

Mount Rainier July 2010

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[Pictures on Web Picasa \(slightly compressed\)](#) Contact [Steve Marquis](#) for originals

Normally climbing Rainer would be the climax of the year and this time would definitely be that for several members of our team but for me Rainier was preparation and primarily about camaraderie; my son Jordon, my good friends Suzanne and her son Paul Bateman and two men from work association; Rick Hippi's son Scott and Tom Duffy a fellow engineer. Rick desperately wanted to be with his son on this big climb but blew his ankle out skiing with Tom the week before we were to go. Despite his iron will, he just could not 'will' the huge swelling away in time.

Tom learned of the climb and came over to my house as well as Scott for an ice axe and rope rescue crash course. A six man team is fine by my book and on Thursday morning 5am we were packing into Suzanne's Suburban. She pulled out my equipment list and read off each it to the group as a mental checklist. If we had only paid more scrupulous attention!

When she got to the climbing harness Tom thought Yup, Steve's providing that. (I had brought several extras as promised) and I was thinking "Yup, got mine" and so when she was done we left only to discover at the trailhead that the extra harnesses were in my car left in Fall City. Oh dear!



In the mean time the ride was pleasant and the check-in with the rangers the normal tedium. Then as i was putting out group gear for distribution to team members Tom mentioned he needed the harness. Oh wow I muttered audibly did I ever screw up. Reviewing our inventory of scant ribbon supplies, between Eric and I we had just enough ribbon to fashion a swami belt old school style harness for him and a shoulder harness. I'd have given him my own but it would never had fit, snug as it was already on my smaller frame.

It worked though and wasn't too much fuss and so with a word to the Lord for safekeeping we tromped off toward the trailhead. It was still under construction and we met volunteer trail crews seriously slaving on the new trail higher up the bank. A huge chunk of this system was washed out the previous year and we meandered over quite a few streams as we bypassed their work. One very old but mountain strong woman beamed about opening the trail for traffic this very day. We thanked her kindly for



the very hard work that we would benefit from and pressed on to the steeper hogback section leading to the Inter glacier.

This part is where you really feel the 50+ pounds - I mean every last one of them but at the same time the peak and the glacial bowl open up for full view and that spectacular propels us on.

Near Glacier Basin camp we stopped for a snack. When we do this again, this would actually be a nice place to overnight making for a 3 1/2 day approach where we register at close of day then climb for 2 hours to Basin and use that as the launch to Shurman or Emmons Flats. As it was this was going to be one long day. Come to think of it. Each day here is fantastically long and arduous. We climb from morning to dusk with killer heavy packs. Set up camp in blasting wind. Eat, "rest" for 3 maybe 4

hours getting up in the middle of the night to do it all again. Then after summiting (hopefully), we descend, break camp and walk all the way out getting to the cars in late evening to arrive home bleary eyed after going at max max energy level non-stop for 26-28 hours. Now why do we do this again?



At this point of the mountain this internal conversation is frequent. The passage however is nothing short of immense – spectacular my attention to detail constant. I am constantly alert for where to best lead to avoid the ever present hazards of rock fall or crevasses; always searching for the line that threads the most gentle slope on a slope that has little to no gentle parts.

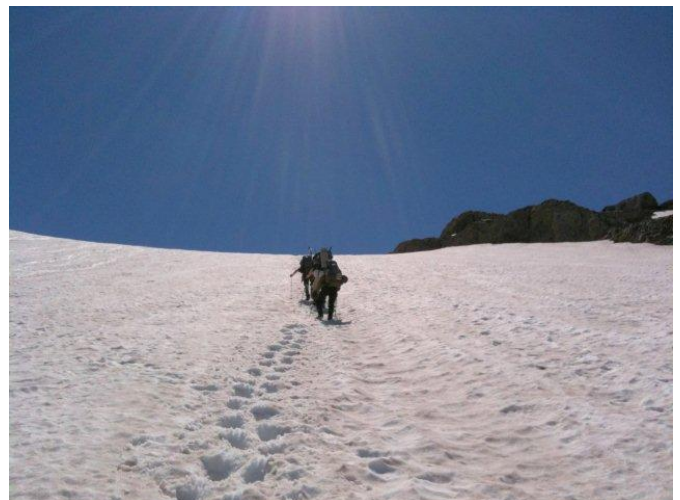
Last year we took some life threatening rock fall here. This year we had no such



troubles until we crested the inter-glacier at Camp Curtis. This is the dividing ridge



between the inter-glacier and the immense Emmons glacier. Half way up this side of the mountain is a huge rock prominence called the Steamboat Prow justly named for its shape and affect of splitting the glaciers left (Emmons) and right (Winthrop) leaving

