



Mt Steward has called my name for over a decade. It has 3 famous climbs. The south is a walkup with steep gullies, steep snow fields and a bit of scrambling up the final rocky ridge to the top. The West is a lot of class 3-4 rocky slabs and ridges with a couple low class 5 pitches needing rope. The North is my life goal and is 11-16 class 5.6-5.9 airy pitches. This Journey was the easiest South face and took us 3 days to do it.

In the company was Suzanne Bateman, Chris and Eric Mueller and myself, Steve Marquis.

The 1st day brings us to the trailhead approaching from Ellensburg side; North Fork Teanaway trail head about noonish and a long hike up the 1st major ridge and down steep steep snow to the valley floor presenting the South face to our view. We arrived midafternoon and set up camp. Chris and Eric still had plenty of energy and wanted to explore up the canyon to a lake. That side of the mountain is where the west side pitches begin. I was plenty happy to just chill for once and bid them well.

I can't recall at this late retelling (2015) if Suzanne stayed and rested or went with the boys. I build a modest fire and relaxed – something I very seldom indulge in.

I moved Eric's tent back a ways from the fire, but I was to learn later not far enough! Ugh.

They fairly ran the day and a good chunk of the evening out going a few miles up and back but when they finally got back, to my dismay and Eric's ribbing, a spark had found its way to Eric tent and left a small pencil lead sized hole. After being humbled I offered to buy it but in the end he preferred to keep it – hazards of the trail.

We started the next day early but not in headlamps crossed the thin river and cross country route finding ensued to choose an appropriate coulee to ascend. It was not so obvious which was the better – there being more than one path. Eric's route finding is legendary and I think he may have led out. After several hours of UP UP UP scrambling up the gully, it became obvious that Suzanne was not up to her usual stamina. I've been with her on super tough multi-day climbs when the "timing" would have kept

most gals at home, so something especially fatiguing was dogging her beyond that. We would have slowed the pace but she offered more like insisted to just hold up and enjoy being that far up the mountain. We found a comfortable place to perch and open enough to find her on the return and bid her well.

Within an hour of more step gully and rock slab climbing we topped out on the ridge bordering steep snow field leading up to the summit bid.

This is where we make a mistake. With ribbon or GPS or Cairn we should have unmistakably marked that spot.....

We donned crampons about this time and broke out the Ice Axes. As it got steeper and steeper we roped up and continued a fast pace to the skyline. After another heart pumping endurance "sprint", we finally we rolled out to a rocky bank hiding the final summit bid. It was glorious just being there. In this rocky band separating the south snow field from the more western side you could see almost anything as if you were on the very summit. What we could see clearly on the rocky ridge and face to the true summit gave us pause for considerable thought.

The face was just an 1/8 mile away down a few hundred feet and up maybe 400. A 50 yard-100 yard wide super steep snow field with ominous stress crack suggested the desire to break away. The rocky ridge on the far right of the chute representing the "Route" was covered largely in snow and cornices gaping over the North cliff faces. There was no nice route. The biggest concern was traveling on the chute that could break away and take the hapless climber with it. The cornice rocky ridge made it difficult to trust the edge.

I voiced a plan. Chris though it doable. Eric was more reserved and agreed to record the ascent or folly as the case might be. My plan was to travel in a running belay on rope hugging the ridge as we went until we got to the part of the chute we deemed in danger of break away. We would shift to a full leap frog belay with one of us anchored at a time in the hard snow of the protected rocky band. The traveler would venture out to the chute but only 5 feet or less from where the breakaway line could likely form. We kept the pitches to less than 50' and thus figured a slide could be held and the danger mitigated.

This greatly slowed the last couple hundred feet but whether we only fooled ourselves or not this mode of conveyance greatly eased our minds. At last we summited and beheld the full glory of one of the most sought after peaks in the cascades.

Despite the ardor, the summit is never a place one dwells a great time at, We took pictures and a brief snack and mindful of now 2 companions waiting and staged below, Chris and I reversed the sequence and belayed again to safe zone below.

Eric was surprised at how long that took and I offered my apology for his wait. Down the steep field we practically ran glissading and sometimes falling in our pell mell descent. As we came to the rocky band marking the fields of gullies leading to the valley we suddenly realized how they all looked so similar. Arg.

I mentioned a mistake!

A chute was selected and down we plunged grappling and sliding all the time searching for the familiar, but it became obvious to all that we had chosen the wrong chute. At a convenient spot we carefully

climbed and traversed the gully wall to where we could attain the next gully which immediately looked familiar. The last thing we wanted was to miss Suzanne.

Now when you descend rocky gullies it is proper to descend closely together and if possible in echelon style lest you kick a rock loose and kill the fellow below, but Chris was so anxious to adventure his way down that no persuasion would restrain him. We definitely tried not to dislodge rocks but its almost inevitable. A good sided rock was dislodge by one of us and we yelled and hollered ROCK Rocks ROCK ROCK – but hapless and helpless to the missile shooting in his direction, I’m sure we were all praying Suzanne’s prayer – “Dear God help us!”

Finally finally Chris turns his head just in time to see the grapefruit sized boulder sail at breakneck speed but inches past his ear! It was so stinking close.

We shared a few friendly if not animated words of concern as no one wanted to be the one to kill their partner!

Gratefully, we continued the decent; now in tighter formation. Fortunately our now better judgment on the route was rewarded and in a short time we found Suzanne safe, happy and well rested. I was greatly relieved to be sure on all accounts.

We arrived in camp well into the evening near last light and no one wanted to break camp for an epic trudge out. There was no real choice but to delay our egress to Sunday morning, a day later than was hoped. There was no way to communicate this fact. Wonder now in this telling if we had all informed our spouses of this possibility. That would have been prudent planning so as not to create unnecessary alarm; two days for this trip was quite aggressive but I just don’t remember.

I suggested we all pool our remaining food and resources and so we had a grand pot luck dinner that evening and similar the next morning. The hike out was uneventful, a good push of energy to go straight up the snow chute – about a 1000 feet I guess. We had our final snack with pictures taken at the valley rim with the peak of our current affection prominently in our backs. The rest of the trip to the trailhead found me working hard as usual to keep up with these young “walking machines” who remain the finest partners in the mountains one could hope for....