

World Wide Web Address: <http://lomaprieta.sierraclub.org/pcs/>

General Meeting

Date: September 12, 2006
Time: 7:30 pm
Where: Peninsula Conservation Center
3921 E. Bayshore Rd.
Palo Alto, CA

Program: A First Ascent of the East Face
of Mt Harrington,
Kings Canyon NP

Presenter: Rick Booth

During the time of July 21-25, 2006, Tom Malzbender and I hiked into Grizzly Lake with the intention of ascending the East Face of Mt Harrington which has apparently not been climbed. We found a great two pitch route just to the left of a direct shot up the East Face and managed to climb it without killing ourselves. This short slide show attempts to chronicle this ascent.

Directions: From 101: Exit at San Antonio Road, go east to the first traffic light, turn left and follow Bayshore Rd to the PCC on the corner of Corporation Way. A sign marking the PCC is out front. Park behind.

Proposed Sharsmith Peak

The April 1995 issue of Scree has an obituary of Dr. Carl Sharsmith, the beloved ranger-naturalist of Tuolumne Meadows in Yosemite. He entertained and educated almost every summer in Yosemite and taught at San Jose State the rest of the year.

There is a proposal to name a peak after him, Peak 12002 south of White Mountain Peak. The details are at <http://www.name4carl.org/>

-- Dan Anderson danx@drydog.com

Notice from the Vice Chair

Leaders of official PCS trips are supposed to require all participants to sign a waiver and then forward the original of this waiver to the trip scheduler, Bill Kirkpatrick, pcs2006@earthlink.net, or 28 N. First St., #100, San Jose CA 95113. The waiver can be downloaded from the PCS website, <http://lomaprieta.sierraclub.org/pcs/leaders/LiabilityWaiver.asp>

PCS Trips

PCS trips must be submitted through the Scheduler (see back cover for details).

Dates: September 10

Peaks: Mt. Ralston (9,235')

Class: 2

Leader: George Sinclair 916-390-6927

We will climb this peak as a dayhike from Hwy 50 near Camp Sacramento. Good elevation gain, but it is almost all on trail. Good views from top. May become a loop hike with at least one additional peak if there is sufficient interest. Call leader for details.

Dates: September 22-24

Peaks: Excelsior Peak, Glass Mountain

Class: 2

Leader: John Wilkinson, 408-947-0858, johnfw1@mac.com

Enjoy great views and easy scrambling as we climb these two

contrasting peaks. We'll camp near Virginia Lakes on Friday and climb Excelsior on Saturday, Glass Mountain on Sunday. Whether we drive out to the start of the Glass Mountain climb on Saturday afternoon or Sunday morning remains to be determined. This is a very suitable trip for beginners. Contact leader to sign up. Limit 12.

Dates: September 22-24, 2006 (Fri-Sun)

Peaks: Hawksbeak Peak (11,134)

Ehrnbeck Peak (11,240)

Class: 3

Map: Buckeye Ridge, Tower Peak 7.5 min.

Leader: Pat Callery, haishan1@yahoo.com

Enjoy an autumn weekend in a secluded corner of Yosemite climbing these rarely visited peaks. Those who have approached Tower Peak from Leavitt area may recognize Hawksbeak peak as the stunning vertical fin visible above Piute Meadows at the head of Walker Canyon. We'll climb it from the other side, via the Class 3 south ridge, after hiking in from Twin Lakes trailhead. Depending on time and energy we'll consider tackling other local peaks like Ehrnbeck, Center Mountain, and Crown Point. Given the very long hike in and plethora of fine peaks in the area, we'll make this an enjoyable 3-day weekend trip.

Dates: October 7, 2006

Peaks: Mt. Whitney

Class: 2-3

Leader: George Van Gorden vangordeng321@aol.com

Co-Leader: Bill Kirkpatrick wmkirk@earthlink.net

We will climb the peak in one day going up the mountaineers' route and coming down by the Whitney trail. If there is snow in the upper part of the chute we will need crampons and an ax. Experience with crampons and knowledge of and ability to self-arrest required. Our pace will be moderate to a little faster than moderate.

Dates: October 7-8, 2006

Peaks: Mystery Peak (6,687 ft)

Class: 1-2

Leader: Debbie Benham, H: 650/964-0558,
deborah05@sbcglobal.net

Co-Leader: Joerg Lohse, JoergPCS@gmail.com

Come meet the bad boy bears of Hetch-Hetchy! Come enjoy the last clear days of the Sierra with this late season carcamp at Hodgdon Meadows Campground. Saturday, we'll hike up our Mystery Peak; Sunday we'll find something to summit. \$5 nonrefundable campsite fee holds your spot. Contact either leader to sign up.
PS: Feel free to come for the day if you're not up for camping!

Dates: October 27-28, 2006

Peaks: Mt. Langley

Class: 1

Leader: George Van Gorden vangordeng321@aol.com

We will meet at the trailhead around noon and hike into our camp in about three to four hours. We will climb the peak on Sat. and get back to our cars before dark. This is a good trip for beginners although it could be chilly.

