



## The Wright Peak ~~Slide Climb~~ Bushwhack

This was my first difficult hike after becoming a forty-sixer. The next journey began with this attempted slide climb...the journey to summit some of the mountains under more challenging conditions such as bushwhacks, slides or in the winter. I failed to even find the stream marking the beginning of the bushwhack last month when I made my first attempt at this route to the summit. In retrospect, that was a good thing since I started in the later hours of the morning and would still have made many of the mistakes in the following paragraphs.



*THE TRIBUTARY SOUTH OF THE SECOND LARGE ISLAND IN MARCY BROOK. I VEERED RIGHT TO FOLLOW THE STREAM BED. BELOW...A BEAUTIFUL WATERFALL OF THE STREAM PARTWAY UP.*



The beginning of this hike was similar to many others in the area as I hiked to Marcy Dam. I stopped for a view of Wright and its steep northern slide. I couldn't wait to start up it and it didn't look that far away. The day was clear and only a little hazy in the early hours of the morning.

I began the bushwhack just south of the second large island in Marcy Brook on the way to Avalanche Lake and prior to the bridge that crosses the brook. A stream entered from the right at about 2100' elevation.

According to one of the guidebooks, I needed to ascend about 1000' before veering off to the base of the slide...mistake *number 1!* I had the GPS set so that the altimeter was accessible and began to walk up the streambed. It was a slow rocky ascent on slippery rocks. I soon sought the firmer footing of the woods on the left-hand side and found a very, very faint path that paralleled the brook. It seemed to be used more by animals than man, but it led up and through the gentle woods that accompanied the first portion of the hike.

In my mind, I envisioned the stream flowing down the north side of Wright since viewing the large slide from Marcy dam...my *second* big mistake. The GPS was not functioning and the stream was not on the topo map. My only tools were an altimeter, a sketchy description of the route to the slide and a sense that I was walking east.

The woods became steeper and closer as I meandered ever upward in search of the rubble I knew to be at the bottom of the slide. The brook was a near rush through the trees much of the time. Finally, the ascent became much too steep to realistically climb so I descended to the brook bed and climbed on until I saw quite a lot of debris...mistake number *three* (this was debris not rubble).



I decided to try and find the slide since my GPS stated that I'd climbed a little over 1000': my target vertical distance. Remember mistake number 1? I exited the stream bed to the left...oops, mistake *number four*...and steeply ascended the mountain I thought was Wright. After climbing a couple hundred feet, I caught a glimpse of a familiar mountain through the trees...Wright and its telltale crown of rock! I was bushwhacking through the thick conifers of Algonquin. My second mistake regarding the route of the brook needed to be undone and rethought. I was, in reality, south of Wright and needed to find the southern slide that was to the RIGHT of the stream.

I descended Algonquin, leaving my enthusiasm behind, and crossed over to begin a new bushwhack to the base of the slide. Since I had climbed over 1000', I thought the slide might be a bit west on the slope of Wright. I climbed and climbed ever more slowly through the tight scratchy conifers. The mountain was hungry and tore at my body and pack. I was diligent and sought the slide west after ascending about 100', but it was nowhere to be found. I continued up. Every twenty feet or so, I was forced to rest. The bushwhack required the use of my legs and hands to push and pull my way up the steep incline and through the tight trees. I used the trekking poles and my



forearms under my wool shirt to deflect branches and smaller trees from poking and scratching my face. I was about 80% effective (use your imagination) and felt like I was recently in a fight with a mountain lion.

Every step increased my dejection. I would not let this mountain beat me



*THESE ARE FINE EXAMPLES OF THE TREES THAT I PUSHED THROUGH FOR HOURS IN AN EFFORT TO GET TO THE TOP OF THE RIDGE. THE PICTURE ON THE RIGHT COMPRISED MORE THAN HALF OF THE JOURNEY AND WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR MOST OF MY SCRATCHES.*



twice. I knew, by this point, that I was not going to hike a slide: the parameters had changed, and I was going to complete a bushwhack. Even if I turned back the effort would be very similar to finishing what I had inadvertently started. Every now and again a small clearing allowed me a sunny place to rest as the GPS altimeter ticked away the vertical feet ever so slowly. My body began shaking from the strain at about 3400' feet in elevation...not a good sign.

I was reanimated at about 3500' when I stumbled upon a piece of metal plane wreckage measuring about 2' by 3'. The WWII plane struck the north side of Wright (mistake *number 5*: I thought it was on the south side, but I'm ahead of myself). This debris was undeniably from a plane, though I couldn't imagine what part. It was deeply embedded in the ground. Assuming this was from the WWII plane, I tried to visualize the force necessary to jettison this large piece so far from the crash site (which I still assumed was on the south side near the slide I couldn't find). I snapped a photo and moved on, anxious to find more.

Wright is over 4000' tall. I knew the trees would only get tighter as the elevation increased. I was not disappointed as the mountain lion mauled me further. The trunks got increasingly thicker and less pliable as I continued to tear my way through the tight scratchy growth for nearly two hours. I scaled a small cliff using the trees to secure myself and stumbled on. Finally, the grade lessened and I reached the top of the ridge

*PIECE OF PLANE WRECKAGE FOUND AT 3500'.*





through the cripplebrush. A “short jog” east would, assumedly, place me on the summit. I dreamed of eating comfortably on the rock crown of the mountain. I soon ascended the false summit and the trees stunted to knee level. I carefully walked through since I did not want to injure the plant life by my inadvertent bushwhack. I nearly cried tears of joy when I saw the rocks a few hundred yards away and nearly cursed when I saw the slide below and to the EAST. I had not hiked far enough along the streambed to find the rubble field and thus exited far too soon.

It wasn't long before I lived my recent dream of sitting and eating on solid rock as my body shook from the exertion. The chill wind removed the comfortable portion of the dream quickly. It was only about 2:00 p.m., so I had plenty of time to eat and search for the plane wreckage that I could not find on my first hike to the summit in 2002. The fact that I believed the wreckage to be on the south side assured that I would not find the mangled engine or any other parts on this hike either. Note: Search for the wreckage on the north side!

After an hour of eating, photography and looking for metal pieces in vain, I gave up the fight and descended without incident on the well worn anorthosite path that I walked two years prior. I reflected as each step brought me closer to my truck. The day was anything but dull. It was my first complete bushwhack, but a bumbled slide climb as a result of my vast collection of false assumptions. I laughed it off and vowed to bring Deb up the slide correctly sometime in the near future. Together we could explore the WWII plane wreckage and enjoy the views of the beautiful Wright Peak.



*CRIPPLEBRUSH ON TOP OF THE FALSE SUMMIT BEFORE THE ROCK CROWN OF WRIGHT. THE TREES WERE ABOUT WAIST OR KNEE HIEGHT.*