



THIN AIR

Volume 20, No 4

September, 2008

HAMS SEMINAR IS GETTING READY FOR 2008

Inside this issue

- HAMS Seminar.....1&3
- Mt Rainer Liberty Ridge.....1,2,3,6
- Call for climbers4
- Upcoming trips5
- Letter to the editor.....6

The High Altitude Mountaineering Section of the Denver group will present its twentieth annual seminar on high altitude mountaineering this fall. The seminar consists of six sessions on consecutive Monday nights starting October 6 and ending November 10, from 7:00 to approximately 9:30 p.m.

Experienced climbers will present lectures on topics as diverse as organizing an expedition, fitness and conditioning, nutrition and menu planning, high altitude/cold weather medical issues and group dynamics. Mountaineering slide shows from around the world will be featured to complement and expand upon the lecture topics.

Attendance of the seminar is a prerequisite for admission to the High Altitude Mountaineering School.



Learn about all aspects of high altitude climbing and trekking at the 2008 High Altitude Mountaineering Seminar. See Page 3 for additional details

HAMS SEMINAR—CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

Five Days on a Three Day Climb: Mount Rainier's Liberty Ridge

-Article by Jim Rickard (Climbing partners: Doug Kruesi and Kurt Wibbenmeyer)

The plan was to pack in to Glacier Basin (~6,000') the first night; cross the Winthrop and Carbon glaciers, and climb the lower portion of Liberty Ridge to Thumb Rock (~10,600') the second night; then over the top (14,112') and down to Camp Schurman (~9,500') or all the way out by the third night. One of the problems with climbing Liberty Ridge is that everything has to be carried up a technical climb and over the top. With this in mind, we had trimmed the weight as much as we could, going over gear lists again and again and throwing out everything we thought we could get by without. Even so, you can only get so light; each of us had around 80 lbs of equipment, while perhaps 20 lbs of this was "worn" (such as boots, clothing, etc.) 60 lbs was left in the packs.

We trudged up the road, with some nice views of the mountain in the distance, eventually reaching the Glacier Basin trailhead at the White River campground. The deep snow made the trail difficult to follow in some areas, but eased the multiple stream crossing where flooding has badly disrupted this trail. We continued to Glacier Basin, and even pushed our camp an extra 500' uphill. It had been an exhausting day, but we were on our way!

That night it rained. Instead of an 8 to 10 lb expedition tent, we had brought a 2 lb GoLite Hex, a teepee like arrangement consisting of a conical tarp, a single center pole, and a separate floor. While it saved a lot of weight, with three people in it you couldn't help but have edges of pads or toes of sleeping bags hanging out; and they got wet. With no chance of anything drying in the foggy morning, it all got packed wet, and remained wet (or frozen) for the rest of the trip. Oh this was going to be fun.

We left our snowshoes in Glacier Basin, put on crampons, and headed up Saint Elmo pass. Even with the rain and lightening, we had gotten a good rest, and were moving well. From the top of the pass we dropped a couple hundred feet onto the Winthrop Glacier and roped up. The clouds moved in and out, providing occasional glimpses of the shattered glacier above, alternating with white-outs which obscured the route ahead. It hadn't frozen the night before, and walking on the soft, rain drenched snow was work, but not terrible, most steps sank in 6" or so. Perhaps a third of the way across the Winthrop, Doug dropped into a crevasse to his hips -- time to start taking this a little more seriously.

Liberty Ridge, con't on pg 2

Liberty Ridge, con't from pg 1

We alternated leading, and made it across the glacier to the Curtis Ridge. Clouds had clamped down at about 10,500' making it difficult to discern our route; but it was clear from here that while the Curtis and Parmigan might be "ridges," Liberty is a "buttress" at best. The Carbon glacier, starting from twin cirques either side of Liberty Ridge, has chewed it away to a very steep, short, spur, rising 5,300 vertical feet in 6,700 horizontal feet. The toe of Liberty Ridge was still well above us at about 8,800'.

