

# the **SCREE**

## Mountaineering Club of Alaska

January 2015

Volume 58 Number 1



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**Monthly meeting: 6:30 p.m., Tuesday, January 20**

**Program: Andy Hall, author of Denali's Howl, explains how the MCA was a big part of the story of the 1967 Wilcox Expedition tragedy.**

***Keep close to Nature's heart...and break clear away, once in awhile, and climb a mountain or spend a week in the woods. Wash your spirit clean.***

**-John Muir**

# The Mountaineering Club of Alaska

[www.mtnclubak.org](http://www.mtnclubak.org)

**"To maintain, promote, and perpetuate the association of persons who are interested in promoting, sponsoring, improving, stimulating, and contributing to the exercise of skill and safety in the Art and Science of Mountaineering."**

Join us for our club meeting at 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday, January 20, at the BP Energy Center, 1014 Energy Court, Anchorage, Alaska.

<http://www.alaskageology.org/graphics/meetingmap.gif>

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## Cover Photo

Will Mayo celebrates perfect conditions on the summit ridge of Mount Huntington. Photo by Josh Wharton.

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**Article Submission:** Text and photography submissions for *the Scree* can be sent as attachments to [mcas Cree@gmail.com](mailto:mcas Cree@gmail.com). Articles should be submitted by the 24th of each month to appear in the next issue of *the Scree*. Do not submit material in the body of the email. Do not submit photos embedded in the text file. Send the photo files separately. We prefer articles that are under 1,000 words. If you have a blog, website, video, or photo links, send us the link. Cover photo selections are based on portraits of human endeavor in the outdoors. Please submit at least one vertically oriented photo for consideration for the cover. Please submit captions with photos.

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## Monthly Meeting: Tuesday, January 20, at 6:30 p.m.

Program: Andy Hall, author of [Denali's Howl](#), explains how the MCA was a big part of the story of the 1967 Wilcox Expedition tragedy.

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## Climbing Notes

Wayne Todd reported that on November 22 Ben Still, Carrie Wang, and he climbed Russian Mountain (4318) in the Russian River drainage of the Kenai Mountains.

Paul May reported that he climbed Peak 1900 in the Schoppe Lagoon drainage of the Chugach Mountains on March 31; he reported that his GPS receiver indicated that the summit elevation was 1980 feet. He also reported that he climbed Peak 1732 in the Papoose Cove and Esther Passage drainages of the Chugach Mountains on April 3. He reported climbing Peak 1900 in the Contact Glacier and Nellie Juan Lagoon drainages of the Kenai Mountains on May 20 and that his GPS receiver indicated the summit elevation was 1940 feet. He reported that he climbed Peak 1600 in the Jackpot Creek and Blue Fiord drainages of the Kenai Mountains on May 22 and that his GPS receiver indicated that the summit elevation was 1645 feet. He reported climbing Long Peak (2196) in the Kenai Mountains on June 28 and Peak 2750 in the Cochrane Bay drainage of the Kenai Mountains on July 3. May also reported climbing Peak 1750 in the Esther Lake, Tange Lake, and South Arm of Granite Bay drainages of Esther Island in 2014.

Sam Zmolek reported that this past autumn Andy McDermott and he climbed Peak 1990 in the Nateekin River and Captains Bay drainages and Peak 1999 in the Captains Bay and Nateekin Bay drainages on Unalaska Island.

We look forward to reading detailed accounts of these climbs in future issues of *the Scree*.

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## Thank You

GLUK winter training, December 6, 2014, for American Heritage Girls, Trail Life USA scouts and Boy Scouts wishes to thank these MCA members for generously donating their time and talents: Carrie Wang, Wayne Todd, Galen Flint, Mary Beth Bragiel, Richard Baranow, Matt Beckage.

Much appreciated!!!

Greg Bragiel- Course Director

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## Hiking and Climbing Schedule

- ⇒ **Hope to Seward Ski Tour.** February 21-March 1. Contact Greg Bragiel at [unknownhiker@alaska.net](mailto:unknownhiker@alaska.net).
- ⇒ **Serenity Falls Ice Climbing.** February 27-March 1. Ice climbing weekend at Serenity Falls Hut, Eklutna Lake area. Contact Cory Hinds at [chinds100@gmail.com](mailto:chinds100@gmail.com) to sign up and for more information. The hut has been reserved for the nights of February 27 and 28.
- ⇒ **Eklutna Traverse.** April 12-19. Mandatory traverse training days March 21-22. Contact Greg Bragiel at [unknownhiker@alaska.net](mailto:unknownhiker@alaska.net).

Online? Click me!



**Check the Meetup site and Facebook for last minute trips and activities. Or, schedule one that you want to organize.**

## A Lofty Failure

*Text and photo by Sam Zmolek*



*Ridge to Lofty Mountain.*

Lofty Mountain is perched out on the far northeast end of Unalaska Island, a monarch that stands as the only peak higher than 2,100 feet anywhere east of the Dutch Harbor area until the mountains disappear beneath the waves of Unalga Pass. As such a notable peak, it is one of the few on the island with a historic name, and has been beckoning me for the past couple years.

On June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2013, I made my first foray into the area, optimistically hoping to summit Lofty. It was a bold plan that was to teach me much about the area. I started out on foot from the end of the road at Morris Cove in the early afternoon, following the old trail up a gentle pass between Morris Cove and Constantine Bay. At the crest of the pass, I turned southeast off any existing trails and began heading up

to the summit of Peak 1453, dubbing it “Lazy Mountain” on account of the gentle slopes.

As I enjoyed my first vistas of Kalekta Bay from the summit, I started to see my next moves fall into place, including the peak-filled ridge that lay ahead if I wanted to take the highline to Lofty. Only a gentle, cool breeze reminded me I was still in the Aleutians while I surveyed the area.

Upon the resumption of my walk, I dropped down a gentle pass to the southeast before ascending again to get on the central ridge. At this point, I turned to the northeast and began following a gradual, upward trend along the broad and meandering ridge. After an hour or so of heading northeast, the ridge suddenly narrowed and steepened, into a formation resembling a sawblade that appeared impassable. Upon closer examination, this craggy peak was, in fact, the

preferred route due to the long detours that going around would have entailed, and there was a narrow track that, while not for the faint of heart, was a comfortable scramble. I wistfully coined this sub-summit as "Sawmill Peak" though it doesn't quite have a full 500 feet of prominence. Continuing farther along the ridge brought more interesting sights, including what looked like a diving platform on the summit, whimsically protruding into the void above the Kalekta Bay drainage to the north.

From this high point, I dropped down a few hundred feet into a saddle and began a fairly strenuous ascent of the next peak. While cresting the summit, I felt my knee pop in some serious pain, immediately regretting the 10K I had run the previous month. As I took in the fine view and assessed the pain, I knew it was time to turn around. I was about six walking miles from the car, alone in rough terrain, and felt like I had a wooden peg for one of my legs at this point. I dubbed the summit of Peak 2007 "Pegleg Peak" to remember that tough day.

As I retreated and looked for a campsite to rest my leg, it became clear this was a challenge that would demand an earlier start next time, as there was still the deepest saddle of the whole trek in front of me, and then what appeared to be a very jagged ridge from that summit to get to Lofty. I stewed over that first failure for some time, and found an opening to return for another attempt six weeks later on August 11<sup>th</sup>.

On this second attempt, I skipped Lazy Mountain entirely, and attacked the central spine by ascending from the southwest, after traversing through the lowlands on the Agamgik Bay Trail. Everything was going quite well this time, and I plowed through the miles efficiently on a long day thanks to good weather and an early start. As I descended Pegleg Peak in the sun, I was back into the joys of the unknown while sizing up the penultimate peak ahead. It was only early evening, and I could taste victory in planning my next move. I decided to drop my gear in the saddle, find a good place to pitch my tent, and try for a late-evening summit of Lofty with a pitched camp waiting for me to retreat to. After some searching, I set up camp in sheltered spot in the tall sweetgrass at around 1,100 feet.

Admiring the inviting campsite, I briefly considered calling it for the night and going for the final two summits in the morning. I quickly decided to just go for it, however, because I could always make a second attempt in the morning if I ran

out of light. I threw the lightened load onto my back and trudged up Peak 1918, dubbing it "The Lion's Mane" for the ferocious view I saw from the top. The Lion's Mane was certainly the steepest thing I had climbed yet that day, but it wasn't overly harrowing on the ascent of the southwest ridge. However, when I crested the summit, I couldn't help but stare at the series of frighteningly jagged teeth along the ridge to Lofty Mountain.

After stopping for the necessary ogling and summit photos, I set out to assess the route. Once I was on the ridge, I found it wasn't as dreadful as it appeared, and I made fairly quick progress in the fading light as the evening waned. I even thought I was in the clear, and looked at my watch, deciding I would have just enough time to scramble to the summit of Lofty before darkness forced a retreat. As the ridge grew tantalizingly close to the final peak, I was crushed to find that the last 100 yards or so leading to the face of the mountain became a choss-ridden death scramble on a terrifyingly narrow walkway that seemed completely unobtainable by any means I had available. I looked around and saw a possible detour off the ridge behind me and around to the east of Lofty that I could try in the morning, but I had no heart, energy, or daylight left to give it a shot. I slinked back to my tent and hoped for the best in the morning.