Trip Reports

Mt. Tom

July 22-23, 2006

By Kelly Maas

Mt. Tom is one of those Rodney Dangerfield peaks that just doesn't get much respect. We've all seen it as we drive down 395 into the Owens Valley, but somehow it looks too close, too easy and too boring, even if it is over 13600 feet. It doesn't help that Roper describes it as an "enormous, dry hulk of a mountain". Secor is a bit more neutral: "the enormous mountain west of Bishop". For many years the adventurer in me eyed the long, straight north ridge that descends to Pine Creek, and I'd declare that "when I climb Tom, it's going to be in style – up the north ridge in a day." I would leave the road at 6000 feet and go straight up the ridge for over 7600 feet. But I wasn't sure how seriously to take myself. Then two years ago Landa and I attempted a similar but milder, pure and elegant ridge climb of Laurel Mtn. near Convict Lake. I came away from that unsuccessful attempt convinced that there must be a better way to climb Laurel. Sanity prevailed and my Mt. Tom north ridge dream died away.

Turn to July 2006. I wanted to lead a beginner climb, and our PCS emperor is named Tom. So Mt. Tom was a natural choice. It's well known that an old mining road leads half way up the mountain, and (my old version of) Secor describes the route as class 1. But I figured it must certainly be class 2 – as described in Roper; just right for a beginner trip. Who knows, maybe it would even have good views. But I was concerned that it might not be enough to satiate our group's climbing appetite, so I went back to the map to look for a second objective. Four Gables looked too difficult and committing from Horton Lake to be the secondary objective of a beginner's trip, but Basin Mountain looked like it might fit the bill. Once it was announced, two people quickly signed up to join Landa and me.

As we breakfasted at Erick Schat's Bakkery and waited for the Bishop ranger station to open, it occurred to me that I should

have called ahead to ask them to leave my permit out...what a Homer! [Note that Inyo N.F. will no longer leave permits in the night drop box if your destination is inside Kings Canyon or Sequoia National Parks. Boo, hiss.] We got away from Bishop at 8:30 am and started hiking at 9:30.

The Horton Lake trailhead is pretty easy to reach from Bishop. Once on Buttermilk Rd., just follow the main track for about 6 miles. A small sign indicates Horton Lk TH to the right. There are definitely limits to how far you want to take a regular passenger car, but you may want to try going further than the 0.5 mile that Secor suggests. With a higher clearance vehicle you can drive a mile further.

Even as we ascended the dry slopes of the Owens Valley we discovered that mosquito season was indeed in full swing. We also couldn't help but be amazed by all the flowers. I was particularly impressed by the awesome display of big white prickly poppies. As we ascended the Horton Creek drainage, we gradually realized that the pointy peak at the head of the valley wasn't Four Gables. Four Gables is actually rather inconspicuous from this angle. The better looking peak is actually a satellite, about 2/3 mile NNE of Four Gables – Peak 12,808. I see on the web that the name "Horton Peak" has been proposed for it, but I don't know if that's official. More on "Horton Peak" later.

It was a bit after noon when we reached Horton Lake, so we set up camp and ate lunch. Mt. Tom was declared to be the first objective, so we set off slowly up the former mining road, marveling that people once drove vehicles up this crumbling mountainside. To the south we could see dark clouds building. From the hanging valley to the SW of Mt. Tom, the way to the top appears quite obvious. Although the scrambling wasn't difficult, neither was it entirely class 1. And it looked like it might get harder up above. But our eyes continued to watch the rain, which was far away but moving our direction. Before too long, as the thunderclaps echoed, it became clear that it was time to turn around. The summit would have to wait for another day, and we retreated to camp. Somehow we missed most of the rain, but lightning crashed all around. None of us regretted the decision to turn around. In camp a cold wind blew, in stark contrast to the almost sweltering conditions we had experienced on the hike in. But we were glad to be rid of the mosquitoes. Dinner was spiced up with wild onions growing at the lake. Yum.

About 3:00 am rain drops began falling on the tent. I concluded that the weather was broken and we would not be climbing in the morning. Although the rain stopped, I let our designated wake-up time slip by. As we leisurely ate breakfast, we saw that the weather was improving. "Do we go for it?" The answer was "yes," but which peak? There were good arguments both for the new peak – Basin – and for going back to Tom. We quickly settled on Tom and loaded up our day packs.

Quickly returning to our previous high point, I gazed over at "Horton Peak," noticing the attractive snow couloir on its NE side. I don't know if it's a year-round feature or if it's only an early to mid season snow climb. If anyone has reports from other times of the year, I'd be interested in knowing. It's probably best approached from the eastern Gable Lakes.

Higher up, the ridge appeared narrower and steeper and we wondered if we should stay low (mostly on the left) to avoid the difficulties. It turns out that much of the ridge can be taken direct or nearly so. It's also true that you'll have to work hard to find a way that doesn't involve at least a couple of class 3 moves. None of us were complaining, but the non-trivial terrain

did slow us down. The word "enormous" kept coming to mind. From Horton Lake to the top took a bit under 4 hours for our strong group. The view from the top is indeed impressive, partly because Mt. Tom is offset from the main crest. But we again saw rain clouds building, so we didn't linger long on top. We also had to drive home that night, but there was no way to move quickly over all the broken rocks.

