

<http://peakclimbing.org> - www.facebook.com/peakclimbing

General Meeting

Date **March 8, 2011**
Time **7:30 – 9:30 pm**
Where **PCC**
 3921 E. Bayshore Road
 Palo Alto, CA
Program **Trekking and Climbing in**
 the Khumbu Region
Presenter **Nicola Astley**

In 2008, Nicola trekked around the Khumbu region and climbed 2 +20,000ft peaks in one of the most spectacular settings in the world with a backdrop of the Himalayan giants - Mt. Everest, Nuptse, Lhotse, Cho Oyu and Ama Dablam. She invites you to listen to her experience, to see photos from her adventure and to hear about her plans to return in October.

Nicola says: It was a fantastic trip, but also the hardest thing I've ever done. There are challenges for high altitude expeditions – not just the altitude itself, but keeping healthy, the "Khumbu cough," no showers for 3 weeks, pee bottles (!) and the total lack of clean

water. It's not if you'll get a stomach bug, but how bad it'll be. But, it's a stunningly beautiful area - the high mountains, monasteries and the warmth of the Sherpa people will never leave you.



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 and enter in the back of the building.

Google <http://tinyurl.com/28ngaw>

Editor's Notes

You'll love reading this month's Scree. The comments from our President, Emilie Cortes, are a must-read, and upcoming trips include two list finishes: Daryn Dodge, the DPS list, and our very own Louise Wholey, the SPS list. Way to go! And check out the trip reports - who knew that Linda Sun was related to Tigger? And don't forget our Trip Planning Meeting on Tuesday, March 1. Judy

Chair Column

Year of the Woman

For those that have made the last two meetings, you'll note I have dubbed 2011 the "Year of the Woman" at the PCS. The entire executive committee (affectionately referred to as EXCOMM) is female – myself as Chair, Louise Wholey as Vice Chair, and Sonja Dietrich as Treasurer. Additionally, Judy Molland is the SCREE editor and Lisa Barboza leads the Mountaineering Committee. Joe Baker is getting in touch with his feminine side as he manages the PCS website. Climbing and mountaineering are male-dominated pursuits, and yet here we are with a nearly entire female leadership team.

When I first discovered mountaineering, it captured me and shook everything in my life upside down. It was almost a magnetic attraction to the mountains that I was, and still am, completely unable to resist. Despite that compelling attraction, I was very intimidated by my impression that climbing was so male-dominated and it might be challenging to

integrate myself. Would I be welcome? Would I be strong/fast/hearty enough? Would I be perceived as, or worse – actually *be*, a burden?

I tracked down a woman I knew about through my MBA network, Alison Levine, who had been to business school, worked on Wall Street, and then left it all behind to become a full-time climber and motivational speaker. I wrangled Alison into a coffee date and what ensued was a ruthless brain picking session. To date, that is the only real time we have spent together, but it was so pivotal that I still refer to Alison as my "mountaineering mentor." One of the topics that concerned me most was the male/female dynamic in the mountains. She was successful in alleviating my concerns and encouraging me to begin my mountaineering career with gusto.

I now do my best to inspire other women who may be having some trepidation or who might be holding themselves back from getting out there and exploring their personal limits. I hope that the visibility of women this year on our leadership team will also be a beacon that women are more than welcome in the sometimes beautiful, sometimes inhospitable mountain environment.

Hope to see you in the mountains!

-Emilie

New Trip Rating System

(with thanks to Louise Wholey)

We have extended the system for rating for PCS trips to include a rating that will describe the effort required. The new PCS rating system is a series of three designations from the following groups:

Miles (to summit the peak)

1 = Less than 5 miles of total distance

2 = 5 to 10 miles

3 = 10 to 15 miles

4 = 15 to 20 miles

5 = 20 to 25 miles

Climb

A = Less than 1000 feet of total elevation gain

B = 1000 to 2000 feet

C = 2000 to 3000 feet

D = 3000 to 4000 feet

E = 4000 to 5000 feet

Travel

T = Trail

1 = Limited/easy X-C

2 = Moderate X-C

3 = Strenuous/difficult X-C

A trip rated as 2D3 means that the trip will be five to ten miles long to reach the peak with nearly 4,000 feet of climbing at times over strenuous/difficult cross country terrain.

Peak climbs typically have three phases:

1) backpacking to camp (often on a trail), 2) the peak climb (usually only a few miles but X-C with lots of climbing), 3) the return to the trailhead.

Rather than make this too complex for leaders, we will start by using this system for an over-all rating of the trip. If a trip, however, has one day that is particularly strenuous, the leader should identify that day as having special demands and give a separate rating for that day as well as the over-all trip. Longer trips climbing multiple peaks probably require a rating for each day, but leaders may wish initially to rate just the hardest day of the trip.

