

The Rest of Washington's Cascades Collection, 1991-2015

Hiking and Scrambling - North Cascades, Glacier Peak Wilderness, Enchantments, Mt. St. Helens



Left to Right: Lyman Basin from Spider Gap, Prusik Peak from Gnome Tarn, Mt. Rainier and Spirit Lake from St. Helens

Introduction

This collection is about the Washington Cascades, excluding Rainier (see separate Rainier Collection). Beginning in the **North Cascades**, this includes an updated report about our 2015 trip (Hannegan Pass/Peak, Baker/Ptarmigan Ridge, and Cascade Pass/Sahale), as well as old reports about Cascade/Sahale and Boston Basin. Continuing south to **Glacier Peak**, this includes 2 backpacks (Spider/Lyman, Image/Cloudy) and 3 dayhikes (Dickerman, Sulfur, Green). For the **Enchantments**, this includes a fall backpack, and dayhike/deathmarching via Aasgard Pass. Finally, the **Mt. St. Helens** section is a mixed bag of climbing, hiking and research trips. At the end, I summarized lesser hikes with a few pictures no longer in the archive.



Left to Right: Hannegan (Ruth & Shuksan), Ptarmigan (Baker/Coleman Pinnacle & Shuksan), Sahale Arm

Twenty Years Later – North Cascades Basecamp, August 2015

This trip was planted a few years ago when, while getting my annual physical, I shocked my gynecologist (who I've known for 15 years) by casually but accurately identifying the new photographs on her office wall as "Hannegan Pass." Even though Michele knew I was a serious hiker, she forgot I was from Washington - and, given how off-the-beaten-pass Hannegan seems, she never thought anyone would recognize their family's latest vacation destination in Glacier, WA. In some ways, it is surprising I knew where the pictures were taken because I'd only visited Hannegan once (July 1995) and all I remember was that it was a long slog up a lush valley with distant vistas (at the time, John and I thought we climbed Hannegan Peak - but man were we wrong, as proven on this trip). In spring 2015, Allison and I committed to this trip - renting an amazing house in Glacier for 3 nights, before moving to Marblemount and tackling Cascade Pass/Sahale Arm. It would be Allison/Marshall's first vacation following several months dealing with health-scares (not to mention, their first trip to the North Cascades). Meanwhile, I would be a week back from my super-hard Swiss Via Alpina trek - tired but in shape. After an early celebration of our mom's birthday in Tacoma, we set out for Glacier on August 14.



Left to Right: Tahoma National Cemetery, funky Glacier, GREAT rental house, are we in Switzerland(?), Heather Meadows

Because I'd just returned from Switzerland (one of my dad's favorite destinations), I insisted - after 9 years - we finally revisit our dad's urn-site at the WA veteran's cemetery. This detour proved to be a good escape from big rain up north, and crazy I-5 traffic. Indeed, I was SHOCKED how developed everything has become north of Seattle. The last time I drove this far north, things were calm, rural-feeling, and largely green starting around Everett. This time, it felt wrong and strip-mally all the way to Mount Vernon. Terrible! Heading east, we continued to Sedro-Woolly, where we made a rainy pitstop at the North Cascades Gateway/Institute Visitor Center. Unfortunately, we then missed a turn and - instead of heading north to Glacier on highway 9 - we went east on 20. It wasn't until we hit Concrete where I was, like: this is the road to Cascade Pass, not Baker! While

Glacier was a cute and funky little town, there were no major facilities (e.g. well-stocked grocery store), leaving us a little frustrated we hadn't picked up a few missing items earlier. After one more direction/information problem finding our rental home (tucked off the main highway in thick woods), we finally settled in to our miraculously inviting house. Thankfully, we came with most of our groceries in hand – prepared to cook healthy and cheaper meals for ourselves in-house. After an excellent meal of filling taco/rice bowls, we headed out for a short woody walk around the extensive complex.



Left to Right: more Bagley loop/meadows, along the Nooksack – forest, rapids

August 14, 2015 – Rain, Rain Go Away!

The next day, misty rain engulfed the high country. Getting a late start, we hoped to hike the 6-mile Chain Lakes Loop from Heather Meadows Visitor Center. It took 45 minutes to drive from Glacier UP, UP, UP to the trailhead, conditions seeming to worsen as we slogged up the trail to Artist Point (some sections on cabled-together log steps that looked like crazy things Ellen and I climbed in Switzerland). At some point, we ran into a ranger trying to clear the trail because of possible lightning (hard to imagine because it seemed cold already)... so we turned around, having climbed 700 feet in 1.25 miles! We then did a 2-mile loop around Bagley Lakes before ducking into the CCC-era visitor center. Huddling around the non-roaring fire, we ate our lunches and reviewed options for the rest of the day. Given that it seemed less bleak in the valley, we found a riverside trail along the RAGING Nooksack that offered reasonably dry conditions, some distance and rolling elevation gains/losses. In all, we racked up 7.5 miles and 1500 feet up/down - not bad for a poor-visibility rainy day!



Left to Right: Hannegan trailhead/parking lot, typical trail first mile, some climbing second mile

August 15, 2015 – So THAT'S What Hannegan Peak Looks Like!

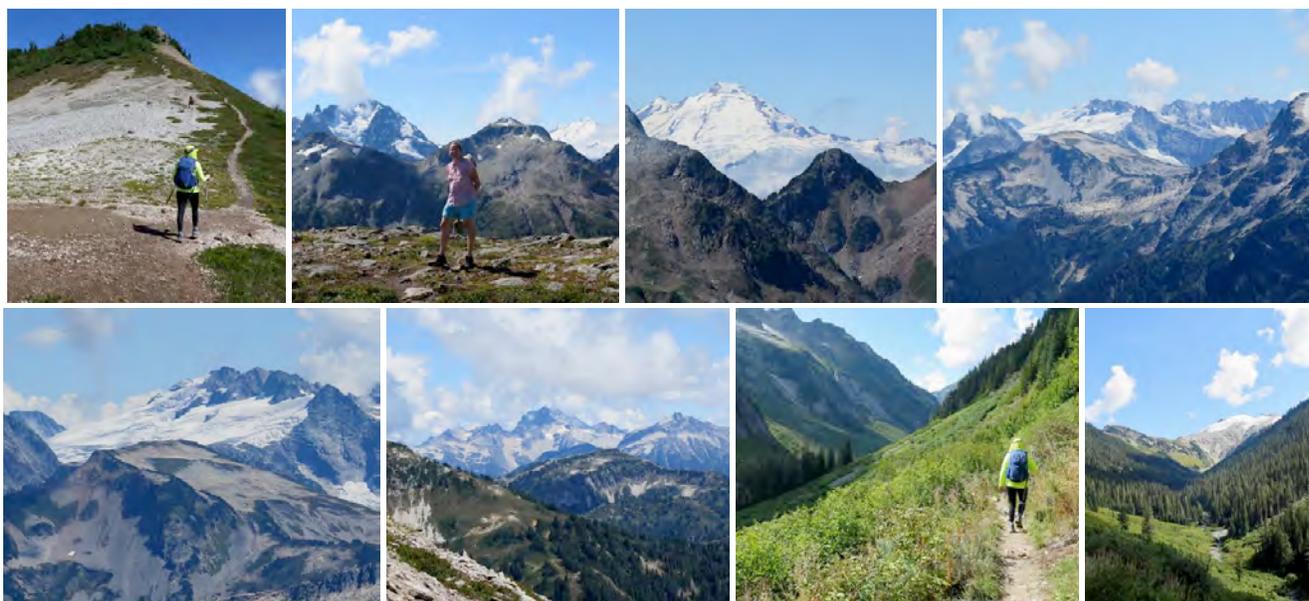
Although seemingly closer and flatter, the Hannegan trailhead required another 45-minute drive, the final 5 miles on a rough, potholed dirt road. All things considered, Allison was shocked how many cars were waiting at the end. The first part of this hike was super-familiar to me, despite 20 years of lapsed time: 3 miles of brushy valley hiking, often side-hilling on the eastern slopes... nice views of classic rocky peaks above. While Hannegan Pass is not very open, the climb this time felt more scenic and meadow-like than in 1995 – great views of the white-glacier dome of Ruth Peak at the valley terminus. At the pass, there are 3 options: an official trail drops to the Chilliwack and continues east to Whatcom Pass, a semi-official dead-end side trail climbs north/up Hannegan Peak (what we did), and a rudimentary climbers path heads south towards Ruth Peak. When I used to live in Seattle, ALL were things I'd hoped to complete someday. Oh well!



Left to Right: near pass, above pass – vast views, detail of summit/Nooksack Tower, summit from flat arm with campsites

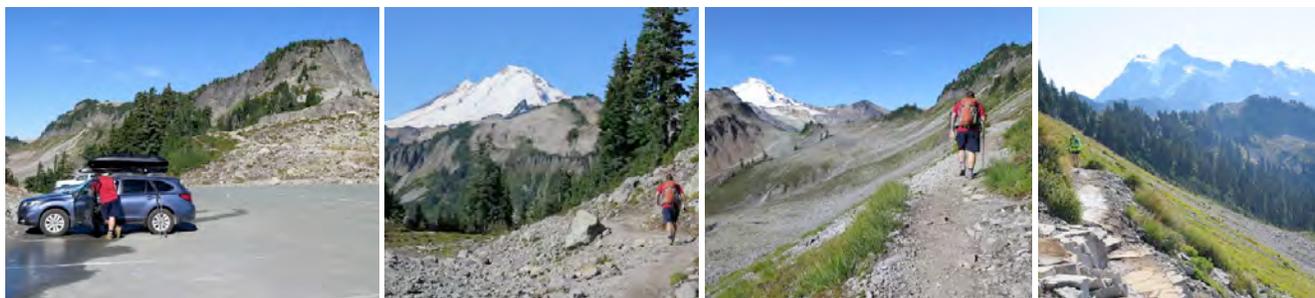
Continuing north, we began climbing immediately – feeling like we were on the Mt. Hood/McNeill Point shortcut. Within 10 minutes, we enjoyed HUGE views in all directions – all more impressive as we climbed higher. To the south/west, Ruth and Shuksan/Nooksack Tower were the dominant peaks (at the summit, Baker would fully appear!). The views south/east were more vast – although this time the Challenger/Pickets were obvious to me (they were not in 1995 because there was more

snow on everything, vs. today when MASSIVE Challenger Glacier was OH-SO clear!). After 20 minutes, we came to a flattish arm with a lot of cleared campsites – which I recognized as the place John and I stopped in 1995, erroneously thinking this was the top (in reality, we only made it halfway up the peak). The real summit is a significant climb beyond where we stopped – the total mileage/elevation being 11 miles and 3300 up/down. The last shot above shows the summit from this arm.



Left to Right: (top) the final big climb to the summit, me & Shuksan/Baker, Baker detail, Challenger/Pickets; (bottom) Challenger/Copper Ridge detail, mystery peak to north, heading down, Mt. Ruth and Hannegan Pass

The final climb was steep and tiring, making me feel like I'd lost all my great Swiss fitness. But the views were totally worth it. That said, there were SO many peaks I could not identify (we definitely should have brought a larger-scale regional map because I'm sure there were some familiar/famous ones on the horizon). With warm, sunny, stable weather conditions, we – and about 20 others – lazed around eating and gazing for at least an hour before making our way back down.



Left to Right: parking lot with Table Mountain, Baker views as we set out, hiking along Table, Shuksan views

August 16, 2015 – AMAZING Ptarmigan Ridge

Allison and I spent too much time researching and trying to decide today's hike. Torn between a few Baker-focused trips nearby (e.g. Heliotrope, Exelsior, Skyline), we ultimately chose Ptarmigan Ridge. Where the other hikes involved longer drives, more effort, and dicey river fords, Ptarmigan involved scary language about snow crossings and route-finding. But because it was a spectacular day and the winter snowpack had been low, we took our chances and were supremely rewarded (more than I could have imagined – having thought Baker sort of mediocre based on hiking the Railroad Grade in 1994).



Left to Right: leaving Chain Lakes trail and Table behind, across the high basin to Ptarmigan Ridge proper

Of course, we also appreciated that the Ptarmigan trailhead was at scenic and familiar Artist Point – the first mile overlapping with the Chain Lakes loop – Baker and Shuksan visible right out of the gate. After traversing along the side of Table, we came

to an obvious pass where the Chain Lakes loop trail dropped hard against Table and the Ptarmigan branch descended briefly into this stark bowl of grass and then rocks – heading towards the ridgeline in the distance. Although the trail was obvious (no snow), it was easy to imagine someone getting lost in the nothingness up there – particularly in bad weather. We then gained what I assume is Ptarmigan Ridge proper and meandered gently along, usually on one side of the rocky spine.



Left to Right: lower Ptarmigan, steep meadow traverse, steep rock traverse, heading to next pass – Coleman Pinnacle/Baker

Upon gaining the ridge, we initially walked in lush meadows (sometimes high-angle). As we climbed, however, the way became all rocks (sometimes, again, high-angle). These are key sections where descriptions warn that scary snowfields often linger, making the traverse challenging to impossible for inexperienced people lacking technical gear. But today, nothing scared the crap out of me – particularly because the views of Baker and toothy Coleman Pinnacle were quite dramatic.