I awoke in the morning to the sound of rain hitting my tent, and poked my head out to see that there was almost zero visibility, so I knew I had failed again at the ultimate objective. Gathering my gear together and moving out of the sheltered alcove I was in, I realized just what an adventure I was still in for. In addition to the limited-to-non-existent visibility, the wind was raging with gusts that felt over 50 miles per hour. I almost got lost in the fog in my attempt to retrace my route over the summit of Pegleg Peak before I realized where I was and managed to traverse the south side of the mountain to reach the next pass. Then I had to go over Sawmill in the tempest, but was pleased that it didn't become a more frightful endeavor than I was bracing for.

The rest of the way off the ridge I ended up zigzagging in the fog to help ensure I didn't descend in the wrong spot and end up in a distant drainage. Needless to say, I was very excited to finally get off the high ground and be under the low ceiling, enjoying the thrill of being alive, alone, and soaked through the last few miles of trail before reaching the car. I hope the third time will be the charm for Lofty, but in any case, I think I've left enough memories along the ridge to last a lifetime.

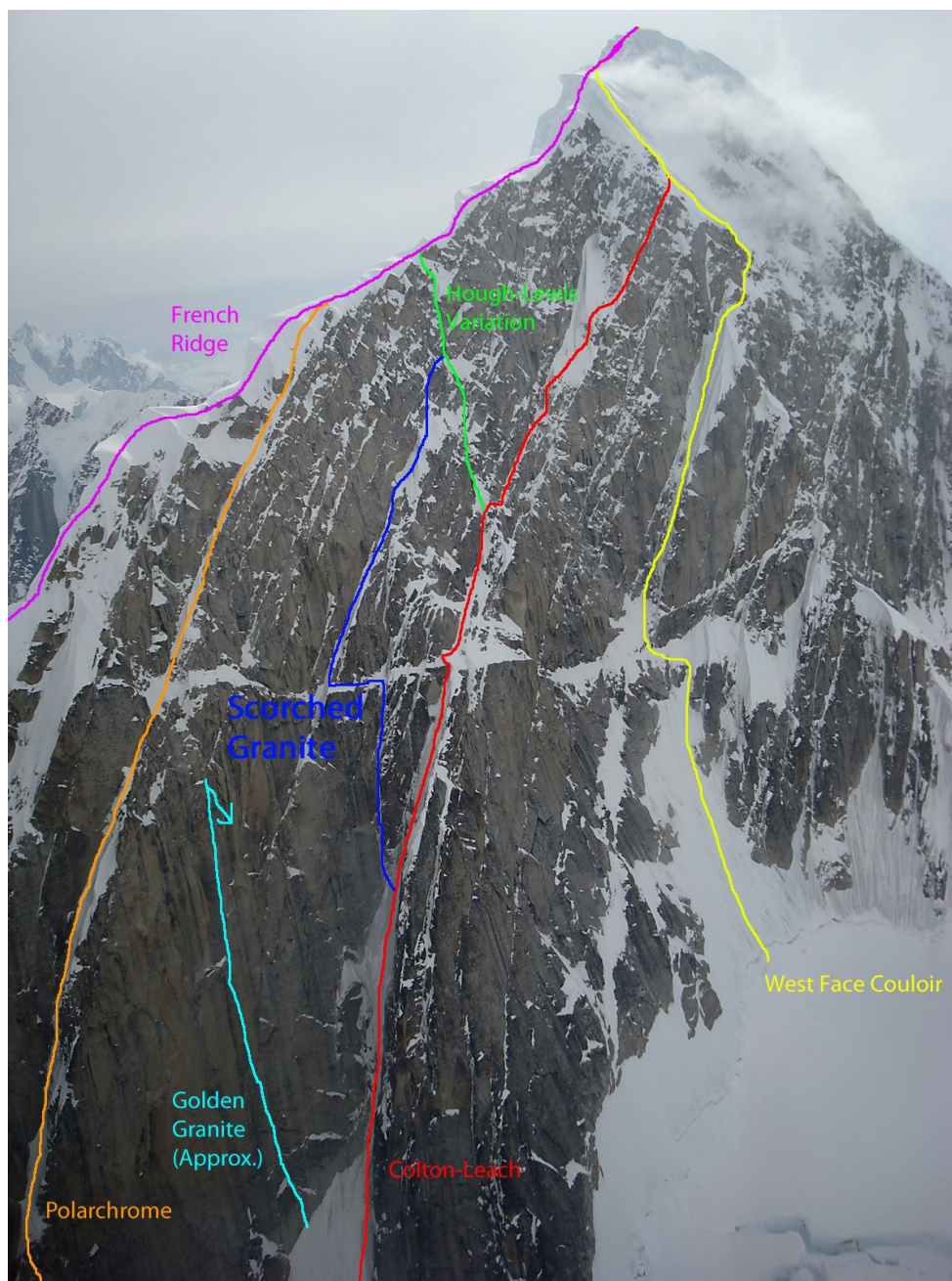
## “Scorched Granite” on Mount Huntington

Text by Will Mayo

The shaded corner of gray granite in the center of the West Face of Mount Huntington rose above me toward the cobalt sky. My legs stemmed, the front points of my crampons perched on edges on either side of the dihedral. My breath was audible in the stillness of the Alaskan spring high-pressure air. The hand-sized crack in the depth of the corner was choked with rotten snow-ice: too insubstantial for tool placements yet tenacious enough to coat the guts of the crack, prohibiting rock protection. I readjusted my grips on my tools, surprised my fingers were warm in my skimpy dry-tooling gloves. I looked down at my last pieces of gear, well below

me now, just above the belay. As I turned back toward my tools, I heard Josh Wharton’s shout of encouragement, “Dream line!”

The climb had started months before, in February 2014, in the dank limestone amphitheater of The Fang in East Vail, Colorado. Dripping sweat, I made the last steps up the packed snow of the approach trail and entered the shelter of the overhanging wall, hearing voices and the distinctive scrape of crampons from the opposite side of the cave. I stomped the snow off my snowmobile boots, kicking clouds of dust in the dirt, and dropped my clip-stick and my pack on a flat boulder at the base of the warm-up. Taking off my shirt, I turned around, steam



Routes on the West Face of Mount Huntington. Photo by Mark Westman.

rising from my shoulders, surprised to see my friend Mark Westman walking toward me smiling.

“Dude! What are you doing here?” I asked.

I always seem to run into Mark in the most random places. He is the kind of guy that never seems out of place, whether he is on a remote glacier in Alaska, in the desert in Utah, pulling plastic in the gym in Alberta, or clipping bolts at a sport mixed crag in Colorado. There’s Mark, smiling and saying little, but when he does speak, he does so in a manner that really make one want to listen. Eventually, our conversation turned to the Alaska Range. Mark is widely considered to be the climbing Don of the Alaska

Range. He likely has logged more personal climbing days in the range than anyone, his wife Lisa is the Kahiltna basecamp manager, his brother-in-law is Paul Roderick, the owner-operator of Talkeetna Air Taxi, and Mark works for the National Park Service as a climbing ranger. Mark has climbed and flown as thoroughly throughout the range as anyone, and he keeps meticulous historical records of Alaska Range climbing. He knows where the unclimbed lines are and when they will be in condition. I had been on six trips to the Alaska Range, but had taken a long hiatus, not having returned since 2007. Finally, I was eager to get back into the mix.

“So, are there any plums left in the Ruth?” I asked. Mark’s eyes lit up.

“Yeah, sure, but do you remember that smear on the West Face of Mount Huntington?”

“No,” I said, “I don’t think it was in when we were there.”

“It’s left of the ‘Colton-Leach.’ It was there, it forms every year. I’ll send you a photo.”

A couple of weeks later I stared at Mark’s photo on my computer screen, astonished that the striking line of ice had never been climbed. The smear poured down the West Face of Mount Huntington into the lower reaches of the initial couloir of the “Colton-Leach Route.” Above, the direct line crossed a horizontal ledge leftward to gain the base of a symmetrical angling hanging couloir in the center of the face. It appeared to continue straight up mixed terrain to the French Ridge, a compelling swath of untouched terrain between “Polarchrome” and the “Colton-Leach.” The notion that such a stunning line had never been climbed, one with no apparent objective hazard, and on one of the most prominent faces in the Alaska Range, stuck me with disbelief.

Immediately, I tried to pin down a plan with Mark. Our schedules throughout the spring conflicted thoroughly. I called Chris Thomas, he was planning a trip to Africa. I sent Raphael Slawinski an email. He was teaching physics in Calgary until June, when he was planning to help Steve House with his Alpine Mentors program on Denali. I called Josh Wharton. He was in, set to double-down, already planning to head into the Kichatna Mountains at the end of April. We planned on the beginning of May. But, toward the end of April, Josh sent me an email. He was waffling. He was concerned about being away from Erinn, his wife, and their four-month-old baby for so long. He said I might want to try to find another partner. He was on the fence.

I sent Ben Collett the pictures, asking him what he was doing the following week. Immediately, he was in, claiming to have just made a mess in his boxers. Ben is perhaps the most motivated climber I have ever met. I cannot recall ever asking him to climb and not receiving an affirmative response. But, he is an attorney and was starting a big case. He only had the first week of May available. We watched the weather. A few days before our intended departure, the forecast turned for the worse. I got a call from Ben, he was pissed, but we agreed there was no reason to go all the way to Alaska only to spend the week swatting mosquitoes in Talkeetna. I hung up the phone and accepted reluctantly that it just wasn’t meant to be this year. But later that afternoon, I received an email from Josh. They had canceled their trip to the Kichatnas and were spending the week climbing in Rocky Mountain National Park. Pay dirt! He was back in. We agreed to watch the weather and pounce if a window opened. The window came toward the middle of the second week in May. We packed our bags and flew to Alaska. It was show time!

