

Buck/Louis Creek to Fortress traverse

Twelve Summits in 3 ½ days

July 3-6, 2009

Buck Mt (middle)(8528') 18/100	Cirque Mt (7966')
Buck North summit	Mt Cleator (7625)
Mt Berge (7948')	Mt Cleator N summit
Mt Berge S summit	Liberty Cap (6760+)
Point 7529 (7529')	Helmet Butte (7400') 19/100
Nepeequa Pk (8073')	Flower Dome (6332)

Carla Schauble, Yana Radenska, Matt Burton, Steve, Tisha Schmidt, Anne Arnoldy

Miles: 46.77

Ascent: 20109ft

car end 2775

Time end 1:30p (7/6)

5:26am, it's been light out for over an hour and I'm just driving to meet to carpool. Phone rings, "Hey Dicey, what's up?". Dicey, "I'm still at home and Tazz hasn't picked me up and doesn't answer her phone... What should we do..."

Yana headed down and picked up Dicey and we met at our Monroe spot. Arriving were: Dicey, Yana, Matt, Yukon222 and Schmidt Alti-babe. On our drive we were well over the pass before Tazz answered the phone. Those that know her will know the words out of her mouth. She'd hightail it out and try catching us on the route or at camp. A stop at Cole's corner to grab last minute gas station cuisine make sure we had all made it so far. At the trinity TH it was already warm. Dicey always able to find food found two scrumptious donuts on the ground. They worked well as large pole baskets, but no-one took her offer for another breakfast.

The trail was hot and dusty. The mosquitoes were out in force. Going up was getting hotter and hotter. A set of switchbacks after mile 4.5 I could feel the drips of sweat. I heard later the temps were over 90 –yikes. That hot and I feel like a puddle of jello. After a small avy debris field at mile five we gathered for a long break. At this spot we searched for a river crossing. Some precarious possibilities rejected a search a few hundred yards up stream there is an old logjam (trick is after the mile 4.5 switchbacks the trail levels, woods open and soon after mile 5 a field with a view of Buck creek. Turn left and cross here).

Now the fun. Up, over, through, don't step in the bear scat, log walk, veg belay, shift right, wipe sweat, shift left, is everyone still here, pull through brush, stay left side of the Cleator ridge, catch our breath... repeat... At a break I could hear voices. Then from above Aaron and Doug drop down to say hi. They are heading up to climb the East face of Berge. Having crossed Buck Creek lower had even more fun than we'd had. The brush opened a bit and we kept just left of the ridge. Being on the ridge we missed the clearing at 5800' and found what we thought was it at 6000'. We took a long break and scouted a way into the basin. Nothing looked like the route description. A beautiful spot with great views. Tazz found the radio we left for her and we made contact and told us to look for a camp with a blue tarp. I headed down to scout and found a clearing at 5800' south of the ridge. The area was covered in snow and under a tree was a white and blue tarp and some garbage. South from this tree clump is a faint trail that contours into the basin. In the basin we were under a cliff band and upward traverse on a route to avoid and be above cliff bands on the other side. Our goal was to go up over these then

down under a buttress crossing at 5900'. Considering our late start, long breaks, delays and the extra vert for the day not knowing if we ran short of daylight we'd make it out of the snow/talus scramble on the other side of the Berge buttress we decided to head up the basin to the pass to camp. It'd prove to be a better choice give we'd not have to carry over and down Berge with our heavier packs. We gathered and said hi to Aaron and Doug again as they scoped out their route of Berge. From here up was snow, kick stepping to the pumice covered gap between Berge and Cleator. A great camp, views east and west and water running a short ways down on the NW side.

Everyone made it to camp (c7050'), even Tazz with some of the usual grumbling. For the day ~8 miles, 5100' ascent.

I followed Matt up the south face of Cleator for dinner and a sunset from the false summit. There was a serious drop to get over to the real summit, so that would have to wait for an approach from High Pass (west of Cleator). A nearly full moon appeared above Berge and the skies glowed with hues of orange, red, and blues.

