the SCREE

Mountaineering Club of Alaska

January 2017

Volume 60 Number 1

"We will open the book. Its pages are blank. We are going to put words on them ourselves. The book is called Opportunity and its first chapter is New Year's Day."
- Edith Pierce

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Monthly meeting: Tuesday, January 17, at 6:30 p.m.

Dana Drummond presents "The Care Bear Traverse" and other climbs in Argentine Patagonia.

The Mountaineering Club of Alaska

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 17, at the BP Energy Center, 1014 Energy Court, Anchorage, Alaska.
http://www.alaskageology.org/graphics/meetingmap.gif

For the MCA Membership Application and Liability Waiver, visit
http://www.mtnclubak.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=members.form.

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Cover Photo

Jon Cannon (left) reaches his high point on his attempt on Supple Peak on Montague Island while Andy Milauskas continues upward.
Photo by Ben Still

Article Submission: Text and photography submissions for *the Scree* can be sent as attachments to mcascree@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.

Monthly Meeting: Tuesday, January 17, at 6:30 p.m. Dana Drummond presents "The Care Bear Traverse" and other climbs in Argentine Patagonia.

You might know Dana as just the owner of The Hoarding Marmot, but he's actually used some of that gear! Dana's skied, climbed, and adventured all across North and South America. Some of his more memorable endeavors have been climbing in the Alaska Range, ski mountaineering in Peru, working for Yosemite Search and Rescue and climbing in Yosemite as much as possible, and, of course, two trips to Argentine Patagonia! His buddy "Stitch" gave him the nickname Mad Dog and he's never looked back.

Hiking and Climbing Schedule

February 18-22-25: Hope to Seward backcountry ski touring. Approximately 80 miles. Participants can ski either or both segments of this trip. Trip leader: Greg Bragiel. Informational meeting, sign up at the January MCA meeting.

February 24-26: Serenity Falls Ice Climbing trip. Stay at the Serenity Falls Hut.

April 1-9: Bomber traverse backcountry ski touring, glacier travel. Approximately 35 miles. Visit the Snowbird, Bomber, Mint, and Dnigi Huts. Trip leader: Greg Bragiel. Informational meeting, sign up at the January and February MCA meetings.

June 17-18: Flattop Mountain sleepout. No leader.

June 23-July 1: MCA Summer Mountaineering Instructional Trip. This is a vigorous hiking, climbing, and glacier-travel traverse through the Talkeetna Mountains, the Bomber Traverse, wherein the group stays at various locations that lend to the specific instructions. Basic mountaineering skills, snow travel, ice axe/tool use, ice climbing, glacier travel, navigation, route finding, rappelling, rock climbing, fun, exploration, leadership skills, and confidence building. Glacier travel. Approximately 30 miles. Informational meeting, sign up at the January-March MCA meetings.

Online? Click me!

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

Climbing Notes

Paul May reported that he climbed Peak 1280 in the Chamberlain Bay and Growler Bay drainages on Glacier Island on April 3 and Peak 1732 in the Paddy Bay drainage of the Kenai Mountains on May 6. We look forward to reading more detailed reports in upcoming issues of *the Scree*.

I was catching up on old *Screes* lately, a bit behind I'm afraid. An article in the July 2012 issue reported on some summits ascended in the Talkeetna Mountains near the Chickaloon Glacier and the "Sheep River Glacier." For the record, a group of us flew to the upper Talkeetna Glacier with Jim Okonek in late May 1990 and climbed several surrounding peaks, including Sovereign Mountain (8849), Lonely Peak (8517), Peak 8450 (Sec. 16, T23N, R5E), Peak 8150 (Secs. 9/10, T23N, R5E), and Peak 8780, which we called Bulldog Mountain (due to a feature along our route) and labeled Peak T-3 in the article. "Aladdin" is not a true summit, sorry. The team included Phil Fortner, Kevin Dobelbower, Donna Deekell, and me.

Willy Hersman

Choate's Chuckle

- Tom Choate

Newer ice tools are in what way like non-profit newsletters?

Answer: They don't need any adze.

10610-Foot Mount Goode as seen from the Pioneer Ridge-Austin Helmers Trail on December 5, 2016.
Photo by Frank E. Baker

Ten Days in Prince William Sound

Text by Jon Cannon; photos by Ben Still

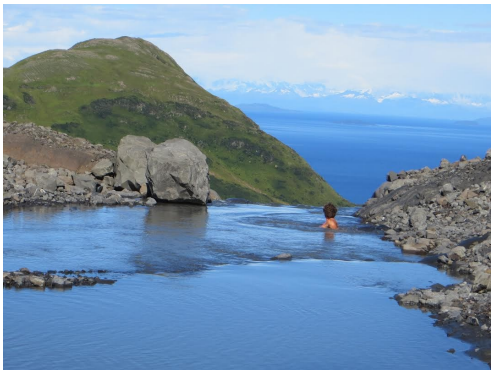
After owning a boat in Prince William Sound for more than five years, I am just amazed at how few people actually step foot on the shore. So many folks head out on their boat, do some fishing, anchor up for the night, and repeat ad nauseam. The best case scenario for many of these boaters is a bonfire on the beach.

It just blows my mind. There might be a more beautiful place in Alaska than the sound on a sunny summer day, but I sure have not found it. The hiking in the sound is amazing, miles and miles of untouched country, and an amazing amount of unclimbed peaks just outside of Anchorage. They may not be the tallest peaks around, but every step upward is rewarded with a view people pay thousands for.

On August 14th, 2015, we headed out of Whittier aboard my boat the *Seaquestrian*, destination only moderately known. The trip was planned with two foci: Half the crew of six wanted to climb, and half the crew wanted to fish. Really, this was ideal for the climbers, who could be dropped off anywhere the boat could touch ashore, and be picked up whenever and wherever as radioed for.

Port Chalmers from the summit of Peak 1875; Andy Milauskas photographing the slowest (by far) member of the group, Jon Cannon, the boat just a speck in the bay below.

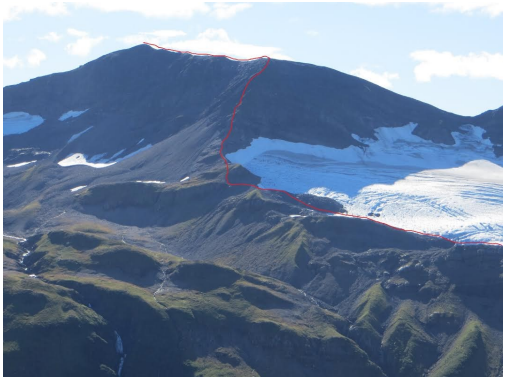
After a couple beautiful days of tent camping, hiking, and peakbagging, the weather picked up and we made for the Port Chalmers Cabin on Montague Island. We had reserved the cabin for just such an event, and got amazingly lucky on the timing.



Andy Milauskas in the infinity pool.

Normally, I have nothing but nice things to say about U.S. Forest Service cabins, but whoever decided on the location of that cabin was high on crack. It's a tidal, muddy, rocky beach that could only be reached at high tide; otherwise plan to schlep gear up the beach a ¼ mile or so over slick rock, after tendering in the gear to the shore with the dingy because it is so shallow you can't approach the shore at anything but higher tide in the boat. There are about 100 perfect cabin locations in that bay, with great beaches, running drinking water, good anchorages, etc. The Forest Service certainly selected the one place with none of these.

While the sound on a nice day is about the nicest place on earth – well, they don't say, "It's always s------r in Whittier" for no reason – we were happy to be ensconced in the cabin, warm and dry.



Glacier and summit route for Supple Peak.

After one day of constant rain, we woke up on August 18th to bluebird skies. Andy Milauskas, Ben Still, Pika the dog, and I headed out on foot from the cabin, walking around the southwest side of the bay on the beach to make our way up Peak 1875 on our way to Peak 2950. [*Ed. note: Peak 1875 is the higher north peak of a low mountain with two summits overlooking Port Chalmers. The lower southern summit is marked as Peak 1850 on the USGS maps; Peak 1875, the higher northern summit is unmarked on the USGS maps.*] That area, and cabin, was a well-known deer hunting location and the game trails were easy to follow. Hiking in the sound was defined by horrible, thick brush that opened quickly into mossy muskeg fields that provided easy hiking, soft ground, and a fun game of connect the fields as we moved up the mountain.

It was easy to see why those muskeg fields were Pika's favorite, soft moss on her paws and tiny, oddly deep kettle puddles – is that a thing? – dotted the fields, making for a puppy playground of running around and frolicking that just made us feel like doing the same. Quickly we finished playing connect the fields and, about 2.5 miles after leaving the cabin, had reached our

first goal – Peak 1875. That close, easy peak had certainly been summited many times by deer hunters. Their quarry was visible from the summit in a small group below us.

From there we quickly moved down the back side of Peak 1875 into a small valley. We had mostly moved out of timberline summiting Peak 1875 and only a couple small patches of brush dotted the landscape between there and our second peak.

Andy Milauskas on the summit of Moist Peak.

Moving up the slope of Peak 2950, we crested a ridge to find a glacier-fed creek flowing back down to the valley below us. Andy, on a dare, braved the mountaintop infinity pool, just long enough to shrivel up nicely and pose for a photograph.

