

Lux Peak (5650') - skiing

Stevens Pass / Lumiere Ridge

March 5, 2011

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Sunrise 6:41, sunset 17:56, moonrise 6:33, moonset 19:19 (1 day past New Moon)

Weather – clouds/fog to sun, returning to cloud, no wind...

Avy forecast was improving from the major dumps beginning of the week. Monday had been epic with 23" of snow overnight. Our worry was of snow depth – avy, trail breaking... The weather window was marginal with Saturday being cloudy and high winds out east. Many emails, but looked like people opted to hold out for Sunday. Avy forecast lowering to considerable and less below 5000', and to keep an eye especially on east aspects. Hmm, something with easy access since the lower roads were covered in snow. Also with a cloud cover were would it be okay without views? Lux has been on my list and I'd not skied in the general area since the mid 90's. Time to return. Not knowing how long it would take with the deep snow, we had options for other peaks and slopes to check. Was hoping on more people to share the trail breaking and making a traverse rather than having to return and regain altitude. If we were quick maybe we could catch a lift ride back.

Surrounded by skiers and snowboarders

The night before we went up for night training and camped out in the parking lot. Morning the lot was filling fast with participants for the "Hope on the Slope" 24hr fundraiser. Being lazy we took a leisure start and waited for the lifts to open making a lazy access to the top of Tye Chair (9:12a, 1.4m, c5200, 1310 ascent by lift :). West and into the trees to traverse to the saddle north of Power Outage Peak (9:17a, 1.8, c4982) Deep snow booting up under the power towers and soon followed by snowboarders in our tracks to the north end of Lumiere Ridge (9:40a, 1.9m, c5151). Good time for a "Pop tart" break by both parties.

Leaving the snowboarders behind

The snowboarders dropped down the ridge while we traversed under the east side of Lumiere Ridge. Snow was deep making slow traversing. A few spots to glide and loose elevation. May have been better to loose more or to have skied the resort to the bend in the "Wayback" road and skinned up from there (or follow the summer PCT route). At the low point of our traverse (10:14a, 2.4m, c4563) we donned skins. Starting off we heard voices and were joined by some enthusiastic youths. Seeing we were going to skin up they dropped down for many whoops and a few bump drops. We rose to the saddle west of Lake Susan Jane, then up the south side of the lake and creek to the flat area where Mill Creek originates (11:17a, 3.0m, c4830, 267' up from Lk SJ). On the way up we could see a skin track across the lake and up the PCT route. So far the clouds had obscured views further than a quarter mile bringing the focus closer. Now the sun seemed to be burning through. To encourage the sun we made comments aloud that we'd not be able to find our sunglasses and too lazy to put on sunscreen... Some food and we gained the covered skin track at the flat and followed up south and SE to the base of the east ridge of Peak 5578 (south end of Lumiere Ridge).

Leaving the track

The skin track headed north to the col we'd use to return to Lake Susan Jane. We wanted to gain the pass west and above Swimming Deer Lake. A traverse on the PCT would put us traversing on a steep hill dodging trees. Instead we ascended the east ridge to c5440 (12:34p, 3.9m, 614' up from the flat area). Sun was doing it's magic of burning off the clouds, bright and sun patches in places and a view looking down into Christmas Bowl and our route out. A slight traverse left of the ridge west and off with the skins for a 360' descent to the Pass above Swimming Deer Lake and north of Lux. Yumm, nice powder, low angle and safe. All the way so far not a view of Lux. What would it be like? At the pass (12:56p, 4.2m, c5152, 3h33min) we re-skinned, looking up the sun cleared and OMG. The right face of Lux was a vertical cliff. Guess we're not doing the west side, lol.

De-Lux or not?

We veered to the east side up thinning trees. Would make for nice gladed skiing back. With fat skis we sank to below the knee aiming to pass the east ridge at c5400'. Ahead south a broad bowl NE of the summit and the ridge close above us. Carla took a hack at breaking a trail to the ridge. Sun was out and views amazing. Heading south we quickly met a dead end : ((13:41, 4.5m, c5550, 408' ascent from the pass).

