



JANUARY 1998

A Publication of the Mountaineering Club of Alaska

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Box 102037, Anchorage, Alaska 99510

### JANUARY MEETING

Wednesday

January 21, 7:30 pm

Pioneer Schoolhouse, 3rd & Eagle Streets

Downtown Anchorage

Slide Show: *Dave Roberts* will show slides from one of his past Alaskan adventures.

### HIKING AND CLIMBING SCHEDULE

- Jan 10 Echo Bend Ice Climbing  
Beginner to Advanced. Meet at Eagle River Nature Center at 8:30 a.m. At 7 p.m. the evening before the outing (Friday, 1/9/98), there will be a slide show at the Eagle River Nature Center covering ice climbing in the Chugach Mountains. Parking at the Eagle River Nature Center is \$3.00/day or \$25 for an annual pass. It is unlikely that the Eagle River Nature Center will have annual passes available that early in the year, but they will be available at the Chugach State Park Offices. Leader: Steve Davis 694-3556 (h), 562-3366 (w)
- Feb 15 Cumulus Mt.  
Western Chugach. Class D. Good condition is the key - elevation gain 5000 feet! Crampons, ice axe, appropriate clothing, headlamp. Leader: Richard Baranow, Wendy Sanem 694-1500

### TRAINING SCHEDULE

- Feb 2 Expedition Planning  
6:30 - 8:00 P.M. Kaladi Brothers at Brayton. How to be organized for backcountry travel.

### TRIP REPORTS

#### More Big Ice on Triangle Peak

Rhett Buchanan



On October 16<sup>th</sup>, Tim Ciosek and I climbed a fun route on the north face of Triangle Peak. It follows the most obvious vertical gash down the north face, starting about 100 yards left (east) of Matt and Evan's route (*Scree*, Nov. 97). The bottom half of the route consisted of about four pitches of low angle ice and snow. We climbed unroped to save time. The rope



came out for pitch five, a short mixed pillar and more snow. The final pitch was half snow, half slabby rock. We emerged out of the gully onto the sloping east ramp of the peak just in time to witness a beautiful sunset. We hiked down this ramp towards Calliope (east), passing through a rock band about halfway down. We crossed over a frozen tarn and back down into the Symphony Lake drainage. Time on the route was about 6 ½ hours, though the approach, descent, and hike out made for a 17-hour day (shorter for Tim, who made the wise decision to bivy in the valley below the climb). Some rock gear was useful (cams, pins, spectres), along with the usual ice gear. This route was formed up in early October and might be climbable well into the spring.

### Girdwood to Knik - Glacier-Free

Chris Flowers



ardly seems likely, but take a look at a map - there actually is a line of brown and green snaking between the Whiteout, Eagle and Lake George Glaciers - and it's a pretty classic walk/pack/raft trip at that.

The route follows the Winner Creek trail and then through two easy passes to the upper Twentymile River. Here I made the mistake of dropping to the river and bushwacking and I mean bushwacking. No game trails or nuthin' - and forget about crossing the Twentymile, although Jeff Sands says there was a dead fall crossing somewhere. A side-hilling route would go better through this section. The upper Twentymile forks before it gorges out. Each fork is crossable individually after the fork.

From the upper Twentymile through a beautiful, broad pass with big, fat black bears and up onto the ridge on the left. Descended the ridge, crossed the tongues of three glaciers, ascended a sidehill (to avoid brush) and traversed a few miles to a beautiful avalanche chute that drops, brush-free, into the Upper Lake George River (formerly Upper Lake George). Class 2+ water at times, flat at other times, and one spot of class 3 just above the Knik Gorge that I portaged.

I floated down the current-free gorge until the icebergs were too thick to use my Selvor trail boat/pool toy as an icebreaker. I climbed over and around icebergs to an open lead and paddled further. I was almost to the next ice jam when a double-decker bus-

sized chunk fell off the fifty-foot ice wall to my immediate right. The spray was refreshing, but obstructed my view of the six-foot wave to follow. I battened the hatches on my mighty ship and brought the bow around, expecting the worst and subconsciously humming "The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald."

The wave started to curl, but somehow I rode up to the crest and down again with nary a drop over the gunwales. For the next five minutes I rode a storm of rebounding and rebounding waves in my tiny vessel.

