

## Mt. Rainier National Park Collection, 1991-2006

Hiking the Wonderland Trail, Scrambling and Climbing, and Remembering Our Father



Left to Right: St. Andrews Lake, ascending the Emmons below Little Tahoma, Paradise Memorial hike

### The Wonderland Trail

Circumambulating Mt. Rainier involves about 100 miles, 23,000-27,000 feet gained/lost (depending on route variations). Until 1997, the Wonderland was the greatest thing I ever accomplished - outranking other wilderness adventures and my doctoral degree. John and I completed the Wonderland over 9 days between July and August, 1993. We lucked out and had perfect weather - in large part because we had flexible schedules. However, I never took the trail lightly, having watched my father's tribulations with weather and injury. He never completed the trail like this - in one fell swoop. It was genetic that I would have to try it myself. By 1992, I had hiked more than half the trail via rigorous daytrips (rigorous = 10-15 miles, 3000-4000 feet gained/lost) - the same regimen encountered on a daily basis if your goal is the Wonderland in a week. In 1992, John and I next backpacked segments of the trail: Longmire to Mowich (45 miles, 4 days) and Mowich to White River (30 miles, 3 days). Weather was great for the first few days but then gave way to overcast cold days punctuated by thunder, lightening, and rain (typical). Somewhat by accident, we discovered a great (but strenuous) camping alternative - cross-country (XC) zones. Said areas lie a quarter mile off the trails in upper alpine zones, making full views of Rainier outside the tent almost a given (provided the weather is good - not a given). Using XC zones will add mileage and elevation to standard Wonderland trail itineraries. One must be also able to route-find and be practiced in minimum impact techniques on land that isn't pre-cleared for camping. Like all camping, XC sites require an official permit - and most XC zones are limited to 2 parties per night.



Left to Right: WT practice - (top) Indian Henry's, Pyramid XC, BIG suspension bridge, are we there yet?  
(bottom) Klapatche, Golden Lakes swing, Curtis Ridge XC site, Ellen's pick-up truck

Of all the years I'd considered doing this trip, the summer of 1993 looked the least promising: rain through most of June and July - with, at best, 1-2 days' relief at a time. Likewise across the country, things were bad: perpetual flooding in the Midwest and concomitant heat waves in the East. When the New York Times corroborated local forecasts that predicted national patterns were breaking up over the last week of July, I figured something big must be sweeping through, resulting in long-term high pressure for us. Call it intuition, but I knew THAT week would be the only chance of good weather. With 4 days warning, I gathered supplies as John, having just climbed Rainier during a 2-day clear spot that weekend, was busy - feeling obligated to work heavily. I spent a small fortune on dehydrated dinners to be supplemented with pudding and soup; we also carried heavier dinners, to be eaten following each cache-pick-up. Lunch included dried fruits, GORP, salami, crackers, cheese, and candy. Breakfasts were simple, consisting of a Powerbar for me and oatmeal or cold cereal with dried milk/water and tea for John. All items were divided into 3-day sections so we could cache 2 packets at approximately 30-mile intervals along the way.

### To Summerland

Our planned route evolved greatly over time - and continued to do so up to and including the day we began. A year before, we

favored a 10-12-day itinerary starting at Longmire and going west (because weather typically hits this side first). Conflicting fears endured regarding Panhandle Gap (the highest trail point, 6900 feet) because foul weather could move in during the latter part of the trip - BAD. Originally, I'd not considered doing the alpine variation through Spray and Seattle Parks (the official route bypasses these strenuous sections, a damn shame). In the end, we set out from White River, caching food at Longmire and Lake Mowich. When we left, our list of intended campsites read: Indian Bar, Maple Creek, Longmire (lodge?), Pyramid Peak XC, Klapatche, Golden Lakes, Spray Park XC, and Lower Curtis Ridge XC. By Thursday, weather predictions holding, John and I both committed to leaving the next day. Food was distributed and duct tape was placed on cache bins. After many concerns about pack weight, I brought fewer items than I would normally haul on an excursion such as this: rain gear, poly-pro T-shirt, wool sweater, nylon shorts, long underwear, 3 pairs of wool socks, gloves, a wool hat, and a nylon hat. Fuel was a sticking point: I felt we should carry all fuel (1 large and 1 small MSR bottle) while John felt we should hide some in the woods near Longmire (rangers refuse to cache it). I got my way. We left Seattle on Friday (July 30) around 9:15 in fog. Our first goal was Lake Mowich. As usual, the final section of road was hell, despite being unpopulated and un-dusty from the rain. Events at Lake Mowich provided a good omen: after depositing our cache in the ranger cabin bin, we met 3 weatherworn backpackers who were on day 6 of the WT after starting at Longmire. Father, Al, was giving up and needed a ride back to Longmire - good weather or not. Despite the severity of his ripeness, he was friendly and seemed content with his 6 days out. His family was out for 3 weeks from Michigan; he was an engineer and his wife and daughter, both outdoor enthusiasts in good shape, were the schemers behind this trip. The women were prepared for severe elevation gains, which Al said he hadn't been informed of. The journey for the women would take another 11 days. Despite getting lost around Eatonville, we arrived at socked-in Longmire around 1 p.m. Al gave us money, despite contrary wishes (although we did enjoy lunch). Longmire rangers were wary of our itinerary. First, we all agreed there was no way we were making it to Indian Bar tonight. Plus - no rooms at Longmire. And so we decided that it would be Summerland tonight (the last available site - the group cabin), Nickel Creek, Paradise River and the remainder of campsites as originally planned. Much to our surprise, there were apparently few people doing the through-hike at the time, despite hundreds braving the biblically awful conditions a few weeks ago (including a 14-member family reunion congregating at every major group site on the way).



Left to Right: at the White River trailhead, Summerland (morning 2), near Panhandle Gap (day 2, actually)

Permit in hand and food cached, we left Al and Longmire. Since we'd be going to White River via Stevens Canyon, we grabbed some fast food at Paradise. John drove the twisty road to White River and I recall staring steadily into the Stevens Canyon, wondering where the trail lay and whether we'd make it that far, intermingling thoughts of Panhandle Gap cloaked in ice. I also recall seeing pieces of Sunrise from the road and thinking there wasn't snow up at 6000 feet - so perhaps some of my fears were in vain. We passed an interesting repair bridge placed across a deep chasm where the normal concrete bridge had been washed out. The wooden planks clanked like cobblestones beneath the tires. White River was in a state of retiring when we arrived at 4:30. Given the multitudes of RVs, there weren't many hikers or bathroom-users. Thus, we changed in peace. Great care was taken to pre-bandage all pressure points (i.e. bunions and hammertoes). We left at 5:30, wearing little considering the overcast day that was slowly ending - a soupy mist accumulating. I wore what I would wear for the next 8 days: nylon shorts and a poly-pro T-shirt. In the cool air, we walked 2 miles of road to the Summerland Trail junction, at one point stopped by a ranger who couldn't imagine getting such a late start as us. Having hiked to Summerland a dozen times now, I'd say this was one of my faster runs. Unlike other trips, however, there were no views. Dew was forming everywhere and an opaque vapor had wrapped the high meadows, preventing vision beyond 50 feet. To our dismay, the group cabin and ALL surrounding sites were occupied. Evidently, we had all received group site permits - with ranger and/or system error at fault (i.e. several parties had not registered at computer-access points the rangers could track). The group kicked out the first couple earlier and we were not sure where they moved. Slightly more graciously, the group let us camp a stone's throw from "their" cabin on uneven ground. John, un-amused with the situation, erected the tent while I cooked. We rid ourselves of the heaviest food first: noodles, cheese, canned chicken, and basil. Of all the nights, this was our most efficient. We went to bed soon after eating, enjoying a reasonable night's sleep. Within 15 minutes, our neighbors were loudly proclaiming that the fog was clearing. Indeed, the seeds of climactic success were sprouting. Remarkably, John and I zipped sleeping bags together for the first time on this trip (editorial insert: I'm not sure why we'd never tried this before given that we'd done everything else). While sometimes trying in terms of space, this configuration proved desirable for heat generation and movement. I was surprised to find Summerland quiet after 10, given its reputation for being overrun with rodents all too familiar with human food.

#### To Nickel Creek via Panhandle Gap, Indian Bar, and Cowlitz Divide

We awoke the next morning to totally clear skies. To facilitate breakfast and preparation for the day, I made at least 4 trips to and from the creek, 5 minutes down from camp. John and I breakfasted on a big rock there - the meadows in full bloom before us. About 3 boy scouts came for water at one point, curiously inquiring as to our plans. When I told them we'd be hiking the whole trail, they responded: wow, that's hundreds of miles (!!!) - which I corrected. John and I then argued, his resenting my not helping carry his more substantial breakfast. John and I will always have different camping styles: he likes more fresh food and I prefer to economize; he likes to sit and read and I feel the need to move and absorb the environment. My Powerbar

breakfasts were filling and, surprisingly, I didn't tire of them until the last 2 days. However, I did find a spot of tea tasty, and John's Grape Nuts did look more appealing as the trip proceeded (editorial insert: MUST NOT COMMENT!). The trip to Panhandle Gap was no less dramatic than any of my many climbs thereto (remarkably, John had never hiked here). Snow cover was high, though - with substantial patches all the way up. The most shadowed 20 yards of steep trail flanking the gap were icy. I felt the most afraid here and actually began to shake. At the gap, the views of Mt. Adams and Hood were the most superlative I've seen. And so we enjoyed lunch #1 around 11:30. Even so, I was concerned as I traced the general direction of the trail - watching it disappear quickly into long fields of white. As we would soon discover, the topography of the snow was an undulating scheme of small waves - the product of superficial melting patterns. We began our traverse in no time, the quickly-melt snow soft, slushy, and slippery. John maintained his first real distance in front of me, a trend that did not continue much after this day. There were melted sections where the soil was waterlogged and the emerging plants trodden upon to poorly connect snow-paths (when not overlapping the real trail). I stopped at several points to take significant rests, meeting up with John and complaining that I didn't recall it being quite this far.



Left to Right: (top) climbing to Panhandle Gap, view from gap; (bottom) descending to Indian Bar, stone shelter

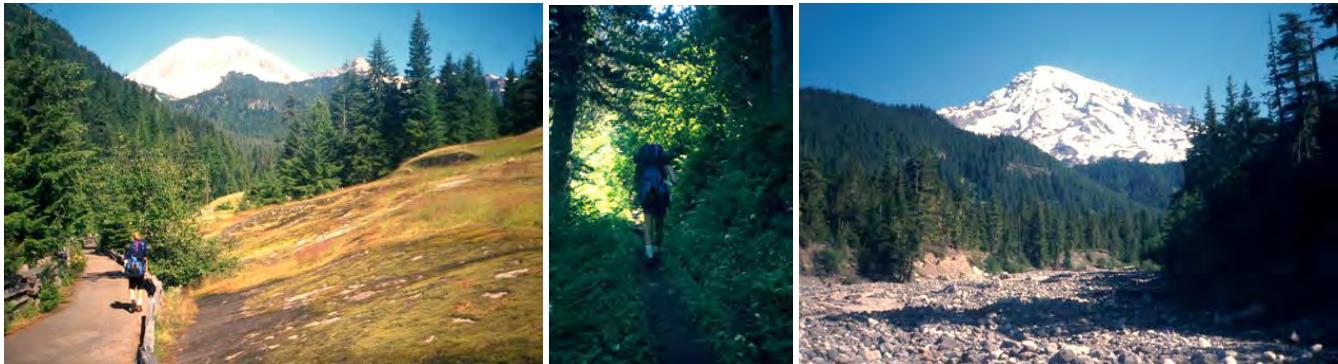
There were also several short uphill sections, each giving way to a more open view of Indian Bar - a huge canyon cutting down into a gloriously green U-shaped valley, the striped patterns of waterfalls descending from the snow on top of the rocky shelf. This whole section provided no views of Rainier - although I can't say we missed it given the amazing vistas of ice, rock, water, meadow, and distant rolling ranges. I remember vividly coming over the final ridge where the trail began its long descent into Indian Bar, the tiny stone cabin visible in the distance. Heading down, I wondered whether the local bear (according to the backcountry ranger last year) would be ambling through the brush again. I was also intrigued with the early stage of the meadow. On my first trip between Summerland and Nickel Creek, Jay and I waded through lupine up to our knees. This time, there was only ankle-deep green, with occasional Indian Paintbrush and avalanche lilies, the latter being one of the first to bloom after the snow. The lilies were dense around the stone cabin at Indian Bar, where many people were enjoying the 2:30 sun. John and I picked a site by the river where I soaked my feet and legs in ice water. I was in pain at this point - the downhill motion, the tension of having hiked the snow. My hips and thighs especially ached and so I soaked them well - positioning myself between two boulders such that I could lower my legs into the water with my arms/upper body. We then ate a more substantial lunch, watching puffy clouds disperse as they trafficked over the radiant sun. At one point, I swore - and still swear - that I saw the bear in the distance (but I will never be certain as it moved away before John could corroborate my story).



Left to Right: climbing first hill of Cowlitz Divide, along up-and-down Cowlitz, Rainier finally emerges from Cowlitz

Alas, we knew we still had several miles to go that day. Worse yet, I knew the route involved a ridge-walk of many ups and downs for 5/7 remaining miles - before the trail finally dropped to Nickel Creek. And so we packed up and started the LONG haul. The first section was straight up and provided convenient snow, which I ate. The mountain seemed to rise slowly from the extensive shelf that is Indian Bar - until its full grandeur appeared whence we topped the first of many bumps on the Cowlitz Divide. To the east, the Stuart Range and Shriner Peak were evident. To the north, the trail-less meadows of Cowlitz

Park made me wonder if people could XC there because it looked magical. We would top at least 3 more significant rises and cross several nearly flat meadows before finally entering the forest and descending. Up until that point, we hadn't been in the woods since the beginning. Comparatively, the rest of the WT involves daily ups and downs between woods and alpine meadows. We arrived at sylvan Nickel Creek around 7 p.m. - long after the sun disappeared behind the adjacent ridge. The camp was set in the trees next to a cold river - in which I'd hoped to bathe (John did, to the amused horror of other campers who assumed we'd been out much longer). Although I wanted only to lie down and rest, I tried to assist with cooking (curried lentils - they sucked). I went to sleep early, John staying out and cleaning, reading. I remember him trying to massage my poor calves later that night but the mere touch sent intense pain straight up my spine. I remember asking John if he thought that was ok: what if I had ripped something and walking was making it worse? But he insisted I'd be fine because I was just sore. The other pain that plagued both of us daily was the bottom of our feet (yes, our balls). Although the throbbing pain would subside in the morning, it came on earlier each afternoon as the trip proceeded. It is interesting that they say you manage not to remember painful things and yet I can easily conjure up more and more pain if I think about it.



