



At last, it was 12pm on Aug 18th, and it was time to leave for the biggest trip of my life. I have registered earlier in January with RMI in Seattle to climb Mt. Rainier and it has been 7 months now that I have been training for it. Embarrassed to say, I haven't really been training hard, partly because I was busy renovating my new house and partly because I was just kind of lazy. My training consisted of 20 minutes run on the treadmills and 20 minutes stair master, 2 days a week, weight training 2 days a week for an hour per session. From time to time, I would go biking and hiking locally on the weekends to supplement that. As the date drew closer, I joined CMC and participated in their annual 26 miles hike to force myself to train harder. In early July, I went to PA and backpacked the Black Forest trail with a few friends with a 50+ lbs backpack for 3 days. The last two weekends of July, I went training by scrambling up Breakneck Ridge and hiked to Beacon's fire tower and back. The last two weeks, I decided to give myself time off before the trip to let my body rest. In my opinion, training hard is only part of the formula; you have to give your body enough time to rest as well.

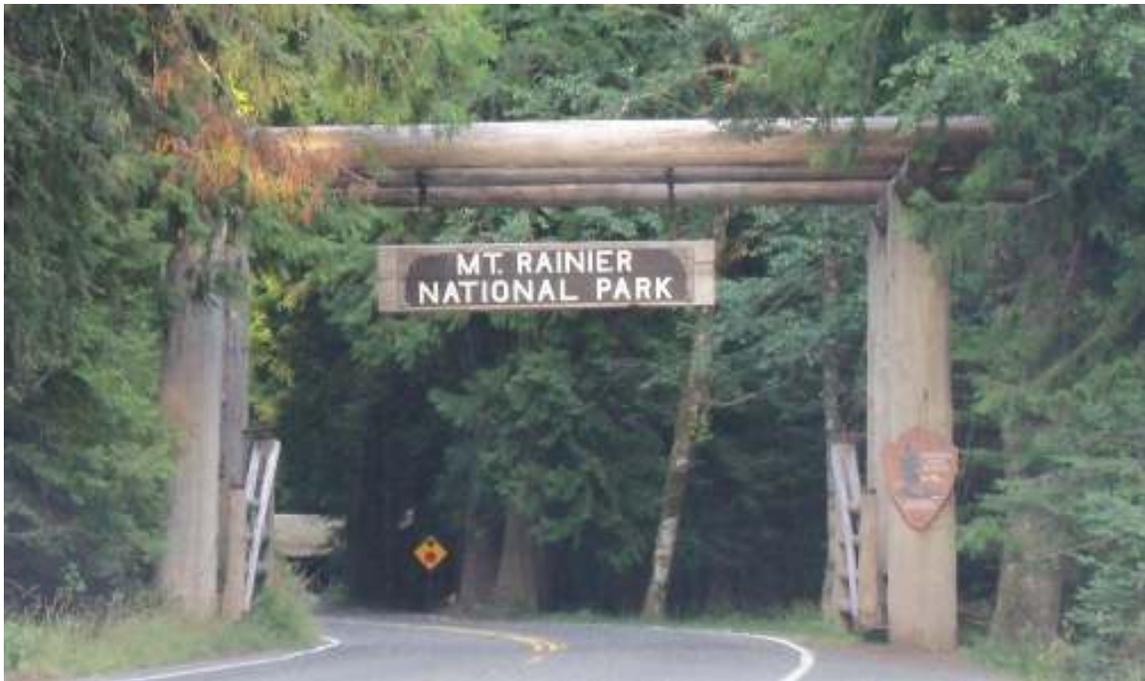
Well, the time has finally come, I have everything packed and my boss drove me to the train station. It was almost 13 hours later before I arrived in Seattle. I took a taxi to my hotel room and spent an uneventful night there. Next day, I took the shuttle to the airport and picked up my car rental. I spent the 19th sightseeing Seattle. Went to the space needle, took the monorail, visited Chinatown and took part in the underground tour. Seattle is a pretty boring place, with hardly anything that stands out culturally or historically. Luckily for me, it was only one day there to recuperate my body. Piece of advice, if you ever go there, best to take the mass transits, unless you are willing to pay for parking everywhere you go, because there is no free parking in Seattle. I gave it a nick name – “parking lot city”.