Fleeting memories of all that led to my current position hanging beneath the crux of our new route on the West Face of Mount Huntington quickly flashed through my mind and then left it. All other thoughts faded away as I focused on a single-tooth of my

pick biting into a shallow pocket in the coarse granite. I pulled up and crossed my other tool to hook the base of a seam, a fracture in the right wall. My crampon skated, casting sparks against the rock, emitting the unmistakable odor of scorched granite. I placed a shallow micro-cam and a solid RP and lay-backed against my tools in the crack, climbing up beneath an overhanging bulge. A few meters higher, I could see a shallow horizontal shelf protruding from the left side of the corner. I prayed it was a crack. The walls on either side reared up, pushing me back. My forearms began to sear and my calves quivered slightly. I paused and looked down at the RP and the small cam in the seam, and climbed upward, committing to the crux. I rowed against my tools and raked my crampons against the crystals of the granite on the right wall, igniting more sweet olfactory sparks. I hooked the shelf with my left tool, locked off, and pried my right tool in the verglas-covered crack. The back of the narrow edge opened into a precious, dry horizontal crack, I stuffed in a solid cam, clipped the twin ropes to it, and worked my right tool up again in the crack in the corner, again rowing up, to stem my left crampon, back-stepped onto the ledge, skating the side-rail points onto the ledge into a solid airy stance. I tapped the lower reaches of a drool of ice above, just within reach. I looked down between my legs at the belay and screamed in euphoric rage. I knew at that moment that the route was going down. I knew we would succeed.

Indeed, the route played out as we expected. We finished up the final pitches of steep ice to the horizontal ledge, traversed leftward into the base of the hanging couloir, climbed 60-degree ice to its top, and continued up moderate mixed terrain to the French Ridge. The snow and ice conditions of the French Ridge were ideal. The snow was solid névé and the steep steps of the ridge bore solid patches of alpine ice for solid screws. Along the way we passed a cluster of old pitons in a rock outcropping, likely the highpoint of the “Hough-Lewis Variation” of the “Colton-Leach.” The upper snow slopes, known to stymie even the most seasoned alpinists with bottomless depth-hoar, were styrofoam-like runnels, which allowed easy passage. At 5:30 p.m., we stood atop Mount Huntington, basking in the warm evening sun, admiring Denali, Sultana, and Begguya. The descent down the “Upper Harvard Route” was straightforward and uneventful. We finished rappelling the West Face Couloir as the late evening shadow engulfed us. We continued down the snow slopes, across the bergschrund, and walked back into camp at 11:30 p.m., merely thirteen and a half hours after leaving it.

Lying in my sleeping bag that night, I was in disbelief. Somehow, it seemed almost wrong for everything to go so fast, so smoothly. For decades, Mount Huntington has thwarted some of the best alpinists in the world, and it has been a notoriously feisty challenge for those who did manage to stand atop its summit. It seemed like it came too easily for us. The climbing had been better than we had imagined, the protection was good, and the conditions had been perfect. As Josh likes to say, because so much of alpine climbing is about luck, half of the battle is simply showing up. Sometimes, you just get lucky. I fell asleep that night knowing I would not dream, as none would compare with the dream that had been that day’s reality.

# Welcome to the Big Leagues – A Solo Backpacker’s Journey into the Denali Wilderness

*Text and photo by Matt Kearns*



*Matt Kearns heading south in Unit 10 of the Denali National Park backcountry. Photo by Matt Kearns.*

I just got out of the military and wanted to travel before using the GI Bill for school. Alaska was at the top of the list. In between an itinerary of kayaking in Glacier Bay, rafting in the arctic, and climbing in the Saint Elias Mountains, I had the first week of July all to myself and knew just how I wanted to spend it – in Denali National Park. Trail-less and huge (at six million acres of wilderness), an opportunity for an extended backcountry trip in Denali makes one feel as if he’s been called up to the Big Leagues of life-list backpacking.

With a few ideas that I’d been compiling from my seven-year subscription to Backpacker Magazine, I went to the permit office. The helpful rangers and I hashed out a 30-mile traverse from the West Fork of the Toklat River to the Eielson Visitor Center through Units 8, 9, 12, and 13. I’d conservatively given myself six days and a high/low route option just in case the recent deluge of rain and snow made things too sketchy.

I was a little nervous going solo, but not overly so. I fancied myself experienced: an Eagle Scout with a Boy Scouts of America

“50 Mile Afoot” award and 15 years of backpacking experience, the most recent of which was in the rugged Pacific Northwest where I aggressively pursued mountain climbing and backpacking in Olympic and North Cascades National Parks, much of it solo. I was mostly worried about bears. The only hiker to be killed by a bear in Denali’s history was also solo. My resume hasn’t included much time in grizzly country, save the few weeks I was already in Alaska. But armed with my can of bear spray and the tips from the mandatory safety video I pushed my concerns to the back of my mind.

On the Camper Bus on the way in, I met lots of nice folks. Crystal and Josh from Bend, Oregon, were headed to Wonder Lake. A California couple comprised of an avid hunter and wildlife biologist was skilled at finding moose and caribou in the distance. Three guys got off right before me in Unit 8. I was certain my bus-mates must have felt that I was a badass when the driver stopped at Unit 9 and I was the only one to get off. My pride quickly faded as the bus drove away and I was left all alone to plunge into a willow thicket and start yelling for bears; Denali’s first lesson in

humility. Yelling, “Hey, Bear!” quickly became unnerving. I employed a series of fun yells and yodels, as if I could ignore the reason I had to make all the noise in the first place.

My first day was fairly benign. The sunny weather helped take the chill off my first fording experience. Drinking water that wasn’t loaded with glacial silt was harder to find than I expected, I made the mental note to tank up whenever I came across a clear stream. The icebergs swirling and crashing about in McBride Inlet in Glacier Bay made for the most interesting campsite of my life, but the spot I found for my first night in Denali was the most *epic*: A wide gravel bar holding the braided Middle Fork of the Toklat River; plush, verdant tundra pockmarked with bomb-like craters where grizzlies went digging for ground squirrels; the multiple hues of orange, red-brown, tan, and black rock and scree of the low alpine; and the spiny, snow and ice encrusted hulks of some lesser Alaska-Range peaks.

Day two included my first mountain passes. I climbed a small steep gully that still held snow in the bottom. I could see day-old grizzly tracks in the snow, the gouges from the claws still plainly visible. I was impressed with the grizzly’s climbing ability – he picked a good line through the 5000-foot pass. But he was headed down and I was headed up.

At the top I immediately realized the high route was a no-go and I had underestimated the effects of the wet weather. The recent dump of snow at these heights completely covered the north-facing slopes and large, fresh avalanches were readily apparent. I headed a little downvalley to try a second, lower pass. I couldn’t totally avoid all north aspects, but I found a path with streaks of scree as “ribbons of safety” that broke up the snow slope – or so I thought. The scree was saturated with melt, the rocks hiding a boot-sucking mud that proved as slippery as snow and twice as hard to traverse. I am still dumbfounded how such mud could adhere to a 35- to 40-degree slope.

The last bit of snow right before the pass could not be avoided. As I stepped out into it, I became quite concerned about its stability and decided to forgo the traverse. I glissaded down the edge of the snowfield, losing hard-earned elevation, but acknowledging I made the right decision when I had to stop the glissade every 10 seconds to let the mini-avalanches I was riding continue past me. I safely regained the lower pass, descended into Unit 10, and set up camp.

My third day began with a meeting of a large caribou herd shortly after leaving camp. I sat down and we watched each other just across the river for 15 minutes before they gave up their curiosity and walked on. In leaving, they showed me an optimal spot for crossing – my knees and a caribou’s knees seem to be about the same height. There was a good bit of fording back and forth due to cutbanks. Without the caribou to help, I was forced to improvise. Because I couldn’t see the bottom with all the silt in the churning water, I would repeatedly bomb a potential crossing with rocks, listening for a “kachink” that indicated the rock struck bottom or the “kaploosh” that foretold greater depth.

Once I found my place, I would strip off my pants – no sense getting them wet, modesty be damned – and step barefoot into old sneakers pressed into wading duty. In the water I learned that I could handle the current, provided it didn’t rise above the

second cam-lock on my trekking pole. More than once I would plant the pole, but then step into an unseen deep hole nearby, sinking to my waist as the surging water threatened to knock me down. I would emerge from the frigid water with red, stinging, wooden legs and shoes filled with rocks and sand. I’d put on my pants and boots and continue on my new side until the next cutbank would force me to repeat the whole ordeal.

I wanted to camp at the mouth of the drainage with the lowest and most straightforward pass into Unit 12. When I rounded the bend, I was greeted by an 80-foot waterfall, part of the trouble of using 1:63,360 topographic maps with 100-foot contour intervals. Utterly blocked, I backtracked to my second-choice drainage/pass and found a great campsite on a tundra bench above the stream.

