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VOCene #1 - 13 June 2004

Upcoming Trips

1) SON OF ROCK

What: Climbing school...and potluck.

When: Saturday June 19th, 9:00am - 3:00pm. (weather permitting)

Where: Little Smoke Bluffs, Squamish

Who: people with some climbing experience who want to learn or brush up on some cool

climbing skills and tricks.

people with more climbing experience who want to teach other people said techniques and tricks.

Why: Because. Of course.

Send Fiona Campbell, fionaca@interchange.ubc.ca, an email if you are interested in participating or instructing and watch the message board for more details and information.

Club News

1) HARRISON HUT

Roland and Frank Baumann have been doing a brilliant job of organising some much needed maintenance work for the Harrison Hut. On 3rd June Roland, Nick Close, Nick Goban, and Sebastian Zimmerman flew in with Frank by helicopter. They repaired damage and painted the south end of the hut, the outhouse, they flew in a new stove, and flew out some garbage.

Important work that remains to be done is 1) to install a new door 2) to complete painting of the south/north of hut. Roland has already bought and painted a door, and yesterday (Sat 12) Frank flew it into the hut.

There will probably be another flight into the hut in mid-August to complete this work (access by foot is currently complicated by a washed out bridge across Meager Creek). Please follow the thread on the message board if you're interested in helping out.

2) CLUBROOM MOVE

The VOC clubroom is moving to new and improved quarters next to the Bike Kitchen at the north end of the SUB. Sprinklers, flooring and painting has gone in this week, with cabinets and shelves due to appear next week. The following week 21 - 25 June will be the big move!!! If you are around and can help out with the move, give Trish an email (P_Stathers@hotmail.com)

or a phone call (604-688-2248).

3) MESSAGE BOARD / WIKI / VOCENE

In today's wired world it's ridiculously easy to keep in touch, so:

- * Let us know about your amazing trip. Post your trip report in VOCene by emailing it to vocene@ubc-voc.com.
- * Use the message board to organise trips and events. Note that it's kosher to buy/sell stuff using this forum too.
- * Share your wisdom. The Wiki is an amazing tool that allows anybody and everybody to collaborate in a virtual VOC guidebook.

Trip Reports

Fairweather Tales, from Roberta Holden 7/6/04

It's been 10 days since we got off the mountain and you'd think that the small-town pace of life in Yakutat would afford a moment to write down a few words about our escapades on Fairweather. But the adventures continue on a smaller scale and have managed to fill the days quickly. Here are a few notes on our last adventure:

One sunny afternoon, the 9th of May, Eliris sailed up Tarr Inlet in Glacier Bay, pushing through some light brash ice at the head, and offloaded 4 happy climbers and their massive loads of gear. After bidding adieu to the faithful sailing crew (Hamish, Panya and Don), Vance, Cecelia, James and Roberta (the Fairweather Fairies to anyone monitoring on VHF at the time) hauled their unwieldy loads up the morainal debris at the foot of the Grand Pacific Glacier.

For the next few days we rode the Ferris Wheel. A route aptly named by Vance, for once getting on and reaching the top there was no choice but to stay on and arrive back at the starting point. We headed up the Ferris Glacier, a valley surrounded by spectacular steep walls. We traveled roped and hauled our sleds over the mostly mellow undulating, though sometimes broken terrain of the ablation zone and on up to the head of the glacier where we planned to climb a ridge to gain the Grand Plateau. The decision which sent us around the wheel was largely the result of an aborted late-night recce of the route by Vance and James. Just as they had geared up for another attempt, a large serac came crashing down near the route, about 1.5km away from our camp creating wind and spraying snow that shook our tent for several minutes while sparks lit up the cloud of snow like lightning. The whole area was impressively active and avalanches and icefalls resounded throughout the hot day. Despite some disappointment this decision was the right one and the magnificent landscape alone made the detour worthwhile.

We had made provision for the possibility of not making this route and had left a cache of food at the Ferris-Grand Pacific junction. Our plan B route was a large corkscrew up the Grand Pacific glacier joining the Grand Plateau glacier on the Gulf of Alaska side. The Grand Pacific is a large swath valley surrounded by unimposing peaks and the

mellow terrain allowed us a couple days freedom from traveling roped. Our traveling schedule had become a bit skewed. To avoid the heat of the day we skied late into the night, but had not managed to get onto a completely nocturnal schedule. The late afternoon heat did give us an excuse to enjoy a new treat introduced to us by Cec: ice cream! A concoction made from a dubious mixture of snow, GU, hot chocolate and milk powder. YU-UM! Travel on 2 sides of the day also gave Cece the chance to stretch her birthday over two days! A small project overlaid on this trip was to collect samples of ice worms at different locations for a DNA and taxonomy study. An unobtrusive activity and excuse for a few rest stops, the project added an interesting dimension for a group of scientifically-minded climbers.