Left to Right: south side meadows, me and Baker, brief bear sighting, heading back – unbelievable views of Shuksan

Eventually, we gained another pass with vast views south – as well as head-on into icy Baker high country. Continuing onto the VERY high-angle south side meadows, we climbed an increasingly rudimentary path, wondering when we should stop. Based on the Mountaineers' description and our mileage, we stopped at Camp Kiser, a flat area under the Coleman Pinnacle (some on-line descriptions make it sound like Camp Kiser is farther along the ridgeline – but we suspect that is some higher basecamp, given that a visible trail continues). Anyway, a large party was just leaving, with reports that they had seen a black bear. Sharing the spot with a couple and their tiny dog, we enjoyed lunch. Although I continued down the now-rocky path for 10 minutes, I ultimately turned around because I was losing the views of Baker as the way dipped towards another gap above the dramatic Sholes Glacier. Heading back across the steep meadow section, we did see a small black bear running through the rocks WAY down in the valley below (Allison's second wild bear sighting!). The hike back was straightforward, made slightly annoying by shitloads more people around Table. Wrapping up the hike (8.4 miles, 1800 up/down) around 5, we drove 2 hours to Marblemount, the closest town to the Cascade Pass trailhead. Despite 20 years of insane Seattle sprawl, Marblemount seemed like a weird time capsule of shockingly antiquated accommodation options. Our rabbit-infested riverside cabins were atrocious: smelly (smoke, perfume, fungus) with sagging EVERYTHING (beds, roofs, floors...).



Left to Right: Triplets & Johannesburg, approaching Cascade Pass, ptarmigan, Eldorado & Forbidden/Torment

August 17, 2015 – Cascade Pass/Sahale Arm

For our final day, we hiked Cascade Pass – intent on scrambling to the toe of the Sahale Glacier (and climbing basecamp). This legendary hike (which I'd done at least 5 times before) was the primary draw for focusing this trip on the North Cascades. While it didn't disappoint, we were unable to complete the final half-mile. After breakfast, we left highway 20 and drove 45 minutes up the lush Cascade River road. As with Marblemount, this drive felt like it hadn't changed since the mid-90's. That said, the final parking lot seemed a little more manicured, with a better outhouse facility. Although there were cars there, it did not seem nearly as crowded as Hannegan. I felt and hiked very strong in the morning – tearing up to Cascade Pass well

ahead of Allison/Marshall – but I definitely bonked later in the day. While most of the trail felt the same, there was this switchback area halfway up to the pass where some kind of serious avalanche had decimated the forest, leaving this impressive open view (the meadow growth looked 1-2 years old). I noticed several similar areas higher up on the arm.



Left to Right: (top) pass rock circle, base of Sahale Arm, climbing arm, first view of Sahale Peak; (bottom) Doubtful Lake, Magic Mountain, more climbing towards Sahale, view down arm – Mixup, Magic

The pass was more developed: a circular rock seating area in the center of the pass, many more wide social trails scarring the land. Allison/Marshall arrived about 20 minutes later and, after using the pit toilet (just above the pass on the Mixup Peak side), we began the steep and rocky slog up the front face of Sahale Arm – several areas seeming very different and torn up with rockfall. Within the hour, we crested the arm's lower end – earning our first views of Sahale Peak and Doubtful Lake (deep in the cirque below the arm and peak). And then we continued plodding up the relentlessly uphill arm – which is where I lost my steam and my mojo. At some point, we crested the middle arm – earning higher views of Forbidden/Torment, Boston Basin, and Eldorado Peak... distant Baker peaking in between. Looking up, I knew I was only going to make it to the top of the green (which I did). Although I had definitely gone beyond – to the Sahale climbing camp at the toe of the glacier – I could not see any clear route. Likewise, Allison/Marshall attempted to climb maybe 100 feet higher, giving up when the route became unclear and questionable (loose, steep rock). Our hope had been to clearly see Glacier Peak to the south (typically visible only from the glacier), but we had to settle for Formidable and Spider (of Ptarmigan traverse fame).



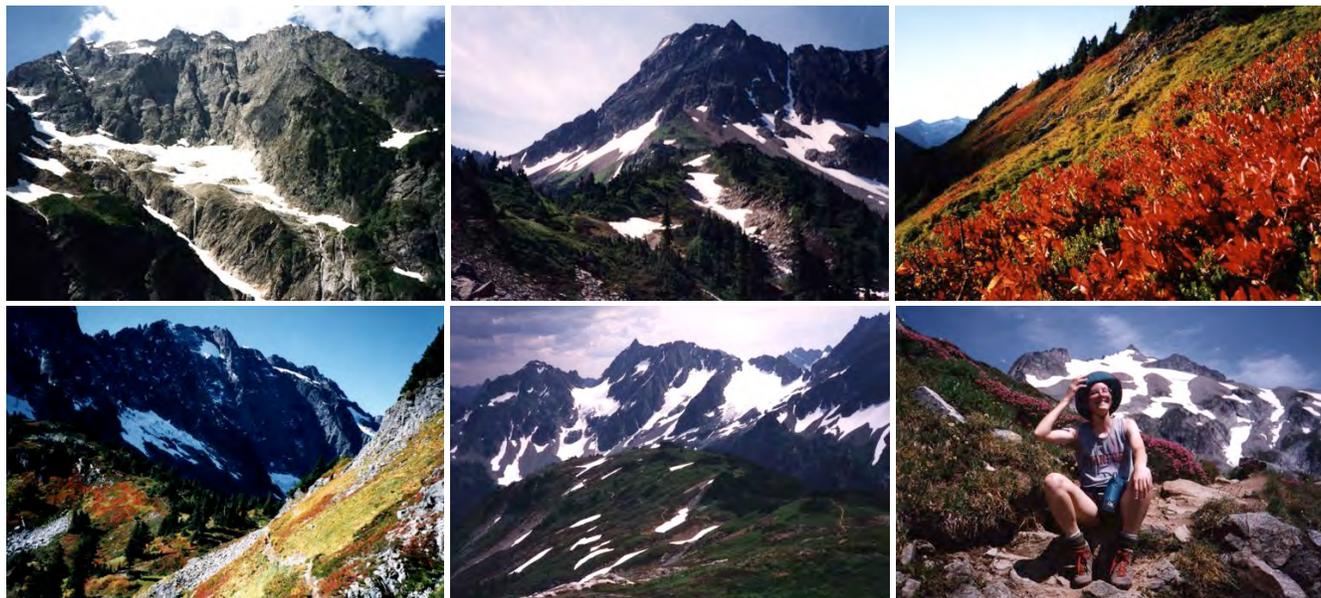
Left to Right: Allison charging to Sahale, distant Baker, turning around, Forbidden/Torment & Boston Basin, self-portrait

During lunch, we agreed to forego staying at Motel Rabbit a second night – in favor of Hotel Sylvi. Arriving back at the trailhead around 6 (total mileage 11.1 miles and 3500 feet up/down), we returned briefly to Marblemount to cook one last meal, pack up, and then hit the road again. Needless to say, we were not back in Tacoma until well after 10. Our total trip spec's were over 38 miles and 10,000 feet gained/lost!

North Cascades - Cascade Pass/Sahale Arm 1990's

Astoundingly - considering I lived in Washington 28 years - I didn't visit the North Cascades until 1994. As a child, I was aware of the park from impressive pictures in a National Geographic book my dad gave when I was 10: the toothy peaks, the soaring heights, the hippies with Lennon spec's and external frame packs swaggering up something called "Cascade Pass" against autumnal reds and low-angle September light. But Cascade Pass would not emerge again until Jenn ordered me up there. Getting to the Cascade Pass trailhead is a piece of work. The Cascade River Road, which branches off highway 20 in Marblemount (already 2-3 hours from Seattle), is paved for 5-8 miles, turns to good dirt for 10 miles, and then becomes shitty the last 3 miles: ruts, ridiculously steep grades for short distances, and random segments of eroding pavement. The drive is moderately scenic, unless you've got some jerk who's driving a suspiciously clean sedan (probably a rental) 10-15 miles an hour, won't let you pass, and is spewing dust in your face. This will, no doubt, happen for at least 15 miles. Only the last 5-8 miles of the drive are within the national park boundary. In and of itself, though, the end of the road - the Cascade Pass

trailhead - is a truly superlative vista: the soaring rock ramparts and hanging glaciers of Johannesburg, Triplets and Mixup. Directly to the east is Cascade Pass, a broad U-shape that seems oh-so-close. Aside from a decent pit toilet, expect NO amenities: no visitor center, food, gifts, ranger, running water, campground, RV hook-ups - NOTHING. And it DAMN WELL better stay that way FOREVER. Five minutes before the end is an obvious pullout (unmarked as of 2000). This is the climbers' path to Boston Basin (see next report). In contrast, the Cascade trailhead is signed and proceeds from the parking lot.



Left to Right: (top) parking lot view of Johannesburg, final stretch to Sahale Pass, autumn slopes heading up from pass; (bottom) fall colors and Sahale Pass, looking down Sahale Arm to Mixup, me and Sahale Peak

It's 3.5 miles/2500 feet to the pass, doable usually by mid-July (it can be snowy and avalanche-prone earlier in the season). The trail zigzags through the forest on the north side of a big talus slope (visible from the parking lot) - offering occasional views onto the Triplets and Johannesburg. Half a mile from the top, the way opens abruptly and crosses a talus slope with columbine and thistle. When John and I went in early July 1994, however, we encountered black swarms of biting flies and mosquitoes at this point and to the pass. Fortunately, breezes blew said bugs away up higher. In 1994, John was facially pestered at the pass by this rodent-sized horsefly; in his effort to swat it, he smacked his glasses into the bridge of his nose, leaving a bloody wound that required a neon green bandage. Thereafter, we spoke to a female ranger who was cutting earth and moving stones to repair the trail. Ironically, she was there again in 1995 (doing the same thing) and recognized John as "the big, blond guy with the neon band-aid." Cascade Pass is an open saddle with some campsites (RETROSPECTIVE COMMENT 2016 - these no longer exist!). At the pass, the view east is awe-inspiring: a deep valley flanked by an endless line of granite ramparts. The main trail continues down this valley, winding up in Stehekin (accessible only by foot or boat).



Left to Right: Sahale Arm - flowers and Mixup, rocky views of Triplets and Johannesburg, orienteers near high camp;

In addition to Stehekin, Cascade Pass is also used to access Sahale Arm - the best dayhiking option (13-14 miles/3500 feet to the Sahale Glacier/basecamp). While the views from Cascade Pass are good, the views from Sahale are spectacular and should not be skipped by fit/able individuals. From the pass, the way climbs through a boulder field before traversing up and along the L-shaped arm. Views west over the Cascade River valley are grand. To the north, the earth drops radically to a deep furrow occupied by the circular blue-green Doubtful Lake. The vista of the land plummeting in rivulets of snow or talus gullies on the opposite shores of the lakes is vertigo-inspiring. The highest point above is Sahale Peak, a nipple on the hogback arm as compared with the more soaring surrounding features. The trail turns again to assume a more northerly line and continues to about 1000 feet short of Sahale's summit, terminating at its small glacier. This portion is easy to lose, un-maintained, and involves a lot of boulder-hopping and gravel-clawing. A small city of climbers' tents will be encountered at the toe of the glacier, many surrounded by man-made walls of stone. The ascent of the blocky Sahale pinnacle is a technical climb (glacier and class 4-5 rock). From around 7000 feet, the views west open to include a distant vista of Mt. Baker, as well as the nearer Forbidden, Torment, and Eldorado - which stand guard above the lush greenery and dizzying angles of Boston Basin. To the south, larger peaks of the Ptarmigan traverse (more in a minute) emerge - in particular, the menacingly beautiful Formidable

and Spider Peaks. Indeed, the view to the south and east appear as kaleidoscopic waves of peak after peak after peak: Glacier, Pugh, Sloan, and everything else in between - even, on a really clear day, Rainier. Notably, verified grizzly sightings have been made by rangers in the lower meadows - and we actually saw one from a distance between Boston and Sahale.



Left to Right: Sahale climbers' camp, distant Spider & Formidable over Mixup, Jay/John/me with Sahale Peak and glacier

Cascade Pass is also the northern jump-off point for the legendary Ptarmigan Traverse, a week-long glacier and rock trip south, only for hard-core climbers. A bunch of teenage ex-Boy Scouts pioneered the route following an interesting series of events, as narrated by Lowell Skoog: one of their friends in the troupe was gay and killed himself. The suicide, in turn, brought national attention to troupe's climbing activities - which were deemed dangerous and banned. In protest, his friends left the troupe and, calling themselves the Ptarmigans, dreamed up the never-attempted route. They then went out with hemp ropes, frame packs, nailed boots... and they did it. Amazingly, they ascended every peak en route (all technical) and left a can of scrap paper with their names beneath rocks on each summit (never going public with any of it). Several years later when the "BIG MEN Mountaineers" went out to do it (assuming they were first) - the so-called professionals were aghast to find cans/names on every mountain. The first day of the Ptarmigan goes from Cascade Pass over the massive glacier and notch to the left of Magic (Cache Col). The way only gets worse after that, terminating via Dome Peak and the so-called Downey Creek trail (which Sara and I thrashed to Cub Lake in 1997).