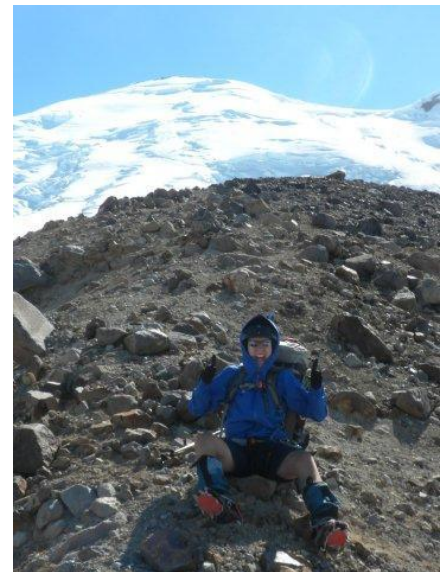


the inter-glacier on which we traveled as a sort of wake. While there is a modestly technical route directly over the top of Steamboat, which I have descended once before, our intentions were to follow the more common route traversing left of the prow, dropping across Camp Curtis down a few hundred feet to the fantastically fractured Emmons glacier before rounding up about the prow a good 700 feet to Camp Shurman. Our final high camp spot was just a couple hundred feet above the ranger station at Camp Shurman.

On my previous two trips, finding this crossover was totally obvious but now we had some very serious challenges. Camp Curtis is actually a long strin of camp sites along this windswept ridge. Wind was now understating it. The blast seemed to come suddenly out of the previous balmy calm combined with the near setting sun and our sweaty bodies fresh from the steepest part of the climb - all spelled one thing COLD.



We all hunkered down attempting to eat something and add a layer if possible. It was so powerfully that talking even close by was a challenge and standing and



walking was a serious challenge not to be tossed backwards or land on your face with the gusts.

It was here, under these trying conditions that I made the first of three errors that are sobering to me even at this distant writing.

A set of boot tracks heading farther up the ridge towards Steamboat led me to think the crossover was farther up. Curtis is not a place, per se, but a string of camps along a ridge. I thought I had led the group to the approximate crossover but the boot tracks fooled me into thinking the final crossover was farther up. If I had just walked up onto the rocks a bit to reconnoiter I would have seen I was standing exactly on the crossover! Second, I should have gathered the group - Jordon had already seen the trail, having unknown to me, climbed the ridge. In the intense wind he could not be heard as I led the group out and farther up and then up some more. At some point - way too late, it became painfully obvious to me that I had led the group past the cut off and up the back side of Steamboat. It had so much snow covering it this year that it was just a swale of ever steeping white - gone were the tell tale switchbacks I would have recognized from the previous two trips.

I had passed out a few whistles to members but Jordon had none and after yelling at the top of his lungs had given up trying to communicate his knowledge of the better route. He mistakenly assumed I really wanted to be on this route. If I had clearly

discussed the route ahead of time with all members and then made sure I could always be in contact with all members with whistle or rope I and the whole team could have benefitted from his insight. Instead of struggling to keep up with my pace, he just vectored off onto the near rockier ridge while the rest of us struggled against the high angle and stiff gusting wind in deepening snow. In retrospect, I think the intense wind warped my sense of time because we gained the better part of the 'boat before I was certain we were off route - I decided to attain the ridge and make a judgment call as to whether we could descend. The wind just blew all the harder though and bracing myself in the gusts while looking down now at Camp Shurman it was clear that to bring the group down the technical prow would be epoch at best and more likely - life threatening.

I yelled through the wind for everyone to get their harnesses on and prepare for a descent. Jordon's route seemed good and so with a running belay we followed the rock and gravel ridgeline back down to Camp Curtis to exactly where we had previously been huddled taking a snack.



Now in full dusk, we selected two ice block shelters left from previous climbers and set to work in earnest to build up the walls against the wind. The men took the largest platform and Suzanne and Paul the smaller and more sheltered spot for added privacy. Like Baker, Paul was wiped out at this point and I offered another "dig deep" pep talk. His stomach was feeling so poorly again that he could not eat dinner and just crashed when they got their tent up.

