

North Gardner (8956') –via Wolf Creek and South Ridge

May 30, 2010

Short version:

Day 2, warm eve, coyote serenading waking to a bluebird day. North Gardner via the south ridge from the upper basin and a hike out for almost a 30m weekend. –short version is kinda' boring, huh?

Detailed version:

A long walk in yesterday to the Meadows. Was pleasant with the damp surroundings –raging creeks, wet plants, flowers, screaming and groaning burn area, fresh bear scat, first porcupine sighting since I was in grade school and an adventurous attempt on snow Abernathy's North Ridge. Expecting cold and got warm instead the snow was not as good as hoped, but had contingent plans. As I lay thinking of the day and drifting off I hoped for colder eve temps, a clear evening sky and great summit views. A group of six were heading up at 5am from the meadow so decided to not rush it and let them bootstep it –hey, why not have it a little easy to use their steps. Is that cheating? Nah, reminds me of a bumper sticker on a Thistle I competed with small boat racing, "Old age and treachery will win out over youth". :-) A little chuckle... Rainie had gone fast asleep –one tired pup. I'd carried her pack a ways for her, still she was tired, though she does love hiking. Woke in the middle of the night to very high gusts of wind. Later subsided and the singing of a coyote filled the eve.

Morning came with clear skies. Rainie the Wonderdog was feeling her age and the choice was for her to stay in camp and dog nap while we headed up. It would be good for her to be rested up for the hike out.

Started out at the leisure time of 6:20a, a thin crust on the meadow snow, then 300 vert on the left side of the stream on bare dirt. A little freeze in the dirt, but not hard. Back on snow above 6000', there was a frozen crust that held weight most the time. First hour knocked off nearly 1200vert heading up. Looking at Gardner it looked do-able if done early, but once the snow softened in the sun not a good trudge (maybe...). I was informed we were to do North Gardner first, then thought of taking the ridge from the hump over and back to tag Gardner and avoid the south facing avy trap.

I found a nice grouse feather and a little later heard a long low hoot... Seemed quiet and a long ways away. Looking around about 100' away was a grouse bellowing up and calling out. This guy is going to have to learn to put some gusto in it to bag a nice hen...

Up to the left and a slight drop through an upper basin (c6800'). North flowing right (east) is the ridge from Point 8487 to Gardner. Looking ahead to assess the standard approach we could see rising into the basin almost every pitch on three sides had sluffed with still more snow that could go. Balls and a front wave below the end of the sluff that left rippled waves showing how fluid the snow had been. On the west (left) was a high ridge. I spotted tracks going up an avy flow zig sagging and a set down –not sure how far that group went since no tracks up at ridge level. Being conservative (well, hopefully a little wiser) I headed left to the ridge, soon coming upon fresh tracks from the Oly group. The tracks were nice postholes except one set of smaller prints that floated on top. We donned snowshoes and floated on top of the crust following alongside.

Up a steepish short stretch to gain the far south end of the west ridge at c7200' (8:00a, 1h40m, 1.2m, 1500ascent). The Ridge was much slower going (and safer) than straight up the bowl. Differing snow textures and depth, snowshoe rock scrambling, trees to dodge, some steepness, drop down a little, then up... Voices? ahead could hear the other group still not to the point at 8487'. So far the snow feels stable. Ridge opened up to a broad mellow low angle walk and soon at the top of point 8487' (9:05a, 2h45m, 1.8m, 2785ascent). Great views and the Oly group about half way to N. Gardner. A pause for food and with the spotting scope I check out the ridge to Gardner. Hmmm, possible if better snow

conditions or no snow. Again one of those routes not enhanced in our favor with this snow. The ridge north to North Gardner looked mellow, at least a good shot that way.

Heading north, down the ridge working the west (left) side and top, then over a saddle to go around a bump onto the steeper east side. A steep pitch and not liking the run out. Snow check still tests good. Hope it is so on the way back or it'll be some fun rock scrambling... The short pitches got steeper with more "not fun" runout sections. Very apparent how a little snow can change a route. The flattening effect didn't help, but as I got to each section it was a go. The Olympia group passed on their way back, with mention that a member of the group was of working on the Classic 18 list. I didn't have the heart to tell them North Gardner is not on the list, that Gardner is. Their plan was heading out after this peak.

The last 100' took off the snowshoes. Summiting around 11:10 (8956', 4h50m, 2.3m, 3420ascent). The mountain had been making its own cloud clear on the west and flowing fog on east as the air accelerated up the peak and east. As we summited it cleared all around, warm sun made for a pleasant summit break. In the footsteps of the previous group I found a shallow rock, hmmm... Where would I be if I was the summit cairn? A little digging around the rock... it was a smallish loose rock. Could this be? I kept digging about 18" down around and found more and more stacked rocks. Clearing the snow I almost missed seeing a tube blending into the rock. Sweet, found the register set by Don Goodman in 1986. After browsing seeing so many familiar names and documenting 40 pages of signatures I replaced the tube top up. This year the Reg (Mountaineer Reg) will need to be replaced.

About an hour on the summit relaxing and playing name the peak, I didn't want to leave, but snow conditions could become impassible in spots if we didn't get a move on. Sans snowshoes we sank to the knees similar to the group an hour ahead of us. Past the eastern sidehill crux I was concerned about, over the saddle to the west side and back to point 8487 (12:50p, 6h30m, 2.9m, 3590ascent). Sitting on a dry rock I ate a sandwich and stared again longingly at the ridge to Gardner. Close inspection with a small spotting scope I could see a route, but not in these snow conditions –bummer. Down the broad ridge and where it started to narrow a nice low angle face to glissade. Pretty sweet 6-700' of glissading. Tried walking sans snowshoes but snow was soft and sank well past the knees. With snowshoes the going went well working left and SE, down and out of the basin. At 6800 foot below the south face of Gardner I checked it out one more time. Nope, snow too soft, angle all ripe, not in the cards for today. The final pitch had great snowshoe skiing down to the bare area west of the creek. A 300 foot dirt walk (yeah, I took off the snowshoes). Arriving at camp (2p, 7h40m, 4.6m) Rainie was napping and waking was happy to see me. A little romping in the snow she was up to her belly and loving it.

The forecast was for a precip the next day. The skies had a thin high cloud and in the distance cumulus were building. Plan was to break camp and head down the trail a bit to break up the hike out. The clouds would insulate for a warmer eve and the snow wouldn't get any better for a Gardner summit attempt. We lounged in the dry camp, bare foot and warm. Finally, left camp at 4 for the long 9.7 mile scenic walk out. Bypassed a very good camp at South Wolf Creek trail. Soon arrived at Wolf Creek Meadows, across the log crossing –only 2.3 miles to the van. A little gotch ya' with uphill to the TH.

Tired and sore feet. A beautiful weekend and amazed to have had such great weather.

Stats: 29.4m, 12730ascent (day 1, 14.7m, 7036ascent; day 2, 14.3m (+.4m*), 5694ascent)

Gear: snowshoes, ice axe, sunscreen (zinc oxide)

Happy trails!

fwb2