Day four in Denali turned into what was likely the most trying day of my life. The idea was to ascend the cirque and find the easiest and safest path up the north slope to the ridge line. The ridge, swept by wind and sun, was practically snow free, based on my observations from below. I’d continue west along the ridge to my desired pass and then descend into Unit 12. And for the most part, that’s how it worked out – I left camp in a drizzle, boulder hopped up the streambed to the cirque, found a strip of scree and stable snow and gained the ridge line. But the drizzle quickly and suddenly worsened up high as I progressed along the ridge. I found myself in a full on s---storm – snow and sleet blown by winds gusting to 30 miles per hour and visibility dropping fast. I faced a three-way dilemma:

- a) Backtrack along the ridge and/or drop down to the right and return from whence I came. I wasn’t at all confident of finding a safe strip of scree to descend the north-facing slope in the whiteout and the avalanche activity on north aspects over the past few days had me genuinely concerned with the rapidly falling new snow.
- b) Drop down the ridge to the left on a south-facing slope. Until I reached the pass, the south slopes were steep and the possibility of getting cliffed out existed. Plus, if I didn’t travel far enough along the ridge, all the slopes on the left led into the same drainage that was blocked by the huge waterfall the previous day, so I’d end up stuck in the valley.
- c) Continue along the ridge. In the declining visibility I could use the ridge as a handrail, never getting lost, avoiding avalanches, and knowing that once I reached the pass I could descend a safer south slope and enter a drainage that I knew was passable per the rangers.

I choose to press on along the ridge, but it was not without extreme difficulty: the sloppy, wet scree again. And in the few places that weren’t snow free, there were deep drifts with new slushy stuff on top. I’d place my boot gingerly to pack down a step, allow it a moment to freeze, and then weight it. Most of the time that worked; when it didn’t, I found myself wallowing crotch deep in the drift and I had to flop around and dig myself out and up. My boots filled with snow.

The snow patches also presented a visibility problem. I’d get disoriented in the whiteout, ground and sky indistinguishable. I poked my way forward with trekking poles like a blind man. Plant, plant, step, step, plant, plant, step, step, plant, plant ... AIR! I’m too far right, too close to the crest of the ridge! Adjust course



left and continue. Twice I cluffed out on the ridge. Those damn 100-foot contour intervals again. The ridge was the most gradual feature on the topo and I still encountered gendarmes and steep outcrops. It was a loose scramble up and over with the wind threatening my balance.

My GPS died and my cold numb hands fumbled with the battery swap. The light layer I had on underneath my shell seemed fine when I left camp, but it was now wet from precipitation and sweat from exertion and the building fear in my gut. "This is how people die out here," I thought to myself. It was sobering and saddening to think I could actually perish on the ridge in the declining weather if I didn't make the right decisions. I thought about using my emergency beacon, but they wouldn't send a helicopter up here into this weather. I thought about home, but I forgot to pack my "Dorothy approved" magic red slippers. I cursed and swore at the storm, but it did no good. The frustration brought me the closest to crying I've ever been in recent memory. But whining and wishing wouldn't get me off that ridge. Only I could do that for myself. I switched to positive thoughts, focusing on my fitness and my resolve. "I'm still fresh; I can keep going. Moving keeps me warm. I could find a place to bivvy if I had to. I'm not out of the fight 'til I'm dead."

I eventually made my pass and descended the drainage with zeal. My only worry now was an impassable waterfall. The canyon narrowed. There was no choice but to slop through the water, but my boots were soaked anyway. I soon found myself peering over the edge of a 20-foot waterfall! I was able to carefully scramble around on loose rock and scree. After that, I was home free; I descended the drainage until I came to the first suitable campsite. Weary and wet, I set up the tent, stripped my sopping layers, and crawled into my sleeping bag to warm up. Dinner could wait.

In camp that night, sleep was fitful despite my exhaustion. I kept questioning if I made the right decisions. Did I continue out of a stupid sense of duty to my permitted itinerary? I'd like to think not, but the thought of turning around is seldom appealing. I ruled out "summit fever" of some type. I could not have cared less about passing up and over Green Dome at 6450 feet, the highest point on the ridge. It was simply an obstacle to be surmounted on the way to my safe passage down. Ultimately I concluded, in a twisted sense of irony, that despite the challenges of the ridge, it just felt safer and more certain than the alternatives; the shortest and most straightforward way to safety was up and over, through the teeth of the storm. I reminded myself that I was in my tent, warm and dry in my sleeping bag, safe from the ravages of wind and wet, so I must have done something right.

Denali wasn't done with me yet. Unbeknownst, the previous day's precipitation had swollen Sunrise Creek, the larger drainage I would have to descend on my fifth day. It was a raging, frothing torrent of silt-laden whitewater. I could hear rocks bouncing along the bottom of the creek – it sounded like a bowling alley on league night. I knew that conditions like that meant that the water wasn't safe to cross. But what were my choices? Even if I wanted to call my trip right then and there and head out, my only options would be to either descend Sunrise Creek and reach the Park Road in 4 miles or backtrack up and over the same passes

from the day before, now laden with new snow, and reach the road in about 10 miles.

Sunrise Creek pinballed back and forth against cliff faces repeatedly over the next mile. I couldn't pick a side and stay along it for longer than 120 yards or so. I entered what I called "super fording mode," stripping below the waist and refusing to swap from soggy wading shoes into pants and boots, or even to dump the pebbles from my shoes to save on the transition time. I ended up crossing the dangerous, icy waters 15 times.

At the end of Sunrise Creek, things leveled out into a wide gravel bar. I didn't know it from pre-trip planning, but I could actually see the Eielson Visitor Center and the road off in the distance, high on a ridge overlooking the valley I was in. I stopped to contemplate the scene. Denali National Park had proven quite challenging. I came expecting the wildlife to be the biggest obstacle to my safety; I completely underestimated the terrain itself. I was awed by the raw power of nature – of biting storms and gushing streams. Here I was, a hotshot Lower-48 backpacker, and I felt as if Denali and Alaska were handing me my ass. To continue in the backcountry after the trials I had endured thus far, when "civilization" was visible a few miles away, seemed contrived and foolhardy.

I sat for a long time. I was tired and challenged, but not beaten. I had made acceptable decisions thus far and came about 20 miles through rough country. The sun came out for a moment. I warmed up and dried off. I ate a snack. I had another day's worth of food and reading material, per the original plan. I stood up, shouldered my backpack, and continued into the backcountry.

I'm glad I did. The Contact-Creek-to-Wolverine-Creek pass was the lowest and easiest yet and the views from the top were the best of the trip. Wolverine Creek was a joy to descend, the clear waters flowing through a wide drainage, no serious cutbanks, and nothing that couldn't be forded with a little dry rock hopping. I relished the final night of solitude before returning to the masses along the Park Road and looked forward to my final night at Wonder Lake, hoping the clouds would break and I could glimpse The Mountain (Mount McKinley).

In the morning on Day Six, I followed a game trail descending Glacier Creek. The mosquitoes swarmed so suddenly and so intensely that I flew into a mild, flailing panic breaking out my headnet and repellent. I squished the few that had been captured inside my headnet into my beard, the coppery scent of my blood mixing with the smell of DEET. I soon spotted the Park Road and the Visitor Center once more, setting off on a beeline across the well braided, knee-deep Thorofare River and up the steep slopes beyond.

Once I got off the bus and sunk the road behind me, I saw no one for five full days – my longest time alone to date. The first person I saw at the Eielson Visitor Center didn't see quite the same Matt Kearns that walked south from the Toklat River Bridge. The smears of dried mud, wet boots, and tired shuffle only alluded to the full story: that this trip was the biggest challenge and the pinnacle of adventure in my life so far. I had 30 miles of Denali's best backcountry to myself for nearly a week. I developed a deeper respect for all wilderness, and the humble confidence knowing that I could make it in the Big Leagues.

## Vista Peak Surprise: Ursine Eagle River Peak Baggers

*Text and photos by Joe Chmielowski*

It was late October. Head and eyes down, I walked south on the ridge between Blacktail Ptarmigan Rocks and Vista Peak in the Chugach Mountains in an almost meditative trance, kicking steps through about seven inches of snow overlain by a tough crust. I heard a “shhhhhh” sound in the distance. I stopped instantly and looked at Vista to see if an avalanche was scouring the face. I saw no movement and was confused. I shrugged to myself and plodded onward. A second later I again heard the “shhhhhh” sound. But this time the sound was much louder and much closer. I stopped moving and looked up. Instantly I froze. A grizzly bear and two cubs were bounding directly for me at high speed.



*Western ridgeline leading to the summit of Vista Peak. Note that the right side (south) is gentle and a poor place to outrun or hide from a charging bear. The left side (north), although extremely steep and dangerous is much better suited to evasion.*

At this point my brain began registering the scene incrementally – like discrete visual photographic frames being played in slow motion. Frame 1: Grizzly bear with two cubs running at me. Frame 2: Yell “hey” and raise my poles. Frame 3: Grizzly with cubs (one on each side of her) now half the distance. Frame 4: Can’t go right because the ridge is too gentle, must go left to the cliff. Frame 5: “I hope this works.” Frame 6: Jump over the ridge and scramble down extremely steep snow cliff. Frame 7: Scurry climber’s right into a rock face and chisel out a snow platform. Frame 8: Heart beating in my sternum. Frame 9: Hold breath and wait.

The playback from my mental camera might seem disjointed and lacking in detail, but that is the way I processed the situation. To

try to provide a bit more context, after I heard the second “shhhhhh” sound, I realized that it was the mother grizzly huffing and running directly at me about 100 feet away. Yelling did not slow her down in the least, and in my second mental photograph of the bears, I distinctly remember them about 50 feet away and seeing her black nose and eyes. The strange thing is that her cubs remained by her side during the whole charge. And I think what sticks in my mind most is how fast she ran. Actually, she really didn’t run – but instead, did a series of powerful leaps with her front legs scooping in the ground and her back legs hopping like a kangaroo. I realize now that if I had bear spray, it wouldn’t have mattered. She would have bowled me over at 30 miles per hour, regardless of some irritating spray. Or she would have accidentally (or intentionally?) knocked me over the north ridge cliff.

