

Burgundy and Paisano

Contributed by weekendclimber
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Wine Spires

All week long, as I watched the weather forecast go from good to bad and back to good, then bad again our plans kept fluctuating. Once Eric and Mike showed up at my house a little after 7pm on Friday we finally decided to head up to Washington Pass and bivy in the basin below Burgundy Col. So, after a few packing adjustments and picking another Mike downtown, we were on our way to Mazama to crash at one of the Mike's friend's cabin. I was surely in store for a adventure with these new acquaintances, far more than I would realize yet.

The Trudge

After eating a quick breakfast at the Mazama store, which consisted of a berry muffin, we were off for the short drive back to the pullout across from the Wine Spires. We all finished packing and headed down the boulder slope to the stream. We made a delicate crossing on a slippery log farther upstream from another set of snags that provide a far better passage across the raging waters. From there, the trudge up hill was on.

The last time I made this approach was many years ago and I had been dreading it since I found out this was where we were headed the night before. Unlike the first time I made the trek though, this time I didn't have a tent and all sorts of other unnecessary gear. A light pack, most assuredly, made a huge difference getting to the basin where we would stash our overnight gear. Though my memory is vague of that past ordeal, I do recall it taking far longer than the hour and fifteen minutes this trek took.

Good views!

Once in the basin, we picked an area to stay for the evening and stashed all our overnight gear and did a bit of refueling for the rest of the approach to Burgundy Col. It wasn't more than a half hour after arriving that we were back on the trail headed uphill, but this time with lighter packs. This took us a little longer than reaching the basin below Burgundy, but we found ourselves at the col in plenty of time to climb our routes that we had designated the night before. Mike and Eric planned on doing a route about 50 feet to the right of Mike and I's, which in turn enabled us to garner some beta from each other.

We paired down our gear and made the quick descent down the snowy East side of the col and around South to where our routes started. As Mike checked out the moat between the rock and the snow I stared up at the beautifully cleaned rock that resembled another place I had climbed last summer. The first pitch of our route Action Potential had a name

that was only too familiar to me: the Bugaboo Pitch.

{mospagebreak title=Action Potential&heading=Action Potential}

Gathering at the base once the stability of the snow was confirmed, we all helped to make a nice snow ledge where we could change into our rock shoes. We all roped up and I waited for Eric to lead off from our ledge and onto the rock, which he opted to do in his boots. I followed him and then traversed left several feet to where a clean, sharp flake broke the face. It ended in a short overhang that I hesitated at for a moment, before pulling over it and upward. I setup a belay no more than twenty feet from Eric and brought Mike up. Pitch 1 was history.

Mike then led up what looked to be a blank slab, but as he crested a small bulge in it a finger-crack appeared. This lead up and right to a short headwall with some convenient flakes that broke the face. Next, a short traverse to the left across a slab to a shallow corner ended in a semi-hanging belay, which according to the topo, starts the crux of the climb. It was my turn to take the lead.

North Cascades

I set off left using a nice crack as a handrail, and then got my self situated to pull up into the 5.10 finger-crack splitting the face above. I plugged a blue TCU into a small pocket near my shoulder and put a long sling on it and then stepped a bit to engage the crack. My fingers were only able to fit into it to the second knuckle, making the first moves very insecure. I backed off once, then twice, and finally I resolved to aid through it for the sake of time and sanity. I placed a number 8 nut and put a few slings on it, but as I stepped up past the move that stymied me, POW, I was airborne. I dropped back down to the sloping ledge landing on my feet just as the rope came tight.

Fortunately, my blue TCU held my fall but the damage had been done. I was mentally done, and with Mike having no desire to give it a try after my folly, we decided to bail back down to our snow ledge. I left a couple of nuts, a biner, and my cordalette, which gave us just enough to get back to our ledge in one double rope rappel. Wow, we had hardly climbed 60 meters and we were retreating. At least it will be there another day for me to give it a go, as will I.

Tower Mountain

Mike and I made the short slog back up to the col and waited for Eric and Mike to get done with their route. I grabbed an apple and munch away, while at the same time, made some small talk with another pair of climbers who were bivouacing at the col. A few minutes passed and we all heard a loud yell and then sounds of large rocks falling. Then an object, at the time I didn't know if it was a rock or a body, could be seen sliding down the snow slope gouging a deep trough in the snow. Later we would learn that Eric had shifted this rock onto himself and sat with it in his lap while Mike moved out of the firing line so he could let it go.

With both our teams giving up on our routes, we all gathered for a tail tucking session at the col before whimpering our way back to camp in the basin. We stopped again at the small drip of water that crossed the trail back from the col so that we could drink as much water as we could before topping off our bottles for the evening. Later in the season, there would be little to no water near where we camped, so we reveled in the luck that we had to find this small drip. Unlike most other streams I've come across in the wilderness, this one had no silt to murky the water in my bottle.

Rough'n It

Strolling back into camp, we reorganized our gear by throwing it all over the ground and then decided to get some final bit of climbing in. Some of Mike's friends were camped nearby, and they joined us in a bouldering session on the large rock that lined the west side of our camp. On the southern end of this boulder, someone had drilled and placed a rivet for what we all concluded must have been for hanging a food bag. Being that I remembered this specific rock from my trip many years before and the fact that I did not recall a rivet in it, it must have been placed within the last ten years.

After our bouldering session, we all munched on our dinners and claimed our spots on the ground for the evening. Just as night began to fall, we all tucked in and went to sleep. As I lay there thinking of the next days climb, I saw a brilliant flash just below the Big Dipper. I asked if anyone else saw that and the only response I received was snores.