Class ratings will continue to be used to describe the technical difficulty of a climb.

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.

Summer Trip Planning Meeting!!

Mark your calendar for **Tuesday, March 1, at 7 pm**, for our summer trip planning meeting at the home of Scheduler Louise Wholey.

Food (pizza, salad, etc. - contributions accepted) will be served to allow people to come directly from work. Leaders please come with ideas on trips you would like to lead; climbers please come with ideas for trips you want to do.

21020 Canyon View Drive

Saratoga, CA 95070

Home phone: (408) 867-6658

Tim Hult Request - Please Read

(Posted separately since dates will vary, depending on snow conditions.)

1) Shasta winter ascent. Doing a winter ascent of Shasta can be a tricky affair involving waiting and watching for the perfect weather window that matches your schedule. Contact me to be put on an email / discussion list. We will do either the Cassaval or Sargent's ridge route. Participants must have arctic appropriate gear.

2) Also but with no descriptions: I'd like to try another spring tour this year, or, simply do some spring yo-yo skiing as well. This past year would have been a terrific one to do some of the high trail head passes on skis as day trips and I feel bad that I missed them.

Please contact me at: [timothy.hult\(at\)gd-ais.com](mailto:timothy.hult(at)gd-ais.com) to discuss your interest in either of these.

PCS Trip Calendar

These are required statements.

Note: CST 2087766-40. Registration as a seller of travel does not constitute approval by the State of California.

Note: All Sierra Club trips require you to sign a Liability Waiver.

<http://www.sierraclub.org/outings/chapter/forms/signinwaiver.pdf>

March 20 - Round Top

Leader: Arun Mahajan

March 26, 27 - Sandy Point, Last Chance Mt.

Leader: Daryn Dodge

April 2, 3 - Cone Peak

Leader: Joe Baker

August 13, 14 - Iron Mountain - Louise's 70th Birthday and List Finish

Leader: Louise Wholey

PCS Trip Details

Round Top

Goal: Round Top (10,381')

Location: Carson Pass

Date: March 20

Leader: Arun Mahajan

Difficulty: Intermediate Level Skiing

Day hike on snow, ice-axe, crampons, skis or snowshoes. Skis with skins or snowshoes needed for the approach then ice-axe and crampons for the summit area.

Meet at 8am at Carson Pass Sno-Park on Highway-88, ready to go. To park there you will need a sno-park permit.

Difficulty: Snow/winter conditions but otherwise intermediate level skiing and you have to have some experience with axe/crampons and be able to handle the altitude of over 10k ft, early in the season.

Contact Arun Mahajan at
arun.mahajan(at)att.net

Sandy Point and Last Chance Mountain

Goal: Sandy Pt, Last Chance Mt.

Location: Death Valley

Dates: March 26, 27

Leader: Daryn Dodge

Assuming the Sandy Pt ascent on Saturday is a success, Last Chance Mtn on Sunday will be Daryn Dodge's DPS list finish. Sandy is a 2,000' gain and 11 miles; Last Chance is 3,000' of gain and 5 miles. Join us for one or both peaks. We will have a short celebration on the summit of Last Chance Mtn, and perhaps back at the trailhead, so climbers can drive home at a reasonable hour on Sunday. Send e-mail with conditioning and experience to Leader: Daryn Dodge. Co-leaders: John Cheslick, Kathy Rich, and Gary Schenk. Contact Daryn Dodge: ddodge@oehha.ca.gov

Cone Peak

Goal: Cone Peak (5,155')

Location: Ventana Wilderness, Limekiln campground

Dates: April 2, 3

Leader: Joe Baker

Difficulty: Class 1

We will climb Cone Peak from Highway 1. Cone Peak is the most spectacular mountain on the Big Sur coast of California. It is the second highest mountain (Junipero Serra Peak is higher) in the Santa Lucia Range. The trip is on-trail but somewhat strenuous. This will either be a dayhike, or we'll camp at Vicente Flat and do the longer loop. I'm leaning toward the second option because Lime Kiln Campground (trailhead at the ocean) is still closed due to the fire. With the second option, we can take a leisurely hike up to our camp spot, where we'll spend the night on Saturday, then climb our peak on Sunday morning, before hiking out. This should be an excellent time to see lots of wildflowers.

Louise's 70th Birthday and List Finish

Goal: Iron Mountain(11,149')

Location: Mammoth area, Eastside of the Sierras

Dates: August 13, 14

Leader: Louise Wholey

Difficulty: Moderately difficult, 2D2

Backpack from the ranger's station at Soda Springs (7400') to Anona Lake (9100') via Fern Lake, about 8 miles. Bring a treat to share for our pre-dinner party. Next day, climb the east chute (class 2-3) to the south ridge and walk the final ridge to the summit. Everyone is welcome. If we have too many people we may make it a day trip and party at camp near Mammoth.