Left to Right: John at Box Canyon, hiking through nothing but woods most of the hottest day, Kautz Creek (actually day 4)

#### To Paradise River Camp

The next morning, we were up early. I remember laying my still-wet socks out to dry, the sun taking a long time to make its way over the ridge. During breakfast, I admitted I was afraid I was not going to make it because I was still in pain. But we eventually packed and made our way out, knowing we were barely a mile from the road. For the first time since starting this backpack, we heard cars. Shortly thereafter, we intersected the road at Box Canyon and decided to take the short concrete path that led to an overlook 100+ feet high above the narrow canyon - the water rushing below, sounding like distant waves or rain. The roar of the traffic cut short any desire to extend our visit and we proceeded immediately across the pavement and down the trail. Likely, too, the obvious heat had some influence on this decision - a cloudless blue sky that punctuated the glowing, glaciated white of the mountain. But it was not this view that we would see for most of the day as we continued down through the mostly-deciduous woods - through broadleaf trees, a carpet of crunchy leaves under our feet. Indeed, this section is the one most often skipped - but I felt I needed to do the whole thing (editorial insert: I would, for the record, skip this section were I to do the trail again). I was glad we hiked it on the hottest day - neither at the beginning nor at the end. The distances were strangely deceiving: Maple Creek seemed farther, Reflection Lakes closer. En route to Maple Creek, we crossed Stevens Creek, a raging river through a curvaceous chasm of gray smooth boulders and solid rock. While this would have made a perfect lunch spot, we felt there were too number people with that same idea and so we decided to venture on to Maple Creek, assuming it offered a similar riverside locale. No dice: the river was some distance away and the bugs were extremely hungry - such that we had to pace while eating to avoid the aerosol of flying vermin. Prior to this point, I'd neglected to wear much bug repellent - and, of course, the bites were now accumulating on my legs and arms. We continued back onto the overgrown trail, the dewy foliage pretty much washing away all the bug repellent - although my greater fear was ticks (and so we made efforts to check ourselves frequently). At several points, we broke out into open avalanche slopes - where we watched cars winding down Stevens Canyon proper... the occasional trailer followed by a steady, tailgating train. Surprisingly, however, we really could not hear the traffic - save a horn signaling said trailer to move its ass. The mountain came slowly into view as we rounded into the head of the canyon, beneath Mazama ridge. At Martha Falls, we pumped fresh water and enjoyed the spray of cool water. The only picture of these falls I'd seen before depicted a woman walking in front of a wall of jagged rock over which flowed this veil of water. The actually small falls and narrow ravine defied this photograph. John and I enjoyed our first bawdy flirtation: there is always something about John, commando in skimpy short shorts, pumping water between the lanky spread of his legs. Climbing steadily again, we reached the road in a reasonable amount of time, crossing into thick deciduous forest all the way to Lake Louise. A hot Sunday afternoon, our encounters with people grew indicative of weekend numbers for Mt. Rainier. At Reflection Lake, we snacked again - before hiking along the roadside and crossing pavement. Walking with huge packs through crowded families provides a good excuse for barreling through unruly kids. It is amusing when some poor kid, having rebelliously run ahead of his/her parents turns to find this big, pack-bearing stranger on his/her heels and suddenly is overcome with this look of terror. Many such events happened in the vicinity of Reflection Lake. The way between Reflection Lake and our camp for the night, Paradise River, passed through terrain I'd never before traveled. Although there were nearby roads all the way, the trail lay completely in dense forest. At one point, we intersected the junction to Narada Falls, approaching from a position lower than the overlook. John had never seen the falls so we made our way through the crowds to gain a brief view. Paradise River Camp, like that at Maple Creek, lay exceedingly far from the river - where I'd planned to bathe given the early time (4 p.m.) we got into camp. And so, after dumping packs, John and I trekked down the trail to the point where a huge log bridge allowed access over the low, rocky river. Wearing my bikini top and shorts, I sponged off at the river's edge beneath the bridge. The water was especially cold, although I stood for some time in the water. Due to the openness of the river, the sun pervaded over us, allowing us to dry off as we sat on the wooden railings of the bridge. We returned to our sylvan campsite just before a female ranger passed through, checking permits and reminding us

again that we were not bound by the severity of our intended itinerary. A man and some children passed by later, the last people we saw until later that evening. As John and I were changing in the tent, a female deer approached and proceeded to munch loudly on the leaf buds and flora next to us - unaware of our presence through the mirror-like mosquito netting. John and I found ourselves in simultaneously erotic moods - probably motivated by the fact that we were both clean (editorial insert: yes, I removed all subsequent narrative from my original journals except to note that the deer kept distracting our full intentions - not to mention the fact that both of us ached like hell). Indeed, I continued to wonder if I was going to make it. I felt if I made it to Klapatche I simply would not turn around - that I would be bound to finish it, even more if the weather held. We dined that night on freeze-dried lasagna, consuming as much as possible because we would be picking up new supplies the next day. A family arrived in the middle of our dinner and camped immediately next to us because other sites were apparently flooded. Incidentally, the toilet facilities were hilarious: a lengthy, muddy trail led, winding this way and that, back to this unmarked, open flat spot in the middle of which stood a singular wooden toilet (no walls, shield, nothing). Most of the evening seemed, in retrospect, to have been spent playing bathroom tag with the 3 children, mom or dad on their respective ways to the toilet - trying to squeeze a spot between family members without getting caught.



Left to Right: John by Mirror Lake, Rainier and Pyramid Peak, alpenglow from Pyramid XC zone

#### To Pyramid Peak XC Zone via Indian Henry's

The next day was pleasant and John and I enjoyed a leisurely breakfast. The hike to Longmire was 3-4 miles, generally downhill. Surprises along the way included Carter Falls, some big cylinders (presumably for water) along the trail, and a lengthy crossing of the Nisqually River via a couple of long halved logs with handrails. We then walked a level trail alongside the river before finally cutting inward and crossing the road. Fortunately, we first came to the stone cabin that serves as the information area. Ditching our packs on the substantial porch, we stretched briefly before going in to obtain our cache. The rangers were impressed with our pace - although my expressed pain led them to suggest, again, that we slow down and change the itinerary. We decided to think about it over lunch. But first, we went through our food cache - redistributing things, deciding what we could do without, and repacking. As we worked, we met two women who were setting off that day to begin the WT, packs bursting at their seams. Their plans paralleled ours over the next few days - except they would be at Devil's Dream (we would be 2 miles up at Pyramid Peak XC). Their major concern was water - which explained the 3 gallons lashed to each of their packs (we explained that water was generally available). They were also taken aback when I expressed my painful condition (their tone and remarks suggested that they were under the impression John was responsible). Certain we would meet the women later, we went to the lodge for hamburgers. An elderly woman from Oregon was fascinated with our trip. After lunch, I called my mom, who was upset to hear I was continuing despite pain (she offered immediate rescue). We then visited the store to buy more ibuprofen, lotion for bug bites, and Kool-Aid. I remember standing in line for more than a moment wondering: do I really want to continue? But John assured me that I wasn't rendering permanent damage. With that, we continued the all-too-familiar walk from Longmire. Rampart Ridge was easier than our last time (almost a year ago to the day) - probably because we were in better shape - but the views impressed me less. Indeed, the overall scenery on this trip - while glorious - was most powerful because we were doing the trail continuously. Anyway, we descended to Kautz creek - and then began climbing again. Near Pyramid Camp (not to be confused with the XC zone), four men (45-55) wearing tiny shorts and fanny-packs pass us going opposite our direction. It was apparent to John, but not to me, that we'd run into these guys near Indian Bar. We spoke briefly - as they were interested in moving: they were running the Wonderland in 3 days, having started at Longmire. Friends drove a camper for them to White River and Mowich. The whole thing was quite impressive. I couldn't imagine running what they were doing today: 40 miles (Mowich to Longmire), 10,000 feet gained/lost in 12-14 hours. John and I, on the other hand, would take MUCH longer to arrive at our destination. From Pyramid Camp, the trail meanders upward, leveling around the next camp, Devil's Dream. Nearby, we met a haggard couple with climbing gear: an older, heavier man and a young woman. Their plans were to camp near Pyramid Peak and summit Rainier via formidable Success Cleaver. Concerned that we not lose the beautiful XC spot we enjoyed the year prior, John and I placed some distance between them and us. At Devil's Dream, John used the john and I swatted mosquitoes and horseflies, my repellent having sweated off in the heat. Of all the days, today felt the hottest. Fortunately, most hiking was in the forest - with open meadows reached late afternoon. From Devil's Dream, the trail ascends sharply before Squaw Lakes (beneath Iron and Copper mountains). John and I reminisced about this location last year: taking off packs and wading in the sandy mud, being eaten alive by bugs (too).

Moving on, John predicted - as we rounded the flower-laden shore - that we would soon be to Indian Henry's. However, I countered with my distinct remembrance of a hellacious series of stairs before the final meadows. Said stairs - a procession of unevenly placed planks - repeatedly greeted my wearied thighs and challenged me to the bitter end. I can't say this section went any faster than last year - but it was prettier. While Summerland had definitely been green, it was just in the initial stages of blossoming. Indian Henry's, on the other hand, was truly at the peak: a rich diversity of colors and textures everywhere. We briefly visited the ranger's cabin, writing an entry in the logbook (which had updated, last year's pages replaced with blanks - the former hopefully removed to archives). I don't recall what I wrote - except that it regarded the great weather. With no sign of the climbers, we left languidly for Mirror Lakes, enjoying the beauty, the brewing colors of the alpenglow that hinted that the

day would soon be over. The Mirror Lake spur trail is another one of those trails that always takes longer than it looks. I always feel slightly guilty about our site, an open spot (probably a pond earlier), because it may not be exactly within the official XC zone. While it is surely out of sight from the official trail, it is right off the climber's trail. Certainly, there are equally riveting campsites farther up - but our site was originally chosen because we were losing daylight and it had an awesome view. As we erected our tent, the motley couple passed wordlessly. Given that we had encountered a bear last year, we dined well away from the tent - on a huge boulder above one of the many Mirror Lakes: macaroni and cheese, beans, and pistachio pudding. I remember being bitchy - fed up with my bug bites (which totaled over 200 - seriously), chilled by this inconsistent wind, wondering whether John was, in any way, making me do this. These feelings picked up the most as John sponge-bathed in the mucky lake. He wanted me to return to camp by myself and go to sleep. But I was nervous after last year's bear encounter - and he didn't seem to understand. After waiting for John, we returned to the tent where he read while I lay stiff and still. The wind picked up more but I managed to sleep a few hours. Later, the gales full force, I remember long, waking hours: the wind pounded the tent, collapsing it to 30° at its worse. The rain-fly ruffling and grasses shuffling, it became annoying to discern what was wind and what was something else (e.g. bears) - even though I knew it was the wind. But it wasn't cold - just deafening. John, at one point, went out to use the bathroom - which spurred me into the same desire (which I resented in the middle of the night). To my utter amazement, however, the outside air was warm - almost humid. Without my glasses, I could perceive only shapes and tones of light and dark. In the distance was the distinct form of the mountain. Seeing this vague but dramatic form required I don my glasses. This will surely go down as one of the most conspicuous moments in my life: me, wearing only glasses, barefoot in the middle of a meadow, warm winds caressing my body, a full moon behind, the mountain in full form... the snow light blue against the darker tones of rock, all against the starry night. Never have I beheld such an awesome sight. THAT view made up for my sleepless night (I just wish I'd had the sense to sit out there a couple hours instead of rolling incessantly in the sleeping bag). Only night views from Shriner Peak (on the east side of the park) with Jay compare: the mountain silhouette all night, extended moments of the northern lights. In many ways, though, tonight was even more beautiful: unendingly complex tones of blue and the color of the mountain by full moon. But I retired, having done my deed on the edge of the grassy circle. In between vague slumbering, I guessed - based on the tenacity of the wind and the purple and red hues of prior sunset - that a storm MUST be brewing hard out there. Consequently, I thought that we would surely awaken to nothing but clouds - clouds that would settle in for the next week.



Left to Right: heading up the east side of Emerald Ridge, me at the Emerald vertex, down the west side of Emerald

#### To Klapatche Lake via Emerald Ridge and St. Andrews Park

The only good thing about morning was that the blue skies were still out. It is remarkable how soundly John can sleep through anything; I, on the other hand, was tired, crabby, and concerned about our killer day - 14 miles, 3600 feet up/2000 down, including the high, evil suspension bridge. I also did not enjoy chores, as John likes to paternalistically call the routine of packing things up and such. However, I can say that it was at this point that my legs truly stopped hurting. In fact, they had assumed a hard, tenacious feeling - stiff at times but giving way to a tough strength that would carry me through the remainder of the trip. Brushing my teeth, I was notably amused by the fact that here we were in this glorious meadow overlooking the mountain in its entire grandeur by the morning blueness - the juxtaposition of this awesome spectacle beside us spitting foam into the heather was ridiculous. Soon thereafter, we made our way back to the Wonderland, passing mosquito- and frog-laden ponds that looked still from a distance. We consequently juiced up with various ointments once we got to the Mirror Lake intersection. It is so odd, I think, to describe the trip in terms of routines, but, by many counts, it was just that: cooking, eating, cleaning, packing, hiking, unpacking, sleeping, much of which I credit to John. Having said that, I imagine the one who works the hardest gets the benefit of sleep. The morning hike took us to the fringes of Indian Henry's and then drop 1500 feet to Tahoma Creek - mostly through forest. As we dropped to Tahoma, the way evolved into sandy soil and drier forest - the source of the former being glacial (indeed, Tahoma outbursts took out so many low bridges that a high suspension bridge became a necessity). Construction of a new high bridge was in progress when we arrived (new concrete blocks were set in place but the old cables and planks had not been replaced or moved). We did what we did last year: I removed my pack and followed John across, and then John went back for my pack. I can still see the vista of the bridge laid out before me, trees in the distance. But I never looked down to capture all 80-100 feet beneath my feet - nor do I recall much sway. I know I could do this myself and this second time was easier; nevertheless, I felt at the time I would best make it with John - given my dizzy exhaustion. The new bridge will span 20 feet longer at the same height, provided the canyon does not erode further.