As I stood on my small 1.5-foot-square ledge, I had irrational fears that somehow she would come down after me. So I picked a mental route farther along the cliff face if she should decide to come down and finish me off. I started thinking, “What in the hell is a bear doing at 4,500 feet in the snow?” Then I realized she was probably looking for a den, or had established one nearby. Or maybe she was just trying to get over the pass to the Peters Creek drainage. I pondered these thoughts for about 20 minutes on my narrow perch before starting to shiver. I realized I couldn’t stay on this ledge forever, so I started yelling, “Hey bear” up and into the rocks. A few minutes later I emerged very



*Grizzly prints about 200 feet below the summit of Mount Magnificent.*

the question: Why would a grizzly mom and two cubs embark on a serious mountaineering expedition and scale up a couloir? Perhaps they just enjoyed free climbing the terrain with their natural claw crampons.

After Vista I headed back to the charge area (the scene of the crime, so to speak) and took photographs like they do on television. I then headed to Roundtop and came off the back side down to the Ptarmigan Valley Trail. At a creek crossing I saw more bear tracks and thousands of blueberries. I picked a few large berries and tasted them. They were absolutely amazing. They were warm from the sun, extremely sweet and half fermented. I thought to myself, "If I were a bear, I would just stay down at low elevations, getting fat on alcohol-infused berries." Why were those bears up so high?

leery – and yelled a bunch more times. Eventually, I cautiously climbed up and back onto the ridge, not knowing which way she went – left, right, or down into the Meadow Creek valley.

I was shaken up and wanted to figure out where the bears went. So with some effort, I unscrambled the footprints in the snow. What they revealed was that the sow and two cubs charged to the exact spot where I stood frozen. The sow then went to the extreme edge of the ridge and looked over the cliff to ensure that I was either gone or dead (her prints went to within about three inches of the cliff face). Then all three bears turned around and went downhill into the drainage.

The good news is that the bears descended off of the narrow ridge. The bad news is that the momma grizzly really wanted to get rid of me. I can't believe that she even checked the cliff to ensure the job was done! At this point I considered skipping Vista Peak – but knowing that they were heading to lower elevations, I pressed on. I followed the bear prints along the ridge (they were coming at me) and eventually they disappeared. I couldn't unravel that mystery. Confused, I pushed up to the summit by scrambling through some rocks and avoiding the avalanche areas.

On top it was beautiful and sunny. I admired all the surrounding peaks: Mount Rumble at the head of Peters Creek Valley, Bold Peak, and even farther to the east, the massive Mount Marcus Baker. While sitting there, I keenly scanned the ridge and valley to look for the bears, and thus avoid them. While looking, I spotted their tracks. It turns out that they came from the Meadow Creek valley, scaled up a very steep ravine and couloir to the ridge about 400 feet below Vista's summit, and then were working their way north toward Roundtop when they encountered me. So that solved that mystery, but still begged

With those thoughts still churning in my mind, I pushed up to Mount Baldy and then descended down a very muddy trail. The top two inches of mud were melted and slick while beneath the top layer was ice. The Baldy descent on the new trail was almost as dangerous as the bear encounter. Well, not quite.

Later, in the comfort of my home, I reflected on the day that had begun with insomnia at 2 a.m., which sparked a decision to get an early start and go climb 5,026-foot Vista Peak. I had started on the Mount Baldy Trail above Eagle River at 5:45 a.m. with my headlamp and had even texted my friend Todd Kelsey to tell him where I was headed, because he is my safety net. Mentally reconstructing the day, which came rushing back to me like a cinema re-run, I suddenly realized how lucky I was. If I had been 100 feet farther along the ridge during the encounter, the cliff would have been too vertical for me to escape. And had I been about 300 feet closer to Blacktail Ptarmigan Rocks, the ridge would have been too broad and flat to provide a place to hide. As it turned out, I was in the right place at the right time.

I often brag to my friends that I have never had a bear encounter because I don't hang out at streams, creeks, rivers, or lakes. I am not a fisherman, but instead I spend my time above timberline in the snow and ice. But I won't be bragging any more after my Vista adventure. And just to prove that this encounter is not a fluke, six days later while climbing Mount Magnificent in the same general area, I found fresh male grizzly prints 200 feet from the summit. I think these Eagle River bears are a grizzly subspecies that really enjoy peak bagging.

# People of Aconcagua

By Matt Hickey

I walked off the mountain shortly before Christmas. My climb of Aconcagua was now only a memory. As my distance from the mountain grew farther - first to Mendoza, then to Minneapolis, and finally Alaska - so did my memories. Eventually the triumph Barry and I had of summiting South America's highest peak became less a vivid memory of success and more a melancholic reflection of the individuals we came across while on the mountain. Mountains attract unique and adventurous people. Aconcagua was no different.

High-altitude mountains have the tragic tendency of disregarding the sacredness of human life. Steep, icy slopes and thin air have no concept of the aspirations and limitations of human organisms. All too often the lives of the individuals so enamored with these mountains - the individuals that would do nearly anything to accept peace with the mountain massif - are the same ones that are forever changed or lost while attempting the peaks. My journey to Aconcagua resembled that sad mountain conundrum and the destinies that unfolded henceforth. My encounters with these passionate people all started when Barry and I arrived in the mountain town of Los Penitentes.

We didn't know where we were going to sleep the evening we arrived, but we knew we wanted a good night's rest before stepping out on our trek to base camp. We piled off the bus with over 200 pounds of luggage and coughed as the diesel-powered bus lugged on toward Chile, spewing fumes into our faces. We didn't want to walk far and luckily we didn't have to. Not more than a quarter mile from the bus stop was a sign that read, "Internacional Hostel." "That will have to do," I thought to myself and ventured in that direction.

Carlos met me at the door. "Buen Dia," he said.

"Hello," I replied, "do you have any beds available?"

"Si, si, please come and stay."

Carlos was a slender, handsome man in his late thirties. The clambered cupboards of climbing equipment, preponderance of mountain paraphernalia and myriad mountain photos spoke to his passion for the mountains.

"Tu alpinist?" I said in horrible, improper Spanish.

"No more I climb," he responded.

I had noticed that Carlos was doing all his pointing and gesticulating with only his left arm. I didn't know if this was a cultural courtesy or something else. I quickly put it together.

"This no work anymore," Carlos said while staring at his right arm. His arm was paralyzed. It hung lifelessly as dead weight from his shoulder, swinging and swaying at will as the rest of his body moved about.

Smiling, he said, "Please, this way to your rooms."

Barry and I hauled our gear to our rooms and began making last-minute preparations for our climb that was to start in the morning. My mind was not on the climb, though; I was thinking about Carlos. How did he lose the mobility in his arm? Barry beat me to the inquisition.

Carlos had been a prominent Argentinian mountain guide. He'd led climbs from the high central Andean peaks such as Aconcagua to the famous technical spires of Patagonia. He had a long list of mountaineering accomplishments to his name and was quickly becoming one of Argentina's top mountain *guias*. Suddenly that was all taken from him.

As the story goes, Carlos was high on a Patagonian peak leading a stiff section of rock when he took a long, supposedly protected fall. His intermittent protection failed. He rapidly plunged downward, crashing onto a rock ledge. The right side of his body took the brunt of the impact, narrowly saving his life, but paralyzing his right arm in the process. His climbing career was over. That evening Carlos' cat kept me awake. I hate cats and they always find a way to annoyingly apply their affection on me. I woke up grumpy and with a headache. I slowly gathered myself and walked out to the dining room for breakfast. Waiting for me were Carlos and the cat.

"You sleep well?" he asked with a large grin. I felt like he already knew the answer. The cat was sitting right next to him. I smiled back at Carlos, but sent a stare back at the cat while nodding my affirmation of his joke well executed.

I sat in silence while I nibbled at a piece of toast with jam and butter. I couldn't stop thinking of the despair Carlos must have felt after realizing his eternal handicap was forever going to keep him from doing what he loved. A graze of the cat woke me from my daze.

"We're packed and ready to go, Carlos. Gracias por la bed," again I spoke in broken Spanglish.

He escorted me to the door and with a giant smile on his face he said,

"Good luck! Come back and talk to me. You are strong and will make summit. I know."

He embraced me with his one good arm. "You are strong," he said again, now backing away from me, clenching his one mobile hand into a motivating fist. He was living vicariously through me and other climbers that passed through his hostel. That was all he had left connecting him to the mountains. He was alive, though; not all are so lucky, as we'd later discover.

Barry and I trekked into Casa de Piedra. At about 8,000 feet, Piedra is the first established camp along the journey into

Plaza de Argentina Base Camp. We arrived shortly after midday and planned to rest and hydrate to facilitate our acclimatization. After setting up camp we basked in the hot, high desert sunshine until boredom set in. I sat up, slipped on my boots and prepared to venture around camp. I noticed a small, yellow, tent propped near a large boulder. A blond head emerged from the entrance followed by a skinny body. The man looked my direction and began approaching. His Grateful Dead T-shirt was a giveaway that he was American.

“What’s up guys?” he said.