Jordon, always reaching out to others became a human digging machine and helped them make their snow wall high enough



to comfortably cook behind. I cut out some cooking cubbies for both camps and variously made snow blocks and set up tents. Tom and Scott were great campers, filling needs seamlessly without a word. It turns out this spot was exactly where I had originally requested of the forest service for our first night but they would not permit it, claiming we were too large a group! Now with

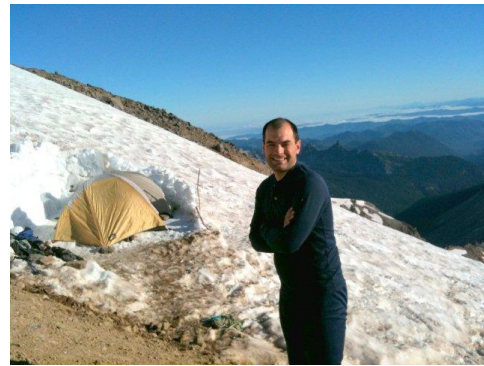
us setting up our 'camp of necessity' the mountain did not seem so crowded after all - we being the only ones in sight on it! Ahhh government...

Dinner was fine, the view amazing and with two earplugs, quite restful, knowing that we would not be getting up in four hours as previously planned.

Instead of 1 day to high camp 1 day to summit and back to high camp then 1 day to exit, we would take two to high camp allowing time for acclimation and crevasse

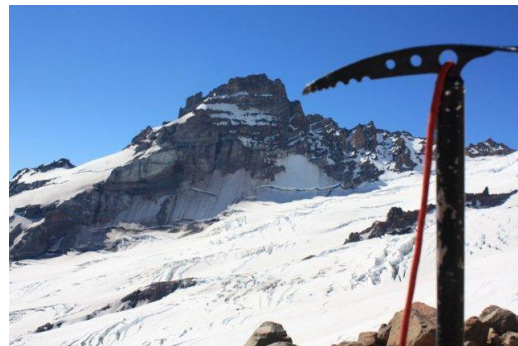


practice, then one day up and then all the long way out. That sounds like a lot on that last day and it is but I had done it before when I did the whole



trip in just 2 days. Killer you bet but somehow you survive it!

When the morning sun finally demanded our attention, the wind was completely gone. It was just stellar - for us anyway. Everyone was feeling great, including Paul who was now



100% again. Ah, the resiliency of youth. As our team's youngest member, barely 14, he was really doing great. In retrospect as a lead I really should have been more cognizant the day before of the personal wellbeing of all the team members by asking each person occasionally how they were doing. It is just way too easy to assume your own experience is universal when someone

else might be having a tough time of it. This lesson was really drummed into me later on this trip. I'm sorry it took me so long to begin to think outside of my own experience...

At this point we were all almost on top of the world! ha..all smiles and were getting our ropes setup for the more treacherous Emmons when an RMI group (professional guides) came down passing close to our camp spot. Poor guys, they were bummed having been blown off the mountain at about 13 thousand. I can well believe why. It must have been hellatious knowing what we experienced earlier last night at a much lower elevation. For them not so good; for us our timing was impeccable.

I think I was leading and all roped up we



crossed the divide and entered the Emmons crevasse field below. It was much better covered this time and we had only a few jogs to manage as we obtained the next 700 feet to Shurman. Our destination was several hundred feet higher though so we only hung out



long enough for a few pleasantries with the other climbers, a visit to the high camp head and to check in with the high camp ranger.

It seemed more like a hundred feet but it must have been more.



Many abandoned ice castles presented for our choice and an RMI group, the only other folks this high, gave us a friendly wave as they returned from rescue practicing in a nearby truly humongous crevasse.



First order of business was marking off a safe zone with flags and establishing a latrine spot. Given our mixed company I found a most convenient spot behind a snow wall. After setting up camp and snarfing lunch I asked if the team would like to practice rescue as well. Scott practically jumped up and was instantly enthusiastic and all agreed that it would be a great way to spend the afternoon.

So with that, we gathered our gear in our now feather weight packs and headed toward the abyss.

It's really good to know if the team is knowledgeable and mentally ready so without warning I body slammed to the snow yelling urgently "falling!" Instantly all 5 dove on top of their ice axes in arrest position. "Excellent" I hollered to what I hoped were my surprised companions. "Perfect!"



stay attached on the rope and the imperative of being belayed near the crevasse lip. Everyone was totally focused as we tossed our first "victim" into the crevasse - my backpack! When I was confident in



immediately volunteered. She made a great victim and with our live body in real risk, the team performed flawlessly. (Of course barring the failure of the main line I use redundant backup anchors backing up our team) Paul & Scott were the main anchors holding Suzanne with Tom and Jordon setting most of the rigging. For the most part Jordon tended the edge later to be assisted by Scott.



I instructed about different anchors and deadman construction and reminded all to



everyone's skill, I asked if there was a volunteer. To my surprise Suzanne







We were there a surprising amount of the afternoon and by the time we got back to camp instead of having

some "bask in the balmy afternoon sun" time, it was actually a rushed push to get water and dinner done before dark. I was really hoping for a good LONG rest this evening knowing what the next day was going to be but not so. The usual 4 hrs+ of tossing and turning on an air mattress would be as good as it would get. As luck



would have it my luxurious down filled 2" thick air-mat sponge a leak and so the night was more like that of a rotisserie chicken than the sultan's suite I was hoping for. When the harps began playing at 12:30am it was not exactly heavenly.



