

Spectacle Buttes via Carne High Traverse

Oct 16-17, 2010

South Spectacle Butte (8392') p1072

North Spectacle Butte (8080') p680

Freezer Peak (8017') p400+

Icebox Peak (8112') p472

Carne Mt (7080') p480

(ref Carne Mt Lookout, 6991, p191)

Weather: Sunny, below freezing temps. 26F Friday eve, 30F Sat eve

Sunrise ~7:23, Sunset ~6:13

Prequel:

Time for another trip to try a peak that has been on my want list for many years. A couple years ago I made a preliminary visit the same time of the year, but there was enough snow on the ground to make it a no go. And I had other obligations at the time. Funny thing was that Carla had been to the exact area the week before me.

We drove over in the eve and camped at the Trinity CG (not sure of the official name). Several hunters camping on the way in and one deer on the road. Earl in the morning at O dark 30 (5:30) we got up. A cold morning temps below freezing. A short drive to the Phelps Creek trailhead. A couple cars with sleepers and one in a tent. Loaded and ready we were on the trail at 6:20 (set altimeter to 3290').

The Plan:

Our plan this trip is up Carne basin for a beautiful Carne High traverse. Drop to lower Ice Lake and make an attempt on South Spectacle from the NW, looping CCW and up the south side of the west summit ridge. We had some info from Eric's Base Camp, an amusing TR story from Jim Brisbane (the amusing part was poor Putz. And some images from our buddy TwoDogDad's recent attempt. Between the three we hoped to add our trip to a fun and successful summit. I'd not tapped the north peak so I'd hope to tag it as well. On our way out if time allowed Ice Box would tempt us. Little did we know what else would tempt us and what the weekend would have in store –just that it was cold.

Start the Approach:

In the dark the short walk to an up and right on the trail to Carne Basin. The trail switches back a few times and heads up, and up. Opens with a ravine on the south and rises for views to the west of Domineering Buck Mt (See our Buck Mt loop from Independence Day weekend 2009). Fir trees thin to a talus field. More switchbacks, ground flattened to Carne Basin (1h24min, 2.13m, c6130, 2720ascent). Hunters had a large tent and several smaller ones on the west end of the basin, though no one in site. On the east end another group of friendly hikers. It was light out, the larch still had yellow needles, though starting to get past prime.

I was having memories of my first trip here for my first intentional larch hunt (with VickiL, StepanieS and PatG). Heading up the trail deep in needle ice. The needles were several inches tall and made the going like walking uphill in soft sand. In 15 minutes a left at c6400' towards Carne and on the ridge in another 15 minutes (2.8m, c6700) with views to Chili Peak. Dropped down the east side a switchback or so and headed north passing the Rock Creek trail in 15 minutes (3.25m, c6490'). Regained our altitude to the NE ridge/saddle (2h15m, 3.4m, c6500'). This is where I feel like I'm really on the High Traverse. The trail covered in golden larch needles and great views. We headed north and followed the trail descending and traversing surrounded by green spruce (?), red blueberry bushes and golden larches. The views west and north were well worth the few ups and downs – we were both tired of the seemingly long road walk in the deep woods.

2hrs40min (4.3m, c6130') the trees opened to the first (and lower) basin with a small stream. A field going up to the right, we crossed and followed the trail on the NW side of a ridge back into trees. 18 minutes and the trees opened again to Box Creek Basin (#2, 4.8m, c6195). This basin we followed up on the right side to an upper basin (only 13min, 5.1m, c6520'). All these basins were beautiful and each would be worth camping. Rising up this basin to a saddle on the north (leftish) (3h34min, 5.5m, c6740). . Then a slight drop and traverse through

even more larch to under a buttress and into a talus basin. Direct views of Maude from the saddle at the top of this basin between Box and Chipmunk basins (4h22min, 6.4m, c7355', 4770ascent).