Mason Robison was from just outside Glacier National Park in Montana. Ironically, Mason was a stonemason and a self-proclaimed “high-end stonemason” that only took “on very elaborate and expensive projects.” He earned enough money through his work to travel the world climbing for half of the year. He told us about the house he was currently building on a large piece of land an excessively wealthy and immensely generous customer had given to him and his wife. When our conversation began to ruminate he poignantly mentioned that he had a doctorate in philosophy and then he aptly spoke of the metaphysical connection he had with the mountains he climbed and the big wall solo ascents he put up. Barry referred to the strength required to climb large mountains solo. So, Mason elaborated on his recent ultra-marathon events in response to the rhetorical statement Barry proposed regarding strength. To cap it all off Mason ranted about the Argentinian Park Service’s denial of his request to solo a route on Aconcagua’s treacherous south face. Mason was a living man accomplishing feats most people deemed as fiction.

I didn’t like Mason. I thought he was arrogant, self-righteous, fabricating, and full of himself. But it wasn’t dislike I was feeling toward Mason; it was envy. My jealous side hated when Mason spoke, but I never wanted him stop. His stories were oratories of all the things I wanted to do. It hurt to hear because I had not done, but it was pleasurable to listen because of how he had. I thought, “This is the life I wanted live.” Mason died six months later.

Two thousand, five hundred feet up the Muir Route on Yosemite’s El Capitan, Mason began to lead out Pitch 27 of the thirty-three pitch route. While placing his first piece of protection, a large flake of rock lodged itself loose from the wall pulling him from it and severing his climbing rope. Mason fell the 20 feet he had led above his partner’s belay stance and then another 250 feet until his static haul line ran its length, became taught, and transferred an unsurvivable amount of force through Mason’s body. He was killed instantly. The accident was freakish and of nobody’s fault other than chance – the same chance that took Carlos’ arm.

In posthumous reports I read about Mason, everything he had spoken of was true. He was a high-end stonemason. He was an ultra-marathoner. He had a Ph.D. and was an incredible big-wall climber. I also learned that he had climbed from Base

Camp to Aconcagua’s summit in 13 hours, making the ascent Barry and I completed seem herculean.

That evening at Casa de Piedra, Barry and I sat huddled around a campfire with Mason and four muleteers, discussing worldly things before heading off to our tents. We exchanged a few words with Mason in the morning over a cup of coffee and some oatmeal and then parted ways. I never would have thought his time would have been so short.

Less than two weeks after setting out on our journey, Barry and I made the summit. Both of us felt horrible on summit day due to the altitude and lack of proper acclimatization. We needed to climb fast. Bad weather was forecasted for the next week and we’d have run out of food and fuel if we’d used the standard, time-intensive acclimatization method. We took a risk and it paid off, but it doesn’t always work out that way.

I received a text message from my brother with a link to a story.

“Two Northwest Climbers Killed on South America’s Highest Peak,” the *Seattle Times* headline read.

I was returning home from a day of ice climbing outside of Anchorage a few weeks after returning from Argentina when I received the message. Aconcagua, though only a few weeks removed from my life, was a now a distant memory, but when I read the headline I had an eerie suspicion that memories of the mountain would return when I read the article.

While searching for help in attempts to gather support to bring his dying friend down the mountain, Eric Nourse succumbed to altitude-related issues. Not long after Eric perished his friend died due to a similar altitude-related illness on an exposed perch at 20,000 feet. I had been very near this location just three weeks prior. Thoughts of the cold, windy, and desolate upper mountain sent chills through me. The names in the article sounded familiar and the ages seemed to match those of an American trio I met on my last day hiking out the valley. Happy to have the opportunity to have a conversation in clean English, I initiated a short dialogue with the incoming climbers. I learned they were planning to attempt the Polish Glacier Direct Route – the same route Barry and I planned to ascend until we learned of precarious conditions. We opted out. They did not. Three weeks later, two of them were dead.

I’m happy to have met these people despite the melancholy I now feel with their destinies fulfilled. These people of Aconcagua were full of vigor. They were all in their element – the mountains. Mountains gave their lives meaning. Mountains took parts or all of their lives. I, too, am a person of Aconcagua and I often think of my own destiny.

# Peak of the Month: Rainy Mountain

By Steve Gruhn

Mountain Range: Alaska Range; Hayes Range

Borough: Unorganized Borough

Drainage: Rainy Creek

Latitude/Longitude: 63° 16' 16" North, 145° 51' 25" West

Elevation: 3879 feet

Prominence: 554 feet from Peak 5650 in the West Fork of Rainy Creek and Specimen Creek drainages

Adjacent Peak: Peak 5650

Distinctness: 554 feet from Peak 5650

USGS Map: Mount Hayes (B-4)

First Recorded Ascent: 1941 by Arthur Newton Stewart and a U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey party

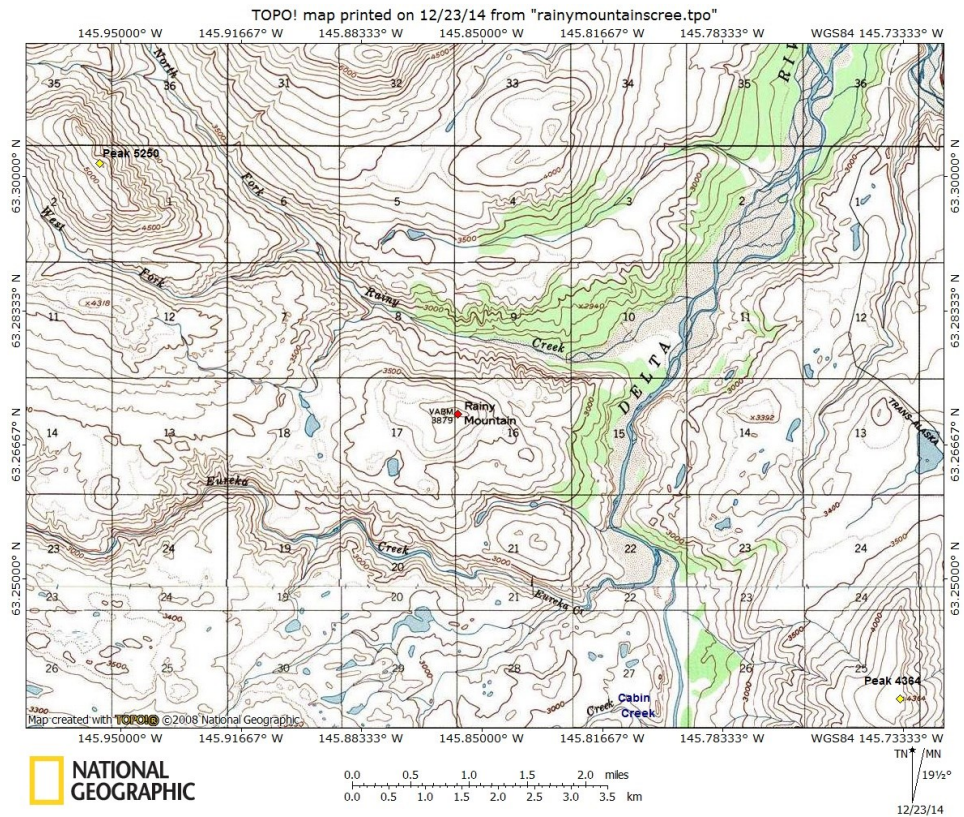
Route of First Recorded Ascent: East ridge

Access Point: Phelan Creek

While conducting surveys for the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, A. Newton Stewart led a survey team across the Delta River. They started from the point on the Richardson Highway where Phelan Creek spreads out over its bed about 1.65 miles north of McCallum Creek. They noted a draw to their west-northwest, and on horseback they ascended the slope on the south side of this draw after fording Phelan Creek, which was three to four feet deep in the main channels.

Upon topping out on the slope and coming into the boggy flats above Phelan Creek, they observed a small, cone-shaped hill about six miles to their west with Rainy Mountain about a half mile behind it.

They went westward across the flats, keeping about a quarter mile south of the lake to avoid bogs, and continued westward, passing another small lake to the south. After crossing a deep draw and small northward-flowing stream and having to come out again onto the flat, they passed two small lakes – one to their north and the second to their south. They then passed about 300 yards south of a double knoll. After they were abreast of the small knolls, they observed a canyon with sheer rock sides. Not wanting to cross this canyon, the party headed



down slopes to the north to reach the Delta River across from the wide mouth of Rainy Creek. Not wanting to take the horses across the Delta River, they left them there. The trip had taken about three hours to this point.

They crossed the Delta River in a rubber boat and headed westward up a gradual, grassy slope on the south side of Rainy Creek. They continued up the east ridge of Rainy Mountain to the summit. The backpack took about two and a half hours after crossing the Delta River.

The survey party established a bench mark by setting a brass disk in a one-foot diameter buried boulder at the summit.

In 1950 a U.S. Geological Survey party revisited the summit. In 1970 a National Geodetic Survey party visited the summit, arriving by helicopter.

The information for this column came from survey notes available at <http://www.geocaching.com/mark/details.aspx?PID=UV4784>; from my correspondence with Albert E. "Skip" Theberge, Jr.; and from Stewart's genealogical records, available at <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~saylormowbray/bowermannotes.html>.

## November Board Meeting Minutes

Meeting convened at 6:08 p.m. on November 16.

Attendees: Cory Hinds, Greg Encelewski, Elizabeth Bennett, Rachad Rayess, Aaron Gallagher, Galen Flint, Jayme Mack.