The traverse along Emerald Ridge to its vertex was one of the many dreaded parts of the day for me (the bridge and the climb to St. Andrews being the others). A year ago, I was hiking 20 minutes behind John - dying in the heat, and almost unable to carry on. Today's intense heat did not help - but John and I agreed to stay together. The remarkable thing about most days: there were winds and breezes that would efficiently cool us down every time we made our way into the open. Said winds worked their magic as the way opened onto this arid moraine ridge along which the dusty trail climbed: views to the mountain,

Puyallup Glacier, the emerald glades on the higher ridges. A jaunt of several short switchbacks ascended the final "V" that crosses the tip and low-end of Emerald Ridge proper, ramparts of high meadows above the glacial valley on which Klapatche, St. Andrews, and Tokaloo lay. The ruddy iron color of the Puyallup Glacier is striking, the incredible waterfalls that emerge from snowfields high on the rock imperceptibly long. We lunched at the vertex and, after a small spat regarding the best location, moved from a buggy grassy promontory to the windswept moraine. John and I, admittedly, were getting on each other's nerves again. After eating, we started down the edgy trail that traverses high above the Puyallup Glacier, enjoying ever-widening views of the glacier's icy face. We then entered forest and passed a considerable amount of time before arriving at South Puyallup Camp - where we saw our first tent (no people) for the day. Nearby, we spied impressive columnar basalt, relieved ourselves, and pumped water. It was around 1 p.m. when we crossed the large wooden bridge over the raging chocolate-colored water and I remarked how nice chocolate milk would be. We then committed ourselves to steadily tackling the big evil ridge - 3600 feet. I can't say that the wind was magically present during the initial ascent - although the brevity of the hike was surprising and appreciated. The trail ascends via long switchbacks that zigzag back and forth between forest and brushy meadows. John and I joked about how grueling this section had been the year before - with me so far behind that he scuffed out notes to me in the trail - that I would read MUCH later while huffing away. This time, I wasn't behind much at all. Even so, I was so happy to see the seemingly final top of the ridge that I neglected to recall the fact that this really wasn't the top. The switchbacks end at the distal southern end of St. Andrews Park, near the park boundary: grand, sweeping views west toward the Olympics across miles of clear-cuts. However, then the trail continues generally up the backbone (like Cowlitz in reverse) and back toward the mountain. I remember the buzzing bees in the carpet of wildflowers, the numerous butterflies. John vanished ahead because my energy dissipated and I began to moan along the meandering trail - confounded by the topography, wondering where the hell damn St. Andrew's Lake was (it should be right around any of the many corners).



Left to Right: stair section before... St. Andrews Lake (Tokaloo on snowy ridge before Rainier), Klapatche alpenglow

We next regrouped at this infamous rocky tarn where we stopped a year ago for water. Where, the year before, John and I made grape Kool-Aid in lovers' bliss (capture on film in an ethereal shot I included later), we were not on great terms this year. I was tired, bug-eaten, and dirty - wanting only to bathe in St. Andrew's Lake and then to get to camp and sleep. So I sat restlessly while John made nasty cherry Kool-Aid. I remember John being especially bossy again - which bugged me on a daily basis on this trip. Eventually, I continued alone to St. Andrew's. As I approached the lake, the land became familiar - but I remember being astounded with the awesome view of Rainier emerging over the ridge behind the lake (more snow than last year) St. Andrews is an odd lake: deep gray blue, it sits in this perfect bowl that hangs along the ridge with a narrow outlet right along the trail. Were it any deeper, I would fear the whole thing would pour over the lip of the basin during some earthquake. John caught up and became the first one into the water. Cool winds blasted from the west, making bathing seem less attractive to me. Nonetheless, John made a rapid cleansing - stripping completely as I teased him about the women we met at Longmire catching him as such. Soon, I decided to wash up - standing in my bikini top and shorts and wiping down with my bandana. Despite the wind, the full sun quickly warmed my skin and, combined with the wind, dried my hair. Even so, I put on this itchy new pair of cheap white polypro long underwear (backups for the Capilene I usually wear) and a wool sweater. While it was tempting to stay longer, we proceeded down the half-mile trail to Klapatche. Although it wasn't late, we'd hiked a LOT - and still had comfortable daylight hours left to kill. It was time to relax. It is always surprising to hike this brief section: it is as though you start close to the mountain but, as you hike toward Aurora Peak (adjacent to Klapatche), you pass this deep chasm (North Puyallup) that abruptly separates you from the mountain. And then you continue around Aurora's flanks (10 minutes away) until you come to its western base where Mt. Rainier stands above Aurora, mirrored in the shallow waters beside Klapatche Camp proper. It feels like you should have dropped 1000 feet and walked for miles - even though you haven't. Given the lack of people since Longmire, we thought Klapatche would be empty. We were thus surprised to find a party using our campsite from last year (featuring incredible views over Puget Sound - the lights of Seattle and Tacoma, all against the profile of the Olympics). Consequently, we camped 1 site removed from this party, affording privacy and a more tree-shrouded vista of the Sound. At some point, a second party showed up, taking the foreground campsite well away from us (overlooking Rainier through trees). Pleased to be camping among trees given the previous night's wind, I fashioned a long clothesline with extra cord, hanging our clothes in a camper's rainbow. I then turned my attention to the highly anticipated dinner: chicken and dumplings. The most complex of our freeze-dried meals, this dish required assembling dough balls and plopping them into a hotpot of gravy, chicken, and vegetables. Efforts proved worthwhile and dinner was enjoyed by twilight. Later, we strolled down to the lake, admiring the reflection of the alpenglow and conversing with the newly arrived party carrying a portable radio. Astonished to hear we were doing the whole trail, these guys said that the weather report indicated a massive heat wave in the lowlands (Seattle was 92°) - still holding for the next 3 days. It was remarkable to hear so many parties express surprise at our trip - particularly given that last year we met party after party trying to complete this trip in as little time as us. Given that the Longmire women were nowhere in sight, we surmised they'd stayed at the South Puyallup - behind schedule. I remember little about the remainder of the night. So much of backpacking, especially on multi-day trips, consists of dreaming about sleeping, resting, and simply lying flat and still (not to mention enjoying that your feet aren't pounding any longer). Certainly, Klapatche was one of the most enjoyable places on this trip. I have vague recollections of John giving me an

exquisite massage, and returning the favor - although my pleasure with touch probably had more to do with the fact that I could actually enjoy it for the first time in days. Exhausted and peaceful, I rested well - one of those rare nights I enjoyed sleeping outside in a tent. And it was nice, of course, to feel cleansed of the dirt and grime - as well as the negative feelings I'd been feeling with John. Admittedly, we walked the trails with virtually no ill feelings the year before - and this year was definitely different. It's perhaps unanswerable why that is: the nature of the trip as opposed to the nature of each of us.



Left to Right: long climb to Sunset Park, in Sunset proper, sunset from Golden Lakes

#### To Golden Lakes

Despite prior moments of strife, we awoke calm, peaceful, and in a state of great desire. Enhancing said mood was the relative ease of the coming day (8 miles, 2000 feet gained/lost). I felt somewhat awkward pursuing said desire while camping near a bunch of guys - particularly since we'd slept with the fly off the tent, leaving vulnerable corners of nothing more than sheer netting. But the weather was warm and pleasant, the sounds few and natural, and John and I fresh and engaging, taking great pleasure in the moment of a grand day and a successful trip. We breakfasted quietly by the lake, our neighbors greeting us as usual. Both consisted of middle-aged guys who seemed slightly ill-equipped (despite carrying radios). Both said they were doing just this section of the Wonderland (Mowich to Longmire), having failed repeatedly before. Although most were respectful of our plans, I did get a negative vibe from 1 guy about our youth and lazy-sounding academic lifestyles (as though we weren't in it for the long haul... just some romp-in-the-hay overnight trip)... not that we weren't romping in the hay. Following our scenic breakfast - Rainier translucent in this beaming glow - we packed up and prepared for the long, steep downhill trek to the North Puyallup. John and I reminisced about last year when we met several 60-something couples making their way steadily up this route, having gotten an early start from Golden Lakes. On this trip, however, we would pass 2 of our neighbors and a garbage-dropping team of teenage boys led by 1 adult. The latter informed us that they'd come from Carbon River, reporting massive snowfields extending from Seattle through Spray Park. We told them of the significant snow cover from Indian Bar through Summerland (editorial insert: there was, relatively speaking, no snow in Seattle and Spray Park - maybe one 20-foot snowfield). After a brief walk through lush forest, we reached the West Side Road terminus (closed since the 70's) at the base of the huge bulbous rock, the name of which I still don't know (it appears on no maps). Said rock completely eclipses Rainier. We stopped briefly, the sun blazing and numerous horseflies ruining our notions of lunch. We continued up the trail, hoping for a more secluded place to eat. The ascent to Sunset Park/Golden Lakes is a long traverse involving only about 4 gentle-which-become-tortuous switchbacks. After a considerable time, we stopped in the woods to eat - right by the trail, on a big log. Again, we were scrambling to finish all food before picking up the final cache at Mowich.

Continuing, we dreaded that we would soon be out in the open silver forest of Sunset Park. When we finally reached said burn, we were astounded to feel this glorious wind blast up the ridge. Our last trip afforded good views of the mountain, but against a whitening sky. Consequently, we stopped for pictures and to snack again, meeting this female solo hiker doing the Wonderland (having started at Sunrise). Slightly heavy with long sandy hair, granola girl looked like she'd been out many days. We pulled out our maps, discussing the since-abandoned Sunset Park/Lakes trail. Someday, I would love to find this route - camp by an alpine lake with a full view of Rainier. This would contrast with the dank campsites at Golden Lakes - my least favorite on the whole route. Said lakes are distant from the mountain and you feel sunk way down in the trees. Nevertheless, the lakes sparkle and there is a massive, open view of Puget Sound/Olympics. Best of all, the lakeside ranger station has a logbook and a swinging chair that produces various pitches when you pluck its rope. Upon arriving there, we located our campsite, losing our ideal spot to 4 chattering Aussie women. After setting up camp, we returned to the ranger's cabin and, with the women in ear/eye-shot, John and I bathed and washed clothes. The water was relatively warm, heated in this shoal atop solid stone covered with a millimeter of fine mud. Our bathing, however, was far too short. We retreated to camp, napping naked in the tent under this glorious hot sunlight - a comfortable end to a relaxing day. For dinner, John and I enjoyed chili, speaking of which: spending any time with John (particularly in a tent) required enduring his excessive flatulence. The chili, to my astonishment, rendered few such expulsions that night - although it was scary to think where everything was being held up. Indeed, John often suffered many back-ups outside - solids sublimating to gas (editorial insert: I always said that John should eat more charcoal so his powerful GI tract could turn them into diamonds... of course - this was usually followed with some remark about wedding rings and we all know where that went). Following dinner, we strolled to this open knoll from which a worthy view of the sunset was enjoyed (despite the yappy women). We eventually asked them where they'd been: bug-ridden Spray Park (although they spoke magnificently of the grand views). In terms of snow, they said there was nothing but a few simple fields. At some point, the women took our picture - a silhouette against the layers of color above the horizon. We watched the light go from yellow to orange to red - wisps of high clouds that still played with our sense of impending weather doom. But, by this, the 6th day, it felt as though the predictable cloud formations - which peaked around 5 p.m. and then dissipated - were something we could depend upon. I remember little of that evening save climbing into the tent and doing nothing but floating in this midair sensation of not touching anything with the currently-most sensitive part of my body - my feet. I recall no negative feelings regarding the night or my sleep - particularly compared to the year before: encircling clouds, lightning, thunder... a tree alighting on the adjacent ridge after a strike. That year, John thought he could get away with

carrying only a blanket and so we struggled to share my single bag - shivering in terror that we'd be struck by lightening, evident shards of trees surrounding our tent.

#### To Spray Park XC Zone

We awoke to yet another stunning day. After breakfast, we packed and headed down to the ranger cabin, stopping at the bathroom for, in my case, an exquisitely regular dump (editorial insert: as opposed to chili-boy). We also recorded our impressions in the cabin logbook. A startling number of entries from the past several weeks described incredible downpours, the most ingenious featuring a well-illustrated cartoon of 3 soaked men garbed in plastic trash bags. Behind them, the rain appeared as this dark monster that vaguely took its anthropomorphized shape from the stippled raindrops. Contrarily, our entry expressed hope and satisfaction. We continued from the cabin, traversing the long ridge. I would guess that the trail zigzags right up to the park boundary (visible clear-cuts one ridge over) before dropping to the Mowich River Valley. John and I frequently discuss the odd practice of clear-cutting - why logging companies don't avoid areas near the park simply because of rotten publicity. I'm certain it extends from some old appreciation for development - man's dominion over nature. Either that or it really is just all about money. Anyway - given unobstructed views toward Rainier, it was tempting to sit and stare... but the miles ahead were severe (more than anticipated). The descent to the Mowich River's many channels was both quick and slow: quick when we were walking, slow when we ran into people. First it was the running man (a lone ultra-light hiker running the Wonderland in 3-4 days). Next, the women from Longmire had been completely thwarted by the climb to Devil's Dream - so they retreated, re-started at Mowich Lake, and made it down to Mowich River Camp. Here, they gave up and decided to hang out. They expressed amazement with our pace and stamina - and my recovery. They said they'd done the Appalachian Trail years ago and assumed the Wonderland would be comparable (apparently it was not). We told them to enjoy Golden Lakes (their dayhike destination today) - and to visit Tolmie Peak and Spray Park later. We continued to the braided river - notorious for bridge washouts. We crossed the first vein of the South Mowich via a long, narrow, recently-hewn log. The second vein had no such bridge - only a passable snag, over which the river lapped as we crossed. On the beach of the North Mowich, we gorged on remaining food near where we built the famous Sandcastle Eros the year before (editorial insert: despite said name, we did not defile anything in the vicinity this year). A pair of young male climbers equipped with rope and ice axes passed us going the other way. I got major stares from them, being a coveted woman among outdoorsy men - enough femininity to be fawned over, enough muscle to be respected, damn it (editorial insertion: HA HA, I'm on the floor laughing over that one). The trip up to Mowich was just as awful as the year before (not a good thing - considering we still had another 4 miles AFTER the lake). The switchbacks were relentless, the route meandering - glimpses of skyline and ridgeline, all suggesting the lake would be right there. Finally, we came to this nameless waterfall with all these kids - and correctly figured we couldn't be far from the lake. Being Friday, there were a lot of car-campers. At the ranger's cabin, we laid down our packs and sat on the porch, admiring the great expanse of Mowich Lake. A young couple with a child mistook us for rangers, asking about short hikes in the area. I don't think they were impressed when we told them what we were up to - perhaps jealous they couldn't do such adventuring with child. Ah, the sacrifice of children - someday I may regret writing that. We unpacked our food cache, now beneath a considerable number of other food bags. To our dismay, the cheddar was moldy and we probably hadn't packed enough powdered milk. After loading up and continuing, I felt that moment-of-no-return pass through my spinning head. Why? We'd be closer to more escape routes than we'd been the last few days. Perhaps it was more about anxiety than fear - so close to success. Giving it up could destroy the perfection of what had been. Like a Shakespearean tragedy - you have elevated the situation to its highest possible point and, in so doing, you now have the most to lose. Despite anxiety, I remember saying to John: can you believe we're going to make it? And John, who'd been the certain voice since the beginning, reverted to his typical devil's advocate self: we're not done yet.