The going got better back on the "road," and we were back at camp in 3+ hours. We enjoyed watching the dark clouds wander by as we hiked out, but we cursed the many mosquitoes that swarmed over us as we passed the wetter areas. As we drove north to dinner at the Whoa Nellie Deli, the entire Sierra from Bishop to Yosemite was enshrouded in sinister dark clouds. We wished luck to any friends who might be in the Sierra for longer trips right then. We got home late, but it had been an enjoyable and rewarding weekend.

Participants: Chris Prendergast, Toinette Hartshorne, Landa Robillard and Kelly Maas (leader and scribe).

Starlight Buttress Attempt / Mt Sill – Swiss Arete

July 1-4, 2006

By Rick Booth

This trip was mostly focused on climbing Starlight via the Starlight Buttress. Mt Sill was secondary. It turned out the other way around.

July 1 Matt Laue, Linda Sun, Dee Booth and I headed up the North Fork of Big Pine Creek Trail headed for Gayley Camp. We made our way up into Sam Mack Meadow, which now was mostly clear of snow compared to two weeks previous, and then up the un maintained trail that leads up toward the glacier. This had the usual snow patches on it and at about 11,500 feet the area was pretty much blanketed with snow. This is convenient since hiking in the snow is easier than negotiating the rock shelves there. Unfortunately at about this elevation Matt started experiencing altitude sickness. At approximately 11,700 feet Matt ground to a halt. This was near a rocky section with flat spots here and there and a water trickle so we decided to stop here instead of forcing our way up to Gayley Camp. Matt opted to try and make it through the night and see how he felt in the morning.



Part of the Palisades group on July 2, 2006
V-Notch Couloir, Polemonium, U-Notch Couloir, North
Palisade, Starlight

At 4 AM Sunday morning we checked on Matt. He wasn't going anywhere up. Linda graciously offered to take Matt down to a lower elevation while Dee and I would try and climb the Starlight Buttress. Dee and I packed up and off we went. When arriving at the bergschrund guarding the couloir to the left of the buttress it appeared to be all overhanging, like a cornice, and certainly without a snow bridge. We could see rap slings hanging all over here and there on the rock to the right so we decided to attempt a direct approach to the buttress. This we did. I lead up to a little shelf and was confronted with a fixed piton in a corner. Getting past this fixed pin was about 5.9. This brought us to a second shelf just below a flared slot. I headed up this thing and continued up the broken face to the right for about 100 feet to a shelf with yet another rappel station. This was maybe no more than 5.7 to 5.8 but was awful climbing with a pack. At this point we threw in the towel since we had a long ways to go and we had burned a good chunk of the morning thrashing on the direct approach.



The bergschrund guarding Starlight Buttress

I rappelled off the station and we dropped back down to the glacier. Dee and I then went around to the right and checked out the start of "Piper at the Gates of Dawn" which looked like it had a far easier bergschrund problem to solve, like no problem, since it had a snow bridge. After that we went around poking ice axe holes here and there in the glacier and checked out the U-Notch Couloir and environs and wandered back to our campsite on the rocky ridge. Palisades 1, Rick and Dee 0.



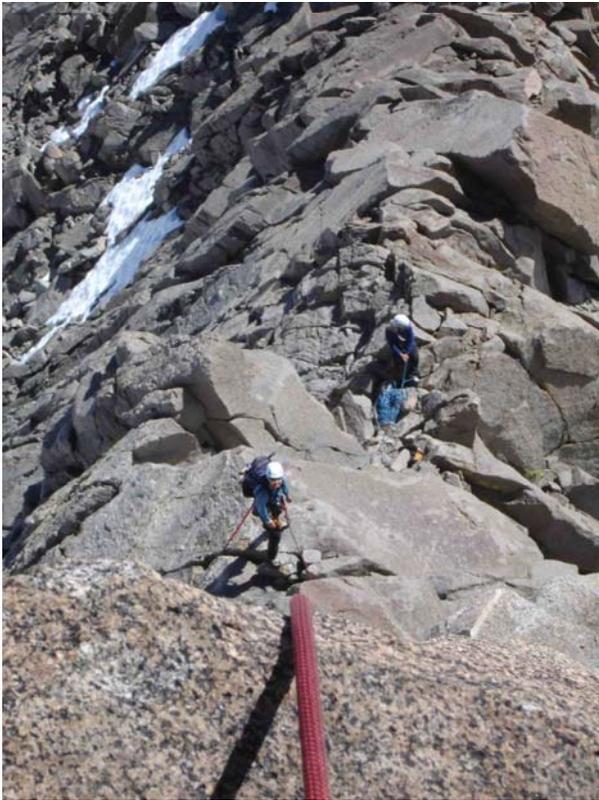
Dee Booth below the U-Notch bergschrund

About an hour after arriving back at our camp we were joined by Linda. She had taken Matt down to Third Lake and set him up near the water and left him the keys to my 4Runner. It turns out Matt slept there for a while, pounded down some water, and then made it down the trail to the parking lot. He then drove into Big Pine where he treated himself to the worst dinner at the worst restaurant in the world. I always figured altitude sickness was bad for you but I never imagined this sort of consequence!

