



THIN AIR

Volume 21, No 3

May, 2009

ORIZABA, BY DAVE CORVILL

Inside this issue

Orizaba....page 1, 2, 3, 6

Canadian High Points.....page 1 and 4

Upcoming HAMS trips.....page 5

On January 1st 2009, a group of 9 friends from CO & CA flew to Mexico City to begin a week long trip to attempt Orizaba. CMC members Dave Covill, Gerry Roach, Ken Gurvin, Alan Chudnow, and Wayne Johnson were accompanied by Dave's son Chris. The group was rounded out by Joe Burke from the Bay area of California, who met Dave & Chris on Denali in June of 2007 and who hopes to accompany them back there in 2010. Dave's co-worker Erik Kling and his good friend Pat Kelley of Lake City Co were also on the trip. Erik is attempting to become the 1st person to snowboard from the summits of all 54 14ers in CO. Pat is a Yosemite Big Wall climber, and co-founder of the Lake City Ice Park. Ken is a Board member for the CMC, and instructs Winter Camping School and Wilderness Trekking School. He graduated from HAMS this past year. Alan is a Knot School instructor, as is Wayne. Wayne is also a Basic Mountaineering School Instructor. Gerry is, of course, the 2nd person to do the Seven Summits, and is a 50-State-Highpoint Completer. Gerry has climbed Orizaba in the 1950's, the '60's, the '70's, the '80's, and the '90's. You get the picture; this was his last shot at the 2000's... Dave and Chris are 49.9 state highpoint Completers, having managed to get to 17K on Denali for a couple of nights, after being pinned down for 10 days at 14K Camp due to weather. Dave is the co-author of Hiking Colorado's Summits, a Falcon guide to the CO county highpoints, and instructs HAMS, WCS, WTS, and KTS. Chris is in college in Boston.



The team assembled in Mexico City at the airport, and were vanned to Tlachichuca, the small town at the northern base of

Continued on page 2

CANADIAN HIGH POINTS PROJECT by Rich McAdams

It seems there are 13 high points in the official Canadian record with four being challenging (either with the approach or the actual ascent), five being moderate, and four considered easy (drive up or walk up). At this point only Jack Bennett has completed all 13 and his travel journal/guidebook provides excellent descriptions as to the respective challenges and rewards for each summit.

So, the first summit will be an attempt on Mt Columbia in the July 4th timeframe. Columbia is the high point of Alberta and is located within Jasper National Park. I would rate this ascent as a moderate snow climb, with some crevasse, avalanche, and weather concerns. Most of the cost to do this peak will be the car pool expenses to Banff and park access fees.

Canadian High Points, Continued on page 4



Orizaba, Continued from page 1

Orizaba, by Jesus Antonio Juarez Guzman. Seems that everyone in Mexico has 3 or 4 names... We stayed at the Canchola Household, and were very well taken care of by Joaquin Canchola and daughter Maribel, with numerous relatives pitching in to make the operation run smoothly. The Canchola House is one of two operations in T-Lach, and was deemed to be the B&B of choice due to the rooms, food, price, and service. HAMS incoming Director Dave Pellegrini had stayed with them previously, and he highly recommended them.

On Day 2 we took 4WD trucks to the end of the road, as it were, at 14,000' at the Piedra Grande Hut. We chose to camp in tents near the hut, as it could be crowded and noisy with climbers. We spent 4 nights there, with some nights seeing a handful, others a couple dozen climbers. Many locals visited the hut, since the entire mountain is designated as a national park, but they were always gone by dinner time, as it is a solid 2 hours of driving on dusty volcanic ash roads to town. We hiked up to ~ 14,400' on Day 2, and called it good. The weather was reasonably warm, perhaps 60d during the day, and always above 30d at night. We had clear skies not counting the air pollution the entire trip.

On Day 3 the group set out for the base of what is known as The Labrynth, a steep section at the end of a valley that leads to the upper mountain above. The Labrynth is full of fingers of steep, hard ice; remnants of the snows that melted out from there as recently as a decade ago. Some of us made it to the top of the Labrynth at ~ 16,300', while others made it to the base of it at ~ 15,800'. Above the Labrynth lies a sloping ridge composed of ash which leads to the bottom of the summit snowfields at about 16,600'. The snows are firm, but not icy, and begin at about 20 degrees but quickly get to 30 degrees angle by 17,000', and top out around 38-40 degrees just below the crater rim around 18,300'. There is no respite from the verticality; this is a committing climb, one can not rest and sit, take the pack off, etc. it's up or down, that's all that is safe to do.

On Day 4 it was determined that Pat & Erik would attempt the summit, as they felt well-acclimated on their initial hike. The remaining 7 would make another acclimation hike to the top of the Labrynth at 16,300' or higher, and remain on the mountain in support of Pat & Erik. The duo made excellent time, and summited in 5 hours and were down in 3, a remarkable time given previous trip reports which noted times in the 7-9 hour range up and 4-

Orizaba, Continued from page 2

6 hour range down. They had cold temperatures and wind, and were so fast on the ascent that their start time of 3:45AM left them in the dark for most of their climb. They were not in sunlight until close to the summit. They experienced very cold temperatures and were forced to stop a few times to try to warm up, until they could finally climb into the sunlight. The others all made it onto the icy snow of the Labrynth and felt good about their chances the next day.

