

TRIP REPORT

Mt. Pinchot (13,494") and Mt. Wynne (13,179')

July 25-27, 2008

by Greg Gerlach

I left Los Angeles at 7:30 a.m. for the 250 or so mile drive to the trailhead. I had about a 30 minute wait at the Inter-Agency Visitor Center located south of Lone Pine while several groups of people ahead of me were issued permits. Permit in hand, I traveled up Highway 395 in search of the Sawmill Pass Trailhead. I had forgotten the map and struggled to find the correct turnout from the highway. After several wrong turns, I finally made it to the trailhead and was hiking up the trail at 1:00 p.m. The trail goes south from the trailhead parking area up through the desert sand and sage brush, switch backs up to the ridge, then drops down a little bit into Sawmill Canyon. I continued up the trail, passing the scar of an old fire, and reached Sawmill Lake at 7:00 p.m.

where I made camp and read and relaxed for the remainder of the evening.

The next morning I was hiking up the trail by 7:30 a.m. I went up over Sawmill Pass and dropped down the other side to the John Muir Trail, where I headed north and made my way to my planned campsite located at the lake basin just east of Mt. Wynne. I quickly made camp, threw some gear and water into my day pack, then headed off toward Mt. Pinchot at about 1:00 p.m. I traveled north up towards the peak's east ridge, made a left turn at the ridge and climbed just below the north side of the ridge toward the summit. I crossed back to the south side of the ridge, continued up to just below the summit crags, then scrambled to the top. The route was mostly class 2 and I arrived at 3:10 p.m. Also, I was only the second person to climb the peak so far this

year. I thought about doing the third class ridge to Mt. Wynne, but entries in the summit register made the route sound too dicey for me to do alone. I descended the summit by way of the southeast face, which was steep in places but only class 2, and I was back in camp at the lake at 5:10 p.m.

The next morning I was heading up Wynne's east ridge by 6:00 a.m. At around 12,800' in elevation, I circled around to the south side of the peak, then made my way up to the summit. I was on top at 7:20 a.m. and the route was mostly class 1 up the ridge and class 2 near the summit. Also, only 6 pages of the summit register have been signed by climbers. The weather looked a little iffy, so I quickly made my way back down the peak to camp, packed my gear and headed out by 8:30. I arrived at Sawmill Pass at 12:00 p.m., the car at 4:00 and was home by about 9:00.

Trip statistics: 36 miles and about 11,500 feet of elevation gain.

Mt. Hoffman

by Mary McMannes



Bob Sumner sitting high on Mt. Hoffman, Half Dome and the Range of Light behind him

When July 2008 rolled around, I asked Sage editor and good friend Bob Sumner if we could do some pre-Colorado conditioning hikes and climbs around the Mammoth and Yosemite areas, and he agreed to be my guide. He also arranged a swell place for us to stay in a beautiful house next to Little Eagle ski lift - 7 bedrooms and 7 bathrooms. Nice digs for a lady from Lake Reseedy where the breezes never blow. But on with the story.

Peak#1 is McGee Mountain (10,885') and not to be confused with the listed McGee located somewhere in the Evolution Valley. Popping a quick breakfast at THE house, we were back

Exploratory Conditioning Hike with Hawthorne Bob in the Sierras

on Highway #395 exiting at the Mt. Morrison road. After a few tenths of a mile, we turned left (south) on the dirt road just before the cemetery. And what a cemetery. (More details, later, for cemetery meanderers.) Past the Mt. Morrison cemetery, we turned left (east) on the power-line road and followed this downhill to a junction where another dirt road heads west up the canyon. We followed this road to a sign, "Road Closed 2 Miles Ahead," at Tobacco Flat and parked. There was one place where one needed a 4-Wheel drive to get back up the steep road; but if necessary one can park and walk if you're in a 2WD vehicle. We hiked up the road a couple miles, then turned left, for some cross country eventually summiting the apparent peak. To our west were great views of the climbing route on Mt. Morrison. Last time I climbed that was with: Dale and Jackie Van Dalsem, Maris Valkass, and Art Bauvelt, all comrades now gone. Bob and I lunched on top despite pesky meat-eating bees, and Bob quizzed me on naming the surrounding peaks which I feebly got a few correct (Mt. Baldwin, Morgan North with the Nevahbe Ridge, and more.) McGee was a great little peak, and we returned happily to Bob's Cherokee Jeep after gaining 3200' in 6 miles.