Contact: louisewholey(at)yahoo.com

Private Trip Calendar

Important: 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 Scree editor.

April 22 - 24 - Split Mountain

Leader: Lisa Barboza

April 29 - May 1 - Diamond on the Soles of Your Shoes

Leader: Steve Eckert

May 27 - 30 - Senator, You are no Mount Kennedy

Leader: Steve Eckert

October - Mt. Kailash, Nepal/Tibet

Leader: Warren Storkman

Private Trip Details

Split Mountain

Goal: Split Mountain (14,042')

Location: Big Pine, Eastside of the Sierras

Date: April 22 - 24

Leader: Lisa Barboza

Difficulty: Intermediate/Advanced; 2D3 with class 2 winter climbing

Another prized winter 14er. Winter backcountry travel and snowcamping skills highly recommended.

This is an intermediate/advanced trip and you must have previous crampon/ice axe experience. You should have a solid backpacking/hiking foundation to carry a heavy pack, a proven ability to acclimatize, and an adventurous attitude as winter climbing can be challenging and require tough decisions. Many winter attempts do not result in a summit as conditions typically must be ideal. Possibly includes Prater and Tinemaha. Led by Lisa Barboza, co-led by Emilie Cortes. Contact Lisa Barboza at Lisa.Barboza(at)gd-ais.com

Diamond on the Soles of Your Shoes

Goals: Diamond Peak (13,127'), Mt. Mary Austin (13,040')

Location: Pacific Crest, Kings Canyon NP

Dates: April 29 - May

Leader: Steve Eckert

Difficulty: Class 2 Snow Climb

We'll start low at the end of the Oak Creek Road (6,000') and hike the Baxter Pass trail from desert up into spring slush. The snow will be firmed up by the time we reach our camp at Summit Meadow (10,800'). We'll ascend the southeast face of Diamond Peak (13,127'), which RJ Secor calls "a splendid snow climb in the spring". If we have time, we'll also attempt the often seen but rarely visited Mount Mary Austin. Participants are

skilled with ice axe for self-arrest and use of crampons on a mid-angle slope. Some members of the party will choose skis; others snowshoes.

Leader: Steve Eckert 650-508-0500

Co-leader: Aaron Schuman 650-968-9184

Senator, you are no Mount Kennedy

Goals: Mt. Hutchings (10,785'), Kennedy Mtn (11,433'), Slide Peak (10,915')

Location: Monarch Divide, Kings Canyon NP

Dates: May 27 - 30

Leader: Steve Eckert

From Cedar Grove (5,035'), we'll hike up the Copper Creek trail. When we meet snow, some of us will switch to skis and others to snowshoes. We'll set up camp in Upper Tent Meadow (9,189') and make a side jaunt to Mt Hutchings (10,785'). Saturday, we'll pack over Granite Pass (10,673') to the north side of the Monarch Divide, traverse up and down through the Volcanic Lakes basin, and make camp at East Kennedy Lake (10,100').

Sunday, we'll climb Kennedy Mountain (11,433') and the rarely visited Slide Peak (10,915') and return to our camp. Memorial Day, we'll pack out all the way back to Cedar Grove and head home.

Leader: Steve Eckert 650-508-0500

Co-leader: Aaron Schuman 650-968-9184

"We choose to go to the Moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard." – John F. Kennedy

Mt. Kailash, Nepal/Tibet

Goal: Mt. Kailash - Lhasa

Location: Nepal/Tibet

Date: October 2011

Leader: Warren Storkman

October is generally the best month to travel in Nepal and Tibet - for weather and holiday events and particularly for the Kora around Mt Kailash.

Reason for starting the plans early:

To give the opportunity to arrange vacation time for the 21 day trek, the 7 days in KTM and air travel.

There will be two separate flights within Nepal. The first flight will take us west to a large lowland airport with a hotel overnight. The second day we'll fly in a smaller (20 seat) plane and upon landing will start the trek. There will be 6 nights of camping then on the 7th day the group crosses into Tibet with an interesting army border check. This entry is by foot - no roads in this area.

The group will then stop camping and use a hotel on the 14th night.

For those wishing to skip Lhasa a return to KTM is on the 16th day. The Lhasa group will return to KTM on the 21st day by international air.