Morning had a breeze and clear skies. Sunrise didn't bring the hoped for alpine glow. We packed up expecting at least eight hours for Buck and were heading out at 6:45a to the west side of Berge with crampons and ice axes... A steep snow field with a careful ascent and upward to a low point south of the Berge summit at (c7630'). A traverse north, Matt departed for his route up Berge (both summits) then off to Napeequa. Under the north side of Berge we turned SE and wound our way down rock and snowfield to the

RT to Napeequa, 7529 and Cirque was 4 hours

Short version:

A late start with Dicey's ride not waking and having to re-arrange the carpooling. Leaving the Trinity trailhead Dicey found a snack of donuts on the ground and we were off through gauntlet of mosquitoes. Beating up the trail through the dust and temps over 90 degrees. At around five miles we crossed Buck Creek and up Cleator ridge. Up, over, through, don't step in the bear scat, log walk, veg belay, shift right, wipe sweat, shift left, is everyone still here, pull through brush, stay left side of the Cleator ridge, catch our breath... repeat... At a break I could hear voices. Then from above Aaron and Doug drop down to say hi. They are heading up to climb the East face of Berge. We changed our plan and went to the pumice covered gap between Berge and Cleator for a camp (also avoided a carry over of Berge. Dinner and sunset on the false summit of Cleator with a rising nearly full moon and clear skies.

Saturday (day 2): On snow at 6:45a up over the west side of Berge and down to the Buck-Berge basin. Up the snow and sometimes heather and into the upper snow filled basin. Little summits north and east. The first left most one is low. The next (clockwise) left summit is a good scramble. On the way up I see a goat going up the face to the middle summit (highest). A bit of vertigo on the left summit, I signed the reg and took some pano shots. The rest of the group was heading up the middle summit so I headed over to it using the mountain goats route from the NW. Everyone found a spot with Dicey finding a seat hovering over the vertical drop on the east side. No register on this summit. We hung around then I took off to try to make it out to Napeequa. Some fast glissades and trudging up to the summit of Berge. Signed the reg and then tagged the west summit for good measure. Matt and I were checking in on the hour. Couldn't tell

what he was saying when I was in the basin. He was coming off Napeekqua when I tagged Berge and gave some good beta. I descended Berge to the low point south of High pass. Matt was heading toward Point 7529 so I headed there to meet. I hung around the summit, but couldn't see him. Saw tracks... Heading back east to get around a cliff band we ran into each other. Got some beta on Napeekqua and Cirque...

Matt was on his way to a swim in the frozen Triad lake and I headed up. I followed Matt's kicksteps up the moraine, below a cliff bank, up high a finger, a little rock and another patch of snow. Rock scrambling up the east side, past a knob heading up. A small flat ledge with a 2 foot tall tree. Temptation is to go up –wrong... Traverse south past the summit and there is a series of easy small ledges with dirt that eventually turns west and up to south of the summit. The reg is in a salsa container. A piece of paper from Mike Tokok in 1998 on computer punch card. Not much traffic to this summit with only four signatures before Matt's (Mike Tokok, Mike & Nathan Collins and Stefan Feller). I took a long break a bite to eat, took off the boots to dry and massage the feet.

I worked my way down and then over under the east side of Cirque. I heard voices and saw the group on the summit of Point 7529'. Up the snow finger then traversed south on Matt's route. The route I took down goes as well –a third way up hit the NE ridge and follow it to the summit block. The summit block is un-nerving.

Walked around it then scramble up. A step across to a cheval on a single 18-24 inch wide block standing on edge. After getting across the cheval there is a flattish sloping spot to sit on –not advised. Matt had left a rock on the tip. I was more concerned about not dropping my camera I forgot to leave the rock I'd put in my pocket. Getting off is a dangerous move. If you go up there be satisfied by staying off that last piece. You'll only be a foot lower. With my legs a little wobbly from the nerve racking move, I hightailed it down. The snow made quick going. Huffing up over a last bump about the same height as camp. Then down and stopped to fill water with Yukon and Schmidt Alti-babe.

A great sunset and group time at camp. We made potential plans and alternates for Sunday, waiting to see what the weather would hold. Forecast was for thunderstorms...

Morning the skies looked favorable. We broke camp and headed out to High Pass. Dropped our packs and a quick trip up for views east into Buck Creek and our route of the day to Buck Camp and Helmet Butte. Another fin of Cleator just east had us glad that wasn't higher. Leaving High Pass the traverse under the east flank across snow patches slowed us down. A lot of kick stepping and in an hour we were at another pass. Trail took us around the west side of the mountain and to another pass on the south side of Liberty Cap. The trail went west around Liberty Cap, we went up and over. Wide on top with an impressive drop east and more views of our route. We went down the west side to intersect the trail and to Buck Pass camp. A massive avalanche came down Helmet Butte all the way to the edge of camp.