On our return to 395, we stopped at the little

cemetery which is well worth the visit. There are several graves for children where little toys surround the grave site and lovely gravestone quotes. It was a solemn experience, as we knew many tears have flowed here. There are also adults in this wilderness place buried with hiking boots and other favorite souvenirs. My favorite marker was for Ollie Honea, "Mom," 1891-1964. Her inscription reads, "She truly lived in a house by the side of the road," referring to the famous poem by Sam Walter Foss and was customary memorization by grammar school kids in our parent's generation. I liked the wildness of the cemetery where sage and mountain lilies grow side by side, and one can visit his or her loved ones surrounded by the grand show that only great mountains and vast desert can offer.

Day #2, and we're traveling over to Yosemite for Cloud's Rest or Mt. Hoffman. We opted for Mt. Hoffman as a new experience, since both of us have climbed Cloud's Rest several times (mainly for Doug Mantle's multiple List Finishers which always ends on Cloud's Rest.) We stopped at the kiosk on Tioga Pass Road, then proceeded to May Lake Road to the trail-head parking lot. We followed the trail 1.2 miles to May Lake and saw lots of tourists lounging around tent cabins. Ah such is the luxurious life in the Wilderness but not for us. We headed west (to our left) and hiked along the south shore of the lake, where various footpaths merge becoming the main trail up to Mt. Hoffman. This trail is unsigned, but you will notice there are plenty (and I mean Plenty) of ducks. We had a fine time on the Mt. Hoffman summit (10,850') after a leg belay and a marmot who bothered us non-stop for our lunches. It was another stellar day in the Sierras with views of Half Dome, Cloud's Rest, and Muir's Range of Light which can dazzle any seasoned climber or city slicker. Returning back to the cars, we had added an easy day hike of 6 miles and 2100' gain. Too bad, we

didn't have Day #3 for Cloud's Rest as we were meeting Doug, Marcelo, and Don Sparks for dinner in June Lake. Across the way, we could see Fairview Dome where Marcelo and Doug had climbed earlier. (One of the Classic Climbs of North America.) The cerulean blue sky was becoming white-grey, and soon the views would be obliterated by the raging Yosemite fire of 2008 (started down in the Valley by some people target shooting.) A perfect mountain day was no more.

Day #3, I returned to Mammoth, where Don and I climbed Mammoth Mountain (11,053') and 2100' gain. By that time, Yosemite was on fire, and the Mono Basin was filled with smoke so one could barely see the islands in Mono Lake. The newspaper reported the fire started three hours after our coming down from Mt. Hoffman. Bob returned to Hawthorne (NV) which he now referred to as Smokehorn.

These are some great dayhikes for getting into condition for Sierra peaks and Colorado 14ers (Laura Stockton and Don Crowley were winging their ways to Colorado for a few of these, too.) Dana and Warren are off Tioga Pass Road and are easily accessible for a couple more conditioning hikes before going to the back country. Thanks to Bob for a great three days. A plus was meeting John and Tammy Hooper, Mammoth residents, who are also working on the Lists (DPS and SPS), and John is getting close to his own DPS List Finisher.

When you've sat in that Lazy Boy in the winter popping those See's candies, these are early summer conditioning hikes which you'll enjoy, tremendously. If you're up there with your family and children, I highly recommend Mt. Hoffman.

The Mystery of George Creek:

A Trip Planned for Barnard, Trojan, and Williamson



photo | Barbee Tidball

View up George Creek on Saturday after the snow

April 30-May 3, 2009

A group of seven convened 7:00 a.m. on Thursday, April 30, at the Mary Austin House in Independence. The participants were Danielle Carlin, Chad Kavanaugh, Margy Marshall, Wayne Martin, and Barbee Tidball; leaders were Larry Tidball and I. We left several cars at the house and carpooled to the George Creek trailhead, following RJ's driving description and leaving two cars in a space before the rough part begins. We carried all the packs and four people the rest of the way in my trusty Tacoma, which happened to turn over 300,000 miles on the dirt road. Woo hoo!



photo | Barbee Tidball

Tina and Danielle at one of the many creek crossings

By 8:40 we set off, following Larry most of the time as he led us up the use trail and the various crossings of the creek. Much—but not all of the time—the use trail was easy to follow by the tread and ducks in less obvious areas. Now and then I led a bit, including the last push into camp after the final stream crossing. Barbee had lost her camera and went back to the crossing to look for it—successfully! Larry stayed back with her. The rest of the group pulled into the lovely camp sites in the trees at about 10,000' just before 5:00 and soon had set up camp. Once I had set up my tent, I went down to check on Barbee and Larry, who were about fifteen minutes from camp. It was a pleasant day for weather and unhurried hiking with generous breaks.