Left to Right: Ellen - slanting toward basin, climbing moraine with Johannesburg, looking back on Boston from Sahale

North Cascades - Boston Basin to Sahale Arm 1990's

As stated in the previous section, Boston Basin is an "unofficial" climbers' route that is not maintained. Go there with that in mind (or don't go there if you want something straightforward). In any case, Boston Basin is a mecca for climbers who seek technical ascents: Torment, Forbidden, Sharkfin Tower, Boston and Sahale all involve glacier and rock climbing. I have done the hike to the basin twice: once as an in/out daytrip and then as a traverse linking Boston with Sahale (and Cascade Pass). The obvious but unmarked trailhead is 5 minutes before the trailhead to Cascade Pass. I suspect that the mostly viewless path - big payoffs only at the absolute end - confuses many unsuspecting dayhikers, sending them back early and frustrated. Indeed, to access the basin, you must assault a rough, muddy, indistinct route with several excessively steep sections (with some scrambling) and grades of 1500-2000 feet/mile. You also have to rock-hop and/or ford several bridgeless, raging creeks. Despite this, I think Boston Basin is a fabulous daytrip. Do NOT try this as an overnight excursion, however, because Forbidden is listed in the "50 Classic Climbs of North America" and so everyone wants to climb it (there are only, like, 3 permits per night all summer long in the basin - and barely enough flat spots to accommodate that). Of course - the good thing is that I have never actually seen another dayhiker in the basin (but I have definitely seen more than 3 parties camping!). Nevertheless, the way is hardly daunting for the first quarter mile. A former road, the wide path initially follows a mild grade, slide alder creeping in from the sides. Things fill in dramatically after the route crosses a rockslide - at which point the way becomes the scramble that defines this hike's notorious reputation. A telling sign: all roots and branches in reaching distance along the chute-like path are smooth - worn down by thousands of rough, dirty hands using them for bracing holds. Admittedly, the first time I did this trip I was a little stunned. Having done it again - after Aasgard Pass - I was less impressed by the difficulty of the route. After the first major scramble, we entered a substantial and long thicket of impenetrable foliage. Fighting the greenery, we agreed if we were - say - dropped from the sky and happened to land a mere 10 feet from the so-called trail that we would not be able to find it. And so you have to be on the path to stay on it. Following another intense scramble, the way re-entered more tame - but still steep - forest. The trail grew exceedingly muddy and overgrown, many deciduous branches at armpit height blocking views of stumbling feet and the rooted, bumpy terrain below. We counted at least 6 bridgeless or poorly-bridged water crossings. We then entered a much drier forest section where, during our first visit, we actually got lost for about 5 minutes. We then reached forested meadow and the trail was very obvious - the emerald green of Boston Basin proper through the trees. Of course, we then hit one of two really BIG rivers that lacked a bridge. Ellen and I were shaky on the partially submerged rocks, the milky brown glacier-fed river whooshing by in a deafening roar. Ski poles definitely helped. At this point, the whole of the western half of basin is obvious: Torment and Forbidden - gray-brown towers

and ramparts jutting above a carpet of spring green. For me, one of the strangest sensations about being in the basin was the sense that the earth was falling away. I found myself perpetually leaning with this strange mix of vertigo and imbalance. The way climbed a little more, heading east to the climbers' camp. On both trips, we watched climbers descending Forbidden - appearing as slow-moving ants down finger-like snow chutes. My favorite view, though, remains Johannesburg across the valley: its hanging glaciers and vertical rock an in-your-face testimony to the soaring quality that distinguishes the North Cascades - many peaks rising from 3000 to 8000 feet over little distance.



Left to Right: entering basin proper, slick-rocking toward Quien Sabe, climbing the BIG moraine toward Boston and Sahale

On our first trip, Ellen and I traipsed up to 7000 feet via granite slabs that reminded us of Utah slickrock. We avoided snow because we were concerned we could wander onto the Quien Sabe glacier whose ice towers and crevasses yawned just above the rock. Our direction was toward the Sharkfin Tower, a major tooth along the rip-saw spine between Boston Peak and Forbidden. With each step, the massiveness of Johannesburg and the Triplets grew in gigantic proportions. As we climbed, too, we were acutely aware of how near we were to Sahale. Consequently, we returned 6 weeks later with that goal, having studied the maps more carefully. For this traverse, we left the climbers' camp, heading up an obvious moraine path and climbing its undulating dragon's back via a knife-like heap of rubble. In retrospect, we should have contoured more along the moraine's southern flank given how much we had to drop later. At the time, though, the lower rocks looked unstable. Regardless, the views from the top of the moraine were fantastic - worth every ascent and descent. Even so, I was surprised that the way wasn't clearer - as it was obvious from both ends (i.e. you could stand on Sahale and see the whole route, vice versa from Boston). But the terrain in between has a wave-like feel - peaks and troughs flowing in 200-foot intervals (i.e. you knew where you were on a map but were often in cleft-like draws and mini-valleys with less local visibility). Ellen and I eventually found ourselves on the highest point of the moraine, looking down VERY steep talus on all sides. We wound up descending into this huge rocky bowl, often on our bottoms or crab-walking on mobile talus (20 solid minutes of careful maneuvering and lots of cussing). At the bottom, we crossed another glacier-fed creek before meandering through a flat boulder field with HUGE white granite chunks and slabs. Many rocks creaked as they tilted beneath our weight. We were uncertain as to how to proceed to Sahale: a higher and more direct route via a steep moraine and snowfields or a less direct, meadow approach lower down (we chose the latter). While descending the previous moraine, we swore we'd seen an obvious trail zigzagging up our target meadow - but, man, when we actually found ourselves at that point - there was nothing and so we clawed up the steep heather and loose dirt slope in a manual, desperate manner. All the while, we assumed we would intersect the Sahale trail at the "top." Alas, though, we climbed through a keyhole at this boulder/meadow interface only to see nothing but virgin meadow rolling toward a higher line of land in the distance. We also saw a large brown bear romping down the meadow and swear to this day it was a grizzly (weeks before, a female grizzly had been confirmed one drainage over - along the Ptarmigan). After 15 minutes of whining and climbing, we crested Sahale at 7200 feet, and sat down for a LONG and overdue lunch. Ellen, who had never seen Sahale, said it reminded her of Switzerland (where she'd recently competed in a world orienteering championship meet). We made a fast descent to the parking lot, then down to the Boston trailhead. En route, we met 2 late-start dudes heading for the Ptarmigan. Upon hearing where we'd come from, they seemed surprised, recounting how hard our trip was for them a few years back. I just shook my head: you think what WE DID was HARD?! Maybe I need to try the Ptarmigan. As for our mileage, I estimate 14-16 miles with 4000-5000 feet gained and lost.



Left to Right: leaving the parking lot, heading through Spider Meadows, looking down on meadows

Glacier Peak Wilderness - Spider Meadows to Upper Lyman Lake September 1998

For this trip, I set out with Niki, a friend I'd worked with in Yellowstone. At the time, Niki was just getting into backpacking. We had originally planned a 5-day loop (Lost Ridge) in the SW corner of Glacier Peak Wilderness. However, major work came up and we had to shorten our outing. Being that I have long lists of trip options, I quickly came up with an alternative that proved amazing, challenging, and satisfying: Spider Meadows to Upper Lyman Lake. Access to this area had been threatened in the mid-1990s over logging and mining holdings. We left Saturday morning and headed to Lake Wenatchee. The long drive up the Chiwawa River Road was pleasant, offering views of several minor peaks. Everything looked promising until we reached the

trailhead: 30-40 cars spilled beyond the parking area, hugging the side of the mountain along the narrow dirt road. Fortunately, a big party was leaving and we snagged their spot near the front. Niki said I looked totally honed as I strapped on my HUGE backpack. In fact, I felt wasted because the thing was so heavy. Initially, I thought it wise to give Niki a break and carry more - but that didn't last long. Our plan was to camp in Upper Spider Meadows and dayhike to Upper Lyman tomorrow. We would then return to camp, pack, and haul out. Given the lateness of the season, I chose NOT to carry an ice axe because Beckey's Guide said there was a well-marked snow-free option (that was, for the record, a BIG mistake). I also didn't want to concern Niki, who did not have one. The hike in was hot, dry, and dusty (6 miles, 1500 feet). The forest was thin, affording some shade and views. There were several levels of meadows/campsites: the lowest sites (completely full) offered the first views up the valley. For some reason, I thought Spider Gap would be obvious but, honestly, I wouldn't have been able to guess where it was because there were so many rocky pockets (in fact, I don't believe the gap IS visible). We climbed beyond the throngs, arriving at what we incorrectly surmised were the final high camps. There were few free spots and we selected 1 that we hoped would provide early sun the next day. Near us was a group of loud Italian women, and farther away: a pair of scary dudes who, against the rules, built a fire. Niki's decision to remind them that burning was not allowed effected threatening behavior in our neighbors that harangued me all night (given that we were 2 women with only a tent-wall between us and the outside). The only reason I got any sleep was because the Italian women were next door and they could beat the shit out of these guys. We briefly explored higher in the immediate cirque - glorious, with more tents dotting the boulder-strewn meadow. We returned to camp and ate vegetable soup and macaroni/cheese. Niki made fun of me as I also consumed an entire package of Canadian bacon. The night was spectacular - surprisingly warm and brilliant with the soft haze of many galaxies.

After an early rise, we climbed immediately, the trail narrowing to a rudimentary footpath. We zigzagged grassy talus, hugged tightly to a massive rock face, and then crossed into a hanging valley 1000 feet above our camp. To our surprise, there was another camp! And the scenery was stunning: subalpine meadow, rock gardens, soft larch turning orange, bare jagged peaks rising majestically - Red Mountain (orange with iron deposits), Maude (the tallest non-volcanic peak in Washington), and Seven-Fingered Jack. Of course, we then encountered a problem: upon locating the Spider Glacier, we found no obvious, snow-free route. After scouting, we decided to ascend the snow. Several sources dispute Spider as being an actual glacier. I agreed with them until crevasses started showing up and then the footing became precarious, owing to exposed ice. Niki, a crazy skier, was far ahead, completely unaware of my concerns. Plugging on, I knew that we could not come down this if conditions were the same later. The narrowing field of crevassed and compact snow/ice was steep in several places and the crumbling rock headwalls on either narrow side spelled injury in the event of an uncontrolled fall/slide. I kicked myself for not having an ice axe - and then I kicked myself for knowingly proceeding upwards anyway. For our ugly exit from the glacier, we clawed up sandy talus, having missed a simple, elegant exit a little further up. Spider Gap was breathtaking in all directions. We also noticed an obvious footpath heading down (to Spider) along the rocks - Beckey's snow-free route - and I felt more comfortable with getting out in one piece. To the north, Lyman Basin and several huge peaks, the largest of which was glacier-clad Dome. Even more spectacular: the Lyman glacier spilling into Upper Lyman Lake.



Left to Right: (top) to/on glacier/gap, short-lived trail from gap; (bottom) gap view of Dome, descent, glacier, Upper Lyman

Of course, my confidence was short-lived. To the north were 2 problematic things: another snowfield, much of which was still in shade and/or littered with rocks (it sloped so abruptly that you couldn't see how it transitioned to land); and an obvious trail that contoured high along the rocky cirque. The latter seemed consistent with another Beckey statement and so we followed it. After 10 minutes, said trail vanished in super-steep rock. Although we attempted to blaze our own scrambling route, our legs were quivering too much and we backed off and returned to the gap. MANY people were traveling via the snowfield - all using ice axes. We discussed the route with one pair who assured us it was easy. And so, against my better judgment (but not my desire), we headed down. Niki bombed the route while I tiptoed delicately... or five-pointed on my ass when things were too slick or steep. I had to talk myself down through several short sections. But I made it - and then danced across the boulders, Niki now behind me. I can't say there was an obvious trail, as other folks above insisted - but the terrain was simple and I felt completely confident I could climb back up the route. Watching the time carefully (we had agreed on a 1 p.m. turnaround), we

decided that the Upper Lyman Lake shore was our goal. Much as the lower lakes and meadows were calling us, we knew better than to push our luck today. We sat on huge sunny stones by the lake, eating lunch and relaxing for an hour. The best thing about this lunar and wild place: the blue Lyman Glacier that calves directly into the lake, forming a 100-foot wall of ice at the head of the lake... not to mention icebergs in the opaque water. Indeed, I enjoyed delightful and magical memories of Patagonia. In the distance, too: Cloudy Pass - someplace that looked utterly wild and captivating. Given the season, Cloudy was hued in gold and olive green, with visible spots of red and maroon.