Without a commitment or obligating yourself just let me know if this trip is of interest to you. If you change your mind, I'll drop your name. I'll e-mail more information and try for an early trip cost. Contact Warren Storkman (650-493-8959) or email: dstorkman@aol.com

Trip Reports

Mt. Gayley, North Palisade, Polemonium

June 19 - 22, 2010

By Rick Booth

Well, this trip report is a day late and a dollar short but here it is anyway, about yet another trip to the Palisades Glacier, a part of the Sierra I never seem to get tired of visiting. These days I need to manufacture excuses to visit the Palisades and this year's excuse was to go with Linda Sun to climb the last fourteeners on her list. However, while I never tire of being on and near the Palisades Glacier, the hike into the region is starting to wear on me.

On Saturday, June 19, we headed up the North Fork of Big Pine Creek Trail. This was mostly uneventful, although at each rest stop Linda had to wait longer and longer for me. By the time I did the mandatory belly flop onto the tundra at Sam Mack Meadow I was pretty tired and I knew the next 1200 feet of elevation was going to be a slog. It always is, even when I am in decent shape. Linda, who is related to Tigger, could have powered on to the end of the map, but suggested we stop at Sam Mack Meadow, and then hike up to Gayley Camp the next day and climb Gayley for the project of the day. That was fine with me.

The next day we finished the hike to Gayley Camp, located right at the northwest corner of Mt Gayley. There are multiple flat spots there for camping. Water is the only problem and usually requires finding a drip off a rock some place. The sites were mostly free of snow and the entire area was deserted. We put our packs down on a nice site that would be out of the wind and went searching for a water drip. We managed to find a good one so filling water bottles was not too painfully slow.

Satisfied we wouldn't dehydrate any time soon, we packed up and headed for Gayley. This involved contouring around the east side of the glacier and heading for the saddle between Gayley and Sill, which is called Glacier Notch. Once at Glacier Notch we encountered a group of eight individuals doing an amazing thing. They were rappelling down one of the worst, one of the loosest, one of the ugliest, chutes in the Sierra. Rocks were flying out in all directions. Hollering and yelling went on forever. I put my helmet on.

For those who have never been up to Glacier Notch from the glacier side, there is a chute that goes diagonally up to the left and looks like it would be an easy way to the saddle. It isn't. Dee and I made the mistake of coming down that thing once and I made a mental note to not ever do that again. Linda and I headed up the central part of the wide couloir, such as it is, that goes to the saddle. Except for one short section it is easy and mostly standard Sierra talus and a lot safer than the narrow bowling alley chute.

At the top of Glacier Notch we turned left and headed over to Gayley. The Yellow Brick Road version is right on the ridge line, but both times I have been there I never found it on the ascent and only managed to hike down it going back to Glacier Notch. Anyway, it is mostly moderate class 3 to and from the summit of Mt Gayley. We signed the register and headed back to Gayley Camp.

The next day we headed for North Pal. This involves hiking across the glacier to get to the bottom of the U Notch Couloir. There was a snow bridge on the right side, and we crossed the bergschrund without incident. The rest of the ascent of the U Notch Couloir was weird. The snow layer was fairly thin and the ice was closer to the surface than the previous times I have been up the U Notch Couloir.

Furthermore, there was a lot of big rock sitting around on the surface and down at the bottom of the couloir. This seemed to be coming out of a side couloir about a third of the way up the U Notch Couloir. Scary. In any case, we kept chugging up the couloir. The top section was extremely icy so we escaped to the rock on the right, which was loose, as usual.



Bergschrund at the base of the U Notch Couloir. Note debris and bridge on right edge.

At the top of the U Notch Couloir, we roped up to climb the chimney, which is right there at the very top. At the top of the chimney, we attempted to head across the slab to the notch, which allows for dropping down onto the class 3 talus. This was choked with snow so we went further to the right on the ridge. From there we were able to pack the ropes and make our way down to the third class talus. This was devious. Once on the talus it was the usual third class wander to the summit. Except, maybe, for the hairy fourth class move above a big drop into the Mendenhall Couloir. This is where Big Al single handedly yanked Arun right past the move in 2005. Big Al Peery, modifier of routes. But, I digress.



Old weasel cranking up the U Notch Couloir. Steep. Picture: Linda Sun

After signing the register and checking out the exposure in various directions, Linda and I retraced our route back to the top of the chimney and rappelled down the chimney in two rappels. There is a rap station about half way down but it is in a weird spot. Anyway, it worked. Once down into the U Notch, we debated whether to take the time to climb Polemonium and decided to go for it.