From the saddle we made a traverse to the saddle south of Maude. Spots were rather hair raising with unscarifiable dirt. Later we found others had gone due east up and over the ridge then followed it down to the saddle. Seems like a lot of up, though only an extra 100', safer and allows for an excuse to tag "Freezer". Carla was smart and found a better path in some rock, making it to the saddle south of Maude and looking down to Ice lakes (4h40min, 6.6m, c7690', 5105' ascent).

The day had turned to a nice sunny, yet still on the cold side. Down the slope, care of the frozen water on the rocks. At the flat of the upper lake a veer to the right and down another pitch to the lower south pond. East past the inlet and traverse the pumice slope to Lower Ice Lake. No sign of anyone else. We checked out several camps and picked a sweet spot with view of the lake, the Spectacle peaks and view south down the creek (5h33min, 8.1m, c6860, 5135ascent). We set camp, packed summit packs, a food break... What a beautiful day! Sunshine, still some larch color, very peaceful. We both wondered why so few people get to areas like this and Cathedral Lake rather than the Enchantments. It's okay these other areas are not as popular, preserves them and nice to enjoy the solitude (no goats either).

Approach part 2:

We packed our summit packs, Carla packing the scramble rope. Neither of us had gone past this area and the reports made it sound like it would be a coin toss if we'd figure a route for a summit. We had an extra day just in case. 12:55pm.. we set off in great spirits for South Spectacle Butte. West over the lower lake outlet, up the rise and traversed to find the trail down. The trail was steep and eroded –what a mess. Dropping 250+ ft (13min from camp) from the lake at c6600' we started a SE traverse across the talus field at a white rock cairn. Traverse was slowly staying above a giant lone larch and lowering to c6500' through some trees to a giant chasm gully. YUK! Loose and unscarifiable, no pro... It looked possible going up and over (but looking from the other side not good). We worked some little ledges and a less steep drop to the stream and a precarious scramble up the other side. I tossed a couple cordelettes tied together and anchored best I could. This gully made the one from Leroy basin to Maude look like a ditch.

South Spectacle West Ridge:

We continued a scramble slowly rising traverse amongst larch, and heather into the west of the bowl north of South Spectacle. Followed the heather and rock ridge toward the west ridge (1h15min, 1.1m, c6800'). A choice, up a loose gully south or traverse up and around the west and up. We took the traverse and some c12 then c13 scrambling up the west ridge. Kept to the south side of the ridge and gentle traverse at c7500'. At c7700' (2h05min from camp) an uphill turn at a rib that drops "dramatically" on the east side. At c7800 the last break in the rib. We pondered looking down at what Brisbane may have described in his TR. Looking forward (NEE) along the wall is a small ledge we took for ~20' into the gully and up the loose scree to the ridge. At the ridge follow it NE still staying on the south side of the ridge. A few mini ribs and gulleys to scramble, over the south false summit and a short north to the true summit 8392' (3:40pm, 2h45min, 2.1m from camp, 10.2 from TH). A cairn and register. We celebrated with a summit lounge, name the peak, food, drink... The way up was much easier than I expected, neither of us looking forward to the nasty gully. The days getting shorter we still had to return to camp and hoping maybe enough energy for the north summit.

Back to Camp:

Left the summit following Carla through the upper maze at 3:55pm. We followed our up route down. Up near the ridge to the tower bump. Down the gully and across the min ledge traverse. On the way back direct in the face was the cave that Eric (Eric's Base Camp) had mentioned to traverse at. So... we were on route. I was wondering if we had missed and on the way up kept looking for the right spot. Traverse at 7500 lowering and around the west ridge catching the top of the loose gully at c7000' (5:20p). Taking in the view NW to Ice Lakes, Chilli peak SW, Icebox, Maude, the valleys, sunshine... It still had a fall chill and a beautiful day. I'd not expected we'd have such a good go of the trip. We were lucky with pristine conditions. A little goofing off then down the gully and traverse back to the gully of doom. This time we crossed a hundred feet lower with less sweat. A

slow rising traverse through the trees and across the talus to the trail and back up to the saddle east of Lower Ice Lake (6:22p, 12m and 12+ hours on the trail).