Traversing below the hanging glacier on the mountain, the going finally started to leave the realm of walk-up and got more difficult. Large boulders dotted that area and we traversed along the base of the glacier, which had melted its snow layer from the winter before, leaving only glacier ice. After passing below the glacier, the ridge to the summit was the obvious route. We moved upward and the ridge became increasingly vertical. I realized that Pika, lacking opposable thumbs, was not going to make it up the climb/scramble from there. She was pretty goat-like normally, but that was getting quite vertical, 5.4 or 5.5, and the rock was very loose. Not really knowing what Pika would do if I left her and not wanting to see my dog tumble to the glacier below and blow up like a Hefty bag filled with vegetable soup, I decided it was in our best interest to head back. I was much slower, so told Andy and Ben that I would trace our path back and they could just catch Pika and me.

Andy Milauskas on the ridge heading up Moist Peak.

I headed back. Meanwhile Andy and Ben continued upward along the ridge, making the summit ridge only a few minutes after I left them. One of the most breathtaking sights in the sound, or really Southern Alaska for that matter, was the unobstructed view of the Pacific Ocean. Knowing that if I could hock a loogie far enough, I could hit Antarctica thousands of miles away really made me feel both small, and also significantly better at hocking loogies than I actually am.

Blue sky dominated the horizon as far as the eye could see, and the two climbers moved up the ridge to the summit.

Years ago my wife Holly made mention in a conversation that she hates the words moist and supple. She just thought they sounded gross. We found it hilarious because who doesn't like moist cake, and supple melons … yes … melons. Being boys trapped in adult bodies, we had mocked her for years with those words. Before the trip we had decided on some good peak names—Moist Peak and Supple Peak.

Reaching the summit, Andy and Ben elected to dub Peak 2950 as Supple Peak.

Staring off into the distance to see the curve of the earth, they contemplated life, liberty, and certainly hocking that loogie to Antarctica. Retracing their route, they caught me on the summit of Peak 1875 and we continued back to the cabin the way we came, covering a total distance of around 12 miles.

The next morning our cabin time had expired, so we packed up the boat and headed out. The night before we had decided that the climbers were going to attempt the tallest peak on Montague - Peak 2999. The soon-to-be-very-bored fishermen could not yet keep any fish that we were not going to eat in the next two days. The trip was still too long to hold fish on ice for the remaining five days. They were over-enthusiastic about catching dinner and rolled us out on the beach as quickly as possible, leaving us for the rich waters of Montague. The first person who dropped a line in the water would catch that "day's limit;" they were quickly twiddling their thumbs waiting for our return. Should have gone climbing!

We moved off the beach into the forest. The next quarter mile or so was some of the thickest brush any of us had seen in the sound. With downed trees, devil's club, alder, and all the other Alaska favorites, only Pika was not struggling to move, and even she didn't seem too happy about it.

Before too long the brush gave way to muskeg fields and again we started playing connect the fields as we moved up the valley. Ahead we could see the valley was defined by a bit of a plateau that had a fabulous waterfall coming down the front of it.

We were able to find some more forgiving access to the plateau by moving up to the left of the falls. From there we continued up pretty steep terrain, connecting field to field with short bursts of

bushwhacking. By that time my rather out-(oh, I am)-of-shape self was really beginning to feel like I had been doing something between yesterday's hike and today's. I was getting tired and my footing less sure.

We made our way through the last bit of 'whacking before timberline, some dwarf spruce that were just above head level. At some point in that area, I stepped forward without realizing I was walking off a four-foot-tall ledge hidden by the spruce and I ass-over-teakettled myself to the ground.

I made my way, moaning and groaning, the remainder of the way through the brush to the open sunlight, where I felt like a vampire exposed to the rising sun. I had lost my sunglasses. I was pissed … those were expensive prescription sunglasses and I had no idea where I lost them. I could see well enough without my glasses, but I was disappointed to lose the eye protection on that glaring day.

The way back down the ridge of Moist Peak.

Catching the ever-patient Ben, Pika, and Andy who had waited, I explained my loss and we all agreed we would look for them on the way down, all knowing they would never be seen again.

Continuing upward, we crossed the creek we had previously seen in waterfall form. We moved up the ridge in front of us toward the summit ridge. It was about that time that summit fever vs. friendship took over and Ben and Andy moved forward ruthlessly toward the summit, knowing I probably wouldn't die … probably …

Jon Cannon (left) and Ben Still on the summit of Beardy Peak.

They moved on ahead and realized that I was tired, really tired, tired like a fat man rarely gets. I plodded along, determined not to miss the view of Antarctica just ahead of me.

The terrain started to steepen again and once again I was climbing more than scrambling. Worried, I looked around for Pika, only to find the wily critter already above me on safe ground. How had she even done it? I hadn't seen her move in front of me, but I was tired; maybe I missed it. "Well, if she can do it so can I," I thought. I started climbing and soon found myself clinging desperately to the side of a cliff. How the hell had those guys done that? How had my damned dog done it? I was terrified. Perhaps not the most terrified I had ever been, but I sure was having trouble coming up with any contenders, and I was trying. As I clung onto the cliff, which would crumble away any time I moved, I just kept thinking, "If my dog can do it, so can I." She was scared of laminate floors for god's sake. Before I knew it I was too far up to turn back. I just kept climbing and finally made it to the summit ridge.

Whew, was that load off! I had come all this way and just a couple more steps and I was within spitting distance of the Pacific.

I rounded the ridge to find it completely socked in. Blue to the north, cloud bank to the south! I was pretty disappointed, but, hey, I just freed "The Nose" … or that is what it felt like at least, and the summit was just along the ridge. I plodded my way along the ridge to the summit to find Ben, Andy, and my loyal mutt waiting for me. I had made the summit of Moist Peak! If you didn't see that name coming, well, you are not the sharpest tool in the shed.

On the way back down the ridge, all I could think about was that down- climb. My query, "How about that climb up that cliff?" received little in return to calm my fears. "Yeah, pretty nice huh?" and, "Pretty straightforward." GREAT; thanks, guys.

I made the edge and started to descend, waiting for the hard part I knew was to come, but before I knew it I was down. I looked back. I could not even see the route I had taken up. To this day I have no idea where that cliff was. Perhaps that was it, and I was tired? Did I get off route? I could have; I have the sense of a direction of a Rumba. I never did figure it out.

After that the descent was pretty easy; I was tired and slow, but Ben and Andy were patient. From above, we could see a route that would avoid the brush I lost my glasses in. So we did, skirting just around it. I was thinking that I must have lost them in the fall. Both Andy and Ben had retraced their route in the brush, saying they didn't see anything, but finally reaching the area I had to look for myself.

Lo and behold, Rumba Jon found the spot I took the tumble and found the glasses! Ecstatic, I joined the crew and continued downward, for the most part retracing our route until the flats near the ocean where, from above, we could see a creek cutting its way directly to the ocean sans brush. We headed out to see the boat waiting with three extraordinarily bored fishermen aboard.

Jon Cannon (left) and Ben Still on the summit of Horn Mountain.

Total mileage about 6.5 miles.

We made our way back to our favorite camp in the southern sound, and I pretty much passed out. The next day we took as a rest day. Pika posted up under a tree and didn't move the whole day. I was close to the same. Pacing around like a landborne dugong swilling down precious beer and sitting by a fire.

On August 22nd Andy elected the route of the fisherman … traitor, and Ben, Pika, and I set our sights on Peak 2034 on Knight Island, and if "Jon the baby" was up to it, Horn Mountain to the southeast.

We were rolled out rather unceremoniously in Mummy Bay by anxious fishermen who could keep their fish.

Jon Cannon (left) and Ben Still on the summit of Horn Mountain.

The elevation gain was quick and easy. There was little vegetation in the area, which was why we chose that spot to get dropped, and we made the false summit quite quickly. Looking out across a very steep pass it was obvious to Ben, and less obvious to me, that the peak we could see just across the way was the summit.

Looking ahead, it was just cliff in front of us, so we traced our path back and moved farther south to skirt under where we had just been standing. It was a steep rocky slope, and moving down and across it was not easy, but not impossible either. With time we made the pass we had been looking over, and shortly thereafter the summit of Peak 2034 – Beardy Peak.

Why Beardy Peak? I don't know; it was Beardy. That is all.

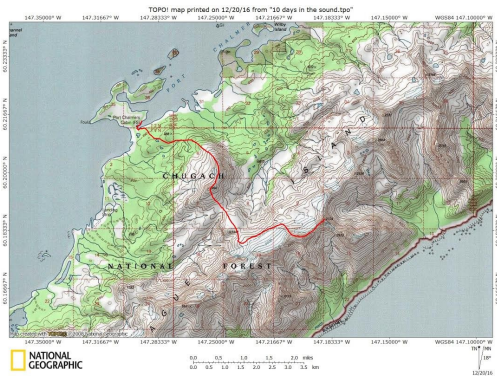
A short break and snack and I checked my baby card at the door. "Let's continue to Horn Mountain," I said and Ben was more than willing to take me up on it.

We ended up taking the longer but similarly elevated circle route to Horn Mountain marked by stunning views, easy hiking, and a small black bear running in fear of us in the valley far below. We made quick work of the hike to the base of the mountain. There were steep grass slopes up the side of Horn Mountain, although somewhat unnerving, considering what would be a butt slide of death to the bottom, the handholds and footing were good, and soon the summit were upon us.