Left to Right: climbing the gap, that's GNEISS, GNEISS rambling, primitive but ebullient selfie, Seven-Fingered Jack

The climb up the snowfield was simple by comparison with the descent. Our rocky, high route above the glacier was incredible at first - easy with mind-boggling alpine terrain and HUGE scenery all around. But then things got sketchy, the trail eventually vanishing completely. We came to what, at first inspection, was an un-passably steep edge that dropped precipitously to the upper camps (in view but still far away and down). But then we noticed there were a few scratches in the grass and rock-piles that looked man-made - but still looking unreasonably steep. After backtracking and scouting, we eventually decided to carefully maneuver down the ugly beast. Well, obviously we made it. But it was WAY UGLY. We enjoyed a snack at the upper camps, having arrived there around 3 p.m. Soaking in the views, it was difficult to head down to our modest basecamp. There, we packed up quickly and made it back to the car in 2 hours. En route, we passed innumerable hunters (we were leaving the day before the high hunting season began). Our drive back seemed to take forever but we arrived home by 11 p.m. even with an annoying dinner stop in Monroe. Niki loved the trip because it truly gave her a sense of trailblazing in the backcountry - not to mention giving her views into a region of the Cascades that was entirely new. Seeing a "live" glacier, of course, was icing on the cake. I have to agree that, for a 2-day excursion, this trip satisfied all my desires... including that one I don't like to admit to: taking a risk. While stupid by all technical accounts, I admit that I did relish the glacier and the snowfield - even on my ass. A year later, Niki and I would complete a likewise-fabulous trip to Cloudy Pass, by way of Image Lake and Suiattle Pass. From Cloudy, the views onto Spider Gap and the Lyman Basin were awe-inspiring - both for their beauty but also for their illustration of the hairy little route I still can't believe I endured and, at times, enjoyed. And you can see them if you continue...



Left to Right: campsite at Image with Glacier, hiking to Suiattle Pass, looking at Spider/Lyman from Cloudy Pass

Glacier Peak Wilderness - Image Lake and Cloudy Pass September 1999

Well, the first thing I want to get out of my system: the way out from Image Lake has WAY too many fucking uphill sections. Hiking in, of course, you will perceive you are going uphill all the way - and you will think, "Damn this is going to be great going out." And then you will go out. Particularly if you do something stupid like try to hike the whole 16 miles/4500 feet in 1 day, you too will utter swearwords every time you round another bend and see MORE trail. You too will swear that once you hit the parking lot, you will kiss the ground. However, once you finally get there, you will realize that if you lower to the ground (with your pack on), you may not be able to get up. Alright - the honest truth: it was worth every step. As with Spider/Lyman, Niki and I had originally hoped to complete 5-day Lost Ridge. Alas, that area - like most places this year - was WAY under snow (yes - even in September). To my surprise (after several phone calls), Image Lake was not. Image had been on my to-do list but I'd skipped it repeatedly, hoping to incorporate it into an around-Glacier trip. Our itinerary setting out: hike either 9 or 13 miles to camp (day 1), climb to Image and set up camp (day 2), dayhike to Cloudy Pass (day 3), climb Plummer mountain, a guidebook-described easy peak for experienced scramblers (day 4), and hike ALL the way out (day 5). My big hope for the trip (unfortunately unfulfilled) was to have an unobstructed view onto major Ptarmigan Traverse peaks; other aspects of the trip, however, vastly exceeded my expectations. We set out on September 11, leaving Tacoma 6:45 a.m. After just living through the all-male Yellowstone trip (still pumped up on testosterone, which likely explains my still-foul mouth), the notion of spending 5 days in the woods with quiet Niki was, like, such a contrast. Of course, a Honda Civic full of guys pulled up just as we were hauling on our huge packs - infusing our competitive machismo. The friendly group of 3 or 4 (Niki and I were both too distracted by obligatory-longhaired-blond-guy to accurately remember) said they, too, were heading to Image (as they dumped all new equipment onto the ground). Smiling, we headed off - signing the trail register and joking about writing in the intentions section: to whip the guys' asses behind us. Many jokes were spent on OLBG et al. throughout the trip - mostly because the

guys never showed up. We lunched after 2-3 hours of walking along one of many, many, many draws (the trail seemed a perpetual series of S-curves - each one entering a gully or draw). We surmised, based on the map, we'd come 4-5 miles at that point. As usual, Niki made fun of my food: sour gummi worms, pepperoni, and a can of Durkee French fried onions (Yellowstone testosterone poisoning, I'm telling you). Initially, Niki didn't want to go beyond the 9-mile camp but we had this pact that if we got there by 3 p.m., we'd continue to the 13-mile camp. We arrived at the former at 3:05 and Niki didn't even blink. With 1500 more vertical feet, I assumed we'd arrive in camp by 5 p.m. Initial progress seemed fast but then this couple heading down indicated otherwise. Much swearing and moaning was had until we hit the empty camp at 5:30 (13 miles, 3000 feet - pretty bitchin' for the babes). Given that the couple also said they'd seen a bear (in reality - higher up in the meadows), Niki grew worried. Having just lived through my first backpacking trip in grizzly country, though, I was remarkably fearless. What I did fear at camp: the lack of water. A quarter-mile hike was necessary to fetch water - and so, sufficed to say, MORE swearing and moaning. The dark camp was a giant shelf (1 giant cleared site for 2-3 tents) cut into an exceedingly steep hillside. Thus, when talkative Jerry and Don arrived - daylight diminishing fast - we had to move our tent over to make room. Niki and I enjoyed a fine meal of potato leek soup and pasta (both excellent with fried onions!) - and then shortbread cookies. Meanwhile, Jerry and Don ate instant camp lasagna and seemed to covet my battered onions (like I said: testosterone - or testosterONION!). Our night was surprisingly warm - in contrast with what Jerry and Don said had been a cold previous night at Image Lake. My final lingering complaint about the site was the damn pit toilet: down this wildly steep path, its seat was so roughly hewn that it left gouges in your ass after you sat there contemplating all those bloody trees blocking out the light.



Left to Right: first big views of Glacier Peak, Miners Ridge heading to Image, checking that map!

In contrast with Jerry and Don, Niki and I slept until 10 a.m. the next day because we were only 2 hours from Image. Thanks to a lot of shade, good breezes, awe-inspiring scenery, and a mild scare with the a sun-bleached black bear right off the trail, we made it to Miners Ridge by noon. Dumping our packs at the first major junction, we proceeded left to a tall creosote-laden fire tower lookout 5 minutes away. Used to outgoing tower-tenders, I assumed this older couple would invite us in and give us a standard and longwinded spiel. But it took a full-blown knock on the door to rouse these folks and - even then - they did not seem to want anything to do with the public. Their last day was 2 days away - and so I suspect that they, like us by the end of this hike, were in an exhaustedly anti-social mood. We asked about short hikes for this afternoon, as well as the route up Plummer. After suggesting an obvious knoll above Image Lake, they explained that there was a partial trail to Plummer from near the Lady's (Horse) camp but then the route vanished, becoming super-steep. We then asked about Ptarmigan but they said that the views from the knoll were as good as they got. Indeed, even here, we could tell that the northern ridge and cirque - in which was set Canyon Lake - was formidable. Of course, I should have figured this out by looking at the maps more carefully. Incidentally, Canyon was not recommended because the trail thereto drops fast into the trees (i.e. no alpine views). We returned to our packs, reluctantly securing them over bruised shoulders and hips. The right fork at the junction headed to Image Lake (3/4 mile away, according to the sign - total bullshit!). The 40-minute walk took plenty of ups and downs - finally dropping into the fascinating bowl. In general, Miners Ridge is WAY steeper than I had pictured. That a lake could even exist there is stunning. The camps are south of the lake - in this rolling meadow studded with stands of fir. Fortunately, there were kick-ass views of Glacier from every angle. And we picked the most decadent site, easy given that we were the only ones there. As planned, we stayed 2 nights - the first alone and the second with this lone photographer who confessed he was glad there was someone nearby because of bears. We'd originally hoped to take a nap but, thanks to 70° heat and major bugs, the only feasible way to do so was in the tent with the netting all closed (i.e. it was a sauna).



Left to Right: bra-less on peak 6506, Ptarmigan-blocking cirque (Canyon Lake below), Dome Peak, Peak 6506

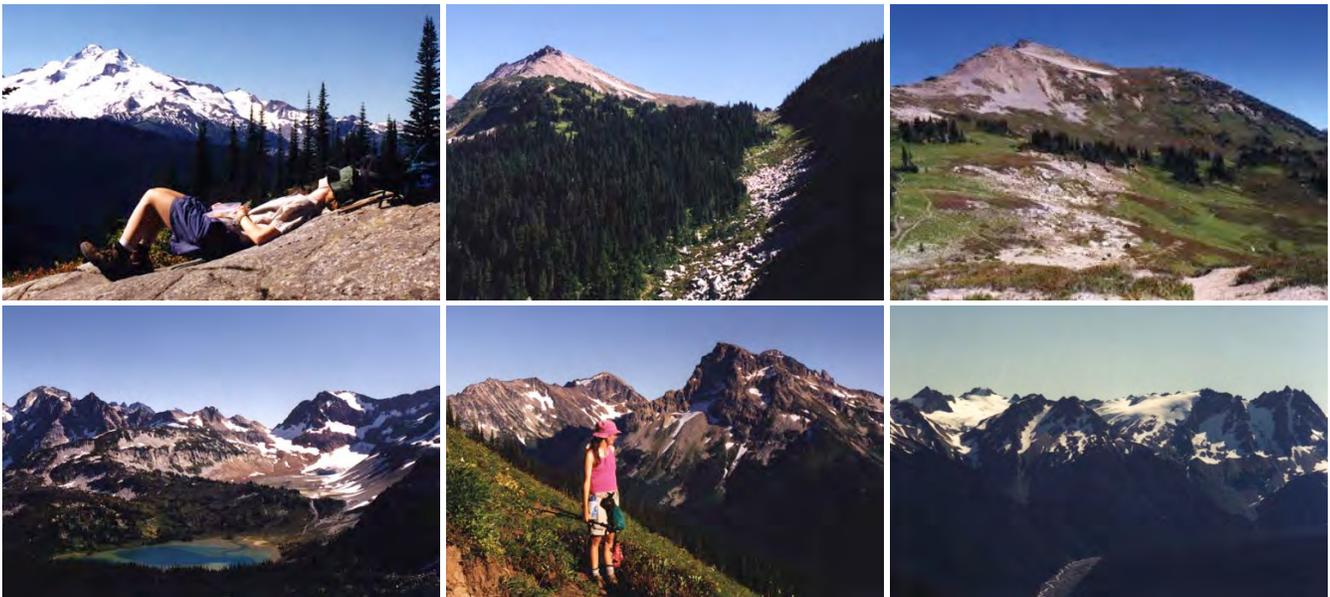
Around 3, we headed out, intent on climbing the highest knoll east of Image Lake - which we called "peak 6506" because that was its elevation (and the only map notation). To reach this point, we headed along the Miners Ridge trail towards the Lady Camp and, just where said trail first crested, turned left on this unmarked path. Eventually, we came to another branch and took the signed fork to Canyon Lake. The spectacular route cut high above Image Lake and then came to a saddle. Here, the real trail then continued down over the other side (to Canyon) but an unmarked trail headed up towards peak 6506 - RIGHT on

the knife edge of the scenic ridge: Dome grew bigger and bigger to the north, the whole of the Image cirque massive below, and - all the while - Glacier beamed miraculously to the south. The edgy route improved at the end - with a gentle open field of grass leading to the impressive summit. Niki, however, was far too comfortable with the one drop-off side of the summit. Looking across the valley, though, it was clear to both of us that Plummer was WAY out of our league. The other thing in view on the summit was this used condom; clearly someone knows where to fuck - they just have no clue how to dispose of their contraceptive devices. After sitting and laughing about any number of inspired topics (some of which I don't even have the gall to repeat), we headed down. From the summit, an obvious boot-beaten trail took a direct line down to the "pass" above Lady Camp. However, said route vanished 100 feet from the junction with the Miners Ridge trail - making it impossible to see from that main trail. Nonetheless, we had a great time with our accidental high-route loop around Image Lake. We hoped OLBG and company would be busily setting up their tents when we arrived - no such luck. And so we sat eating ramen and batting flies. That night would be blazing hot - July heat wave hot. I had the sleeping bag open, wearing only a thin tank top and shorts. In the morning (maybe 5 a.m.), we were awakened by large animal sounds and opened the tent to a four-point buck stamping the ground alongside several females... Glacier Peak glowing subtle morning hues in the background.



