



With only a few days warning I scurried to prepare my pack with food and the lightest gear. I would be traveling with a team of hiking machines, though not quite in the same class as the marathon speed hikers Jean and I met on the PCT last month during our most excellent 50 mile adventure – (honeymoon in the hills of the North Cascades.)



Eric and a few of his old high school /church buddies were planning to do some technical climbs in the Slot canyons of Utah, but fall storms threatened flash floods that can be easily deadly, so climbing Mt Olympus came up as the preferred alternative. Knowing I was interested in the summit, skilled and equipped in the art, I got a call. Over the years since I 1<sup>st</sup> met this band of



brothers, almost a generation younger, my skills in technical climbing provided just enough advantage that the group of tall speed walkers were willing to tolerate my slightly slower pace. That seemed to pan out again as we all headed out together to the Hoh river trailhead to climb the immense Blue Glacier, the heavily crevassed upper reaches and the class 4 summit blocks. This was something I attempted a decade ago with a group of boy scouts, but equipment failures stopped us shy of the upper reaches. I came to see that as fortuitous as the higher reaches of the mountain has treachery that was not apparent from the lower pinnacle we previously achieved.



After a luxurious stay in an inn as the group gathered together, we got an

early start up the Ho River trail. There was as a heavy fog and a bit of drizzle as we traveled up the gentle trail. "Massive trees" doesn't do justice to the monarchs, but the farther we walked the drier it became. 12 miles in we crossed the high bridge several hundred feet above a main tributary to the Ho. The clouds had parted and we relaxed eating lunch while taking in the slot canyon below. This marked a big change from the almost flat trail to an unrelenting steep one leading to high camp. Along the way, we met a couple young men in their twenties. Pleasant fellows, but they were less prepared; but very fast hikers.



We continued a strong pace and by about 6pm we arrived in Glacier Meadow Camp, 11 hours of hiking later.

The crew did not feel the urgency for an early start, but we negotiated a 4AM start, a couple hours later than a typical alpine ascent. By 6am, after a steep ascent up the wall of the glacier bowl and then down the ridiculously steep inner wall we stood on the skirts of the immense blue glacier. We donned harnesses and while placing

crampons, those two young men caught up again. We noted they had no ropes, microspikes for crampons and one of the boys who was wearing a bike helmet was missing a lanyard to his Ice Axe. Yet they carried themselves so confidently we hesitated to speak up. This was something I would come to regret like the cock who crowed three times for Peter as three separate time I had the chance to make a difference, but oddly, very uncharacteristic ; I help my peace.



It was ¾ of a mile to the far side and then up. It took little time it seemed to attain where 10 years earlier, I had taken the scouts. We called it Panic

Undulating, Fractured, Endless darkness, flumes of rushing rivulets, maze and labyrinth attempt to describe but fail wholly to put flesh on the scene. You need to be there to take it in.





Peak back then, but that outcropping was actually much short of Panic Peak. Sean led the rope team up the immense snow dome skirting bands of crevasses – it felt like a good 800 feet – like the Roman Wall of Mt Baker and then we got some relief as the wall rolled off revealing a vast plane sparsely crevassed. On the right was the true Panic Peak with two research buildings at the foot. Straight ahead was our goal.

The closer we came, however, the more impossible the final ascent seemed. Super steep glassy



assents ending in a massive blocking bergschrund revealed an icy wall and more 60degree snow to the class 4 bare summit block. Nothing about this route looked doable without much more time and additional equipment.



Another route on the map took a path off to the left flank traversing across a modestly steep slope feeding into the jaws of a neighborhood swallowing 'shrund.

After some discussion, we all agreed to a 2pm turn around. This was somewhat arbitrary, but even 2 was 4 hours later than what one would tolerate on Rainier. In this case we just had to feel our way to this decision as the snow hardness was unfamiliar to us all.

We would not be able to afford a misstep on that traverse section. If someone slipped only lighting fast self-arrest would keep us out of trouble. Eric asked me to lead this one, so I took several pickets in case I needed to place protection. With everyone in self arrest ice axe position I forged a route winding around obstacles and threading a path that in some places closed off to but 10 feet of passage between competing gaping crevasses. Maintaining self-arrest position we carefully, steadily



crossed the most dangerous section of our trip.

Attaining the notch leading to the back side of the 3 main peaks marking the summit, we once again met the 2 young travelers who were on the way back down. Did I mention they were fast! We chatted mountain pleasantries for a few minutes and then continued largely in their foot path to the top.