My 1996 guidebook indicated that you could reach the Carbon glacier from about the 7,500' level on the Curtis ridge -- whether the glacier has changed, or the author was mistaken, it would now require a 200 foot rappel off of rotten rock. We elected to take a quarter mile detour down the ridge, lose a few hundred more feet, and start our crossing of the heavily crevassed Carbon glacier from a safer start. Looking up the Carbon toward our goal was intimidating, large crevasses and seracs appeared to block our way. Two possible routes presented themselves, one generally straight up the glacier, veering slightly east of Liberty Ridge; and another less direct approach involving crossing the Carbon to the west, climbing steeply between seracs to a shelf in the glacier, and returning to approach the ridge from the west. We found traces of a previous party's tracks heading for the long route. After some discussion, we decided that if they took the less obvious route, perhaps they knew something we didn't, and we headed off following what we could find of their old track.



Climbing High on Mt Rainier's Liberty Ridge—Photo, Jim Rickard

The route went well enough to the base of the ridge, where we had to cross a couple impressive crevasses on dubious snow bridges. After those, we crossed a small bergshlund, and climbed to the ridge crest. At this point we learned that regardless of the name, "Liberty Ridge" really isn't a ridge route. The spine of the ridge is loose, fractured, volcanic rock, precariously stacked in vertical pillars. It appeared the easiest route was to climb the steep snow and ice just west of the ridge crest, crossing bands of loose rock only when necessary. At times, it seemed that climbing the glacier along the perimeter of the cirque might be easier, but as afternoon wore on, bus-sized seracs began to break from the hanging glaciers, fall hundreds of feet, and explode into avalanches that swept the walls above the glacier. Ok, so maybe Liberty Ridge isn't a great route, but it's the *only* route in the area that isn't suicide.

Once on the ridge, and away from the crevasses, we unroped. In most places we could probably self arrest, and in any case we were too tired to deal with protection. I found that I was panting so hard for so long that the roof of my mouth was drying and cracking. We traded off breaking trail in the fresh snow (apparently the previous night's rain had been snow at this elevation), and trudged on to our campsite. The clouds closed around us and it began to snow.

Thumb Rock is big. From thousands of feet below it had appeared to be a small flake on the ridge, here it was a tower 100' long, 40' high, and 15' thick. Nor is it a single rock, but an aggregation of loosely bound chunks. There was a small rectangular tent platform dug into the saddle beyond the thumb, but it didn't fit our more or less circular tent, and the wind was raging. Instead, we pitched the tent right next to Thumb Rock on the leeward side. Looking at it from the high side just before going to bed, our little nylon cone sitting below a 40' high 15' wide pinnacle of loose stones didn't look wise. What were the chances one of those rocks would fall through the tent and hit us in the night, 1 in 10 maybe? After our 5,100 vertical-foot day with full packs, we were too tired to care; we hoped for the best. The vantage from Thumb Rock made something else clear: We had wondered why all the route descriptions had you packing over the top, why not set a high camp at Thumb Rock, climb to the summit with a day pack, and return? Because: Downclimbing, even on the relatively moderate slopes below the thumb, would be dangerous! Sure, you could do a pitch, or two, or ten; but in 2000 feet the chance of making a mistake gets pretty high, and protecting the whole descent would take forever. This was the next thing we learned about this route: It is committing in the extreme; can't go left or right due to near continuous serac fall, can't go down due to length and danger.

During the night the wind occasionally shifted direction just enough to shake the tent violently, and force snow through the wall/floor gap to form drifts over and between our already wet sleeping bags. At times, the gusts were so violent I feared the tent would tear away; what would we do then? Sometime after midnight the winds finally calmed, peace at last (except for the ongoing thunder of falling seracs) and we got some sleep. At least we wouldn't be getting up at some absurdly early hour like the poor chumps on the south side of the mountain!

