

Blanca - NW Face - Class 3 snow climb - Part 1

Peak:	Blanca Peak - 14,345 feet
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Post Date:	06/29/2009
Date Climbed:	06/27/2009

Blanca Peak

Co-climber: Mike

Day 1: Pack in to Como Lake

Day 2: Blanca Peak

Day 3: Ellingwood Point

Day 1

We drove up the cobbly rough road as far as Mike was comfortable, packed up and started hiking up the road.



Some beauty along the road:



As we hiked, we started remembering all the things we forgot... vest at the jeep, PB&J sammies, TP, 14ers.com route descriptions (in jeep), medical bag, wet wipes... the list went on. At least we managed to correct a couple items as we met a group of 3 hikers from Minnesota that were coming down. So now we had some route pictures (never really used - as everything is still snow covered) and a roll of TP.

Approaching the stream crossing, it started to rain a little bit. Luckily we were passing by the cabins along the way, so we could duck in and get our rain gear on.

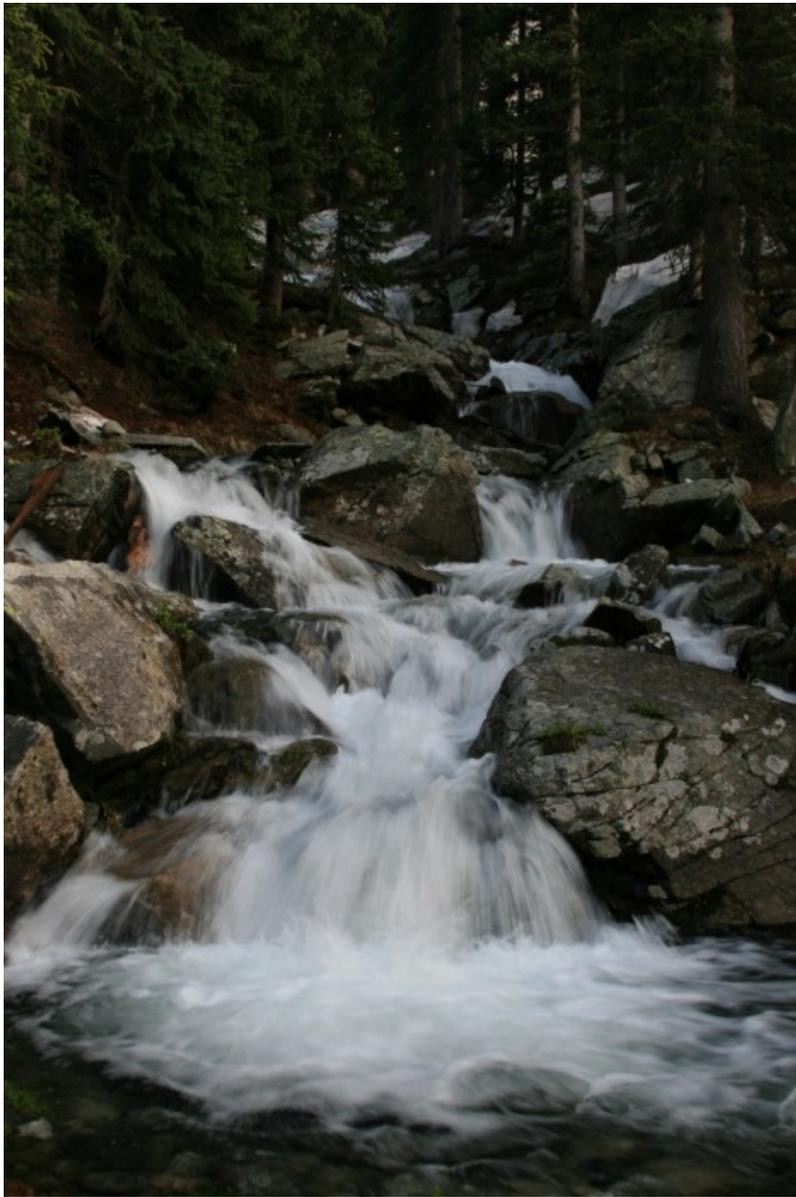


After what felt like a long time on the road, we got to the lake and set up camp.



We spent the lovely evening walking around the lake and meeting the temporary inhabitants. It's quite a gorgeous area!





