

Another in the Summit Sunset Series

Round Mt (5320'. Prom 4780)

Mt Higgins (5176', prom 896)

Via Swede Heaven Road.

**Round via south ridge,
Higgins from east ridge.**

Jan 27, 2011

Yana Radenska, Mike Helminger, Carla Schauble, Vicki Lord, Franklin Bradshaw and Jack (4 legged)

Oh, good to be in one car. When they did the "not it" for writing the report I was informed til the next morning I was too late with my "not it".

Short report:

Now that'd be cheating... this was a good trip and worth the reading. Basically, a flat tire, late start, straight up steep open forest. Sunshine and breeze with great view and jack heckling us. A short day turned long and a return by headlamp. Want more? Then you'll have to read more.

Long report:

The start of this trip was from many times hearing Mudslinger talk of this peak, his attempt and the intrigue since I've seen no successful trip reports from the east side and so many scramble attempts from the west run out of time. Mudslinger provided us with a great photo image of the East ridge. A study showed a puzzle to solve. Mudslinger had mastered almost all of the route, but fell short time wise. We'd hope he would join, but missed in communication due to an instant change in venues due to the changed Friday's weather forecast. I think Yana is working hard to plan these for summit sunsets. BTW, sunset was scheduled for ~16:56.

For this trip, snow levels, conditions, weather and group dynamics needed to be a fit. We knew from a start that it could be a long day. Guess I didn't really translate that clearly to Vicki. She was great putting up with our antics. And Iron joined me in the gullible club. To assure at least one peak, I was informed we'd do a "warm-up" going up Round Mt. Huh? A warm-up? Hey, It would take all day just to get Higgins... Again, Yana's guile had me on another trip. I'm going to have to learn how to find gullible in the dictionary to know what she keeps talking about as she laughs...

Round Mt, I was told is the 8th most prominent mountain in Washington State at 4780' prominence. The highest in an island of mountains just north of Whitehorse, south of the Baker areas and west of the North Cascades. With the impressive finned ridge peaks of Higgins a sight I've seen so many times driving through the Oso-Darrington area. Heading east look north (left) and you'll see the ridge lines angling up... Higgins comprising of several impressive peaks. The lookout on the west peak being the most visited, the middle summit (Skadulguas Peak) ([see John Ropers write up at](#))

being an impressive fin with a vertical north side and the highest Higgins summit at the east, not summited as much. The west a serious scramble (from what I've heard) and the east –well, it truly was a climb. A TR I found after the trip had a fast summer trip by Fred Beavon and a comment of the climbing being class 3-4. From what we encountered I'd not agree.

I've wondered so many times how to summit those peaks and what that area was like. Today was the day I'd get my first glimpse. –Gullible... lol.

Getting ready

The night before word was spread the hike of the day would be Round and Higgins. Maybe not attain Higgins, but see what we could do. Randy had been wanting me to get his wife out on a trip. She agreed.

Not sure if that eagerness will be repeated :). I loaded with a wide assortment of gear not knowing what to expect. Picket, two ropes (only took one up), some cams, ten double slings and webbing, pitons, ice ax, second tool/hammer, steel crampons, snowshoes, extra munchies, gu and water... Darn, my pack was getting heavy. Great of Iron to volunteer to haul the rope.

Off we go

Almost at the turn off to Swede Heaven road, I got a TM from Dicey. They had a flat... We turned around and found them with the tire almost changed. A stop at the Shell at Swede Heaven road to put air in the wimpy spare and load weight from her car to Vicki's. Off we go searching for the next turn off Swede Heaven onto 371st. Then up and up, Yana four wheeling on that wimpy little spare. Followed the main road, no turn offs, always on the most used road til stopping at a blocked bridge.

Over an hour behind schedule we started the first crux (8:00, 1735') in the rising sun across the slippery bridge. In 5 minutes and 600-700ft a dry creek. Directly after it direct up the very steep cut. Dicey had printed out maps and route descriptions. A GREAT help as we followed [raising3hikers weekend trip up Round](#). Once up the steep bank the terrain was a nice pitch with tall trees and very little underbrush. The easy joy shifted at salal ended and the pitch increased to darn steep. We took the Iron route –straight up. Hmmm, we have to come down this... What I really missed. Took me a bit to figure it out. A Yana trip without copious devil's club and swampy bushwhacking. Sweet the wide open forest.

