

South Twin Sister (6932')

via Orsino Creek – west ridge (Chasing the Cheshire cat (or was it a rabbit:-)

June 20, 2010

Mudslinger (BillB) and fwb2 (FranklinB)

Short version:

Driest area was predicted the Sisters on Sunday. Rode bikes up the logging road past new activity. Turned up road to South twin. Hiked up to ridge for great scrambling to the sunny summit. More very good rock scrambling and a few good glissades. A five mile downhill ride with mud flying and the Blue Mountain closed... An inhaled meatball sub had to suffice.

Longer version:

The Spring weather was playing havoc with predicting a dry place to hike for the weekend. Had a good two day option that bailed due to the potential wetness. It was looking like the best wet was the Sisters Range with cloud ceiling around 6500'. And sunny up high on Baker.

Mudslinger was up for giving a go at a one day trip. Easy enough to bail if it was wet.

We'd give the Twin Sisters a go. On the drive up the notion of going up a logging road south of the NTS road, follow it as high and far up Orsino creek as possible, then a bushwhack (if possible in the tight newer growth area) to the basin gaining the west ridge and up to the summit of South Twin. Once he summit see if heading north would go.

Parked near the bridge on the Nooksack and recognized at least one car. We'd heard they were looking at doing the North Twin. While loading a logging truck went up the road. At 7:20 (c1232') we were off heading up on our bikes, low skies, muddy road and feeling the joys of not having been on the bike for six months. The road goes relentlessly up, not flatted til at least 2.3m (fresh clear cut).

At 2.5m (c2645') we took the heavily used fork right. Rounding a bend we came upon active logging (2.3m c2770'). We waited for the loggers to wave us on. The pitch had mellowed and felt easy compared to the lower road, even with my legs burning. Probably would have been lighter without all the penalty weight...

Caution on the bridge (3.7m, c2965'), the planks are lengthwise with tire eating gaps. Still on the main road at 3.9m (c3015') veer left at Y. Hill tops out at 4.9m (sign on right '9 miles', on left '9110') with a log partially across an abandoned overgrown road going to North Twin. We headed down the road and a left on a major looking road (5m, c3192'). A ways up a giant red pipe and swales across the road. Followed the road as it diminished and became more and more overgrown. Time to drop off the bikes near several cairns (5.7m, c3510, 2hrs).

A break and changed to boots. A cairn on the other side of the stream had us heading up another overgrown gravel road. Alder brush full of moisture. The road ended and we found a faint, yet definite trail (.2m, c3660'). We decided to follow it as long as it took us in the right direction. Tread to follow and old ribbon pieces, pauses to find the trail, and trying to knock the moisture off the brush. Pants got soaked anyway. Woods opened to a boulder field with cairns and faint path on the right (south) side (.5m, c3770', 15min). At c4370, a right turn paralleling a cliff at our left.

The fog was thick enough to obscure the steep walls til upon them. Heading SEE under a buttress (.9m, c4550') onto snow and up to a flat basin. We assume it was a basin based on the map (1.1m, c4875). Visibility was minimal, we navigated by compass and elevation. A brief opening showed a snowfield that reached the ridge we were sure would be there. It was good to see that our guesses were right. We had already decided to head south til attaining the ridge lower. Heading in the direction of the snow pitch up low angle snow to (c5460', 1.4m) then more south and the pitch increased to about 50deg. Topped the ridge at c6542' (1h45min from bikes). We could see nearly a hundred feet. Still hoping the clouds would clear...

Rock on the right and steep snow on left. The rock was very sticky and solid. Excellent for scrambling and climbing. Many up and downs, past a small tower, staying right 10-50' below ridge. The entire route is well cairned. Not so much following them as much as as we went along we kept running into them. Around point 6405 the ridge had a branch more southwest-ward. On the left (north side) mudslinger spotted a rap sling. More up and solid rock scrambling. Some spots steep and some fun step-overs –all fun.

A highpoint in the ridge (c6542') and the clouds lifting to blue. A good view of a basin to the south and a few options up. Direct the rock got more aggressive (mid 5th cl). The right snow w/ rock ridges and a lower angle ridge far SE. Mudslinger lead off across to the lower angled slope, but hit ice. Proved easier heading straight up the snow topping out on the NW at 6904', 2m, 5h15m from bikes. The sun was out with views east to Baker and south a few peaks floating in the low clouds. Food and a break, we ventured the SE end of the ridge to look over the east edge and potential route to NTS. The SE end was hidden by a snow bank. Over it another dry rock area and a register hanging from the high point (6932' USGS, 2.1m) and two USGS markers. The reg tube was dated 97', only names from last year (2009) and all appeared Canadian. Another peak being annexed to our northern brethren? Found a TR from one of the parties that did a loop in three days. <http://www.peakbagger.com/climber/ascent.aspx?aid=77792>.

No visibility looking down and to NTS and what we saw was steep. A no go to drop into the void. Heck, did NTS even exist? Couldn't see a thing... nearly an hour on the summit and it was nearly 3pm. A guess of 4, max 5 hours to the bikes. Time to get off the summit. Playing it safe, we headed down the way we came. Kick-stepping down the steep back to the rock ridge. We headed back the way we came. At .2m (c6530') from the summit I got carried away doing a snow shortcut and very quickly we both realized this was wrong. And headed up and north to get back to the north branch of the ridge. A few places that may have been shortcuts... But, "no time for a shortcut". Kept climbing the west ridge back to where we came up. Down-climbed a bit then glissade. Cloud lifted to see more of the basin and the gap between the peaks –but still no NTS. Down, right under the buttress, across the boulders. A brief wet bushwhack high traverse to the north rock field and down. The left side had a faint path and cairns lead us back to the wood trail. Woods opened to clearcut and trail to old road. Back at the bikes and made then in 3h50m. Repack and donned helmets and off for our reward ride.

The road was gravel, then mud. Found out how Mudslinger got his name. 18 minutes from the NTS road to the car. Had to slow down from mud flinging in the face and eyes. Thoroughly caked in mud and smiling from a successful fun day in the mountains. A strenuous morning warmup ride, hiking a non-documented and to us unknown route. Great rock scrambling, views, sun, a sunburn and rewarding fun downhill ride.

We planned a burger at 'Blue Mountain' south of Acme. Lights were off so had to settle for a hot sub in Sedro Woolley.

Thanks mudslinger for sharing the adventure.

Happy Trails,
fwb2

Stats:

15.7m, 6811vert ascent

Bike: 5.7m each way, 2 hours up and 25 back, 2782vert ascent

2.1m each way hike, 5h15min up and 3h50min down, 4029vert ascent

Gear used: ice ax, trek poles, helmets, mt bikes

Gear not used (penalty weight): 30m rope, light rack, steel crampons.