The full sun was warm and the air still, it was peaceful. Still, the height remaining demanded our steady plodding –“ steady gains the mountain,” I kept repeating to myself as I led up to the final snow slope. We hunted about for the smallest gap to the rock. The notes seem to disappear into endless darkness. You don't want to drop anything and certainly nobody down there. At 1<sup>st</sup> we tried to stay roped, but the scramble up the rock wasn't bad at all and with the rope drag, we all decided in unison to lay it aside. Chris and Sean topped out first followed by



Eric and myself. The slightly higher West peak beckoned a mere 100 yards or so off, but we all knew it was a good hour or two away and we would satisfy ourselves with the Middle Peak.

We rolled off the obligatory boulder to the awaiting mountain's hungry crevasses, a sort of offering vicariously in our stead! Our 2pm turn around came too soon for Chris who lobbied for more time, I swore mildly adding more items to my growing pile of small regrets and descended to the waiting ropes.



With all the snow galley slaves reassembled to the ore locks, we hustled off the hill; glissading beckoned but no one really wanted to take off the crampons and I was not too interested in a wet bum. When we arrived back at the notch, again Eric suggested it would be a good idea for me to lead the traverse, though I'm sure any of the crew would have done as well. They are all careful, skilled and excellent route finders. Planting feet carefully, we made the passage and breathed relief after passing the last big gaping ma.

We used Eric's good judgments augmented by his GPS to locate the closest decent line on the massive snow dome. The last thing we needed was to descend to a crevasse. The steepness and tangle of crevasses below squelched our interest in glissading what would otherwise be some serious whoopin' it up .



THEN we spotted a fresh butt-glissade. It was our two young friend's for sure. We followed that down a ways and then made an ominous camp booty discovery – an ice axe had been left behind – - Oh dear, we could see the skid marks continued off the steepest section and we all instantly knew what had happened. We all knew that one of the two had no lanyard connecting to his wrist to his ice-axe and a patch of ice had yanked it from his grasp. Surely, we all presumed, he must be dead as

the speed and waiting crevasses below seemed – simply un-survivable.

We followed the skid path down as far as we could before the icy steepness begged our detour. A set of footprints told the rest of the story that his partner had likewise vectored off to the side. Now we could

see another set of footprints far below the crevasse field and so we speculated, "Were those footprints his partner going to look for him, or, did by some miracle he manage to survive?"



We descended rapidly and then to our astonishment we spotted a man on the rocks below heralding us. Below the hazards, we pulled the crampons and slipped and glissaded down to the spot below. "By all the Gods of Mt Olympus!"; more likely the one true God, that young man had survived. His companion was already on his way down the mountain to try and catch the High Camp ranger. But, the afternoon was already long in the tooth. Having had some exposure to how rangers work in emergencies, I knew given a fairly stable victim that no help would be coming tonight.



One thing I was fairly certain was that the rangers would want an assessment about the victim; straight out of the MOFA (Mountain Oriented First Aid) book; that's how they work. So with the help of our two dentists (doctors) we got his pulse rate over time and I took some clothing off to reveal the injuries on his hip. I looked for bruising in his abdomen and ribs; he was remarkably free of collateral injuries. He had actually managed to fly over the crevasses though smacking into the far side each time. His right hip was severely bruised and bulging a bit. He had actually managed to walk, shuffle, drag himself a good 100 yards or so to the rock where we found him but now the adrenalin had worn off he needed help to even move his leg. He also complained of some shifting in his



pelvis when he tried to put weight on his leg. We thought he might have a cracked pelvis or possible tailbone. I recorded all the assessment on my iPhone to be send down the hill and volunteered to stay the night.

Everyone pulled emergency gear and extra clothing to make the



night's stay as good as it was going to get and then we parted company. The notes on the iPhone had what the rangers needed to authorize the evacuation so that turned out to be a useful excersize.



I had tried my phone and the young fellow, Brian Beeghly 's phone but to no avail. I even climbed several hundred feet up after everyone left to what we previously called Panic Peak, re-designated Panic Point where 10 years ago I had managed to made a "summit victory" call. No go this time with Brian's phone, so as dusk approached, I made my way back down to where we had situated Brian in a tube tent. With some effort I buddy carried him to a better spot that was flat enough and wide enough for both of

us. I augmented the spot with a rock wall and did my best to cover us up with my open sleeping bag as the wind built and built. I hoped it would abate, but it only built up worse.