The plan for Friday was to be up 5:30 and off at 6:30 for Barnard and Trojan. But at 4:45 it had begun to

rain lightly and the peaks were really socked in when it was time to get up. Barbee checked with everyone, and we elected to sleep in. About 8:20 patches of blue sky were about, and the clouds were less threatening over the peaks. We decided to go for it. Barbee needed Barnard, so that was our first goal. We left camp at 9:20, following Larry again as he took us on a snow bridge over the creek and on up the slope, cramponing to the basin with the unnamed lake. Next we tackled the slope up to the basin below Barnard and Trojan with more good cramponing. When we topped out there, we had lunch. Then on we went for Barnard often on dirt and rock. During our push from the basin to the summit, the wind built and buffeted us with strong, icy gusts. Some rime ice was on the summit rocks, and we were quick to sign in and move below the ridge into a more sheltered spot. Thanks to Harry Langenbacher, there's

**Barnard doesn't look so impressive,
but we still had about 1000 feet to climb from here.**



photo | Barbee Tidball

an ammo box and fine register book with a picture of Patty Rambert on the inside cover, replacing the historic register and container that were stolen a few years ago. Those on the summit first went down to the basin to await the others for the descent to camp. It was snowing lightly by the time we made the summit, and the wind was increasing.

So the sensible ones returned to camp with some glissades. I went on for Trojan and used their glissade tracks for my own return. They were in camp before 7:00; I was back just before 8:00. They had taken breaks; I just hustled. The new register box on Trojan had holes in the plastic, so I tried to keep it a bit protected from the snow and rain. As I neared the stream crossing close to camp, Larry came down for water and to guide me the last bit through the willows to the crossing—much appreciated.

With the wind really howling Friday night and snow being lashed into our tents, our thoughts were that chances of climbing Williamson were pretty thin. The slopes to the Williamson plateau were generally free of snow, so the thought of several inches of new snow on rock at the angle of repose didn't sound like safe or pleasant climbing. We all decided that we'd hike out Saturday. Fortunately, it stopped snowing in the morning, the sun came out, and we had a lovely day—some wind at first, but we were soon below that. Clearly, however, it was really windy up top with spindrift blowing. Barbee had brought in a birthday card for me, signed by everyone, and Margy sang a special birthday song. What a great way to spend a birthday in the glorious Sierra.

As we hiked down, at times we missed stream crossings or the use trail. This had happened to Barbee and Larry and me before. It's so strange since usually use trails seem easier to follow on the way down. The first two stream crossings from our trip in we avoided altogether, staying on the north side of the creek and not even seeing the crossings. So this, for me, is the mystery of George Creek: that one never seems able to follow the same route twice, intentionally or not.

At our last crossing coming out, the branch Chad was standing on broke, so he went in. Barbee and I still had to cross. As I went the short distance to where I'd crossed two days before, the bank caved or something; all I know was that suddenly I too was wading the creek. Barbee then joined me in that. All was well. We were back to the truck about 3:00, having started down about 8:20 and taking good breaks and lunch besides a bit of extra scouting, crossing, and bushwhacking. We had good group efforts at finding the trail and crossings.

With all the cars started, we headed back to civilization. The Tidballs and I stopped briefly at the Eastern California Museum to check out the new Norman Clyde exhibit, which Bill Oliver helped bring into being. Check it out!

Thanks to everyone for a fine outing.



Tina

Mexican Volcanoes:

Pico de Orizaba (18,490') and Iztaccihuatl (17,337')



Iztaccihuatl (17,337'), as seen from Amecameca / photo by Kathy Rich

On Christmas night, 2008, four of us, Paul Garry, Mike Chapman, Joseph Bell and myself, met at LAX to take the red-eye to Mexico City. Paul and Mike had recently climbed Cho Oyu in the Himalayas, so Joseph and I were very glad to be in the company of experienced international climbers. Our 9-day itinerary included plans to climb both Ixta and

Orizaba. (Orizaba is the highest peak in Mexico and the 3rd highest in North America).

