

March 1, 2008 – Crystal Mountain VertFest (randonnee rally), sponsored by Outdoor Research. The last rando rally that I entered was in March 2003 at Stevens Pass. Since then there has always been a family schedule conflict when the rallies were scheduled, either because I was out of town or because Steph was busy and I had to take care of Tom. This year was no different (Steph went to Leavenworth to go XC skiing) but Tom was invited to a sleep-over birthday party at Keegan Aislinn's in Bellingham. I convinced Keegan's mom Wren to take Tom on Friday night as well as Saturday. I drove Tom and his friends Adrian Eldridge, Willis Bridges and Liam Bateman to Lakewood on Friday evening and passed them off to Wren.

I had posted a call for carpool partners on turns-all-year.com and I got responses from Monika Johnson, Seth Davis, and James Rowe. We met at the James Street carpool parking lot under I-5 at 6 a.m. Saturday. I drove to Crystal Mountain, bringing both rally gear and heavier lift skiing gear. The pre-race meeting was delayed from 9 to 9:30 a.m. Several inches of new snow fell overnight, a good thing after many days of dry weather which produced icy slopes.

I ran into a lot of people who I hadn't seen for a while, including Kaj Bune (the VertFest organizer for Outdoor Research), Martin Volken, Tim Kelley (still working for Dynafit), Craig Dostie (now working for Backcountry magazine), Andreas Schmidt (helping out in the Black Diamond tent), Dan Nordstrom (president of Outdoor Research, competing in the event), Dan Cauthorn (W.L. Gore rep, also competing), Paul Baugher, and many local skiers. There were about 70 skiers participating in the rally in the various classes.

We lined up just uphill from the base chairlift terminal. Race Class competitors (making two laps) were in the front row. We stood just a few steps back from our skis and at 10:15 a.m. Martin Volken started us off. A couple of Dynafit sponsored ringers took off ahead of the pack. A third, only slightly slower, skier pulled out behind them. Seth Davis was after him on the climb of Lower Bull Run (now called Lower Ferks). I eventually passed slower skiers to pull into 5th position behind Seth. Another fast skier gradually reeled me in and caught me at the base of the boot track up K2 Face. I'd brought a cordelette for carrying my skis on my back, but had neglected to dig it out of my pack as planned, so I just clipped my skis to carabiners on my tiny pack's shoulder straps. My skis wind-milled around my head all the way up the boot track. I let the faster skier pass me at the top, and he tenaciously took off after Seth.

I continued to the top of Silver Queen in 6th place, within 100 yards of Seth and the other skier. I think they were faster on their transitions, because I could not see them at all when I took my skins off. I skied along the ridge to below The Throne, then descended to the base of the high Campbell lift and skied down Queen's Run, CMAC, and Skid Road back to the base. It was snowing hard at the time and I was wearing just a turtle neck and a bandana on my head. The wind and snow gave me an ice cream headache. Seth and the 5th place skier were already skinning away toward Lower Bull Run when I arrived. I clumsily put my skins back on and started up after them.

By the time I reached the top of Lower Bull Run, Seth and his pursuer were out of sight. I could not see anybody following me below. I was sort of in my own Private Idaho. There was no way I was going to overtake anyone, and little chance anyone would catch me, so I relaxed my pace, somewhat concerned about bonking. I hadn't carried any food or water, and I was beginning to feel hungry. With only three full ski touring days behind me this season, my legs felt out of shape. My lungs seemed to be doing okay. As I approached the base of K2 face I could see the 3rd, 4th, and 5th place skiers climbing up above me. That was the last I would see of them until after the race. Seth later said he was overtaken near the start of the final downhill. At the base of K2 Face, I took off my pack and dug out my cordelette to carry my skis. I also dug out a hat to

cover my snowy head. The boot track had some long steps in it, which further strained my weary legs.

I continued past the Campbell Basin lodge and started up the final ascending traverse toward the top of Bear Pits. Here I overtook that last of the one-lap skiers, a young woman on telemark skis. I took off my skins and descended into the Bear Pits chute. I was very thankful for the new snow overnight. Otherwise the chutes would have been very icy. Lower Bear Pits had some nice soft snow, but my legs were too tired to enjoy it much. I skied without stopping, but not very fast. After I reached the groomed trails near the bottom of the Rainier Express chair my legs recovered somewhat and I picked up my pace. I skated and tucked to the finish line arriving (I later learned) in 6th place in a time of about 2 hours, 17 minutes. I was a full 17 minutes behind Seth, who was just a minute or so behind the 4th place skier who overtook him. Hungry, I went into the lodge and bought a hot dog, French fries, and a brownie. I eventually walked to the car and switched to lift-skiing gear. I skied a few runs on the upper mountain before the 3:30 p.m. award ceremony, but my legs were pretty shot.

The racing (two laps) class was won by a member of the German national team. In 2nd place was a Dynafit sponsored skier visiting from Salt Lake City. The 3rd and 4th place skiers were from the Vancouver, B.C. area. Seth was 5th, I was 6th, and Monika Johnson came in 7th. Seth won the "local hero" honors as the fastest Washington skier (a distinction that he got no credit for, unfortunately). Monika was the fastest woman. I won a prize (an Outdoor Research jacket and \$50 cash) for the fastest racer over 50 years of age. In the raffle following the race I also won the last prize given away, a pair of 175cm Black Diamond Kilowatt skis. These skis are much wider than any I have ever owned. I've been wanting to find some fatter skis for lift-served powder skiing, and it looks like I have! Later I posted the following follow up on turns-all-year.com in the "VertFest 2008" thread:

Big thanks go to Kaj Bune, Martin Volken, Ben Haskell and all the sponsors who supported the event. It was a great time.

The race class (two laps) winner was a member of the German national team. 2nd place was a visiting skier from Salt Lake City, ~~who skis for Dynafit~~. 3rd and 4th places were taken by strong skiers from the Vancouver, B.C. area. Seth Davis of Seattle won the "local hero" honors, with a strong 5th place finish in the race class. Monika Johnson was the fastest race class woman, finishing 7th overall.

There were lots of great raffle prizes and our carpool (renamed the swag-mobile) brought home a lion's share. Thanks to Monika, Seth and James for being such great company on Saturday.

Note: From Feb 19-23, Steph, Tom & I went to Schweitzer Mtn. in Idaho during winter school break to ski with the Glucks & two other Sacajawea families. We had sunny, spring-like weather and very enjoyable skiing.

March 5, 2008 - Silver Peak ski - see p. 1850.