Left to Right: entering Spray Park, Zen-like garden near camp, donning raingear for massive mosquitoes

John and I resumed hiking around 2:30 - not unreasonable for 4 miles but, given that we'd already walked 11, it was brutal. Half-way between Mowich and the Spray Falls junction, we passed 6 elderly women backpackers, most with walking sticks or ski-poles and gaiters on (they also confirmed that there was hardly any snow). We also passed a group of 5 teenage girls being led by 50-something dad - who stopped to remark that we were starting out awfully late and that camping was prohibited in Spray Park (need he remind us). I smiled and cockily replied that we had permits for cross-country camping, which was permitted (he said nothing, perhaps taken aback with the tone of my response, my gender, or both). During the frustrating final ascent to Spray Park, I stated that this day was longer than I expected and that I would never repeat this section again under such circumstances - adding that I doubted I would ever undertake the Wonderland again. My feelings stemmed more from the general wear - feeling so tired at the end of repeated days. I recall distinctly saying that were I ever to try it again, it would be when I was in my 30's - during Indian summer when there were no damn bugs (editorial insertion: thirties - HA HA... try 40's at this rate). Spray Park, though, is a subtle introduction. The first sign that you are there is the opening of the landscape. Then the mountain emerges, but the trail meanders through thickets via multiple, parallel trails (3-5 in some places). Indeed, Spray Park suffers - more than any trail in the park - from people and weather damage; people, in an effort to avoid mud and snow, stomp out new adjacent trails atop the meadows - creating melding freeways of tracks. Recent efforts to condense trails

were obvious as we made our way across these sections: slabs of stones along the extra trails, meadow repair materials between. As we hiked, the sun disappeared behind the ridge that defines the western side of Spray Park (which includes Pleasant and Hessong), increasing our need to make camp - although we agreed that getting as far as possible was also a good idea. Our goal: 10 minutes below the high point between Spray and Seattle. But hiking to this point took a lot of work and filled me with hunger-induced anxiety and fear. When we came to the spot we had mind, we were surprised to see dry circles of dirt where tarns usually existed. And so we continued a little farther, cutting off-trail toward the mountain when we spied some snow and then weaving through this maze of windblown shrubbery and trees. We came to a spot that was 5-10 minutes from the trail but separated by a wall of brush (i.e. not visible). There was a good patch of snow and a tarn near where we placed our tent. While I set up the tent (ravaged by the most bloodthirsty insects thus far), John started dinner. At some point, he insisted we put on our raingear to avoid bites. This night represented the nearest I felt to insanity on the whole trip. My bug-induced swearing, slapping, and frustration were too much for John (he wasn't bitten hardly at all - and the times he was produced no ill effects). Each and every one of my bites, in contrast, swelled into itchy welts within hours and lasted, as such, for days. The constant buzzing and mmm-mmmmm-mm sounds that accompanied every movement at Spray Park (outside the tent) provoked me because of their strong connection to the painful and itchy bites covering my body. To be out in the sun with raingear was ridiculous too. I remember walking toward the mountain - there was this gorgeous plateau with boulders of all sizes set upon this level plain of mud in a Zen-like manner. Flanking the flats were these beautiful masses of pink and white heather that glowed in the orange light. And there behind it all: the mountain against an absolutely blue sky. But all the while, I am sitting on this stone unable to focus straight because the damn mosquitoes were making kamikaze runs into the reaches of my hood, face, nose, ears, eyes... I was swiping the air like I've never physically fretted in a long time. John and I would take a lovely picture here - in our raingear, with a mosquito visible on John's hat no less. Argh. Argh. Argh. We eventually finished preparing dinner - after dumping half the water John boiled because he had made no effort to measure it. Even so, dinner was the worst: a lime-flavored chicken and vegetable dish that was a different brand than the other dehydrated meals we typically used. The funniest part about dinner was having to choreograph food into the tent without mosquitoes. First, I went into the tent to be the acceptor: the person who unzipped the tent fast, accepted the food, re-zipped, and then killed any beasts that managed to get inside. John, meanwhile, was the retriever: the person who relayed food between the distant cooking site. Assembling dinner required 4 trips back and fourth. John, in an effort to lose the cloud of bugs, would stroll round and round to gather as many as possible. He then would tear toward the tent at top speed, leaping into the tent and leaving most of the swarm behind. We had this routine down so well that only 3-4 mosquitoes entered the tent each time (these were quickly killed on the spot). Unfortunately, many a bug splattered blood onto the tent netting upon squashing - HIGHLY disturbing. While John cleaned the dishes, I searched for an adequate place to hang our food - difficult given that the trees were no more than 8 feet tall. After much discussion, we decided to hide the food at under some rocks beyond the tarn. I then retired, not even bothering to brush my teeth. I managed to sleep well until 3-4 a.m. - after which I couldn't sleep more than a few 30-minute stretches. Laying in dirty, itchy discomfort, I remember seeing the silhouette of the mountain by the light of the moon - which rose from the west and cut this mighty arc across the sky. Completely afraid of beasts in the night, I delayed using the bathroom a long time - until finally traipsing 10 yards across the open meadow where I watered the flowers. I remember my bare feet, the fact that the meadow felt squishy and soft and cool to my skin - contrary to what I was expecting (pointy and bristly or something). I fell asleep better after visiting the meadow, eventually awakening to luxurious sunlight after a final 3 hours of solid sleep.



Left to Right: snout of the Carbon Glacier, tent view from Curtis Ridge, alpenglow on Willis Wall face

#### To Lower Curtis Ridge XC Zone via Moraine Park

Today's hike was of concern given yesterday's exhausting demands - particularly as we would be ascending the steepest single section of the Wonderland (Carbon to Moraine), and as we would be descending the section that caused last year's knee problems (Seattle to Carbon). I remember many moments of mutual frustration between John and I. John tends to move more slowly because he can carry more using an internal frame pack (which requires more careful packing). I remember starting out before John, crossing the meadow into another open place between groves of windblown trees. Here, something big fled - as I stood shaking with fear, listening to branches breaking, heavy thumping across the hollow-sounding meadow. Running back to camp, I waited for John and we resumed soon thereafter. Intersecting the trail, we continued through rocky, tundra-like terrain overlooking all of Spray Park. Here, I wanted so much to throw off the pack and climb to a higher point where Jay and I enjoyed my post-oral exam celebratory hike (editorial insert: the orals being a major hurdle en route to the Ph.D.). But there would be none of that today given the strong, mutual urge to make camp early tonight - our LAST. And so we crested the second highest point on our route (6400 feet). In contrast with the official Wonderland (via lower Ipsut Pass), the Spray/Seattle route traverses high, often snow-covered terrain. Beyond the Spray/Seattle high point, 3 major snowfields were pocketed in scree, each 100-300 feet and bearing a dirty line of footprints. We were likely the first to cross this morning given our early start and proximal location. Thereafter, elevation is lost slowly at first, the trail lingering between snow and rocks. After ambling for a spell, the trail severity increased noticeably - as did the flora. We began crossing many streams as we approached small Cataract Falls - a granite spillway covered with green moss. We eventually reached forest, signaling our

proximity to Cataract camp (which was not, as reported, flooded). While John used the Cataract can, I dropped my pack and rested. Already, my body felt tired. The 1.5 miles to Carbon River was as boring as ever (I'd done it 4 times before), the trail dropping through a cluttered section of windstorm-blasted forest. For a brief time, the trail opens to views of Echo Cliffs, the way proceeding down a canyon - the headwalls of which comprise Mist Park (a hanging valley below Spray Park with no trail access). Finally, we arrived at the Carbon River where, alongside incoming Cataract Creek, we sat on some big logs and ate salami and fruit. We resumed again, hiking 5 minutes to the swinging bridge: it conjures up so many visitations, initial fears, motion, and familiarity. We crossed without event, laughing that we felt as though we'd been sailing on a wavy sea. A short but definitely challenging climb took us to the snout of the Carbon Glacier, the lowest elevation glacier in the lower 48 states. Having seen it dozens of times before, we didn't even stop.

And then the truly evil ascent began (mind you, I've done this 10 times before - albeit only once with a pack). Walking slowly is the only thing that gets me through. While I did not fall significantly behind John, I was behind, requesting frequently that he wait. The more I do this section, the more I feel: how quickly the steepest section passes (between the snout and Dick Creek Camp). I am never possessed to stay at Dick, this little hellhole on the side of a hill/cliff (despite the view-all toilet with its amazing vista over the dirty glacier). Moving on, we plodded up the forested switchbacks, resting variously in the trees. Admittedly, my memories of this section were screwed up by the fact that I was just there a month ago (not to mention all the other times); indeed, memory seems a palimpsest. Anyway - the trail went through repeated stands of trees, occasionally traversing steep open slopes with partial views of Rainier. This area is the first of many teasers: you THINK you are getting out of the woods but you really aren't - at least not for 30-45 minutes. We crossed the stream several times - at some point rock-hopping the base of this sylvan waterfall that splashes down vertical rock (a nice spot for drenching your hair). Here, the trail meanders noticeably up along this beautiful low valley - lovely flowers and small pines twisted by heavy winter snow. All the while, the babbling brook unfurls a silver ribbon between the rocks and flora. Of course, the trail meanders relative to the creek - up and down and left and right, making a strange switchback in the middle of nowhere... At I believe the final crossing, John insisted I sit down and take my pack off. Expressing frustration with my frequent breaks and bitching, he felt I wasn't doing anything constructive. But for me, it was, like: what am I supposed to do? The bugs and heat hadn't affected him - he had zero understanding or empathy for how I felt. Should we have slowed down earlier? I don't know - I feel good about what I did - that day and every day on the trail. Would slowing down earlier have been better for John in terms of putting up with my complaints? I don't know (editorial insert: John was incapable of enjoyably slowing to my pace. So no - there was no making both of us happy). After resuming, it seemed like no time before we were crossing into the lower meadows of Moraine Park. Alas, though, I've seen the views from above - SO much more impressive. It's distressing - this notion that simple views were once satisfying and then, because you've pushed and seen something grander higher up, the former view is no longer worth as much. One good thing about progress, though, is that in the same way previous goals lose their shimmer, so too do difficulties. In any case, the ascent of the ridge above lower Moraine Park - which used to be hellish to me - lost its reputation because I've come to accept that it's a 15-minute ascent (nothing out of an entire day - or week). Of course, that's not to say the climb is not a bitch while you're doing it. And so we huffed to the top of the ridge, where a sign indicating Mystic Lake stands squarely in the middle of a sandy, boot-beaten climber's path heading right (the Wonderland proceeds left).

Right was our route: the way to the most wondrous place in the park for me, upper Moraine Park/Lower Curtis Ridge. Of course, such invocations were not exactly the focal point of my thoughts at the time. Mostly, we were arguing again: John now wanted to sleep ON Curtis Ridge but I didn't like this idea given its exposure. As we hiked up the meandering path, John finally agreed that we should stay at the same lower plateau we'd enjoyed last year (just beneath the ridgeline). We descended from the high lava-covered knoll on this section - down a half-rocky, half-sandy hill. Here, the way becomes indistinct across a meadow with lots of muddy ruts. Beyond, we entered this flat tundra-like bowl: our fabled site. A couple dayhikers coming down from the ridge remarked how lovely and amazing this place would be for spending the night. Indeed. Although there were no definite signs the weather was getting worse, we did note a sea of clouds covering the lowlands. My poor mother, I thought - thinking we were up here in some awful storm! After setting up the tent with me, John gathered water - including to warm for bathing. I recall feeling famished then, the combination of last night's crappy dinner plus the wear of the trip. I sat down to cook an early spaghetti dinner - starchy noodles, exceptional sauce. Eating at 4 p.m., of course, would render me hungry most of the night. After dinner, we sponge-bathed and, given some wind, I put on fresh longjohns and my rain jacket. Garbed likewise, John and I finally hiked up to Curtis Ridge proper, vegetating before the awesome spectacle of Willis Wall and the entire head of the Carbon Glacier. John brought a book and sat trying to read while I lounged, more talkative than he would have preferred. For whatever reason, I couldn't sit and stare long - I don't know if it was the anticipation of the trip ending or the fact that I'd been here so many times before. Even John was less interested in the scenery than his book - and neither of us were inspired or innocent. Frankly, I would have liked to make out up there - lie in the sandy earth and kiss, sit in the warm curve of his body between his legs, have him hold me about the front, talk expressively about the view: the gaping crevasses and blue ice, thundering avalanches and smoky billows of snow pouring in huge rivers down the ribs of the wall. After watching the sun sink below the ridges above Spray Park, we returned to the tent and I remember John reading more as I lie down. With the sunset, the wind died and it looked to be a peaceful final night. I found myself finally likewise - comfortable, clean, momentarily well-fed.