Since we had an actual harp player with us (Suzanne) I thought that would be a fun wakeup. Everyone grabbed something quick to eat and



began suiting up in harnesses for a fast departure. Before we went to bed, Tom and I had divided the rope and pre-tied butterfly & figure-8 knots for easy setup. I know some wisdom has each person tying in but I have each person use two locking biners with one dedicated to the main line; old school but it works well.



There were maybe five teams including us making their way up the mountain and as early as we woke up we were the last one out! I was leading and kept a hard pace that slowly began to gain on the nearest team. For the uninitiated, words like 'hard' or 'fast pace' has their own unique meaning at this altitude. When I demonstrated the pace back home everyone was laughing as it looks more like the Matrix movie



with variations in slow motion. Even with our light day loaded packs, with all the snow cloths, harnesses and rescue gear, the thin air, the previous days nonstop max energy efforts and little and lousy sleep (if it can even be called that) it all takes it's toll making that "light load" feel exactly like the 50lbs version the day before. It's uncanny!

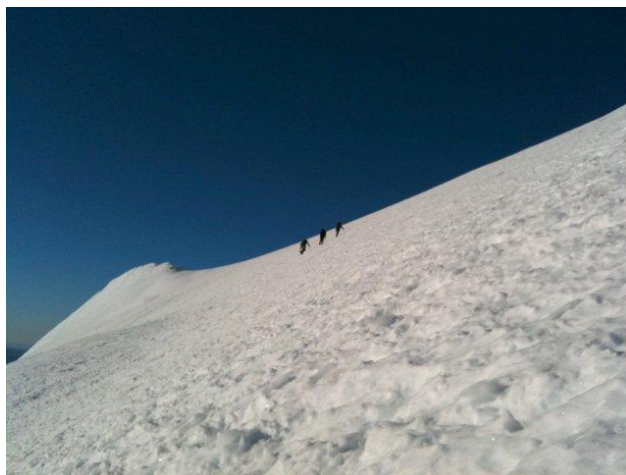
We passed one slower group to the mild protestations of my own and after several



hours of almost nonstop pushing as the dawn began to break, we caught up with another couple of groups that were taking breakfast. I had seen this relatively flat spot from below and challenged the group to push to attain it by dawn as a sort of artificial goal and just about had a mutiny arguing I might just keep that goal to myself! What this group of newbees didn't quit appreciates yet is just how long, how unrelenting, how unforgiving of a slow pace this mountain was goin to be; but they would by the end of the trek; that is certain.

Unfortunately, instead of a dead quiet at this time of morning, as had been the case the previous two trips, a cold stiff wind whipped up to make eating breakfast a chore and enjoying sunrise only arduous. Shame that's usually a treat after 4 hrs of bone crushing grind.

Leaving our very short breakfast 'nook,' we crossed over a collapsed crevasse section and angled off somewhat to the right but always up.



I had been advised that the direct route straight up over the bergshund toward the crest was going to be a booger and an alternate route had recently been forged taking a corkscrew route to the right attaining the great saddle that also leads easily to the summit crest. It would be our choice when the time came and my eyes were constantly watching the glimpses of advanced parties well above to see which route was being negotiated. I clearly saw a group head up to the 'schrund and I set my mark on the same.

The trail braided a bit and steepened dramatically making slow going but I chose a route and pressed upward finally leveling out on a grand travers. A boot track led off to what must be the corkscrew. A swath of other tracks led directly up to what looked like a headwall of ice. That must be the 'schrund and my only question was then, "does it go?"



As we basked for a moment in the full morning sun there was some brief discussion as to which was better but after listening for a moment but there was no foolproof choice so I just said with no further explanation "come on, let's go" and I started up the last hundred feet to the wall. The boot tracks leading up were

so braided here as to lend no great confidence as to whether we would find a grand chasm or the remnants of the bridge I was hoping for. Attaining the ridge revealed a vast crevasse marking the final barrier to the top. We followed a faint track traversing to the right a few hundred yards hoping for better but seeing only the same. This part of leading a group can be rather nerve wracking in that you have your best judgment, hope and intrepid drive but no certainty of success yet the group you are tethered to is depending on that skill to find the route and safely guide them. This was neither the first nor the last time on this trip that I petitioned the Lord for wisdom.