Left to Right: evening shots of Glacier/Image, morning sky/light

Our executed plan the next day was to cross Suiattle and Cloudy passes, ultimately looking over Lyman Basin and Spider Gap. We followed the STUNNING steep, meadow trail to avalanche-demolished Lady Camp - dark snow clawing at collapsed forest near many campsites. Lady Camp is the only stock camp (there is an elaborate horse-only bypass trail around Image to Lady). Our route then dropped via many switchbacks, eventually meeting the lower Suiattle trail - which contoured through woods for 2 miles, until another junction and camp. Here, a barely-intact cabin stood with a rusty barstool out front. Given ample horseshit, we joked about taking pictures of both stools in the same shot. We then started climbing towards Suiattle. Despite poor ratings from Jerry, Don, and several guidebooks, I thought Suiattle was great. After passing another camp, we took a short nap on a big rock with magnificent views of Fortress Mountain. At Suiattle, we had to choose between a shorter hiking trail with no elevation loss, or a horse path that dropped 400 feet before climbing to Cloudy. On the way up, we chose the former: a skinny way-trail, sloping in all directions, muddy, edgy, rocky, and partly under snow. Not surprisingly, we took the horse trail back. After joining the Pacific Crest Trail, we climbed 400-500 more feet to the pass. I was surprised how wooded the north side of the pass was given that the south side was virtually bare. Glacier was, notably, still visible.



Left to Right: (top) Suiattle, to/at Cloudy Pass; (bottom) view to Lyman/Spider, looking back at Fortress, Tenpeak/Clark

Cloudy Pass was stunning. The remoteness of the area and the fact that you can see so many impressive peaks (e.g. Dome, Sinister, Gunsight, Chiwawa) - and their connection - was awesome. Equally impressive: Lyman Lakes/Glacier, all below the pass in this HUGE cirque of meadows. Looking at Spider Gap did give me hives. I couldn't believe I'd tackled that the year before. After a long rest - slapping flying vermin - we headed back to Image. The horse trail option down Cloudy, although nice and easy, was long and tedious. I'd probably choose to 5-point my ass down the other thing than repeat this meandering

descent. I was impressed how much the views changed as we came back: Suiattle/Cloudy are so set behind Fortress that you lose sight of Tenpeak and Clark (east of Glacier). I realized, after studying the maps, how massive Clark truly is - and the fact that there are literally no trails on these peaks. Things like the legendary Napeequa Valley trail are as close as you get. Upon returning, we spied a tent and, once again, hoped OLBG and company had arrived. Nope - just this old photographer. We gave him bug-spray and pepperoni and he seemed overjoyed, wanting to pay us back with candy (we had plenty of that). That night, we ate corn chowder and cous cous with sun-dried tomatoes before heading back to the lake to take classic pictures of Glacier reflected in Image (the main reason why people haul their asses up this trail).

The next morning, we got a slow start because - at the time - we were planning to just hike to 6-mile camp. Plus, we took our time to wish the mountains goodbye, knowing we'd likely not suffer up that trail again. We descended to 9-mile camp in 2 hours, Niki suffering blisters and me shin splints. While lunching, we met a lone male backpacker who claimed to have gotten a late start yesterday (and camped somewhere en route). He said he hoped to get to Image today, spend 1 night, and then hike all the way out because he had "an appointment with his therapist." I told him to cancel his appointment because an extra day up here would be worth more of his while. He didn't get that (no surprise there). Judging by his new pack, Niki and I surmised he was recently relocated to Seattle - likely post-divorce. Next, this scary, armed woman leading a pack of horses and 3 guys was rude to us. I relished when "therapy man" encountered the "huntress." Finally, we met 2 nice guys: a retired ex-ranger doing a 35-mile loop that included Miners Ridge, and sweetie-ranger Scott, who looked like Parker Stevenson (the other Hardy Boy) and was replacing the fire tower curmudgeons. When we met Scott, it was 3:30 and he asked: "so, you haulin' out in a day?" At the time, we probably giggled. But when we arrived at 6-mile camp shortly thereafter, we went: "hot meal, shower, bed. We are SO outta here." Of course, that's when things became unending. I misjudged a few distances and, with the light fading, it was getting clammy and cool. At some point, too, Niki took a bad fall. Even though we had calculated that it would be 7 before we got out, we wanted to believe otherwise. Well, it was 7:30 - given ranting, falling, bitching, and moaning. We dashed to the silty Suiattle and scrubbed down, changing clothes in the muddy horse camp nearby. And then we made our way home, dreaming of big food. For the record, though, Darrington sucks (I've never had anything pleasant happen in that town). There is nothing until you hit I-5 - and even there you choose between Denny's or a Denny's clone. Needless to say, I don't remember much of the ride home except that we got back around 11:30 p.m. and my mother got all fruity with concern over why I brutalize myself. But I felt MUCH better the next day. What a totally awesome summer it's been!



Left to Right: Dome Peak from Sulfur, me variously on Dickerman, Joel on Dickerman - Glacier in background

Glacier Peak Wilderness - Favorite Glacier Dayhikes

Sulfur Mountain (9 miles, 4000 feet) - I did this memorable trip twice (with Sara in June 1997 and with Randy a month later). In contrast with guidebook assertions, the trail is in good shape (at least, given snow, the part we actually saw). This hike begins from the same trailhead as Image. Branching left shortly after leaving the parking lot, the Sulfur trail meanders a little as it commits to a relentless but well-graded series of switchbacks through dry forest. Snacking around 4000 feet, Sara and I thought we could see Glacier Peak through the trees. Within 30 minutes, we came to 5000 feet and the way flattened, still in forest. Unfortunately, the permanent snow began and we had to dig out the map. Indeed, the rest of the climb was one of the few times I've truly orienteered to the bitter end (frankly, we should have brought wands as the snow was hard and we could not leave reliable footprints). Nobody else had been here and we were alone. We took to poking swags and sticks in the snow, leaving a faint trail of debris. We headed in SE direction, sidehilling upwards. There were no signs of the way opening up for another 500 vertical feet - a long time in terms of horizontal distance. At several points, we ran into steep drifts and had to work our way over or around them (or backtrack and choose another route). Nevertheless, I do recall the specific moment we saw the light at the end of the tunnel: we entered this straightaway that looked like a trail (a clearing in the subalpine forest, marching up a gentle slope toward blue skies). Unfortunately, once at the "top," there was a giant knoll in the way. Kicking steps up this thing, we found ourselves on this meadow ridgeline - most melted out and aglow with emerald grasses and gem-like wildflowers. We found our lunch spot, an outcropping of rocks - and sat down for strawberries, cheese, and bread. From our vantage, we had striking views: Glacier, Dome, Baker, and many other North Cascade peaks. We enjoyed a nap before heading down. A month later, I returned with Randy - which requires a funny introduction (even though I have no pictures from our socked in trip). A former climbing instructor (from 1994), DDG Randy stumbled into me a week Sara and my trip up Sulfur. I was shocked that he recognized me first in front of the UW athletics center. Back in 1994, Randy enjoyed teasing me about why I stayed with John given that I clearly preferred to hang with him and his housemates after our weekend climbing trips together. My explanation at the time: "because I don't want to go back home until after John finishes watching his two favorite shows: COPS and Star Trek." "Whoa, whoa, whoa... (I can still see Randy saying this) You are with a man who watches COPS? Sarah, this is a serious problem. What is your number?" By this point, Randy had the phone and was dialing (bear in mind, John has no idea who this guy is). All I hear: "Hello - is this John? (pause) Are you watching COPS? (pause) Really - why? (pause) No, I don't think you know me. (pause) Yes, she's right here." Of course, John knew I had a thing for Randy; he described my post-trip behavior as akin to the cat who swallowed the canary (even though I never did anything other than flirt and dangle from ropes). Randy had that same teasing quality about him when he recognized me in

1997 - this time with James, who definitely did not look like he watched COPS (but begged a dozen different questions). "Sarah," Randy beamed, "I'm still at the old place. Give me a call so we can go out for beers - it looks like we need to talk." So we did and then wound up on Sulfur, sharing parallel tales of love and loss. Despite our punctuated meetings, I never miss Randy - but I cherish the moments I've had with him like gold. And Randy - if you are listening: I hope you're still gainfully employed and not involved in any teamster-backed lawsuits over planting tulips in the boss' infield.

Mt. Dickerman (8.5 miles, 3800 feet) - I did this hike as a snowbound climb twice in May 1997 (with John and then Joel) - both times using ice axes and snowshoes. The Mountain Loop Highway trailhead parking area is small, in contrast with the extreme popularity of the hike/climb. The trail climbed immediately, reminding me in every way of Mt. Si. Despite snow along the road/parking lot (at 2000 feet), the trail was mostly snowfree to 3500 feet (the final summit is just over 5700 feet) at which point we began some mildly hairy contouring on steep snow through the woods. Indeed, I was glad I had an ice axe as the overall slope was at least 30° and the snow was icy in places. Near where we finally broke out of the forest, we crossed snow slopes over several even steeper gullies with streams (you could hear how thin the snow-bridges were). The edgy footpath in the snow seemed so precarious to me that I almost turned around. But I didn't because it was clear that we were almost out of the woods. The final 1500 feet through rolling snow to the breathtaking (though dangerously corniced) summit was AMAZING! I was never sure, though, if we were on the real trail. In John and my case, we were following others' tracks (although I felt confident at the time that we could have pieced our way up there with just our map). In Joel and my case, we were pretty lost between the end of the forest and the final summit because there were no clear tracks. In either case, the summit was STUNNING: Baker, Shuksan, Glacier, Rainier, Olympics, and all the surrounding Cascade peaks. And the glissade down was totally cool, totally cool (although I had a sorry bum!). This is not a climb for everyone in early season; you need confidence, route-finding abilities, and ice axes. I should add, too, that it's not a climb for solitude-seekers. We shared the summit ridge with at least 20 others, passing a dozen more climbers ascending as we slid down the mountain.



Left to Right: approaching Green Mountain summit, looking down valley from summit, Ellen on summit - Glacier in background

Green Mountain (8 miles, 3500 feet) - Had friends not SO highly recommended Green, I would have likely bypassed it given unassuming description and pictures in the guidebooks. What makes it amazing: its inspiring view of Glacier, its centrality to many Cascades peaks, and its bountiful meadows (all accessed via an easy trail). Unfortunately, the views pale by comparison to Sulfur and Image/Miners. From somewhere along the Suiattle River Road, the trail ascends through thin forest for under a mile and then breaks out into dense meadows. When John/Ellen/I went, it was early July and so lush that you could hardly walk through the brush- and flower-lined trail. The trail makes a series of long gentle switchbacks up this slope, contouring farther east until finally rounding a corner of sorts. Glacier bursts forth at this point - soaring up the valley just a ways. Early in the season is nice because the peak is still visibly white. After meandering, the trail enters a middle basin where it goes through some bumpy terrain, by some lake-lets, and through some stands of trees. This was particularly buggy when we went through - with many patches of snow lingering. It is somewhat unclear where you are ultimately heading because you cannot even see the summit of Green Mountain at this point. Eventually, you start heading more or less north. A green grassy hillside will be in your face and the switchbacks will cut up this thing. Glacier will come out again somewhere in there. At the top of this crest, the trail will walk an edgy spine to the true summit. This is a breathtaking skywalk - with emerald meadows, rock, and snow giving way to the amazing Downey Creek valley to the northeast. Most of the peaks of the Ptarmigan traverse are laid out in distant procession up this valley. Dome Peak and Buckindy are the largest and most distinct. The summit proper had a nearly demolished fire watchtower that didn't look safe for entry. A careful survey showed Mt. Baker and many other snowy distant peaks. The combination of falling away views and the thin trail gave me full-on vertigo and I was so flipped on the narrow summit of Green that I had to leave within five minutes.