On Monday morning at about 5:15 AM, Dee, Linda and I headed up for the Swiss Arete on Mt Sill. We hiked up the snow and rock to Gayley Camp, which was astonishingly deserted on a July 4th weekend, and headed out on the glacier. Putt, putt, putt, across the glacier and up towards Glacier Notch. Scramble, scramble, scramble, up the loose dirt, scree, and talus to the notch. Putt, putt, putt up the L-Shaped snowfield. Oops, left turn onto the rock to the left to get on the saddle on the Swiss Arete. Climb, climb, climb, up one pitch. 5.6. Climb, climb, climb, some more to the start of the step over pitch. 5.6, maybe 50 feet. Climb, climb, climb, the step over and on up the hand crack just past the step over. Maybe 5.7 for the hand crack. The step over is maybe 5.6 but exposed. There is an escape further to the right on the shelf that avoids the hand crack but it had a pile of snow under it. This is supposedly easier. Climb, climb, climb, another pitch. Maybe fourth class. Climb, climb, climb, another pitch. Maybe 5.7? What's up with that weirdo finger crack thing that gets up a big block? And, just like the first time Dee and I climbed the Swiss Arete, the supposed squeeze chimney was nowhere in sight.



Two birds on the Swiss Arete, Dee Booth and Linda Sun



Looking down pitch one of the Swiss Arete

Now I was on the summit. Dee was up shortly, offered to sit on the summit to get out of the way, and was back in .5 seconds after confronting the icy gale blowing up the south side of Mt Sill. Linda was also up quickly. Eight hours from base camp. We signed the register, making note of Stephan's party which had summited the day before, and headed down to the rappel to get down to the shelf traversing under the west face. This was accomplished with the usual thrashing associated with long raps on relatively shallow terrain. Off across the ramp we went, and on down the L-Shaped Snowfield. Glissade, glissade, glissade, down the L-Shaped Snowfield. Scramble, scramble, scramble, down the junk on the west of the Glacier Notch. Putt, putt, putt, across the glacier, down through Gayley Camp, now occupied by two guys from Atlanta, and on to our bivy site.



Linda and Dee on the summit of Mt Sill
The North Palisade, Starlight, and Thunderbolt in the background

On Tuesday morning we hiked out, located Matt at the car, and drove home. Matt had recovered and was up to his usual tricks, running his mouth as usual. I felt sorry for the dudes from Atlanta. It was now raining.

References:

Climbing California's High Sierra, second edition, John Moynier and Claude Fiddler, The Globe Pequot Press (A Falcon Guide), 2002, ISBN 0-7627-1085-3. Good photo of the route.

The High Sierra, Peaks, Passes and Trails, second edition, R.J. Secor, The Mountaineers, 1999, ISBN 0-89886-625-1

Mt. Sill, Allan Bard, Shooting Star Guides

**Peak bagging in the Avenue of Volcanoes:
an Ecuador climbing trip.**

- Author: Arun Mahajan
- Dates: 9-22 Jul 2006
- Peaks: Cerro Pasachoa, Guagua Pichincha, Illiniza Norte, Cotopaxi, Chimborazo
- Place: South America
- Participants: Arun Mahajan, Dimitry Nechayev, Maja Engmark
- Difficulty: class 1, class 2, class 3, ice axe, crampons, glaciers, helmet, rope used, snow travel

The three of us, myself, Dimitry Nechayev and Maja Engmark spent two weeks in Ecuador eating potatoes, cheese, trucha, bananas, granadillas, melcocha and so on, although we stayed away from the local delicacy, cuy (a rat by any other name....). Somewhere in all this indulgence, we also managed to huff and puff our way up a few peaks. I am hoping that this little note about our trip will help in deciding among the various types of the excellent Ecuadorian banana chifle and if not too tired from eating them, maybe help you in your wanderings among the high paramo and the most excellent mountain scenery that is bang on the Equator.

Dimitry and I flew from the Bay Area into Quito and there met with Maja Engmark, an accomplished outdoorswoman from Denmark. We spent a couple of days in Quito paying the obligatory visit to the Mitad Del Mundo, a monument to mark the Equator that passes just north of Quito and getting our fill of the churches and other sights of this interesting city situated on a high plateau and ringed by hills. We also did two trips up a local peak, Loma Cruz, by way of the Teleferico, by far the more posh and civilised way of getting up any mountain instead of hiking like hicks. We managed to do a bit of hiking once at the top but mostly we drank the excellent coffee at the cafeteria up there. We also supped at the various restaurants in the Mariscal district, a happening place, although that is where all the tourists hang out, sort of like an uncrowded Thamel. We also visited The Magic Bean, the place mentioned in the Ecuador trip report by that great andinismo, John Zazzarra. To stretch the Thamel analogy further, The Magic Bean would be the Rum Doodle of Mariscal.

In Quito we also met Diego Zurita, one of Ecuador's best known guides who is a partner in Compania De Guias De Montana. We had arranged with his company to participate in their 'climbing special' which promised us five peaks in just under two weeks and Diego was to be our guide.