On the 20th, I woke up early and drove to REI to pick up some supplies. You should see the store they have there, it is humongous! The store took over the whole block and it is over 3 stories tall. I can see the store just after exiting the highway. It has its own underground parking. As you walk from the parking lot to the entrance, you pass a garden with hiking trails that takes you pass a waterfall. If you ever go to Seattle, you should visit this place. After picking up my supplies, I started driving to Ashford, where I would meet the RMI guys.

It was 3pm when I reached the Whittaker’s bunkhouse in Ashford. Checked in and was told they overbooked me for the bunk space. But they were kind enough to “upgrade” me to a private room (aka housekeeper’s room). Oh well, I thought, better have my private room with private bathroom than

squeezing in with bunch of guys. At orientation, I met one of my guides Billy and my other teammates. It was surprising to me that some of them had no prior hiking/climbing experience. One guy said he was there because he lost a bet. Well, at least he had the foresight to climb with experience guides. We then went over the gears we have and those who didn't have enough will rent from the store. I had almost all the gears required, so the only thing I needed to rent was the avalanche transceiver. It is one thing I wouldn't take lightly of, especially after the avalanche instance in early June that buried 11 climbers. Luckily 10 of them were pulled out by guides and the one independent climber was never found. He didn't have an avalanche transceiver on and didn't register with the park office, so nobody really knows who he was. His body is still somewhere up there on the mountain.

After orientation, feeling bored, I decided to go to the park and check things out. Not knowing that my climbing pass given out by RMI didn't include the park's entrance fee.



Luckily the ranger was kind enough to let me in for free, seeing that it was after 7pm already. So I drove 14 miles along the winding roads of Mt. Rainier National Park to reach Paradise parking lot. Walked around for a bit and it was getting chilly. Looked at my watch and it was 50F. It was getting dark and it was time to go. By this time my headache is getting bad (had it since this morning) and wanting to throw up. As I drove down the mountain on the never ending road, I tried hard to keep from throwing up. But resistant was futile; I finally had to do an emergency stop by the side of the road and vomited out all my lunch and dinner. What pissed me off was it was only 5-10 minutes from the park entrance. Missed it, by that much.

I arrived back at the bunkhouse at around 9pm. I was so tired I just took some Tylenols and went straight to sleep. The next day, I joined the other guys/gals in my team and headed out to Paradise trailhead for a little training. It was 8:15am and we were all quite excited that things were

finally going. We reached the trailhead 45 minutes later and geared up. Here I met Dave Hahn, who was the guide of the other team. He is legendary in the climbing world, having climbed Mt. Everest 12 times (most for a westerner) and Mt. Vinson 26 times, among other great accomplishments.



Anyway, after gearing up, we hiked about a little more than an hour to reach a snowfield, where we spent the day learning the basics, such as self arrest, team arrest, rope travel, pressure breathing, and snow travel with rest steps. It was very informative and I learned how important these techniques are for any climber. After training, we took some pictures at the trailhead and spent the rest of the day packing up. Before going to sleep, I went to the grocery store to pick up some snacks, mostly candy bars and a smoked sausage (bad, don't buy). At 8pm, I went to bed knowing it will be a long next three days on the mountain.

Woke up right on time at 7am the next morning, with all my gears already packed, I took my last shower before the climb and ate a big breakfast. Combed my hair really good (not that it matters) and shaved. Looked into the mirror and remember thinking to myself, I wonder how I would look after 3 days in the mountain.

The forecast for the next few days is sunny, warm, and with plenty of sun. It was pretty warm when we left our bunkhouse, and I was only wearing my base layer top. So it was kind of surprising to me that it felt really cold when we reached Paradise trailhead, probably in the 60s or lower. We were putting on our fleece jacket, hats and gloves almost immediately. My pack was weighing almost 40lbs, not too bad I guess, giving that I did a training hike in PA a month earlier with a 50+ lbs bag for 3 days. After bathroom runs and some picture takings, we were off to the climb in hazy, foggy weather. We hiked in a steady and methodical pace up camp Muir, and I have to say their system really worked. Normally I would be huffing and puffing all the way up and getting really tired fast, but walking in this steady pace really helped me to control my body temperature and I was overall comfortable with it. We hiked for an hour and then we take a 15 minutes break. Along the way, we didn't see many other hikers, probably because of the foul weather. After 6 hours of hiking up 4500 feet, we finally reached camp Muir at 10,300 feet in snowy condition. I was kind of tired, but otherwise not feeling too bad.



