

The Cascade Epic

September 5, 2010



My first attempt at climbing Cascade Peak was in the mid 1980's. Kathy, Christoph and I tried to ski it and didn't make it to the top. I tried to ski it a few more times without success. Not making it to a summit isn't that unusual but after several tries, not making the top starts to become a question of: is it me or the mountain? I made a few half hearted summer attempts more recently and still didn't make the top. It became obvious to me that I was going to have to give it everything if I was going to get to this summit.

In 2010, as the Labor Day weekend approach, Jen said she wanted to do a real hike and climb a real mountain. I suggested Cascade Peak. Jen, Ria, Addison and I would go climb it.

Right from the start we didn't really give it the full hearted try I was looking for. We got up late; left the house late and in the end we didn't get on the trail until 9:30 AM. Way too late. We started up the trail on a beautiful, clear morning with three of us feeling happy and Ria in her usual hiking mood. She worries so much about what is to come that it over comes her and she weeps and cries about how hard it might be.

After about a mile of walking on a nice trail we came to the place the trail and our path diverted. We turn off the trail heading up the canyon to climb the peak. Sense it is the most obvious, direct and sensible way to climb the mountain from this side I figured many people must go this way and there should be some kind of rough trail going up the canyon. I had skied

up the canyon in the spring and there were other ski tracks going this way. There had been no sign of a trail but then there was four feet of snow. Sure enough, when we turned off the main trail we immediately picked up a rough trail and started following it. It was okay but it seemed to be going to much up and to the left. At first I figured someone must know something I didn't and they were just avoiding the heavy brush in the bottom of the canyon. But it soon became apparent that we were on a game trail not a people trail. The deer, elk and moose weren't going to the top of the mountain and neither was this trail. But now we were kind of committed to this side of the canyon so we just kept following the deer trails.



By this time Ria was in full melt down mode, sobbing and weeping. I couldn't figure out why, as usual I was just trying to ignore her. But on the same hand I was getting pretty frustrated with our slow progress. The brush and downed timber and scrub oak and thick underbrush and the fact that we were moving farther from where I wanted to be was stressing me out. Addison was a happy camper as she almost always is when Ria is down. Jen had brought Sunny, her little mini dog along and they were both happy too.



I was wearing shorts as was everyone else and my legs were getting very scratched and sore from all the brush. Surprisingly we all had long pants with us we just didn't think to put them on for some reason. In fact we never did put on long pants all day. I rally don't know what we were thinking. We had made it to the upper end of the canyon and now had to cross to the other side. That meant crossing a deep ravine with very steep sides and full of stinging nettle. I dropped into the ravine trying to stomp down as much nettle as I could but I guess I didn't get it all because

the other three got a lot of stings. Through her tiers Ria couldn't see a big rock as she tried to climb the far bank of the ravine and it roll into her leg and gave her a good scrape. Now she had a good reason to really cry so she stopped holding back and really let us have it.

She was able to keep it up for quite awhile and it was really starting to get on my nerves. I don't real no what happen next. Jen told me Addison sat down happy as could be to tie her shoe and when she stood up again all the happy was gone. Addison now joined Ria in crying and weeping and generally being miserable. Jen who had been very patient up to this point was starting to get annoyed. At this point we were still climbing through thick brush with no signs of

even a game trails. I was trying to figure out what directions was our best bet but I was having trouble concentrating due to all the whaling and weeping. It looked to me like it was only a few hundred yards higher and we would be out of the trees and thick brush. I finally had enough and told Ria and Addison that if they didn't want to come along that was fine but this wasn't a good place for a kid to be wandering around alone. How would you ever find your way out of here? How would anyone ever find you if you didn't? You better just keep up. Jen and I pushed on through the thick brush.

Ria for what ever reason seemed to pull it together and followed along but Addison was going to show us just who was in charge and she started falling behind. We hadn't gone far when we crossed into a steep gully that was relatively brush free but of course Addison was no longer with us. We could hear her screaming from somewhere in the trees behind us. Jen wanted to go back after her and I told her no, I would go back. As I got closer and Addison had been sitting there alone for several minutes, her screams got louder and higher pitched. If someone else had been in the canyon to hear her they would have been sure she had some kind of major injury but I was pretty sure she was just testing. I yelled that she had better have a broken leg or worse because if I got there and she wasn't hurt at least that bad I would break her leg myself. Of course when I found her she was just sitting in the grass screaming, nothing wrong at all. She just wanted to prove that we wouldn't leave her. She had called my bluff and won. Now it was my turn. I told her she had better get up and get going and if she slowed or stopped I was going to use a stick and give her something to cry about. As we walked on up I continued to give her a piece of my mind and she didn't seem to be willing to call my bluff this time.