We woke to a beautiful morning, shook the snow off our sleeping bags and out of our boots, and started gearing up for another day. About 100 feet out of camp we found that what had appeared to be more steep snow was about 8 inches of fresh powder over hard ice. Ice so hard and brittle that your axe bounces off; so you hit it again, harder, and this time a large "dinner plate" of ice pops out and skitters down the slope, and still your axe isn't holding. Out came the ropes, pickets, and our pitiful collection of three ice screws (trimmed down from six to save weight). We carried on, simul-climbing when we could, and belaying when we had to; what else was there to do? One of my vivid memories from this climb was belaying the leader out and watching him start to hammer in a picket: "Thwack, thwack, ping . . ." uh, that's ice, it isn't going in, "ping," still not going in, "ping-ping-ping-ping!" It's not going in even if you really REALLY want it to; but what could I say, I'd done exactly the same on the previous pitch. Eventually the leader clears the ice and starts putting in a screw, leaning on it as hard as possible (very difficult while balancing on front points) to get it to bite into the glass-hard ice.

The day wore on, the clouds closed in, it started snowing, and we realized we wouldn't make Camp Schurman, we'd be camping on the summit. Later, perhaps 7:00 p.m. Kurt said the unspeakable, we weren't going to make the summit; we had to find a place to bivi. The closest things to bivi sites were the occasional patches where the slope eased off to "only" 45 degrees. With hard ice just inches under the snow, "digging in" wasn't an option. We continued on. Near 13,100 feet, around 9:00 p.m., in poor visibility and gathering twilight, I was the third man on a pitch. Doug and Kurt above were clearly not happy, talking and pointing at something I couldn't see off in the endless white. Eventually they remembered me, and belayed me up. Then I saw it, a slope of 50 degree or more ice heading up to a vertical cliff of ice. The near white-out made it difficult to judge size and distance, but clearly we had a serious problem.

Liberty Ridge, con't on pg 3

HAMS SEMINAR—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The HAMS seminar is open to all interested CMC members and the general public. It will take place at the Foss Auditorium in the American Mountaineering Center in Golden. Dates for specific topics may change due to speaker availability.

Tuition is as follows:

- ◆ \$40 for CMC Members who pre-register.
- ◆ \$45 for Non-CMC Members and CMC Members who do not pre-register.
- ◆ \$8 for individual evenings, payable at the door (CMC Members as well as Non-CMC Members).

To register call the CMC office, signup on line with your credit card or send your name, address, phone number and check made out to "CMC" to the CMC office. Please note "HAMS Seminar" on your check.

HIGH ALTITUDE MOUNTAINEERING

SEMINAR - 2008 SCHEDULE

- OCT 6 Introduction to Seminar**
Introduction to HAMS Section
Introduction to High Altitude Mountaineering School
Equipment for High Altitude / Cold Weather trips
Slide show
- OCT 13 High Altitude / Cold Weather Nutrition**
Slide Show
- OCT 20 Fitness Training and Acclimatization**
Slide Show
- OCT 27 High Altitude / Cold Weather Medical Issues**
- NOV 6 Group Dynamics**
Slide Show
- NOV 10 Organizing an Expedition**
Slide show

Liberty Ridge, con't from pg 2

We were on the crest of Liberty Ridge, having just climbed a snow and ice slope on the west side. The east side was rocky, and fell away almost vertically, but among the rocks were little pockets that could almost be called ledges. Perhaps 25 feet below us was one such ledge of ice, snow, and rock, about six feet wide and sloping toward the precipice at about 20 degrees, it seemed to be our best hope for a bivi. We chipped out what rocks we could, tried to shovel in some snow to cover others, and piled up what we could against the rocks along the edge to create some sort of "lip" before the fall. Having a tent with no floor actually paid off in this place; we secured it to the rocks with stoppers, rope, pickets, and whatever we could make hold, and propped up the interior pole. It was clear pads and sleeping bags would quickly slide away, so I climbed back to the ridge, secured one of our ropes to a large rock, and allowed two ends and a loop to hang down into the tent. These would be our lifelines; we each attached our self and our pack to one of the lines with prussicks. Our boots went into the packs, and we slid into our wet, frozen sleeping bags fully clothed, hanging from our harnesses. Kurt had managed to heat enough water for us each to have a hot cup of tea (but no dinner), and we settled in for what I assumed would be a miserable night.

