

Draft II - Trip Report by Kurt Wibbenmeyer

COLORADO MOUNTAIN CLUB FAIRWEATHER MOUNTAIN EXPEDITION – 2010

TEAM	Rich McAdams – Leader	Bill Blazek
	Mike Butyn	Dave Covill
	Wayne Herrick	Jim Rickard
	Gerry Roach	Kurt Wibbenmeyer



L to R – Dave, Kurt, Rich, Bill, Wayne, Gerry, Jim, Mike

Day 1 – Saturday, May 8, 2010

The team caught a flight from Denver International Airport at 8:00 am and changed planes in Seattle, WA then landed in Juneau, AK before noon local time. We caught a small 10 passenger plane at the Juneau International Airport and were bound for the Haines, AK airstrip. The weather was warm and sunny in Haines and our bush pilot Drake Olson of Fly Drake wanted to fly the team onto the Grand Plateau Glacier right away. Drake's glacier plane can only accommodate 2 passengers and mountaineering gear so he asked his neighbor pilot, Paul to fly 2 flights of 2 mountaineers to get all of our team on the glacier before dark. We were dropped off at the elevation of 9,800 ft. In less than 12 hours we traveled from Denver to the Grand Plateau Glacier. The temperature was 15° F but sunny on

the glacier and we all got to work quickly digging a tent platform and erecting snow block walls for wind protection. We dug 2 latrines. This would be our Base Camp.

Day 2 – Sunday, May 9, 2010

The overnight temperature dropped to -10° F. We rose from the sleeping bags at 8:00 when we felt the warmth of the sun's rays on the tent. It took the team 3 hours to cook breakfast, melt snow for the day's hike and pack up for the supply move up the mountain. Our plan was to carry climbing gear and 8 days of food up 2500 ft. to stash in the location of our high camp. Half way up we stopped at a camp of 2 guys named Chris and Jeff from Spokane WA, Gerry knew Chris from a climb they did together 20 years earlier. We proceeded up the glacier crossing over snow bridges. We stashed the gear at 12,300 ft. elevation and headed back to Base Camp.

Day 3 – Monday, May 10, 2010

Our team rose at the same time as Sunday but it took longer to pack up the tents. We left 1 tent up for emergency use and as a place to store food and gear for our return. Based on communication with the other team from Washington, they also move to the High Camp. A location was chosen for the tents and digging began but due to the slope it was more trouble than Base Camp. Jim calculated from the map that we were 1 mile from the summit and 3000 feet below. Mike started a latrine pit but I finished it, digging it 4 feet below the surface with a deeper trench. Wind began to blow at 9:00 pm and snow came later.

Day 4 – Tuesday, May 11, 2010

The snow and wind continued all night and created drifting mounds everywhere including in the tent vestibule and between the fly and the tent body fabric, even into my boots. We shoveled the drifted snow from around the tents and snow block walls. The blizzard continued all day as we read books and played games between snow shoveling every few hours. It was a complete white out all day and we heard falling seracs. We now were worried about avalanche danger. The drifting snow filled in the latrine; we put out wands to the toilet area to find our way back to the tent.



Photo by Jim of High Camp in blizzard

Day 5 – Wednesday, May 12, 2010

The day was much the same as the previous day. It was estimated that total snow fall from the 3 day storm was 2-3 feet.

Day 6 – Thursday, May 13, 2010

The first class blizzard continued over night but there was a short break in the storm and it was decided to move camp lower before we were caught in an avalanche. The white out returned by the time we (all 10 from 2 teams) were packed up. The guys with GPS units had them ready to navigate but the wands we placed along our trail days earlier were the best guide element even though the fallen snow covered all visible surface evidence of our trail. We alternated leaders due to the difficulty of breaking trail in the soft snow. At the location of the Washington team's camp (later Gerry named it the Mezzanine Camp) our team decided to continue down to our Base Camp for refuge. It took some work to get our camp into shape but it was nice to have a good safe camp.