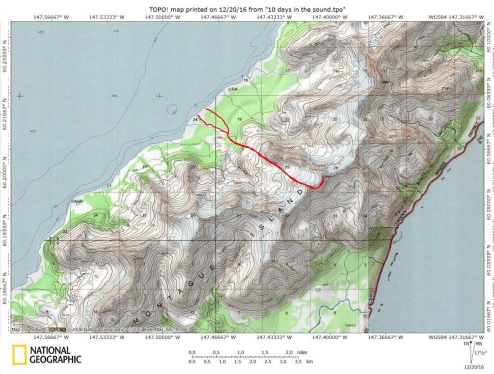
We elected to descend Horn Mountain to the south and moved down the slopes to some pretty dense forest, picking a route ever downward to the ocean. There we radioed the boat and were picked up from another excellent day of hiking.

Total mileage about 5 miles.

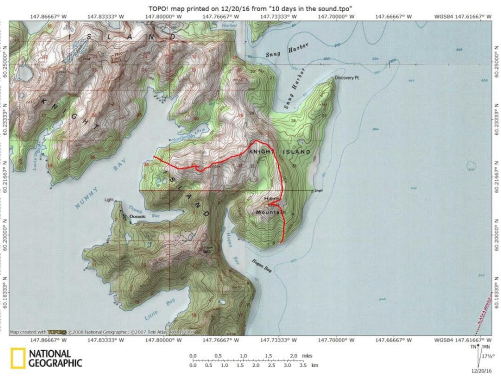
The next day we packed up and headed home after an excellent 10-day trip in the sound.



Peak 1875 and Supple Peak route map.



Moist Peak route map.



Beardy Peak and Horn Mountain route map.

Gates of the Arctic Traverse

Text and photos by Luc Mehl

The Brooks Range has always intimidated me as a logistical challenge: expensive, remote, cold in the winter, and buggy in the summer. But it was the largest swath of Alaska I hadn't seen, and with a lot of planning, we were able to do a long and remote trip within my budget. We had to have the route, logistics, and pace, dialed in to pull off that ambitious trip. Our route evolved to be: fly to Anaktuvuk Pass, float southwest on the John River, hike west to the Alatna River, float southeast on the Alatna to access the Arrigetch Peaks, cross the Arrigetch, float northwest on the Noatak River, hike southwest to the Ambler River, and float west to Ambler. Four hundred miles in 19 days.

Left to right: Ben Histand, Diana Johnson, Sarah Histand, and Luc Mehl on Ariel Peak's summit.

Our first week was hard, several 12-plus-hour days. Ben Histand and Diana Johnson started on the Haul Road (Dalton Highway) and met us (Sarah Histand and me) in Anaktuvuk (60 extra miles and a true border-to-border traverse of the Park for Ben and Diana). Their extra days were long, featuring snow and cold nights in their too-thin sleeping bags. Their feet would have appreciated some down time in Anaktuvuk, but then the clock was ticking and Sarah and I were anxious to start moving.

Balancing weight and comfort, which was closely related to recovery, was tricky going into new terrain, especially in the arctic. Ben and Diana made a handful of gear choices (or not choices, depending on what they could borrow) that made the wet days more difficult. The John River was splashy, and their old boats left them soaked, while Sarah and I stayed drier in the newer models. Ben and Diana shaved weight by bringing 40-degree sleeping bags, which turned out not to be warm enough (we brought a warmer bag on the Anaktuvuk flight) and Ben slept on his packraft instead of a pad. It is a constant game, trying to save weight, but bringing enough stuff to sleep well at night. But the game is less serious if you are able to laugh off the discomforts, which Ben and Diana did.

We left the John River at the Hunt Fork, working our way west over Peak 4061 to Gaedeke Lake. We anticipated bad tussocks along the valley floors, so we took ridges whenever possible. The ridge walking was incredible, a gift from the arctic. We also spent a lot of time in the tussocks, but they weren't terrible. We didn't have much visibility those days, but the complete lack of bugs was a major morale boost. We had plenty of company, too - hundreds of caribou.

After six days of travel, we reached Gaedeke Lake around 11 p.m., and were met by John Gaedeke. John's dad built the lodge at the lake before Gates of the Arctic National Park was established. John was a huge logistical help, providing our two food drops and route beta. Ben had a pineapple in the food drop; John said it was probably the first pineapple to have made it to the lodge. We ate a warm breakfast, eggs, bacon, sausage, and packed up for the Alatna.

We all agreed that the Alatna float was one of the highlights of the trip. The water was low, but clear. We had sunny days for the float, which helped keep everyone warm, even through the splashy sections.

Sharing the tundra with caribou in the Gaedeke Lake area.

We spent a day hiking a cache from the Alatna to the Noatak over Portage Creek. Setting our "hiker's cache" was an exhausting 25-mile day, but it allowed us to pass through the Arrigetch with very light packs. After hiking the ridge over Peak 4414 toward the Noatak, we tied six kevlar bear bags in the tallest trees we could find near the Noatak; it reminded me of the children's book Caps for Sale, with hats and monkeys in the trees. We returned via the creekbed on good game trails. We found a can of bear spray that had been chewed by a bear.

We had time to kill on the Alatna before our scheduled second food drop with John Gaedeke at Circle Lake, so we floated half-days to recover from the hard previous week. We met John, re-packed our

food (including cookies from John's mom), and continued into the Arrigetch.

Packrafting the Alatna River.

The Arrigetch are an anomalous pod of granite faces and towers in the heart of the Brooks Range. It was awe-inspiring. Our route was over Ariel Pass, as outlined by Roman Dial. I had been describing this part of the trip as the "exposure crux" so that everyone was prepared (the hike to Gaedeke Lake was the "morale crux," and the flatwater Ambler float was anticipated as the "restless-legs crux"). We got to the pass and it looked nasty, much worse than expected. I dropped my pack and spent a few hours trying to find a line through the 600-foot cliffs. I could make it halfway down, with some sketchy moves, but then I couldn't see a line through the lower cliffs. I checked in with Ben, let him know that it didn't look good, but that the shoulder of Ariel Peak might go. Ben headed up Ariel to check that option. I returned to Diana and Sarah defeated, letting them know that it wasn't the right route for us, and amazed the Roman and others had found a safe descent. Ben returned from the shoulder of Ariel and said that it went. We scrambled up and found the comfortable descent that matched Roman's descriptions. It was the most exhausting day for me, mostly mental, nervous about everyone's comfort with exposure, feeling the pressure to pick a safe line, and blaming myself for selecting a route that wasn't going to work.

Ben Histand scrambling up the shoulder of Ariel Peak.

The next day was my 38th birthday, and we spent it hiking toward the Noatak. Sarah and I watched a bear for a while, our eleventh grizzly. We were uphill and downwind, so the bear didn't know we were there. The rest of the bears had all sprinted away as soon as we made noise, and we expected this bear to do the same. Instead, when we started making noise it circled around us, not scared, but not aggressive. It was moving a little bit closer while circling, and my knees got wobbly; I didn't know that was a real thing. Finally it got a whiff of us (I think it was a whiff of Sarah, to be exact) and turned around to run a half mile away. It was a good lesson for me, that we should have walked around instead of counting on a behavior that followed the pattern we had seen. We finished the day with a blueberry cheesecake creation that Diana made for my birthday. The berries were incredible the entire trip.

The Noatak was pleasant - flat, but pretty. We started seeing float groups. It was the least interesting river we saw, so I found it strange to be the primary destination for floaters.

Crossing Nakmaktuak Pass to reach the Ambler River was another highlight, even though we didn't see much of the mountains due to the low clouds. (Brad Meiklejohn audibly groaned in disappointment when I told him we didn't see those mountains.) Some of the walking was ballfield flat, and all of the walking was pretty good. The Ambler canyon was deep and impressive; we stayed on a shoulder and had a few glimpses into it. The Ambler River was impressive, too. We watched the water change from clear and frothy to high and muddy in about 30 minutes as a flood built up. It made the first rapids a bit more challenging than we were prepared for (Class III), so I boat-scouted, signalling the group when and where to portage. Eventually the river mellowed and we were able to stay in our boats. We floated through a very cool mini-canyon with an overhanging wall. The Ambler River would be worth a return trip.

We made great time on the flood-stage float to Ambler, and received a warm welcome - coffee from the City building, showers from the school, and rides to the airport from principal Scott Lefebvre and the Ravn Air agents. Sarah got to sit up front with the pilot and they spent half the flight looking at maps and talking about our route and other trip options in the area. We spent the night in Kotzebue and flew home the next day.

I wasn't ready to be home. Our fast pace, constant route-finding, and light packs made a stimulating and rewarding daily routine. Once home, I woke from route-finding dreams three nights in a row. Sarah woke up two nights and struggled to understand where she was, seeing mountain forms in the shadows of the room. I dreamt about a bear encounter on my fourth night. But by the end of the week, I dreamt about software installation on my new work computer. Back to the (other) real world.

Thanks for gear, beta, and logistics help: John Gaedeke, Carol and Stan Histand, Dave and Ruthann Urban, Scott Lefebvre, the City of Ambler, Abby Laing, Malcolm Herstand, FILGO, Toby Schwoerer and Darcy Dugan, Eric Schmidt, Frederique Beringer, Margaret Archibald, Ryan Hokanson, John and Sande Christopherson, Joyce and Barry Johnson, Brad Meiklejohn, Pat Farrell, Shasta Hood, Molly McCammon, Roman Dial, and Thom Walker.

Surprise!

Text and photos by Wayne L. Todd

With Ben Still and Carrie Wang

October 22, 2016

Carrie Wang (left) and Ben Still viewing Surprise Mountain.

