

Stanley Smith Glacier Ski Traverse

April 21-28, 2006

A group of five of us did this horseshoe ski traverse on three glaciers – centered around the Stanley Smith Glacier – north of Pemberton along B.C.'s west coast. It's a fine tour, with lots of ski ascent possibilities (we did five peaks in mixed weather) and grand views across a sea of glaciated ranges. Even this southern tip of west coast icefields would easily swallow the Columbia Icefield, the largest icefield in the Canadian Rockies.



Ski tour route in faint red, counterclockwise from middle left, on 1:250,000 Pemberton (92J). Most of the route can be seen in more detail on the 1:50,000 maps Stanley Smith Glacier (92 J/13) and Mount Dalglish (92 J/12).



Landing in a Tyax Air fixed-wing plane (much cheaper than by helicopter) on the Lillooet Glacier between Lillooet Mountain and Mount Dalglish. We had waited out bad weather in Pemberton for two days, and thus it was like hitting a pillow when we landed in about half a metre of fresh snow.



Our first camp, on the Lillooet Glacier. Our tents were pretty deep, well out of the wind, but would have been buried by any significant snowfall.



Skiing up Mount Dalglish (9,582 feet), via the East Ridge (left skyline). Because our camps were generally around 8,500 feet, it would usually take only an hour or so to get up most of the peaks we ascended; this one was a little over two hours on the ascent. We skied to near the summit, with a ferocious wind that died in a little saddle just below the top.



Spectacular views from the summit of Dalglish (Dog Leash?). All aspects, save the north, dropped off sharply – some 6,000 feet to the valley floor, four kilometres away.



Day three – This was our big moving day, dropping from around 8,500 to 5,800 feet at the toe of the Ring Glacier, which we then ascended for some 3,000 feet (with 55-pound packs) to a camp near Stanley Peak on the edge of the Stanley Smith Glacier. The bad news is we were following a bunch of snowmobile tracks; a dozen of them had come from nowhere and zipped past our camp the previous day while we were attempting Lillooet Mountain. We turned around on that peak because of avalanche risk, but that didn't stop one sledder from high pointing up a nearby mountain face below a fracture line, prompting this joke: *What's a snowmobiler's last words? Hold my beer while I try this.* The good news is we were able to follow their tracks up the Ring Glacier, eliminating some heavy trail breaking.



Approaching Stanley Peak from our second camp. We were able to ski all the way up this 9,600-foot peak in a little over an hour, with a much faster descent on pretty decent snow. We later packed up and moved our camp a few kilometres north, from where we were able, the next day, to ascend Mounts Mills, Dodds and Henderson in half a day.



After a weather day that forced us to stay in camp, we traveled in limited visibility by compass, and roped up, south and then east down the Bridge Glacier, climbing to our last camp west of White Cross Mountain. Here,

we're leaving this camp to descend south off the glacier into the west drainage of Salal Creek.



Descending into Salal Creek – A friend had once descended this fractured lower glacier in a whiteout, covering only three kilometres in a day. They stopped and set up camp when they saw what looked like a long crevasse just ahead of them; in the clear light the next day, it turned out to be the creek. Fortunately, the mists lifted enough for us to see and we were able to whisk down this stretch in about 15 minutes – a good thing, too, as the surrounding steep slopes were already getting warm at 7 a.m.



After navigating down some narrow creek beds and traversing through forest, we reached the logging road along the upper Lillooet River and were able to ski most of it to our truck near Meager Creek under a light rain. A group shot of the grizzled, sweaty fivesome back at the Pemberton Airport.