Old business

1. Board turnover:

A. Galen has arranged speakers for monthly membership meeting for December, January, and February

B. Officer handbooks available for everyone and are accessible through Google doc. Basics are stated; however, they have not been updated. (Treasurer and president duties seem to be updated). Galen will speak with Tim Silvers to discuss how to update officer duties on Google doc. Board members/officers instructed to take notes of their turnover responsibilities and their duties to start building a concrete duty list for each position.

C. Aaron will have budget status report for each meeting, Cory will have agenda for each board meeting. MCA board instructed to email Cory before board meetings with any topics you wish to discuss at the meeting.

2. Christmas dinner planning:

A. Christmas party scheduled December 16th at BP Energy Center

B. Galen will be sending request to Moose's Tooth pizza for donations for 15 pizzas (half veggie/half meat). Galen may pay for pizza out of pocket and be reimbursed by club, or Aaron will meet her at Moose's Tooth to pay, as the club checks have his name listed.

C. Galen will bring drinks. Cory will bring ice and ice chest. Last names for side dishes have been rotated.

D. Club members who would like to share a slideshow must have on a thumb drive and bring no more than 10 slides to share. (This on MCA Facebook.)

3. Basic mountaineering school:

A. Student/instructor interest sign-up sheet available at monthly meeting November. 18th, 2014.

B. Dates of Basic Mountaineering School will be available January 2015.

C. Chugach Avalanche Center is willing to make custom courses for MCA. Level one and possibly level two classes discussed; however, there is a large jump between one and two. Level one and two courses are both four days long. Discussed shorter courses and requesting a level one refresher course and observer course. Or, half-day avalanche recognition course field day and a separate observer course. Josh Clark will follow up on this with the avalanche center.

D. Board to help solicit volunteers to teach at BMS. (Galen volunteers to teach a ski class). Cory requested that Jayme send each board member a request for lining up specific types of volunteers.

4. Equipment chairperson (Josh):

A. Cory evaluated Arctic Storage and found it was dry, but cold and was concerned about the electronics. Possibly move electronics from Arctic to Best Storage (if it is heated).

B. Josh will see if we can combine units by transferring gear to Best Storage (International Airport Road and C Street) as Best Storage unit is being subsidized; Arctic is not. Josh will bring

proposal from Best storage to next board meeting.

C. Josh soliciting volunteers to help re-inventory gear.

D. MCA has limited gear availability for rent over the past five years and ropes have never been rentable. Gear only rented out to leaders of a training event.

5. Club improvements: additional activities, mentoring, history, develop actions:

A. Tabled by Cory until next meeting.

6. New business:

A. Calendar is \$13 and is sold at Alaska Mountaineering & Hiking and Alaska Rock Gym.

B. Greg Bragiel okay with hut budget cut in half.

C. Proposed budget approved with two edits. Membership dues will change from \$8,500 to \$9,000. (New dues will be \$20 for individual, \$25 for family, if membership is bought in December. 2014 the current dues will be honored). Training will change from \$3,500 to \$4,200.

D. Dnigi Hut. Cory introduced a proposal to evaluate various unknowns related to the condition and options for this.

D.1 Galen will speak with snowmachine clubs to see if they have interest in taking over Dnigi Hut. This is only to evaluate and possibly narrow our options.

E. Discussed sending in a spring/winter work party vs a summer party to assess and possibly repair Dnigi Hut. Doing so in spring/winter will save time and money as we may be able to snowmachine in.

F. Dnigi Hut has mold problems caused by lack of ventilation and leaks, a work party went to hut in in 2013 and did some repairs.

Dnigi has never had large-scale renovations. According to logbook 30% of users are MCA members, the rest are snowmachiners. Discussed repair and maintain, repair and give to snowmachiners, remove hut and burn (in winter for safer conditions) and fly out leftovers, fly hut to new location in Hatcher Pass, move to Mint Hut or expand Mint Hut. How feasible is it to permit a new hut site? What is the complete cost to relocate? Rachad states \$5,000 to \$10,000 per helicopter hut pieces to a new location. Galen mentions building new hut. Cory mentions moving hut.

G. Cory will discuss with Department of Natural Resources, Division of Mining, Land, and Water about possibility of new hut lease within Hatcher Pass Management Area.

H. Restart Awards Committee - Hoeman Award, President's Award. Cory will restart this committee soon.

7. Other:

A. What are we doing with extra funds? Should these be used for classes, pizza for monthly meetings, pay presenter and fly them up to talk?

B. Discussed no formal monthly meeting June and August (still have July picnic) due to low attendance. Discussed having activities that appeal to everyone; e.g., climbing and bonfire at Boy Scout Rock.

Next meeting: Monday December 15th at 6:00 p.m. in REI classroom. Discuss next summer's monthly membership meetings, discuss leftover funds.

Meeting adjourned at 7:56 p.m.

## December Board Meeting Note

*By Rachad Rayess*

At the December board meeting, the members discussed a new proposal under the title "Mentorship Initiative." The aim of the proposal is to "facilitate the transfer of experience from veteran to novice in different outdoor skills." The idea is that the club has a lot of members who have a wealth of knowledge and experience. A lot of times, these experienced veterans do not interact with the novices (not because they do not want to, but because they do not know one another). This proposal will help connect people and build skills and new relationships. This is how it works:

- Any MCA member with expertise in an outdoor skill can apply to become a mentor.
- Outdoor skills can range from climbing to skiing, biking, mountaineering, packrafting...
- Students are MCA members who would like to learn a new outdoor skill and who are willing to commit to a once-a-month outing with a mentor.
- Each mentor gets assigned two students and is required to meet with them once a month. The meeting could be indoor (educational, learning about trails, reading from a book...) or outdoor (could be a few hours or a couple of days).
- The commitment time is either three months or six months for mentors and students.
- Mentors will mention their type of expertise so that students would be matched with them based on common interest.
- There will be a sign-up sheet for mentors and students during the monthly club meeting. Alternatively, if you know you are interested, you can send an email to [rachetta@yahoo.com](mailto:rachetta@yahoo.com).

The club is hoping that this proposal will generate enough interest from future mentors and students.



*Eklutna Lake in autumn from Pepper Peak Ridge. Photo by Frank Baker.*



# Mountaineering Club of Alaska

## 2015 PROPOSED BUDGET

	Proposed for 2015	Budget Change	Approved for 2014	Current for 2014
<b>REVENUE</b>				
Membership Dues	\$9,000	\$500	\$8,500	\$7,405
Scree subscriptions	\$350	\$150	\$200	\$405
Training	\$7,000	(\$2,000)	\$9,000	\$7,045
Photo Calendar	\$2,500	(\$500)	\$3,000	\$2,393
MCA Products: T-Shirts, Patches, Etc.	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Interest on Accounts	\$75	(\$25)	\$100	\$64
Other - Donations, etc	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$115
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	<b>\$18,925</b>	<b>(\$1,875)</b>	<b>\$20,800</b>	<b>\$17,427</b>
<b>EXPENSE</b>				
Training	\$4,200	(\$1,800)	\$6,000	\$2,907
Scree	\$2,400	\$100	\$2,300	\$2,306
General Meeting	\$1,700	\$0	\$1,700	\$1,002
Administrative	\$800	(\$100)	\$900	\$548
Hut Construction & Maint.	\$17,000	\$13,000	\$4,000	\$1,883
Insurance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Club Equipment	\$700	\$200	\$500	\$961
Library	\$250	\$150	\$100	\$240
Other:				
Photo Calendar	\$2,600	\$0	\$2,600	\$1,800
MCA Products: T-Shirts, Patches, Etc.	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Other - Awards	\$600	\$0	\$600	\$0
Other -	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
<b>TOTAL EXPENSE</b>	<b>\$30,250</b>	<b>\$11,550</b>	<b>\$18,700</b>	<b>\$11,646</b>
<b>DUE TO (FROM) RESERVE</b>	<b>(\$11,325)</b>		<b>\$2,100</b>	<b>\$5,781</b>
<b>CASH BALANCE - All Accounts</b>				
Beginning Balance - January 1, 2014				\$31,559
Increase (decrease) during 2014				\$4,931
<b>Current Balance for 2014</b>				<b>\$36,489</b>
Checking - Credit Union 1				\$14,217
Money Mkt and CDs - Credit Union 1				\$20,640
Savings - Credit Union 1				\$415
18-month CD - in trust for hut lease - Northrim Bank				\$1,168
Petty Cash				\$50
<b>Ending Balance - Revised 11/14/14</b>				<b>\$36,489</b>

# MOUNTAINEERING CLUB OF ALASKA

## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

The Mountaineering Club of Alaska (MCA) was formed in 1958 to promote the enjoyment of hiking and climbing in Alaska and the exploration of its mountains. We welcome all who wish to become members.

**Participate and Learn:** The MCA conducts scheduled hikes and climbs led by experienced club members, technical mountaineering and climbing courses, and other instruction throughout the year. The club maintains seven mountain huts in the nearby Chugach and Talkeetna mountains. The MCA's Vin Hoeman Library contains hundreds of books, numerous periodicals, bound volumes of the *SCREE*, and a 'Peak File' with information on local climbs. The club has climbing gear for trips and training, including ice axes, helmets, crampons, and avalanche beacons.

**Stay Informed:** The MCA publishes a monthly newsletter, *SCREE*, and emails it to all members. The *SCREE* contains announcements of upcoming events, the hiking and climbing trip schedule, and trip reports written by club members.