While traversing between Russian and Bear (R&B) Mountains in 2015, Ben Still, Carrie Wang, and I noticed a snow-filled trail in the valley to the north. After buying the new Kenai National Wildlife Refuge (KNWR) map, I noted there was an official trail up that valley from the Kenai River. As we had one more peak to climb in that massif, it was logical to do so on this "new" trail.

As we'd climbed R&B with Ben, it made sense to climb the third peak, Surprise Mountain, with him. These Kenai peaks seemed to be the early-winter ''go tos," so on October 22 we found ourselves at Jim's Landing, blowing up three packrafts. In the sub-freezing temperatures it seemed unnecessary to water-shrink the boats. Somehow the big guy got the little packraft, so he did not have much freeboard.

The river crossing was easy, but the small marsh beyond required paddle ice breaking. A high scent of rotting salmon was in the air. Three bears were noticed up river; we suspected Ben the Bear Man was a factor. I was concerned about returning to "modified" boats, without a crossing means and the cost factor. (The trail lay directly across the river from Jim's Landing and even had a trail marker.)

The trail was quite good and worn a foot deep. In summer it might be mucky, but we had frozen ground. Other than downed trees we had no hindrance as we made our way east toward direct sunlight. Ben carried bear spray in hand. Breaking out of the forest we had bright fresh snow views and a bit more snow than expected. Spindrift trailed off the ridges above us. We lost the trail a couple times, but made good progress. Carrie and I worked to keep up with Ben, as usual.

The upper trail, with Russian Mountain in the background.

Before topping out in the valley, we arced up toward the right ridgeline, encountering treachery in the form of boulder fields covered with a foot of light snow. Slower and awkward progress ensued. We tried to

link up clean alpine patches over the ridge and into the valley below Surprise, not that successfully.

Shaded and in wind, we winter hiked to the top with sudden sunny views of the more majestic and rugged southern Kenai Mountains, the Skilak Glacier, River, and Lake. Unlike our approach, the south side of Surprise was quite steep. We bundled up to hang out.

Exiting, Ben then led around the very east end of Bear Mountain's ridge, which mostly eliminated the boulder fields. In the foot-plus of snow, I realized my lower pole was missing, but resigned it to the "lost and may be found someday" group.

The sun was blocked by Bear Ridge and we presumed no more Vitamin D potential, but as we made our way out, we get four more mini-doses. A short side trail to the east revealed a rustic still-standing summer type cabin (another cabin of unknown history). Many more rusting water pipes were noticed on the exodus.

We're relieved to find three intact rafts and undisturbed gear. Low-angle sunlight shined on us again as we paddled across the Kenai to mostly conclude our Surprise day.

Efficient mountaineers would use this trail earlier in the year and easily climb Russian, Bear, and Surprise in one day. More adventuresome could boat out Skilak Lake (or try the Russian River?).

Ben Still (left) and Carrie Wang in the valley. Hideout Hill is in the background.

The edge of Skilak Lake.

Ben Still (left) and Carrie Wang on Surprise Mountain, viewing to the south.

Ben Still at the old cabin.

Ben Still, Wayne Todd, and Carrie Wang on Surprise Mountain with Skilak Lake in the background.

Ben Still (left) and Carrie Wang ready to cross the Kenai River.

Kobuk Valley and Bering Land Bridge

Text and photos by Roman Dial

Near Crossfox Butte.

Lava field caribou trail.

Alaska's network of conservation areas may be unsurpassed in the world. We need to keep it that way, too. Write to our Senators and even that Representative to say that we need to keep Alaska's wilderness and parklands wild, just in case our new President tries something that spoils their wildness.

Of the 14 or so wilderness National Park units in Alaska, two in the northwest part of the state are rarely visited by those from outside the region: Kobuk Valley National Park and Bering Land Bridge National Preserve.

This past summer as part of my quest to traverse all of the 14 wilderness National Park Service units in Alaska, I traveled to Kotzebue twice, first in early June and again in mid-August to cross these remote parklands. They would be numbers 11 and 12 on my list begun in 1983 when Fairbanksan Jim Lokken and I crossed Kenai Fjords National Park from Seward to Homer by way of the Harding Icefield.

Northwest Alaska is not generally as dramatic as, say, the Alaska Range that so many peer at from a tour bus, the Wrangell Mountains that so many "heart," the glaciers of Southeast that so many cruise, or the Brooks Range that so many fly over in small planes.

Northwest Alaska is big and empty. It's the last frontier of the Last Frontier and June is my favorite month to go, even if the bears are a bit unruly then.

My own history with northwest Alaska started in 1986 when I paddled a Klepper kayak down the flooding Noatak River solo in 10 days of September, completing a Brooks Range traverse from Kaktovik to Kotzebue. Leaving from Pingo Lake in a howling wind and reaching Kotzebue with ice on my boat, I shot a caribou on the way, floated it out, and flew it home to Fairbanks.

My trip was inspired by Dick Griffith, who'd traversed the range similarly, but over two decades. In 1959 he mostly walked alone from Kaktovik to Anaktuvuk Pass. Then in 1977 he and his friend Bruce Stafford walked from Anaktuvuk to the Noatak River where they then paddled Klepper kayaks to Kotzebue. In 1976 Steve Hackett followed his bold, solo ascent of Mount Igikpak, at 8276 feet the highest Brooks Range peak west of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, with a fast solo Klepper paddle down the Noatak.

In 1987 I spent the summer in Nome with a mountain bike and a Sherpa Packraft. I had many adventures there, working for Alaska Gold on Dredge #6 by the Bering Sea, some social, some mountainous, all wild. I made a grand traverse of the Kigluaik Mountains over a long weekend, climbing the spire on Mount Osborn that to my eye looked tallest, walking to the Cobblestone River over Mosquito Pass, and then floating out the Sinuk River. Ian McRae, who's spent almost two decades among the Kigluaiks, has compiled that region's mountaineering history in a most entertaining fashion on his blog, *Kigsblog* (http://kigsblog-allapa.blogspot.com/).

Twenty years later in June 2006, again between the snow and the mosquitoes, I returned to Kotzebue with Jason Geck and Ryan Jordan. We three were intent on walking 625 miles without resupply or support – Wilderness Classic style, but without packrafts – from Kivalina to the Dalton Highway through the most remote spot in the USA. The spot is 119 miles from the nearest village or road.

Unfortunately, after hyping up our trip online as the "Arctic1000,"

Ryan was forced to drop out with a twisted ankle a week into the trip. Jason flew out from Anaktuvuk Pass, only 75 miles or so from the finish, to his fiancé and as race organizer for the 2006 Wilderness Classic. I made it to the Dalton Highway, 25 days and 625 miles from Kivalina.

On our long walk we saw over a dozen bears and half of them were more than curious about us. We took to hiding when we'd see them because we had only one can of bear spray and the bears took to running toward us from up to a mile away when they'd see us.

Two Junes later, in 2008, my wife Peggy and I flew into the same Utukok River airstrip Ryan Jordan had flown out from, but this time we had iron and glass. Iron for bear protection and glass to watch animals and birds. We packrafted north on the Utukok River to Archimedes Ridge, hiked west, then returned south, up the Utukok River over Cairn Pass across the De Long Mountains to packraft the Kugururok and Noatak Rivers to the village of Noatak.

Chris Flowers during the Fish River packraft.

Again, the barren-ground bears scared us on several occasions. But on reflection that's to be expected of hungry bears just emerging from hibernation, in a hungry time before the caribou drop their calves, in an otherwise hungry arctic landscape. The scares came from their "overbearing" curiosity, when bears came at us as we simply walked, sat still, or boated. They saw us and came to check us out and all the yelling, waving, clanking pans, shooting off guns or firecrackers just weren't enough to dissuade them. These were not Denali Park, Katmai, Kenai, or hunted bears. These were hungry bears probing for weakness.

Another trip to northwest Alaska was a weekend in November 2014, when Luc Mehl and I flew to Selawik and then nordic ice-skated most of the 100 miles to Kotzebue: down the Selawik River, over Selawik Lake (third biggest in Alaska), across the Kobuk River Delta and Kobuk Lake (Hotham Inlet), walking the last 12 miles on a snowmachine trail at the tip of the Baldwin Peninsula into Kotzebue.

This academic year, 2016-2017, is a sabbatical year for me, which means I have time for creative activities, like exploring northwest Alaska's parklands by foot and packraft.

I have been packrafting since 1983, writing the sport's first book, Packrafting!, because Alaska's conservation lands are so extensive and wild, big rivers and steep creeks without bridges or easy fords rule overland travel. It wasn't until the first durable packrafts made by Sherpa were available that summertime, full-Park traverses were possible. Once we early adopters of packrafts used them for crossing rivers, we soon realized that we could float them, too.

Then with Thor Tingey's urging of his mother Sheri Tingey in 2000, we started to get whitewater worthy craft. Fifteen years later packrafts are good to go to Class IV, steep creeks or big water, reasonably dry and surprisingly stable and even Eskimo rolled in combat situations.

But in northwest Alaska's parklands, Class II is about as exciting as one can expect.

On June 3 Brad Meiklejohn, professional conservationist, president of the American Packrafting Association, and architect of the Lower Eklutna Dam Removal Project, and I flew with Alaska Airlines miles to Kotzebue. From Kotz we flew with Eric Sieh of Arctic Backcountry Flying Service in a Cessna 206 to a gravel bar at the junction of the Noatak and Sapun Creek, maybe an hour's flight. He was super helpful, providing us with fuel and, if we'd wanted, bear spray. It's also possible to buy those at the Alaska Commercial Store in Kotzebue.