They gave us a choice between staying in the hut or outside in a tent. I chose the tent and it turned out to be great. Most people chose the hut, so I wind up having a 3 person tent all to myself. After mooching on some soup from a fellow climber, I started having a headache. It was quite bad at times I feel like throwing up at any moment. I guess the altitude did have some affect on me there. So I just took some Tylenols, drank a lot of water and went to sleep early. I didn't have dinner that day.

The next day, I woke up at 8am in sunny weather, and feeling really refreshed after sleeping for 12 hours. Went out and cooked my breakfast on the ridge and enjoyed the fantastic view of Mt. Adam and Mt. Hood in the distant.



At 10am, we started our hike up to Ingraham Flats, which is 1000 feet above camp Muir. So we all put on our crampons, harnesses, helmets, avalanche transceivers, and roped up into 4 person teams. To reach Ingraham Flats, we will first need to cross the Cowlitz glacier, which has a nick name of “Bowling Alley”. It is an area very prone to rock falls and we were given instructions earlier to be prepared to dodge and run if they tell us to. Once we crossed the glacier, we go up Cathedral Rock and finally arrived at Ingraham Flats. It took a little more than an hour to get there, and we spent about 45 minutes there relaxing and watching Dave’s group descending from above from Disappointment Cleaver (their group made the summit that day). After that, we hiked back to camp Muir. I remember it was really hot that day, close to 93F. We wind up spending the rest of the day packing up our gears, preparing for our midnight summit attempt and just relaxing. Myself, I just find a really good spot with a big rock as a back rest and enjoyed the sun while I listen to Jacky Cheung on my MP3 player.

At 4pm, we gathered around for the pre-summit talk. Basically just watch yourself and don't fall into any crevasses. We ate dinner at 5:30pm and headed into our sleeping bags at 6pm. I hardly got any sleep at all because some dudes outside my tent were constantly talking, and the fact that I was just too anxious. I tried to listen to some music to clam myself down and it didn't work. It wasn't until half an hour before wakeup time that I went into a semi-sleep. And before you know it, the guides were knocking on our tents and waking people up. Needless to say I was reluctant to climb out of my warm sleeping bag, but at last I did and the cold woke me up instantly. I quickly put on my clothes and grabbed my gears and breakfast. Went to the meeting point and already people were like ants running around packing up things. I quickly cooked my breakfast and did a quick bathroom run. It wasn't a good experience if you can imagine people lining up outside waiting and you're in constant pressure to do your business quickly and get out and let other people use it. While I was eating breakfast, I was surprised to see other climbers were coming up the Muir snowfield. I assume they were coming up from the parking lot and planning to do the summit hike that same day. Hardcore!

Anyway, the night turned out to be perfect for a summit climb. According to my guides later on, you can't get better weather than this. 50F, full moon, light wind, and great visibility. In my pack, I have my goose-down parka, winter gortex gloves and mittens, my primaloft mid layer, gortex shell jacket and pants, fleece hat, goggle, baseball cap, glacier glasses, extra pair of socks, food and snacks, balaclava, and two liters of Gatorade. I decided earlier to put my long johns bottom on even though it wasn't that cold, but I

predicted that it will get colder as we go higher and it will not be possible to put it on as we are moving. So what I wore when I started out were my base layer long sleeve top, avalanche transceiver, helmet, head lamp, long johns bottom, softshell pants, crampons, gaiters, harness, ice ax, and light glove liners.

We started out at 1:15am. The first goal was to cross the Cowlitz Glacier, up the Cathedral Rock and to the Ingraham Flats, where we would take our first break. It was a great sight to see a long row of headlights snaking across the glacier in almost silence. Wow! In about an hour, we reached Ingraham Flats and took our 15 minutes break.