Arriving in Mexico City on Boxing Day, we took a 2hr bus ride to Amecameca, the staging point for our climb of Ixta. At the hotel we encountered a group of British climbers who had just returned

from climbing Ixta. We plied them with questions about conditions on the mountain, particularly the availability of water, which was a major concern. After stocking up on supplies, we saddled up our backpacks, flagged down a colectivo to take us up to Paso de Cortez, and then on to Alzimoni Lodge where we planned spend the 2nd night before heading to the La Joya trailhead. Although we had agreed upon a price of 200 pesos each, the driver refused to take us to the lodge unless we paid more money. Joseph brightly suggested—“Look, the lodge is just up there, we can walk there!” On reaching the Lodge 3 hrs later, lugging our heavy packs plus 5-gallon jugs of water, we regretted our decision to save a few pesos.

Miguel, the caretaker of the Alzimoni Lodge and an avid climber himself, welcomed us. We found him to be a veritable mine of information about conditions on the mountain, including the one remaining source of fresh running water. December/January is the dry season, so water



is scarce. There are 2 main routes for Ixta: the ‘normal’ ridge route and the Ayoloco glacier route. After much discussion and weighing up the various options, we decided on the latter route as it would allow us to establish a high camp at 14,500’ near the spring that Miguel told us about, below the trail near the Portillo. A second benefit of being off the main trail was that we had less to worry about with leaving our gear and tents behind while we summited. After an alpine start we headed up towards the glacier, passing the Ayoloco hut on the way. Just as we had suspected, there was almost no snow left around the hut, making it a dry camp. Our ascent up the glacier was made difficult by the icy conditions, and we determined that we would not retrace our steps, and instead return via the normal ridge route. On the summit of Ixta we were surprised to see 2

paragliders waiting in vain for the ‘right’ wind.

The next day we made our way back to Paso de Cortez and took a colectivo east towards Cholula - which turned out to be a long and

*At the top of the Ayoloco glacier and heading up Arrista Del Sol to the summit
photo by Paul Garry*

Joseph on the summit of Ixta, with Popo in the background



photo by Kathy Rich

bumpy ride. A couple of bus rides later; we reached Puebla, a lovely old colonial city. It was a pleasant change to spend a night in civilization. Next morning we took the bus to the rural town of Tlachichuca, the staging point for our climb of Orizaba. We were due at Senior Reyes' compound that day at noon for our transportation to the Piedra Grande Hut (at 14,000'). This involved a 3-hour ride in a vintage 4x4 on incredibly dusty roads, but we weren't complaining! At the hut, which was surprisingly empty considering it was New Year's Eve, we made ourselves comfort-

able and prepared for our summit bid later that evening. Unfortunately, Joseph seemed to have picked up a stomach bug on Ixta, so he decided to pass on going for the summit with us.

The wind was howling outside, but we were told that conditions would be better up the mountain, and this turned out to be true. Our main concern was the 'labyrinth', an appropriately named maze of rock, scree and ice, which we would need to ascend in the wee hours of the morning. However, Paul did a wonderful job of route finding in the dark and we reached

the foot of the Jamapa glacier around dawn. As we steadily climbed the ever-steepening slopes of Pico de Orizaba the angle went from a gentle 10 degrees to 45-50 degrees. However, crevasses were essentially non-existent, so roping up was unnecessary. The glacier seemed never-ending, but since we were in the shadow of the sun until we reached the rim of the crater, we pressed on, as it was quite cold. The true summit was just a short distance further. While basking in the morning sunshine, we enjoyed the glorious views of Popo and Ixta in the distance, before making our way down the mountain. Af-

ter spending a comfortable night at Senor Reyes', we took the 3 1/2hr bus ride back to Mexico City.

It was an excellent trip. Food and provisions, including bottled water, could readily be found in local markets. Finding cooking fuel and gas canisters was difficult in local towns unless you knew what to look for. Overall, we found traveling on Mexico's local and express buses to be inexpensive and relatively straightforward. In Mexico City, the centrally-located Hostel Moneda turned out to be an excellent place to stay.



Pico de Orizaba (18,490'), as seen from Tlachichuca / photo by Paul Garry



The route from the old hut at 14,000' up the labyrinth to the snowy summit of Orizaba (upper left) / photo by Paul Garry



Paul at the crater rim, near the summit of Orizaba / photo by Kathy Rich



Mike, Kathy and Paul on the summit of Orizaba

On our last day, after declining the many organized tours offered to us, we took a local bus to the Teotihuacan pyramids and had a most enjoyable day free to roam and explore as we pleased.