The weather was cold and windy when we landed and huge wolf and grizzly tracks punctuated the sand bar. We huddled in a grove of 10-foot-tall willows. Willows were everywhere along the river and lower creeks and they were flush with new growth from the new normal of a warming Arctic.

The Baird Mountains separate the Kobuk and Noatak watersheds. Kobuk Valley National Park preserves several entire watersheds including the Salmon and Tutuksuk Rivers, which are ideal wilderness packrafting streams with nothing harder than easy Class II.

The Bairds are forested in the lowlands of their southern slopes to an altitude of about a thousand feet. Above that is surprisingly brushy. Willows choke creek bottoms, sunny slopes, elevated flats and seeps. Alders are thick on low ridges and north slopes. To break free of these bushes you need to be at least 1500 feet above sea level. The alders are not like those in Lake Clark National Park, the Kenai, south side of the Alaska Range or Chugach Mountains, or Southeast. On the north side of the Bairds they are relatively sparse, but on the south side there are thickets.

The Western Arctic caribou herd passes through these mountains twice each year as they head north from their wintering grounds to the calving areas in the Utukok Uplands. The caribou have left

great trails that go north-south, but moving from drainage to drainage, east-west, as is a packrafter's wont when river-skipping across landscapes, can be frustrating if you haven't yet polished your Zen of 'shwhack.

It took us a day to get from the Noatak to the Salmon River watershed, hiking over Peak 2405 along firm, level, and dry ridges that paralleled Sapun and Kanayat Creeks. It was sunny but the wind blew strong and cold. Breeding surfbirds and plovers squawked. When they flew, the wind tossed them like feathered confetti. We easily avoided tussocks by walking on lichen and *Dryas*-covered ridgelines. The tussocks were dry in early June with dwarf birch shrubs growing on their tops.

As soon as we crossed into the Kobuk watershed, brush was more abundant. We linked ridgelines with caribou trails and made our way to an unnamed tributary of the Salmon and put-in a couple miles above it. The creek was shallow, but we made it down without cutting our boats on its sharp schist, hoping for more flow on the Salmon.

At first the Salmon was broad, flat, slow, and shallow – a disappointment. But as we made our way downstream, passing cottonwoods, and then a few lonely spruce, the river picked up flow and we made good time.

Brad Meiklejohn paddles down the middle Salmon River in Kobuk Valley National Park.

The mountains there were typical of Alaska's Interior, even though we were well above the Arctic Circle, what people who hail from Eagle River or Anchorage might call "hills." In my experience people from Anchorage and Eagle River tend to yawn, loudly, at Interior topography. Like alcoholics or junkies, Southcentral folks tend to juice up on bigger, sharper, icier mountains and steeper, bigger, scarier whitewater. Those parts of Alaska in between the Brooks and Alaska Ranges often bore them.

I can see their point (I've lived in Anchorage 25 years). But as one who spent a youthful decade in Fairbanks, and who also spent formative years in the Appalachian Mountains, I have a real soft spot for those wild Interior landscapes that look like New England might have before humans arrived.

It wasn't cold on the Kobuk side, but we still made spruce fires on sand bars, heating tea and eating lunch after sitting in boats for a couple hours at a stretch. The water was amazingly clear. We watched huge grayling surface from deep blue pools to snatch flies.

Somehow it was hot and yet without mosquitoes and after we'd thrashed our way over Peak 2250 to the Tutuksuk River, Brad bathed in its clear waters while I napped in the sunshine wearing only shorts without head-net or bug dope: Arctic idyllic.

The next day Brad, an inveterate birder, pointed out a Siberian tit, also known as gray-headed chickadee. This little bird is one that life-listers long for, flying to Alaska to make river trips just to see it.

The Tutuksuk had some steep bluffs and even little rock islands, its waters a bit more interesting than the Salmon's. Tors crenellated the ridgeline above until the ridges ran down to the Kobuk lowlands, where the Tut's current slowed.

Just before reaching the lowlands, we passed a grizzly on the tall sandy bank. It immediately took an interest in us, padding along the bank and tossing its head. The current was strong and with our paddles we easily outpaced it, but Brad was surprised the bear followed us for 15 minutes or so, popping in and out of view from the bankside willows as it hurried to keep up.

Brad has made annual trips to the Brooks Range for the last 30 years. Never had he seen a bear so relentlessly curious. But Brad's trips generally fell in August, when bears were well-fed and still feeding on berries, fish, and a summer's worth of kills and carrion.

Early June bears in the Arctic are hungry. There're no berries, no spawning fish, the winter's carrion long since consumed by wolves and foxes, the young and dumb prey not yet born.

As we wound our way through the loops of the lower Tutuksuk, Brad used his Gaia app on his phone to choose channels.

Reaching the Kobuk after midnight we floated downstream to the first gravel bar and made camp. The mosquitoes had popped and we hoped that the barren, wind-swept bar would keep them away. We made a driftwood fire and went to bed.

Instead of floating on down to Kiana, Brad suggested we follow the Kobuk 15 miles or so upstream to the Great Kobuk Sand Dunes.

The Kobuk was running strong and wide with spring run-off and ferrying across took some muscle. Once across, we walked along the sedge-covered banks, often with flowering onion and chives poking through. The walking was great and if we'd had fat-bikes, or even 29 plus mountain bikes, we would have made quick time.

The walking was so good we easily outpaced the bugs and needed neither head-nets nor bug dope, except when stopped.

We stopped for several narrow, but very deep, side streams that drained thick brush. We waded one that was belly-deep, jumped another that was mud-slickened, and paddled a third. The fourth we 'shwhacked upstream to step across.

Much of the way upstream we were reminded of how rich that Interior country on the edge of the Arctic was. We saw geese and ducks and knew that salmon and whitefish swam in this river. Most obvious were the spectacular heads of bull caribou in the woods, on the banks and some still in the river. These animals had been harvested by the Inupiaq who lived in Noorvik, Kiana, Ambler, Shungnak, and Kobuk.

Easy walking along the bank allowed easy thinking about how rich and bountiful this region was. On the Noatak there is only one village. North of the Noatak in northwest Alaska the other Inupiaq villages are all coastal. South of the Kobuk, along the Selawik River, like Noatak there is only one village. South and west of Selawik most of the villages are coastal. Only along the Kobuk do multiple villages stretch hundreds of miles upstream where people have lived for a long time.

The modern locations of villages are historical, their placement based on where trading posts, stores and schools were built. But to persist, villages need access to resources, and only the Kobuk seems to have enough year-round resources to supply a half dozen villages upstream for 200 miles.

Brad Meiklejohn enjoys great walking along the Kobuk River with the Baird Mountains in the distance.

As Brad and I walked farther, we passed a recent fire scar. Judging by the wilted leaves on the edge of the burn it looked to have happened only weeks before. Even the tussocks had burned but were now sprouting new growth out of their burned heads.

We walked through the burned forest. Across a tussock bog we could see a small set of isolated dunes, a hint of the Great Kobuk Dunes. In the woods and perched on the river bank, we found multiple sites of old dwellings, rectangular pits now grown over by trees with narrow entrances. We knew that upstream was Onion Portage, an ancient and important prehistoric site dating back 10,000 years.

Along the Kobuk were wolf and bear tracks and leading to the Kobuk Dunes were caribou highways. Like all game trails, and especially caribou traces, they were easy to find, but hard to hold, as they would vanish when the going got tough or easy.

I walked to the dunes from the river in about an hour, following an obvious ridge above the Kobuk that is an old dune itself. I only explored a small part of the Dunes after midnight, drawn to the vast expanse that reached to the base of the Waring Mountains. It looked perfect for fat-bike exploration and I was tickled to hear later that photographer Carl Battreall was there about the same time as we, pedaling the dunes.

Approaching the Kobuk Dunes reminded me of other dune areas in Alaska, the Bremner Dunes on the Copper River and the Buffalo Dunes on the Delta River. Spruce and soapberry bushes, along with horsetail in the wetter areas, seemed to push into the dunes, or maybe the dunes spilled into the vegetation.

What was striking to me on the edge of the dunes were the *Dryas* meadows that looked like a sled-dog yard that had never been cleaned: wolf turds everywhere. Just as I imagined the ancient Inupiaq discovering that the Kobuk Valley was a protein-cornucopia with winter moose, spring and fall caribou, summer fish, and waterfowl, I imagined wolf packs waiting in the spruce as caribou stepped off the dunes or followed the sandy creeks like Kavet Creek.

After spending the night, we blew up our rafts and floated 60 miles down the Kobuk to Kiana in a day and a half, catching the scheduled Bering Air flight to Kotzebue.

Flying over the barren Baird Mountains, rounded and white, looking very good for exploration by foot, but a bit dry for packrafting, I thought I would very much like to return to the Kobuk region.

If I had a couple weeks, I'd fly to Kotz with a fat-bike and a packraft in May after the ice went out and work my way upstream, riding the Kobuk's banks, the Dunes, and the dry vegetation laced with caribou trails beyond them to Ambler, and then float the bike downstream on the high water of early June.

But before I return to Kobuk Valley National Park, I told myself, I had more parklands to cross: Katmai, Cape Krusenstern, and the next on my list, Bering Land Bridge National Preserve as part of a Seward Peninsula traverse.

In 1987 I spent a summer working in Nome for Alaska Gold. With a mountain bike, a packraft, and a full-time job, I was limited to weekends and after-work adventures. But I had the U.S. Geological Survey 1:250,000 Bendeleben and Solomon quadrangles and on them I spied a route from Deering on Kotzebue Sound to the end of the Council Road.