The stars projected with such stunning brilliance that the Milky Way stretched across the sky like the hour hand of a great celestial watch, and yes I watched it's brilliant spectacle the better part of the entire night.

Somehow in timing that can only make sense to God, He had a way of making lemonade when lemons were on the fare. Having had other plans for this weekend, we weren't even supposed to be on this mountain, and yet here we were, in a place and time most unusual where we could do a little good for a fellow traveler.

It seemed like we talked about God til midnight. Brian is a seeker; I, a fellow traveler with a light. I had in my backpack all along what he needed to secure his life on this climb and 3 opportunities to offer it; just a bit of ribbon to secure his Ice axe to his person and a few words of wisdom. Yet like Peter of long ago, the cock had crowed 3 times without me saying anything about climbing wisdom. In a way, now as we took in so much of God's grandeur before us, I had in my backpack something even more important than climbing ribbon. I had knowledge of the source of life eternal and our thoughts were directed to things of import late into the night.

And that was one long, blustery, rugged night.



As dawn approached I think I managed an hour of sleep, but as the Sun crested, I stirred, refreshed as if the cursedly lumpy backpack I laid on was a feather bed. I no sooner gathered our things in anticipation of rescue that I heard a distant wop wop of the Park Service helicopter. It circled several time scoping out the best landing and gaging the wind before smartly touching down just below us.

In little time, Brian was assisted into a jump suit and tucked compactly in to the chopper. I spoke a bit with the pilot and found out he was the same person who piloted the chopper in the rescue and recovery on Rainier the 2 years previous when we solemnly watched him fly a ranger's last remains off the mountain. **Mountains give you reason to consider a lot more than just the summit.**

I received this journal entry from his partner that cleared up a lot of questions as to just how the accident happened.

**From:** Alexander Asai [  
**Sent:** Saturday, May 30, 2015 5:17 PM  
**To:** Steven Marquis  
**Subject:** Re: Mt Olympus

Hi Steve, Sorry for the delay in getting back to you. I've been in the middle of my term at nursing school and things have been busy lately! I'll do my best to clear up the confusion.

So, I was in the lead descending down, and across snow dome at an angle. I thought about glissading, but decided it was a bad idea due to the steep slope, crevasses below, and the still firm snow underfoot. I warned Brian and told him it wasn't a good idea, but he decided to glissade anyway. He glissaded for a bit, then tried to self-arrest, but his grip on the ice axe gave out and he continued to slide past me, beyond the convexity in the slope, and out of my sight line. I thought he was a goner for sure, but hurried down as fast as I could safely go in hopes he was still attached to the mountain. After scurrying down a couple hundred yards at the same angle across the slope, I could see that he was in fact still alive and he gave me a wave to let me know he was conscious. As I got closer and could we talk to each other he thought that he was OK, just a little banged up. I asked if he had hit his head, and he told me that he hadn't, just bruised his butt and legs from the slide and sudden stop. The crevasse that ended up stopping his fall was narrow and shallow, and when I got close he was sitting on the lower edge of the crevasse. It was not wide (he didn't have to bridge it with his body) and not an immediate danger. The crevasse was in a section of the glacier that was made of ice (blue tint) and I did not feel comfortable making my over to him with my micro-spikes underfoot, so he had to traverse the distance on his own. When he first stood up and tried to walk he thought that one of his legs might actually be broken. Admittedly, this was terrible news as he was obviously in a lot of pain, but I knew that the fact he could stand up and put some weight on his leg meant that his leg was not broken. I advised him to take it slow and take his time making his way over to me. This was probably about 20 yards. Once he made it back to the snow, I carved out a seat with my ice axe to allow us to sit down and give him a little break.

When I could see his face I could tell he was in shock due to his ashen skin tone and pale lips. I had him sit down, tell about how he felt, and gave him some ibuprofen to help (a little) with the pain/swelling. I knew that I needed to get him up and moving sooner, rather than later, because his legs were only going to get more stiff and sore the longer he sat, and I didn't feel comfortable having him spend too much time on the snow slope (cold and dangerous). I gave him my gloves, choice of my ice axe or poles (he chose the axe), helped him put on another layer, and then we set off with me kicking steps in front while also providing encouragement. Progress was slow, and I had to stop and wait on multiple occasions. My goal,



which I shared with Brian, was to get him over to the rocky area where he would be relatively safe and warm (as compared to the snow slope) and able to wait while we figured out what was next. We managed to make the traverse in three sections. We traversed over for a while, then I had Brian slide down a short ways (where it was less steep and there was a flat runout), continued to traverse, slid down a little further, and then made the final traverse to the rocks.