Day 7 – Friday, May 14, 2010

The sun came out. Our team decided there were 2 major tasks to complete in the next 2 days, move to the Mezzanine Camp and put in fixed ropes to get across the bergschrund. Drake flew in another team of 6 climbers, 4 men and 2 women. It is a guided team run by Alaskan Mountain Guides. A rope team of 3 guys from our team, Rich, Bill and Dave, made a carry to the Mezzanine Camp. The other 5 of us rested.



Photo by Kurt of Fairweather below saddle ridge

Day 8 – Saturday, May 15, 2010

We left Base Camp at 11:00 with everything we needed to set up tents at the Mezzanine Camp. The Washington climbers welcomed us and then broke trail in the snow up to the High Camp area. A rope team from our group consisting of Wayne, Jim and myself followed them up. They turned back at High Camp and we continued up to the bergschrund. The snow bridge looked substantial and we belayed Wayne across. Jim and I followed across and up the bank. We dug 2 pits and set 2 snow flukes deep for anchors then tied rope on setting up a fixed rope across the snow bridge. We spotted a ramp with access to the top of the saddle ridge. It was 6:00 and Wayne wanted to go farther but Jim and I was cold and wanted to get to camp. That evening after dinner Jim, Wayne and I were discussing the day and thought that tomorrow may be the best day to go for the summit after fixing another rope. Wayne spoke to Rich and he concluded with us and it was decided to leave camp at 8 am.

Day 9 – Sunday May 16, 2010

Mike's knees were hurting him and he decided to fly out today since Drake was also picking up the Washington team. Dave and Bill broke trail to High Camp leaving at 8:25. Rich joined Jim and me on our rope to make 3 rope teams for the day. We left at 8:35 and reached the High Camp at 11:00. Wayne and Gerry left at 9:00. At High Camp we collected the stashed climbing protection gear, then Wayne and Rich switched rope teams so the 3 of us that placed the fixed rope yesterday would be together for the next fixed rope. Above the first fixed rope we switched our snowshoes for crampons. Above the ramp we spotted yesterday there was another narrow crevasse we climbed above and set up an anchor using 1 picket buried deep in the snow. We continued up to the ridge, I was in the lead but was hesitant to go all the way to the top for fear of there being a cornice. I noticed Jim in the middle rope position moved up to the edge to see the Glacier Bay of the Pacific. I told him I had cornice phobia since I fell through one last year on Mt. Columbia.

Wayne led the rope team as we continued south along the ridge down to the saddle; at that point Jim told us he wanted to turn back but wanted us to keep climbing. I did not want him to go back alone but he convinced me it would be safe to get back to the other teams on his own. Later he told me he felt a sense of foreboding. Wayne was strong and continued to up the ridge to Fairweather. The other rope teams turned back at 13,400 ft. at 3:00. I had a personal radio and Jim would call us every hour for encouragement as he watched us climb. The climbing conditions were varied above 13,500 ft., always with a concern for hidden crevasses but typical for this type of mountain. The maximum steepness was 45°. We stayed roped but never put in any protection. Wayne and I reached the summit at 5:00 pm. It was an ice domed summit. We took pictures of each other and went to the northeast side out of the wind for rest, food and water. I made a radio broad cast to the team that we were on the summit. We spotted what we think was Mt. St. Elias and Mt. Logan. I told Wayne I wanted to go back to the summit and get a photo of the 2 of us together. On the way up he put his foot through a small crevasse so I said, "Lets skip it and get down."



Wayne on Fairweather summit, photo by Kurt

We moved quickly down but stopped to photograph the sun reflecting off the Bay. Jim spotted us on the ridge from the Mezzanine Camp and gave us a radio call. We discussed pulling the fixed ropes but decided to leave them for the guided team. We got back to camp at 8:10 pm., less than 12 hours after leaving for the climb. Many of the team was out to welcome us after our success.