12 July 06: Pasachoa, 4200m/14000ft



We started walking at a hydro-electric station. Initially we were on a 'dirt road' which was heavily rutted. Pasachoa was visible straight ahead. When the road terminated at a fence with a servicable hut beyond, we jumped the fence to go right, angling on the slopes of the Andean highland grass, the paramo, till we got to a trail that made its way to a ridge. Another fence jump and more ridge walking, some steep, got us to a rest break spot with some shelter from the wind. Cotopaxi was visible through

the clouds and with its black summit wall, the Yanasacha face, looked like a snowy one eyed giant. We walked over some rock that was solidified lava and then to the summit. It was a beautiful day although a little windy and cool and we could see into Pasachoa's extinct crater which was filled up with trees. We spent 30 minutes at the summit, getting our lungs acclimated to the high altitude. The walk down was a little quicker but we compensated for that with a long lunch break. RT time: 6 hrs 45 mins, with 3.5 hrs to get to the top and that included many breaks. Just my kind of climb!

13 July 06: Guagua Pichincha, 4800m/15500ft.



Guagua (the baby) Pichincha is the highest peak on the Pichincha massif which is visible from Quito and is one end. The other end of this massif is Rucu (the old) Pichincha. Ironically, even though we were able to spot the Pichincha peaks on several days, we never really had a clear view of Guagua. It seemed to be in the clouds all the time. Whymper says that 'nothing more need be said about the ascent than that it might be made alone by any moderately active lad'.

We started off by parking the car on a flat spot along the road that continues on from the hamlet of Lloa. Another guided party (Eric and Elfie of Graz, Austria) with their guide, Marcial, parked close to us. Guagua was not visible due to the dense clouds. We continued along on the road switchbacking and gaining altitude quickly till we came to a refugio with spartan facilities. We took a break there and we were all breathing a little heavily because of the altitude. It was cold and slightly windy outside and visibility was poor.



We continued on the trail from behind the hut. The steep trail dropped us to the top of a ridge which was actually a crater rim. We had expected to see views of the bubbling crater far below us but the clouds robbed us of the sight. Here we turned right and followed the ridge which got steeper till the false summit and then some more scrambling got us to the true summit. Summit views were not extensive as one would expect because of the clouds but this peak, that is almost as tall as Mont Blanc, gave us some much needed acclimatization. For the return, instead of following the ridge back, we cut left, into the scree and that got us back down quicker and we were even able to bypass the refugio. We got back to the car at 2.30pm or so after having left it at 9.30am.

There is a fantastic report on climbing in the Avenue of Volcanoes by the great John Zazzarra which not only gives an idea of the climbing available in Ecuador but to also to gives a sense of the larger-than-life personality of John. In that report, he also uses Guagua as an acclimatization peak and as a filler between harder climbs.

14/15 July 06: Illiniza Norte, 5126m/17069 ft



Now, we left Quito and were to return only after a week or so. At this point, it felt as if our climbing was to begin in earnest.

The Illinizas, norte and sur, north and south, are respectively Ecuador's 8th and 6th highest peaks. They form two distinct peaks, separated by a saddle that has a basic refugio but the story goes that they were one large volcano. The more fanciful story is that one of them is a woman who was heartbroken when her father, in the fashion of fathers everywhere, took a dim view of her lover and took somewhat drastic steps to show his dislike and paid a wizard to convert the lover into a peak, Illiniza Sur.

Subsequently the wizard, taking pity on the pining woman converted her into another peak, Illiniza Norte and thus they stand, gazing eternally into each other's rocky profiles. Illiniza Sur also has a reputation as being one of the harder climbs in Ecuador while Norte is considerably easier.

The drive along the Pan American highway was interesting and we stopped for a bit at the small town of Machachi where a market was in full swing. Bananas, granadillas, yuccas and papayas jostled for space with car tires, chickens and metal tools. Onward to the township of El Chaupi and then up and up on a 4WD dirt road till an area called La Virgen. We were thankful to the skillful driving of Diego and he selected an excellent campsite on a spur road which had a stream nearby. There we pitched tents and decided to go for a walk in the direction of the Illinizas refugio. We got some acclimatization in by this walk and also got to study the route but the clouds soon closed in and it got cold, so we backed off and huddled from the cold wind into the large dinner tent and plotted the next day's climb. One of the interesting things of this trail was passing through a small cloud forest of polylepis trees.

The next day, we were up at 4 and after breakfast, were walking at 5.15am. It was cold, clouded over and windy and visibility was poor. Diego set a slow pace but we kept moving. We got to the refugio at 7.45am. There was moisture in the air which was settling on our parkas and packs as ice. Rime ice was everywhere, on the refugio and on the strange plants. The hut was at 15250ft. Then began the steep climb on the so called Normal Route up Illiniza-Norte. We could not see anything. We climbed on on the ever steepening trail and then we had to round the Paseo De La Muerte, the pass of death. While dramatic sounding, it is just exposed class-3 but in a high wind with the rime ice making the rock slick, this got to be somewhat spicier than the aji-con-chocos that we had eaten a couple of days before at lunch with the plato tipico (alert: more unnecessary Spanish words in the middle of a trip report) in

