

One Mole, two dicey and Three Musketeers 8/6/2010

The Mole/South Face (Edwards Peak) (7280') and Three Musketeers (7680')

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Weather: diffused sun, minimal wind, 70-80s.

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fwb2 & dicey

Weather forecast for the weekend looked like a continuation of the wet and electrifying. A break on Friday (plus work obligations brought up The Mole. At attempt last year proved electrifying (<http://www.nwhikers.net/forums/viewtopic.php?t=7976732&highlight>) –we'd hoped not to re-enact that again. Plan was the same way up Hook creek and this time out Via the Tamarak basin (same as Don and Randy completed - <http://www.nwhikers.net/forums/viewtopic.php?t=7978086&highlight>). Last minute we found they would be doing Temple Ridge, so plan involved meeting up after the summits and walking out.

Morning was warm. The wind had settled down and the air was thick with lingering wildfire smoke. We started 1.7 miles west from the Snowcreek TH. Across the private bridge over Icicle Creek (c1700'), left, then of the two roads right and up the small trail past Rat Rock and soon steeply towards Yellowjacket Tower. For me this was the worse part of the trip. Steep dirt, calf workout, not awake and wondering what the heck was I thinking anyway? Sunrise slow, dark and heavily diffused by the thick smoke –very eerie. We followed the climbers trail to a switchback c3330' under Yellowjacket Tower and headed west in a traverse. Soon finding the way easy and then cairns. This was much easier than last time and the rock, bush, windfall scrambling was a relief from the steep dusty dirt path. We worked to near center of the Hook Creek basin and started up, aiming for a large brown granite patch at c3700'. I stayed more right than the last time and found less brush and deadfall to crawl over. Flattening a little at c4700, then up again still staying right of center and taking a zig zag of least resistance. Steep grippy slabs, boulders, a dry creek and fallen logs all made for an entertaining route. At 5600' we moved left back to center to a flattish area with some live trees, direct view of the rest of the ascent to the Mesa and last chance to tank up with water. I've always thought this spot beautiful in the contrast of burnt trees from the 1995 fire, granite boulders, grasses, heather, green trees, basin feel... and the noises of the mighty pica. Leaving the flattish area giant boulders cleared right side. c6670' left under a buttress bypassing more direct narrow gulley to the Douolith/Mole Col. Snow melted so further left to get out of the soft sand-trap. Left are two gulleys we kept up and took the right one landing us at the c7200' saddle a small hump west of Edwards Mesa (4.5hrs from car). Good spot for a break and taking in the view up Hook Creek and all the way to Prusik Pass.

From the saddle we dropped south working right (west) under the buttress at c7040'. The ledges over to the Mole gulley were the most challenge of the trip. Under the buttress we stared at what we thought of the route. Found the tree, ledge and wall. Couldn't see the flake –but we read it was hidden. The route looked challenging –always hard to tell looking flat on. Things present themselves much better up close. Descended the ledge to the gulley and crawled up, slipping down then up to under a left running crack under the tree.

Pitch 1 - No great place to setup, so a little precarious. Set an anchor on the east wall. Some horns I grabbed fell apart so used a #3 & #2 cam in a deep crack –figure that was bomber. Dickey belayed as I went up the 10-15' crack to the tree. Crack held #1 cam easily and one more (no decking out for me :-). The crack was solid and easy (5.4?). From the tree up 4' then down and over a 3-4' gap to a broad ledge that lead cl2-3 to a solid wall. At the wall right up cl3 boulders past a (heard "rope, half"). I'd set trying to minimize drag issue, but there was getting to be plenty of rope drag. A sweet crack (5.6?) presented itself above, but I wasn't sure how it'd be for an anchor distance wise or the rope drag (would do next time). I moved left of the developing V to a nice belay area directly under a large flake (heh! The hidden flake...). The first pitch was much easier than it'd looked from across the way. Were we in for a surprise ahead?

Pitch 2, I lead up right some boulders along the wall north of the belay, landing me behind the flake. Narrow –like a foot narrow. I pulled back and backed through it, slung the top horn of it and lowered the south side. Half way down stem to a boulder, rotate CCW and up. A 5.7 crack in right wall, could layback, but that's no fun. Hand and toe jam up, held a green (#.75) and a purple (#.5). Then a saddle with slings on the right a broad platform and good size tree. This was a fun V and crack system –Dickey was all smiles (after the flake). Wish that system had gone further. I think from the last belay ~20m. From the saddle up looked Cl3-4 so belayed from here.

