

The Stanford
Alpine Journal
2005-2006

The Stanford Alpine Journal 2005—2006

The Stanford Alpine Journal is an annual publication of the Stanford Alpine Club.

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Stanford Alpine Club

The Stanford Alpine Club has a distinguished history of alpine excellence. Its inspirations lie in the steep granite of the Yosemite Valley, but its members have contributed accomplishments around the globe. The SAC went dormant during the 1980s and 1990s, but was resurrected in 2002 to promote alpine pursuits in the Stanford Community.

The modern SAC perpetuates the original spirit of alpinism by providing a forum for planning excursions, and by introducing new members to the safe and responsible enjoyment of mountaineering, rock climbing, ice climbing, ski mountaineering, and other alpine pursuits.

Cover Photo: Jared Brown, Mike Kerzhner, and Clint Cummins on the summit of Standing Rock—Monument Basin, Canyonlands National Park, Utah, USA; © 2007 Matt Farrell.

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2 Following in My Parents' Boot Tracks

— Stephanie Abegg —

On July 4, 1974, three sisters named Mary, Susan, and Barb set out on a weekend backpacking trip on the Dosewalips Trail in Washington's beautiful Olympic Mountains. Susan, a recent graduate of the Tacoma Mountaineers Basic Climbing Course, was eager to share her enthusiasm for the "Freedom of the Hills" with her sisters. Stopping for a rest break, the three young ladies were relaxing and enjoying the wild Olympics scenery. All of a sudden, a young man came hiking along from the opposite direction. His name was Marty, and he was from Illinois. It ended up that he had dinner with the three sisters, and exchanged addresses with Susan. Marty and Susan wrote a few letters, Susan proposed, and in June 1975 Marty had moved west and they were married in Susan's backyard. They spent their honeymoon camping in a garbage dump on San Juan Island, but that's another story. This was the beginnings of a long and joyful marriage, with lots and lots of climbing! Eventually Susan and Marty had two daughters. One of them was named Steph (that's me!).

My parents didn't stop their trips to the mountains when I was born. My first hike was in Banff, Alberta; I was only 2 months old. My first overnight backpacking trip was to Stuart Lake, near Mt. Stuart; I was only 1 year old. Apparently I loved it. Climbing, hiking, and mountaineering have been normal summer activities for as long as I can remember.

As the years passed, I developed my parents' love for the mountains. This last summer, between my graduation from Stanford and my full time job at a civil engineering firm in British Columbia, I spent my days climbing and hiking in the North Cascades and surrounding mountains. During this time, my parents always looked forward to my return home, not because they were worried, but because they looked forward to seeing my photos. My slideshows would always result in an evening of reminiscing on their past climbing days and them pulling out their 30 year old photo books. I enjoyed these reminiscences as much as my parents did, particularly the climbs on Mt. Rainier, Mt. Stuart, and Bugaboo Spire that my parents and I did 30 years apart.

I – Mt. Rainier 14,410 ft, Disappointment Cleaver

Thirty years ago, my parents lived on Vashon Island, a ferry ride and a couple of hours drive from Washington's license plate logo, Mt. Rainier. Rainier, at 14,410 ft (that's tall for the North Cascades, where 10,000 ft is considered massive), was my parents' first major alpine climb. Although they climbed several of the routes on the volcano's snowy slopes, Disappointment Cleaver was their first choice, both because of its enjoyable snow climbing and aesthetic views of Little Tahoma and Ingram Glacier. So when I began planning a climb of Mt. Rainier in June with two Stanford friends (Eu-Jin Goh and Paul Csonka), my parents were quick to recommend Disappointment Cleaver.



Climbers coming up the snow slope above Disappointment Cleaver, about 30 minutes from the summit; © 2007 Steph Abegg.