colonial Quito. After this bit, we dropped our trekking poles and did some more scrambling and there we hit snow, or rather hardened snow with the wind having cut strange patterns and shapes on it and soon we were at the summit which is marked by a metal cross. It was about 10am then. We took photos and rested a bit. The summit has a very small area. There were no views which was rather disappointing. I was expecting to see the incredible summit of Illiniza Sur from here and perhaps even the snow mushroom at the top, the El Hongo that had beaten back Whymper on two occasions. After some careful down-climbing back to the trekking poles, Diego suggested that we drop down by the North Face route and this would mean we would not be going back to the Paseo de La Muerte, the refugio and the saddle between the Illinizas. This sounded appealing at first but our concern level rose once again as the route was steep scree and the wind picked up some more and we were being buffeted so much that we had to crouch low to keep our balance. As it is, our outer layers were soaked because of the rime ice and moisture in the air and now this wind blew dust on them making us brown all over. But we kept moving as that was the only recourse and soon the angle eased up a little and we found ourselves in a beautiful mountainside with a verdant valley below us.

Once over a ridge, were back on the trail. We got back to camp at 12.45 and this gave us enough time to rest, get our clothes dried out and prepare for the next day. We ran into Elfie/Eric/Marcial once again. Maja also ran into Trudie/Rita who had prudently decided to back off from below the summit due to the high winds and the cold.



The next day, our day of rest, took us into the Parque Nacional Cotopaxi, to a beautifully constructed lodge called Tambopaxi which is on the north foothills of the immense peak, Cotopaxi, the mountain of moonlight, the necklace of the moon and at 19347 ft, the second highest peak in Ecuador and we had designs on it. Tambopaxi, with its log construction, reminds one of the lodge at Sunrise at the base of Rainier or the Timberline Lodge at the base of Mt Hood. It is an elegant building and very well appointed. It is advertised as an acclimatization center and is just under 12500 ft. The view of Cotopaxi from here is outstanding and we could make out the initial section of our route from here. It looked depressingly steep.



We set out for a long walk, the three of us, Maja, Dimitry and I. It was a wonderful afternoon. We walked over hills covered with knee high paramo. Some llamas grazing nearby completed the Andean pastoral effect. Dimitry and Maja decided to have a longer walk towards Laguna Limpiopungo while I headed back to the more civilised charms of Tambopaxi.

I have to make a special mention here of the excellent meals, the service and the appointments at Tambopaxi. If you go to Parque Nacional Cotopaxi, under no account miss out on this place. It also serves as a starting point for several hikes in the national park.

17/18 July 06: Cotopaxi, 5897m/19560 ft

Diego met us at Tambopaxi and also arriving was Patricio (Patto) the energetic assistant guide. Patto had just finished climbing Coto and was joining us for yet another visit just a day after. Amazing dude. The 5 of us + gear drove to the parking lot at the trailhead of the normal route for Coto. It was windy and cold but the sun was out. The dusty wind swept parking lot at 15100 ft makes one's head spin.



Our destination for that day was the Jose Ribas refugio at 15750 ft. Despite carrying backpacks and the cold/wind, we made the next 200m in about 45 mins walking over a moderately steep but wide scree path. The hut was crowded and noisy but some of the crowd thinned out shortly, probably day trippers turning back. Maja was not feeling too well so she decided to rest and Dimitry, Diego and I went to the glacier about 30 mins of uphill scree-walking away to practice our snow skills in the steep terrain. It was sad to see the recession in the glacier. Diego showed us a sorry looking island of snow and ice which had been part of the main glacier system and also showed us how far down the glacier used to go. I looked up at tomorrow's route with some trepidation. One of my friends, Dee Booth, who had been on Cotopaxi's summit just a few months back had warned me that the initial section was steep and that it had taken a lot out of her to get over it. Well, that was for tomorrow. So, we got back to the refugio, dined and pretended to fall asleep at about 6.30pm while yet another excellent sunset ended and brought out the stars.

Up at 12 into the surreal atmosphere that is so common in these huts with everybody clumping around in their plastic boots, the clank of gear and the glow of individual headlamps. I am never sure whether I am asleep or awake as I stumble along making sure that I have everything. By 1.10am, after downing a quick breakfast, all covered up to handle the cold we trooped out into the night. I was wearing five layers, I think, for my upper body and a neck gaiter, a balaclava and a windstopper cap. It was COLD but once we got walking, it was bearable and very soon we climbed the scree and got to the glacier where we put crampons and roped up. Me, Dimitry and Patto on one rope and Maja and Diego on another. Maja was still unwell but she was brave and decided to give it a go. Patto kept a steady pace and soon we hit the steep and icy section. The axe shaft would not sink well and we had to really concentrate on our footwork making sure that all crampon points stuck. This seemed to go on forever and it seemed that we were climbing from break to break...axe-step-step, the mantra to repeat over and over. I kept

telling myself that at some point of time in all this the so called 'fun' would begin.

At one point the angle eased a little and we took a break near what seemed to be a huge ice wall but right after that was another steep bit and then another steep section and then another. We passed fantastic shaped snow and ice structures but had neither the day light nor the time to stand and stare and snap pictures. Finally, the sun started to come up and we saw the unreal ice world that we were in. I looked at the horrible suncups that were tinged with black on the south side of the peak.