Finally we rounded a modest prominence and to my relief (sort of) the gaping 'shrund closed leaving a broad level platform to cross. I said "sort of" because the platform abutted the far side of the 'shrund wall. Steps had been cut, like a long staircase almost straight up and then angling a ways out of sight. A fall from this wall would be very bad to deadly as one man's fall could pull the entire team into the gaping continuance of the crevasse to the right or off the angled slope altogether into who knows what, I could not see what was over the edge but it's usually not good...

A skilled team could negotiate this safely with ice axe belays harnessed in but only two of us were so set up and my confidence level needed to be much higher to generally to afford the risk. I thought for a moment and then announced how we would proceed.

I set two solid anchors at the base that



would be the ultimate safeguard from sliding off the mountain altogether. These are called pickets and are stout aluminum stakes about 2 feet long that you position in the snow.

Then I taught each of the team then and there

how to safely pass an anchor without uncoupling your rope. I retrieved the other two pickets, set Scott up with a ice axe belay tied into his harness and left Jordon in charge of the crew.

I carefully picked my way up, plunging my ice axe deeply each step. About 30 feet up I set a picket and about 30 more - another. Finally about a hundred feet out with the slope easing off I plunged my ice axe as a final belay and prepared to take in rope. As soon as the 1st team mate arrived, Paul or Suzanne I think I had them set a full belay and then I proceeded up. With both of us it was enough I thought to manage a fall and





together, constantly resetting our individual belays, we continued up as the rope gave with each next climber. Tom had some hang-up at one of the picket crossings and struggled for what seemed like a long time but finally all passed the 'shrund. We topped out of the jumble by crossing one more small bridge and then the summit crater rim presented it's beckoning call.

Jordon now had all 4 pickets dangling like some used pot salesman and I yelled down to redistribute two of them

to Tom. Then I waited. And waited and waited watching with some apprehension as a new team emerged. Now the trail was somewhat narrow at this juncture and we were blocking them. Their lead was happy for the rest at first and said our pace was just right

but after a while they were ready to proceed and I motioned for our group to get off path. Then I must say my patience waxed thin. This is where I made my second mistake.

I let competitiveness get the best of me and I barked something like "Guys, get your butts up and get moving!"



The command had the desired affect but I immediately regretted it as Jordon and Tom struggled to their feet and our line moved forward up out of the way of the overtaking parties. We hiked the next few hundred feet of elevation gain to the base of the rim - virtually the peak with little said.



We un-roped and rested a few moments. Jordon and Tom sat off, heads down and looking pretty sullen. I figured they were royally POed for my



outburst and I did my best to personally apologize to each. The true summit was just up a dirt trail maybe a hundred feet more up the rim and I beckoned the group to follow. Jordon was not moving at all and I tried to help him and he muttered something about not knowing how he feels. I really felt bad but there didn't seem anything more I could say.

Mountaineering is a catalyst for growth. It is hard. It is stressful and can be dangerous. In fine, it takes a person often to the ends of physical and emotional endurance. In those extremities there is amplification of sometimes our best but occasionally our worst which can be exposed to plain view. In those moments we have rare opportunity to move forward and be better than we were. For me,



mountaineering experiences bring me closer to God. I wonder if that's not why the prophets oft chose high mountains to seek God and refinement.

This seemed one of those growth moments and I groaned inwardly with introspection as to my leadership on this trek. Still, one must move on and leaving Jordon to rest, I led the rest of the team up the dirt path over the crater rim to some balmy spot. Inside the crater it was quiet from wind, warm and sunny and perfect for resting and taking lunch. Behind large rocks and the snow floor of the dormant crater were protected areas for long overdue private time...certainly none of that was to be found in the previous 10 hours of exposed climbing! Did I mention this was going to be one long day???

I was relieved to see Jordon come down the trail and join us a few minutes later. Jordon asked if anyone had some Ibuprofen as he had a splitting headache. Tom chimed in that he too was feeling terrible and could use some as well.

I mentioned that back at that logjam I had made my second mistake. Speaking rudely certainly qualifies but that wasn't what I was referring to. I failed to take the pulse of the team along the way. Both Tom and Jordon were showing all the signs of onset altitude



sickness, the sluggishness, irritability and headaches. It was all there but I failed to do health checks along the way. They didn't offer and I didn't ask.



Being a lead is more than pointing the way and only now did I see that expanded, proactive role that I should have been playing. I had a full pharmacy with me and passed out a quantity of medicine and encouraged as much water intake as they could.



We'd all share as needed. We stayed a bit longer then made the pilgrimage to the true summit but found no register; odd for such a popular peak, snapped a few more pictures and then hustled off the rim to our ropes waiting in the snow.