Backpacking the Enchantments - Frozen Asses and Flaming Larches October 1995

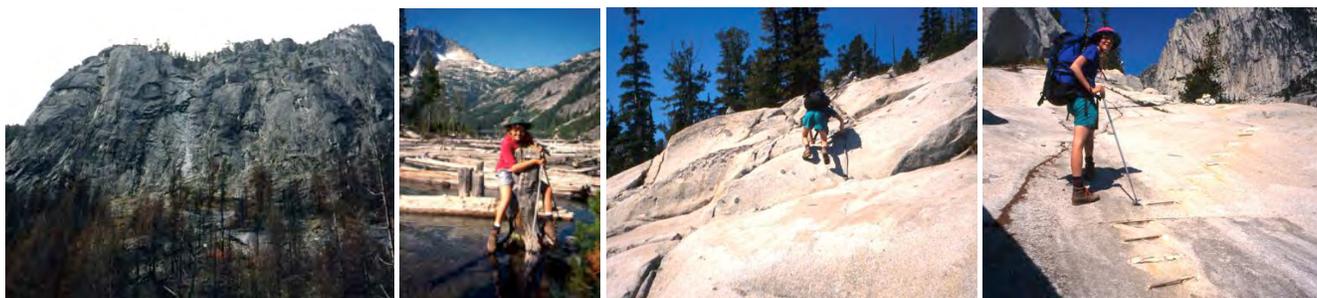
Ellen & I did a similar 1996 summer backpack, making it farther/higher on day 2; some pictures (not orange) are from that trip. Washington's famously granite Enchantments technically lie in Washington's Stuart Range (although Mt. Stuart, the highest peak in said range, is not visible from the Enchantments proper). This trip represents my first journey into the Enchantments, a series of high alpine lakes and tarns (6500-7500 feet) set in a basin of rolling white granite, all beneath modestly higher peaks. The Enchantments are accessed by Icicle Creek Road - which originates in the Bavarian-style tourist trap known as Leavenworth (2-3 hours drive from Seattle). The Enchantments are snowbound most of the year, with only a narrow window of access: mid/late-August through early October. Both routes into this basin (less difficult Snow Creek and scrambling up Aasgard Pass from Lake Colchuck) are extremely strenuous, with or without the complication of snow. Do not be fooled by people telling you Snow Lake is the "easy" way in. It is only less difficult relative to Colchuck/Aasgard, an unofficial climbing route that ascends 2200 feet in 3/4 mile on talus (next report). For years, I was mesmerized with the Enchantments - all that granite. Since visiting the Wind Rivers and the Sierras, the Enchantments seem small and less substantial... not to mention: overcrowded, abused, and frustrating to access. Of course, all of these things explain (or are explained by) the extreme permit system required from June 15 through October 15 (rangers do patrol frequently). Permits reserved in advance cost

money (nonrefundable). While about 75% of the nightly spots are given out in advance, there are a few available on the day of entry (rangers put names into a hat and draw for spots at 7 a.m.). The rangers' comment to me about this approach: "some days there are 100 people on the porch and others just 1." Having unsuccessfully tried the lottery in 1996, all I can say is GOOD LUCK - you will be DAMN lucky to get a permit. Under the jurisdiction of the Leavenworth Ranger Station, the Enchantments are part of the Alpine Lakes Wilderness, an expanse that includes the Cascades between Snoqualmie and Stevens Passes. Frankly, I have done little here because all trails are MOBBED. In 1987, the Enchantments closed access to stock and dogs, and limited overnight access to 100 PEOPLE (NOT parties). In September 1994, massive fires threatened the region, destroying the bridge over Icicle Creek along the Snow Creek trail. This closure dispossessed 6 weeks of pre-paid permit holders, bumping many to 1995 - important because it impacted my first visit.



Left to Right: heading to Perfection, donning all the gear, Perfection Lake and Little Annapurna

When I called about a permit in February 1995, there were 2 spots for the entire upcoming season. Nevertheless, we got Sept. 26-29, exciting because fall brings out the flaming orange larches. Of course, September 26 was raining hard, snowing above 5000 feet, and the Icicle Creek bridge was still out. We bailed, lost our money, and put away our backpacking gear for the season (or so we thought!). Three weeks later (AFTER the permit season ended - the bridge finally repaired), I happened upon a good weather forecast for the weekend - and a local chatgroup inquiry suggested that the Enchantments were only dusted with snow (i.e. doable). John and I headed out at 9 a.m. on October 21, prepared to freeze our asses off - our plan to hike 7 miles to Snow Lake (5500 feet) and establish basecamp. The next day, we would dayhike up to the Enchantments proper, return to camp that night, and hike out the third day. Snow conditions would determine how far we'd dayhike in the Enchantments. Despite snow falling at Stevens Pass, the roads were only wet and we arrived at Icicle Creek. After crossing the freshly-hewn-timber bridge, we ascended a steep quarter mile on a wide, ripped up trail that seemed more like a bad road. We then climbed long, gentle switchbacks that zigzagged up an open hillside - the parking lot in view below. Massive Snow Creek Wall was visible too - as were many smaller granite faces with bouldering climbers. Eventually, a burned forest was entered, and we walked along Snow Creek toward the namesake wall. The trail entered a gap, traveling in a narrow valley for a few miles. Views up to and across toward the Snow Creek Wall were surprisingly open. At first, John mistook the size of the wall (as being a rope-length high) until I pointed out a climber - a miniscule object relative to the huge and complex face (500-800 tall feet in many places). Beyond this point, the fires had not penetrated - and the forest was green and dark. A surprising number and variety of mushrooms were thriving, despite freezing air. The way then climbed alongside a granite headwall via short switchbacks - the views up and down the valley surprisingly good. Although many people begrudge this "long" way into the Enchantments as a toilsome, viewless enterprise, I really liked the hike in - both the views and the relative ease compared with my expectations. Having endured plenty of WAY longer approaches (e.g. anything in the Olympics), Snow Creek was no big deal. After a steep section and a bit of woods, we reached Nada Lake, a skinny body of water at 4500 feet. Here, we passed the second cluster of campsites on this route (the first had been near Snow Creek Wall).



Left to Right: burn, Snow Creek Wall, Ellen/Snow Lake/McClellan and tomorrow's route, me scrambling said route

From Nada, the trail climbed gradually along the lake, ascended another headwall of boulder fields, and zigzagged through forest before breaking out into the Snow Lake basin. Marshy lower Snow Lake, with many campsites, is separated from the upper portion of the lake by a 10-foot high concrete barrier over which the trail goes. Apparently, this structure was built in the 1930's and serves in some fish hatchery function. The shoreline of the upper lake fluctuates and, on this trip, appeared as a flaky white zone 10 feet lower than usual. We continued until we found a poorly marked campsite near the south end of the lake. Even so, our camp was splendid and we put the tent in the trees, just back from the shore given that we wanted to avoid icy winds off the appropriately-named lake. Seated on this old, bleached-white log, we cooked with a commanding view of the lake and several impressive peaks above - most prominently: snow-dusted McClellan and Temple. Between said peaks lay a broad gap that appeared forested near its base and soaring granite above - THAT would encompass the bulk of our climb for tomorrow. In the mean time, we had to contend with a wicked temperature drop. When we arrived at camp, it was 5 and the sun had long vanished behind McClellan. A fierce cold wind ripped down from the southwest, dying only when night fell. We

were expecting temperatures in the 30's and were shocked when, at 5:30, it had dropped to 20°. Thus, we put on everything - sweaters, fleece, raingear, medium-weight longjohns - and began to boil 6 cups of water. On our last outing 6 weeks before, the stove sputtered a lot and John thought he'd cleaned it. But there at Snow Lake, John expressed repeated concern that the stove was not working right again. Unfortunately, we ignored our own observations, distracted by the cold and the views. One HOUR later, we had boiling water. We made and consumed instant chicken noodle soup as we boiled spaghetti, reserving some water for the sauce (that featured half a stick of butter). Given all the wasted energy, we used the opaque spaghetti water for hot cocoa. It actually wasn't bad relative to the starchy spaghetti and overly buttery sauce. Not one of our culinary highpoints. We retired at 8 p.m., the stars flickering against a moonless sky. Temperatures dropped to 10° in the tent but the sleeping bags were comfortable, provided we wore all our fleece. We slept well, waking just before 9 a.m. The morning didn't seem as bracing because John fully cleaned the stove (again) and had boiling water in 10 minutes flat. We hit the trail by 9:30, the sun partly illuminating Snow Lake. The ground was frozen in many places, 2 inches of hoar frost crunching beneath our feet - ponds and creeks covered with rime ice. For 20 minutes, we hiked the remaining perimeter of the lake. The ice-covered log bridge over Snow Lake's incurrent creek was cracked in half. Having been deceived by a few guidebooks, I assumed the "easy" way in was going to involve a good, wide path all the way up. In fact, the mile-long ascent to the lower Enchantments was one of the harder routes I've done - many sections involving class 2 scrambling and route-finding - on this trip made more difficult by minefields of ice. The way is marked by intermittent cairns ranging in size from 2-20 rocks (the former were missable). As predicted, most of the lower section was in woods: a boot-beaten track zigzagging along a large whitewater creek. Things opened gradually and the trail, concomitantly, began climbing on more severe granite. There were several interesting spots where someone (hopefully officially) had unnecessarily slapped concrete blob steps and/or metal footholds on the rock. Anyone who hasn't done some friction climbing (e.g. playing on Utah sandstone) and/or off-trail scrambling may be taken aback by some of these HUGE rock sections - all at various angles with decent exposure. John and I lost the trail at several points, spending some time backtracking and/or looking for missed cairns. Eventually, what appeared to be the top was reached: the first real view into the lower Enchantments, over Lake Viviane, up to Temple and Prusik. At Viviane, an interesting log crossing was met (thoroughly iced when we did it) and then the most impossible-looking traverse must be dealt with: across this granite ridge flanking the lake. First, it traversed on the outer edge (big exposure and lots of friction-based scrambling) and then it switched to the Lake Viviane-facing side. On our trip, the Viviane Lake side was in the shade and frighteningly icy - so much so that I almost called it quits. Were it not for the trees to hold onto, I would have gone back. The route settled down after Viviane, descending gently to silvery Leprechaun Lake. The rest of the lower basin lakes lay in shallow bowls between granite knolls. Leprechaun had an inch of surface ice, which we broke to pump water. The moment we stopped, we had to don all our gear (indeed, drinking icy water didn't help). The air temperature was 15°. Views here were remarkable: soaring granite walls, jumbled boulders, whale-sized stones, sidewalk-like stretches of solid white rock, Zen-like rock gardens scattered with flaming orange larch. Indeed, the deciduous larch occupied random niches throughout the basin and provided a striking contrast to the white stone and stark blue sky. Pocketed between the stones were patches of sculpted ice and crystalline snowdrifts.



Left to Right: (top) McClellan & Leprechaun Lake, October Prusik from trail, time to turn around; (bottom) Ellen & I at Gnome (off-trail) and Prusik/Pass, view back of McClellan, Little Annapuna From Perfection

The whole of the basin cannot be seen from any one point along the trail. Flowing creeks snake through the granite, connecting most lakes. The way through the lower basin, like the way up from Snow Lake, was marked by variably visible cairns. Although technically easier to walk, it was easy to lose. In general, the lower basin did appear pristine, suggesting regulations are working. However, I was unable to find signed campsites - which seemed bad (i.e. encouraging people to free-for-all their tent placement) given all the other rules. The one party we saw camped here did so ON the trail by Viviane. It was also unclear what to do with food given the lack of obvious bear wires or trees. Given that we saw no wildlife or warnings, I am unable to comment on the need to hang food. From Leprechaun, we proceeded up through the lower basin, passing about 5 bodies of water. Snowbound Little Annapurna, a sloping peak that resembles a frozen wave, emerged and grew south to the southwest. We stopped at the north end of Perfection Lake, near where a dead-end side-trail heads up to famously

photographed Prusik Pass and Gnome Tarn (someplace Ellen and I successfully visited during our backpack in 1996). This flat meadow was grassy and snow-free, with gnarled, bonsai-like larch dotting the terrain and the needle-like spire summit of Prusik Peak poking over the ridgeline behind us. Although the main trail continued higher (all the way to Aasgard Pass, 7800 feet), we knew better than to climb beyond Perfection in October. Our return was non-monumental. The air temperature never got above 25° and ice remained in every nook and cranny on the descent. The sky whitened and it was clear that a weather system was moving in. When we arrived at camp, it was 3:30 p.m. Sweaty and cold, we made a quick decision to hike out, given that we were uninterested in putting up with a snowstorm. In an astonishingly concerted effort, we packed in 20 minutes and hiked out 9 miles in 2.5 hours, the last by headlamp. As we passed the Snow Creek Wall (around 6 p.m.), we heard all this commotion and watched several headlamps shooting down the rock. At the trailhead, 2 climbers were reporting an emergency. But we spent a quiet night in Leavenworth, dining on Bratwurst and sauerkraut in an effort to replace all the lost calories. For several days thereafter, we experienced shivering spells and unusual muscle aches (presumably from not stretching well enough or warming up). For me, this trip represented one of the most awesome things I've seen in a while.