Despite questionable weather reports for the weekend we planned to climb, Eu-Jin, Paul, and I headed up to Camp Muir. In a few hours we were stripping off our raingear as we broke through the clouds into the brilliant high mountain sunshine. We were surprised to find over fifty people at Camp Muir; I can only imagine the crowds on a sunny summer weekend! The RMI guiding service has greatly increased the traffic on the mountain since my parents climbed it in the 70s'.

We went to bed early, planning to wake up around 1:30 am. Despite the constant crunching of crampons and clanking of harnesses and ice axes from other climbers getting an even earlier alpine start, we managed to stay in our sleeping bags until 2 am. At 2:45 am, we were the last party to leave Camp Muir. Our route across to Cadaver Gap was lit by a constant stream of headlamps.

Crossing over Cadaver Gap was straightforward, as was the traverse across Ingram Flats, the climb up the Cleaver, and the snowy slopes to the summit. With an ample supply of spring snow, Rainier is a straightforward climb and can be done in 3-4 hours from Camp Muir. My favorite part of the climb was the vast expanse of the crater rim. Someday I will have to go back and camp near one of the steam vents along the crater; my parents did this

once when they had a 3-day weekend. Mt. Rainier is an enjoyable athletic climb, and I now understand why my parents climbed it so many times.

II – Mt. Stuart 9,415 ft, North Ridge Direct

Not long after climbing Mt. Rainier, I embarked on a 10-day climbing trip with Clint Cummins, who was in the Seattle area for the Fourth of July.



Steph on the knife-edge north ridge of Mt. Stuart; © 2007 Clint Cummins.

Clint and I had discussed several climbing possibilities in the months before our trip. Overwhelmed by the endless bounty of alpine climbing in the Cascades, I asked my parents for input. “Why don’t you climb Mt. Stuart?” my dad suggested after a few seconds thought, “that was my favorite climb.” That’s saying a lot for a guy who has climbed hundreds of mountains in the North Cascades. A look through my dad’s tattered climbing guide reveals climbing notes on Mt. Stuart on every other page: “Mt. Stuart, west ridge, July 1979, athletic low Class 5,” “Mt Stuart, north ridge, August 1980, great exposure, fun climbing on the Gendarme,” and hundreds of comments like “go left, the right side of the ridge drops o ,” “6 hours 40 minutes descent back to camp, only 1 rope needed,” “third party to the summit this year,” “used several long slings,” “stay on the right side of the couloir, later

in the season this might be tricky.” His guide looks like an editor’s copy of a first draft—a circle around the word “exposed,” an exclamation point beside “loose rock,” a star beside “take the ramp to the col,” etc. My dad’s climbing notes provide an invaluable wealth of knowledge.

Heeding my parents’ suggestion, Clint and I began our trip with a drive to Leavenworth, Washington. In addition to Mt. Stuart, we planned to climb nearby Prusik Peak as well, another of my parents’ favorites (they climbed it six times between 1979 and 1981, on one occasion in a hailstorm and on another occasion twice in one day).

Clint was eager to climb both Stuart and Prusik, despite the fact that he had already climbed both (no surprise!). Clint had soloed Stuart’s north ridge some 30 years ago, but had always wanted to go back and climb the Great Gendarme (5.9) 500 ft below the summit (the gendarme maintains the true ridge, but many parties avoid this intimidating 200 ft block by descending and traversing below). And although Clint had climbed Prusik Peak, he had not done the Burgner-Stanley route (5.10), the now-standard route on the sheer granite south face. I found both Stuart and Prusik to be amazing alpine climbs. I think the north ridge of Stuart is my favorite climb to date. With its classic exposed knife-edge ridge and over 20 moderate rock pitches and probable bivy, this Fifty Classic is hard to forget.