We were now above the tree line but the vegetation was still almost hip high. Ria was much happier and Addison was just being quite. We were finally looking like we could actually get to the top of the mountain. We could see it just above. There was a long sweeping apron of grass up to a cliff band and then just a grassy hillside to the summit. It looked close but my GPS



told me it was still 1,500 feet to the top. I knew that 1,500 feet per hour is really fast but it looked so close. I told the girls I thought we could be on top in just over an hour, around 3:00PM. It is possible that we could have made it that fast if it had been hard snow or something equally easy to walk on but it wasn't. As a matter of fact it wasn't a grassy apron it was a combination of all kinds of high country plant life, much of it Lupine and a lot of it blue flowery plant but all of it waist tall or taller. The blue flowery plants had lost their flowers and were now covered with dried burs

that stuck to everything. Ria attributed the hard going to the plants pushing us back. Sunny who was buried someplace down under it all was one mass of burs when she finally emerged. It was painful enough having them stuck in my socks, having them in my eyebrows and pubic hair would probably have been even worse. The apron had looked rather smooth and easy going but besides having very tall, tangled vegetation we found the hiding below the vegetation was a lot of large boulders and rocks that we couldn't see until we tripped over them. I was starting to consider how difficult it was going to be getting back down all this thorny terrain.



We finally made it to the top of the apron and were now looking at the cliff band. We were able to cross through it relatively easily. We then traversed back to the right and onto the hillside that would lead us to the summit. There was no issue with vegetation this high so it was actually pretty easy going compared to what we had been through so far. We made it to the

summit and sat down to enjoy the view but I couldn't stop thinking about the next half of the climb; getting down.

Way to the south, two miles at least, I knew there was a trail that went back to our car. Other than that there was no other way down that didn't consist of at least as much bush whacking as the way we had come up. My legs stung and burned and blood was running down the front of my shin from some of the scrapes and cuts. It made them hurt even worse just thinking about going back into the thickets. But what other options did we have. It had taken us six and a half hours to get up here. It would take at least four to get down. We wouldn't be back to the car until 7:30 or 8:00 at best. We still had food but we were all out of water already. It was turning into a long day.



The trail to the south seemed like the best bet; it was just that we had to follow a steep, rough, rocky ridge for at least two miles just to get to the trail. It was the sting of my legs that made me choose what I did. I couldn't bear to go back down into that thick brush again. Besides the other three were voting to the trail too.

Once again I really knew better than to think we could cover those two miles in an hour but I really would never have guessed it would take us as long as it did. It was rough technical terrain. Only small sections could we just cut loose and walk. There was lots of steep side hilling and crawling through those knurled old windblown pine trees that grow on high ridges.



This was the home of mountain goats and we saw lots of them. First it was just one, then three and then the whole hillside was covered with them. Ria counted 50 at one time. Some were far away and some were very close. They left nice trails for us to follow but it isn't good following mountain goats. Sometimes they go ways we should not so we can never trust the trail. I had a fear we would work our way into a corner and not be able to go on because of cliffs and have to back track using time and energy we didn't have.

It was perhaps half way around the ridge when the reality hit me. I had gone ahead to make sure we could get past a cliff. I was sitting alone on the ridge waiting for the others to catch up, looking out at the Heber Valley far in the distance when I realized that we were not going to make it back to the car before dark. Somewhere between here and the car we would be stumbling along in the darkness, tired, thirsty, hungry and cold. There was nothing we could do to avoid it at this point. We just weren't going to make it in time. When the girls finally got to me I told them that it was official, we were now on a true Epic Adventure; we weren't going to make it before dark. They really took it pretty well. They had given up the weeping and crying several hours before and the idea of an epic didn't seem to faze them. Sunny was asleep in Jen's pack so she could care less about it getting dark. We were all quite thirsty but there wasn't much that could be done about that. We got up and moved on along the ridge.

Like I said I would never have believed it would take us three and a half hours to cover those two miles but then I guess I don't know that it was only two miles. (I have since learned that it was closer to 3.5 miles.) We eventually found the trail and started down. The sun had set long before and Ria was on a roll. She gets that way when she is going home. She was trying to set a blistering pace but the trail was steep and rough and it was impossible to go fast. It was looking like it would be 10:00PM or so before we would reach the car. Then the trail level off some and Ria took off. Jen was right behind her but eventually Addison and I dropped back and couldn't keep up. At some point Jen stopped Ria and made her wait. It really wouldn't do to get completely separated and it wouldn't help to get to the car before us. Addison was having some issues and rightfully so at this point. I told her to just go whatever speed she could and we would get there. Better to go slow than get hurt now.



It was completely dark when we came to the civilized part of the trail. It is really a dirt road blocked off to cars. It meant we had just one mile to go. We were all pretty excited and in a happy mood. We were going to make it even if it was dark. We could just make out the ground in front of us but it was easier then what we had been doing in the light that morning. We walked down the road four abreast talking and congratulating ourselves. We past through an area with picnic tables and fire circles and Ria suddenly said, "Is that a water"? And it was. It was a drinking fountain. We were all really happy after quenching our thirst.

We cover 13.5 miles in just less than 12 hours. We got home to our warm house and beds just a bit before 10:00 PM very tired, dirty with many cuts and scrapes but we were really glad to be home. And I had made the top.

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