

The 2009 Challenge

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 Tuesday, 27 January 2009
 Last Updated Friday, 15 January 2010

I wanted to challenge myself to accomplish something unique and significant this year. When I came home from the 2008 Summer Grand Tour I knew I wanted more of that sort of experience; I wanted to be far more of an active participant in my life, than the observer I feel I've been. I was inspired by the efforts of Will over at CyclingChallenge to not just do something relatively small, but something so far out of my ordinary, that I would really, really have to work for it. I don't know that I'll accomplish something as strenuous as Will's "ascend on a bicycle over 160,000 vertical meters", but I'm going to give it everything I can.

Of course, the trick was, finding out exactly what it was I was going to do. I noticed that I had been spending a lot of my downtime during the Summer Tour reading about mountain climbing in the various places I was camping. When I was a kid, there was a little hill called Vine Hill about a mile from my house, and my brother and I would climb up it's little gullies and washes, imagining we were Gregory Peck in "The Guns of Navarone". Then I read the line that said "Climbing the Grand Teton is an great start for novice climbers". Boom... there was the first goal... the rest have followed hence and the final list is a pairing down to what I think I can accomplish in this, my first annual challenge. Without further ado...

- Climb Grand Teton
- Hike to the summits of Mount San Jacinto and Mount San Gorgonio
- Hike Yosemite Falls and Nevada Falls in 24 hours
- Hike to the summit of Lookout Peak
- Hike to The Needles
- Scuba dive at least once a month
- Earn an Advanced Diver certification
- Go on at least one overnight hike
- Hike to the summit of Mt. San Gorgonio and dive to below 100' within 24 hours.
- Trim down another 15 to 20 pounds prior to climbing Grand Teton

Now for the details, item by item.

Climb Grand Teton 13,760 feet / 4,194.05 meters. This is the big one; the main goal. Like I mentioned above, I spent a lot of time thumbing through the mountain climbing blurbs in the travel guides I bought in the summer of 2008, and I settled on this as the goal that I would accomplish in 2009. I'm training very hard for this: weight training, extensive cardio, functional movement workouts, stretching, nutrition, you name it. With an elevation that tops out over 13,000 feet and starts at a base of 6,500 I'm looking at having to deal with real altitude. I don't plan on going unprepared either mentally or physically.

The routes to the summit involve a majority of strenuous hiking and scrambling, along with various pitches that will be top roped on the way to the top. Climbing on a rope at 11,000 feet is about as non-every-day as I can make it.

Hike to the Summits of Mount San Jacinto and Mount San Gorgonio These are the tallest peaks in southern California. Mount San Jacinto has a summit at 10,834 feet and Mount San Gorgonio at 11,499. I hope to use these as practice hikes, since there isn't much climbing to be had on them.

Hike Yosemite Falls and Nevada Falls in 24 Hours

The Yosemite Falls hike. I've done it before; it nearly blew my knees out. I was in such major pain for the last 4 miles of that hike, I was nearly certain that Mountain Rescue was going to have to come get me. I was not pleased with myself.

The day after that hike, I hobbled around on stiff legs and took the bus to the Yosemite Lodge visitor's center. On that bus was a guy that asked me about the hike. He said something to the effect of "I was up at Nevada Falls and Liberty Cap earlier today so I'm looking for something to do tomorrow. I was thinking about doing Yosemite Falls." Considering the condition of my body, that sounded downright stupid. The frustration that welled up in me thinking "What the hell?!?! You're only 33 Dan, what in God's name makes you think you're body is already ruined at this point?" was pretty overwhelming. I was very disappointed with myself. That's when I signed up at Easton.