#### To Sunrise and White River - Full Circle

When I awoke, the notion of another Powerbar was disgusting and John's Grape Nuts seemed more appealing (editorial insert: as they did up on Curtis Ridge the night before). But John growlingly gave me a few spoonfuls. There was already a sense of completion at this point. With 14 miles to go, we packed up and started down the climbers' path. Near the junction with the Wonderland an ephemeral pool provides a full reflection of Rainier (often thwarted by wind or bad light). On this cloudless and sunny morning, blue skies framed a perfect double mirror image. We continued down the meandering trail to Mystic Lake, coming to this grassy basin where boardwalks are built through the marsh near the lakeshore (editorial insert: contrary to popular expectations, views of Rainier are limited at Mystic). Here, my ankle began giving me problems, forcing me to empty and re-tie my boots; a twig had lodged into the folds of my sock, grinding into my ankle bone. The hike from Mystic

reminded me of my impressions the year before: a gentle downhill through the woods, campsites beyond the lake. The trees were small and scrubby, the forest floor sandy - remnant mudflows from Winthrop Glacier winding through the young forest (perhaps in another decade they will be washed away). At some point, we hiked a straight trail along a creek, the narrow path 4 feet high above the raging glacial stream. And then we saw the glacier proper - the dirty, ironclad behemoth, a low-lying creature slothfully groping across the valley - creating the valley. I am often taken aback at how unnatural mountain terrain seems - how quarry-like and devastated geological things. We passed 2 parties traveling in our direction (a sporty older couple and 2 boys wearing blue jeans). We crossed the river that emerged from the glacier over a medium bridge - and then began the dreaded ascent toward Skyscraper Pass. Nearby, we managed to momentarily lose the trail because mudslides and fallen trees confused the route (just our luck: the last day and we get lost). After some debate (John wanted a view of the glacier), we stopped for a snack in this green thicket. After eating, the ensuing climb to the pass seemed to last less time than last year. Clawing up one wickedly steep spot, we ascended to an intermediate flat section. After this, we climbed again, passing Granite Creek Camp, an idyllic brook crossing where we pumped our last water. And just before: the DNA tree, a 10-12 foot tall stump/trunk shredded into two helical ribbons. Actually, we noted many DNA trees, speculating which were A, B, or Z-forms, had helicase chugging along. As we climbed, the terrain grew more open and grassy, and the expanse of Rainier, Mystic basin, Observation and Echo Rocks massive before us. Given the views, we stopped to look into the Winthrop Glacier and Steamboat Prow, John pointing out the route he took up the mountain just before this trip. The startlingly obvious cattle-track of footprints could readily be seen with the naked eye. We admired the flowers dotting the dry earth on the east side of the mountain - very different from the lush terrain we'd hiked the last 8 days. We then topped Skyscraper pass proper, views opening fully east: the valley beneath Mt. Fremont, the massive bowl where the Northern Loop trail meets the Wonderland. Given thoughts of dinner, baths, and beds, we did not linger. We hiked into the bowl, passing several Japanese men (wives following). We then met this elderly woman who appeared unkempt to the point of being unhealthy: missing front teeth, torn clothes, and attracting every horsefly in the vicinity. She yapped on about all her hiking mishaps - most on the Appalachian Trail (innumerable falls, including one that left her with a stone lodged deep in her leg). Following her bidding us good-bye, we continued to the Northern Loop junction for a second lunch (and longing for something cold and greasy).



Left to Right: rounding the base of Winthrop Glacier, nearing top of Skyscraper Pass, view from Sunrise

We continued climbing, quickly arriving at the intersection with Burroughs Mountain. Given the crowds, it was satisfying to walk strongly with such huge packs - albeit more for me: the skinny girl with the big man. Bombing past several huffing dayhikers, we came to this distinctive section that traverses a substantial talus slope. Here, rock slabs have been neatly piled, forming a wall alongside the walkway. However, a portion had collapsed and 2 rangers were guiding people over the wreckage. Old ranger dude offered me his hand, verbally assuring me that just because I looked like a pro didn't mean I couldn't use help (needless to say, this pissed me off). Just as we cleared the obstruction, we passed another ranger carrying a "trail closed" sign (others behind us would have to take a longer route back to Sunrise). Having narrowly averted this inconvenience, we forced our way through several older people walking 3 abreast. We reached what I call the top (ALL downhill from there) and enjoyed hazy views onto the eastern Stuart Range. As we looked west toward Rainier, an ominous bank of clouds was making its way over the profile of ice and rock: clearly the end - not only of our trip, but also of the fine weather. We bounded down the hill toward Sunrise, through throngs of Sunday visitors. After being affronted by pavement and traffic, John and I decided not to wait in line for greasy food. Stumbling awkwardly into the visitor center (with packs on), we inquired if, indeed, the weather was deteriorating. It was, the ranger said, and we were lucky to have achieved 9 days of clear weather. After locating the trail on the other side of the overflowing parking lot, we walked the final 3 miles in peace. Views of the immense Emmons Glacier and White River valley dominated. Although the path was dry, there were many lupine and Indian paintbrush. At several points, the trail was no more than a narrow ledge of dirt along a washout zone - places where snowmelt likely raged down the mountainside. Despite feeling more confident with heights and strength, hiking the Wonderland did not goad me into wanting to climb Rainier more; in fact, it affirmed my preference for looking at the mountain (not being on it). At one point, we met a couple of burly chain-smoking guys who wanted to know how far before they would see something (a difficult thing to answer). Soon, we heard the sounds of the parking lot, the noise of people in the distance. One minute from the pavement, we said hello to this corpulent woman who remarked that we certainly looked like we'd been somewhere. When I told her, she was astonished. We walked dazed through the camper-filled grounds, noting a watermelon tucked beneath a trailer, the smell of burning wood, and the mouth-watering aroma of grilling meat. At my car, we greatly enjoyed the final removal of the packs. I've heard seasoned hikers claim, over time, to stop noticing when they're carrying packs (that the pack evolves into another body part). Although I felt that way from time to time on this trip, it was hard to ignore the bruises on my thighs, hipbones, and shoulders. In contrast with previous trips, though, I could at least pick the pack up off the ground. While it has been a pleasure hiking without the pack since the trip, I do - masochistically - miss hauling my belongings around on my back (a little).

After face- and pit-washing, and changing clothes in the restroom, we were off around 4. Our plan was to drive to the Copper Creek Inn for dinner via Longmire, picking up our food cache bin at the ranger station there (we never picked up from Mowich). The sun seemed low, the long shadows impressing my memory as we drove the curving edgy highway along Stevens

Canyon. Staring into the valley we'd bushwacked a week before, it was hard to believe we'd done the whole trail. When we arrived at Longmire, I went up to the 3 rangers in the surprisingly empty visitor center, explaining that we'd just completed the trail and now we needed to know where the free dinner was. Laughing heartily, the rangers shook our hands, congratulated our efforts, and explained there were no free dinners. Meanwhile, a party of four Australian guys listened to our exchange. Hauling expensive gear (commingled with Tim's Cascade Chips lashed to the outside of the packs), they were preparing for their assault. Expressing amazement at our luck and feat, they admitted they were already late (first night = Devil's Dream) but were prepared for several days of bad weather. All we could do was wish them good luck. After picking up our cache, we continued our drive out, impressed that the mountain was no longer visible. At Copper Creek Inn (10 minutes past the entrance), we embarked on our long-awaited eating expedition: trout or fried chicken, salads, vegetables, all the "little loaves" we wanted, and blackberry pie. I called home and my mother was shocked we made it (all week, she had convinced herself John was forcing me along, irreparably damaging my legs). Despite my mother's unfounded concerns, we stayed with her that night in Tacoma. In contrast with stated intents to bath and retire early, our excitement got the best of us and we remained WAY too awake and talkative WAY too late. John and I showered together, washing everything twice - to exorcise all the evil residues (including, no doubt, microscopic bug parts). In the months to come, this massive achievement took its time to fully hit me. In many ways, writing about it has most defined the significance and pleasure of the journey. While I remember the pains and toils - and the many moments of wanting to quit - I have put such thoughts behind me. I am not certain how to comment on John and my relationship except to say that it was shaped by the Wonderland. But I was too tired to delve into our depths (or shallowness), to self-realize en route. Last year, our short wanderings seemed like a effortless adventure that, from this relative distance, seemed like the embodiment of immaturely contented love. Doing the entire whole trail felt older, more seasoned, more experienced - but also more whole: whole in that we traversed the entire trail, and whole in that John and I experienced every feeling and emotion regarding one another (editorial insert: now THAT'S something to chew on!).



Left to Right: lovers' bliss shot during practice trip near St. Andrews, sunset silhouette, watercolor - night study in blue

#### Epilogue 2005 - and the Watercolors

My journals from this trip were actually incorporated into a book I made, including original watercolors (my first time working with this medium). While most were done using photographs, the all-blue night study from Pyramid XC (still one of my all-time favorite anything's) was an interpretation from memory. At the time, the collection was given and dedicated to John (albeit with the upfront statement that it was mine if he ever left). Don't need to explain that one. I don't long for or dream about doing the Wonderland again - although I did think about it during many trying days along the John Muir Trail - the most comparable trip I've done since. My father continues to send me local newspaper stories about how crazy Rainier has become: more regulations and fees, involved reservations. And so I wish you luck if this is on your life-list. For me, perfection was achieved and I don't think the weather, fortune, and general lack of crowds that we enjoyed could ever be reproduced again.



#### **Climbing and Scrambling on Rainier**

For this collection, I historically archived: Panhandle Gap in early July 1989, snow/ice training at Paradise, and climbing Rainier via Emmons/Schurman (with a discussion about Camp Muir). ALL of Rainier's climbing routes are glaciated (with 1 very difficult exception) - and no one should take this mountain lightly. By definition, glacier climbing requires being roped up,

crampons, ice axes, and knowing how to route-find and self-rescue. Most hikes at Rainier are snowbound until late July - which means you have to be comfortable route-finding and walking on snow (i.e. traversing high-angle and using an ice axe).



Left to Right: (top) first few snowfields, final crux; (bottom) the top, dad in Panhandle ice-melt, Ellen and I - Moraine Park

#### Panhandle Gap, July 1989

Looking back, I am not surprised this trip initiated a serious life obsession: hiking and finding my limits with climbing. Although I did not keep a journal of this trip, I remember many details as though they happened yesterday. At the time, I was 21, had just finished college, and was about to move away from home to begin graduate school. My father, who dragged Ellen and I (in my case, from age 3-14) on many Rainier outings, had likely given up on us girls ever pursuing the outdoors. I don't know who initiated this trip but there we were: dad, Ellen (16), Diane (my best friend through college, still today), and I were in the ORIGINAL Dodge Caravan heading to Summerland. We had - for the record - invited Jay but he was on his way to Japan and had all kinds of loose ends to deal with. Had I been who I am today, I would have realized that mid-July meant major snow past Summerland, my father's only stated goal. Indeed, there probably was a reason dad had his ice axe (i.e. he planned to go to Panhandle Gap, with or without us). Indeed, this was my dad's modus operandi: getting us in over our heads and bombing up the trail so he could climb something. But the giggly girls did not have ice axes or much experience. And, Ellen - unlike the rest of us (who did don hiking boots) - wore tennis shoes. She would consequently be the one to bail. Adhering to a long family tradition, my father carried most group gear his classic red external frame pack - including fried chicken made the night before in a deep-fat-fryer (which I own to this day) and the Wall Street Journal, which he read after lunch. Needless to say, seeing my father reading the Wall Street Journal against the backdrop of Rainier amused Diane to no end. Unfortunately, we failed to take a picture of this. Although I don't remember much about the hike to Summerland (a mellow 9 miles/2100 feet), I DO remember how few people there were; these days, the place is ALWAYS mad-house. After lunch, my father's real intentions became clear: Panhandle Gap, the highest point of the Wonderland Trail (another mile/1000 feet). From our floral lunch spot, it was obvious that it was all rock and snow beyond - albeit boot-beaten and with some flags where it went over a raging river. Some people were clearly proceeding (most with ice axes). I don't know if my dad announced he was leaving but pretty soon we were all on snow. Diane - being a gymnast with actual balancing skills - was more comfortable than me. But Ellen was freaking out big-time. The initial line order was: dad, Ellen (now carrying the ice axe), me, and then Diane. After climbing to the high basin under now-visible Panhandle Gap, Ellen bailed when she saw the final crux: narrow footprints along a high-angle snowfield that butted up along/under scary rock - all contouring steeply to the gap. So we ditched her at a flat rocky spot and I took the axe. At the scenic gap (views of Cowlitz Divide and Adams), Diane was lured into sliding down the huge face (probably glacial) by 2 female mountaineers with nylon pants/jackets and ice axes. Diane's parents were terrifically upset after hearing what she "had been allowed to do." Diane, wearing only cotton shorts/underwear, achieved an ice enema. Hiking back, someone dropped their camera case into raging Panhandle Creek. After bushwhacking below the bridge, my dad retrieved the case with his ice axe. After hearing our stories, Jay responded: I would have gone if you'd said you were doing Panhandle! In the coming years, we (Ellen, Jay, John, me...) would snow-climb many of Rainier's scenic high meadows in the spring - with Moraine Park being the most outstanding. However, I don't recommend this long and difficult route to normal people. You really have to know the way before tackling this route in snow because a lot is in woods and on steep hillsides. With shorter days and less stable weather, too, you have to be in serious shape and carry more emergency gear. As with all early season trips, though, the views of the snow-covered highlands are REALLY something to behold.