In the morning, the ice above us still looked difficult, but not impossible. The first pitch was mine, and I did a climbing traverse to the left, trying for as much distance as possible before running out of protection. I ended my run screwed to a 45 degree ice slope below large seracs -- it gave me something to think about as I belayed the others up: "If that serac were to fall, would it dump off to the left or crush me?" Doug took the next pitch, heading directly to the base of the serac before turning right and climbing along the base of the ice cliff toward a lower section that might provide a route higher. He placed his final screw directly into the vertical face, and could only turn it about half way in; then hung on it -- not very encouraging. He belayed Kurt, and finally me up; as I removed the other screws I was acutely aware that all three of us were now hanging on one poorly embedded ice screw. Kurt got the next pitch, continuing to the "weakness" we had spotted, then climbing a short section of 65 or 70 degree ice to reach the next layer. There he paused and said "I think this is as far as I go." No one said a word. After a few minutes he said "Well, maybe I'll go a little further." and continued on. When I was belayed up, I found the others clinging to 50 degree plus ice below yet another cliff. Oh goody, my turn -- at least it was only eight feet of dead vertical. Pulling myself gracelessly over the lip brought a brief moment of relief, until I realized that just below me to the right was the edge of the serac, the full height of which we had been working our way through all morning. A fall here would be bad. My belayer chose that moment to say something about how much rope I had left; I really didn't hear it, but replied with a long string of fear driven profanities. Finally getting a hold of myself, I reminded myself it was my turn, I had a job to do, and I continued up, placing my remaining screws. Kurt led another ice pitch as the slope eased slightly; then Doug, who had been longing for "steep snow" rather than ice, saw his chance. Fifty feet into his lead he placed a picket, probably just to prove he could, then took off; never pausing, never looking back. The first 400 feet above camp had taken us almost four hours, Doug dragged us up the next 400 feet in forty minutes or less. It felt good to be making progress again.

At 3:00 in the afternoon, a day later than planned, we finally reached the summit of Liberty Cap. At 14,112 feet, with a 492 foot drop between it and Columbia Crest, it could be considered to be Washington's second highest mountain. On the other hand, from any distance, it's just a pimple northwest of Rainier's summit. Having never climbed Rainier before, I had originally hoped to continue to the high point; not now, we wanted nothing more than to get down.

Finally on easy ground, and going downhill, Kurt led a forced march across the mile-wide summit plateau towards the head of the Winthrop glacier. There we hoped to find the climber's trail for the popular Emmons/Winthrop route, and follow it for an easy cruise down to Camp Schurman. Alas, it was not to be; with the road closed, no one had climbed the route, and there was no trace of a trail. We had clear skies and sun above, but a solid cloud deck below at about 12,000 feet. Kurt, who had climbed the Emmons route before, led us down through crevasses and seracs, and even managed to point out Camp Schurman during a momentary clearing. But once we entered the clouds, we were in a full white-out. We continued de-



Clinging to one screw on Mt Rainier's Liberty Ridge—Photo, Jim Rickard

Liberty Ridge, con't on pg 6

Call for Submissions for the 2008 HAMS "Climbers List"

HAMS is accepting submissions of names and climbs for the fourth annual list of higher or "exotic" peaks climbed by HAMS members.

Submit your climbs to HAMS.Expeditions@cmc.org (or mail to the CMC, attention: HAMS), please include, as a minimum: Your name, peak name, summit elevation, location, & date climbed.

This is similar to "The 14'ers List" and "Beyond the 14'ers," published annually in the Trail and Timberline, but a bit more -- well -- arbitrary. The rules, such as they are, include:

- 1) Climbs must be submitted by January 31 2009.
- 2) Only climbs during calendar year 2008 will be listed.
- 3) An effort will be made to recognize valiant attempts that failed to reach the summit. If this describes your climb, please also indicate the approximate elevation reached, and reason for turning back.
- 4) For all climbs, commentary and/or photographs are appreciated, and may be published at the discretion of the editor as space permits.
- 5) Finally, what constitutes a "higher or 'exotic' peak"? This is where it really gets arbitrary:
 - a) No Colorado peaks. Colorado has lots of peaks and routes which clearly deserve to be called "exotic," but HAMS doesn't want to be in the position of deciding which are, and which are not. If you've climbed one of these, you are invited to write an article for *Thin Air*.
 - b) Any peak outside of Colorado of 14,000 feet or more.
 - c) Lower peaks outside of Colorado that present a degree of difficulty, either in climbing or access. For example, Granite Peak (12,745) Montana, counts, Mount Sunflower (4,039) Kansas, probably doesn't. Unnamed 3,353, the highest point in Gabon, does.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE HAMS MT. RAINIER SUMMIT TEAM

In July, the HAMS graduating class along with instructors successfully climbed Mt Rainier via the Winthrop-Emmons Route.. Congratulations to all HAMS summit team members. That is quite an accomplishment to get all 14 members to the summit!