Pitch 3 we scrambled cl3-4 and simul-climbed direct toward the summit. Wrapped a chicken head I'd seen in Don and Randy's report. Route I took had one spicy spot for a squished mantle. Protected and belayed that spot. PooF! We were at the summit boulders and the summit rap slings. We checked out the rap station, and after a bit worked our way CCW around the boulder and up to the highest point finding under some rocks a mixed nut register left by MikeC and TomS June 26, 2010. Only one group signed in since then doing the N Face 7/3/10.

The climb up was fun, short at less than an hour and a half. I'd been in two times and turned around, once in the gully. Now looking at the rock wish we had another day to play and try other routes, this looked like a fun series of rocks to play on.

Lunch time and taking in the smoked out views. I spotted Don and Randy and watched them going up the snow finger under The Temple. Man, they're quick. They may be out before we get there... No worries, 45 minutes on the summit we rapped off the sling east –not the way we'd come up. Down an overhang to a cool alcove ledge. Walked up boulders south and left through a cave. Onto the south face walked down and right to the notch above the 5.7 crack in the V. Single rap to the ledge, back to the tree, almost dropped the rope (Oops!), short rap off below the tree to the gully (40min for the three raps). Gathering stuff, I kept dropping down the gully, rather than rock, it was Shoe!, Lunch!...

All back in the pack up and out the ledge and then right and up the sandy gulleys to Edwards Mesa.

Edwards Mesa is a magical place. I don't think it gets seen by many people. A true gem of colors and visuals. Granite, larch, sand, grass, heather, open and flat, tarns, outcrops... A place to spend a day climbing and walking to explore. For now we headed south to a flat camp looking area and down a sandy/granite slope to Toketie flats. Laughing at Randy's comment of what the goat were doing and taunting... -you'll have to read his account. Across the wet and springy flat We needed to cross over Three Musketeer Ridge. From afar it looked doubtful. We headed up and slightly left –more up. Goal was to come under the spiky looking top, traverse to a gully and the saddle left of the spikes. Then ridge walk to the summit. All went as planned following the least resistance and not an urge to go left to much (Cl2). The summit was protected by a sea of thick trees. Up the eastern bump to see another further east that was higher. Down and up it. Was like giant black fat potato chips on edge. No reg, though nice smoked out view (1h20m from leaving Edwards Mesa).

We sat on a giant flat rock to eat and look for Don and Randy. No sign of them. Was rather smokey, so who knows? Maybe they were already heading down. Packed up and to the saddle and headed south (away from car...) into the Tamarak drainage toward a lake with no name on the topo map. I did find the name on Bill and Peg Starks map as Musk Lake. Half way down we heard a yell and yelled back, it repeated. Hee, hee, hope this wasn't some other group. Closer we could hear them say they were at the lake and flattening out going CW around the lake standing in the swampy area not caring about the mosquitoes were Randy and Don. They'd finished off The Temple and ready to celebrate. Fun to catch up and share the hike out and celebration.

Left Musk Lake SE up a depression then s and a little SW up a stunning giant slab of granite. I'd been in this way last year and it looked just as beautiful as I remembered. Down granite to a creek for fresh water then follow path through the trees to more granite and down a long boulder field. Right (west) next to the trees a path lead to Nada Lake landing at a sign that pointed up to "toilet". Another good break spot watching the water release gushing from the side of the mountain from the upper lakes. Every time I hike the Snow lake trail it gets seemingly longer. Luckily it was shaded and not an un-bearably hot day. The seven miles breezed by in two hours of foot ache (TH c1390). I biked back the 1.7 mile to the car stretching and enjoying the breeze. Back at the Snowcreek TH celebrations had started.

Another great day in the mountains. The four of us had started The Mole last year. They'd gone back later in the year and now we'd made our first trip up it and all coming back together. Next question was where to eat? Leavenworth was closed, 59er Diner closed, Squirrel Tree had only fried food. Four miles up the Wenatchee road the bar on the left had burgers and pizza. Good to know where to go when it is late.

This was a great trip. Loved the route and rock, best company going up and down. Couldn't ask for a better climb partner and the scenery. Not this year, but I will be back to spend more time on the Mole and surrounding rock.

Stats: 14.7m (16.4rt to car), 7550ascent (7950rt to car), 7950 descent, 14h50m

Gear: helmet, 60m single, rack used #6 choke, .4, .5, .75, 1, 1 (didn't need a #2 or #3, except initial anchor).

References:

Don/Randy's tr <http://www.nwhikers.net/forums/viewtopic.php?t=7978086&highlight>

Stefan Feller's tr <http://www.nwhikers.net/forums/viewtopic.php?t=14292&highlight>