Restless:

The sun had set and the last glow of day subdued the surroundings. Not yet used to the early eve I wanted to walk a bit more, otherwise I'd be restless with too long a night to stay warm. And I'd not made a visit to North Spectacle. I guessed 1:45-2 hours for a round trip. Off I went, north then east up the broad valley. Then steeper on scree to a north south running ridge. Left and up the bald ridge to the east running ridge, under a rock bump (6:45p, c7500'). Headlamp out and puffy for the quickly dropping temperature. At the end of the ridge it started getting dark. Pretty easy going just follow the ridges then weave your way up the talus. At the summit it was dark. I traversed as far north as possible and then back finding the high point. I didn't find a reg so placed a small one (7:10p, 12.8m, 8080').

Not much to see so wove my way back to camp following my up route. I could see some headlamp action at camp and I flashed my lamp that way so Carla would know I was on my way down. Back at camp (13.9m, 13hr45min, 10354ascent) I felt lifted from the fantastic day and the buzz of endorphins, pang of hunger and overall ready to sit back and relax. Warm food, stars, laughs. Plenty of time for some night shots. Not the results of using the DSLR, but okay for a little point and shot. The laugh was Carla bounding lighting up the tent so it'd glow.

A cold night/morning:

It was a cold night reminding us we were at high elevation and the seasons were changing. I'd brought my winter bag and was nice and toasty. Carla was unusually cold. After a bout with Guardia she'd not been eating. Amazing after eating an energy bar she almost instantly warmed up. I enjoy hiking and camping, the cold now is a different issue. It was a starry eve and a cold morning. The pumice field was frozen making for easier walking (8:25a). We headed back along the lower pond and up to the saddle south of Maude (1m, 55min, 750' ascent).

South of the saddle the summit of Freezer Peak (Peak 8017) is about 350' up the ridge. 150' up from the saddle is a flat spot for a tent and a good slope to the Saddle at Chipmunk saddle. The ridge walk was a quick class 2 walkup (13min from saddle). We should have brought our packs part way up. After some taking in the views we returned to the saddle. We noticed two hikers coming up towards the Maude saddle and waited. A party we knew was supposed to be heading to Maude this weekend. We chatted a bit then both groups went on our way (didn't know them). With our packs this time we went back up Freezer's north ridge 150' to the camp site, then descended scree with an occasional boot path to the Chipmunk saddle (10:51a, 2.1m, c7365'). If returning via the High Traverse we'd go up the slope on the right to the ridge over the north traverse. Later reading it sounds like the route JimB and group took when heading to Ice Lakes.

Down the scree, heather basin and traverse talus under the buttress with a rising traverse to the saddle between Box Creek and Chipmunk Creek. A nice boulder to sit on with some fire pits nearby. A very pretty spot, though no water (11:23, 2.8m, c7000'). Another break, it was getting warm and time to remove the longjohns. Then traversing south rather than following our route in. We'd followed a nice trail through the heather slope then left to traverse a bare slope with four gulleys to cross. We spent some time trying to decide on a route and ended up going up the NW slope (not a good idea). Our route kept getting worse. Loose rock, then some trees and heather then loose dirt and rock again. Crossing several gulleys with drops that you'd not want to check out. One had a goat carcass. Not a good thought. If the goat had troubles... Carla wasn't too thrilled, and neither was I. Our upward traverse was heading east and we came out of the small trees to a large pumice field (12:40p, 3.6m, c7680'). Whew! Dropped our packs, a quick bite and north on up the class 2 walkup to the summit of Icebox (peak 8112) (12:54p, 3.75m – no reg).