On Day 5 the Gang of Seven headed for the summit, with Ken, Alan & Wayne leaving at 3:15, and Joe, Gerry, Chris & Dave at 3:45AM. The rear guard quickly caught up to Ken & Alan, and it was determined that we would push on past them, as their chances of summiting did not look good. We caught Wayne at the base of the Labrynth at 5:30, and became a summit-bound team of 5 from there. We quickly put on our crampons in the pre-dawn glow, and by the time we had crested the steep icy fingers and were removing our crampons, the sun was rising; a glowing ball of orange fire penetrating the smog of the skyline to the East near Veracruz. The temperature was manageable, perhaps 20 or so, and the winds were totally calm, in contrast to the prior day. We were able to see the lights of Veracruz for the first time all trip, a real treat considering the omni-present pollution in Mexico. As we walked up to the snowfield, we began to feel that the summit was a very good possibility. All of us felt well, and we were well acclimated. Most other climbers tried for the summit on their 2nd or 3rd day; we were bidding for it on our 4th day.

A high camp at the base of the Labrynth or at the top of it had been considered, but that notion was quickly quashed when we realized that all water would have to be carried up from 14,000' Hut Camp, as the ice would not easily yield any water, and the summit snowfield at 16,600' might in theory, but it too was hard icy snow, not what we were used to melting in CO and AK. We put our crampons back on and headed up. Gerry and Joe employed a straight up technique, while Chris and Dave did a lot of zig-zagging. When the angle began to get serious, we were relieved to find that a faint trail was beaten into the hillside. At about 17,500', about 2/3 of the way up, it began to switchback to alleviate the steep angle of repose. The first four pulled away from Wayne, who was feeling fatigued, but who kept putting one foot in front of the other. The Gang of Four reached the rim at about 10:15, rested, and made for the summit, up about 200' in two to three hundred yards. We summited at about 10:45 AM, 7 hours after leaving the tents. There was no wind, bright sun, and temps at least 60 degrees. We could easily see Popo and Ixta to the west 75 miles, and other smaller volcanoes all around us. The smog was present, but much less than the previous days. We could see Wayne steadily climbing upwards, but it appeared he would be a half hour or more behind us.

Unbeknownst to the others, Dave had a small portion of the ashes of Jack Longacre with him, in a taped film can. This is known as Jack-in-the-Pack in the highpointing world. Jack was the founder of the Highpointers Club, and passed away in 2002. His ashes have been to the 50 state highpoints, to the Seven Summits, both Poles, and many dozens of other places in the world, including many country highpoints, the Great Wall of China, etc. We decided to conduct the Jack Ash ceremony without Wayne, as time was of the essence, and he would be tired upon arrival, and knew nothing of Highpointing to begin with. Joe Burke took still and video photos, while Dave scattered Jack in a small hole and built a cairn around him. Chris took his turn with the film can, and scattered Jack around the general summit cairn area. When it came to Gerry's turn, he scattered Jack to the wind, a fitting tribute to our dear friend, who loved to be everywhere and see everything. Words were spoken, tears shed, and then it was time for lunch and the descent.

We ate, Wayne arrived, and Chris felt it was so warm out he took off his shirt. This was quickly photographed for Highpointer's Club Newsletter Editor John Mitchler, who never met a bare chest he didn't like. Not to be outdone, Dave volunteered to do a handstand, no mean feat at that altitude, and given that his crampons were still, of course, attached firmly to his boots. Joe, Wayne & Chris held up Dave's feet, and Gerry captured the moment.

We started down close to noon, and caught up with Ken & Alan at the top of the Labrynth. They had made it onto the snowfield, and were pleased with setting a new personal altitude record of close to 17,000'. All of the group made it down between 4PM and 5:30PM, a very long day for all. Erik and Pat were successful in guarding the tents, having spent the day working on their tans and reading a book apiece.

