

Mt Ann (5840+', Prom 960)

Mt Baker ski area, Austin Pass, Swift Creek drainage

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Sunrise 7:40, Sunset 5:06

The wide weekday weather window was changing to narrower and narrower. Stefan had posted earlier about having Wednesday open, based on MM5 weather predictions being good. The objective being Mt Ann. The previous day (Tuesday) had been very cold (single digits) and this morning an inversion on Stevens pass keeping temps in the low teens. The forecast seen early AM for Baker was temps just below freezing and rising to mid + 30s with some sunshine diminishing the next day to clouds and potential rain. Window looked good for a day trip and Mt Ann looked like a long drive and a nice shorter day trip.

Usual P&R, cram stuff in car as cars buzz by for their commute to work. Us heading the other way for play. Two car loads so Iron and Hotpantz could leave early if needed and get back to Seattle by 7p. A stop at the ranger station outside of Granite and next the maintenance parking lot at Mt Baker. We'd had clear skies coming in and now some high clouds. We were loaded and left the lot at 8:30 (c4260') for Austin Pass. Only a couple vehicles in the parking lot and no one seen on the mountains. Snow was light and we made Austin Pass in under 30 minutes (.8m, c4736', 476' ascent).

The snow was sun-baked and heavy dropping the gulley into Swift Creek drainage. It would have been better to stay skiers right (west) and ski the slope than the direct down route -I was following, not having been here before. We all gathered and headed down staying on the east side of the gulley which soon opened to what appeared a swampy area sans snow. Steep vertical walls on the east and steep walls on right with recent avy signs. The skiers followed the skin track leaving the east side of the open area, while the snowshoers made new tracks direct down the drainage. All part of Mike's love of clean tracks and getting a workout. Being a little quicker on skis I asked and got direction to, "just follow the ski track". Many up and downs sidehilling. Soon trees thinned again and the track became a mess of indecision (9:42, 2.6m, c3910, 1h10min). It appeared a main track lead due south. Thinking a better option than the lighter track leading uphill and SEE I went downhill and south. Later I found half the group went left (SEE track for a mellow creek crossing).

In a few minutes I came to a deep creek (9:44, 2.9m, c3800'). I waited then lowered to the creek about 8' down, across loose snow and up a bank on the east side. Hmmm, this would be interesting heading out. Shortly, Iron and Hotpantz appeared and followed suit. Regaining the ski track we took a break while I re-skinned and waited for the other half of the group. Some map checking and finally decided to proceed (no sign of the others, 10:06a, 22min wait). The snowshoers headed SE up the shallow ridge, while I followed the skin track.

Which way up

Rounding the shallow ridge opened to the beautiful snow covered lower basin north of Mt Ann. Running down her north face a deep gulley with signs of a massive avalanche. To the left a large, but smaller one. At the base of Mt Ann, I could hear Mike and Carrie talking on my left, but never saw them (10:32a, 3.3m, c4010'). The left (NE face) presented open face and a potential approach to the summit ridge -rather open and exposed to avy. Heading up the north wall through trees and between the two gullies a zigzag of a skin track. I followed the skin track right side of the smaller avy debris then up through the trees. Zigzagging a mellow rise. I'm used to a steep climb so felt relaxing. I'd wanted to get ahead of the group to break trail in needed and also have a chance to catch my breath if needed (was having asthma issues earlier). In stopping and looking below I still did not see the other three. Crossed a small gulley and up to a flat spot that looked like others had also used to take a break (10:45a, 3.7m,

c4500', 2h17min). As I ate, drank and looked for sign of the others I heard yells, sounded like my name, but that was all I could get. No response on the radio. After a bit (16 minutes) I was worried that someone was injured and was checking out how to descend and backtrack. The way up didn't look like a good way down. I did a snow check and it was solid under a 4" powder layer. Still appeared low avy danger. I decided best bet would be to ascend up cross left look for an up track and if needed head down that side if needed.

Get a move on

On up I went in the steeper skin track veering left (east). Checking the radio I found the volume knob was turned down. Turning it up and calling out I soon got a call from Yana. She wanted to know where the heck I was. I was interested in the same. She was 300' from the summit. I was at 4700', well below even the ridge (c5460'). I put a hustle on and soon saw two snoeshoers (Mike and Carrie) heading up the west face of the left peak (Lake Ann Butte, 5681'). In a bit heading right I saw the dots of a snowshoer and soon two skiers heading to the right and the ridge. Time to put a move on, stop or slow to breath and on. Gained the ridge to see Yana starting to kickstep the summit block (11:34a, 4.3m, c5460, 3h3min).