One of the gems on the Palisade traverse: "Starlight, Starbright" and its summit block

TRIP REPORT
Aug 2, 2008



Our Palisade Traverse: Long Day's Journey into Night

**by Augie Medina
and Tom Becht**

**THE APPROACH AND
THUNDERBOLT PEAK
(14,003')**

The SP Team: Mountain Impulse (Augie), Becht (Tom) and Glenn G (Glenn)

INTRODUCTION: THE SELLING OF A TRAVERSE

TOM:

I had been intrigued on doing the Palisade Traverse for sometime ever since reading Bob Burd's harrowing trip report from his 2002 Sierra Challenge. It had been on Augie's checklist since August 2003 when Climbing magazine featured it as one of "America's 4 Best Ridge Traverses." I had attempted to climb Thunderbolt the year before but my partner and I had failed to "lasso" the summit block and we departed defeated.

To succeed this year, I enlisted the help of two friends that I had

met over the last couple of years hiking and scrambling. Glenn has done most of the traverse already and had the necessary rock climbing skills to lead the summit blocks; Augie had climbed Mt Sill from our preferred exit point. After much deliberation, we had decided to follow the lead of others and use a car shuttle to enter via Bishop Pass and exit via Big Pine. Glenn and I had both experienced the reverse talus traverse back to Bishop Pass and elected not to repeat that path. At the time, we didn't understand Augie's reluctance with exiting via Big Pine TH – something we would understand by the end of the trip.

TOM:

The alarm woke us in our comfortable motel beds in Bishop at 12:30 a.m. Saturday morning. I had managed to get about 4 hours of sleep; the others (as I found out later) much less. We quickly got ready, drove to the Bishop Pass trailhead, and were hiking by just before 2 a.m. We made reasonable time up to the pass, occasionally stopping for logistical reasons (eat, replace headlamp batteries, etc.), and filled our water bottles at the small lake by the pass. Our first obstacle was navigating the granite ledge slope of upper Dusy Basin, usually a challenge during daylight hours. Glenn successfully discovered a ledge system that ran most of the way to our target, Thunderbolt Pass, and led us under a moonless black sky.

About half way across, the faint glow of the rising sun helped



***Bishop Pass Trailhead 1:30 am;
Tom (L) and Glenn***

guide us the remaining way to the pass. Our unimpressive speed of 4.5 hours to this point didn't favor a timely completion of our goal but we tackled Thunderbolt's steep and loose SW Chute #1 with all of the vigor that limited sleep can afford. We scrambled ever upwards trying not cascade rocks on friends below, then moved into the next chute via a ledge system when a chock stone blocked further progress, and finally conquered the 100' class 4 headwall at the notch between the twin summits. Just after 8 am., the three of us stood grinning under the perilously perched summit block, soaking in the sunshine and the fantastic views around us.

AUGIE:

Glenn had topped the longer 5.8 side of the summit block before, but he was eager to lead the challenging 5.9 side this time. For Tom and I, virtually any way to get to the top was an aspiration. We eye-balled the block like cognoscenti examining a painting: Thirty feet high on the west side and only fifteen feet on its east

side. But it's readily apparent why most people opt to ascend the longer side. The short side has no apparent bottom if you peel off.

Glenn was up to the challenge and led the block in great form after having spent a little time coming up with a sure-fire initial move to get onto the summit block. Getting onto the block basically would be the crux for all three of us. Glenn then threaded the rope through the carabiner/ bolt anchor at the top and I lowered him. I then tied in while Glenn set up to belay me. Glenn's belay was not directly underneath me so a fall would mean a pendulum. Actually, all the belay would accomplish would be to keep a falling body from going all the way down the mountain.

I spent a couple of minutes working up to that first move to get onto the block. After I was on, I probably spent the most time evaluating how to make the second move. After that, my rhythm was pretty smooth to the top. After Glenn lowered me, both of us had to do a little coaxing to get Tom to give it a go. He persevered and made it up in good form. We had the photo/video op and turned our attention to getting to Starlight.

En route to Starlight, we could see two climbers who were right behind us on the traverse eyeing T-Bolt's summit block. The summit block is the lower protrusion dead center and the climbers are just to the right of it.