Now what?

After much shutter delay and some more munchies we contemplated, and contemplated. Gulp, the summit looked to be a house sized pile of corniced snow perched on a pointed rock point. Cliffs on the west and cliffs on the east. A sharp ridge with drops and no way past the house sized corniced pile. Turn around or ??? We ripped off the skins and dropped into the NE bowl enjoying a few fluffy powder turns and a traverse under a east buttress. Blasting a route into a SE bowl (14:03, 4.6m, c5370, 5h5min). Re-skinned we worked south across the bowl and up to the south ridge of Lux (14:21, 4.7m, c5500). The ridge was a rollercoaster of windblown snow. Not much cornices and steep both east and west side. West side treed and east a bowl and further on above cliffs. Weaving both sides we zippered our way to a point where everything was lower –including that giant snow cornice lump now to our north (14:52, 4.9m, 5650', 5h54min).

Views!

The sun had burned most the clouds. Glad they did. The view was a different one that I've seen in the area. Nasikelt NE looking rugged, behind it Jim Hell and across from us a west facing slope showing a nice avy from a few days ago (under magnification can see fresh snow rounding the edge break. To the south Bulls Tooth and French Ridge. Took us longer than expected so we'd return from here. Looked to be possible further back the ridge to ski the trees west toward Mig Lake. This time we'd head east and follow our track back. An option of a sweet steep gulley with a few tasty drops. Considering, I'd have to push Carla to get here off them and the deep snow we chose to take the mellow route out. Shutter delay, food and time to head back. The snow had sloughed part of the first gulley that lead to the SE bowl. We dropped this gulley with heavenly turns and back under the east buttress. Skinned up to past the "dead end" ridge to the flat north false summit (good camp spot, 15:45, 5.2m, c5515). Along the way a little hole (1" dia) intrigued me. Eye close looking in I felt like Alice in Wonderland. A small opening enlarging to show diffused light and the green of a tree buried below. Guess I'm easily amused.

HiHo, HiHo...

Off we skied amongst the wide open trees to the pass and a quicker than expected skin up to the east ridge of Peak 5578 (16:25, 5.7m, c5440, 1h20 from summit). Another group had been through using our track and heading to 40' under the summit.

It's all in the timing. Fog the way in then clearing for a perfect summit attempt and views from it. Descent and back to the pass in sun. As we left the clouds reformed hiding Lux. Like a magic peak. Not visible til at it. Its own sun, then when leaving gone. Looking back, just a cloud. Was the peak really there or was it a dream?

On the north ridge we ripped the skins and made fun work of the powder north to the col above Lake Susan Jane (16:51, 6.1m, c5532'). Turns down the col and a traverse left to the creek leading to the Wayback Road (17:00, 6.7m, c4063', 1h56). The trail breaking in had taken longer than expected and we knew from the summit we'd missed the lazy lift up. Time to sit, eat a sandwich and relax a little. We skinned up the road and ski slopes. Used a low angle road then up the "Gemini" run to the Tye Saddle (18:00, 7.6m, c5097, 45 min from road break). Skins off legs tired we punished ourselves skiing the resort back to the resort base (18:12, 8.9m). Such a different feel from the un-touched powder skiing earlier.

In the lodge we met several people doing the Hope on the Slopes that recognized us. We wished them well then headed off to the Westie and plans for tomorrow. A few TMs and phone calls and tomorrows trips was organized. Then a call back... complications. Well, that is another story...

A great day with unexpected sunshine, views and much more stable slopes that predicted. How does it get better, freshie powder turns, views, sunshine, great partner... (thanks ;) !

Happy turns!
fwb

Stats: 8.9m total, 4.9 to summit, 3088vert in, 4625 total (1310 by lifts)