Now I had a decision to make. My second in command, my son Jordon, *would* have been my choice to lead off with me as anchor at the top of the rope but now with both he and Tom compromised, I had to make adjustments by positioning them in the middle of the rope. I selected the next most experienced mountaineer, Suzanne as our trail blazer. I had let her take that role on Baker and she did fine. This was going to be a lot more challenging but I've learned to admire this gutsy lady with a good head on her shoulders and a team-cognizant attitude. She would do.



With two compromised teammates, I elected not to descend the steep and more treacherous direct route but to try and follow the corkscrew - a route I was only theoretically familiar with. I pointing in the general direction of some braided foot paths



and Suzanne led off. I only gave her one instruction; to go long around a certain crevasse and to not attempt a short cut. I had gotten a glimpse of another group going long and I figured there had to be a good reason whether apparent or not.

This part was pure trail blazing as the path was hard to see and it looks for all the world like we are walking right up towards sheer cliffs. What we are hoping for is modest steep snow. That's the challenge for the lead route-finder and with little instruction I let her

use her best judgment and pick the route.

She was doing well by my estimation; hadn't led us off any cliffs nor dipped anybody in an unidentified crevasse so all was going pretty well. I did observe an interesting dynamic with Scott and Tom who inherently may have sensed a bit of uncertainty (quite natural) in our new route leader) as they would offer somewhat more than occasional unsolicited advice - more so than with me at the lead. When we came to that large crevasse I had previously seen one of the crew challenged her direction leading the long way around it. I think she had heard one too many comments from the peanut gallery and she trumped the chatter with, "Guys! Steve said to go around this one and that's what I'm doing!" Well that was the end of that and at the far end of the rope, who was I to argue with me?"





I mused to myself that it is a rare moment indeed to be savored when my name is used as authority and not connected with some expletive. Ha.

We rounding the far end and crossed a small section of collapse 'schrund and doubling back below the crevasse soon saw the gap we would have had to negotiate had we not done the longer end run. Right decision. This section of the mountain was stupendous with colossal ice cliffs all around but fortunately none leaning in our direction. We traveled gently down across a long exposed slope whose jaws fed into some dark abyss well below us. I kept reminding the crew to use self arrest positioning for the ice axe and begged Suzanne who was working up to a very fast pace (I always kid her about being a barn sour filly on the way home) to take a more measured walk on the exposed traverse.

We crossed paths with a young ranger carrying a full pack just coming up who would undoubtedly overnight on the top on his way the far side of the mountain.

Vectoring down, again we encountered a much braided trail that had begun to melt in the late sun to such an extent that it was definitely hard to see an unambiguous "right" route. Suzanne pressed on forward with a furious pace that I worked hard to match all the while with renewed questions, suggestions and general commentary from the "penut gallery" which was all just fine with me but at some point (remember - leading can be very stressful) Suzanne snapped to "give it a rest Guys!" or words to that effect.

Sensing the tension, I halted the line for a moment and being windless was able to say, "Guys, leading is difficult enough. She's doing a fine job and if she wants your advice shell beat it out of you. " The attempt was to lighten the moment and build confidence and I think my interjection had the desired effect.

With a little laugh, we proceeded to a short section that leveled out a bit and was bisected by a crevasse. Perhaps we were either a bit off the route as we did not encounter this on the ascent or more likely we walked right over this in the early morning but the rift appeared with the warm sun which may have collapsed this long section.

I mentioned 3 mistakes. This was my third.



One by one, my team jumped the 2 foot gap and then finally me. I looked at the gap, and then ... I stuck my head into the gap.

"Back away from the edge and set two pickets I commanded in earnest. I followed up with a rhetorical question to our group waiting on the far side if anyone else had looked under the edge?

My failure to instruct Suzanne to look "under" the visible gap could have

cost us dearly. In fact only few days later, an entire team was dragged into a crevasse following a fall from one of their team mates killing their lead. To take the anchor position I had delegated the lead to a careful, watchful young mountaineer but I had failed to instruct on how to judge when it was prudent to jump such a gap. We pray for guidance and safety; to receive the wisdom we lack, the lamp to our feet when lost, the bridge over troubled waters. In this case all I could think was to praise Him for such "tender mercies," as Suzanne is fond of saying. Amen to that.

This collapsed bridge was incredibly undercut; 6 feet back under my feet and on the other side 10'. Even on the far wall it was only maybe 4' thick. Why it held my team??? I was thunderstruck by the potentiality of what did *not* occur. It was so sketchy, so ready to go that I asked Tom to take video of my jump. If it gave way on my jump, I definitely wanted that scene recorded for posterity. With a solid belay set on the far side and my team set I made the jump rolling as I landed to lower the impact. Sorry, no spectacular Warren Miller footage; just gratitude to tell the story.