SUBMIT YOUR OWN TRIP REPORT. Thanks to HAMS member Jim Rickard for submitting his trip report on Mt Rainier's Liberty Ridge. If you would like to submit your own trip report to be published in *Thin Air*, please send to Darin Spykerman at: spykerd@comcast.net. I'm sure others would love to read your story.

WANT MORE INFORMATION ABOUT HAMS?

VISIT THE RECENTLY UPDATED HAMS WEBSITE AT:
WWW.CMCHAMS.ORG

INTERESTED IN LEADING YOUR OWN TRIP, TREK, OR EXPEDITION??

If interested, contact Jim Rickard
[HAMS.Expeditions@cmc.org]

JOIN HAMS MEMBERS AS WELL AS OTHERS AT THE

HAMS RENDEZVOUS

SEPTEMBER 13-14, 2008

Location: Big meadow near Winfield

For more information, contact Jim Rickard at

HAMS.Expeditions@cmc.org]

Upcoming Trips

Upcoming trips approved by the ExCom, as well as tentative trips in the planning stage are listed below. For more information, and for other trips offered by Adventure Travel, be sure to check listings on the CMC website at www.cmc.org/events/events.

To request an application for approved trips, or for even more information, contact the leader at the phone number or email shown.

Don't forget to submit your story to Thin Air!

You do not have to climb an exotic peak in a foreign country to be eligible for a submission! Please submit your latest adventure or other article to

spykerd@comcast.net

APPROVED HAMS TRIPS

Kilimanjaro, 19,340' Feb 7-21, 2009 \$5250, Including air,

Leader: Steve Bonowski (Trip is full, but accepting applications for waiting list)



SPECIAL SAFETY NOTE: as this is written on Feb. 1, '08, the present political violence in East Africa is confined to Kenya. Tanzania is not affected, and due to different tribes and government philosophy, likely will not be. We will offer the optional 3rd week extension to Mt. Kenya again if the situation in Kenya stabilizes.

We're back with the 7th Kilimanjaro trip sponsored by the Club's High Altitude Mountaineering Section. Kili is the world's largest free-standing mountain and is one of the fabled Seven Summits. We again will do the Machame Route and stay at the famous Marangu Hotel, first visited by Club members in the 1950s. The trip includes a four day budget safari to Serengeti, Lake Manyara, and Ngorongoro Crater. A series of training & get-acquainted hikes will be offered beginning in October. Nights are a mixture of a rustic hotel with full amenities, travelers camps, and tent camping. Excellent physical conditioning is required, and a high comfort level with 3rd world travel. Posted price includes air fare, lodging, ground transport, visa costs, Park fees, most meals, leader expenses, and CMC fee. Cost does not include shots, medications, travel insurance, bar tab, excess baggage fees, and a few meals. Final cost may vary slightly depending on air fares and currency exchange. Trip packets are available by regular mail only after March 15 from the trip leader, Steve Bonowski, at nztrekker@earthlink.net, or P.O. Box 280286, Lakewood CO 80228. No phone calls please.

Trip is approved and is now accepting applications



Parinacota (20,801'), Nevado Sajama (21,484')

Trek the Cordillera Real, June 17-June 29, 2009; \$3445

Here is your chance to climb in the spectacular Cordillera Real of western Bolivia as we tune up and adjust to the altitude. After a three day trek and some time in La Paz, we then head to the southwest corner of the country for climbs of two beautiful extinct volcanoes, including Sajama, the highest in the country. As we drive to the peaks, the high altiplano slowly gives way to the fringe of the Atacama Desert, the driest on the planet.