{mospagebreak title=Round 2&heading=Round 2}

Silverstar Sunset

With our climbs being on the west side of the Vasiliki-Wine Spire ridge, we all sleep in until the sun finally hit us around 9:00am. At that point we would not have been able to sleep any longer any how, since the heat of the sun made lying in our sleeping bags unbearable. I fired up my stove to boil some water for oatmeal and wiped the crusties from my eyes while the others stirred around for there own breakfast. Sleeping in the open under the stars has always been a favorite way of mine to spend a night and having slept well this particular evening, I was refreshed and ready to tackle our objective.

The west ridge of Paisano Pinnacle, though not a particularly difficult climb, provides for some great views of the Washington Pass area. While looking up towards the route from camp, it is seen as a distinct and abrupt ridge that crests at summit of Paisano, just above Burgundy Col to the southwest. When looking from the north it is hard to make out the ridge line at all, since the rock blends with the west buttress of Burgundy Spire just beyond to the south. Considering that the approach trail parallels the ridge to the north, this make finding the start of the route a bit tricky.

Paisano Start

As we walked back up the trail that morning, we came to the stream we had gotten water from the day before. Once again, we drank up and filled up with water for the day and then made a direct traverse to where we believed the route began. This traverse proved to be the crux of the route, as there is no path across the loosely filled scree gully. We clawed, slid, and surfed our way across to the base of where we believed the route started; below an obvious treed bench on the ridge. Finding a nice series of ledges below our start, we threw off our packs and started to gear up.

We roe-sham-boed for the first pitch and Eric got the short straw. I grabbed the rack and runners and tied into the double-ropes that we had brought for the weekend. As I looked above for the first moves, it appeared that the moss filled groove that I was about to head up into had not been climbed before. Making my way up and I cleaned a few cracks of tuft to place gear into and stemmed my way across a sandy ledge. Soon enough though, I pulled myself onto the little ledge we spied from our watering hole on the other side of the approach gully. Above me, the ridge made a sharp point with the southern flanks dropping hundreds of feet to another gully that separated Paisano from Burgundy.

Eric on Lead

From this spacious ledge, I belayed Eric up to me and we swapped gear so he could lead the next rope length. He climbed around some blocks and then up a low angled crack that could be seen from below, so I took a few pictures. Before I knew it, he setup a belay at the top of the crack and I put the camera away and shouldered my pack and followed the rope up to his perch. The next pitch wound around to the left and then up a crumbly set of cracks and flakes that ended in another spacious ledge below a twin set of cracks. The views to the west were enormous, with many of the peaks of the North Cascades still showing their wintry blankets of snow.

Hanging Out

It was Eric's lead and starting up the twin cracks, he grunted and pulled through to the top in good style. From there, he disappeared over the bulge above and I sat in solitude paying out rope, listening to the sounds of the highway thousands of feet below. Once I heard the call that he was off belay, I quickly grabbed my camera and set the timer for a self-portrait as he pulled up the remaining rope. Before the rope came tight, I had my camera put away and my pack on my back again, ready to follow his lead.

The twin cracks above the belay led to a narrow ridge with a hand traverse across a few hundred feet of exposure and then to the left side of the ridge-line. This short traverse put us about 80 feet below the ridge, at a small ledge with a few shrubby trees crowding it. I stepped over Eric and grabbed the gear from him while still on belay; not only to save time, but so as to not make the crowded ledge even more so. Once I had quickly sorted through the rack and gotten all the runners, I was off to try and find a way back up to the ridge.

I led up and right, around a small overhang and then across flakes directly above the belay stance that Eric found himself crammed into. From here, I continued the upwards traverse to the right on good features, back to the ridge line. By the

time I reached the ridge, the rope felt as though it was trying to pull me backwards due to the severe amount of drag on the winding path I took. Grabbing a few loops of rope in my hand to ease the pull, I scrambled up to a spacious ledge and looped my daisy chain around a tree for a belay. It was no more than about five minutes after getting Eric on belay that he popped his head around the corner just down hill from my new ledge.

Once again, we made haste switching around gear so that he could take the lead and a few moments later he was off. This sixth pitch was one of the best, leading up from the ledge I was lounging on to a series of blocky steps capped by an short, overhanging off-width crack. Fortunately for us, we had brought the #4 camalot, which made the moves, though only 5.8, a lot less nerve racking. Following this stellar pitch made me wish I had lost the roe-sham-boe match that had started our climbing for the day.

Topping Out

At Eric's belay, I reracked and quickly sped up the last remaining bit of the ridge to the top of the pinnacle. I paused for a minute or so on the last bit of unprotected slab climbing that finishes the route, contemplating how well I had placed the #1 TCU that was now about fifteen feet below these final moves. Finally on top, I dragged the rope to a large block and slinged it with a few opposing slings and setup a belay. Just as Eric came over the top, I snapped a photo of him candidly enjoying the views to the west.

Spending only a minute on the summit, we discussed adding on the top four pitches of the North Face of Burgundy as dessert. Looking at the time though, we reconsidered and made the two quick rappels down to Burgundy Col. Once back on the ground, we changed into our boots again and I pounded down the remainder of lunch that I had been munching on. Wasting little time, we packed up and started the march back down to camp.

Back in camp, we found both Mike's had again failed on their objective, though Dr. Mike had managed to make it up one more pitch than the last time he had tried that particular line. We sat around for a bit packing and eating while the bugs in camp began to become more and more fierce. In no time, everything was in our backpacks and we were back on the trail for the trudge back to the cars.

Unbelievably, this downhill walk took us nearly as long as the uphill hike due to the steepness of the path. Other than the pain of walking downhill for so long, the trek was otherwise rather uneventful. It was all worthwhile though, because waiting in the cooler in the back of the car was a few beers that were calling our names.