

Pulling Teeth

Contributed by weekendclimber
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Molar Tooth

Having let myself get a little out of shape in the past two months, when a friend talk to me about doing a trip this last weekend I was a bit worried I would get my ass handed to me. When my watch alarm woke me up at 4:00am on Saturday morning, I took a moment of silence to ask myself if I felt like I would be up for this. Our objective for the weekend was a long traverse that included four summits just North of Rainy Pass dubbed "Four Sheets to the Wind". As I passed in and out of a sleepy consciousness on the drive up, I had that butterfly feeling in my stomach which gave me a bad omen. Maybe it was the fact that there was a 50/50 chance of thunderstorms forecast for the evening and we were going to sleeping in bivy bags all night long. Maybe not.

Elk in Headlights

Having climbed with Alex many times before, I was surprised by the fact that he wasn't quite cracking the whip as I usually have expected when we loaded everything into his car. We made the dark and wet drive up to Rainy Pass (aptly named in this case) which seems to go quicker in the gloomy glare of a headlight halo. Making good time we pulled into the trail-head parking lot about 7:35am and to our surprise we find that there was about 250 neon-spandex laden trail runners getting warmed up. Apparently we picked the weekend for the annual Cutthroat Classic Trail Race that uses the same trail for the approach to Cutthroat Pass. We made haste in packing our packs; start time was 8:00.

Hornet's Nest

We got off a little more than ten minutes before the first runners started and didn't get very far before the first runners started to pass us. About a mile or later, as the runners were still passing us at a fairly fast clip, a low hanging hornets nest made for an unintended trail detour. Several runners noticed it immediately and made a beeline (no pun intended) uphill for the trail, which switch-backed a few hundred yards ahead. This, along with the dodging of runners every 30 seconds, provided a bit of extra objective danger to the approach.

Into the Clouds

Fortunately, it only took about 45 minutes or so for the slowest in the group to finally pass us and from then on we had a bit of solitude. After reaching Cutthroat Pass, we headed to the base of the North Ridge of the Molar Tooth to the southeast, which we reached at about half passed 10 o'clock. I put on all my extra clothes once we stopped and began to gear up for

the climb ahead as I slowly began to freeze. While belaying Alex up the first pitch, I realized that it was pretty cold for August and that maybe I should have brought some warmer clothes. The wind was picking up and clouds began to stream across the rock in front of us as we were on one of the highest points around.

On top the Molar

I followed Alex's lead through the broken corner system that starts the ridge, and to where he setup his belay on a flat spot on the North Shoulder. From there, we did a short, easy simul-traverse across the shoulder to the base of final pitch, all the while trying to keep our limbs from becoming solid blocks of ice. It was hard to imagine being so cold in the middle of August, but it was quickly becoming apparent that fall was upon us. I led the last pitch to the top and brought Alex up to me as the clouds started to disperse and provide a look at the traverse from the summit of the Molar Tooth.

Tooth Decay

The entire traverse includes four peaks: the Molar Tooth, Cutthroat Peak, and Whistler Mountain. Once on top of the Molar Tooth we took a look across the broken valley to the south and decided that with the inclement weather and the low temps we could probably bag the route, but would be miserable while doing it. So instead, we chalked up another failure, and took a leisurely walk back to the cars snapping photos of potential new routes and mushrooms.