The decent from there led us down and ever closer to a huge cliff/ridge making up the sides of the Emmons glacier. Suddenly, we all heard that cry that we don't want to hear, "Falling!" The cry was female. We all dove to the ground and then feeling no snap on the rope arched around to see the cause. Suzanne's head and shoulders were visible but that was all.

She was struggling to extract herself but was having no luck at all. With Tom and Scott firmly in arrest, Jordon, Paul and I swung the rope line in half bringing me in close proximity. She was in something alright; crevasse or some kind of bottomless quicksand. In any case, it was nondescript and just not possible to see the extent of the problem. As I approached with Jordon and Paul at the ready on my line, just as suddenly, I went down in the same quagmire. I instantly rolled sideways just in time to

catch firmer snow and with my ice axe, dragged myself to a safer distance from Suzanne's Venus fly trap.

For certain now, no one would be able do a direct assist, so we collapsed the rope line and anchored two of us to a stake and readied for a pull with an auto-block on the pull rope. An auto-block allows the team to pull on the rescue rope but if they slip up or the victim takes a sudden fall in a wall collapse then the block catches the rope from slipping. We were all working as fast as possible to set up backup stakes and to get the rope to Suzanne who was about exhausted from trying to escape. She hooked the rescue rope to her waist harness and with me tending the block, the team began to haul the line. "heave, ho, heave ho." Up and out she came being dragged pancake style across to firmer snow.

She was understandably a bit rattled but composed herself quickly. I suggested a different route away from the cliff where I saw some flags but when Suzanne got close to the flags they seemed to be marking either an old route or more likely, an impassable hazard. That left us in a frankly perplexing position having to go back to the quicksand area and hope to find a squeeze passage closer to the cliff side.

Our intrepid lead was ready for a change which worked out fine as Jordon and I were already on the reverse side of the rope but I wanted Jordon to pick the route. He's good, has better eyes and I trust his judgment. We swapped positions so he could take the lead position and he began to carefully pick a route threading through the sun rotted out



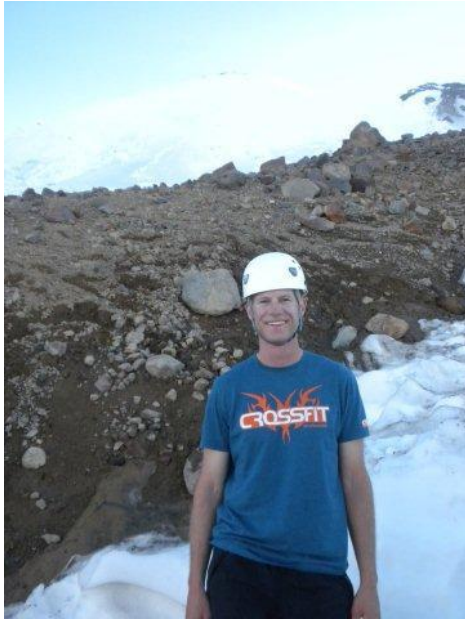
section. He found a descent line that quickly led to a series of chutes after jumping one more small crevasse.

Somewhere a ways back at about 12.5 - 13k a light went on for both Jordon and Tom and I have to say it was like resurrecting the dead. I'm talking sippidy dodah. When we all got to the chute and could clearly see the runout we all jumped in for the ride. When it was not quite steep enough for a butt glissade, Jordon became a locomotive - even a speed boat. It was really phenomenal - literally skiing behind him as we blasted down the mountain following one chute after another. He was moving so fast and my leg strength so compromised that it was all I could do to ski, run



or slide behind him without getting dragged down face first!

Far down below we could now make out Camp Shurman and a number of little black



dots. We must have been the afternoon's entertainment as we whooped it up in a keystone cops sliding parade. Climbing a big mountain is a lot of things. Words like exiting arduous adventure awe inspiring come to mind but there isn't much about climbing that constitutes "fun" but this fit the bill. But even sliding is such exhausting maximum output workout that by the time we rolled out to the Emmons Flats my legs were practically rubber and I was Gumby and JarJar Binks combined.

By now it was getting to late afternoon and we still had a lot of mountain beneath us so after cooking supper and making water we made breaking down camp a fast affair.

Afternoon evening "sun" lasts a long time on the north-east side of the mountain. It would be better to call it something else though as it has all the feeling of imminent dark being in the full shadow of the peak but it lasts like that a long time. Leaving Camp Shurman, we descended deeply onto the Emmons glacier to an ever expanding gloom lending a subconscious sense of urgency to my every motion and footstep. Packed as we were again, though perhaps a few pounds lighter, some on the team hollered for a bit slower pace as I was the locomotive this time and more than once the slick afternoon sun took the feet out from under one or more of my teammates.