#### Basic Snow and Ice Training on Rainier - Washington Alpine Club

When I was too young to remember, my dad took me up a few technical summits near Rainier (e.g. Tatoosh and Naches area). In retrospect, I wish he'd forced me up more big things because I started fearing heights at 22. Despite this, many alpine things (Rainier, Ptarmigan and Bailey Traverses...) taunted me. After Panhandle Gap, my next big one was with Jay: a February ascent of Mt. Ellinor, a south-facing Olympic peak. It was my first real all-snow climb (a 40-50° angle, 1500-foot gully). As I continued to push the envelope with Jay, I felt increasingly insecure - relying on him too much, never feeling I knew what I was doing. Which brings me to my most important climbing rule: no matter how much you like your partner (in any

capacity), leave climbing instruction to professionals and learn how to do it for and by yourself. This notion resounds among my female friends, most of whom feel that too many men just do things to/for women - never actually instructing them. But it took me a long time to commit to a climbing class. For years, I had watched my father get blown off Rainier; meanwhile my mother stopped hiking with him because she didn't enjoy being pushed off-trail all the time. And now I was finding myself in similar relationships - not knowing precisely how I felt about it. Aforementioned Jay - 10 years my senior and a demanding professor - had many summits under his belt (including soloing Rainier). Jay was extremely organized, steady and rational in the backcountry, and - unlike many men - knew when to give up a summit. Of all the men I've climbed with, I trusted and respected Jay the most; consequently, I pushed myself the hardest with him. John, my next partner (unlike Jay, a lover), was a very green climber. Pretty much my age, John had taken a single-weekend workshop about glacier travel, and ascended a few minor peaks. Initially, I avoided climbing with John because I wasn't confident with his experience. I also never felt like I had something to prove because I was his girlfriend and we were supposed to be about more than just the mountains. These relative points often drove John bananas: that I climbed differently with Jay, that Jay could get me to do more high-risk stuff. I finally committed to a course when I realized my graduate research wasn't going to be done any time soon - and I was tired of putting stuff off. Although I lived in Seattle, I avoided the Mountaineers because their 200+ class size didn't appeal to me. Sara (whom I later traveled to Patagonia) had taken a comparable 3-month course with 32 students through the Washington Alpine Club (WAC), which has since grown ENORMOUSLY. Even when I applied, I BARELY made the cut. If you are interested, join the club first and then plan to wait 2-3 years because only active members are now given preference. Of course, you can use the time to save money for all the gear: boots/crampons (\$300-400); appropriate clothes (\$300-\$400); climbing basics (harness, helmet, ice axe, small hardware - \$300-500); general stuff like a pack and sleep kit (\$400++). Which brings me to my second climbing rule: take several years to backpack, accumulating basic gear, and then decide whether you want to make the jump to climbing. Money aside, the more experience you have with gear, weather, scenery, and accidents - the more you will realize whether you really want to climb. Anyway - I made the WAC cut and began the 12-week climbing class in March 1994. Each week, there was a 3-hour weeknight lecture/activity and a weekend outing (1-3 days long). The Mountaineers course is set up similarly, with additional climbs required throughout the summer. Other organizations (e.g. NOLS, RMI, AAI) offer various climbing experiences (days to months) that cost a LOT more. In contrast, WAC, like many clubs, is volunteer-driven (i.e. instructors are not paid). One of my phobias about this class was dealing with a bunch of macho arrogant climbers. Personally, I am not into groups - especially when it comes to physical things. Although WAC did have a fairly equal ratio of males to females, it did have a lot of strutting males and felt, at times, like a meat market (i.e. singles on the prowl - with a bias toward stags). Had many not been easy on the eyes (e.g. Randy), I would have been more annoyed. Which brings me to my final climbing rule: couples with ANY issues should twice about taking this kind of intense climbing class. Although John appreciated my being gone more, I can honestly say that I probably would have left John for Randy had the opportunity arisen (and John sort of realized this over time). I'd love to chock Randy up to pure lust but I absolutely adored and respected him, his skill, his intelligence, and his attitude. Like Jay, Randy was 10 years older and had tons of tangible climbing experience. Although I lost touch with Randy for a few years after the WAC class, he magically re-appeared right before I moved to Oregon. But that's another story. For this sub-report, I am only presenting Rainier-based outings about snow and glacier travel. I eliminated other reports: Si, Erie, Tooth, Baker (most of which we were weathered off).



Left to Right: Paradise practice - me all geared up, activity stations, team Randy after throwing me down some steep thing

#### Ice Axe and Snow Training at Paradise

After our month-long rock-climbing unit, we took up snow training - our first field trip to snowbound Paradise. We hiked 2 miles up to Glacier Vista and proceeded through various training stations. Given our beginner status, we were encouraged to wear cheap plastic raingear and duct tape our ice axe points. Ice axe use is a skill every hiker should have because snow will be encountered sometime, somewhere. We learned to arrest from all positions: head first on back or belly, feet first on back or belly - with and without a pack. Head first on back was definitely the hardest, with instructors holding you by the ankles and dropping you down a steep chute. Randy amusingly wheel-barrowed me down the hill in slow-motion over and over again so I could master the moves frame by frame: sit up, stab axe, swivel and turn over, dig feet in, get butt up, stop. In addition to ice axe arrest, we practiced ice axe belays, orienteering, avalanche testing, and walking as a team on/up snow (kicking, cutting, and timing steps). The best exercise was the roped team hike out. Students were split into rope teams of 4. Each was lead by an un-rope instructor who would randomly run off with the rope, yelling "falling" to simulate an accident. Roped team members would have to arrest and then we'd all be checked for having assumed the correct position. Randy - our leader - purposely lead our group out along this narrow spine of snow with a 10-foot vertical drop to a big snow bowl - and then thought it appropriate to push me over the edge as a test. We passed - but I can't say I appreciated going airborne.

#### Glacier Training on the Nisqually

Moving on to glacier climbing and safety, our corresponding outing was a 2-day trip to Rainier's Nisqually Glacier. Ironically, I took major heat because John's family had scheduled a big family reunion that weekend - and I refused to give up class. After the long drive from Seattle, 40-60 WAC members hiked 1.5 miles (again - all on snow) up from Paradise. When the time came

to drop to the glacier via the tall, steep moraine, I began freakin' out. But upon roping up and crossing that threshold, I found the experience surreal and awesome. After 20 minutes climbing up the glacier, we stopped while several roped leaders probed a huge area for crevasses, establishing the boundaries of camp. And then we built a complex community of wind blocking fences, kitchen utility areas, the pit toilet, etc. Following lunch, my rope team practiced Z-pulleys in the snow (not in a real crevasse), each member rotating through various positions. Afterwards, I figured it was late and we were done. To my horror, however, our group was called to practice self-rescue from a real crevasse. Predictably, watching my teammates freaked me out BIGTIME. A huge snow bollard (a hard-packed snow mound embedded with hardware) served as the anchor for lowering students into the icy pit. My problem - I am embarrassed to admit this - was that I got lax about checking my harness thoroughly (being buried in layers of clothing didn't help). Although the crucial harness belt was secure, I did not realize until after I was out of the crevasse that my leg loops were not fully clipped to the belt (a result/necessity of an earlier pee break). Because their primary purpose is comfort (i.e. you can sit easier in the harness when they are strapped to the hip belt), the leg loops are often overlooked during safety checks. As I was lowered into the crevasse, the feel of not having my legs supported was radically different and I annoyed my instructor with concerns that something was not right. After I climbed out and we realized the problem, we all rolled our eyes. Even so, I had no problems getting out. Even my instructor seemed surprised I ran up my prussiks so quickly. Fear, fear, fear! Aside from being initially gripped, though, I found being in the crevasse was sort of cool. It wasn't big, blue, or sexy, though. Rather, it was a tapering crack that was 10 feet wide and 30 feet deep - with dirty, drippy, gray/black, and rock-hard ice. Most of all, I loved using the crampons: front-pointing into the ice. Prior to this exercise, prussiking was this very distant activity: you struggled up ropes hung in trees or down rock faces, banging your knees against the stone and/or twirling incessantly. In the crevasse, I was against the wall with crampons that I could jam into the ice, providing immense (relative) security and control. Indeed - THAT was so cool to me.



Left to Right: (top) Nisqually camp - the Sara(h)'s; (bottom) me in the crevasse, prize-winning Catwoman on the Nisqually

When our rope team arrived at camp, the partying had already begun. We had been warned there would be several contests: best meal, dessert, and costume. Although I love cooking, I didn't think I could handle it on a glacier - so I put my eggs in the costume basket, donning cherry lipstick and my hand-made Catwoman suit OVER expedition-weight long underwear. I did take home said prize - but I regretted not wearing it ice-climbing the next day. Meanwhile, cooking efforts were extraordinary: the winners being a multi-course Japanese meal and tiramisu, respectively. Although copious amounts of liquor were being passed around, we were not as crazy as one might imagine. I bunked with Brian, next year's WAC president and someone I barely knew. Thankfully, Brian was a nice, middle-aged guy who did NOT have Randy's knee-weakening looks or charm. Nonetheless, Brian was ribbed for sleeping with the Catwoman and, aside from BIG snoring (none of my men have snored, thank god), it was a restful night. The next morning was extremely overcast, with snow flurries. Having finished most stations yesterday, our team had only to complete ice climbing. Roped together, we hiked 10 minutes up the glacier to this whale-like hump of dark, solid ice that soared 25 feet above the snowy flats. Not surprisingly, Pat, the most macho stag (to the point I found him unattractive) was leading this station. First, we practiced walking on low-angle ice with our crampons (totally scary). Increasing the angle, we repeated up and down climbs in these small circular patterns - all unroped. Pat, who likes to do everything fast, sped up each round - which freaked me out. I did, however, enjoy the vertical ice climbing (top-rope from the highest point along the serac). That I could just kick my front points and stand on the crampons was amazing. We also used borrowed ice climbing tools to hack holds for our upper body. However, most of us (myself included) did not have thin liner gloves (only big padded ones) and had to forego protection while using the tools. Pat took the liberty of warming my frozen hands on his exposed washboard stomach. The rest of the day was spent waiting for the other groups to finish. It was VERY

cold and I had more cocoa than I should have - given that others had supplemented it with Peppermint Schnapps. I couldn't decide if I was buzzed or tired by the end of the day. The hike out was not memorable or scenic - aside from the staggering.



Left to Right: John and Brian, the team at White River, Curt and his Rainier

### Climbing Rainier

In July 1996, I made my bid for the summit. Prior to this trip, I had exchanged plenty of stories with folks who tried to or did summit Rainier. Some were experienced climbers, some were beginners, and some were hikers who went with experienced leaders or paid guides. My high school calculus teacher (now a personal friend) was part of a team that was involved with a fatality on an extremely difficult route (Curtis Ridge). My father tried to summit Rainier over a dozen times, only to be thwarted by weather EVERY time. My dad often climbed with 2 of his childhood friends who were ultimately killed on a moderately difficult Rainier route (Success Cleaver). Two friends of friends were killed in an avalanche during a medium grade route (Fuhrer Finger). Another friend, on her first summit via so-called easy Muir/Disappointment Cleaver, had a teammate slide into a crevasse, break both legs, and require helicopter rescue. Regardless, ALL these individuals were blown away by the hugeness of the mountain and the power of the weather - 10% so sick or scared at base camp that they bailed right then and there. John first climbed Rainier via the so-called easy Emmons/Schurman route in 1993 with experienced friends. The following year, to my consternation, he decided he was already good enough to lead 3 novices up via the same route. I considered them lucky to have not been killed. In August 1995, John attempted the Muir/Disappointment Cleaver route with another friend. Full of themselves, they carried all cold meals and 1 bivy sack each (i.e. no sleeping bags). Freezing, they could not bring themselves to get out of bed the next morning - despite perfect climbing weather and conditions. And, lastly, consider that 50% of folks who set out don't make the summit and 5-10 people die climbing Rainier every year.



Left to Right: climbing to Camp Muir, me - first time at Camp Muir, me - second time, in a hula skirt and nut bra

### A General Introduction to Climbing Rainier

The 2 simplest and most popular routes are Muir/Disappointment Cleaver from the south (via Paradise, 5600 feet) and Schurman/Emmons from the east (via White River, 3600 feet). This former is shorter, involving less elevation gain - but more technical because it crosses Disappointment Cleaver, a rock section that is hairy and prone to bottlenecks (imagine waiting for 50-200 people in a line). Camp Muir, the basecamp for this route, lies at just over 10,000 feet. The approach to Camp Muir is, relatively speaking, simple: no glaciers - just a long permanent snowfield. I've dayhiked Muir (10 miles, 4500 feet) twice - no big whoop. Above Muir, however, are steep snow, loose rock, and regions prone to slab avalanches. In 1981, 11 people were simultaneously killed on this route by such a catastrophic event. For the Schurman/Emmons route, you start at a much lower elevation but cross 2 major glaciers - Interglacier and Emmons - just to get to Camp Schurman (at just under 10,000 feet). The only significant rock on the whole route lies between the Interglacier and the Emmons - non-technical as compared with Disappointment. Camp Schurman lies at the base of a huge rock feature called Steamboat Prow (it resembles a boat cutting through the Emmons/Winthrop). Both Camps Muir and Schurman have small huts, nasty toilets, and some rocky spots for camping - although overcrowding forces a lot of people to camp on adjacent snow or ice. Above Schurman, the route ascends the Emmons Glacier all the way up the "corridor." In some years - particularly late season - both routes (which merge below the crater) close because transient snowbridges melt, exposing impassably large crevasses. In warmer conditions, the surfaces of glaciers are slushy; when cold, they are hard - sometimes solid. When surfaces are soft, you may not wear the crampons but arresting a fall will be challenging - and snow bridges will be unstable. When surfaces are harder, you need crampons, should arrest better (unless the surface is rock-hard), and the snow bridges will be pretty solid. Consider that when John did Rainier in July 1995, the snow was medium hard going up and slushy coming down. On the same route 1 week later, 2 experienced rangers were killed descending on compact ice during a cold snap. They fell and slid to their deaths, unable to arrest. Sadly, these rangers died attempting to rescue a party described as having limited glacier experience. The party had

flown in from out of state, intending to climb Rainier for their vacation. Despite inappropriate weather conditions, the party set out anyway. Above basecamp, a party member took a simple fall and twisted his ankle. Instead of self-rescuing (which they should have done), they called for help. The rangers were climbing down to them when they died. Consequently, every time I hear someone from out of state bragging about how they have dayhiked all the fourteeners in Colorado, Utah, or California - and think Rainier will be a similar cakewalk - I get pissed off. If you're one of these people: get off Rainier and GO HOME. Summit climbs begin at 12-1 a.m. While everyone maintains this is because the snowbridges are more stable, I think climbing in the dark is the only way to get people like me up the mountain. At this hour, summer basecamp temperatures are typically at or below freezing. Ideally and minimally, every party should have 6 people divided equally into 2 rope teams. During the summit climb, each rope team should carry an emergency sleeping bag, shovel, and hardware for belaying across dicey areas. Additionally, each person carries food, water, extra clothes, and personal climbing gear (ice axe, prussiks, pulleys, etc.). With 30-50 feet between teammates, climbing seems a lonely thing - which scares me more than falling into a crevasse. In the darkness, communication exists by rope tugs and yelling. By around 4 a.m., when most teams reach 12,000-13,000 feet, the sun begins its majestic rise. Generally, most parties reach the crater rim by 8 a.m., having spent 8-10 hours climbing 4500 feet. In reality, the true summit/register is 10-20 minutes across the crater. A lucky party will get to spend 30-60 minutes on the summit - usually in raging, subzero wind. Then it's time to descend - when most accidents happen (mushy snow, bridges, and brains). Coming down scares me because I walk down snow in a rigid manner and don't know how to fall. Good climbers are more comfortable with loosely walking down snow and maintaining controlled chaos with respect to falling. Simply put, people fall a lot on Rainier: crampons trip you up and you get dumb in your plunge steps coming down. The descent requires 4-5 hours under good conditions - and most people advocate not descending after 2-3 p.m.