After rinsing out my pants, I deflated my boat and scrambled up the rock cliff to a bear trail that meanders the gorge rim. This trail took me to the lower end of the gorge where I re-inflated a patched my raft and floated out the Knik River by moonlight to Pioneer Ridge trailhead and my truck.

I did it July 1-2, 1996, which seemed to be maybe a week or two later than the ideal time, although still very good. Fifty miles in forty hours, including a seven-hour bivouac, at a moderate pace. Call me if you want to do it and I'll either talk some sense into you or if you're impervious to logic, I'll tell you how to improve on my route.

### Mint Hut Excursion

Kirk Towner



we were well-prepared for a three-day trip into the Mint Hut; between the four of us we carried three gallons of fuel, a half-gallon of various beverages, bags of leftover Thanksgiving food, loaves of homemade bread, ham salad and crackers, bricks of cheese, half a yard-o-beef, apple pies, yogurt, pasta, plenty of dog food, several varieties of mints... and that was just for lunches! All this plus the usual assortment of camping gear, clothing, crampons, ice axes, snowshoes, and other odd items we each carried ensured that while ours was a well-stocked excursion, it was not with the lightest of packs that we set out Friday morning from the Gold Mint trailhead.

I had wanted to get started at first light for our long hike in, but events conspired to delay our departure until just before 10 A.M. With me were club members Dara Lively, Matt Nedom, Kathy Zukor, and Kiska the pack-dog. Dahr Jamail and Jim McDonough had elected to hike in a day early since



they could not stay through Sunday. We started out following Dahr and Jim's trail, enjoying the easy walking without snowshoes and making pretty good time. After several miles the trail deteriorated and we were forced to don snowshoes; we reasoned that this was the point where Dahr and Jim had ventured beyond any other ski tracks and had broken trail for themselves. We considered ourselves fortunate to be a day behind; just past the halfway point I announced that 'at this rate, we'll still be at the hut before dark!'

Alas, it was not to be. Less than a mile passed by under foot when we were greeted by an expanse of untracked snow, the trail simply stopped. Upon closer examination, we discovered a cryptic message scratched into the snow from a ski pole. We would all too soon discover the meaning of that single word, which cannot be repeated here. Thinking perhaps Dahr and Jim had crossed over to the other side of the river, we continued up the valley towards the hut, hoping to regain their trail soon. The snow was knee-deep, even with snowshoes, topped by a crust that was not quite strong enough to hold body weight. We eventually settled into a cycle of trading leads; the first person would march for a hundred yards or so, step aside, then rejoin our train at the back. Even so, progress slowed to a crawl. Every little gully, rock, or patch of brush hid a hole of soft snow just waiting to swallow an entire leg, snowshoe and all. Extricating oneself from such a snare was not a simple matter with a heavily-loaded pack. Our hike became a slog. Then it got dark.

Somewhere along the way I announced the good news that it was just another mile or so around the corner to the base of Heartbreak Hill, whereupon we would climb up a thousand feet and drop back down to the hut. I didn't need to mention that we had just spent the last four hours slogging over *level* ground. And I certainly didn't need to mention that I had been forced to revise my ETA two times already as our progress grew slower over the rocky ground. Nevertheless, we were all in good spirits and the evening weather was just fine.

Many hours later, we were still struggling uphill. My headlamp was the only one working. Every step required one stomp to break the crust, two to clear away the sugar snow, and one more to get a snowshoe claw to bite into dirt or rock to support your weight for the next step. Even with the leader's trench, each person in line was forced to excavate the snow from their steps, moving it back into the path of the person below, and so on. I chose as gradual a route as possible along the side of the valley before the true Heartbreak Hill. In the dark, I had started uphill one bump too early and we did not want to lose any hard-

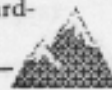
gained elevation. Always up and to the right: we tried it without snowshoes, we tried crampons, we tried the leader with snowshoes and the others with crampons. We even got a second headlamp working. Eventually, the snow won.

I spotted a large undercut boulder on the 20-25 degree slope and proceeded to shovel out a platform big enough for four humans and a dog. As the others struggled up towards the ledge, Matt indicated he was going to put his snowshoes back on. "Don't bother," I yelled back down. "You found the hut?!" he shouted, with not just a little enthusiasm. "Not exactly."