Next to the summit cairn a plaque left recently with "Maude" on it. Not sure what the story is behind it. Great views in all directions, Spectacle Buttes and our entire route. A half hour break and then down heading south. We followed the pumice field seeing goat tracks heading east –we dropped south the westish into basin with boulders and snow at the base. Rounding south (left) around a buttress we found a well worn trail up the

buttress to a field with grasses and Larch trees. This easily lead down to the High Traverse trail at the base of the southern Box basin. We'd run out of water and found a small trickling creek to fill up –and a break for more munchies (2:20p, 4.9m, c6240').

Reading some of this I'd love to write more on the feeling, beauty and the options for future new routes I felt and saw. So much goes through the mind and also topics of discussion on a trip. An internal meditation. Then again, don't need to drag these trs on too long.

The trek south on the High Traverse was as good as the way in, only a couple small blowdowns, trail covered in gold needles. Larch, spruce, pines, open slopes and rock fields easily passed. All with the outstanding views west of Buck, Glacier, Fortress... Shaded spots on the trail still had the needle ice in 1" segments 3-4" total long. Stepping on it the ground would settle, harder for walking than uphill on dry sand. The going was a slow rising traverse to the NE saddle from Carne (3:20p, ~7hrs, 5.6m (19.5tt), c6610). Rather than follow the trail to the south saddle we took a right turn (west) up the ridge (stay leftish) up sparse larch trees. I'd been hearing voices for the last half hour. Soon we passed two heading down and could see many on the Carne summit. It was a full on party up there. Us in full multi-day packs grueling up and then happy, bouncing around taking pictures and celebrating. A quick tag for my third tag of Carne (3:40pm, 6.1m, 7080') and then south down the ridge to follow the trail into Carne Basin.

Another beautiful part of the trip. Carne Basin is chuck full of larch surrounded by ridges and peaks with a meandering waterway through it. The campers were gone and the hunters milling about, some getting ready to head out again (4:14pm, 7.1m, c6100'). Now the longest part of the trip nearly 2 miles of down, and down, through the open slope and down, painful on the feet going down through the trees, switching back and down... will it ever end? No... and down. Even with being cold out my feet were ready to burst into flames, and more down. You think I exaggerate? After the long day it was... About 2500' descent and we intersected the Phelps creek trail (road). And a couple minutes back at the car (5:15pm, 8hr50min, 22.75m total, th c3520, 14851' ascent). Time for a break and serving up a refreshment. A little celebration of a beautiful and rewarding trip.

Post trip adventure:

Darkness would be coming and we wanted to get going for the long drive (including dinner) home. We thought we'd seen Chainsaw Willies car and another we recognized on the way in, but all were gone. I was very slow going down to the main road, weaving forth and back to avoid the rocks that beckoned, "over here, over here..." Last year, I popped a hole in the oil pan and even with having a nearly half way punched free oil pan frequent replacer card I didn't want to add more to it. Now on the smooth dirt/gravel road we saw an oil streak going up each hill. Comments of, "bummer", "hope they got out". I even stopped to make sure I wasn't leaving a twin track. Several more miles we stopped at a Volvo wagon with the hood up. A couple from Portland that had made an attempt on the North Maude ice. We stopped them before they poured oil into engine. Took a bit and he saw the leak – hard to miss the pool of oil under the car. We'd learned much on temporary oil pan repair from previous trips and after several iterations (while collecting the draining oil in a plastic pastry container) an ear plug worked to stopper the leak. I gave them my spare quart of oil and followed them to the store near Lake Wenatchee across from the Headwaters. We had a burger in the headwaters and they soon joined us to share some stories before we each headed out on our drives home.

For larch trips I recommend Carne, the Carne High Traverse and Ice Lakes to be added to the list.

Happy trails!

-franklin

Stats: 22.75miles, 14851'vert, 21hr 35min (on trail and breaks)

Day 1: 13.9m, 10354ascent, 13hr45min

Day 2: 8.8m, 4497ascent, 7hr50min

Gear: 8mm x 30m rope (not used), helmets