The Ridge and onward

The ridge was breezy enough to warrant a shell. A slight drop then the final summit block. Stefan left his skis at the base as well as Yana leaving her snow shoes. Carla was skinning a traverse then skis off to walk and kickstep up. Seems her binding opened... not a good place for that! I followed the skin track that soon was covered with hard blown snow. Not much penetration, but enough to make it with only one slip. Gained the summit (11:50a, 4.6m, 5840' (gps 5887), 2380 ascent, 3h58min) and soon over the rise appears the magical climbing unicorn. We were getting a good laugh out of the kids costume Stefan had decided to wear to on the trip.

On the summit

We watched as Mike and Carrie crossed from Lake Ann Butte and joined us on Mt Ann. Sun shining, a high cloud masking most of Mt Baker and giving only hints of Shuksan being so close. South the silver reflection of Baker Lake, Lake Shannon and great views of the snow covered peaks south. Far south looked like a few places may have rain and north of the border looked like a change of weather. The Magical Unicorn pulled out a set of cupcakes with lit candles to celebrate Carla's B'day. What a great way to celebrate, views from a summit, sunshine and skiing. We enjoyed the treats, played name that peak and relaxed with the views for 50 minutes. Now time to head out (12:40p, 4h8min)

Time to ski

Heading down would be a series of turns and wait. On the way up, I'd lost all my brownie points for blazing ahead. To regain a few of them I was to find a nice safe route off for the B'day girl. The sun had baked the snow to a heavy glop. Not good skiing and even with freshly waxed skis was sticking and doing all we could to not go over the handlebars. A little scouting and we took a small south gully providing a mellow pitch. Exit sharp skiers left to traverse back to the ridge. From here followed the basics of the others up route along a mellow pillowed (and sticky) slope. No sun and depth perception was nil making for interesting balance. We waited for the others while succumbing to a bout of shutter delay. Snow mound textures, sun again, ski tracks...

The next pitch opened up and dropped in steepness. I threw in a hard turn and was able to start a small snow slide. Changed choice of course and easy on the weighting. Some fun turns then traversed high above a group of three snowshoers and a white dog. Later would find they were NWHikers (Flow, Baddog and another guy with helmet and dual axes(?)). We crossed the north facing field and waited on the far (east) side. Mike and Carrie were talking to the other group. We all gathered again before dropping into the trees then to the upper creek cross they'd come in on (1:40p, 6.6m, c3888', 5h8min). Ample snow, smaller creek and a nice snow bridge. Time to re-skin for the trek to Austin Pass.

Re-skinned

What can be said of heading out? I'd not looked forward to this part since it was uphill at the end of a trip. The going was gradual and much better than I expected. Snow firm enough for the snowshoers to walk sans snowshoes. The other group coming in had walked the skin track making a few spots interesting. The track followed the east side of the basin, opened to the flat area. All together again we headed up the gulley, exit left as it started up to skin up the track steeply on the west side. I tried setting a new track, but the snow was so wet and sticky. A real mess. Mike and Carrie showed their strength by kicking up to Austin Pass passing us. On Austin Pass an igloo and on the east side of Table mountain a large group of snowboarders having fun with a jump (3:00p, 8.6m, c4750).

Last turns

Skins off we each started heading down after checking out the views and what looked like rain up north. Near the pass I stopped to talk to Helen and Paul. Helen recognized me and I her voice. I told them a group was in there with Josh since they have been very interested in his well being and training. Paul acted like he did not know who it Josh was. I let them know they were many hours behind us and most likely going to be coming out in the dark. Then off for a few turns and mostly the cat track back to the car. Stopped again to chat with another late group heading up. Odd, back so early (3:15, 9.5m, 4142 ascent, 6h43min). A little celebrating, load the car, a bye to Mike and Carrie and we headed home. All in shock, driving the road in daylight (lol).

Thanks to everyone for the great trip. Would be nice with better snow conditions.

Happy turns and trails!

fwb

stats: 9.5m, 4142ascent.

gear: probe, shovel, transceiver, ice ax, skis, skins...