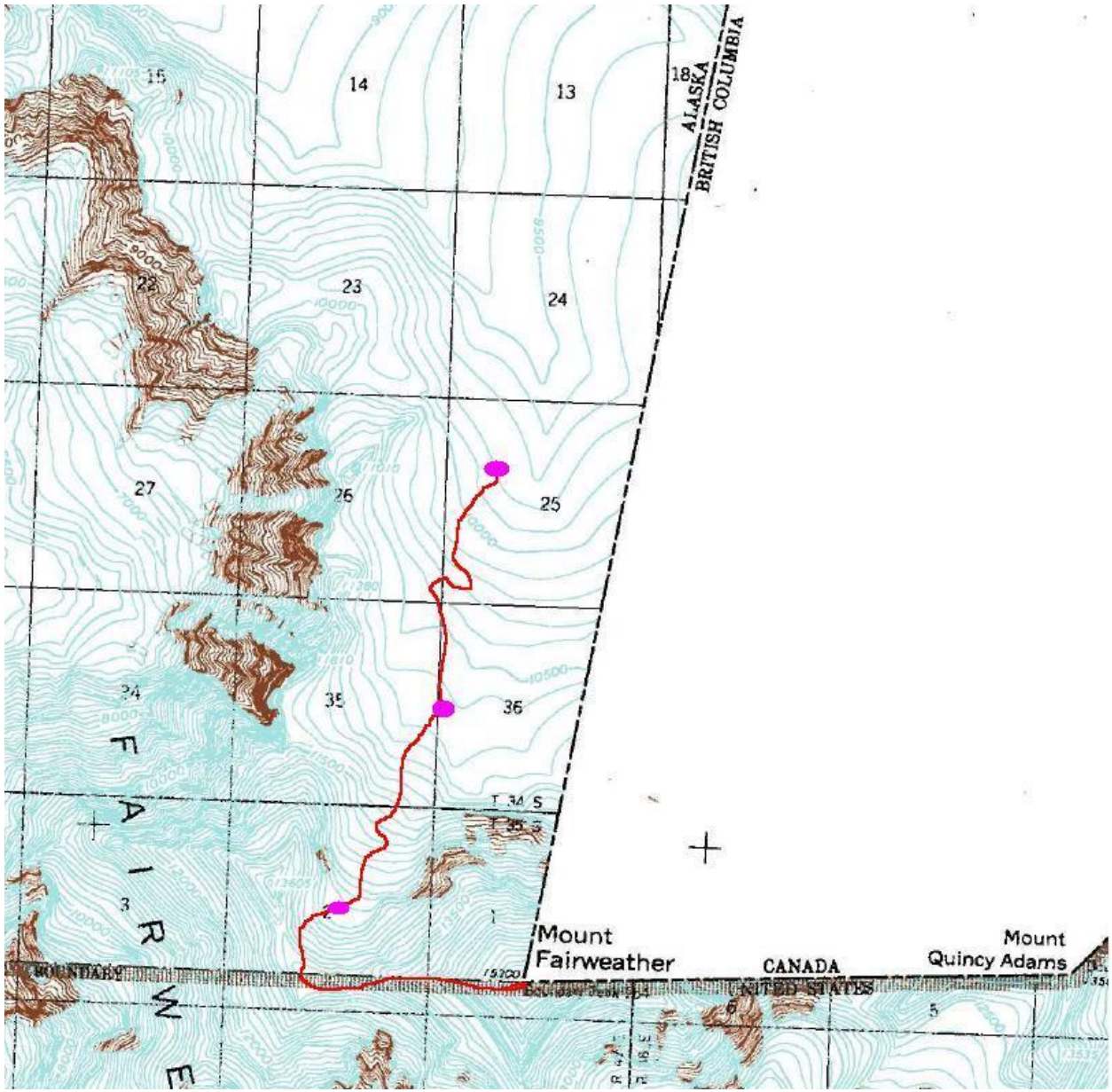
Wayne on Fairweather ridge with Glacier Bay in distance, Photo by Kurt

Day 10 – Monday, May 17, 2010

Drake, the pilot was due to pick us up at Base Camp at 10:00 am. We were up early to pack up camp and head down. We also had to pack up the Base Camp tent. We told the guided team the mountain conditions and what they would find up there. Jim and I were the first 2 to fly out. Drake was able to fly all 7 of us back to Haines in 3 flights. We were all back to Haines by mid-afternoon. That evening we had a 4 ½ hour celebration dinner at Halsingland House.



Drake Olson landing on the Glacier, Photo by Kurt



Fairweather Mountain Route Map