As we descended the Grand Pacific towards the Gulf of Alaska, we had to temporarily drop out of the incredible sunshine we had been enjoying for the past week and into a low thick stratus layer that hung along the coast. The descent was fun and a few tele turns were had, though rope and sleds made it considerably more challenging. Skiing along a small ice ridge, we had just crossed some rocks on skis, when I dropped into a slot. Wedged good and tight in the ice by my hips and pack, and my head a foot below the surface, I was in a pretty funny predicament. From a distance Vance and Cec saw two poles wagging in the air, extensions of two arms loosely pinned in that position. Cec threw in an ice screw above to prevent me going deeper and with a good old Heave-Ho, grabbed my pack and haul! led me out.

The crux of this next leg of the journey was getting up an icefall to the upper Grand Plateau glacier. Perhaps it would not have been a crux had we been able to see the route for the cloud and taken the much more straightforward route we used for our descent. As it was we headed up the heart of the icefall in a whiteout. The snow bridges were sketchy at best and it was almost surprising that no one went in. We did have one victim in the form of Vance's pole, which was sadly consumed by the belly of a large crevasse. This particular crevasse was so hungry that it nearly ate up Vance and Cec's sleds as well, but thanks to some good rope work, were saved. As we neared the top of the icefall the cloud suddenly cleared for a spectacular sunset view over the ocean and mountains and our first sight of the nasty terrain we had just traveled through. Back in the sunshine and after another day's travel on the Plateau we reached our high camp at about 10 000ft. It was day 10 and we enjoyed our first rest day of the trip.

Summit Day! We awoke at 230am and were off by 345. The morning was cold, but the landscape was spectacular as the sun rose above it. About 2/3 of the way up to the col, we left our skis and donned crampons. It was windy. From the col on I was wearing everything I had, including down jacket. The views were spectacular: to the west, St. Elias, Logan, Hubbard, Alverstone, Vancouver, Alsek Lake, Dry Bay and the whole of our route out to Lituya Bay. It was very refreshing to finally be moving in a different style after hauling sleds on skis day after day. Our second tools were used more as pickets than anything else as we placed running belays and crossed a few crevasses without difficulty. I felt the altitude. First as a headache and then as a sense of clumsiness which Cec identified as Altaxia during our descent. The wind gusted to perhaps 80 knots (~100kph) near the summit. We were almost blown off our feet a number of times and had to brace hard. The celebratory moment at

the summit was short-lived as we hurried to get down out of the wind.

After a lazy morning, we headed back down to the top of the icefall the next afternoon and camped for the sunset views. An ingenious new use for an ice screw rounded off the evening. The next morning we descended a steep snow slope before picking up our cache and heading to Desolation Valley. We manoeuvred over the nose of the nunatak, through some nasty moraines and skied over some slush-covered blue ice overlooking our lake, before taking our skis off for the last time. We left the ice the next morning and headed into the most difficult conditions of the trip: a steep scree slope followed by thick slide alder and devils club. Travel slowed to a crawl.

After bashing through bushes and branches for a day and a half, we emerged on the far shore of the lake. The Lake! A most welcome sight for we are out of the trees at last! An excuse to stop, to procrastinate, before heading back into the bush. But now we had found a bear trail, a well-worn path, as good in places as a city-park trail. Hurrah!

And it led into an open forest, lush and green, with a floor covered by a carpet of moss, soft underfoot. The traveling had become unbelievably pleasant!

It didn't last long though before we were faced by a new challenge: crossing the river. Vance and James decided to do a recce, but not anticipating the strength of the river, did not take a rope. It was a sight to see: clutching each other as they crossed, one fell and the other pulled him to his feet, then the other had his feet swept out from under him and was pulled to his feet. They stood on the far shore like wet rats. "Throw us the rope!" they shouted. Cec and I scoffed: not likely could we throw that far! We picked up rocks and laughing, hurled them across to prove our point: they all fell far short. Eventually though, we worked out a system. We tied a rock to the end of the rope and while Cec swung in an offset-cowboy style (the "cowboy crossing" thus refers both to our rope throwing style and to the boys' "cowboy" heroics) I released the coils of rope (when this is ! not done in time the rock comes back and almost hits you in the head!). After a number of tries, we moved upstream to a narrowing where we succeeded in snagging a tree stump on the far side and the tyrolian was born. The first thing to send across was Cec's spare clothes. It was quite the sight to see two large boys (5'11" & 6'3") wearing the wardrobe of a 5'4" (and the important) girls clothes. The tyrolian was quite successful and after all our gear was sent across we had a great ride over ourselves. Vance had built a fire and we tucked into our super nice sand bar, riverside campsite.

