

## Mt. Shasta: Bolum-Hotlum Route, July 2-3, 2005

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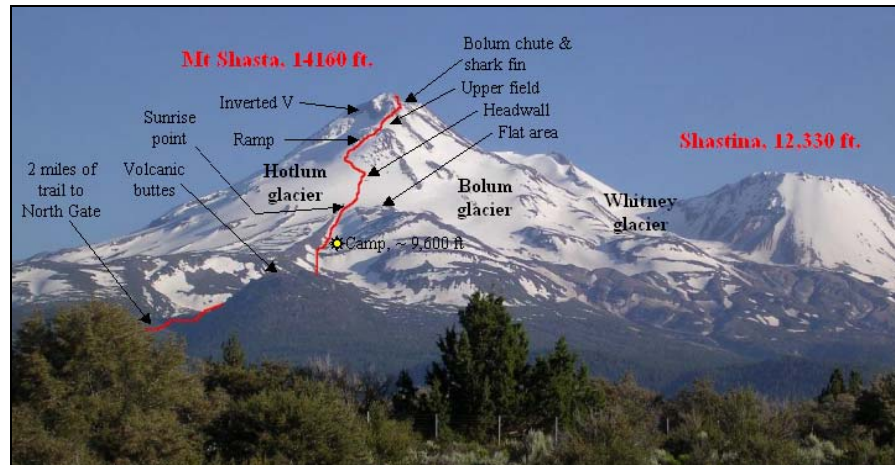


**The Angle of Riposte**  
Zeke carves a tele-turn high above the Hotlum glacier on Mt. Shasta. We started our California summer and 9<sup>th</sup> month of skiing with clear skies, sun-perfect weather, and 5,500 feet of vertical. (J. Harou)

After tanking up on Guatalahara burritos in Davis, CA around 8:30 PM, Julien and I headed up I-5 and pulled into Shasta's North Gate parking lot around midnight. Spent the last half-hour grinding 3,000 ft up the boulder-filled Military Pass road, but my 2WD Saturn Love-ship pulled through without complaint. There were about eight cars in the lot and no one in sight. Threw sleeping bags down among the pines, swatted many a mosquito, and awoke around 8 AM.

Driving up, we debated whether to (i) hit the proven east-side Hotlum-Wintun route (where the trailhead was snowed in and boasted at least 8,000

**North Face of Mt. Shasta—**  
Bolum-Hotlum ascent and ski route marked in red.



vertical feet of continuous snow) that I had successfully climbed and skied three years before, or (ii) try a new route (for me) on the north face.

Awaking to our first view of the mountain and not wanting to waste more time dodging rocks on Military Pass road, we opted to start walking from North Gate. It would still require 7,000 ft of climbing—over a still to-be-determined amount on dirt—to find the July skiing rewards.

Packs loaded with skis, we sped up the first two miles of the dry summer trail while relaying the excitements of—and unexpected reactions to—each of our recent engagements. We were doing the trip *sans* fiancés: which meant they were expecting and wanting us back by the next evening for 4<sup>th</sup> of July festivities. This afforded a critically close—but sufficient—time window for a summit bid if all went well.

We found snow at about 8,500 feet below the col with the Volcanic Buttes. Had a quick lunch, switched to skins, and continued over firm snow around the col and up into the drainage that led to base camp. In this area, there were three or four breaks in the snow that required taking the skis off to walk a hundred feet to the next snow. The skis did not sink into the snow.



Julien at the North Gate trailhead—No snow, skis on packs, but an encouraging view towards the Hotlum glacier and the prominent inverted “V”. Our summit route would follow the right ridgeline.



Skinning up the drainage towards base camp.



Self-timer at base camp—View further up the drainage towards the headwall and summit. (J. Harou)

Arrived at base camp at 9,600 feet or so around 2 PM to find 5 or 6 other tents and a trickle of people returning from successful and not-so-successful summit bids. A smaller crowd than we anticipated for the 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend. Julien arrived a little later with the tent and we set up camp.

Before us, in clear blue relief without a cloud blocking our view, stretched the remainder of the route: another mile and 1,000 ft up the drainage to a headwall, a steep climb skirting first looker's-right and then looker's-left of a faint line demarking the Hotlum glacier bergschrund, a ramp above the 'schrund leading to an upper snow field, and a boulder traverse into the Bolum chute which topped out at a prominent shark fin. This fin was as far as we could see.

Wanting to get a better look at headwall, I skinned up the west side of the drainage towards a flat area between the Hotlum and Bolum glaciers. Both Julien and I had been on ski-hiatus for most of June as we struggled to finish our spring quarter classes and take our final exams so I was also eager to get in some practice turns. I didn't want to start the first—and likely most difficult—turns the next day from above 14,000 feet.



Panoramic view from flats between Hotlum and Bolum glaciers—Shasta headwall, Shastina, and Lake Shastina at the far right.

Up on the flats, Shastina popped into view. A second route of continuous snow leading directly to the shark fin was also apparent. But the Bolum 'schrund looked bigger than the Hotlum one. Enjoyed marvelous views to north out over Lake Shastina and a super descent back to camp over crème-de-la-crème corn. We gobbled down dinner and were interrupted by Julien's ringing cell phone (it was his sweetie). I later used the opportunity to call my honey-bunches-of-oats (voicemail). Was in my bag by 8 PM and fast to sleep by sounds of melt-water running underneath the nearby snowfield.

