add to the list for even day trips is the Reactor stove. Of all the stoves I have it is the only one to not have issues with the cold –and it's easy to light and store when still warm. We took a short break eating then off again –we were only half way down.

The trees became thicker and more windfall. Weaving and zigging back to the saddle north of Matt's Knob (7:16pm, 4m, c1800'). It was pitch black and we traversed following our track. We'd seen a landmark of a giant root ball to pass and head down (SE). Would have been a good idea to have marked this turn off on our way up. Didn't want to go down the steep slope we'd come up, avoid the creek gully on the left and

not get trapped by the debris of the large fallen trees. I kept to a track of hooves, stopping to sight the windfalls and negotiated the slope. It was a more pleasant slope than I expected. Then the brush closed out. We'd hope to avoid that. A good thing though since through it we were in the open in the powerline swath (7:47pm, 4.4m, c910') about 100' east of our turnoff toward Stinky Fish Bridge.

Over the thinly snow covered blackberry brambles and into the woods. The snow was thin enough that the track was difficult to follow. Across some streamlets and not as easy of a hop back over the creek at Stinky Fish Bridge. And it did stink. Everyone was more talkative and obvious happy for such a success as we arrived at the car (8:02pm, 4.7m, c860'). Car packed, thermoses of chia, cold tangerines and veggies pizza were consumed ravenously. Of all the options for New Years Eve this was a good one in my book. Closing out the year on a real adventure blazing the Radenska Route. And tired enough we decided to delay the next days BC ski trip.

Thanks Yana for the idea of the route and trip and everyone for the trail breaking and inspirational trip.

Happy trails! (if you can find one ;-)

-fwb2

Stats:

Up, 2.4m, 8h16min, 4802 ascent

Down, 2.3m, 3h28min, 80ascent

TT, 4.7m, 12h15min, 4882 ascent

Gear:

Ice ax, poles, snowshoes, 50m rope, slings, crampons (didn't use), imagination, good spirits & hand warmers