It was now 11 PM, we had been hiking for 12 hours, Kathy had worked the night before and had been awake for 32 hours, and none of us had the energy to continue breaking trail. It was time to stop. I fired up a stove (plenty of fuel) and we spread out our sleeping bags under the stars. We ate well, and surprisingly there was little talk of mutiny, even when I announced that from here in good trail conditions we could have been at the hut in less than a half hour! This was to be the first winter open bivouac for all of us (Kathy's first winter camping ever), but the weather was perfect — between 10 and 15 degrees, cold enough to keep the snow dry but not too cold. We covered our bags with jackets and trash bags and settled in for some much-needed rest.

On Saturday morning we ate a quick snack, packed up, and set out once again up to the hut. I didn't like the look of the shortcut around Hut Hill, so we slogged up and around, eventually gaining the broad pass and dropping down to the hut from the back. Even with a good night's rest and a steady pace, it took two more hours to arrive at the hut from our bivy site! We immediately commenced the celebratory eating and drinking (to lighten our load for the return) and fired up the stove to warm up the hut. We laughed at the topic we had debated Friday morning: what are we going to climb on Saturday? The climb to the hut was sufficient for us all.

The remainder of our stay at the hut and the journey out was fortunately less eventful. The trail was nicely frozen and packed overnight; only five and a half hours were required for the hike out. And while we never did run out of food, somehow the Motherlode seemed an appropriate end to this excursion. When I called Dahr to ask why he and Jim had turned around halfway, he said something about the snow being hideous and how they had estimated it would take *three* more hours to get to the hut from their turn-around point. I just had to laugh.



## Peak 4210, Bear Valley

Tim Kelley



lick. I couldn't hear the click, but I knew it had just occurred. I had often experienced the click before. Every summer I lay out a climbing itinerary with the intent of following it. But inevitably while climbing I will scan a neighboring range and notice a worthy summit

to scale. In the back of my mind something clicks. It's the peak-baggers click! Forget previous plans. A new peak has moved to the top of the list. And it has got to be climbed!

Such was the case while climbing on Byron Peak this summer. I kept noticing a cone shaped summit draped in snow, to the north of Portage Lake at the far end of Bear Valley. I pointed out this summit, Peak 4210 (Seward D-5, T 9N, R 4E, S 21), to my climbing partner Wiley Bland and suggested that it would be a good one to chase after. With construction of the road to Whittier under way I figured time was running out to have a private peak bagging foray in Bear Valley. Soon this valley will be easily accessible to all.

During the day I noticed Wiley gazing at Peak 4210. It was easy to tell that I wouldn't have problems finding a partner to go after this peak! When we got back to the parking lot Wiley said, "So when are we going after that one?" Just then: three warning beeps and KA-BLAM! A dynamite driven cloud of pulverized mountain spread out over Portage Lake. Another timeless chunk of Begich Peak sacrificed by the crusade to part cash from sedentary tourists. I responded to Wiley, "We better climb that peak pretty damn soon!"

As we pulled into the Portage Lake Visitor's Center on Saturday, September 13th El Nino was serving up an unseasonably warm and crystal clear weekend. We checked in with veteran peak bagger Tom Choate's wife Charlou, a ranger at the Visitor's Center, loaded up our canoe and pushed off into Portage Creek.

Our intention was to cross the creek and hike the road under construction to Bear Valley. But when we got a close look at the amount of heavy machinery in action along the road we decided instead to hug the shore of Portage Lake and paddle to the mouth of Placer Creek. Once there we hid our canoe in the brush and switched to our next mode of transport - hip boots.

The next several miles we splashed through swamps, crossed glacial stream braids, hiked gravel bars and bushwhacked our way up Bear Valley. Eventually we made it to a pronounced spur cloaked with virgin spruce. Though steep going, this coastal rain-forest covered rib was relatively free from undergrowth. We made good time ascending through it. Soon, however, our pace was diminished by the abundance of huckleberries. They were the size of grapes. This year the El Nino weather effect, which provided unusually warm temperatures and plenty of sun, resulted in a berry bonanza throughout South Central Alaska. While we gulped down handfuls of this succulent Chugach fruit we couldn't help but notice the plethora of bear scat around us. We definitely weren't the first ones to find this berry patch!