"Now who's the barn sour horse," I said aloud referring to myself!

Climbing up the ridge out from the Emmons back to camp Curtis we were met by welcome happy sun - at least another full hours worth I figured. What I was really tickled to see though was a trough slicing straight down the Inter-glacier. Oh yeh the days warm afternoon sun and many butts had done their magic to turn this entire glacier into one of the world's largest Disney E ticket water slides. Lady and gents what we are looking at is some serious whoopin it up possibilities here!

Each of us reconfigured our packs for minimum drag and I jumped at the chance to be one of the 1st to jump in. Squealing like a school boy, I whahoo'd with Jordon close

behind. It flattened out bit and we practically jogged to get to the next and largest section. It was ever so steep. Jordon jumped and sailed off and out of sight. I waited for more of the team to come down and a few more sailed over the edge with me now in close pursuit. I tail dragged my ice axe to keep some control but it was only illusion.

I was traveling so fast that holding onto my use axe at all was supreme effort. Tom in front of me was pulling ahead with no axe restraint at all. I was not so brave and held on with all my might as it threatened to be torn from my death grip at any moment. Still the speed mounted and all through the valley the chorus of laughter whooping and shrieks from guys and gal rose to a crescendo as more than a thousand feet flew by at what must have been twenty five mph! On Adams my GPS clocked me at 15 and I was cooking so fast my pants melted; no lie. This was way faster, but being slushier at least this time my pants didn't catch on fire! [Video](#)

Everyone gathered at the runout with young and young at heart practically jumping up and down; simply effusive beyond finding adequate words to express the elation. Tom's words will have to do exclaiming "that was better than any amusement park ride I'd ever been on." There was universal ascension to that! [Video](#)

One more shorter and less steep section was captured on film and then we left the glacier behind. We cleaned up at a chugging stream at glacier basin camp and then once again donned our hefty packs for the steep trail down the hogback. This is where is just gets tough again. Somehow the trail must have been rerouted because I just don't remember how interminably long this exit was. In our rush to break camp several of us made camping 101 mistakes including myself by failing to keep our flashlights at the top. The sun was gone and as full dark came on Suzanne could simply not find her regular glasses. Her distance vision is practically non-existent without them! After a futile search in the dwindling twilight she determined that seeing dimly was better than see fuzzy. Fuzzy understates the matter so she put her prescription glacier glasses back on and Paul and Jordon volunteered to stayed close with her using their lights to augment Suzanne's.



Recalling keystone cops in the rush to breakdown camp somehow both Scott and I managed to misplace our own headlamps. They were certainly findable but now with several miles left of trail and almost no light several of the team got themselves into that homing pigeon mode and showed no mercy to us two dumb bunnies. So to stay up we donned packs and walked on traveling with borrowed light as it were. Tom took sympathy and showed mercy shining his light most of the way for the 3 of us for which I was quite grateful.

Despite being awfully blind it was all we could do at this point to keep up with Suzanne hmmm in this case it truly was the Blind leading the blind or maybe it was the blond leading the blind. I tease her about being our barn-sour-horse as she gets into that

determined zone, puts her head down and despite obstacles, bone weariness and now even blindness churns up the trail like no tomorrow to get to that car!

We got left in the dust a time or two but the advance party would wait for us blind poky puppies and we'd go again. We traveled now on the new trail - recently graveled so the ground was much harder on our tender feet. I winced with pain frequently now as almost no amount of changing or shifting of my load could find relief from various spasms and aches. At this point I am so spent, so sore that every human feature seemed ready for refill, retrofit of flat out redesign. ... when will the bad man stop I muttered to the trees and then when it seemed the feet would cry "strike" if I demanded one more step the Whiteriver trailhead sign appeared and turned my quiet suffering into elation. We had done it!

We changed into car clothes, separated shared gear and said a word of thanksgiving but at this writing I can't be certain if it was just me or the group.

With Suzanne blind as a bat, I took the driver's seat and away we went to the nearest hamburger joint still open. It had to be at least 11 pm because I didn't get home till almost 3am and Tom and Scott closer to 4am.

Now that makes this one for the books; at least mine which I close now with this poem:

You cannot stay on the summit forever; you have to come down again. So why bother in the first place? Just this: What is above knows what is below, but what is below does not know what is above. One climbs, one sees. One descends, one sees no longer, but one has seen. There is an art of conducting oneself in the lower regions by the memory of what one saw higher up. When one can no longer see, one can at least still know. Rene Daumal