Exposure galore on T-Bolt's SW Chute #1

T-BOLT TO STARLIGHT
(14,200'): BACK TO BACK
SUMMIT BLOCKS

AUGIE:

We all enjoyed the descent from T-Bolt into the notch and started the 4th class ascent to the ridge. I led most of the way including to the bottom of the Milk Bottle. In the process, I found a rather spicy route that included a few 5th class moves, some chimney climbing and otherwise what Glenn and Tom referred to as “an Augie variation.”

We came up just left of the 5.6 summit block. The summit block is an awesome sight from a distance rising like a needle in the middle of Starlight’s summit area. It is no less impressive up close. It is noticeably shorter and less difficult than T-Bolt’s block. So when Glenn handed me the sharp end and said I should lead it, I didn’t hesitate too long even though I’ve had little experience trad climbing. I do have kind of an instinct for making effective moves on rock and I got up relatively quickly. I threaded the rope at the top and Glenn positioned himself at the bottom for a belay of Tom. Tom also got up quickly and we were all stoked at having gotten on top of both summit blocks.

STARLIGHT TO NORTH PAL
(14,242'): HIGH POINT ON



Register Box, Starlight Peak

THE RIDGE

TOM:

Daylight was burning so we quickly packed up and headed back down the way we approached the Milk Bottle. Dropping 50’, we headed south over the SW shoulder and started down climbing a steep wall. Realizing that rappelling would be faster than down climbing with three people, Glenn set up the rope (using a handy established rap station) and we quickly rappelled onto a ledge below.

A bit more traversing put us at the notch with the detached block, secured with the most robust anchor I had ever seen (10+ sets of webbing). The landing

on the detached block involved descending to the landing spot and then swinging yourself backward to land on the block. This is a type of rappel you encounter more in canyoneering than in the alpine world.

Glenn, the first to cross, was watching the two of us rap when his camera slipped out of his pocket and fell into a 15 foot deep man-sized crack below his feet. Glenn put himself on rappel and lowered into the crack, looking much like much like a person squeezing into too tight clothes. A bit of deft climbing got him out with his now broken camera (or so he thought) but at least with a still good memory card.

A bit more progress put us 100’

below the summit, guarded by large insurmountable vertical blocks. A ramp and ledge system on the north side of the ridge appeared to allow further progress as far as I could see with an uncertain portion covered by snow. It was as easy as it appeared from the ridge – the snow bypassed and some final 4th class blocks to overcome. Ten minutes later we were standing on top of North Palisade, the king of the ridge line. We enjoyed lunch as we took in the perfect weather, the spectacular views, and our next goal, Polemonium.



Webbing convention above U-Notch

NORTH PAL TO
POLEMONIUM (14,080’):
MORE RAPS, THE U-NOTCH
AND ANTI-CLIMAX

AUGIE:

We started our descent to the U-Notch and found ourselves on a steep, steep route. We did 2 double rope rappels (we had a 30m rope) including one where the rope got us to our ledge with only inches to spare. There are rap anchors galore descending to the notch but it goes without saying that each should be evaluated thoroughly. There are some anchors consisting of 5 to 6 pieces of webbing slung around the rock anchor. They reminded me of a webbing clusterf***k.

However, one of the existing anchors went way beyond untidy. It was a fatality waiting to happen. A big piece of bright red webbing

with the biggest solid rap ring I’d ever seen was slung around a bomber rock. The only problem was that THE BACK OF THE WEBBING WAS SITTING ON TOP OF THE ROCK because there was no place to wedge it behind the rock. Glenn went down to this death trap and, with a flick of his wrist, pulled the webbing right off the rock. We used the webbing to build a solid anchor around a rock right below the offending set-up.

From the U-Notch we traversed and climbed on slabs and ramps and soon found ourselves on Polemonium. After the two summit blocks of T-Bolt and Starlight, and the North Pal high point, Polemonium was anti-climactic. The saving grace was the narrow, airy cat-walk from the

peak towards Sill.

MT. SILL (14,153’) AND AN
EXCRUCIATING EXIT

TOM:

It was now 4 p.m. and we had lost a lot of time since North Pal so we had to move quickly. The descent off Pole was easy (I hadn’t



DEATH TRAP above the U-Notch



Register Box, Polemonium Peak

expected this after having seen pictures showing people roped up). The huge sun cups blanketing the Polemonium Glacier below us merited some long looks and pictures.