We took a relaxing break and decided what to do. Matt, Yukon and Schmidt Alti-babe were heading out so as a group we decided to head up Helmet Butte. A little work to find the field without cliffs. Hoping from marmot ledge to marmot ledge. It felt like stair climbing the Columbia Tower.

I was too far left and hit the ridge. I ran it to where the others came up. A large flattish area below the summit block on the east side. A little looking and a 3-4 foot wide easy chimney scramble up on the SW side brought us to the top. We found an old Mountaineer register that had been hit by lightning. I took a picture and the hit spot is visible. Looking at the tube the middle of it where it contacted the rock shows the electric flow out. Helmet looked to be popular in the 60's and 70's, but not so now.

Exceptional views down to Pass no Pass and Fortress. And the regular name that peak. All happy that it was dry we descended the grassy steps back to the Buck Creek trail. Matt, Yukon and Schmidt Alti-Babe headed off for home and we went to setup camp. Still feeling charged and early in the day I took off to give Fortress a try. So many times I've had plenty of time for a summit and the next day been weathered out. With only the brief description from CAG I passed by the trail to Pass No Pass and after obviously going to far returned to go up that trail. Shortly hit Avy debris, found the trail again and a small camp. All above it was trashed from avalanches. No trail in sight I thought to give what looked doable from scouting from Helmet. I worked up toward Pass No Pass and found an old trail. At Pass No Pass I followed east of the ridge to the upper moraine and snowfield. A group had been in a day earlier and I was able to use some of their kicksteps that hadn't melted away. Amazing how quickly the sun was melting steps out as they were very faint. Snow was hard under and crampons would have been nice. I followed the snow to it's apex. Better would to be to get off it and rock scramble up ledges. A side traverse I went under another snowfield and up the second one. Here I'd have been better to have rock scrambled up before the first high snowfield to the ridge. I summated at 6:45 and managed two pictures before the camera battery was drained. Bummer –no summit 360 pano:-) An interesting summit to adventure around. A little pressed for time (and daylight) I ate read the summit reg, signed it and headed down. I stayed on rock past all but 50 feet of the steep snowfield. I was hoping to find a real trail down and did a downward traversed left to intersect. Never saw a trail, came under a buttress on the east side and down a grassy gulley to intersect the Massie trail. Below this was a massive amount of avy debris all the way down and across the Buck Creek trail. Heading west on the Massie trail I came across Brandon and Josh camped out and checking out the sights with spotting scopes. They'd seen Tazz, Dicey and Yana near Flower Dome. The trail took me to directly above the camp in the lower Pass No Pass valley that had been nearly wiped out by an avalanche. I back tracked to the trail. Up and past Buck Pass camp and on to Flower Dome. The sunset was beautiful, though the skies were showing a change coming. On my way back to the pass to the Buck trail the deer that was grazing on the way in barely acknowledged my presence. Three more grazing near the trail and getting dark, soon I scrambled over the final avy debris arriving at camp. A bite to eat and I was ready to stretch and crawl into the sack.

Through out the eve we could hear deer tromping around camp. After hearing of Yana catching a deer licking her pack I covered mine with a bag. Morning we were in a cloud. Birds fluttering and a cool dampness. The two gals that came in the day before (Brenda and Cindy) headed out towards Spider Gap and we headed down the trail to Trinity. Passing the turn to do Fortress with no visibility we kept going. On occasion a bright sneaker sun hole, then gone. Looking back we saw the peaks remained socked it. A few switchbacks and a camp around 6 miles. After that the trail is nearly obliterated all the way to mile 5. Amazing the huge piles of debris and devastation. The lower we got the more bugs were out. Near Trinity it was non-stop to get past the swarms of over rambunctious ravenous blood sucking mosquitoes. Luckily, at the parking lot there were fewer.

A loading of the car and next stop lunch at the 59er Diner. A long ride home and back to home life and lawn mowing...

Stats for me: 3 ½ days, 46 ¾ miles, 20100 vertical ascent, 9 summits (and 3 false summits)

Equipment: Crampons, ice axe, trekking poles, bug repellent,