We will camp out in tents, with meals provided by a La Paz based outfitter. The outfitter provides all transportation, guides for the trek and mountains, and logistics support from porters and mules. Our four nights in La Paz will be in a comfortable two star hotel. In addition to the outfitter and hotel, the posted trip cost also includes air fare (currently running about \$1,500 round trip Denver- La Paz), Bolivian visa, most meals, gratuities, leader expenses, and CMC fee.

Cost does not include shots (yellow fever vaccination is required to enter Bolivia), personal medications, personal gear & equipment, meals in La Paz, travel/evacuation insurance, bar tab, and airline baggage fees. Final trip cost may vary slightly depending on air fares and currency exchange rates.

Participants will be asked to attend a planning meeting in January, 2009 as well as a number of conditioning hikes and climbs next spring.

Trip packets are available by regular mail from the trip leader:

Steve Bonowski, P.O. Box 280286, Lakewood CO 80228 or nztrekker@earthlink.net. No phone calls please.

scending several hundred feet, carefully probing each step to avoid stepping in a crevasse or off a cliff. Eventually, about 7:00 p.m., our luck ran out; we were completely "cliffed-out" in a white-out, with no options left but to re-climb our track.

We resigned ourselves to another unplanned bivi. Prior to this trip, I had spent a total of two unplanned nights out in my entire life, this trip alone added two more. We climbed back to a relatively flat spot and began probing -- sure enough, we were standing atop a crevasse. We moved up a few feet, where it wasn't flat, and began digging in. At least it was snow on this side of the mountain, rather than ice, and (with a fair amount of effort) we were able to carve out a tent site. We even melted snow and made dinner. As the sun set, there was a brief period of clearing, and we were able to make a plan; doing our best to memorize our tentative route in case white-out conditions returned in the morning.

Sure enough, they did. We awoke, ate, and packed in the clouds. I thought I had some feel for the route we had plotted out the night before, and offered to lead. Being "that kind" of trip, the morning's first obstacle was just above camp: A crevasse spanned by a very marginal covering of snow had been easy enough to slip across while descending the evening before, but placing axes and kicking steps into that thin skim of snow in order to climb back up got the adrenaline going. Some slow travel, carefully probing and stepping into the great white void, a couple sketchy snow bridges, and we were headed down again. The weather didn't improve, and at one point we just sat, ate, drank, and stared into the whiteness for 15 minutes hoping to see . . . something. Never-the-less, without further mishap, we three tired climbers trudged down to the ranger cabin at Camp Schurman.

Looking back from two weeks after the fact, I'm glad to have climbed Liberty Ridge, but sure wouldn't do it again. For anyone considering this route, be aware of how committing it is; weather, injuries, gear failure; there's no way down but up. We had no cell phone service from the ridge, and even if we had, windows of "flying weather" for a potential rescue were few and short. Just to check if I had been exaggerating the difficulties in my mind, I went back to the internet and found trip reports from the two parties who had climbed the route a week before us. They confirmed our experience.

Letter to the Editor

In response to John Wallack's article, "Packing for a Trek or Climb" in the May, 08 edition of Thin Air

We just returned from Nepal - our itinerary included a couple of peaks and trekking. John Wallack's article on "Packing for a Trek or a Climb", Thin Air May 2008, at least from our experience, was spot on regarding stoves and baggage weights. However, regarding baggage size, it has been my experience and was our experience over in Nepal that the airlines do not enforce this.

Note we (five team members) had the largest duffel bags made by North Face and we also had two duffel bags that were even larger. Each of these bags easily exceeded the 62" L + H + W threshold. We had no problems (no questions, no extra money, no hassles) checking these bags (they all weighed in right at 50 pounds) on any of our eight flights (United from Denver to Los Angeles, Cathay Pacific from Los Angeles to Hong Kong, Dragon Air from Hong Kong to Kathmandu, and Agni Air from Kathmandu to Lukla).



The High-Altitude Section of the Colorado Mountain Club

710 Tenth Street #200
Golden, Colorado 80401

NONPROFIT
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT #443
GOLDEN, CO