The talus hop ate up a bit of time but by a little after 5 p.m., Glenn and I stood on Mt Sill's summit. We waited a bit for Augie who had stopped at the cairn for the 4th class descent to Gayley Notch. The lack of sleep had finally caught up to him. Augie later mentioned that, had he not done Sill before, he would have crawled up if need be. But having been there before, his fatigue overcame any motivation to tag the summit again.

We now began the long and torturous 10-mile descent to

the Big Pine trailhead. First, the dry North Couloir, then the equally dry Gayley Notch, followed by a traverse composed of ice, snow, rock, and wet sand to Camp Gayley. By now the sun had set and thoughts of a nice dinner in Bishop had long vanished. Quickly descending the ledges below Camp Gayley, we encountered the use trail to Sam Mack Meadows shortly before needing our headlamps. We forded the river at Sam Mack Meadow barefoot and in the dark- NOT FUN!

Our pace had dramatically slowed due to fatigue and then we were stopped by the stream running down from Sam Mack Lake. A barefooted crossing of a glacier fed stream in the dark was

the last thing we needed but there it was. Pushing on, it became clearly evident that we wouldn't be exiting at any civilized time – Augie was just about done for. At the junction with the main trail, we reviewed our options and opted for a quick nap to recharge batteries.

At 11 p.m., the struggle began anew with renewed energy. With our pace somewhat improved, we forged onwards stopping occasionally for breaks. Near the end Glenn and I (with aspirations to still call this self-inflicted torture a day hike) took our leave of Augie and half-walked and half-ran to the car. Not smart as Glenn twisted his ankle shortly before the parking lot to which we arrived at shortly after 2 a.m. We curled up and got some sleep on the hard asphalt until Augie



Glenn (first) and Augie descending Mt. Sill at end of traverse

arrived about an hour later.

EPILOGUE: GRACIAS TO
MY PARTNERS; A MEDICAL
NOTE; AND A COMMENT ON
EQUIPMENT

AUGIE:

Thanks to Glenn G. for being our rock leader and for insisting that Tom and I could get up those summit blocks. Thanks to both Glenn and Tom for being patient and waiting up for me when my gas tank hit “empty” on the exit to the trailhead. They would easily have accomplished the traverse as a day hike but for waiting up for me.

I thought my hitting the wall was just a result of very poor sleep the nights previous to the trip and not being in as good condition as Tom and Glenn. Turns out there was an added factor. When I got home I was given the results of my Complete Blood Count panel as part of my yearly physical: they reflected a case of anemia of some duration with the medicos insisting I had no business doing hard physical exertion, much less a 24-hour plus endurance activity at altitude. In retrospect, it was just an extra challenge to push through, although I feel much better knowing there was a reason for feeling greatly fatigued at a point where we had over 20 hours to go.

Equipment-wise, Glenn and I offer Tom our grudging respect on his choice of seat harness for the traverse. Always concerned with going as light as possible (I swear Tom’s standard daypack is smaller than what I carry when I go on a long trail run), Tom opted to leave his regular harness and to rely on a make shift “diaper” harness made from webbing based on a visual that he pulled right off the pages of *Mountaineering: Freedom of the Hills*.

When Glenn and I first saw Tom’s get up we teased him big time and predicted unparalleled discomfort in using it and battered internal organs if he fell on it. But honestly, Tom’s contraption

seemed to work just fine. He said it was comfortable and he looked comfortable in it the entire time. What’s next Tom? Back to hobnail boots to save the weight of carrying crampons?

A FINAL THOUGHT.

Except for Sill, the very names of the peaks on the traverse bespeak excitement, grandeur, and challenge. Add a little suffering to the mix if you shoot to do the traverse as a day hike. For most, life generally affords some excitement and challenge as well as suffering, but not always grandeur. This traverse is your chance for some grandeur.



*We forded the river at Sam Mack Meadow barefoot
and in the dark-NOT FUN!*

The Sierra Echo

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Publication dates are Jun 15, Sept 15, Dec 15 and Mar 15. All text submissions for publication, including trip reports, articles, etc., can be submitted in electronic format such as MS Word, WordPerfect, email (electronic format is preferable), or through regular U.S. mail. Photos may be submitted as electronic files (jpeg, tiff or Photoshop in a resolution high enough for print media) or submitted as prints or slides. If submissions are to be returned to you please include a return envelope with sufficient postage. **All submissions should be sent to Sara Danta, 9741 Reseda Blvd, Unit 46, Northridge, CA 91324 or emailed to s_wyrens@yahoo.com.**

Deadline for all submissions is three (3) weeks prior to the publication date.

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