

Missoula to Stuart Peak, October 12, 2008

The kids and Jen took off last Wednesday to spend 5 days with Jen's mom over in West Yellowstone. They toured the park and had fun while I staid in Missoula and worked. As much as I like time to myself, I don't do as well when my family is gone. It's better for me to grab alone time in the mornings. When I have too much of it, I quickly find out how dependent I am on others for my well-being.

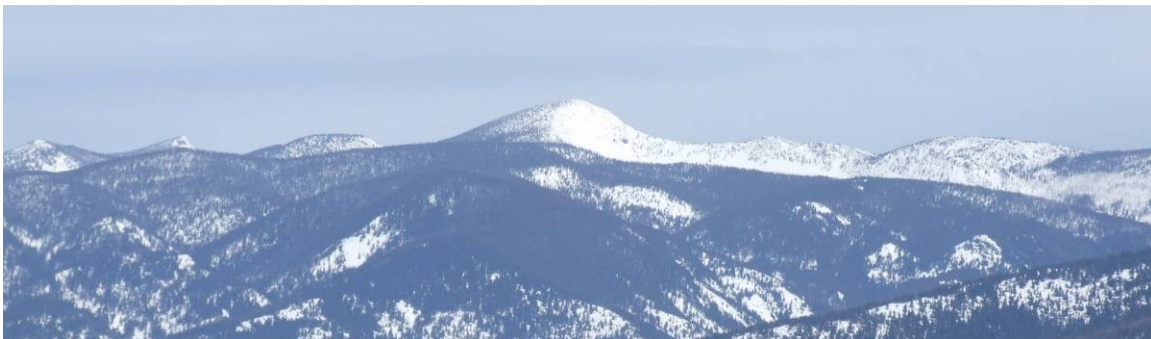
Anyway, on the day they were slated to return (Sunday), I took off from the house around noon on my bike with the intent of climbing Stuart Peak. The Peak is about 8 miles from the Rattlesnake Trailhead, which in turn is about 5 miles from our house. So the round trip is approximately 26 miles hike and bike. Stuart is visible from town and is the most popular destination in the Rattlesnake Wilderness for Missoulians. From Missoula it doesn't seem a particularly impressive peak (see picture below), but once you're on top, the views north into the heart of the wilderness area and further on to the Mission Mountains and the Swan Range are spectacular. And the long haul to the top makes you realize that it is no small mountain indeed.

It was tough to get out of the house, as the morning was snowy and though this didn't persist past noon, it was one of those cold and wet fall days when the looming winter is impossible to ignore. A part of me just wanted to putter around the house for the rest of the day, but I made myself get out and was glad I did in the end.

A good way to bag Stuart is to bike in from the trailhead until the trail gets too steep for comfortable riding. Many folks will ride the 6+ miles to the wilderness boundary, but that makes for a sweaty ascent. The two times I've climbed Stuart, I've ridden in about 2-3 miles to where the trail starts to wash out—just before the overlook mountain bike trail meets the Stuart Peak trail—and then hiked the rest of the way. About two or three miles from where I stashed my bike, snow covered the ground and trail, and by the time I reached the peak the snow was three inches or so deep.

On top, looking north, it was a bluebird day, which was a surprise since in town all morning, and even on the hike up, it was cloudy and spitting snow. However, it was bitterly cold, and I had to begin my trip back down prematurely because I was uncomfortably cold.

I was struck on the way down by how lucky I am to live in a place where I can ride/hike from my house for 3.5 hours and be standing on a high peak in a designated wilderness area looking into some of the most spectacular country in the lower 48. We are truly blessed living here in Missoula.



Stuart Peak from (I think) Mount Sentinel just above campus.



Looking north from Stuart Peak. The nearest high peak is Mosquito, and further back is McLeod—the Rattlesnakes tallest—and further still (in the distance) are the Mission Mountains.

NOTE: I got these pictures off of the web, so they aren't from my trip.