We climbed up through a slot and belayed near a notch to the right on the skyline. The slot was a lot tougher than I remember. From the notch it was another pitch to the top. Maybe 5.6 max for both pitches but the first pitch is weird. We lollygagged around the summit but when we noticed the weather wasn't looking too great on the south horizon, we headed for the rappel station, threaded the double 8.8mm 60s through the rings and rappelled all the way down to the U Notch. I walked over to the chimney side and pulled the ropes. They almost made it clean but hung up. A good yank and they came free. Whew. One hour and forty minutes round trip from the U Notch. Now we had to deal with the U Notch Couloir.

We rappelled the first 200 feet or so, since it had been so icy on the way up. After this, it appeared the snow had softened up since the morning so we decided to hike down. I headed down first and attempted to find a more or less reasonable route down through the snow. At one point I attempted to heel plunge down through the snow. This lasted about six feet, when I hit an ice spot and pitched. I immediately rolled over onto the ice ax and attempted an arrest but the snow was pretty soft all of a sudden so the pick just kept sliding along. Right about the time it was looking like that long dreaded conversation with God discussing all those things I had done and wished I hadn't was going to be happening sooner rather than later, the ice ax pick hooked up and I stopped. I was more careful after that. I also made a mental note to bring the ice ax with the forged steel head next time and leave the all-aluminum ax at home. It worked but, you never know. We mixed hiking down the couloir with the occasional rappelling, which were unnecessary, in retrospect, and landed at the base of the bergschrund. We were down, more or less, and just needed to make the hike back to Gayley Camp. At this point it started to snow and it snowed on us all the way back to camp.

The next morning we snoozed until late and hiked out.

Final Notes

The ascents of the Palisades Peaks from the Palisades Glacier are the best Sierra alpine experiences possible. These ascents require the full range of alpine skills. The glacier and environs are spectacular.

The hike in is fairly long with quite a bit of elevation gain. It is about 6800' at Glacier Lodge and about 12,200' at Gayley Camp. An ice ax and crampons are mandatory and the rock gear is optional depending on your skill set and the route chosen. We used a double 8.8mm 60m system. We packed a set of camalots from .75 to 2, a set of aliens from green to red and a couple of stoppers. The run out with this limited rack was significant in both the chimney on North Pal and on the easy pitches on Polemonium. A bigger, more complete rack probably would have been a good idea. Camping at Gayley Camp is excellent, although it can be choked with snow early in the season. Water is the only issue at Gayley Camp, but I have always found a tdrrip available.

References:

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

Cibule Udolia a d'Alej

July 3 - 5, 2010

By Aaron Schuman

If I had titled this trip report in English instead of Slovak, I would have called it "Onion Valley and Beyond". But the English language wouldn't capture the international feel of our Independence Weekend 2010 outing to the east side of Kings Canyon National Park.

Jim Wholey, Louise Wholey and I swooped down in the Air Wholey Beechcraft Bonanza. What an amazing close-up view of Mammoth Pass! On the drive up from Bishop, we passed a herd of antelopes, an uncommon sight in the Owens Valley.

As we hiked up from Onion Valley to Kearsarge Pass, we met a group of five young travelers from Slovakia. They were in California with the highest priorities. Their plan was just to hike to the park boundary, but we offered to escort them to Mount Gould (13,005'). Vladimir Ritomsky, Jana Vesela and Rastislav Cakoci accepted our offer, and climbed their first big mountain.

Mount Gould is a quick walk-up from Kearsarge Pass, but the summit block is a thrilling class 3 climb with a tremendous drop-off on one side. It was a great introduction to the Sierra Nevada for our new friends. The hero photo shows Jana, Vladimir, Louise, Rasti, and Jim. I'm the one holding the camera.



Back at Kearsarge Pass, we exchanged Facebook info and said our farewells. We stayed in touch, but I've needed Google Translate from time to time.

Jim, Louise and I walked down to the Kearsarge Lakes and made camp. Jim attempted to charm a trout out of the water, but the lake was over-fished.

Sunday morning, we hiked out to Mount Bago (11,868'). When we reached the bowl, we saved elevation by traversing, but in retrospect it would have been quicker to drop down to the flat bottom. The summit of Mt Bago is a hands-in-pockets stroll, as long as you can stay clear of the evergreen brush. It has a dazzling view into the headwaters of Bubb's Creek. In spite of the sandy top, the

mountain did have a cornice in early July. I found a cut through the snow, but it was not necessarily the safest path for Jim and Louise to follow. Call it yet another learning experience.

Back on the trail, Jim split off and returned to our camp at Kearsarge Lakes. Louise and I headed up Mount Rixford (12,890'). It's a long and pleasant talus slope with a broad mountaintop. We descended the north slope as the snow hardened up in the late afternoon shadow, using standing glissade and plunge step.

Wild country! As we hiked out on Monday, we savored the forest abundant with deer, marmots, pikas, sage grouse, magpie, and rosy-breasted finch.