The route followed mining roads leading out of Deering and then

climbed to highlands peppered with evocative names like Crossfox Butte, Asses Ears, Twincairn Cone. The route descended to Imuruk Lake, then crossed the lava fields to Kuzitrin Lake, over the Bendeleben (pronounced "Ben-del-lay-ben") Mountains to Boston Creek and the Fish River, then past Mount Wick on what the map marked a "winter trail" over the mountains to Council.

It took nearly 30 years, but it was a route I'd finally do with Chris Flowers, pioneer of epic backcountry ski routes in the Chugach and Kenai, the first to take a packraft from Girdwood to the Knik River through The Gorge, and a pilot to boot.

On August 15 Chris and I flew on Alaska Airlines to Kotzebue, where we picked up stove fuel and bear spray. But we couldn't get either one on the Ravn Flight with us to Deering. We waited in Deering for a cargo plane that we'd understood would carry these hazardous goods, but when it arrived neither fuel nor bear deterrent was on board.

Gulls on the Gull Islands in Imuruk Lake.

Deering is a neat village, with nice people, industrious and helpful. Like Kivalina to the north and Shishmaref to the west, the village is set between a lagoon and the sea and the sea is coming. Concrete blocks on the beach and roadside were attempts to keep it at bay.

Waiting for the cargo flight, we talked with locals who showed photos on their phones of 12-foot tusks and 10-inch molars from mastodons. Then we walked to the nearby 150-foot sea cliffs of Cape Deceit, where qiviut clung to the tundra grasses and cemetery fences; gyrfalcons soared above puffins, murres, and kittiwakes; and a local guy walked his dog along the beach.

In town people asked us what we were up to.

"Walking to Council," we replied.

The next question was always the same. "Gotta gun?"

"No. We don't even have bear spray. Couldn't get it on the flight."

But we could have carried a firearm in an approved case. In the future, I might bring a handgun and mail the case to the destination from the start.

When it was apparent that our bear spray wasn't coming and we were set on leaving, one local woman had her teenage daughter give us a thumb-sized can of rape-mace as protection.

We asked for a ride to the end of the mining road, but no one answered our call on the local citizens band radio, even when we said we'd pay.

But once we were walking, several people seemed interested. Some even came out in search of us. We went with a local woman married to a First Nations man from Vancouver, British Columbia. They had two all-terrain vehicles. Chris got on one and I got on the other.

They took us past several old gold dredges and we stopped to explore the ghost town of Utica, its cute, boxy frame houses grayed by time and overgrown in willows. They left us at the end of the road at Jack's Camp, where a miner had lived most of his life.

The miner took ill and left the camp and its collection of interesting machinery, including an ancient tracked sno-go the size of a Volkswagen Beetle and an ancient little Caterpillar tractor the size of an ATV. We camped in a tin shack on skids the locals used when hunting, berry picking, and fishing.

On our second day we crossed the Inmachuk River with its spawned-out humpies and fresh bear tracks, following an old winter trail/ATV track up a hill. The trail/ATV track led 60 miles southwest to the Kougarok Road. That route and the Kougarok Road on to Nome had been fat-biked by some local Nomeites and Fairbanksans a few years back.

I had on several occasions tried to get my beach fat-bike partners interested in a traverse of the Seward Peninsula. It was a hard sell. Too often they would tell me that their Seward Peninsula friends said, "No, not worth it." But the Inmachuk-Kougarok Road route had never interested me. The route I wanted to do – the one that Chris and I were finally doing, but on foot instead of bike – crossed uplands and lava fields and packrafted down the Fish River.

We left the trail/ATV track near where it entered the Bering Land Bridge Preserve, enjoying firm, dry, and level footing from there all the way over Black Butte to Asses Ears. From Asses Ears to Salix Bay, where we'd inflate and paddle across Imuruk Lake, stopping at the Gull Islands *en route*, we suffered tussocks for five solid miles. Sometimes pint-sized, more often quart-sized or gallon-sized, but occasionally the size of five-gallon buckets, we stumbled stoically onward, looking for any edge habitat as a respite, even if it meant wet feet or brush.

Since my first trips to the Brooks Range in the late '70s, I had noticed that climate change had been taming the tussocks. At first I thought that I was just getting smarter, that I'd learned to avoid

tussocks. This perception, however, is similar to that of some of my younger outdoor partners who claim I am just getting older when I tell them the brush is worse now than it was in the past.

But we have empirical proof in repeat photography that brush is thickening in formerly tundra landscapes. I fully anticipate that the vegetative-change scientists will soon publish the fact that tussocks are drying up, too.

So, now I know where all the tussocks have gone: they've gone to the flats north of Imuruk Lake.

By the time we reached the far shore of Imuruk Lake after a seven-mile paddle, we had a full-on headwind and whitecapped waves. Within an hour of packing up our boats, we'd discovered a lava flow complete with a caribou trail and "inukshuks," cairns and up-ended stones erected by Inupiaq hunters and travelers. It was like a serpentine highway that led us through the tussock meadows south of the lake.

Walking the lava trail was both easy and exhilarating and we made good time. Exhilarating because we were still a bit bruised from our tussock stumbles and now we could look elsewhere besides our feet, such as into collapsed lava tubes and at the textured, ropy surface of pahoehoe lava.

Chris Flowers stands atop the sea cliffs near Deering.

Finding water and wood for camp was less simple. Willows were present, but few of the old growth individuals that had dead wood standing at their centers were available. We needed wood because we had no stove fuel (thanks, TSA/FAA) and had to cook our camp-time meals. Most of the willows were young, recent growth. And the porous lava fields didn't hold water.

At every step since leaving Deering, I thought about fat-bikes: how would they fare?

I had fat-biked on the Lost Coast from Yakutat to Gustavus and from Cordova across Icy Bay. And with mountain bikes a few of us traveled the length of the Alaska Range from Canada to Lake Clark and across the Brooks Range from Kaktovik to Arctic Village.

The lava fields there on the Seward Peninsula would be a challenge, one best overcome with a lightly loaded bike to make pushes and carries less onerous and the dynamic moves needed for rock-riding possible. But every rider would also need a packraft to cross Imuruk Lake and to get down Boston Creek and the Fish River.

I'd go old-school hell-bike, not new-school fat-bike – with a 26-inch mountain bike and the lightest and simplest packraft setup available.

When the smooth pahoehoe headed west and our route to the Bendelebens south, we left the ridable lava and linked clinker-boulder fields with pint-sized tussock fields. The boulder fields were amazingly stable and we rock-hopped quickly and smoothly for hours.

My son had once worked on a biogeography and climate-change project in northwest Alaska, visiting Gates of the Arctic National Park, Cape Krusenstern National Monument, Kobuk Valley National Park, and Bering Land Bridge National Preserve. I'd asked him which place he liked best, as we shared similar interests in landscapes, wildlife, and ecology.

He said Bering Land Bridge, where he enjoyed a base camp at Kuzitrin Lake. There he saw wolverines and prehistoric sites, a beautiful lake with a picturesque background. The principal investigator of the project had found a lava cave there with an old pre-Columbian dog sled and spear.

But we'd taken a route that went west instead of east and Kuzitrin would be a several-mile detour that I just couldn't bring myself to make, although now I wish that we had. The pull of floating down creeks and rivers in a packraft was just too strong and my feet just too sore from lava, sponga (portmanteau of "spongy tundra"), boulders, and tussocks.

The pass into Boston Creek was gentle, but the switch from flat lava landscapes to Interior granite hills abrupt. Gone were willow thickets on wetlands and instead were alder-covered hillslopes. We stayed high and managed a brush-free descent to Boston Creek, a clear, but shallow, stream splashing over rounded granite rocks.

We floated until midnight when the rain came and we made camp. Bear and cub tracks were fresh. We'd already seen one bear cross the creek downstream of us and were relieved to see it run off.

Over the two half-days and one full day that we paddled south from the Bendelebens, we would see 15 bears, more than either of us had seen in such a short time outside of southwest Alaska.

The bears were drawn to the late season run of humpies that lined the high-water mark like wax museum pieces of rotting gray flesh. We saw a few cabins and were invited into one for breakfast. But we were on a tight schedule and had to turn the generous offer down as we paddled onward.

Bears use rocks like these as marking posts for their territory by marking trails in the Bendelebens.

While Boston Creek was low volume, it had some gradient. The Fish River was the reverse. We paddled in the rain that brought up the rivers, getting chilled in the process. We hiked over the old winter trail to Council a historic route used first by Natives, then as a telegraph line, and now as a sometime ATV trail. It was a beautiful ridge walk, even if mostly in mist and clouds.

After eight days we reached Council. We were met at the airstrip by two ATVs and three people who mistook us for two other adventurers with packrafts who had left Deering on their own trip. We'd stopped at a retired couple's house for coffee and conversation. They called ahead on their radio that we needed a ride. The case of mistaken identity was much to our advantage and we were in Nome, 60 miles away, that night thanks to the generosity and friendliness of those who called Council their vacation or retirement home.

For me, Deering to Council satisfied a more personal quest. I'd waited 30 years to make the traverse and was pleased by its variety of people and cultures, its wildness and landscapes. To go from musk oxen and sea cliffs outside an Inupiaq village to lava flows, and then brown bears and salmon below Interior mountains with an active mining history made the Seward Peninsula the most interesting (to me) microcosm of Alaska.