I am never going to complain about the Sierra Nevada suncups, ever! 'How much longer, Patto?', Dimitry and I asked. '20 minutes', said the laconic Patto. But only a steep dome started at us and not the summit, so we ploughed on. This section seemed especially hard but then as soon as we topped the dome the bright rays of the sun hit us on the face making us blink and scramble for our sunglasses. There were a few people there and we knew that we had arrived at the top. It was time to relax our guard just a little. It was 6.55.



A total of five hours and 45 minutes to get to the top...reasonably brisk although while climbing it had seemed a lot longer!

We saw Trudi/Rita there. Eric was on his way also. Clouds blocked the distant views but we could see the other giant, Chimborazo, in the distance. Someone pointed out Tungurahua. This volcano had just erupted a few days ago blowing ash in the air and causing a near panic in the town of Banos which was at its base. For just a little bit, the low clouds lifted and we could see one of Cotopaxi's amazing sights, a yawning 800 meter diameter crater on the southeast side. The warmth of the simmering volcano underneath is so strong that despite the altitude and the snow all around, the inner walls of the crater are bereft of snow.



Despite the sun, it was getting cold and at 7.20am or so, we roped up again and started the descent. Most of the parties had left already but some were still coming up. The descent went quickly enough. We passed by the amazing ice and snow shapes and this time we were able to stop and admire them. We could see the Illinizas very clearly and sometimes through the clouds, the summits of Cayambe and Antisana. The steep slopes did not seem

to be a deterrent on the descent and in just under two hours we were at the refugio. We said our goodbyes to Trudi/Rita and Eric/Elfie and left the Jose Ribas refugio and hiked out to the car. Then Diego dropped us off at a hacienda style hotel, Cuello De Luna which is just outside the southern entrance of the Parque Nacional. Apparently, Cuello De Luna means the Neck of the Moon....kind of goes with Cotopaxi which is the Necklace of the Moon and those of us on the lunatic fringe who want to climb high peaks. Thi hacienda is just off of the Pan American highway. It is yet another place that I would recommend, excellent in its design, amenities and locale.

The next day Diego came by and we drove to the scenic resort town of Banos which sits in a beautiful valley and under the brooding shadow of a 5000m volcano, Tungurahua, which had been showing its fiery side of late. A few significant eruptions had happened in the past few days and the road to Ambato was closed off. We stayed the night at a bungalow style hotel, the El Higueron, after having 'done' the quaint town of Banos. Diego's friend, William, who owns El Higueron, was an excellent host and his wife and daughter cooked up a great meal for us. It seemed that instead of staying in a hotel, we were guests with a gracious Ecuadorian family. William is also a climber and mountain guide. If in Banos, stay there. El Higueron is on a side street off from Oriente.

20/21 July 06: Chimborazo, 6310m/21012 ft



It is a long drive from Banos to the Carrel Refugio at the base of Chimborazo. This refugio is at 4800m and Chimborazo at over 21000 ft completely dominates the view. The earlier awestruck Europeans had called it 'one of the bigger things you will see'. The west face of Chimborazo with the large Thielman Glacier creeping down from the top is indeed an awe inspiring sight. The guidebooks suggest that climbs be done by the Normal or Castillo route and unless there is good amount of ice and snow, to avoid the southwest ridge route, also known as the Whymper Route.

Diego had climbed Chimborazo a few weeks back and had actually climbed it by the Whymper Route and that was supposed to be in condition. The better way to do this route is to start from the Carrel Refugio and head up the steep scree to meet the SW Ridge.

About 30 mins of uphill from the Carrel Refugio is the larger Whymper Refugio but since we were planning to do the Whymper Route, we decided to stay at the Carrel and so did all the other parties as word had reached them also that Whymper was in condition and Castillo not. Eric and Elfie were also there but Elfie was not going to climb as Cotopaxi had tired her out.

Ash from the erupting Tungurahua had peppered the gleaming dome of Chimborazo and instead of white, it had taken a greish tint. This ash had created other problems. Where it had landed, it had melted away the snow and that had subsequently hardened into ice. That evening we heard the guides involved in animated conversations. I had the sinking feeling that even they were not too happy about the iciness of the routes.

We again went to bed at 6pm or so with a planned wakeup time of 11pm. Hardly had we hit the sleeping bags that we were woken up. It was 10.30pm! Sleeping was futile. We followed the same drill, gear up and grab some breakfast and head out...it seemed to be even colder than that morning on Cotopaxi. Diego pointed us to some foxes which had come out to check us out. We could not make out their shapes, just their tiny eyes unblinkingly reflecting the light from our headlamps. We started walking on the steep scree. I looked at my watch. 11.30 pm. So you want to be a mountaineer, huh? You must be certifiably insane. Who does things like these? But after Cotopaxi, we were feeling acclimated and we were keeping pace with Diego and Pato. We continued climbing till about 2.30am and Diego thinks that we were at 5400m then. It was then that we hit the glacier. It was all ice with neither the axes nor the crampons making any impression. A party of climbers from France with

three guides were roping up just below us. Patto and Diego got into a conversation and Dimitry, Maja and I rested, huddling up in our down jackets from the cold and the wind. Diego told us that we should turn around. It was too icy to climb. He apologised but was firm. We all instantly agreed. From what he could tell, we would have to either do a belayed climb with tools or at least he and Patto would have to put up a lot of fixed rope. It was very disappointing to turn around especially since it had taken us four peaks and almost two weeks to get acclimated to these altitudes. The French continued on however. Slowly we made our way back to the Whymper refugio and then Carrell. We could see the bobbing lights of the French party as they tried to get from the SW Ridge via the traverse and eventually to the Normal Route. There was also a party attempting the Normal Route and we could see their headlamps as well. But soon, we could see the lights of the French party turning around. But then, we decided to turn in and perhaps grab a couple of hours of sleep at Carrel.