We got into the tent after sunset to prepare for an early start. Little did we know there was going to be an attack by a marmot in the middle of the night! At about 12:30 am I awake to the piercing squeak of a marmot right next to the tent. Having seen what a marmot can do to gear (Mike's brand new trekking poles were chewed to bits), I try to scare away the critter. Mike, thinking it's a bear in camp, grabs my Grivel Rambo ice tool and goes outside to defend the territory. Finding nothing, he comes back inside and I can tell him that it was only a marmot!

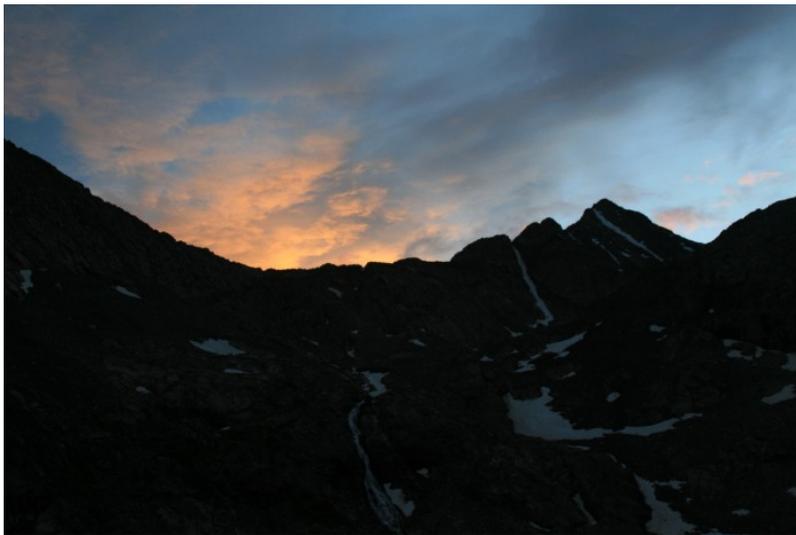
Day 2

Start: 5am Summit: 9:20am

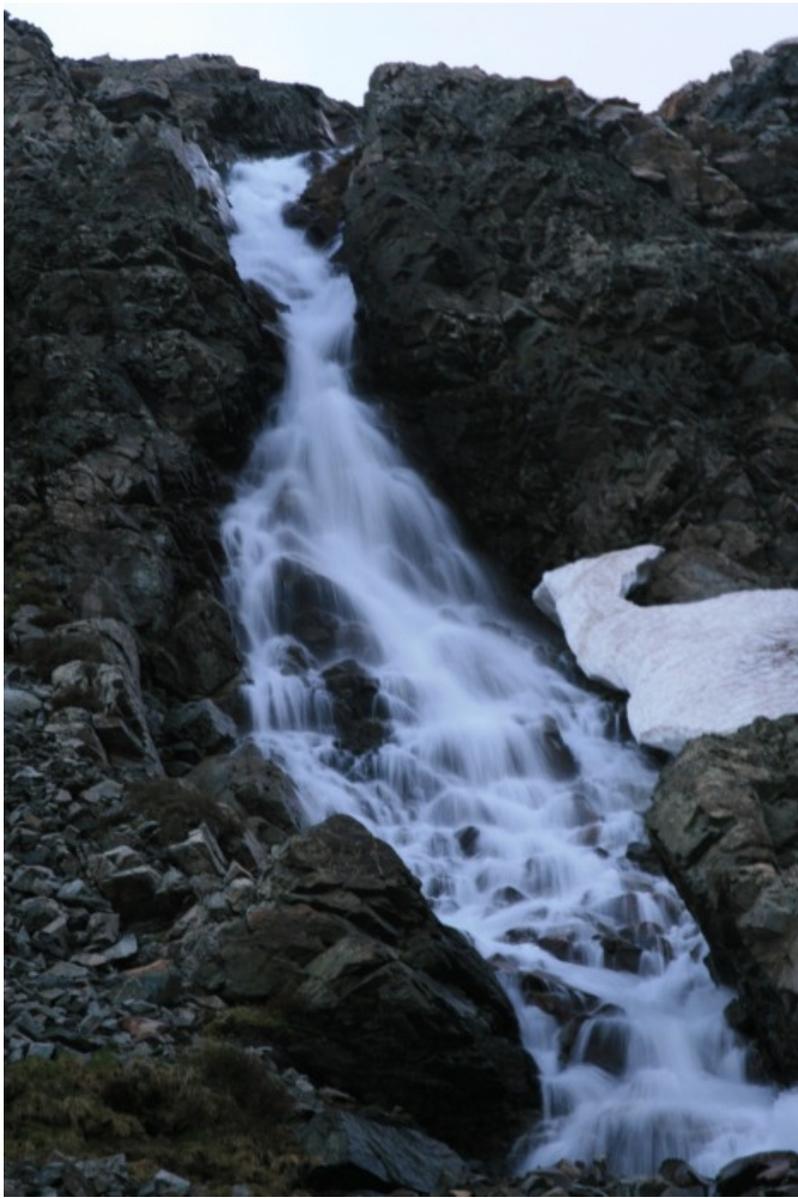
Made a decent alpine start and started walking up the road. Some patches of snow in the trees near Lake Como are still left, but not much else until ~12,000'. From the rain and cold temperatures from the night before, the ground around camp was frozen and would lead to verglance ice on the rocks