Left to Right: Colchuck & Dragontail, reflection, Aasgard from Colchuck, low on Aasgard

Aasgard (Guard Your Ass) & Enchantments Traverse in One Day - Determined to Be Tasteless and Silly

To date, I have been - in reference to the Seattle Mountaineers' adjectives - supremely tasteless and silly 3 times: with John (1995), Ellen (1996), and Bill (1997). This report is based on John and my trip - with side comments about other trips. On the day we left - 4 a.m. from Seattle - it was overcast west of the Cascades. We set out, each in our own vehicle because we needed to place cars at traverse ends. Dawn painted a rosy hue over Stevens Pass, clear skies evident on the east side. As we twisted down Tumwater Canyon, lingering high clouds were visible at 8000 feet. We reached Leavenworth at 6:45 a.m., pumping gas at the Icicle Road junction. Stepping from our cars was like walking into a refrigerator - a vast change from the prior week's 100° heat. The female cashier sported a second-generation grunge haircut with painfully angular bangs and straight, long hair. She grew up in Leavenworth, moved to Seattle and couldn't deal with it - so she moved back to life in the small town. Leaving my car at the Snow Creek trailhead, John and I then drove farther up Icicle Road, turning at Eight-Mile Creek road. For being only 4 miles long, this washboard-from-hell road SUCKED. Three miles in, we came to the Eight-Mile campground but were confused about whether we were supposed to park here or not (the answer - NO). Even at the end, there weren't obvious signs and we headed up the trail uncertain if we were on the right path. Despite the cold, I wore a bikini top and shorts. It was cold at first but I soon began sweating (we didn't encounter full sun until 10 a.m.). The mileage to the Lake Colchuck junction was 2, a gentle path through forest in earshot of Mountaineer Creek. Here (Mt. Stuart left, Colchuck right), we glimpsed Mt. Stuart. But then there was confusion because the bridge frequently washes out - social trails in all directions. Here, we were passed by 3 men in their mid-50s also doing the traverse. They backpacked here a month ago, climbing Aasgard in poor conditions. After camping in the upper basin, they retreated in a snowstorm. We crossed paths half a dozen times, racing to the bottom neck and neck. Sometimes you run into people doing the same long trip and they act like they hate you for it. In contrast, these guys became temporary friends. I only wished we could have had dinner with them afterwards! Beyond the creek, the trail to Colchuck still seemed poor - often wiped by windfall/deadfall. The trail enters Lake Colchuck along its excurrent stream, climbing an impossible lip of land before entering a Shangri-la of towering granite and unearthly blue water. Deeply moved, I staggered, unable to keep my eyes off Dragontail Peak, which forms the right shoulder of Aasgard Pass. Dragontail holds 2 pieces of quasi-personal history: One of my heroines is Kathy Phibbs, daughter of the then-president of my college alma mater, founder of the first northwest women's climbing organization, an excellent and witty writer, and an outspoken leader in feminist and lesbian communities. During a winter ascent of Dragontail, she and her partner took a bad slip on the glacier that precedes the vertical rock and were killed. Hiking in the shadow of Dragontail, I could feel the spirit of "Miss Dish." My other brush with Dragontail involves near-tragedy. In June 1996, I thought I lost Patagonia Sara on the peak. Unbeknownst to emergency contacts, she and her climbing partner began a day late and took longer than planned (including an emergency bivy on the face). These days caused an explosion of fear at home, exacerbated by 3 deaths on Stuart, and 2 on Mt. Colchuck - all in coincidental avalanches. Back home, we talked amongst ourselves, preparing for the worst. The most honed climbers in our circle set out to pull them off - dead or alive - because mountain rescue was overwhelmed with other accidents. As friends assembled at the trailhead, a search helicopter buzzed Sara's route looking for bodies all over the route face but came up with nothing. In the end, Sara and her partner turned up late and embarrassed. When the helicopter buzzed the face, they were ironically standing on the summit. Given all those associations, you couldn't have paid me to haul my sorry ass up Aasgard a few years ago. Last year, a good and sensible male climbing friend of mine remarked that the usual "path" was gone in many places and scary. He felt sorry for the worried-looking families who felt they had to use this route to access the Enchantments (due to the Snow Creek trail bridge being out). Indeed, looking at the pass from Colchuck was frightening. It was quite steep and I was not certain where the route went. A big creek and several cliffy, braided waterfalls come down near the Dragontail side between 5500-6500 feet; vegetation dominated the left side, coinciding with the most reasonable route. Where the route went above 6500 feet was not obvious, but upper sections seemed more talus in nature - less cliffy. We had the extreme advantage of following an experienced party. Our first chore, though, was to make our way around the lake. Sara said that the hardest part about Aasgard was boulder-hopping around Colchuck - and I

agree. The southern cirque of Lake Colchuck houses some of the hugest boulders I've seen: car-sized rocks flung down from above, accumulating in this lakeshore quarry. While the way is topographically flat, the actual procession is hand-over-hand balancing with lots of micro-elevation gains. The most exposed places were these body-sized holes between the rocks. On my second deathmarch, Ellen and I had an easier time with this than John and I - despite her and my opposite experience up the pass. After the rocks, we descended to a sandy shore and ate lavender and pesto rolls with butter while conversing with the likewise brunching men about the route. They verified our plans and so we confidently proceeded up.



Left to Right: middle Asgard looking up, scrambling, Dragontail, near the top of the pass

I don't know if it was cold, luck, my reverent channeling of Miss Dish... but it made me climb effortlessly and fearlessly up Asgard Pass. I am almost ashamed to admit it - but I preferred the way up Asgard. It was rich, satisfying, awe-inspiring, amazing, and exhilaratingly fast! I feel I have eaten the forbidden fruit because now Snow Creek seems tedious and boring. But let's make a few important statements given this lustful romance: First - I wouldn't do it under rotten conditions or with any snow. Second, I wouldn't advocate it to someone who wasn't in really good shape and who hadn't done off-trail scrambling. Third, it would be a mess if there were tons of people up there kicking shit down. And, finally, I am not convinced I would feel confident coming down that thing (PERIOD). The distance between the lake and the pass comprises 3/4 mile and 2200 feet. The pass lies at 7800 feet, not a pleasant place to find a storm brewing! For the first 500 feet, we followed sketchy cairns through granite boulders interspersed with mountain daisies and slide alder, angling to the left side of the wide gully (away from the waterfalls). There was a dusty, dirty trail at many points but John and I were at a loss to keep on it long. The other party, 10 minutes behind, was better with this task. We finally let them pass so we could follow. The way then became more loose rock, climbing beneath cliff-like walls for 1000 feet. There were no cairns - only a faint swath of boot-tracks. Views were MAGNIFICENT: Colchuck, the evolving faces of Dragontail, bonsai-like groves of soft-needed larch. The amount of flora in this otherwise-desolate chute blew my mind! Carrying John's altimeter/watch, I was mindful of our time, and the fact that the elevation was just melting away. The last 1000 feet cut back in a rightward rising contour, on mixed loose dirt and rock. There were places where we used our hands to haul ourselves up - but there wasn't this extreme sense of exposure at all. The only time I felt vertigo was during a concentrated section where I was watching my feet and John blurted, "hey, look at those climbers." I looked up suddenly, getting this huge view of everything all at once - and had to sit down. Ellen and I, a year later, had big problems staying on course through the upper section - the high winds and loose rock completely flipping Ellen out.



Left to Right: (top) final views of Colchuck, John at pass, Dragontail at pass; (bottom) more scenes from upper basin

While not dangerous, it was not pleasant. John and I grew lazy as we approached the pass, stopping every minute to go bananas with the views. Perhaps more than on any other trip, John was audibly and visibly blown away. Indeed, John is a quiet guy when it comes to amazement... but there atop Asgard Pass he was quite verbose (not my level of verbose - but higher than his usual flat-line). And the views were grand: below us - as though viewed from the air - Colchuck was an idealized turquoise, the surrounding hills bore hues of purple, and Dragontail become an entirely different peak. In some ways, she lost some her magnificent height. Once over the pass, the terrain was not the big, rolling granite slab stuff like in the lower

basin. Rather, it was a giant quarry below crumbling peaks, ice-laden lakes pocketed into the bowls of broken stone. We huddled and ate cheese and crackers between large boulders, a determined breeze lowering the temperature despite the clarity of the sky and sun. Here, this lone guy jogged past us (evidently, he frequently completed the whole traverse in 7 hours). So much for our feet/feat! Our timing so far: 7:15-9:30 to the lake; 9:30 to 12:00 to the pass. John and my only disagreement occurred over lunch and regarded scrambling Little Annapurna, now visible. Our pre-trip agreement was that we would do it if we were at its base at 11. Although I knew John really wanted to do it, I also knew how far we had to go and I am a firm believer in sticking to turn-around times. I've been around too many crazy guys when headlamp batteries run out or silly things happen in the dark (not to be taken out of context). Later, we learned that the 3 older guys shared the same goal and bailed for the same reason. Although John wasn't thrilled, he felt better about "our" decision once he heard that the macho men had let Little Annapurna go too (they didn't even have a woman insisting - because they were WISE, OLDER MEN!). After lunch, we continued through the open rolling talus. No single mountain dominated; rather, a cirque-like ridge of crumbling peaks grew higher with every downward step. There was only 1 party camped in the upper basin - beneath Enchantment Peak. As with our October backpack, we observed no marked campsites (although we did find a toilet in the middle basin). After 20 minutes, there was a significant drop - via a huge granite slab - to the middle basin. This sidewalk seemed to point directly toward the route up Little Annapurna, taunting John. While today the middle basin seemed the most spectacular, I now have fonder feelings for Aasgard/upper basin (which Ellen definitely loved the most). Indeed, after our more harrowing ascent of Aasgard, Ellen donned her red and white Dr. Seuss hat and this pair of young fraternity brothers camped in the upper basin grinned: "I like YOU already" (Ellen - nickname hickeybait). They then flirtatiously asked where we were camping and we said nowhere - we're dayhiking the whole Enchantments. This was met with speechless awe as we pranced off. Anyway, once John and I hit the middle basin, the multitudes appeared. This mile-long section was an expansive, nearly flat landscape with shallow silvery tarns everywhere... but you were never out of earshot or sight of someone camping. Eventually, we came to a cleft-like gully above a deep lake above lower basin Perfection. The elevation drop was 200-300 feet, made difficult by a hard snowfield whose terminus sloped right into the lake. A short lakeside hike brought us to busy Prusik Pass junction (where we stopped in October). It was 2 p.m. and we still had an astounding 10 miles to go! Having already described this route, I'll just say that we dashed down quickly, arriving at the car at 6:30 (i.e. 11 hours total - 18 miles 4500 feet up and a whopping 6600 feet down). Some noteworthy things: Although we thought we'd smoked the old guys during the steep descent to Snow Lake, they turned up during the last mile and kicked our asses. A mile below Nada Lake, we met a couple backpacking in - out of water, dazed, and confused about where camps were.



Left to Right: middle to lower transition, middle basin, sleepy-dreamy Sarah, "I'm too sexy" John and Nada

The drive back to John's car was simple and we spent the night in Leavenworth, having reserved the last room at the Best Western 2 nights before! Can you say HOT TUB? Although this is an interesting way to avoid permits and see all the Enchantments, stamina and carrying serious emergency gear are a must. Despite a full 1200 cubic inch daypack and ice axe, I didn't feel hindered. Had a storm blown in, I would have been happy to have all those extra clothes. The idea that anyone can or should do this traverse is preposterous. One needs to fully understand the route demands and get in extreme shape before messing around with this traverse! Ellen and I had a rougher time with Aasgard, thanks to the boot-beaten track having been wiped out by avalanches. Bill, a chemist, trail-runner, and orienteer, joined me in 1997 but admitted that not even he was not in adequate shape. Both trips (Ellen and Bill) took 13 hours. Disturbingly, Bill and I met 20-30 people attempting the deathmarch - many of whom were not going to make it out by daylight and were not carrying adequate essentials.



Left to Right: 1989 - descending then-off-trail to pumice plain, Adams against completely devastated hillsides, breach

Mt. St. Helens (Hiking and Climbing) and Nearby Jaunts

When Mt. St. Helens erupted in 1980, I watched the plume disperse above the horizon in front of the house where I grew up. A few years later, I was watching slides with my dad from one of his early Rainier summit attempts. Seeing an unfamiliar cone, I retorted, "What mountain is that?!" Mt. St. Helens, he replied as he dug out slides of me as a toddler on the shores of Spirit

Lake. The first time I visited Mt. St. Helens as an adult was via a graduate microbial ecology class in September 1989. Back then, only a limited number of roads had been built and the devastation was stunning and abrupt. We traveled to the then-new Windy Ridge road-end on the east side of the monument. Said viewpoint consisted of an asphalt parking lot and a short trail up a hill with a so-so view of the breach. As scientists, we had keys to a gated dirt road that continued toward the volcano. Hikers can now walk this road to access the circumambulating Loowit trail (31 miles, 4100 feet up/down). In 1989, few trails (not even the Loowit) had been cut and so, once we reached the end of the road, our party devised our own route through the desolate pumice plain. Since then, elaborate visitor centers have also been built (Coldwater and Johnston Ridge) on the west side (offering the closest access from I-5), with more primitive but highly regulated climbing access via southerly Cougar, WA. See the full climbing report for additional comments.