That night, we slept well, content that we had each done his best, and come back intact. Gerry and tentmate Alan were awakened at midnight by a young college student from CU Boulder. His friend, whom we had passed going down at the base of the snowfield around 2PM, was having a bad night. He was spitting up pink particles, and his breath was gurgling. Gerry immediately deduced that this was a life-threatening emergency. Via walkie-talkie contact to their tent and the 3rd teammate, Gerry advised them to push the 9-1-1 button on their brand new SPOT personal locator emergency beacon device. This sent a signal to the authorities in Mexico, and to the boy's parents in Colorado. Gerry advised them to begin walking downhill immediately. This does not accomplish a lot on a Mexican volcano, as the roads wind for many miles before losing much altitude, but it was better than staying at 14,000' with a victim of HAPE, or High Altitude Pulmonary Edema. The owner of the climbers B&B, Joaquin, was advised of the emergency and began the long drive uphill, and he met the boys about 10 miles below the Hut at around 11,000' at 3AM, and took them to a hospital. Most of us were blissfully unaware of all of this, and were filled in by Gerry and Alan at breakfast. Joaquin returned to pick us up at 10AM, and by a little after noon we were all back in T-Lach, as we termed it, eating a wonderful lunch, drinking victory cerveza y tequila. The boys from Colorado returned from the hospital that evening, and we were heartened to see that the victim was looking much better and in good spirits, not too much the worse for the wear. They had attempted the peak on their 3rd day, and one of them had given up at the Labrynth while the other two had pushed on to the summit. They had taken much longer than we had to make the climb, and probably should have turned back. Aside from causing their parents a great deal of concern when the emergency signal came, not much harm was done. When the signal comes, there is no communication, just a beep that denotes something is bad-wrong, please send help ASAP". It was encouraging to see the SPOT

Orizaba, Continued on page 6

Canadian High Points, continued from page 1

Looking ahead and getting excited, I think 2010 will consist of Mt Fairweather (BC) or Mt Logan (Yukon), or perhaps even both.

I am now looking for others that might want to share a similar interest. If there appears to be enthusiasm, I will facilitate an informational meeting at the AMC in May. For those curious, please e-mail (Rich.McAdams@hp.com) referencing "Canadian High Points" in the subject line.



Mt Fairweather at Sunset

ADVANCED CREVASSE RESCUE IS HAPPENING MAY 14 & 17

Brendan Oldham is once again the lead instructor for the Advanced Crevasse Rescue Class.

The ACRS Seminar includes a lecture, field day, and detailed workbook.

The lecture consists of knot review, safe glacier team travel, and various rescue techniques including the "C" & "Z" rescue pulley systems

The field trip consists of hanging victims over a cornice on top of Loveland Pass. There will be lots of hands-on practice for students performing as rescuers and victims.



HAMS – Spring Rendezvous 2008 – May 23-25

Join us for the first HAMS Spring Rendezvous, a 3 day weekend of mountaineering, socializing, storytelling and planning future climbing trips with other members. We will backpack into Grizzly Gulch on Saturday, set up camp and plan climbing adventures of the many couloirs, ridges and peaks or ski runs. We will also do a Crevasse Rescue refresher. Come for a day or the whole weekend. Bring all your gear and your sense of adventure.

We will have CMC leaders to guide on the climbs. See the CMC website: www.cmc.org or the HAMS website: www.cmchams.org



Upcoming Trips

Upcoming trips approved by the ExCom, as well as tentative trips in the planning stage are listed below. For more information, and for other trips offered by Adventure Travel, be sure to check listings on the CMC website at www.cmc.org/events/events.

To request an application for approved trips, or for even more information, contact the leader at the phone number or email shown.

Don't forget to submit your story to Thin Air!

You do not have to climb an exotic peak in a foreign country to be eligible for a submission! Please submit your latest adventure or other article to spykerd@comcast.net

UPCOMING HAMS TRIPS



JULY 2010

MT ELBRUS, RUSSIA

18,510'

One of the 'seven summits'



2011

Mt Kilimanjaro

18,340'

One of the 'seven summits'

device work precisely as advertised. I will consider owning one in the future. It also can send a message each day that says "I'm OK", and it can send a series of GPS-coded tracks to home so that friends & family can track your progress each time you remember to push the "here is where I am at" button. A valuable lesson was learned by all present. The mountain doesn't care if you are young, or strong, or live at a relatively high altitude in Colorado. It only cares if you have paid your dues and properly acclimated. The mountain, in the end, decides who to allow to visit the summit, and who to shoo away for another try on another day.

We spent 2 more nights in T-Lach, hosted by the Canchon family. Ken & Alan took a public bus to the city of Puebla, 2 hours distant, and from 9AM-4PM were treated to tours of churches and the city square and various museums and shops. The other 7 of us hung out and enjoyed the down time in the little town of T-Lach. We partied with friends we had made on the mtn and at the B&B, and when the time came to leave on January 8th, Day 8 of our adventure, we were sad to leave. The flight home was uneventful, and all our gear made it in both directions. Mysterious bottles of tequila showed up in each person's luggage upon arrival in Denver, and we are still trying to figure out how that happened...

The entire trip was accomplished for \$1,000 per person, including the \$600 airfare. The \$400 balance paid for our van transportation, our 4WD round trip to the Hut, and 3 nights lodging and meals for 3 days. Truly a bargain in international peak bagging ! If you take the bus from Mexico City to T-Lach, you can trim about \$75-100 off of that amount, but we decided it was worth it to commute in style.

As for Jakk Longacre, well, he is sitting atop the highest point of land between Ecuador and Arctic Canada. There is no higher land than Orizaba for over a thousand miles in any direction. He will wait there for you, go and visit him !



**The High-Altitude Section of the Colorado
Mountain Club**

710 Tenth Street #200
Golden, Colorado 80401

NONPROFIT
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT #443
GOLDEN, CO