At c2926' (9:00, .6m) a nice large pleasant flattish area to take a short break before heading up very steeply again. After another smaller flattish area the snow began thinly at c3700. At just over c4000' the pitch eased to a nice ridge walk in the snow. Snow holding our weight –at times. A little more up the trees getting smaller and we took a break on the high point of the ridge with an opening view of Higgins and Round (10:25, 1.4m, c4418).

From first views heading north

From the "Middle Hump" Iron lead off following down the narrow ridge NNW. Good thing we went all the way to the hump. The slope both side looked too steep for enjoyable travel. Dropped only c120' then up. Trees opening and snow a little deeper and heavy. It was amazing how light the pack is removing climb gear and snowshoes, making for a much more pleasant ascent. At a small crux Iron and Jack (four legged) went left and I went right. On a flat spot I found Jack standing there barking in his way of saying, ha, silly two legged beast, I'm up here, why aren't you. Once Dicey, Vicki and Yan arrived Jack stopped his heckling and ran on to join Iron far ahead.

The route to the Round summit went well and provided impressive views of the Mt Loop and Cascades. About to crest all the little trees vanished and ahead on the round skyline a bark and howl of Jack. Standing there heckling us...again. I guess I should get used to the young-ones heckling the old farts –but even the dog? The Summit is wide and flattish (11:37, 2.1m, 3754' ascent). A slight breeze and drop dead views. Much shutter delay and Jack running in circles wanting to play. His spirit was contagious and after a food break (Jack got the biscuits, we the human munchies) we started our return to the "Middle Hump" the sun was doing quick work making much of the snow. Runout not conducive to glissading til near the bottom where we did get some good butt sliding in. Of course plenty of contagious shutter delay on the way (returned to hump 12:39, 2.8m).

A meeting with Higgins

We repacked at the Hump and started the traverse to Higgins along the SW running ridge. A wide opening provided a grand view south towards Darrington and giant Whitehorse Mt and Three Fingers. Iron surveyed ahead finding we needed to go to the top of the intermediate bump gaining 485', then down again. The next smaller bump we left our snowshoes and up a rocky then steep pitch for another 50' gain. The amply snow covered slope heading west brought us to the open saddle just east of a cliff of the SE ridge (2:04, 3.4m, c4750'). We contemplated the view ahead of us. Looking for weaknesses. A few options with the far right point of the ridge looking obvious.

Let the fun begin

Iron and I set off up some class three rock between small trees and the cliff. Later dicey found this on [Summit Post](#). Good to do the research after - lol. Makes more fun figuring the route ourselves. People have been here. Branches pruned. I went as far as an opening where we could see partially up a gulley and a little exposed down to the saddle. Set an anchor away and to the side of the gulley and after a bit lead off (2:17). The going started well. I soon realized this was no place for Jack. Sorry Jack, guess all that heckling comes back to ya' ;) the pitch got steeper and the snow sometimes thin and not holding to the rock. I did as much steep snow climbing, some rock excavation, a couple roots and used the space above some good size trees to catch my breath. A gulley on the right offered snow up, but no pro. May have been a good shot, but not. The more left gulley (immediate right of the rib) had trees to sling. The rock under was loose and some of the finger holds small and slippery. At this point I dumped the gloves for better grip. Slippery on fingers and the heavy winter boots. A rotted webbing hung to the right. No trust in it. I was able to place a cam (#1 BD -red) and rest on it. Then up with pack getting nabbed by overhanging branches. Oh, what a joy. Hanging on, twisting and moving branches that did their best to entangle. I was having such a "joyous" time of it. Then the true joy of ducking through a set of branches and topping off. The rope was getting tight as I pulled the last few yards to tie to an anchor around a large tree. Guess I'd run the full 50m and some (2:40).

With the rope tied off the others ascended the gulley. In a bit I saw some movement below. I'd tethered to the edge to offer encouragement or at least watch the show. Darn, I hope everyone could follow what was left of that route. Below one spot I saw a coat in someone's hand being waved then something said. I think what was going on was another prank from Yana. I'm sure she told them my secret of when in a bind, just use a garage door opener. In their making do, Iron was forced to sacrifice some gear. I think he was fighting to not let them throw his coat and his hat went north down the cliff in sacrifice. Sorry Iron, I hope your hat is in happy hat land. After all the entertainment three came up. Vicki decided to stay down and take care of Jack. A good climber, just a little rusty and starting to get an inkling of our antics.