Hike the Summit of Lookout Peak Lookout Peak is another hike that sticks in my craw. Just like Yosemite Falls brought me to Easton Gym, Lookout Peak brought me to JD. I took a trip to King's Canyon National Park in late summer 2008, and tried this hike. I got to within 5 vertical feet of the summit and just couldn't take another step. I was totally unprepared for the hike, bringing barely any water and only one small bag of jerky and a single Clif bar. The top of Lookout Peak is a bunch of gigantic boulders and sheets of granite that you have to scramble over to get to the top, and all I could think was, even if I manage to make it to the top, I'll never be able to get back down again, I'll fall and kill myself. So I wedged myself into a split between a couple of sheets of granite and ate what little I had, took a couple of pictures, and hiked back down again. That next Monday, I asked JD to start training me.

Hike to The Needles I've seen The Needles several times now. It's hard to miss the strange outcropping of granite monoliths just hanging out on a spur into the valley. It wasn't until my last trip into Giant Sequoia National Monument that I learned you can actually hike out to them. I couldn't go last time because my friend insisted her Mini had no business driving on dirt roads. So I bought a truck.

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Scuba Dive at Least Once a Month One of the things I did to prepare for my trip to Egypt in the fall of 2008 was to take a Scuba refresher course so I'd be ready to dive in Alexandria. I received my open water certification back in 1998 before a trip to Hawaii and hadn't really done all that much with it. I enjoyed it, but I wasn't really all that motivated to do it. Before I moved to this apartment, I threw out a bunch of my old gear because a lot of it had rotted or deteriorated and I wasn't comfortable donating it. One thing I ditched was my old mask, so I had to get a new one. This time I got one with corrective lenses in it and it makes ALL the difference. I suppose that's what school must have felt like for me in fourth grade when I got my first pair of glasses. Suddenly I could SEE what everyone else was seeing underwater... what a difference! The intervening ten years since my original certification also has allowed me to have a little more spending money so the idea of going diving regularly isn't quite as daunting financially as it was back when I was in my mid-twenties. I'm very, very eager to see all the things I've missed behind astigmatic corneas.

Earn My Advanced Diver Certification Ok, if any of the goals on here are sort of gimmies, it's this one. I decided I was going to do this anyway after that first boat trip in November, so when I was having trouble coming up with a tenth item to put on the list, this was it. I let myself be thoroughly suckered into signing up for the class too... but that's another story for another time ;) I suppose this isn't really all that much of a cop out; my original open water certification dives were nothing short of hellacious. I did them off the breakwater in Monterey, CA in December of 1998 in six foot waves and a driving hail storm. I almost called it off the night between the two days of diving because I was cold and miserable and depressed, but a phone call to my friend Andy convinced me to stick it out.

Now that I think about it, that decision to go back for the second day of dives has fairly shaped the run of my life from that point on...

Gimme or not, getting my Advanced cert is proving to be a harder goal than I originally thought it would be.

Go on at least One Overnight Hike While at the very least, I'll knock this one out when I climb Grand Teton, I'm going to plan, prep and go on at least one over night hike this year. Just me and my backpack... and any unfortunate soul I can find to go with me. I'll probably try something easy at first... a hike out to the trail camp on the way to Eagle Rock. That way I'm within one easy mile's hike of my car on the first attempt with what will probably be new gear. Then I can get a little more adventurous.

Climb to the Summit of Mount San Gorgonio and then Dive Below 100' in 24 Hours Of all the goals of the 2009 challenge, this one is probably the craziest. Obviously, you can only do this in one direction, the other way would ensure decompression sickness. This is also the goal that makes most people look at me askew and ask "why would you want to do THAT?" Well, I don't really know. I think I want to do it, because I can.

Trim down another 15 to 20 pounds prior to climbing Grand Teton This challenge is probably proving the hardest so far. The idea of this isn't so much that I want a lean and svelte figure, so much as wanting to save the 15 pounds of weight on my knees with every step down off of the mountain. I'm still paranoid about my knees causing me difficulty, which is why I'm planning so many intermediary hikes... to prove to myself that they won't fail me. Losing 15 - 20 pounds would go along way to sparing my joints some damage. Still, I've been stuck on 200 now for a long time... exchanging fat for muscle, fat for muscle... going up one or two pounds, going down one or two pounds... but still essentially stuck. Patience... patience... patience...