The next section would be hardest part of the climb, according to our guides. We would need to cut across the Ingraham Glacier and up Disappointment Cleaver. Since rock falls are so frequent in this area, we would need to move fast and without stopping. It would be close to 2 hours climb up 1300 feet before we can rest on top of the Disappointment Cleaver. We started

crossing the Ingraham Glacier and that turned out to be pretty easy, because it was almost flat. But then we had to short rope and start our climb of the Disappointment Cleaver. It was all loose rocks with no snow/ice, so that means no trails or footprints to follow. I can see how people can get disoriented and lose their way easily on this section of the climb. Even in day light the route is not clear, you will have to constantly scan for the red flag on the stick that indicates the correct way. In the dark, that is just almost impossible. Unless you are very familiar with the route, you are almost certain to be spending longer time in route finding in this section. And this is certainly not the place to linger a second longer than necessary.

After getting up to the Disappointment Cleaver, we took our break and I ate some twix bar. Thinking to myself we had done the hardest part of the climb so the next climb up should be easy. Oh well, that wasn't to be. As I found out, the next section of the climb, going over to the Emmons Glacier and up to 13,400 feet to our next resting spot turned out to be the toughest part of the climb for me. The unrelenting steep climb of the first portion in snow and ice tired out your legs really quickly, even hiking in a slow and steady pace. Your feet just slip often, even with crampons on. There were no flat spots to rest your legs on, and you were forced to stand in an awkward duck stance which added to leg fatigue. The next portion wasn't anything better as we had to cross several snow bridges. My heart was really at my throat whenever I cross these. Not knowing if the bridge will hold me or collapse at any moment and take me down with it. Then there came the calves killer switchbacks. Oh man, it seems like they were never

going to end and several times I was just glad we had to stop and wait for the team ahead of us to move.



Finally we reached our rest spot at 6am at 13,400 feet on the Emmons Glacier, the sun was coming out and we all put on our glacier glasses. I quickly snapped a few pictures of the other teams crawling up the switchbacks and ate my third twix bar. At this time, my team mate was complaining about light-head-ness and dizziness. Our guide just told him to keep pressure breathing and essentially “suck it up”. It would be impossible to him to turn back by himself at this point since we have come so far. Like our guides said before, once you have committed to move forward with the climb from the Disappointment Cleaver, you are committed to summit to the top. We all must finish the climb up, or we are all going back together.

Surprisingly, I wasn't feeling too bad, aside from a slight headache, I was feeling fine. The final leg up 1000 feet to the top was pretty uneventful. We crossed several small crevasses and at one point a bigger crevasse which

they put a ladder as a bridge so we can cross. After huffing and puffing up the last couple of hundred feet, we were at the top inside the crater before I knew it. Some people went across the crater and up to Columbia Crest to tag the real top, but I wind up just staying put, resting and chatting with my guide. I think it turned out to be a mistake because I soon felt the effect of altitude. I was getting a bad headache and wanting to throw up at anytime. Not to mention I ate a bad turkey sandwich and my stomach was not cooperating with me. My guess is because when I was climbing, I was breathing so heavily and my body was working so hard, it kept the altitude affect at bay. Now that I started resting, my breathing started to slow and my body didn't need to work as hard, and I was affect by the altitude.

Finally after waiting on the other members to come back, we packed and started our descent. At this time, I was really feeling not too good. My legs are weak, I have a headache, and worst of all, I just want to throw up. It seems that I will be out of breath just doing the simplest thing like packing my pack. But I know I needed to descend to counter affect the altitude. So I carried on and we descended quickly. It wasn't until we reached 11,200 feet at Ingraham Flats that I felt fine again. Oh, also the Tylenol helped a lot as well. Like my doctor said, just take some Tylenol and drink a lot of water. Not sure if that was right or not, but it seemed to help.



By the time we reached camp Muir, it was 1:30pm in the afternoon, we used the 1 hour given to us to pack up and started our descent. It turned out to be the most fun part of the climb. At first we kind of plunge and slide down on our feet, but later we utilize the big garbage bag everyone carried up with us as a snow sledge and we all slide down 3000 feet with it on our butts. It was great fun and we all had a blast. By the time we reached the parking lot, it was close to 5pm. The shuttle was there waiting and we got on and back to the Bunkhouse we go. At the bunkhouse, we drank some ice cold drinks together, high fived each other and joked around. We all got our certificates and except one person, everyone made it to the summit!

On my way back to Seattle, I look back at Mt. Rainier in the sunset and it was beautiful. I can't believe I just came down from there just a few hours ago! It has to be the most satisfying accomplishment I had in my life so far!