Re-gearred we simu-ldclimbed up a steep slope gaining a ridge setting sling on trees. Either side it was steep, and didn't want to take any chances. The going was pleasant and feeling good. Then another crux. A little looking and I tried the garage door opener again. Darn, battery must be dead. Had to resort to working the rightish side, up the near vertical snow covered arête. Cleared snow in places looking for rock ledges to step on and found them loose and useless. Some farming then some kickstepping and was up on the next ridge. Wider and flatter we belayed in the group (ran out of gear). Again lead off fully re-gearred. One more easier crux and a narrow ridge run with only a little gain to the summit. Turning and looking back it was a steep drop north or south, everyone made it without issue (4:45p, 3.6m, 5019ascent). And all on top before sunset. I'm finding sunset is delayed 5-10 minutes on the summits.

Oh, my... the view!

We celebrated and took in the invigorating and stunning views. The day and changed to high darkish clouds and maybe rain on Rainier. Warm with a breeze to keep the cool. The slope west looked mellow. Wonder how that route would be? Ten million photos later Yana lead a reverse of our route. I was wanting to get as far down before dark and barked when the line stopped for what seemed a long time. Then I settled down and looked around. OMG! Baker was glowing pink, snow coverings lower a gray. What a sight. Then I looked behind me. "Heh, dicey! Don't look back!". Stunning the sunset, clouds bleeding deep red. Ripples of texture... I asked that Yana just get us to the first rap and I'd set as she could take all the photos she wanted. Of the sunset series this had been a ho hum sunset looking over the entire Olympics. Now it transformed into a stunning beauty. Something I love about living with views of the Olympics. Even after a cloudy day, at the end the sun drops below the clouds and puts on a show better than any clear sky day.

Into the dark

First rap Yana lead down. I followed and traversed to set up the next rap. Second rap got us to the top of the 50m gully. Pitch black and under the large tree we all worked together to pull the rope, find center, set and off on rappel #3. Iron woke me up to suggest going through the heart of branch hell may not be "fun". We went down the further north clear gully to a large tree a meter lower than the rope. All down a rap off this tree landing us on the snow at the saddle with a little extra rope. Earlier we'd heard Jack bark. Now no welcome committee except a brisk wind (6:20p). Vicki and Jack must have moved to a less windy spot. Looking over to the cliff it seemed a long way up the headlamps dancing. A yell of Rappel on and a headlamp started moving down the face. Another yell of OFF RAPELL and Iron appeared from the dark. Soon Dicey and Yana joined. I tried taking pictures of the rap, but didn't want to take the time to get out the tripod. It was dark and not much showed in the images.

Where's Jack and Vicki?

Following our tracks in some green eyes started toward me and soon there was Jack, all wagging tail and happy to see us. Up the trail Vicki had built a bunker for her and Jack to wait for us. The entire group back together we worked our way back tracking. A steep slope we tied off Jack to belay him across and then a hand line. Again, no sense taking risks on the way back. The last crux some lowered on the line and most down climbed. Grabbed our trekking poles and continued in through the woods. Soon reaching the snowshoe stash we had another bite to eat, loaded the packs and Iron lead us on a traverse to intersect with our up ridge route. In a few spots we saw some tracks. Odd, none of us remember walking that direction. But why in the world would anyone be up here?

The ever steepening endless ridge

At the ridge (8:00, 4.5m, c4230) we followed our track down. A break here and there and staying right of a gully down low. Very steep going down, heel stepping and trying to not slip. We cheated and used a GPS to find the break we'd used to get up from the road. Not obvious the route down the ledge to the road (9:32, 5.7m, 5187 ascent). All happy to be safely at the road one major crux back to the car –the slippery down sloping bridge. A flip of a light in the air and obvious the final crux had taken its toll. And all within five feet of safe ground.

9:37, tagging the cars. Even with late we were all in good high spirits. We'd taken polls along the way and at each asking all were ready to spend time on the mountain and come down in the dark. Yana had done it again, adding to the Summit Sunset Series.

Stats:

Car to Round – 2.1m, 3h5min.

Round to base of Higgins -1.3m, 2h

Base to summit Higgins - .2m, 2h30min

Higgins to car – 2.2m, 4h37min

Total – 5.8m, 13h37min

Gear:

Used: Ice Ax, helmet, snowshoes, 50m rope, dozen double slings/webbing, small cams (.5-1), avy transceiver, headlamp...

Didn't use but carried: Shovel, probe, steel crampons, pitons, second tool/hammer, ascender

Happy trails!

fwb