Left to Right: Mark at Glacier Basin camp, end of the non-snow trail... looking up the Interglacier, climbing it

#### July 1996 - Rainier via Emmons/Schurman

Geekily, our team consisted of 6 scientists. John, Brian, and Allison worked on microbial ecology in the same lab, Curt studied bacterial genetics, and I was a virologist. Mark, the only bona fide Ph.D. (10 years older than most of us), did biophysics and molecular modeling in eastern Washington. In terms of experience, John and Brian had climbed this route once before. Curt and Mark had, like me, taken the WAC climbing course. Curt had several minor peaks under his belt but mid-life Mark was a newbie. Allison had no climbing experience whatsoever. Her then-husband would join us the night before the climb and accompany us to the end of the trail. Our original 4-day plan: hike to Glacier Basin, climb to Camp Schurman, spend a full day acclimatizing and practicing glacier technique at Schurman, summit and return. On July 6, 1996, we left Seattle in several vehicles at different times. Eager Mark arrived first, driving in from eastern Washington. He obtained climbing permits and paid all fees (then \$15 per person). Unfortunately, Glacier Basin was full. Thus, we reserved drive-in car-camping sites at White River. According to folks at the White River ranger station, the Emmons route had been in its best condition the week prior - with clear skies forecast for 4 more days. Even so, the rescue pictures were disturbing: people being carried down in stretchers, yanked out of crevasses. As were the warnings: climbing was a risk, every party must assume responsibility for their own well being, DO NOT expect or assume assistance from rangers or guides. As we left, we picked up several blue bags (for solid fecal waste). Accompanying information about the POOP SQUAD (who removes basecamp shit) was graphic, direct, and hysterically illustrated. The levity of these signs was the only thing that calmed me down. By 7, we were boisterously carbo-loading: pork chops, applesauce, pan-fried potatoes, Greek salad, watermelon, and angel food cake with blueberries and whipped cream. After dinner, we strolled up the road to an overlook. Struggling to visualize our fate, we spied a pair of climbers descending (pretty late, we thought) - as well as several elk in an avalanche chute.

Following a restless night, we awoke at 6 a.m. With heavy packs (mine was 50 lbs. and John's was 70), we began hiking at 7:30. The day was stunningly clear and buttery hot. In contrast to my low expectations (based on a guidebook), the trail was surprisingly scenic - with several views of Rainier. As we crossed a boulder-strewn river, we ran into a bunch of rangers returning from their day-off climb. Amazingly, one turned out to be Mike, the chemistry stock room manager at my alma mater, and a friend of Jay. Mike skeptically reported: "it's really softening up there - the crevasses are opening wide and changing daily. It's a different world every hour and you are going to be blown away." The last 2 miles of trail climbed thin forest before breaking into the snowy meadows of Glacier Basin camp. Although the last mile before Steamboat Prow is a climbers' path, the route climbed easy moraines and meadows with glorious alpine views: high valley walls veiled in snow, craggy rock towers. Only the top 500 feet of Rainier were visible, eclipsed by massive and emerging Steamboat Prow. The obvious path ended abruptly at a creek with an ominous view up part of the Interglacier. Said glacier occupies the middle of the prow - tilted upward at a 30-40° angle. In my readings since this trip, I have been surprised to find that Camps Muir and Schurman are rated similarly. Having hiked Muir a couple times, all I can say: Schurman is 10-20 times harder than Muir. When I stood at the base of the Interglacier, I wiggled big-time. Admittedly, looking at something head-on is a deceiving - but it was hard to argue while watching others moving straight up this stair-like path of kicked steps. Shedding a few tears, I nearly bailed. In the end, I

opted to try - John insisting I feel the route at least 30 minutes. If I was still wigged, he would take me down and then I could catch a ride with Allison's husband. Admittedly, part of my decision derived from the fact that I was worried bailing may reduce Allison's confidence. And so I joined everyone roping up: putting on harnesses, tying prussiks, checking and re-checking everything. The original rope teams were John/Brian/Allison and Curt/Mark/me. Given John's promise to take me down if I still felt wigged, Allison and I switched. Between John and Brian (with John initially leading), I felt more comfortable. While climbing, I consciously looked down as we ascended, assessing how I really felt - and my fears diminished with every foot gained. The surface snow was soft, making for good, solid steps - but I wasn't overwhelmed by thoughts of an uncontrollable slide (not that there were visible crevasses). Although progress seemed slow, time vanished quickly. Hints of crevasses grew apparent along the rock sides where the ice buckled over outcrops as it sloughed down the triangular bowl. Several parties were descending, many glissading. John passed leading onto Brian who - despite his 5' 2" stature - ascended with a vengeance. I was constantly yelling, tugging to slow him down. At 9000 feet, I started feeling new sensations that went beyond exhaustion or breathlessness: mild altitude sickness - nausea, dizziness. Sitting down, we noticed our teammates were WAY behind. We signaled that we would meet them at the rock interface before the drop to the Emmons. After 30 minutes, we came to a level rocky spot where another party was emerging from the other side. Were it not for them, we would have missed the side-trail down (going over the prow tip is highly technical). Eager to make camp, we asked this party to tell our teammates that we were continuing. And then we proceeded over the rocky lip and down an obvious path.



Left to Right: down the rocky prow to the Emmons, on the Emmons, looking up Rainier to summit

Upon looking over the prow side, I about lost it again - and it definitely was 1 of the most harrowing traverses I've ever done. We walked a narrow line of footprints along and down a mostly snow slope angled 30-40° both ways (the slope and the path). Below, there was only a 100-foot run-out before the Emmons' HUGE crevasses (10-50 feet across). Along the tracks were spots of "rock and gravy dirt" that required scrambling. I was belayed, although John admitted later that the snow was so soft the ice axe would not have held a fall. The Emmons, which we dropped to and walked upon, was TRULY massive. The route cut a wide arc around this complex ice rapid hole around the trip - where 5-10 humongous crevasses ripped and bulged, corresponding to ice shearing as it flowed past the rock. After 20 minutes of skirting the mess, we arrived at a band of rock where the ranger cabin had been erected beneath the towering prow tip. Everywhere in view: skyscraper-sized crevasses. In my mind, I knew I had reached my technical limit - this was the end of the line for me. Based on John's prior experiences, we expected to find rock camps. Thus, we were stunned to find pretty much all snow. Faced with this and hastening winds, we could only content ourselves by sitting down and throwing packs off. Curt had carried our only shovel, something we'd only planned to use for avalanche emergencies - NOT camp building. Eventually, we borrowed shovels at the ranger cabin and began reshaping a previously used camp dugout. Perfectionist John had to carve cooking counters, pits for our feet while sitting, etc. While impressive, I preferred reclining in the sun and relieving my altitude sickness with multiple gaseous outbursts (from both ends). In general, the whole party suffered altitude related farting and belching syndrome (ARFBS). After an hour, concern mounted when we realized our teammates were still nowhere in sight (mostly as a result of discovering they had all the stoves). With a surprising amount of swearing, emotion, and self-kicking, John and Brian roped up and left to look for them. Ranked concerns were that (1) someone got sick or freaked and they turned back; (2) they did not know the way and were still on the rock section waiting (and pissed); or (3) they had continued up the prow and gotten into dangerous stuff at the terminus. I was asked to hang back at camp and watch the terminus in case they appeared. Alone, I felt strange and isolated being surrounded by formidable ice and rock. All I could think about was Kate Chopin's The Awakening, about an unhappy woman who finally takes control of her life by walking into the sea and drowning. Instead of being drawn to the swells of ice, I decided to do something more active: put up the tent in high wind. Surprisingly, I had never erected a tent by myself - much less at 10,000 feet in snow. This solo act required a lot of Twister poses - holding down the tent, staking, trying to reach a picket or ice axe... It was an amusing nightmare - but definitely better than slipping into some feminist act of post-modern, alpine suicide. Occasionally, I wandered up to the ranger cabin where I could see the incoming path. After an hour, everyone appeared. Uncertain of how to get off the prow, the others had climbed higher but had the sense to retreat. They were setting up an emergency camp in the rocks when John and Brian appeared. The wind died down by 8, just as we began dinner. To the north and west lay Puget Sound; we dazzled at the city lights and spectacular sunset against the jagged Olympics. Meals were planned individually - only John and I sharing. Ultra-frugal Brian, who wore a handmade webbing harness, brought his father's arsenal of freeze-dried food, all packaged in 1969 (before Brian was born). After gorging on lasagna, I went to bed with a full bladder - too timid to go down the scary path to the poop zone (discussed later). Over dinner, there was talk about a 4 a.m. wake-up for crevasse rescue practice - but I had already talked myself out of anything more.

Within a few hours of retiring, I awoke to the most retching stench from the johnny bag (i.e. John's bag - from Johnny Cat Litter). Whew!!!! The other annoyance began shortly after midnight: our neighbors preparing to depart for the summit. And then OUR party was rattling around at 6 a.m. Earplugs and requests to keep it down did nothing. When the guys finally departed, I slept deeply for several hours. By this point, Allison had also decided the summit was not in her future on this trip. Emerging from our tents, we ate breakfast bars and did some contemplative staring into space. The guys returned by 11 a.m.,

having been unable to find a safe crevasse. Indeed, during our brief stay at Schurman, we witnessed several crevasse edges collapse and, most ominously, the path by which we came across the Emmons no longer existed when we left. The rest of the afternoon, we ate, drank, and BS'd. One of the more amusing products was the following vignette. Normally, there is a pit toilet at Schurman. However, high snows decommissioned the facilities (i.e. they were buried, full of snow, and leaning). The ranger-approved alternative was to shit 500 feet down from camp beneath the prow, adjacent to the Winthrop Glacier - crevasses within 100 feet (it was actually unclear where the ice began). The prow, 200 feet above, audibly spewed rocks, causing much anxiety when squatting with pants-bound ankles. Allison and I, freaked by the traverse, illegally peed near the broken privy as much as possible. Upon feeling solid urges, though, we had to venture down the snow/ice. I was most taken aback by the gaping interface between the rock and snow, down which many people had illegally shat and into which I did not want to fall. Solid/semi-solid waste was supposed to be collected in blue bags (2 bags and some twine). The idea: you shat on the snow, put on the inner blue bag like a glove, picked up the feces, turned the blue bag inside out, and stuffed the thing into the outer bag. Picking up the warm bundle was an experience, and a significant amount of down time was spent discussing shit and blue bags - noting of the sizes of peoples' bags as they emerged from the poop zone (we considered making score cards). Thankfully, bags were placed in metal drums at the ranger cabin - each generating a 12-foot stench radius. At some point, John left camp armed with his blue bag, several days of Metamucil coursing through his system, and the peanut gallery chanting: "Gosink, Gosink, Gosink." When he returned empty-handed, we were aghast. With a surreal expression, he said that just after he twined his bag and set it down, the bag began a rapid descent down the Winthrop. For 15 feet, he bounded after it but relented his desires when the bag vanished over the lip of a crevasse. Much humor ensued about the possibility that future scientists would find John's preserved shit and base huge theories about mankind on this material. In addition to the poop zone, the ranger also earned lots of shit talk. Well-tanned, gorgeous, buff, and blond, SHE took HER snowboard up the mountain and slid down - accompanied by her harem of 3-4 DDG longhaired dudes (all high-raters on the blue bag scale). Conversation, an interesting blend of serious and bawdy talk, was punctuated by Curt farting audibly (John's interjection: "audibly is an understatement"). Indeed, the crevasses were not the only things opening up. Perhaps not surprisingly, Allison and I assimilated well with the guy banter. It is remarkable how stupid a bunch of educated scientists can get - whether fixating on blue bags or how harnesses over-accent men's genitals (i.e. ditty bags and nut-clusters). On the other hand, we did discuss relationships, gender, marriage, divorce, and, finally, standard departmental gossip, the lowest form of communication.



Left to Right: (top) sunset/sunrise color from camp; (bottom) ranger/harem cabin, poop judging, prow tip and buried pit toilet

Given that our all-male summit party decided to climb using only 1 rope, concern did mount when no new parties had arrived by 4 p.m. RMI, the only paid guide service at the time, normally ran 30% of its teams up the Emmons. Owing to road repairs, however, they were not leading the Emmons this season. In addition, soaring temperatures (above 90° in Seattle) were destabilizing snow bridges at an hourly rate. Returning neighbors all reported collapses, resulting in many people falling through to their waists. At one point, John asked the harem if they were going up again. Their unfriendly response: self-guided parties are ON THEIR OWN. Looking up the route, we spotted 4 clearly iffy spots where the way thinned to narrow crossings - all flanked by yawning sections of ice. All day, we had watched the climbers - so we could judge the route in precise terms. Optimistically, the usually tricky bergschrund was solid (unlike its dicey state on John's other ascents). Also in contrast with John's past climbs (wherein the route zigzagged to avoid open crevasses), today's went STRAIGHT up. Given that 2 big parties showed up at 5 - both intending to summit that night - everyone seemed less anxious. Even so, the sky was more hazy. Because of the extreme heat, our men decided to leave by midnight. Having napped so long that morning, though, I was not tired. I spent a long time beside John, putting lotion on his face and hands. While tempting, it was difficult to want to do stuff like kiss given all the sunburn, chapping, and crevice goo. By midnight, though, I was barely awake when everyone left. Outside, the air felt warm and I heard people express concern about everything being unstable. A few hours later, I was awakened again, this time by intense and cold winds. The weirdest thing: I swear I heard John say my name through the wind. At around 5 a.m., I remember getting out of the tent to look up the route. Low down, the weather was coming apart: a

sea of clouds at 5000 feet and cold winds blasting. High up, the weather was still mostly clear. I easily discerned all the parties heading up - noting John's group in the lead (around 12000 feet). I did appreciate that, unlike with Muir, the whole route was laid out above Schurman - I felt safe knowing I could watch the guys. I went back to sleep a couple more hours.