Climbing The Mexican Volcanoes: Iztacciatl (17,159'), and Pico de Orizaba (Citlaltepetl) (18,490')

December, 2010

By Arun Mahajan

My place of work very kindly let us know that it would rather that we all stayed home in the four days between the Christmas and New Year's and I was staring at an orgy of free time...9 days..but where is one to go at such a short notice?

A good friend of mine from the PCS, Linda Sun, had done a trip to Mexico just a month ago and that too had lasted 9 days and she had been able to, in that time, blast up Izta and Orizaba, respectively the third-highest and highest peaks in Mexico. Taking a leaf out of her book and with a lot of advice and information from her, I also contacted Roberto 'Oso' Flores, a mountain guide of Orizaba Mountain Guides that she had used and was pleasantly surprised to discover that he was free at that time and would be willing to guide me up these peaks.

On December 24th, on reaching Mexico City airport by a direct flight from San Francisco, I met with Oso at the airport and he dropped me off to a nice hotel called Maria Cristina in an upscale section of Mexico City, off from Reforma Street.



Everything was bright and cheerful, this being Christmas Eve but that also meant that most dinner places were closed. Not knowing the language or the city meant that I could not venture far from the hotel. Luckily, a restaurant, Sanborns, almost across from the hotel was open. I found out later that it is a chain of restaurants cum retail shops owned by none other than the wealthiest Mexican, Carlos Slim.

The next day, after breakfast, Oso came by and we drove to a small town called Amacameca. It was a pleasant little town with a market area and a very nice church. While I walked around, Oso shopped for mountain food. After a quick stop for lunch, we drove to Paso Cortes, a high mountain pass that had a ranger station where we picked up our permits. Oso's little Ford Festiva made light work of the untarred road as we climbed up to the top of a small peak that housed numerous cell and microwave towers. Almost invisible among all these buildings was a tiny single story brick building, the Altzomoni refugio, probably at about 12,000'.



There were a few rooms there and a common toilet (that did not flush) and the rooms had bunk beds where we spread out our stuff. The altitude was already giving me a headache but I was able to get some good sleep and some more after dinner. I was pleasantly surprised to meet Oso's friend, Ruth, also a part-time guide and full time IT professional. She had driven up in the night and was going to assist Oso with some load carrying (a rather large container of water) next day. She proved to be a very friendly woman and also a strong hiker.

After breakfast, we drove a short distance to the La Joya (or La Joyita) trailhead.



From here, we hiked with our full packs for about 3 hrs to a real refuge (a tiny shed called the Grupos de Los Cien) at 15,000'. It was a beautiful day but windy. There were many hikers and trail runners about. The trail climbs relatively steeply and we had fantastic views of Popocateptl, the second highest peak in Mexico but now out of bounds because of the poisonous gases that swirl from near its

summit. The cold wind on the dusty trail coated everything with a fine layer of mud. The hut itself was a very small affair and with its shape and silver color reminded me of the older generation RV-trailers of the US.



There was nobody in the hut, so we got the best bunk beds. My headache was gone and I was feeling sluggish, but started to feel better after rest and dinner. Meanwhile, our solitude was disturbed and people started to troop in. They were a jolly bunch, mostly locals with a whole range of gear, from wooden-handled ice axes to more modern gear. Some of their crampons looked like they may have been fashioned at a local smithy rather than the factories of Petzl or Black Diamond! However, they kept us all till late with their chatter and music.

The people in the hut started departing in the dead of the night and sleeping was not really possible. I was up at 3am and after a hot drink and some cereal, Roberto and I were off at 4am. We were the last to leave the hut. It was cold and windy. I had 5 layers on (two poly-pro shirts, a primaloft hooded jacket, then a down jacket and a gore-tex on top of it all) and that proved warm enough. It was hard to see where to go (other than up) and I was glad that Roberto knew the way. We saw distant headlamps as we slogged up the steep trail and then a moderately complicated set of rocks. I had worn normal mountaineering boots (not plastic double boots). We soon reached the area below the 'knees'. I had read

that the summit of Izta is in the shape of a woman lying prone and the normal route takes one to the knees and then the belly and then the breasts (the summit). The head is rolled back and forms a subsidiary summit.

At the top of the knees was a broken-down structure, remnants of perhaps a shed or shelter or watch tower, it was hard to tell. Before that point, we had overtaken a party of three and a little after that, we ran into a party that was turning back due to the high winds and cold. We kept pushing, however, and after a couple more saddles (if the high points are only body features like knees etc, how come there were so many ups and downs...did Izta suffer from warts as well?? or so my tired body thought...).