First Trip Into the Blast Zone (1989)

I became interested in Mt. St. Helens during my first year of graduate school when I had the fortuitous opportunity to take a course in microbial ecology with the great Drs. Jim Staley and John Leigh. To study local thermal microbial habitats, we visited several off-trail/non-public sites in St. Helens' blast zone. It was a gorgeous mid-October Saturday and, again, I cannot emphasize how awesome and awful the blast zone struck me. The magnitude of devastation is something I can still visualize - both the scene at the time and the breathtaking feelings I felt when we seemed to round a single corner of road into the nothingness: the intersection of forest with no forest, life with apparently no life. The sheer size of the wasteland was a dramatic thing to behold: nothing but a leveled landscape of gray ash, downed timber. In the years since, the interface between the zones has moderated: more inexact, blurred, and green. Some of this is forced, though, because the most obvious, large-scale changes are in logged regions just outside the monument boundary where the effort to replant has taken place in the form of homogeneous stands of firs. Within the monument, smaller signs are less apparent: bushes and grasses flourishing around creek drainages, an astonishing number of lupine and low plants along the drier tundra, cat-tails and associated fauna in the boggy seeps along Spirit Lake. For us, the pavement ended at Windy Ridge - not very spectacular if what you want to see is the volcano. Because we keys for the gated dirt road, we drove a hair-raising mile to the actual end of the road. I can still remember this washout section where we had to side-hill the cars to avoid driving down this chasm-like rut that shot down for miles. I was in John's car and he made us all walk that section while he drove. From the road end, we hiked another mile on a rudimentary trail before formally going off-trail. Essentially, we then spent 10 hours marching through the blast zone. For the first part of the day, we focused on the Spirit Lake area. At the time, this region was a lot hotter than it is now. Samples from at least 5 brilliant to olive green microbial mats, all thriving in spring run-offs (100 to 120°F), were collected. The colored layering of these communities strongly reflected patterns I had seen in Yellowstone. The latter half of the day involved a confusing trip into the pumice plain and canyon area. Jim had been in this area before and insisted that there were amazing springs just around the corner. Well - a few hours later - we finally found them. For the hours prior, it felt like we were wandering through a maze. This huge area of mini-canyons extends for about a square mile; once you descend into one (each 100-200 feet deep), you can't see anything and thus you can spend some time confused! That first year, I remember Jim pointing down to this low valley where steam rose from a long creek. I was so beat that I hung out up top with half the party. Jim and others would come back excited with the significantly hotter spring samples (70-90°C!). A few years later, I joined this course field trip again (notably with John and Brian, both lower classmen) and we had a generally easier time finding these springs (although the weather, not surprisingly, was worse).



Left to Right: spring team, Ben and Spirit community

Leading Students Into the Blast Zone (1998)

In May 1998, I spoke with St. Helens' lead naturalist, receiving permission to sample the blast zone, with accompaniment. Three weeks later, however, the naturalist called me back, insisting things were not looking good: too much snow on the trail down from Coldwater. By now, I had 8 people signed up and a decent weekend weather forecast. Explaining that a little mud or scrambling wasn't going to deter us, I asked if we could go out by ourselves. The naturalist said yes but decided that he would join us after all. We agreed to meet at Johnson Ridge on Saturday at 9:30 a.m. Come Saturday, 8 of us met at 6 a.m. in front of the science building, the sky overcast. In Seattle, John (yes, that John), decided to join us given that, after the hike (on Monday), he would be teaching a bioinformatics lab for my molecular biology class. My party split into 2 vehicles - I with Kody, Ben, and Brigetta and the other with Daniel (not Yellowstone Danny, who I didn't know yet), Joe, Chandell and Mark. The Oregon crew arrived at foggy Johnston at 9:30 as planned. As we all walked towards the visitor center, a familiar tall figure appeared through the mist (John). Mind you, the students knew nothing of John and my past. Thus, when John wordlessly circled me in a huge, warm embrace, a host of questions emerged - mostly spilling out over the course of the next few weeks. I would later tell him he shouldn't have done that. Anyway - John said St. Helens had briefly peeked through the clouds and we all grew excited at the prospect of this soup burning off. Miraculously, the rain also stopped. John, with a huge grin, sent me into the visitor center. The reason: the young ranger with the long blond ponytail and the big blue eyes. Alas, this was not the lead naturalist. After 30 minutes, ponytail ranger informed us the naturalist was not coming after all. A brief powwow resulted in the decision to self-guide into the blast zone. Given 20% visibility and too much cotton, I was not entirely comfortable with

this choice. But we headed across and down the ridge. The ridge could NOT have been easier. The few snow patches totaled no more than 100 feet and were easy walking in tennis shoes. The snow-free Devil's Elbow crux was only hairy in terms of washouts. Had the day been clear, I'm sure I would have succumbed to vertigo but I was deceived by the clouds and clawed my way along the narrow footprints kicked in the rock and mud.



Left to Right: fall team descends to Spirit, Spirit, entering pumice

We snacked at the Elbow's terminus, hoping St. Helens would show herself. For 40 seconds, she did (well, the crater broke through - surrounded by billowing mist) - enough to inspire awe in most of my St. Helens virgins. Unfortunately, that would be the best view of the volcano all day. The remainder of the trail was in moderately good shape - although there were a few interesting snow patches over streams in the drain-way that descends to Spirit Lake. Daniel (hoping to go to Yellowstone with me in a month), bounding ahead at a feverish pace that made me tired, climbed a thin-looking cake of white and I shouted - "Daniel - I hope you're being careful." As the word "careful" emerged from my mouth, the bridge collapsed 2 feet and Daniel dropped somewhat gently into the stream - a look of surprise on his face. I made a mental note: "need to watch Daniel carefully at Yellowstone." At the junction of the Coldwater/Loowit Trail, we discussed our plans. Should we try to find the fabled pumice plains hot springs? Right about then, we noticed a little steam from up the creek bed and followed it to some altogether new springs (at least to us) that were 34°C. The colors and layers were promising. Maybe this meant new little hot spots were creeping up again around the lake. I suggested, after sampling these mats, we do a more thorough assessment of the lake area and then think about the elusive springs in the canyon area. We spread out and wandered through the log debris. The ground grew to the consistency of quicksand, pulling with audible resistance the closer we got to the lake edge. We found nothing warm, though. And so we ate lunch safely on big bleached logs as Daniel shirked his shoes and socks and waded in the lake with the salamanders. John and I had good recollections of where the best springs were and estimated their location (and a good route) based on our map. Of course, we also all agreed on a turnaround time. And so we headed back through the muck and followed a creek bed to the pumice plain. John and I fanned out significantly ahead of students. Within 10 minutes, John had the springs in view. We continued to the northwestern edge of the plain proper - to where it dropped into a canyon via a sloping cut in the land. Yup, definitely - so we all took to descending the muddy rubble. The spring runoff forms a giant Y, originating from 2 sources that emerge at 70-80°C and then cool in a gradient. We sampled 4 regions, pulling rich mats that had feather-like strands of different shades of green. The temperature and pH were all consistent with habitats for Chloroflexus. It was a spectacular end to a spectacular day. We hiked out, leaving the gorgeous mats around 3:30. Our first job was to get out of the canyon. We climbed an alternate chute that pointed a more direct line back to Spirit Lake. While this was a good option, we still had to piece our way back to the trail proper. Alas, my steady and regular pace was not shared by most impetuous young folks. Fortunately, John and Ben held back and we ate candy and chatted, winding our way back up to Coldwater Ridge. The only respectable after-effect of all this was that I didn't hurt the next day (the kids did). As we topped the ridge, we entered a thick cloud heavy with moisture. My hair grew damp and curled and John teased me about my goofy coiffure. Of course, I can flip his remarks back because his hair is definitely thinner. We made it back to the visitor center by 6. The rangers, just on their way home, were happy to know we got out and the trail was good. I rode home with John and Brigetta - although we all met in Kelso for dinner. It was a loud and raucous meal, filled with discussions of science, life, politics, religion... I repeated a similar student trip in the fall of 1998 - although we ran out of daylight during the hike out. Alas, I have never returned to the park - in large part because the Yellowstone project took off and it became infinitely clear where I had to continue my research. No regrets there.



Left to Right: fearless leader, various shots of the pumice plain and the best and hottest springs

Climbing St. Helens (Several Times)

The ultimate way to see Mt. St. Helens is to climb it. The view from the crater rim (8300 feet) is the best view anywhere in the monument. But it is not for everyone. First, the bloody details: hard-to-obtain permits (nonrefundable, \$15 per person as of 2000) are required anywhere above 5000 feet between mid-May and November. Only 100 permits are available per day (100

PEOPLE, not parties), with 50-75% are reserved in advance (most by mail-in request long in advance), and the rest doled out first-come-first-serve. Permits are physically issued at a greasy spoon called Jack's in Cougar. The basecamp/parking lot trailhead is another 30-60 minutes beyond, most on dirt roads. Even if you have a permit, you still must register at Jack's before going up, and sign out once you have come down. It is possible to show up and put your name on a list the night before (hoping for no-shows or cancellations). The St. Helens ascent is exceedingly popular between July and September, with rangers actively checking permits on the route. The standard approach involves a 10-mile, 4500 foot-gain "non-technical" route from the south via Monitor Ridge. Under mostly snow-free summer conditions, you do not need crampons, a rope, or climbing skills. April-June makes for a great snow climb under good conditions, with ice axes required. Ugly weather conditions will influence how technical things are because if the route is lost, wandering into remnant glaciers or cliffy, steep stuff is possible anytime. Thus, map/compass and emergency gear should be used, along with standard essentials on every climb.



Left to Right: John and I at Jack's, monitor ridge route (in the center), fragile heather, John/Jenn half-way up, me - 7000 feet

My first summit attempt was the last week of October 1993. John and I obtained permits on the morning of the climb. We left Jack's unable to see the mountain, armed with a forecast of rain and snow above 6000 feet. By 7000 feet, ball-bearing snow accumulating on the rocks, we descended with our tails between our legs. At the time, we were being passed by 2 dozen French exchange students singing in their native tongue and clad in sneakers and cotton - their American host families a thousand feet below. My second attempt was the first week of July 1994, when Jay gave us his permits at the last minute because other plans came up. Accompanied by John and Jenn, we ascended the peak on what would be a totally clear, radically hot afternoon. From the parking lot, we ascended 2 miles on the Ptarmigan trail to its intersection with the Loowit. Shortly after this intersection, the climber's route begins and permits are required above. Views to the south and east include Mts. Hood, Jefferson, and Adams. Up to 7000 feet, the rudimentary climber's route was marked by 8-foot tall white posts every 200 or so feet - although this should not give the impression that the going or route-finding is easy. The route traverses rocky lava of various sizes. Even in mid-summer, there will be many patches of snow (which many people prefer walking on as opposed to pointy rocks and sliding sand). There is no trail per se. Although many people stay follow the sandy chutes that parallel the posts, sand/soil really should be avoided because treading on it damages what little flora clings to the mountain. At 7000 feet the posts disappear and the way consists of loose, sandy dirt that gives way under the feet and finds its way into your mouth, eyes, ears, hair, clothes, and shoes. For every step taken, plan to slide back at least half a step. And all the while, the rim will be tauntingly visible - usually with stick figure people in small profile. The rim provides the most awesome view in the monument: into the evolving and steaming crater, down upon the pumice plain and Spirit Lake, full views to Adams, Rainier, and the Olympics. The massiveness of the crater, the geological gradients of rock layers, and the instability of the rim was abundantly obvious - with gigantic rock falls that echoing back and forth off the walls. The true summit lies slightly to the west. But we did not bother with the edgy, ascending traverse given the unsurpassable view and heat that day. Despite my usual vertigo, I did not feel in danger on the rim and honestly believe that one would truly have to try to fall in (although early season snow cornices are deceptively deadly). We watched a snowboarder smoothly sail down a massive snow patch alongside the lava route. Somewhat like him - axes in hand - we then proceeded to glissade a thousand feet down the mountain (people without ice axes should not glissade as patches are rocky and run-outs are short). In sum, we took 6.5 hours - faster than usual for me because Jenn powered up and down the mountain, setting her usually wicked pace.



Left to Right: me on rim - Hood/Jefferson to south, Jenn on crater rim, various views into crater, onto lava dome, Spirit Lake

Parting Vignettes

Although we did not gain the summit, I did partake on an interesting winter ski trip (yes, ME on skis - not pretty) with Jenn and company in March 1997. The first day, we drove to Cougar and spent the night in a cheap hotel. The next morning, armed with skins and randonee skis, we ascended to about 5500 feet - after skiing a significant portion of the road to even get to the usual trailhead. With the weather breaking down, we called it a day and returned to a hot meal and second night in Cougar. I did manage to climb the peak again in August 1997 with Niki. For this trip, we spent our first day in the monument on- and off-trail near Coldwater Ridge unsuccessfully looking for thermal iron springs. We then car-camped at an RV lot in Cougar and

proceeded up the mountain the next morning, sharing the route and summit with what appeared to be a mid-life crisis party men who did everything short of expose and beat their chests. Needless to say, we were highly amused - except for the ferocious winds that sandblasted all parts of our bodies that were not covered.



Left to Right: (top) St. Helens ski trip, Goat Rocks; (bottom) Glacier Basin, Cady/Meander, Baker snowshoe & Railroad Grade

Reports No More

St. Helens is also near both Mt. Adams and the Goat Rocks Wilderness, areas I promised myself I'd visit more – but haven't. My two Adams summit attempts were thwarted by a combination of weather and me wimping out. My one visit to the Goat Rocks (Snowgrass Flats) was with John in 1997. Despite a lot of snow, John made it up Hawkeye Point. Trip reports that are fully gone are Cub Lake (south end of Ptarmigan – hard, camera broke), Meander/Cady (Glacier, picture included above), Gothic/Glacier Basin (one shot of Glacier above), Railroad Grade (Baker, one shot above), and Artist Point snowshoeing (Baker, one shot above). I also did not include anything about several other Alpine Lakes Wilderness places I've hiked – mostly because none were terribly impressive and/or we had terrible weather: Teanaway Ridge (Bean Creek Basin/Navajo Peak), Snow/Gem Lakes and the Tooth, and the mostly-reliable workout climb up Mt. Si (did that a LOT).