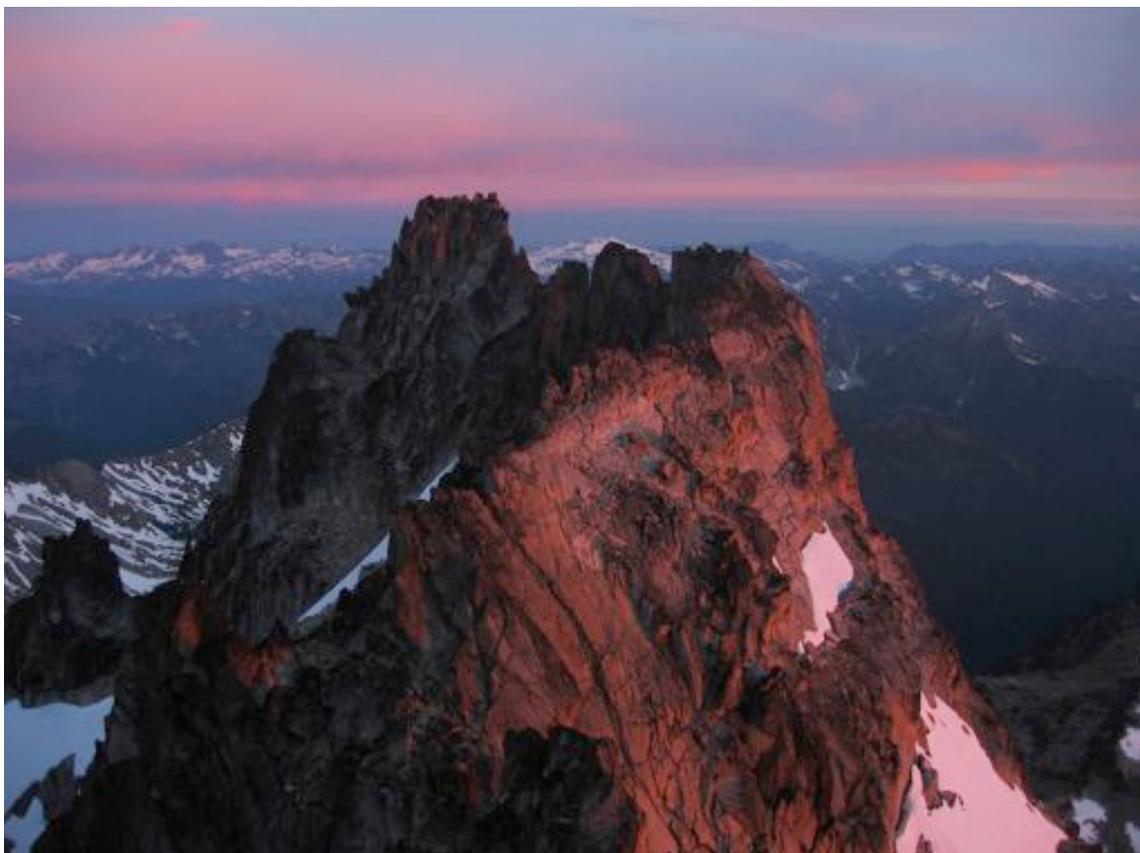
On our climb of Mt. Stuart, Clint and I wanted to travel light since climbing with a heavy pack is neither fun nor fast; we packed minimal gear, which meant leaving our sleeping bags in the car, even though we knew a bivy was likely given the length of the climb. Clint and I each brought 2 liters of water, some food, a jacket and hat, boots, climbing gear, headlamp, and an ice axe. Fortunately, the weather was perfect.

We left the Lake Stuart Trailhead at 5:45 am, followed a faint climber’s trail along Mountaineer Creek (which should be called Mosquito Creek; even my dad’s 30-year-old notes mention the terrible bugs!), and arrived at the toe of the north ridge in five hours. At the base of the ridge, we were about 3,000 vertical feet below the summit (9,415 ft).