higher up on the trail. The verglance started early in elevation at extended all the way to the summit. It made walking on relatively flat ground difficult!

A nice sunrise over Ellingwood Point:



The waterfall that you pass to your left (we noticed a few trails in the snow well off to the right, that dead ended into cliffs)



Where the snow becomes continuous (from the place we named "Marmot Rock" - read on)



The rain and freezing temps made the snow pack hard as a rock, and very slippery. We donned our crampons as soon as the snow + slope got rather treacherous. We carefully made our way up to the upper most basin. Here we met some folks from Connecticut that didn't have the appropriate gear to make the summit on this day. One group was able to summit with an ice axe and no crampons, but they didn't think it was the safest way to go.

With a thick coating of verglance on the rocks, we decide to tackle the NW snow face of Blanca head on. 1,500' of ~Class 3 snow and mixed ice climbing awaited us. 😊

Early on, when the snow slope isn't that steep:



View of the sun warming up Ellingwood PT



In the upper sections where the slope is nearing 60 degrees, I would have loved to have my second ice tool that was still in the tent (since I didn't think I'd need it on this day). While a second tool isn't necessary, it would have been more fun and faster!

Here's me approaching the summit, a happy climber!



Ellingwood Pt:



Crestones:



Little Bear:



Happy, but tired climbers!





After a break on the summit, we decide to follow the standard trail down the north ridge until we find some good snow to glissade on.

Mike making his way back out onto the snow slope for the first glissade.



Our original plan was to do both Blanca and Ellingwood on Day 1, then Little Bear on Day 2. After a tougher than expected climb on Blanca, we decide that the climb on Ellingwood would wait till the next day, and Little Bear would be for another trip (when we were fresh)

We glissade and hike back to where the continuous snow ends (Marmot Rock), and meet up with some fellow trekkers drying their wet footwear in the warm sun. We spent some time just relaxing watching the weather and talking.

Mike's bag of snickers bars got too hot, and they melted, so he put them in the icy lake/stream near us. Little did we know the local marmots were planning the great snickers caper! One was a lookout on a high rock, distracting us, while the other near the stream, chewed through the plastic bag and started eating the snickers bars! When Mike notices, he jumps up and starts chasing the marmot to get the bag back. Some cat and mouse

chasing ensues, until Mike can grab the bag away from the sharp teeth of the marmot. Inspecting the chewed bag, the marmot chewed/drooled snickers are separated from the others. Forgiveness is eventually granted, after the losses are seen to not be that great.

Mike making friends with the marmot:



When the group of us picks up and starts to leave, the lookout marmot chases after us, wanting his share of the chocolate! Howard counter attacks and chases the marmot back up the rock to where he belongs.

After all that excitement, we head back to camp for rest and relaxation. After dinner, we take a walk around the lake for some photos.







I talked with a group that had summited Little Bear, and they said the hourglass was really dangerous with water running under the ice. Some areas the ice was hard, and crampons got little purchase. Where some places they punched through. Not encouraging beta. But as we would find out the next day, this ice must have fallen after they left, as it was dry on Sunday. Oooooo glad no one was there at that time!

Thankfully, there were no more marmot attacks in the middle of the night, so we were able to get a good nights rest before the next days climb.

Day 3 - Ellingwood Point