We awoke at 4 AM, nibbled at breakfast, and were skinning by 5 AM. The snow was hard and our skins slipped a few times. An hour later at the base of the headwall, I stopped to watch the sunrise and relieve my bowels into a famous Shasta Ziploc. Very excited to lighten the load! Put some rocks on the bag for retrieval later and switched to crampons and ice-axes. We continued upwards on the steep but hard snow. I felt strong, climbed fast, led the way, and waited for Julien at various rock outcrops. On the ramp above the 'schrund, we climbed together which speeded our pace.



Evening at base camp—  
Julien on the cell phone to his  
sweetie.



Sunrise across the Hotlum  
glacier



Julien skinning up towards the sunrise vantage point—The top of Mt. McClaughlin, already much lower, is in the far distance.



Climbing the headwall



Resting on a rock outcrop halfway up the headwall—Again, Lake Shastina in the background.

At the top of the ramp, rocks broke the snow, and we were confronted with more up: a small snow field leading to a boulder traverse providing entry into the Bolum chute leading to a shark fin above. Were we nearly at the top? There were two pairs of skis stashed here on the rocks, which I assumed were left by the two climbers we had seen earlier in the morning on the ramp. Julien left his skis here, but I stubbornly kept mine strapped to my pack. The snow was still hard and we continued upwards. Halfway up the snowfield, we met the descending climbers. They said they had traversed

climber's-*right* of the shark fin to meet up with the southern route at the top of Misery Hill. The true summit was only a little bit farther.

And so we continued on up. Above the snowfield and after the boulders, we looked up at the shark fin and decided that climber's *left* up the Bolom chute was the steeper, but more direct route to the summit. So I started up this pitch and Julien followed. However, when we got to the top we were a bit dumbfounded. Or was it merely the altitude? Where was the summit and hoards of climbers? Above us to our left was a steep cliff of boulders (not passable). To our right was a snow-filled gully leading down towards the Whitney glacier. And beyond the gully was another steep snow-covered (false) summit block devoid of people. Julien was extremely discouraged and started cursing a steady stream of shitty Shasta profanity.

Our only recourse was to cross more rocks and angle left towards the top of the gully. And just as we crossed back onto the snow in the gully, we spied the summit and steady stream of people coming up from Misery Hill.



Climbing the ramp above the headwall.



Snow field above the ramp—Prominent shark fin is on right ridgeline



Bolum chute guarded by prominent shark fin



Julien on the summit—  
Snow-covered Trinity Alps in the distance

We were on the summit by 11:30 AM, a 6.5 hour climb despite all of Julien's panting and ranting. The ranger asked for my summit pass (which took a few minutes to dig out of my wallet). We had our first lunch and sucked in the 270° view that included snows on Mt. Lassen, the Trinity-Alps, and Shastina (the view north towards Bolum-Hotlum is blocked). We looked down the 8,000 ft of snow on the Hotlum-Wintun face and watched several folks carve AT-turns most of the way down that beautiful eastern expanse of corn-estate. Julien wondered why he was the only person who looked exhausted. I suggested that the truly exhausted folks never made it the summit.

Then we headed back down the way we had come up. I strapped on the skies right at the top. The summit block was icy-hard. Took off the skis to cross onto the Whitney gulley and back over to the top of the Bolum chute. The NW aspect chute was still hard scrapple, but skiable. An uncontrolled slip or fall would have sent me tumbling thousands of feet towards the Bolum bergschrund.



View down the east  
face—8,000 feet if  
continuous vertical to Brewer  
Creek trailhead?

But exited cleanly, traversed skier's right, and took off the skis again to cross over to the upper snowfield. Here the snow softened a tad, I got 20 or 30 turns back to the top of the ramp where Julien had left his skis, and saw the remainder of our morning and previous day's ascent route stretch out below us.

Waited for Julien to descend on foot and then we both enjoyed softening and improving conditions as we skied down the ramp towards the Hotlum 'schrund. Shot several short ski porn movie clips in the warm corn. Which were curtailed as the angled steepened and we approached to within 100 feet of the 'schrund.

This point was the crux of our descent. We needed to traverse skier's left away from the 'schrund and towards the steeper and more north-westerly headwall aspect where the snow was harder. Julien led and I followed. Past the 'schrund, I gathered courage to carve several turns on the hard snow of the headwall. A few turns later, we were suddenly onto corn again and carved turns for two thousand more vertical back to base camp, stopping only to pick up our morning Ziplocs.

Basked in our summit success, packed up camp, ate a second lunch of left over hummus, and debated whether the snow would be too mushy to ski safely below camp (with full packs). I figured to give it a try and we enjoyed creamy soft and deep (but solid) corn all the way down to the col with the Volcanic buttes. Had to take the skis off a few times over the last several pitches, then finally strapped them to the packs and walked the final two miles out to car, arriving there around 6 PM.



All-in-all, I enjoyed the Bolum-Hotlum route. The continuous skiing from 13,000 to 9,000 feet was fabulous, while the discontinuous snow above and below those sections was slightly annoying. Julien thought the route better suited for mountaineering. And on future Shasta climbs, I think I will stick to the eastern face with it's continuous, longer, and better top-to-bottom quality corn.



Zeke making the first turn at the top of the Bolum Chute (J. Harou).



Zeke skiing down the ramp (J. Harou).



Julien catching an edge on the ramp towards the Hotlum bergschrung— Drainage approach visible far below and left.



Julien traversing skier's left from the Hotlum bergschrund and towards the headwall.



Super awesome corn on the lower part of the headwall.



View of Bolum-Hotlum route and approach from Military Pass road.