The easy going of the forest inevitably gave out to the next phase of the climb - 1500 feet of hanging jungle. We grinned as we raised our eyes up to the wall of alders, cliffs, mossy slopes, devils club, alders, waterfalls, scrub spruce, nettles and alders. Climbing vegetation like this, with a pack, is denounced by many. But it's hard to get a better all-around physical workout. Besides intense cardiovascular exercise you also gain the benefits of contorting your body in ways unimaginable as you struggle to pull, push and plow your way upward. The mud and slime you end up covered in no doubt has skin complexion benefits. Yes, the many benefits of alder bashing go unheralded and untold. Maybe it's time the MCA made a "Chugach Total Body Workout" video to raise revenues for the club. Anyway, back to the climb. Once through the alders we worked our way up through a series of tundra covered ledges. Just before nightfall we set up camp at the 3100-foot level south of Boggs Peak's pocket glacier (Section 31).

Up before dawn, invigorated by the cool morning air and the prospects of another cloudless day, we readied for day two of our climb. Leaving our tent and sleeping gear we side-hilled gullies and scree slopes to gain the large glacier to the west of Peak 4210. Because we were traveling at the end of a warm and sunny summer, hardly any snow remained on the glacier. The little snow that remained was sprinkled with ash from Mt. Spurr's last eruption.

We put on our crampons and crunched across the glacier to the base of Peak 4210's southwest ridge. Ascending the ridge was easy until we neared the base of the summit cone. Here we were challenged by the ridge narrowing into a knife-edge before it dived into an airy notch. To avoid the exposure of the notch we rappelled north off the ridge to the edge of the glacier.



Setting up a belay stance next to a menacing scree lined hole that fell into a dark abyss beneath the glacier, we then climbed a roped pitch to regain the ridge. After squeezing through a large crack on the ridgeline we climbed another roped pitch on the east side of the ridge. Once past this pitch we scrambled un-roped to the summit.

Because there wasn't a hint of clouds on any horizon, vistas of the expanse of mountains in all directions were superb. You could see boats moving in Passage Canal. The USS Ptarmigan plied the waters of Portage Lake. As it is always for me in these coastal mountains, it is impressive to see the amount of glaciation that exists at such low altitudes. The summit also offered a great view of the Carmen Lake. This hidden lake I have tried twice to reach but have not yet visited. On top we found no sign of previous ascent. Wiley and I built a cairn and left a register. We suggest that a fitting name for this peak would be Carmen Cone, due to the proximity to Carmen Lake and its cone-shaped summit.

Three rappelled pitches got us off the summit cone and we retraced our route back to our campsite. As we packed up the tent and extra gear we were treated to a serac-fall show at the head of Bear Valley. Triggered by the afternoon sun, ice blocks calved from a hanging glacier began cart-wheeling and bouncing down a 1000-foot series of cliffs. The thunder of the ice blocks turned to a hiss as the blocks were pulverized to water vapor before they reached the valley floor. Soon after leaving our campsite we spotted a sow black bear and four, yes - four, cubs gorging on blueberries on a ridge one mile to the south of us.

We hollered to let them know we were in the area. This action, of course, got them moving towards us. Picking up our pace, we hustled down a gully to avoid a meeting with them. Before long we looked back up to see the bears crossing our path a couple of hundred feet above us. The harried sow stopped for a moment to glare at the audacious trespassers on her berry grounds. Her shimmering coat and the rolls of fat around her neck told that she was healthy and ready for winter. She then turned back to the task of herding her unruly mob of bruins away from us. We retraced our route down through the alders and forest to Placer Creek. Switching back to our trusty hip boots we waded out of Bear Valley and canoed Portage Lake to the Visitor's Center.

Before this trip I was concerned that the new road into Bear Valley would have an adverse affect on this drainage. No doubt it will, but the impact should be somewhat limited. There will likely be a pull-off where people can stage access into this valley. But the

valley seems too wet for 4 wheelers or easy foot access to hunting, fishing or hiking. The walls of the valley are alder choked which will turn back all except the most ardent hunters. Placer Creek is too swift to paddle a canoe up. And it's too shallow to get a jet boat up it very far. In winter the head of the valley would no doubt be an avalanche death trap for snowmobilers or skiers.

