



## Report # 3 – Ed and Tim at Yosemite Valley

Tim and I awoke early from our rock perch at the top of Yosemite's Merced River system ready to do our last climb of the trip. We figured a couple hours up over the ridge to the pass, and then it was down hill (twelve miles) to the car. The previous three days of hiking had made both of us sore in many places, but it had also put us in pretty good walking shape. This would prove to be helpful.

We were breakfasted, packed and were looking for the trail by 8 AM. Almost immediately, upon finding the trail it would end again into an acre size glacier of melting snow. We again tried with our topo to distinguish which dip, along the thousand foot high wall of rock and ice, is the Red Peak Pass we are to scale. A long-range sighting would have been useful for finding the trail. As I viewed likely candidates, totally packed with unconquerable steep snow, I wondered if, at the beginning of the trip, I had exchanged my paid permit for a wilderness permit, the rangers would have warned me that our return route was still covered with snow. But there was one pass that had half a dozen ribbons of rock islands between the snow valleys and seemed climbable, so we figured that must be the one. The snow was icy but very bright in what was becoming the late morning sun. The problem with crossing the snow changed from one of slipping to one of breaking through the icy top to the deep mush and uneven rocks below. The rocks above the snow were large and not easy to climb, and with the packs on our back it made balancing awkward. The closer to the pass we climbed, the more vertical our path became. I was relieved when we crossed the last major stretch of ice but became increasingly worried about the looseness of the boulders. At first they would just teeter a little with each step. Further up, they began to slide over movable rocks below the ones we stepped on. More and more we went from using our hands for balance to using them to assist in the climbing. I began to question my imprudence, thinking of the dangers I was putting my son in. I could imagine rockslides, broken bones, all sorts of dangers, but I couldn't see how talking about it would help inspire our needed confidence to get over the top. None the less, I worried as to how Tim was handling it. I was greatly relieved when his only voiced concern was "damn spiders". "Eleven thousand feet", he complained, "nothing but ice and rock, and still we have spiders. I can't stand those guys." That's my boy! Shortly after, and somewhere around noon, we climbed/crawled up over the low point in the ridge, hoping to find a trail.

No trail, and even less of a ridge than I could have imagined. We sat and rested on a crooked line of fractured boulders four to eight feet wide. It was not at all clear which way these solid but precarious looking rocks would one day fall; either east to begin eroding down the Merced river system from where we climbed, or west down the Illilouette basin at which we now both stared. We were at the top, inside of a horseshoe canyon. The thousand feet high cliffs to the left (south) were covered in glacier like snow. As they curved below and around us to the north it became more of a mix of snow and rock. The rocky ridge would finger down toward the valley, interlocking with the snowy valley, which would finger up to the ridge. Down at the bottom of this valley, next to where the tree line started, we saw what was to prove to be a natural wash, but from our perch it was optimistically sighted as the missing trail.

We would have liked to have skirted the snow fingers but immediately on the decent we were back to the sliding rock walk. This influenced us to a more downward track. On this shaded side of the pass, the skin of the snow was still icy. The first finger of snow was only 20 feet wide but I could tell that our tennis shoes would just not hold. Climbing up the rock finger to circumvent the snow was about two hundred feet of unstable rock. This encouraged the concept of sliding down the snow and catching the far outcrop of rocks, which took a slight hook toward us before disappearing into the even steeper, almost vertical,

snow beyond. I gingerly took a couple steps out into the snow and the next thing I remember is that I am sliding down the snow at a faster rate than I could have ever imagined. And then I remember a rock that I reached for and how my fingers, not able to overcome my speed, slipping off that rock. But fortunately some rocks below hooked toward me and brought me to a stop. Still lying there, I looked up at Tim somewhat breathlessly and tried to bring up the words that maybe it would be smarter to try something different. In my hesitation he hollered, "Are you all right?" The moment I said yes he, backpack and all, jumped into the most perfect, third base slide you have ever seen. He slipped down the slope at an ever-increasing speed, almost towards me but speeding by where I still lay. He managed to catch the last part of the rock groove hook and with more confidence than me got up and walked on as if it was no big deal, as we continued our advance down to the tree line.