Alaska blesses us Alaskans with natural beauty and a wildness that gives us faith in the future. It's important that we somehow maintain that feeling for present and future generations.

While I may not generally agree with the NPS's policies or implementation of them, I do believe strongly in national parks and conservation areas. I look forward to Cape Krusenstern and Katmai next summer, when I hope to complete my stamp collection of wild Alaskan parkland traverses.

1983 Kenai Fjords – Seward to Homer across the Harding Icefield

1986 Gates of the Arctic – Dalton Highway to Pingo Lake over Mount Doonerak and through the Arrigetch Peaks

1986 Noatak – Pingo Lake to Kotzebue down the Noatak River

1986, 2013 Wrangell-Saint Elias – Nabesna to McCarthy to Cordova through Chitistone Pass and the Tebay Lakes

1988 Yukon-Charley Rivers – Boundary to Circle down the Charley and Yukon Rivers

1989 Denali – Healy to Rainy Pass (Skwentna) past Kantishna and through the Kichatna Mountains

1992 Klondike Gold Rush – Chilkoot Trail

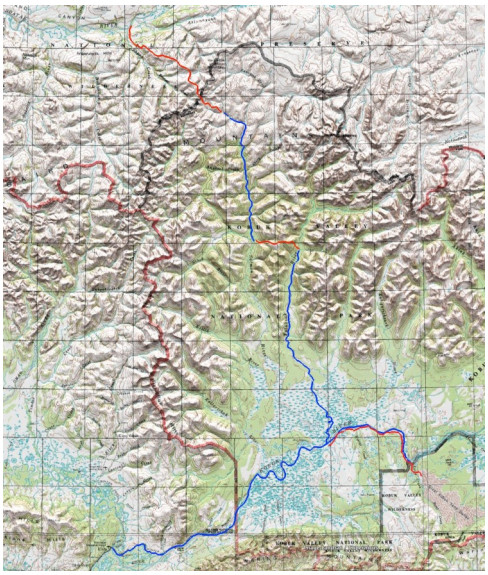
1994, 2015 Lake Clark – Telaquana (Rainy Pass) to Port Alsworth to Iliamna

2011 Glacier Bay – Yakutat to Gustavus across the Alsek River, Lituya Bay, Icy Strait, and Glacier Bay

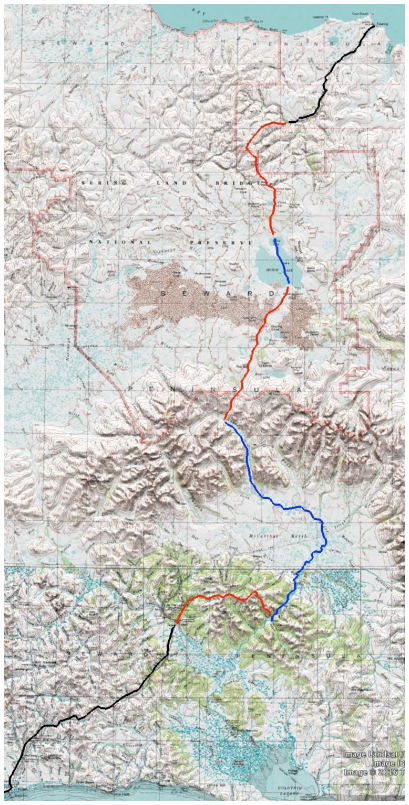
2011 Aniakchak – Port Heiden to Chignik over Vent Mountain, down the Aniakchak River, along the Pacific Ocean

2016 Kobuk Valley – Sapun Creek to Kiana across the Baird Mountains, down the Salmon and Tutuksuk Rivers, and to the Great Kobuk Sand Dunes

2016 Bering Land Bridge – Deering to Council across Imuruk Lake, the Lost Jim Lava Flow, and the Bendeleben Mountains



Kobuk Valley route.



Bering Land Bridge route.

Pika Glacier

Text by Pat Schmalix

Date: May 22, 2010

We woke up every morning to this view of the Trolls.
Photo by Pat Schmalix

Without being hardcore climbers we were looking for someplace that had some easier climbing for our first trip into the Alaska Range. We talked to several people and decided on spending a week on the Pika Glacier. Everyone we talked to, when asked about easier climbing around there, all said, "There's plenty of that around the Pika," but gave no details. So off we went.

Denali Overland picked us up at the airport in Anchorage Saturday morning and took us up to Talkeetna. After sorting gear and talking with Talkeetna Air Taxi, we were able to fly in that evening, getting camp set up by about 9 p.m.

The first day we decided to just check out what was around, so we skied up the glacier between The Crowned Jewel and The Munchkin. Because we only planed on scouting things out, we didn't bring much gear. Of course we got to looking at the small peak just west of The Munchkin (Little Arapiles?) and started up.

With the hot weather the snow slogging got old, so we moved over to the rocks.

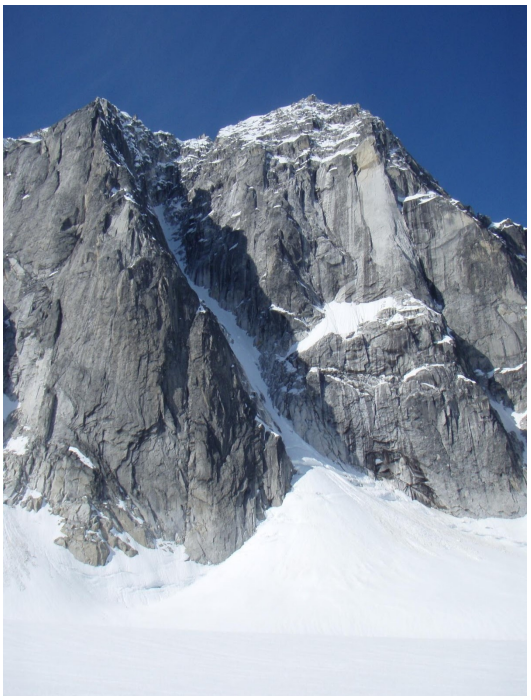
It would have been fun, easy climbing with less snow, but a little sporty with snow and ice over rock without crampons. Once we got off that, we headed to the pass just south of the Trolls for a look around and then headed back to camp.

After talking with a friend in the Alaska Mountaineering School class camped next to us, we decided to head down to Hobbit's Footstool for some easy rock, as it had been a while since we had plugged gear. We did the right side of Hobbit's Footstool, which turned out to be 5.5 or so. Great easy climbing in a beautiful location.

On our way back from Hobbit's Footstool, we noticed a couloir cutting up the east face of The Royal Tower just to the right of

Joel Pomerinki moving to the rocks west of The Munchkin.
Photo by Pat Schmalix

the "Gargoyle Buttress." Notes I had written from an *American Alpine Journal* said it was six mixed pitches above a 1,800-foot 60-degree couloir and done in May 1988 [*Ed. note: see page 137 of the 1989* AAJ].



Couloir on the east face of The Royal Tower.
Photo by Pat Schmalix

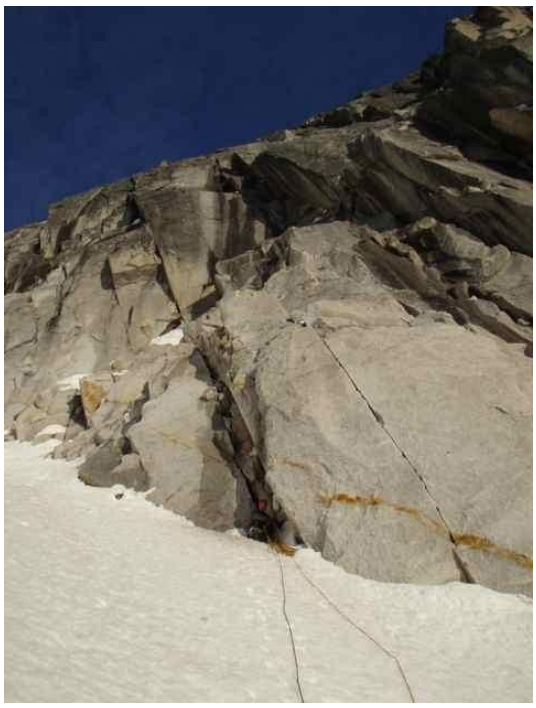
We set the alarm for 2:30 a.m. Unfortunately, there wasn't a hard freeze that night and we discussed whether we wanted to go for it or not. After breakfast we decided we were already up and what the hell. After skiing to the base, we started up the snow cone leading to the couloir, sinking up to the knees and thighs until we crossed the bergschrund. The snow was firmer the higher we got and we even got onto some ice, simul-climbing the whole way. About 1,000 feet up we broke into the sun. With the light freeze it didn't take long for stuff to start coming down and the snow to turn too soft to comfortably climb. I set an anchor on the right side and belayed Joel Pomerinki up. We did five rappels down the right side, leaving single pins and nuts at each station, rolling into camp about 8:30 a.m. and spending the rest of the day sleeping and trying to stay cool.

Wednesday we skied up into the bowl between The Throne and the Trolls, that time bringing a light rack. We looked up "The Lost Marsupial" and thought it looked within our ability and planned to try it the next day. We skied to the col just south of The Plunger and followed the ridge toward the Trolls.

About the time we were going to turn around, next to a rock pillar I saw a crack I wanted to try. Not proud to admit it, I had to step in a runner to get on the route out of the snow. After sewing it up, I was on top of the pillar using a slung block to belay up Joel.