The first four pitches were fun 5.7. Then came the heart of the climb—several hours of exposed ridgeline simul-climbing. The hands-on-the-crest traverses with sheer granite faces dropping into the valley on either side were amazing. We couldn’t ask for better climbing than on the solid sun-warmed alpine granite. Truly classic. And then, just when we thought the climbing couldn’t get any better, we arrived at the base of the Great Gendarme. The two pitches of the Gendarme were an incredible 5.9 lieback and a fun 5.9 o width (never thought I would find an o width fun!). Clint and I were glad we chose to climb the Gendarme rather than traverse below, which we had briefly considered due to the late hour (the sun was setting as we arrived at the top of the Gendarme). After the Gendarme, it was only a few more pitches to the summit. We reached the summit at 10 pm under a fading twilight. What an amazing climb!

But the climb was only half over. Now we had to face the descent. None of the routes down Stuart are quick or easy. Clint and I had decided on the West Ridge as our descent route, so we started to pick our way down. Ideally, we wanted to find a bivy site by a melting

snowfield, since we were nearly out of water. But in the dark we found it too difficult to find the route or see the many rappel slings, so we decided to build a bivy and assess the situation in the morning. Without sleeping bags, it was not the most comfortable night. I found that if I crawled into my pack I was a bit warmer. Thankfully, the night was short, and at 4:30 am it was light enough to start to look for the descent route again. The sunrise was beautiful.



Morning view from our bivy on the West Ridge of Mt. Stuart; © 2007 Steph Abegg.

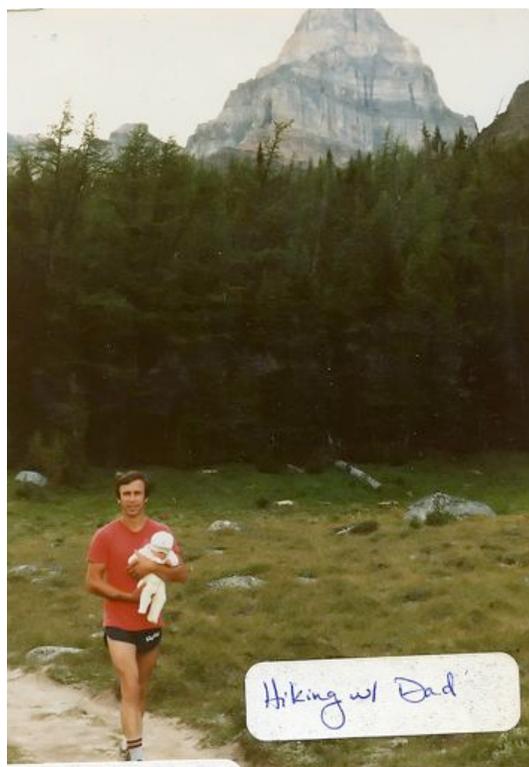
Long. Exhausting. Monotonous. Worth it. That's how I would describe our 15-hour descent down the West Ridge, over Goat Pass, and back to Stuart Lake. This involved a series of scattered rappels, loose descent paths, sketchy downclimbing, and even some glissading on heather. I remember at one point Clint and I rappelled off a single nut. It didn't help that on the entire West Ridge we found no water, and the only food we had between the two of us was three fruit bars and a brownie. Perhaps the next time I climb Mt. Stuart, I will try a different descent—my dad's climbing notes indicate that the class 3 couloirs on the SE side are loose but short, although you do end up on the opposite side of the mountain from your car at Stuart Lake...

Climbing the direct north ridge of Mt. Stuart at the beginning of the summer was a dangerous undertaking, since it set a high standard for the summer ahead. Fortunately, the North Cascades offer plenty of great alpine climbing. My parents are a great resource for helping me choose the classics. Over the course of the summer I climbed several of their all-time favorites, including the South and North Early Winter Spires (with Clint), the Fisher Chimneys route on Mt. Shuksan, Eldorado Peak (a classic knife-edge snow summit my parents joined me on), Forbidden Peak (another Fifty Classic), Mt. Sir Donald (yet another Fifty Classic), Mt. Triumph, Ruth Mtn., Tomyhoi Peak and Mt. Baker, to name a few. I will probably never get the chance to climb so many amazing mountains in so short a time.