Eventually, at one of these ridge-tops, Oso announced that we were going to put crampons on. I came up to him and saw a steep slope that ran out into an flat plateau/field of icy snow with sun cups, some quite high and on the other side of it was a sandy slope terminating on a curving ridge which weaved and climbed to what seemed to be the summit. Getting down this icy slope was a bit sketchy as the ice was hard and I had to make sure that most of my points were gripping. We climbed down, crossed the field and then took crampons off at the base of the sand slope and as we climbed it to the ridge, we were blessed by a spectacular sunrise.

I managed to get a couple of snaps off before my SLR froze up due to the cold. Luckily, I was also carrying a smaller point and shoot inside my pack but Oso was hurrying on and I did not have the time to reach for the camera. We kept climbing and the early morning sun touched everything with a golden hue. This summit was not the true summit after all and we had to go down another saddle before getting to the actual summit.



It was very cold and windy here and Oso started to cough a bit. We could see Orizaba and Malinche on one side and Popo on another. After spending just a few minutes at the top to take pictures, we bolted down, only taking a break where we had to put crampons on again. It had taken us 3.5 hrs to get to the top. On the way down, Oso took us a steep scree chute that proved to be quite fast and we slithered down to the hut in just 2 hrs 15 mins. A bit of rest, some food and we were off at 10.30. The hike back to the cars took 2 hours . I was feeling very happy at summiting a 17,000' peak with hardly any acclimatization and would have easily been convinced at that moment to give up on Orizaba and do Malinche instead. I even broached it with Oso. At the trailhead, there was a small store and the lady there was making some turnovers which I also ate (a big mistake, it turned out later on). Oso then drove, via a very nice restaurant inside a vacation resort where we enjoyed a trout lunch, to the town of Puebla.

This is a very nice and large-ish town, with a bustling town center with a Plaza de Armas', and a large, beautiful church,



modern stores, and coffee shops. Oso dropped me off at the Hotel Puebla Plaza.

I took a long walk in town, checking out the stores, the church and the people. The next day, Oso picked me up and we did the longish drive to the small town of Tlachichuca at the foothills of spectacular cone shaped Pico De Orizaba (Citlalteptl). This is a beautiful snow cone when seen from Tlachichuca. Oso lives there. He dropped me off at the rather rustic motel, Gerar. Tlachichuca is much smaller than Puebla and there is a lot less going on.

I met Oso for dinner and also another guide, Javier, who turned out to be as experienced as Oso and had even been to the Karakoram to climb Broad Peak. Oso's cold was really bad and he had requested Javier to lead me up Orizaba instead. By this time, I was developing all the symptoms of a really bad stomach, which I ascribed probably to that turnover I had eaten at the trailhead shack of Izta...lesson learnt! I was worried the whole night about how I would feel in the morning but luckily for me, I had already started to feel better. Oso had brought along another client, Edgar Aguilar, of Mexican descent but living in the US and so our Orizaba team was formed, me being led by Javier and Edgar by Lupe, another guide.

In a couple of hours, Javier, Oso and Lupe, showed up at our motel in a large 4WD vehicle,



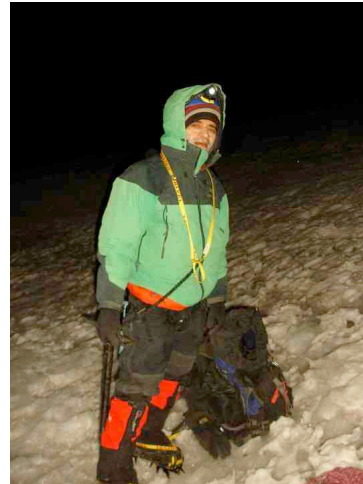
and we piled into it and drove via a small village to the Piedra Grande hut at 13,900'. At the village we had picked up a local who would be our man at the refugio, watching over our stuff while the four of us attempted the peak.



Piedra Grande (big rock?) was a very nice hut with bunks on two levels. It was well maintained and had lots of room to move about and cook. This is a hut that would rival any mountain hut in Europe. There were quite a few people there, mostly younger and many from the US and with varying mountain climbing ability and experience. Oso had stayed back at Tlachichuca. Our guides cooked dinner for us and we planned for a wake up time of 1am and a start of 2am.

Orizaba was going to be a gnarly climb since the hut was below 14,000' and the summit was at 18,410'. From the hut, a trail is visible that rises steeply to the snowline.