Once at the rocks, I gave him my warm clothing, some food, and filled his water bladder. Each of our phones had a bar or two so we tried to call 911 from there. I asked if he thought he could keep descending, but after sitting for a while he didn't think he could make it down any further down, let alone the 20 miles back to the trailhead. In my mind I was also thinking that the rocky area was flat enough that it would be a pretty good place for a helicopter rescue, should that be the necessary course of action. I didn't want to leave him on his own, but after about an hour without having success with the cell phone, and not knowing how long it would be before your group was descending, I had to leave him in hopes of catching the ranger back at camp. He said he was more embarrassed than anything, which made me slightly more comfortable in leaving him alone momentarily. He was alert and oriented to what was going on when I left to go get help.

By the time I made it over to the moraine on the other side of the blue glacier, I looked back and saw your group descending to where he was. It gave me great comfort to know that there were other people with him. I hurried down the rest of the way to camp and spent 30 minutes frantically looking for the ranger, whom I eventually found. I explained the situation to her and we hiked back up to there moraine where she had radio service and could call it in. I decided to wait on the far side until part of your group came back. I figured that one or two of your group would stay with him, and some of the group would come back and give an update. I was prepared to make another trip across the glacier, but decided against it after learning that you had quite a couple down jackets, emergency blanket, and a sleeping bag with you up there on the rock. In hind sight I probably should have gone back, but I also wanted to know what the rescue plan was going to be.

Quite the ordeal, I'm sure glad your group and the ranger were there that weekend! I think you know the rest, but if you have any other questions please let me know!

I immediately descended in the direction I thought my companions might try to return on. There was one key detail we failed to work out about how to avoid missing each the next morning with them coming up one chute whilst I perchance descended another so I raced to a prominence in hopes of beating them before they got to the rock face. The idea was they would return so I could hook into the rope team for a safer egress. Big glacier, lots of crevasses! Luckily, I made a quick decent down the rock

and scree. Just as I came to the final prominence overlooking the massive Blue, I spotted two of our team nearing the face. It was Chris and Sean. I pointed to the best way across the maze and soon joined their company; a very pleasant reunion. To my chagrin, they had made the  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile journey across the glacier without ropes. That made for 5 people-crossings worth without ropes when I could have made it by myself with  $\frac{1}{5}$  the person- risk. My logical side told me, It didn't make sense but their presence had a big positive psychological boost and I was grateful to see them. Fortunately, the glacier held no surprises and being so late in the season was quite solid; hence their judgment call; not one I would have made but I was happy to enjoy their felicity on the way back.



Back in camp, we all sat and enjoyed breakfast and pleasantries. Brian's companion, Alexander Asai, a PCT through hiker, donned both his and Brian's packs that he had lashed together to a huge snail like burden and departed for an 18 mile egress. We offered to help but he seemed in a hurry to be off the mountain entirely today. Wow what a hiker!

It was now late Sunday morning. What passed for a day of rest, would be a steady downhill stroll. Easy by comparison, but starting so late, would also take the better part of the rest of the day. We broke camp and descended to Elk Lake. Chis, the intrepid, led us around the lake on a barely used "trail" that seemed to offer little prospects but somehow he knew or had previously spotted a rock outcropping on the other side. Finally we busted through to a nice opening where we swam and ate lunch. Refreshed, we donned our punishing packs that seemed to grow in weight by the hour and then finished the rest of the 12 mile "easy" trek to a camp near 5 mile (all downhill!).

Sean and Chris made a roaring campfire when I had all but given up from the wetness of the supply. Good outdoorsmen, Sean came with super homemade fire starter goo! And we finally rested, thanked the Good Lord for his grace, reminisced and shared storied about fun and faith and mission times til late into the night as clouds gathered for the 1<sup>st</sup> time since we started. The weather god's smiled on our journey.

Monday morning was super, a bit overcast but clearing and the trail yielded more and more hikers heralding the trail head. By the style of shoes (and sandals) we could judge the distance until flip-flops told us this trek would soon be a memory, a lesson, a relationship long to be cherished.

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