At the bottom of this box canyon it was obvious that we were irreversibly in the wrong valley. With the topo's we theorized we were just one valley over from where we belonged. That all we needed do is to follow the glacier formed river to our left, down stream, to a lake, at which point we would find the elusive trail. I recall it was about one o'clock, a bit behind schedule but nothing to yet worry about. The lake was, so our map purported, a little over a mile away. Walking through the forest of the Sierras with no trail is both tiring and slow. We found that by walking above the river valley, where we just followed it down by ear, that it increased our pace. But still, by three o'clock, we had not come to the rather large lake. This lingering dilemma started to shake the foundation of our theorized location. I wondered if we had entered the twilight zone and were following the river that would never end. And it was even more unsettling when we heard a new river to our right. No such river existed on our topo map. And then we came to the swamp!

A swamp is not something with a visible bank where you know that you are about to cross it. It is more insidious, and at first, just a few muddy ruts with fallen trees for quick bridges. Then you are more on a lattice of fallen trees than the watery ground. And still further, even more fallen trees, layered like giant pick up sticks, over other fallen trees making obstacles over our bridged way. We found ourselves at a point of no return realizing first mentally, and then in reality, the inevitable slip to the black gooey, sulfur smelling swamp. We sloshed up to higher ground to rest and take a measure of our predicament.

Our predicament was that it was five thirty and we hadn't a clue as to where we were, and we were caked in swamp mud. We reluctantly chose to hike down closer to the river, clean up, make camp, and decipher where we were in the morning. On the somber hike down, I had so given up on finding the trail that I must have taken five extra steps past it before I realized I had just walked over it. I turned to look back just as Tim stepped on the smooth, level dirt and proclaimed, "The trail." It just goes to show; you never find what you are looking for until you stop looking. With new energy we got out the topo and surmised that we had missed the lake but were correctly continuing down a major tributary of the Illioette, just as needed. We guessed, this time correctly, that we were about five miles from the car with about two hours of daylight left. "Can we do it?" That was the simple but real challenge which had dogged us since eight that morning. We put on our packs and continued down the trail at almost a run. We arrived at the car a half hour after the need for a flash light to complete our journey, in what, for the both of us, was one of the most strenuous days of our lives. In my book that's a good ending for a true adventure.

Thanks, Ed, for an interesting and exciting account of your hike through the wilderness. I'm just glad we found out about it only after you were safely back home!

# The Riel Family Newsletter

Catch the News

November, 2004

## Some news from Dr. Bruce Gillingham, serving in the army in Iraq

Recently we received from Listy the following excerpt and photo from Bob's brother Bruce

Dad,

Here are some more thoughts regarding Bruce (Bob's brother who is stationed in Iraq). It's an excerpt from a letter he sent to his brother. Listy

Oh what I would give to see the video of you leading the pledge! Jeannette said she sent you some of the excerpts from me describing our situation here. Here are a few things that have inspired me while I've been here that you may be able to work into a nice talk. The 1st LT who was blind in both eyes due to an IED (improvised explosive device) who asked me: "when can I go back to my guys, Sir??" The Gunny Sergeant who asked us to carry him from the OR where we had I had just finished amputating his leg below the knee to our other OR so he could see that one of the younger Marines from his unit was still alive. The Navy Corpsman who held an injured Marine from his unit on the hood of their Humvee following an IED explosion. He started an IV en route to our facility at speeds up to 55mph on unimproved roads, no less. This particular Humvee was like the clown car from the circus. When it arrived our guys kept pulling injured Marines from inside (a total of 5 including the patient on the hood). The remainder of the unit then stood in line and offered to donate blood if we needed it. The common thread of course is the dedication to the Marine brotherhood (generic, as we have treated injured female marines) and the mission. Even seriously injured, almost to a person the war-fighters are so focused on getting the job done that they routinely ignore injuries and personal considerations so that they don't let their units and fellow platoon mates down. My message to the realtors would be to support and salute this concept of self-sacrifice and loyalty, even if they do not agree with the fact that we are here. These war-fighters embody the characteristics that helped establish this country and that will sustain our society despite the corrosive effects of avarice, self-absorption and faux privilege. To the Marines, Soldiers and Sailors here in Iraq and other hot spots Duty, Honor, Country is not a hollow slogan, but the words they live by. Tom Brokaw wrote a best seller about "The Greatest Generation" from World War II. These folks are every bit the equal of those. I hope this helps. Even though I've only been here for about 6 weeks this has been a career experience so far and despite the hardships and separation I wouldn't trade this assignment for any other. I've been training for this for 20 years and am finally using all of my capabilities. We have a great group of dedicated and talented folks and we've already made a difference in

outcomes for critically ill casualties. We have 3 casualties in-bound right now and I have to stop. Let me know if you need any additional bullets. Good luck and let me know how it goes."  
Bruce

Dear Dad,

I thought you might enjoy seeing a picture of Bob's brother Bruce who is stationed in Iraq, where he volunteered to head up a military hospital. He's the guy on the far left. I'm sure he'll have lots of stories to tell when he returns next spring.  
Listy



## Francis Parker Lower School remodeling complete

Some time ago we published some pictures of the work in progress at FPLS. That work now is complete, and the new additions are all in use. We had a tour of the additions recently, and were very impressed with the various new features. There are many new classrooms, a computer lab, conference rooms, and a very impressive library. We did not have a chance to take any pictures at that time, but we did visit Bob later on, and got the following picture of his new office. We will make another visit and get some pictures for a future issue of RFNL.