The new road will probably entice a few more climbers up Begich Peak and Maynard Mountain. But the solitude of the farther reaches of this valley and the ridges that surround it will remain for those few who are willing to persevere to get there.

ADZE



#### Writing Course

Dave Roberts, professor of English at Hampshire College, and author of *Escape Routes*, *Moments of Doubt*, *Mountain of My Fear*, *Deborah*, and *Mt. McKinley: the Conquest of Denali*, will deliver a month-long course on magazine writing about Alaska at APU, January 12-February 9. Not a traditional course to produce fiction or poetry to be critiqued by the class. More attention will be paid to the pragmatic game of getting published than to the development of students as good writers. Learn skills of the freelance writer and read/discuss several modern classics about Alaska. Call APU Department of Liberal Studies 564-8291

#### Film Festival

Banff Mountain Film Festival  
will be in Anchorage Friday,  
March 27, 1998

### MINUTES

#### BOARD MEETING

Dec 3, 1997

Meeting was called to order at 7:50. Members present were: Mark Miraglia, Kirk Towner, Helga Bashor, Brenda Bryan, Matt Nedom and Dara Lively.

#### *Treasurer's Report*

See December Scree.



### 1998 Projects

It was decided the 1998 emphasis will be on training, trips and recruitment of new leaders. Also discussed was the importance of advanced trip notice and planning by leaders to promote member participation. Ability requirements will be mandatory by offering training sessions for members.

### Snowbird Hut

No decision has been made to purchase Snowbird Hut. MCA will continue to pursue the purchase possibility, after an accurate assessment of the hut has been made in the spring of 98.

### Road Signs

Presented to the board by Steve Davis, Dennis Morford and Jonathan Ditto was "Common Sense Rules" for trailhead signs. The proposed rules were discussed and the notice to hikers and climbers was revised by the board to be posted along the Seward Highway. *Letter from the Hinds* The Hinds' are requesting MCA support for two Slovak citizens during their visit to Alaska in spring 98 to join a mountaineering expedition to the Ruth Gorge. It was decided to make up a welcome letter to foreign climbers for future use. Presently, a letter will be drawn up in support of the Slovacs, Pavol Haasz and Milan Ridson.

### Other items

Briefly discussed was that Michelle Potkin will be able to count on leader support of the MCA for the potential climb up Wolverine Peak in support of Breast Cancer Survival. She will be directed toward other sources for financial support. Due to time limitations, the Hut to Hut Project Concept will be discussed at the next Board Meeting.

Submitted in memory of my mother, Grace Hoeman,  
Helga Bashor

## NOVEMBER MEETING

Meeting was called to order by Mark Miraglia. 85 members and 11 visitors in attendance.

### TREASURY REPORT

Kirk Towner reported a total of \$8,269.49. Costs to date: \$10,269.49. Details on accounts may be obtained upon request. You may order a 1998 photo calendar from Kirk. 200 copies have been printed. Cost is \$18 each.

## COMMITTEE REPORTS

### Hiking and Climbing

Steve Gruhn presented sign-up sheets for four scheduled trips. A trip wish list is also available.

### Huts

Scandinavian Hut repairs were discussed.

### Parks Advisory

Scott Bailey reported on access to Ram Valley.

### OLD BUSINESS

None.

### NEW BUSINESS

Wendy Sanem circulated a petition against wolf-snaring.

### ANNOUNCEMENTS

Paul Crews and Rod Wilson requested information about flying and climbing in the Tordrillo Mountains. Fred Trimble came forward and will contact Rod with his information.

Mark introduced the new secretary, yours truly, and committee chair Dawn Groth and director Brenda Brian.

A schedule for avalanche training is available from Doug Fesler.

The American Alpine Club annual meeting is scheduled for December in Seattle.

A sign-up sheet was available for new trip leaders.

The December meeting will have a turkey dinner and a drawing for trip leaders and article writers.

After adjournment, Michelle Potkin presented a video of the 1995 climb of Aconcagua by a female survivor of breast cancer group. MCA is supporting a similar climb up Wolverine Peak in the spring of 98.

Submitted in memory of my mother, Grace Hoeman,  
Helga Bashor

