

Borah Peak, ID, 12,662 ft. – September 5, 2009, HP #7: Raised During an Earthquake

After work on Friday September 4, 2009, I took I-15 north from Utah to Blackfoot Idaho, then US-26 north west to Arco where I continued north west on US-93 through Mackay and finally to Birch Springs road to the southwest ridge trailhead of Borah Peak. It was a 330-mile drive. Upon arriving at 10:45 p.m. I folded down the back seat of my SUV and made myself comfortable for the night.

Next morning, I was up at 5:15 a.m. and by 6:20 a.m. I was following a trail upward to the east between pine trees and sage brush. Soon, as I headed up a series of switchbacks, I caught up to a party ahead of me. I put my head down and picked up my pace and as I overtook them, much to my surprise, one of them called me by name. I turned to see Mark Wray who I had worked with in Australia back in 1988. These days Mark is a pilot and lives in Idaho. In the last twenty-one years we had only seen each other one other time when nine years prior his work had taken him to the DC area. He was climbing Borah with his son, and it was a pleasant surprise to run into an old friend especially at such a remote location. I did not want to interrupt his father and son time, so I was soon on my way.

About 80 minutes into the hike the trees thinned out and Borah Peak came into view, I was at over 9,000 feet by this point. This was my first time seeing it with my own eyes, as I had arrived in the dark not getting a view of the mountain from the highway. From this vantage point the summit looked lower than its neighboring peak - an optical illusion as often happens in the mountains. At roughly 10,500 feet the trail enters an alpine plateau, and about 800 vertical feet later a rocky buttress is encountered which is the bottom of the legendary Chicken Out Ridge, considered the crux of the outing.

Chicken Out Ridge involves continuous stout third class scrambling - with a few fourth class moves sprinkled in for added spice- as it gains 300 vertical feet. The ridge has exposure on both sides with the north side being the more perilous as it looks down 2,000 or so feet. Sounds daunting, but the rock is solid with amble trustworthy hand and foot holds, and as such it is nothing to be worried about - some folks even take their dogs up and over it. The ridge ends at a 20-foot down climb landing on a snow filled notch (which was not so snow filled this late in the year). Just in case, I had packed an ice axe with me but there was not any need to unstrap it from my bag. The route travels north east from this point to the peak following the southwest ridge. This next section is narrow, but was easily passable, and leads slightly downward to a saddle which I reached at 9:10 a.m. From the saddle it is another 800 feet or so up to the summit, which required 40 minutes to climb.

This southwest ridge trail is steep, gaining on average close to 1,500 feet per mile as it surges 5,200 vertical feet in three and a half miles from the trailhead. I took three and a half hours to ascend it and I was privileged to arrive to an unpopulated peak. An American flag was flying from a flagpole prompted up by the summit cairn with an Idaho flag sunk below it partially resting on the group of rocks.



I only had the peak to myself for about five minutes as I took in the beautiful landscapes of the Lost River Range with its many 12,000-foot peaks scattered before me. No longer alone I took advantage of the company by having someone take my photo as I posed holding the faded jean "Mt. Borah, elev. 12,662 ft." banner, which is stored on the peak for all to model with, as I sported my 70's style sunglasses. Those who climbed this mountain before 1983 would have needed a banner labeled with 12,655 feet as

Borah was raised seven feet during a 1983 earthquake that shook the area.

By 10:10 a.m. Mark and his boy arrived, and we took a couple of photos together. While chitchatting we both mentioned a desire to one day climb Denali – Mark hoped to climb it with his son.

I hung out on the peak for about an hour. Ultimately retracing my steps returning to the parking lot by 2:00 p.m. Near the trailhead I stopped to read a "Safety Tips For Hiking Borah" sign which had been in the dark when I began my ascent. The sign said to plan on a 12-hour round trip but besides that it made some reasonable points. A second sign gave the origins of the mountains name stating, "Named in 1933 for William E. Borah, Idaho's senator from 1906 to 1940".

Next to the parking lot I found an empty camping spot with a picnic table. After removing my boots, I cleaned up then made lunch at the table. It was quiet so I rested hoping, but failing, to fall asleep. Around 6:00 p.m. I began the long drive back arriving home just after 11:00 p.m.