**Monthly meetings:** Generally held on the third Tuesday of each month at 6:30 p.m. at the BP Energy Center at 1014 Energy Court (in Midtown Anchorage just south of the main BP building). Special events or changes to the meeting will be noted in the *SCREE* and on our website at: [www.mtnclubak.org](http://www.mtnclubak.org).

- ◆ **Complete both pages of this form. Write neatly!** To participate in club-sponsored trips, **EVERY MEMBER** must read and complete the Release of Liability Agreement on the back of this application.
- ◆ Please make checks payable to **Mountaineering Club of Alaska, Inc.**
- ◆ Mailed *SCREE* subscriptions are \$15 additional per year & are non-refundable. (1 *SCREE*/ family).
- ◆ Annual membership is through the 31st of December.
- ◆ Memberships paid after November 1st are good through December 31 of the following year.
- ◆ If applying by mail, please include a self-addressed, **stamped** envelope for your membership card.  
OR you may pick it up at the next monthly meeting.  
Our address is: **PO BOX 243561, Anchorage, AK 99524-3561**
- ◆ **Note: Mailed applications may take up to 6 weeks to process.** Thank you for your patience.
- ◆ **To join right now, sign up online at [www.mtnclubak.org](http://www.mtnclubak.org)**

NEW <input type="checkbox"/>	DATE <input style="width: 100%;" type="text"/>
RENEWAL <input type="checkbox"/>	NAME <input style="width: 100%;" type="text"/>
1 YR. INDIVIDUAL \$20 <input type="checkbox"/>	FAMILY MEMBERS <input style="width: 100%; height: 50px;" type="text"/>
1 YR. FAMILY \$25 <input type="checkbox"/>	
2 YR. INDIVIDUAL \$40 <input type="checkbox"/>	
2 YR. FAMILY \$50 <input type="checkbox"/>	
How do you want your <b>SCREE</b> delivered? (check one or both)	
ELECTRONIC (Free) <input type="checkbox"/>	E-mail delivery
PAPER (add \$15/yr.) <input type="checkbox"/>	Postal Service (not available outside the United States)
STREET or P.O. BOX <input style="width: 100%;" type="text"/>	
CITY / STATE / ZIP <input style="width: 100%;" type="text"/>	
TELEPHONE <input style="width: 100%;" type="text"/>	
E-MAIL ADDRESS <input style="width: 100%;" type="text"/>	

\_\_\_\_\_ I am interested in joining a committee (Circle which ones: Programs, Hiking & Climbing, Huts, Geographic Names, Peak Registers, Parks Advisory, Equipment, Awards, Membership, Training, or ad hoc committees).

\_\_\_\_\_ I am interested in leading a trip.

Administrative use only below this line: \_\_\_\_\_

Dues Paid: \$20 \$25 \$40 \$50 Paper **SCREE** Paid:  \$15 for 1 year  \$30 for 2 years Membership Card Issued for Yr: \_\_\_\_\_  
on Date: \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_  Cash or Check Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Address Added to Mailing List

**Revised 11/26/14**

**SIGN AND INITIAL THIS RELEASE OF LIABILITY— READ IT CAREFULLY**

I \_\_\_\_\_ (print name) am aware that mountaineering and wilderness activities (including hiking; backpacking; rock, snow, and ice climbing; mountaineering; skiing; ski mountaineering; rafting and packrafting, kayaking, and use of remote backcountry huts) are hazardous activities. I wish to participate and/or receive instruction in these activities with the Mountaineering Club of Alaska, Inc. ("MCA"). I recognize these activities involve numerous risks, which include, by way of example only, falling while hiking, climbing, skiing or crossing rivers or glaciers; falling into a crevasse or over a cliff; drowning; failure of a belay; being struck by climbing equipment or falling rock, ice or snow; avalanches; lightning; fire; hypothermia; frostbite; defective or malfunctioning equipment; and attack by insects or animals. I further recognize that the remoteness of the activities may preclude prompt medical care or rescue. I also recognize that risk of **injury or death** may be caused or enhanced by **mistakes, negligence or reckless conduct** on the part of either my fellow participants; MCA officers, directors, instructors, or trip leaders; and the State of Alaska and its employees regarding MCA backcountry huts. I nevertheless agree to accept all risks of **injury, death, or property damage** that may occur in connection with any MCA activity, including use of MCA furnished equipment and MCA backcountry huts. **(As used in this agreement, MCA includes its officers, directors, instructors and trip leaders.)**

\_\_\_\_\_ (initial that you have read this paragraph)

**GIVING UP MY LEGAL RIGHTS** I agree to give up for myself and for my heirs all legal rights I may have against the MCA; my fellow participants in MCA activities (except to the extent that insurance coverage is provided by automobile insurance policies) and the State of Alaska and its employees regarding MCA backcountry huts. **I give up these legal rights regardless of whether the injury, death, or property damage results from mistakes, negligence or reckless conduct of others.** I understand this agreement shall remain in effect until I provide a signed, dated, written notice of its revocation to the MCA.

\_\_\_\_\_ (initial that you have read this paragraph)

**MY PROMISE NOT TO SUE** I will not sue or otherwise make a claim against the MCA; my fellow participants in MCA activities (except as noted above for automobile accidents); and the State of Alaska and its employees regarding use of MCA backcountry huts, for **injury, death, or property damage** which occurs in the course of my participation or instruction in mountaineering and wilderness activities. Any lawsuit relating to MCA activities or this release shall only be filed in Anchorage, Alaska. The provisions of this release are severable and if any part is found unenforceable, the remaining provisions shall remain in effect.

\_\_\_\_\_ (initial that you have read this paragraph)

**MY RELEASE OF LIABILITY** I agree to release and discharge the MCA; my fellow participants in MCA activities; and the State of Alaska and its employees regarding use of MCA backcountry huts, from all actions, claims, or demands, both for myself and for my heirs, dependents, and/or personal representative, for **injury, death, or property damage** occurring in the course of my participation or instruction in mountaineering and wilderness activities.

\_\_\_\_\_ (initial that you have read this paragraph)

**MY PROMISE TO INDEMNIFY** I will pay all expenses, including attorney fees and court costs, that the MCA; my fellow participants in MCA activities; and the State of Alaska and its employees may incur as a consequence of any legal action arising out of **injury, death, or property damage** suffered by me in connection with any MCA activity or the use of any MCA backcountry hut.

\_\_\_\_\_ (initial that you have read this paragraph)

**MY CONSENT TO MEDICAL TREATMENT** I consent to any hospital or medical care that may be necessary as a result of my participation in MCA activities. I understand and agree that I am solely responsible for all charges for such medical treatment, including evacuation and/or rescue costs.

\_\_\_\_\_ (initial that you have read this paragraph)

**I HAVE CAREFULLY READ THIS AGREEMENT, UNDERSTAND ITS CONTENT, AND RECOGNIZE IT IS A BINDING LEGAL AGREEMENT**

Dated: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Parent or Guardian (if under 18): \_\_\_\_\_

**Revised 2/19/09**

## Mountaineering Club of Alaska

President	Cory Hinds	229-6809	Board member (term expires in 2015)	Rachad Rayess	617-309-6566
Vice-President	Galen Flint	650-207-0810	Board member (term expires in 2015)	Joshua Clark	887-1888
Secretary	Liz Bennett	830-9656	Board member (term expires in 2016)	Jayne Mack	382-0212
Treasurer	Aaron Gallagher	250-9555	Board member (term expires in 2016)	Carlene Van Tol	748-5270
Past President	Greg Encelewski	360-0274			

Annual membership dues: Single \$20, Family \$25

Dues can be paid at any meeting or mailed to the Treasurer at the MCA address below. If you want a membership card, please fill out a club waiver and mail it with a self-addressed, stamped envelope. If you fail to receive the newsletter or have questions about your membership, contact the Club Membership Committee at [membership@mtclubak.org](mailto:membership@mtclubak.org).

*The Scree* is a monthly publication of the Mountaineering Club of Alaska. Articles, notes, and letters submitted for publication in the newsletter should be emailed to [MCAScree@gmail.com](mailto:MCAScree@gmail.com). Articles should be submitted by the 24th of the month to appear in the next month's *Scree*.

Paid ads may be submitted to the attention of the Vice-President at the club address and should be in electronic format and pre-paid. Ads can be emailed to [vicepresident@mtclubak.org](mailto:vicepresident@mtclubak.org).

Missing your MCA membership card? Stop by the monthly meeting to pick one up or send a self-addressed, stamped envelope and we'll mail it to you.

Mailing list/database entry: Aaron Gallagher - [membership@mtclubak.org](mailto:membership@mtclubak.org)

Hiking and Climbing Committee: Vicky Lytle - [hcc@mtclubak.org](mailto:hcc@mtclubak.org)

Huts: Greg Bragiel - 569-3008 or [huts@mtclubak.org](mailto:huts@mtclubak.org)

Calendar: Stuart Grenier - 337-5127 or [stugrenier@gmail.com](mailto:stugrenier@gmail.com)

*Scree* Editor: [MCAScree@gmail.com](mailto:MCAScree@gmail.com) Steve Gruhn (344-1219) assisted by Elizabeth Ellis ([elizabeth.anne.russo@gmail.com](mailto:elizabeth.anne.russo@gmail.com))

Web: [www.mtclubak.org](http://www.mtclubak.org)

Find MCAK listserv at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/MCAK/info>.

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