The next day, we were walking at 2am. The initial section is paved in cement / concrete and then it is all steep scree / mud. It was not very cold but as we got to the snow and cramponed up



and then to the glacier where we roped up just as dawn broke, it started to get colder and very windy. It is a long slog on about 45 to 50 degree slopes from there. We saw people dropping off (as did Edgar and Lupe) and some turning back, but others were plugging on and so did we. Javier gave me no breaks for drink/food and so I kept slowing down but did not want to give up. It was a grind but nonetheless, after endless switchbacks, we made it to the top of what we could see.

This was actually a ridge line but the summit could be seen at the end of this ridge which curved left. There was a large crater on the left as we climbed along the ridge to the summit. Just past the actual high point is a cross. We took just 2 photos and bolted down as the cold and the wind were getting to be unbearable. Again, I did not get an opportunity to grab a drink or a bite to eat. The sun was shining brightly and it was 9:30 am (7.5 hrs from the hut to the summit).

Javier was worried that the wind would get worse. The walk down was straightforward and when we got to the edge of the glacier, we finally took a longish break. We also met Edgar and Lupe there. They reported that they

were slower than us but were climbing well but were afraid that they would run out of time so they had turned around. We got down by noon and drove off at 2pm, back to Hotel Gerar in Tlachichuca.

The next day, we drove to Mexico City but I managed to convince Roberto and Javier to stop for a short while at Teotihuacan, which they gracefully did, and I got a 3 hr visit of this absolutely fantastic ancient city.



After that, they dropped me off at Hotel Maria Christina in Mexico City. Early next morning, January 1st, 2011, Oso dropped me off at the airport.

It was a short but wonderful climbing trip, Roberto runs a great guide service and the people I met were warm and friendly everywhere. Not knowing Spanish was a big handicap, mainly because this prevented me from interacting with the people. I would most certainly want to visit Mexico again, to climb and also to tour this great place. This was the first time I got 'wind burn' on my face due to the cold and winds on Orizaba. My chin turned a dull red and so also my lips, bad enough for the US immigration official to ask what had hit me in the face!

Gear notes:

For Izta, I used mountaineering boots that were crampon compatible. Crampons were essential when I went but a month before, when Linda went, they were not. On Orizaba, I used plastic double boots and also axe/crampons. Poles are good to have and lots of layered clothing and also warm clothing (down) and wind block (gore-tex) clothing. Helmets are good to carry along on any volcano and high peak. Get a good face-mask / balaclava and use it and perhaps ski goggles. The cold and the wind sap a lot of energy.

Route notes:

Both the peaks are high and spectacular. Izta has more features and ups and downs and is therefore the more interesting peak, in my opinion. Orizaba is a wonderful inverted cone with a great looking crater on the top. I just wish I had had more time to explore. In many ways, it is like an overgrown Mt Shasta. The angle of the slope, once on the glacier, is 45 to 50 degrees. Those with lesser experience may feel the need to be on a rope team for additional security. The altitude is a great leveler. People confident at lower altitudes may just not feel so when they are that high and suffering. I don't believe a guide is necessary, but without knowing the language and the lie of the land and other logistics, you may get lost. So, if you have enough time to plan out this trip and arrange for transport (4WD is a must to get to Piedra Grande) and other logistics, then a trip may be set up amongst friends as well.

I recommend Orizaba Mountain Guides, if you are on the lookout for guide services.

Elected Officials

Chair

Emilie Cortes / mountaineerchica@gmail.com
415-260-3618

Vice Chair and Trip Scheduler

Louise Wholey / louisewholey@gmail.com
21020 Canyon View Road, Saratoga, CA
95070
408-867-6655

Treasurer and Membership Roster (address changes)

Sonja Dieterich/ honukaimi@gmail.com

Publicity Committee Positions

Scree Editor

Judy Molland / screeeditor@gmail.com

PCS World Wide Web Publisher

Joe Baker/ pcs@jobaker.us
1975 Cordilleras Rd, Redwood City, CA
94062
650-261-1488

Scree is the monthly newsletter of the Peak Climbing Section of the Sierra Club Loma Prieta Chapter. Current and back issues are posted on the web in PDF and HTML.

Our official website is

<http://www.peakclimbing.org>. Joining the PCS is easy. Go to <http://www.peakclimbing.org/join>

PCS Announcement Listserv

If you join the PCS Announcement Listserv you will receive announcements and updates of trips and meetings. Use the <http://lists.sierraclub.org/SCRIPTS/WA.EXE?A0=LOMAP-PCS-ANNOUNCE&X=&Y=> web page.

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: Climbing using hands for balance.

Class 3: Climbing requires the use of hands, maybe a rope.

Class 4: Requires rope belays.

Class 5: Technical rock climbing.

Trips may also be rated by level of exertion: easy, moderate, strenuous, or extreme.

Deadline for submissions to the next Scree is Friday, March 25. Meetings are held on the second Tuesday of each month.