Left to Right: about 12,000 feet, the LONG walk across the crater to summit, our summit men (minus John - shooting)

After finally getting up, Allison and I boiled water and filled bottles for the trip out. Later, we packed as much gear as we could - although rooting through the guys' stuff seemed hazardous (i.e. pockets of GI gas). All the while, we watched the climbers. The actual summit was 200 feet higher than the white top visible from our vantage. The guys vanished over this line at 8, reappearing within the hour - an hour earlier than expected. Watching them descend was funny - they seemed in a drunken stupor: slipping and sliding every few steps. Except for Mark, all were sick - John having a splitting headache and nausea most of the climb. John, who had never suffered altitude problems before, said this trip was the hardest - owing to the steeper, direct line. Having nervously watched crevasses widen on the Emmons - eating the path we'd come in on - I was convinced one of us was going to break through on the way out. Brian, leading, poked his axe every step - John and I prepared to belay if he went down. But we were fine. The traverse up the prow felt better because so much snow had melted. Once we hit the Interglacier, I knew we'd be glissading because conditions were good. Nevertheless, sliding roped is dangerous and controversial. Although our slide was controlled, I was annoyed every time slack arose because John insisted on going faster behind me. Meanwhile, Curt did something BAD: coiled the rope, laid out plastic sheeting, and had everyone sit together. After roaring down, Curt was cavalier about beating us and I told him he was wrong to do it. Oh well. You live and learn - and hopefully don't get killed. At the bottom, we undid our climbing gear and watched the clouds billow over the prow, glad we were about to dodge the weather. Since the trip, I have never felt any desire to rationalize the could-have's or should-have's of not going up. An article in the Wall Street Journal, by a local Rainier enthusiast, said it best: "From any other point in the region, the mountain dominates the horizon. Now that we were on the summit, it was as if the mountain had disappeared. The peak I'd dreamed of climbing as a boy had suddenly lost its aloofness. I felt strange, as if everything about the Northwest had somehow changed and I'd suddenly grown up." God knows, sitting at Schurman, I would have never guessed what would become of us. Right after the climb, Allison and her husband divorced, a shocker given things she said about marriage during the trip. Despite what I thought was a genuine connection, I could not reconcile Allison's words with her actions after the trip. These feelings would be repeated 5 months later when John decided to leave me. Curt finished his Ph.D. and moved to the Bay Area where he is married with at least 1 child. Mark, then suffering a post-divorce mid-life crisis, moved to Seattle and completed many adventures: Ptarmigan, Bailey, Challenger... Now, he is remarried with at least 1 child. Brian remained a friend for many years and I credit many of my research successes to Brian's encouragement, enthusiasm, and advice. After he finished his Ph.D., he moved to Germany for training (during which time we lost touch). He then accepted an assistant professorship in Las Vegas; I wrote on his behalf and we remain collegial friends to this day.



Left to Right: my dad at 20 on Pyramid Peak, mom and dad at Mountaineers bench in 1982, Paradise memorial 2006

#### Rainier Revisited - In Memory of Our Dad, July 2006

At 4 a.m. July 5, I received the phone call from my mother. I knew, when the phone rang, what she was going to say - not because any of us had been expecting my father to die... but because my father had always told us he would go well before my mother - and because he had, for better or worse, long prepared for his death. I was/am less surprised by catastrophic death, given 3 close friends with parents or spouses who died from heart disease with no warning, and 2 friends with parents who died from rapid cancers - all young (i.e. 50-70). My father turned 66 2 months before. He was in good health, recently passed a physical, worked out nearly every day, and hiked 1-2 times a month - usually at Rainier. He had climbed Mt. Fuji twice since age 57, and traveled frequently and independently - around the country and the world. Despite retiring 10 years ago, he seemed - at first - to be constantly looking for alternative occupations (including unsuccessfully applying to law school). During the last few years, he seemed less restless, his time occupied by volunteer work for educational causes and the city parks - not to mention becoming quite the rose gardener. His only slight health failings: he could have lost 30 pounds, his cholesterol had been elevated for a few years, and his blood pressure had recently gone up. On July 4, following a pleasant

family reunion with my mother the prior weekend, he went to run errands at the Air Force base (with whom he had been active duty 10 years, 25 years reserves). I talked with him on the phone an hour before he left, mostly about the reunion. I can't say he was anything other than himself (i.e. he had little to say). As we would learn later, he did some minor shopping, got a haircut, and then went jogging around Rainier Field, a soccer field along a greenbelt with - yes - a big view of Mt. Rainier. At some point, he stopped by the restroom and his heart stopped, likely because arterial crud broke loose and clogged the valve. The coroner also felt he died instantly with no time to think. Because it was a holiday and my dad was at a fairly obscure location, nobody found him until about 2 hours later. Military security on patrol saw the car and then found him, lying on the ground between the restroom and the greenbelt. However, no one on the base contacted my mother (despite having his ID). Although my dad obviously gave much of his life and respect to the military, something tells me he would not have been completely surprised at this lapse in communication (although he would have kicked some serious ass over it). Indeed, most of the years my dad was active military, he voted democrat because he didn't like all the wasteful spending. After retiring, he seemed more nostalgic about the institution. After meeting him on base in Japan, Ellen speculated it was because he, as a high-ranking officer, received so much respect (i.e. saluting and service). Although all us girls loved our dad, we were definitely not inclined to such overt behavior. Given the holiday, my mother assumed he was stuck in traffic. But even she, by midnight, suspected something was terribly wrong. And then - at 3:30 a.m. - the county chaplain (ironically related to a former student of mine) came calling. Originally, I was to lead a Yellowstone field course that began the next day. Kelly (my assistant) took over, with Allison and I driving home around noon and Ellen taking off from Japan shortly thereafter. I won't spend too much time describing our next month together, except to say that it was strange - strange because the first couple weeks felt so slow. I was said to be the most emotional, although I freely admit that I believe everyone facing loss needs to dive fully into situations that expose feelings to understand and experience absence properly. For example, I knew I had to physically stand on the ground where he died to even approach understanding it (in the end, the sisters erected a memorial at the site - featuring some of his old camping equipment and roses from the yard); I knew I had to fully view and organize his pictures from the last 10 years; I knew I needed to create a worthy display of his military memorabilia; and I knew I had to hike Rainier hard to honor his love for that mountain (the main subject of the rest of this report). Although none of us wanted to view the body, I realized partway through the month that I needed to hold the urn of his ashes, to have them at home for awhile - before committing them to the military cemetery during what was the most intense ceremony I've lived through to date. Indeed, I would have hauled that urn all over Rainier but my mother wouldn't let me - and so the sisters decided to take symbolic handkerchiefs of his to each high meadow, leaving them hidden off-trail with lovely views.



Left to Right: Ellen and I in the lower Moraine Park, Old Desolate, avalanche lilies

### Moraine Park - July 16, 2006

Ellen, her best friend Lisa, Diane, Brendan, and I tackled this monster hike (12 miles, 3500 feet). Although I used to think my dad never hiked this trail (indeed, he never hauled us up there - or mom wouldn't let him), we have 1970-era slides of him up there while trying to complete the Wonderland. But I have no evidence he visited Moraine in the last 10 years, likely because his long-hike days (i.e. anything more than 10 miles) ended in 1997. In contrast, I have visited Moraine 15 times - in large part because it was the first trip I independently picked (notably also going with Diane/Brendan my first time). Unlike other hauls up to Moraine, though, I didn't struggle much - mostly because Diane was growing sicker by the hour (i.e. moving 1.25 mph). Ellen and I had originally hoped to hide the handkerchief near the ephemeral reflecting pool along Lower Curtis Ridge but, unfortunately, Diane's situation barely got us to the lower meadow before our turnaround time. And so we settled for a little scrambling in that vicinity. As with all the hikes, the flowers were GORGEOUS (including avalanche lilies, indicating the snow had melted only 1 week before), the views insane. However, the bugs were massive and, at times, it was actually TOO HOT.



Left to Right: Summerland and all the sisters, Lisa and Ellen recreating her first hike to Panhandle

### Summerland and a Bit Beyond - July 21, 2006

Ellen, Lisa, Allison, and I tackled this more reasonable hike (10 miles, 2500 feet). This was the first hike our dad took Ellen and I (and Diane) on as adults back in 1989. Since 1997, my dad hiked to the lower meadows twice - countless times before

that (although this area and Panhandle were frequent places his hopes of completing the whole Wonderland fell apart in foul weather). This was Allison's first time hiking anything for-real on Rainier - and her first time hiking with Ellen (indeed, it was our first trip together as sisters). We made excellent time to the lower meadows - the day sweltering and buggy to the point of slight insanity. We weren't quite sure where the handkerchief was going (given that my history at Summerland includes being yelled at by rangers for off-trail wandering) - but the task proved easier than anticipated. Afterwards, Allison decided she was done hiking - while Ellen, Lisa, and I were determined to go to the snowline (400 feet higher in the talus). Despite a ton of snow, at least 3 parties were continuing over the gap with major backpacks - several dayhikers wielding ice axes and gaiters. But we would have none of that. We descended in no time and enjoyed an interesting Mexican dinner near White River.



Left to Right: arriving at Eunice Lake, reaching the far end of Tolmie Peak/Ridge, Rainier and Eunice from Tolmie summit

#### **Tolmie Peak - July 23, 2006**

Brendan was kind enough to share his birthday for a dual-purpose Rainier hike. After recovering, though, Diane was not into anything difficult and, thus, Tolmie Peak (6.5 miles/1200 feet) seemed reasonable. Tolmie Peak is the first hike (EVER) I remember: I was 4 and we went with the Mountaineers. En route, I was stung by a wasp and treated by a nurse using mud from Eunice Lake. Although my dad made at least 1 pilgrimage here in the past 10 years, he admittedly avoided it because of the godawful dirt road. Fortunately, Brendan offered to drive us in his beastly full-cab/leather-seats truck (which my dad would have appreciated). When we got to the trailhead, it was noon and there were easily 100 cars in and flooding from the parking area. Remarkably, though, we didn't pass as many people as we thought we would (because they were camping at Mowich or hiking Spray Park). Unfortunately, the weather was insanely hot and the bugs were nervous-breakdown-inspiring (I acquired over 200 bites on my legs alone). This likely explains the paucity of photographs and the fact that this trip was short, fast, and frustrating. BUT we all greatly enjoyed major food at Red Robin and Pirates of the Caribbean after cleaning up.



Left to Right: first view from trail, hiking along Mazama Ridge, Allison and ice axe in Mountaineers bench

#### **Paradise Bonanza - July 25, 2006**

For the last hike, it was just Allison and I. We had difficulty deciding where to go for a couple reasons. I favored Indian Henry's because he readily identified that as among his favorite places on Rainier. But Indian Henry's is as hard as Moraine Park and so I questioned doing it because of likely snowcover and an iffy weather forecast. Although my dad hiked there a lot when he worked at Longmire in his 20's, he never took us and hadn't hiked it in the last 10 years. In the end, Allison and I decided Indian Henry's would wait. Today, we needed to play it safe: Paradise, the place he most took Ellen and I growing up - and most recently and frequently visited. Because we went mid-week, we were able to drive all the way to Paradise (weekend visitors now use a shuttle - owing to major construction). I was determined to avoid all the asphalt trails that head straight up from the main parking lot... but the limited parking areas pretty much had us stuck with only those options - unless we opted to drive to the bottom of Paradise Valley (i.e. then climb more). I knew that the best place to leave the handkerchief was somewhere down Mazama Ridge - and starting lower placed us closer to this target area. We took a short connector trail that headed up toward Sluiskin Falls, climbing through the best meadows on any hike so far (consistent with Paradise's reputation). There were also few bugs, a good breeze, and decent temperatures (although clouds did accumulate over the course of the day - ironically, above Indian Henry's). We eventually joined the Lakes trail that connects Reflection Lakes with the Skyline trail along Mazama Ridge. Despite snowshoeing Mazama Ridge several times, I have not hiked the actual trail in 20+ years. From the initial highpoint, I was concerned by how much snow was visible in fairly large patches. We crossed a few just to head south. Within 20 minutes, we found our handkerchief spot - a perfect view of Rainier to the north and the Tatoosh to the south (definitely a top destination he hiked until the end, typically from Reflection Lakes). After leaving the handkerchief, we proceeded back up the trail heading north, our goal being the Mountaineers bench (or Stevens/Van Trump monument). Once there, I kicked some people out of the chair so we could take pictures - including with/of my dad's ice axe (this was the first hike we carried it, having stupidly forgot it all other days). Afterwards, we were at a loss as to which way to go. Allison was intrigued with the ice caves sign and I figured - what the hell. I knew the caves were gone but I always liked that area and its austere views and lunar terrain. Indeed, we climbed and climbed and everything was FABULOUS. My

favorite shot from the whole day was taken up there (featured in the cover shot - the ice axe with the Indian paintbrush amongst all that rock and snow). Half a mile from the former caves, the snow began but we pushed on 15 more minutes. Bear in mind, we were BOTH wearing Chaco's and enjoying the snow tremendously (in Allison's case - between her bare toes). We returned to the bench and ate lunch before heading up the Skyline - at least through the Golden Gate turn-off. We crossed more snow, proceeding half a mile up before turning down on the glorious Golden Gate trail... which essentially took us back to the car - colorful meadows all the way. After the hike, we visited the visitor center and I got a little teary-eyed when I came to the famous picture from the largest climbing accident on Rainier (the memorial photo representing a final shot found in the camera of a victim). On the way home, we enjoyed a truly satisfying meal at the definitely higher-class (than it used to be) Copper Creek Inn. Allison and I agreed this was the BEST hike of the series.



Left to Right: near the old Paradise ice caves, heading up along Skyline Trail, descending the Golden Gate - Tatoosh

### **Paradise Revisited, 2007**

In 2006, my mother refused to set foot anywhere near Rainier because the memories and associations with my dad were too much. With a LOT of my usual stubbornness, though, I got her up there in early September 2007. Although we'd hoped to hike up to the Mountaineers bench, we decided to keep things simpler and shorter: Glacier Vista (almost 2 miles, 900 feet). After all the dismal weather in Canada's Rockies (which I'd just returned from), we were granted clear and sunny skies with complete views of Rainier, Adams, St. Helens, etc. To our surprise, the old spaceship visitor center was still intact and open (it is going to be demolished and replaced in the coming year). Given that school had just begun, the trails were - at least early on - nearly empty. There were even huckleberries waiting for the eating. As is evidenced by the pictures below, my mother actually did smile up there - something that seemed to surprise her. But, she readily admitted, it was a day that dad would have liked very much. After the trip, we enjoyed the Copper Creek Inn - although our selected meals seemed a little heavier than Allison and mine the year prior. Next year, she has promised that we will hike Burroughs Mountain.



Left to Right: me and my mom, near Glacier Vista, looking back on Adams, Tatoosh, St. Helens