# The Riel Family Newsletter

Catch the News

November, 2004

## Hartman home remodeling update

Recently we had a chance to check out progress at the new Hartman home. Things still are in process, and some major changes are in work. Last spring we took some pictures of the house as bought, and we now have some comparison shots which show the improvements in work.



Original patio



New master bedroom



Old front door



New front door



Old back porch



Remodeled back porch

## Some birthday celebrations

There were two recent birthday celebrations, one with David and Scott (on the same day) and another with Richard and family. With David and Scott we lunched at the Mandarin Plaza restaurant. Afterwards, we took in a movie, Ladder 49, a pretty good movie if you like to see collapsing burning buildings from the inside. It was a fun celebration, and we once again wish the best to David and Scott.

We also celebrated Richard's birthday, along with Liz and JJ. We enjoyed dinner at the Outback Steakhouse in Mission Valley. Afterwards, Richard and I visited the Camel's Breath Bar, where Richard and his partner put on their Karaoke show, using the audio and visual equipment Richard has set up. The show was just beginning and Richard warmed up the gathering audience by belting out one of the

songs popular with the Karaoke crowd. We then went home, and Richard returned later on to take over at the show. It was another fun evening, and we wish Richard many more happy ones!



**Correction** — In the October RFNL we reported in a graduation party for Brett, What we failed to do was to point out that the party was hosted by Francie and Alan, rather than Francie and Lyle. We are sorry, Alan, for this oversight.

**An update on Grandma's problem back**  
Grandma has had two shots in her back, the

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Catch the News

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first one on October 13<sup>th</sup>, and the second two weeks later. She felt somewhat better after the first shot, and quite a bit better after the second one. She actually was able to play two rounds of golf during the last week of October. The third shot was administered on the 10<sup>th</sup> of this month. After that, we will await the medical decision on the next action. We will keep you posted.

## RFNL Christmas dine out certificates

At the last Riel Bowl the winners of the gift dinners were the Ed Riel family and the Riel-Mehan family. We recently celebrated with Ed and Jan at the Outback Steakhouse in Mission valley. Unfortunately, only one of the four Riel kids, Chris, was available, but we enjoyed a great evening with Ed, Jan, and Chris.



Margaret and Bud are next, and we plan on celebrating right after the Thanksgiving holiday.

## Lunch with Margaret

Some time ago Margaret gave us a fancy steamer, identical to the one in her dining room. Some time ago ours quit, and Margaret came over to fix it. The fix still didn't work, and a second visit was necessary. This one worked, as you can see, so we celebrated by enjoying lunch at home.



## Saturday lunches

Frequently, Ed joins for lunch on Saturday, and afterwards

we take care of odd jobs needed at the condo. Every so often Listy and Birdy join us, and a shopping spree follows the lunch. On a recent occasion we were fortunate to be joined also by Jan, Tim, Francie, and Bryce and girlfriend, We all



enjoyed lunch at Sizzler's, along with the chance to hear the latest from Bryce and Tim.



## RFNL Office gets new printer

For many years we have used an HP printer for producing RFNL issues. It worked fine, but was pretty slow (3 min. per page). Even worse, it would not automatically feed reverse side pages, since they sometimes would stick together, feeding two at once. In order to print both sides we had to hand feed, one by one, pages two and four. The new printer



is much faster, at four pages per minute. Better still, it seems to feed back pages properly, thus saving three hours of hand feeding. However, we now have a slow but perfectly good HP printer, which we will

gladly give to anyone interested.

## Thanksgiving is nearly upon us

Yes, it is almost time to start the holiday season, and first up on the agenda is the annual Thanksgiving Day party at the home of Margaret and Bud. We will meet at about 11:00 a.m., and go on from there. Be sure and call Margaret to let her know what to bring. She has assured us that the new patio will be finished in time, and we all look forward to seeing how it looks. SEE YOU THERE!!