III – Bugaboo Spire 10,510 ft, NE Ridge

At the end of August, just as I was beginning to think my alpine adventuring was over for the summer, I got the opportunity to go to the Bugaboos for a few days with my friend Jason. The Bugaboos are a stunning group of sheer granite peaks in eastern British Columbia. Often, you can start the climb right off the glacier. The Bugaboos also have special meaning for my parents, since it marked the end of their climbing career. They had planned to spend a few weeks climbing in the Bugaboos the summer of 1983, but then I was born, so their climbing trip turned into a reconnaissance of the area. Unfortunately, they never got the opportunity to return. So twenty-four years after I put an end to my parents' summers of climbing, I found myself fulfilling my parents' dream to climb in the Bugaboos.

The first step was finding the Bugaboos. Despite the grandeur of these peaks, I didn't see a single road sign indicating their presence. Typical Canada. But somehow Jason and I managed to find the dirt road turnoff, somewhere along the road between Golden and Radium Hot Springs. Soon we were at the trailhead wrapping the car in chicken wire to protect against the rubevoracious Bugaboo Porcupine. The camping area at Applebee Dome was only 3 miles and 3,200 ft away. Although the trail was well-traveled, because of our late start (6 pm) we wandered around in the dark



My dad with me in the Bugaboos; © 2007 Susan Abegg.

looking for the camp, which we finally spotted due to the headlight of a weak-bladdered fellow climber.



Bugaboo Spire; © 2007 Steph Abegg.

Since our trip to the Bugaboos was short, we were able to climb only a couple of peaks (Bugaboo Spire and Pigeon Spire). Already I am banking up my vacation days so I can return next summer. The main objective was the NE Ridge of Bugaboo Spire, an incredible solid granite spire rising a couple of thousand feet out of the surrounding glaciers. This Fifty Classic climb offers 9–12 pitches of sustained and exposed 5.6–5.8 climbing.

Jason and I set out for the NE Ridge of Bugaboo Spire on our second day in the Bugaboos. We got an early start and managed to find our way to the giant cairn at Bugaboo-Crescent col in the dark. From here the view of the NE ridge in the morning sun was inspiring. Jason, however, was pretty intimidated, and decided that he would rather spend a relaxing day basking in the sun with the chipmunks at camp. I was disappointed, but as luck would have it, the last party approaching the NE Ridge was a group of

three French-Canadians who let me join them for the climb. So I would get to climb the NE ridge after all!

When we reached the base of the climb, there were 6 parties ahead of us, five of which were still on the ground. We waited at the base of the NE ridge for 3 hours; finally, at 10:30 am, we were climbing. The climb was moderate, the exposure and the views were magnificent, and the rock was solid. I learned a bit of French as well, since the friendly French-Canadians either forgot I did not know French or figured I did not need to know the helpful beta they were shouting to each other. Even when they spoke English, their accents were quite thick (did he say “o belay” or “watch me here”?). It took us 8 hours to reach

the south summit (10,510 ft), but this time involved a lot of back-ups at belay stations. The main reason to get an alpine start for this climb it to get ahead of the crowds.

After sharing a summit Toblerone, we rappelled down the upper pitches of the Kain route on the south side of Bugaboo Spire, arriving back at camp in 3.5 hours. After my bivy on Mt. Stuart, I appreciated a warm sleeping bag after a long day of climbing!

A few days later (after stopping to climb Mt. Sir Donald on the way home), I was back home giving my parents a slideshow of my photos from the Bugaboos. This time there were no old photo books to pull off the shelf. I'm picking up where my parents left off 23 years ago. Mountains, here I come!



Steph Abegg graduated from Stanford in 2006 with a degree in Engineering Geology. She is now working in British Columbia as a civil engineer, but is thinking of going to graduate school to have more time for climbing, backpacking, and photography. Visit her webpage at <http://sabegg.googlepages.com/>. Photo c 2007 Steph Abegg Collection.)