As we were getting ready to pack up and leave Carrel, we met the French party. They reported that they had turned back at the traverse because instead of snow, all they had found was a thin layer of ice and that was unprotectable. We never got to see Eric as they were still coming down but we assumed that they too had backed out somewhere along the Normal Route, above a section called El Corridor on the Normal Route.

Diego drove us back, making a detour via Riobamba. Maja and Dimitry decided to check out the town and take the bus back to Quito but I was happy to return to Quito. As Diego and I got back to our hotel we found out that due to some administrative glitch, they had given up our rooms to someone else. Diego, ever resourceful, found us rooms in another hotel just a few blocks away. The next day, Maja headed out to the Galapagos for a week of sight seeing and we said our goodbyes. Dimitry and I hired a taxi for the day and took in the sights and shopping of the market town of Otavalo, Cotacachi, and Ibarra and our trip to Ecuador came to a close.

I hope to visit Ecuador again. There are still many peaks to climb there and of course more types of aji and chifle to sample! Perhaps Chimborazo's routes would be in condition then.

Some final notes. If guided climbing is your choice then the Compania De Guias De Montana is one of the best around. I am grateful to the advice and information about Ecuador given to me by my friends and others on the Climber.Org mailing lists including Dee Booth, Kelly Maas, Paul Wilms, Aaron Schuman, Steve Landis, Paul Wilson and Bob Ayers. The trip was enjoyable because of my companions, Dimitry Nechayev and Maja Engmark and would not have even happened had it not been for Dimitry who did all the research and picked up Compania De Guias as our guide service. Diego Zurita was a great guide and mountaineer.

References:

- Ecuador, A Climbing Guide by Yossi Brain, Mountaineers Books
- Ecuador, The Bradt Climbing and Hiking Guide, 5th ed, Rob Rachowiecki, Mark Thurber

Private Trips

Private trips are not insured, sponsored, or supervised by the Sierra Club. They are listed here because they may be

of interest to PCS members. Private trips may be submitted directly to the editor.

For the following trip listing, please contact:

Nick Pilch, 510-525-4841, nicky@mindspring.com

•Date: Sept 22-24

Peaks: Gray Peak

Difficulty: class 1 to camp, class 3 to Gray Peak

Location: Yosemite

For the following trip listing, please contact:

Warren Storkman, 650-493-8959, dstorkman@aol.com

•Date: October 2006

Peak: Kala Pattar (18300')

Location: Nepal, Everest Base Camp

For the following trip listing, please contact:

Warren Storkman, 650-493-8959, dstorkman@aol.com

•Date: January 2007

Peak: Kilimanjaro

Location: Tanzania, optional safari following

For the following trip listing, please contact:

Jeff Fisher, 408-733-1299, jeff_fisher_5252@sbcglobal.net

•Date: January/February 2007

Peak: Ojo del Salado (22,300')

Location: South America

Almost Free!

(Donation to Loma Prieta Chapter requested)

2 pr Crampons & point protectors (unknown brands)

a) Never used 12-pt adjustable, neoprene straps.

b) Used 12-point adjustable. Old, need new straps (these have webbing straps)

Yes! Ski rack, with keys, holds 4 pr. skis. Fits vehicles with rain gutters. Somewhat adjustable (used on old Isuzu Trooper). Comes with instructions and spare parts.

Contact Chris MacIntosh: cmaci@sbcglobal.net

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Scree is the monthly journal of the Peak Climbing Section of the Sierra Club, Loma Prieta Chapter.

Our official website is [http:// lomaprieta.sierraclub.org/pcs/](http://lomaprieta.sierraclub.org/pcs/)

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If you are on the official email list (lomap-pcs-announce@lists.sierraclub.org) or the email list the PCS feeds (pcs-issues@climber.org), you have a free EScree subscription. For email list details, send "info lomap-pcs-announce" to "listserv@lists.sierraclub.org", or send anything to "info@climber.org". EScree subscribers should send a subscription form to the Treasurer to become voting PCS members at no charge. The Scree is on the web as both plain text and fully formatted Adobe Acrobat/PDF.

Rock Climbing Classifications

The following trip classifications are to assist you in choosing trips for which you are qualified. No simple rating system can anticipate all possible conditions.

Class 1: Walking on a trail.

Class 2: Walking cross-country, using hands for balance.

Class 3: Requires use of hands for climbing, rope may be used.

Class 4: Requires rope belays.

Class 5: Technical rock climbing.

Deadline for submissions to the next Scree is Sunday, September 24th. Meetings are the second Tuesday of each month.



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