The next day, after a short bushwhack, we arrived at the beach! A milestone. We were out, facing a huge expanse of ocean and an endless stretch of beach in both directions. The challenges were not over but this first stage of walking along soft, flat sand was very exciting. There was a big surf and the relentless power of the waves was impressive a surfers paradise (but I guess the word isn't out yet). The walking got more difficult as we reached the exposed point of Cape Fairweather and sandy beach turned to rocky coast. We found the bear trail that paralleled the coast in the trees, which was an improvement for a time, but then became more challenging as it side-hilled a steep slope and

caught our skis with its branches.

If you can measure the quality of a trip by the quality and variety of the campsites, then this alone would qualify it among the all-time greatest. This night we were camped on a thick mossy carpet on the shore of a picturesque kettle or pit pond.

We were measuring our progress to Lituya Bay by ticking off the rivers as we crossed them. 13 in total according to the map, but many had dried up, or were easily wadable. There was one though that we anticipated with forboding: ^The Slough^ (dum de dumm). The slough drained the lake at the base of the Fairweather glacier and looked to be a formidable body of water. Where it drained to the sea, a large standing wave formed where the flow hit the incoming surf. We moved up river in search of a route across. A beautiful large grizzly lumbered down to the far shore, considered us briefly and proceeded to swim across. He was swept downstream some, but with such great strength, crossed with relative ease. So simple in contrast to what we were about to undertake!

We found a site to set up a tyrolian, but the river was much wider than the last and the far shore anchor was at the top of a high embankment. So this is how it worked: James swam the river with the rope, upriver of the narrows and set up the rope with as much tension as he could get. Unfortunately this wasn't enough to keep Vance dry as he headed over to help at that end. Vance's tyrolian crossing was more like a chest deep wade through the fastest part of the river while attached to a rope, nearly getting swept off his feet several times. Next, we ferried over all the gear and retrieved the rope by clothesline. The haul line was not long enough to span the river, so we tied every tiny piece of rope we had together to retrieve it. This meant fully dismantling the sleds to recover every tiny piece of string, or dental floss as some of it amounted to. A 20cm ribbon was fair! game as was bungy cord. To prevent it from touching the water and breaking (it looked that fragile) we pinned it to the tensioned line with biners so that it really did look like a clothesline. Anyway, I'm digressing..So then Cec went across in great style and I dismantled the anchor and sent the rest across. Already quite hypothermic from standing in wet clothes in the rain, I put my clothes in my dry bag, tied it to myself and swam across. Despite my well planned great-circle route upstream, I ended up doing only a baby-circle route and got caught in the fast flowing V. Suddenly my bearing on land had disappeared and I was moving very fast. I sighted the branches of a fallen tree and was preparing to grab them as I passed, when my hand closed on what I guessed to be an underwater branch. I held onto it and soon discovered that it was the rope that Vance had neatly tossed me!

As we warmed ourselves by the fire (note I do not say dried, despite my firm, and completely erroneous, belief that I was immune to the rain when next to the fire and to the fire when wet), we had lunch allowing ourselves a wee bit more ration for our success. We had been a bit too cocky as we camped on the ice in Desolation Valley, estimating our time to get to the beach and hike to Lituya. We dumped some of our emergency food and immediately regretted it as we crawled through the bush at a snails pace. After lunch, James made a sat phone call to learn the very sad news that his mother had passed away while we were on the mountain.

Back on the shore and past the Cape, the beach turned to sand once again

and the traveling was fast and pleasant. At our radio sched, we called Eliris in Lituya Bay on the VHF and heard Hamish's voice for the first time since leaving them in Glacier Bay. It was a pretty exciting moment and we prattled on as if we had never talked to other human beings before. We were still 20 km away (that would be about 4 river crossings by our measurement system) so we found another perfect campsite on the beach by a river and ate everything left of our dinner supplies ^ it was a Feast!

The next day as we walked along the sand, we saw a most happy sight in the distance. Walking towards us was Hamish! And what's more, he came bearing a large picnic lunch including fresh bread he had baked! (We were none too subtle in our declarations of hunger on the radio!) So for the remaining 6km, or 1 river crossing, we had a 5th member of our group who guided us through the final bear trail network to the anchorage in Lituya Bay. Not only had we made the state of our bellies known to the Eliris crew, but a fishing boat in Lituya had also overheard our conversation and generously left Eliris 3 enormous Yellow Eye for our homecoming feast.

So here ends the story of this particular leg of our journey. We arrived at the boat on May 26th. The voyage from Lituya to Yakutat was about 90nm/ 18hrs along a coast that we had come to know intimately from the other perspective. We were afforded a spectacular view of Mt. Fairweather from the sea and bid her a fond farewell. It was soon time to bid farewell to the others too: Hamish, Don, Vance and Cec all headed off home (Panya had had to leave before we got to Lituya) and James and I are still here until Isabelle arrives next week. This changing crew is one of the best parts of the trip as we get to enjoy spending time with so many great people, but it is always sad to see them leave. Thanks to all the crew for making this such a great trip.

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