Not wanting to leave anything, we found an exposed walk-off around the back side, returning to our skis with Joel getting some good turns on his split board while I fought my way down in my leather boots and skis on our way back to camp.

Thursday (the only day I forgot the camera) we headed back up to "The Lost Marsupial" (Grade III, 5.8) and were on route at about 9:30 a.m. We took a leisurely pace up the blocky terrain. We weren't sure if the bottom 5.8 pitch was covered in snow or we just bypassed it, but didn't come across anything down low above about 5.5. We simul-climbed some of the 3rd- and 4th-class mid-route while climbing over rock and snow. The 5.6 crack went easier than expected, except for the rock I kicked down, hitting Joel in the knee. We got to within a half pitch below the ridge going to the top and noticed weather moving in from the valley. With the weather and snow conditions, we decide to head down. For some reason we decided to do full-length rappels (not recommended). It seems like rope management was complicated by terrain and rope length, but everything went O.K. until the last rap with our ropes not budging. I set my Reverso to auto-block mode and climbed back up to the anchor, freeing the ropes and doing two 30-meter raps down to our packs and back to camp for the day.



Pat Schmalix at the team's only belay and high point on the east face of The Royal Tower.
Photo by Joel Pomerinki

With Joel's knee bothering him from the rockfall, climbing was out for the day. We decided to go for a ski and scout objectives for next time. While headed out of camp, we stopped by the camp of a couple guys we saw coming in while we were on "The Lost Marsupial." Talking with the guys, I recognized the voice of a guy who I had met in Ouray the last two years. After talking a bit I agreed to take pictures of the area farther down the Pika. We skied down to the base of Italy's Boot, across to The Dragon's Spine, and back to camp.

With a pickup time from between 1 to 9 p.m. on Saturday, we called TAT and asked if they could give us a better guess as to what time they would be there. We told them we were ready and were told they would be there be-

tween noon and 2:00 p.m. At 11:30 a.m., we saw the Cessna 185 circling overhead. We hurried and tore down the 'mid and drug the rest of our bags to the "runway" the AMS group had stomped out several days earlier when they left. After the longest takeoff roll of my life, we were airborne and on our way back to Talkeetna for three dinners with dessert and drinks that night.

Overall, it was a great trip with beautiful weather – five out of eight days with sun and only a total of two hours of rain scattered over the other three days. I never thought I would ask for cooler weather during May in the Alaska Range. The snow was too soft for good climbing, but there was too much snow for great rock climbing. On the flight out, our pilot told us early May was the best time for snow and ice climbing on the Pika and mid-June to July was best for rock, information that would have been helpful before the trip!

I can't wait until the next time I can get into the range, hopefully next spring!

Approach Notes: Denali Overland and TAT.

Hobbit's Footstool is the face in the upper left above Pat Schmalix' right shoulder.
Photo by Joel Pomerinki

Joel Pomerinki approaching the northwest ridge of the Trolls.
Photo by Pat Schmalix

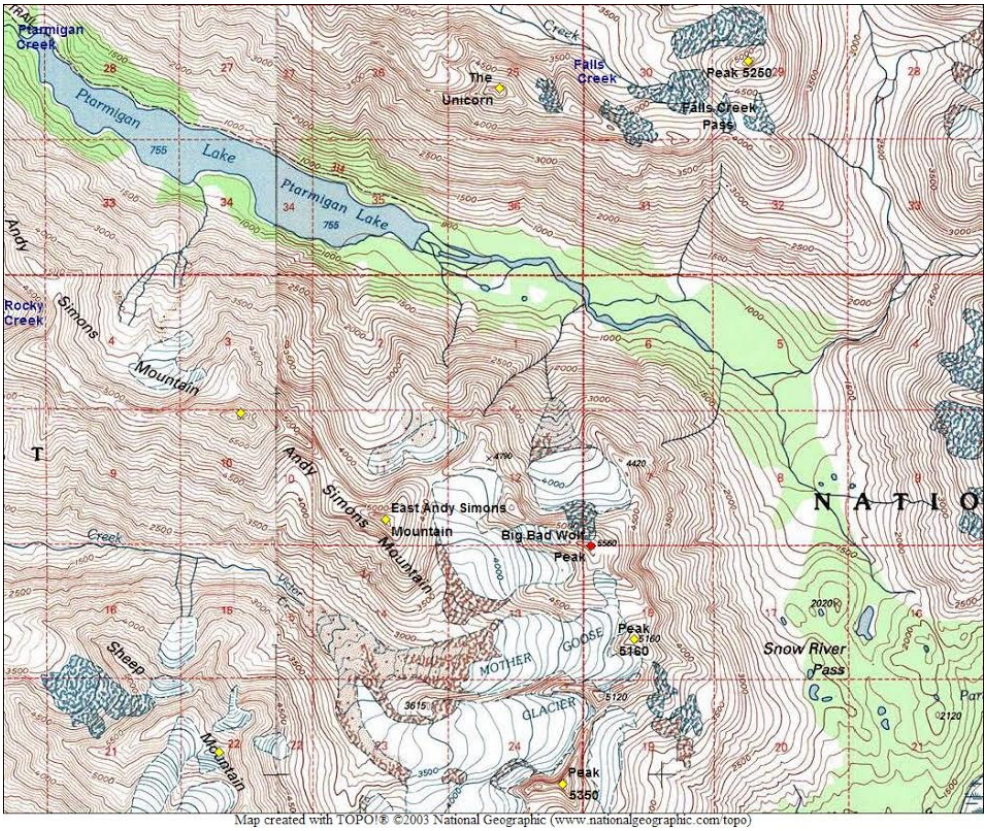
Joel Pomerinki gets ready to climb a pillar on the Trolls.
Photo by Pat Schmalix

Joel Pomerinki on the pillar on the Trolls. Talkeetna is out there somewhere.
Photo by Pat Schmalix

Joel Pomerinki on the lower part of the Pika Glacier.
Photo by Pat Schmalix

Peak of the Month: Big Bad Wolf Peak

Text by Steve Gruhn



Mountain Range: Kenai Mountains

Borough: Kenai Peninsula Borough

Drainages: Mother Goose Glacier and Ptarmigan Lake

Latitude/Longitude: 60° 21' 26" North, 149° 11' 2" West

Elevation: 5560 feet

Prominence: 1110 feet from Andy Simons Mountain (6407)

Adjacent Peaks: East Andy Simons Mountain (5350) and Peak 5160 west of Snow River Pass

Distinctness: 910 feet from Peak 5160

USGS Map: Seward (B-6)

First Recorded Ascent: This peak might be unclimbed.

As the MCA's Geographic Names Committee Chairman during the mid-to-late 1960s, Vin Hoeman encouraged the naming of geographical features to be centered on a common theme in a given area. On May 18, 1963, Cliff Ells, Hoeman, Dave Johnston, Pete Robinson, and Don Stockard climbed the tall peak between Victor Creek and Ptarmigan Lake and left a summit register proposing the name Big Bad Wolf Peak due to the peak's imposing looks and its proximity to the Mother Goose Glacier. The MCA's Geographic Names Committee subsequently proposed the name to the U.S. Board on Geographic Names. The Seward Chamber of Commerce, however, had already floated its own proposal to name the peak after the local conservationist who had been issued Alaska Master Hunting Guide License No. 1. With the support of Senator Bob Bartlett, the Seward folks won out in December 1963 when the U.S. BGN voted to make official the name Andy Simons Mountain.

Hoeman, though, still thought his proposed name had merit for a peak proximal to the Mother Goose Glacier. So, he dubbed Peak 5560 as Big Bad Wolf Peak. However, he never climbed it and, consequently, never formally proposed the name to the U.S. BGN.

I do not know of any ascents of Big Bad Wolf Peak.

The information for this column came from Hoeman's trip report titled "Big Bad Wolf Peak," which appeared in the June 1963 *Scree*, from the December 1963 *Scree*, from correspondence contained in the Grace and John Vincent "Vin" Hoeman Collection archived at the University of Alaska Anchorage/Alaska Pacific University Consortium Library, from Donald J. Orth's Dictionary of Alaska Place Names, and from the USGS' Geographic Names Information System.

Mountaineering Club of Alaska

2017 PROPOSED BUDGET

		Proposed for 2017	Budget Change	Approved for 2016	Current for 2016
REVENUE					
Membership Dues	*received during calendar year*	$9,500	$0	$9,500	$11,555.54
Scree Subscriptions		$450	$0	$450	$415.00
Training	*BMS, ice climbing, rock climbing, other*	$8,000	$0	$8,000	$6,300.00
Photo Calendar		$2,300	$0	$2,300	$1,522.00
MCA Products: T-Shirts, Patches, Etc.		$0	$0	$0	$0.00
Interest on Accounts		$75	$0	$75	$64.59
Other—Donations, etc.		$20,000	$20,000	$0	$15,250.00
TOTAL REVENUE		$40,325	$20,000	$20,325	$35,107.13
EXPENSE					
Training	*campsite, access fees, instructors, trip leaders*	$3,750	-$250	$4,000	$3,759
Scree	*postage, mailing, printing*	$2,800	$0	$2,800	$1,949
General Meeting	*rent, refreshments, entertainment*	$1,000	$0	$1,000	$15
Administrative	*supplies, P.O. Box, website, ads, travel, misc.*	$800	$0	$800	$894
Hut Construction & Maint.	*materials, supplies, hut equipment, lease fees*	$30,000	$0	$30,000	$853
Insurance	*reincorporation fees, insurance*	$0	$0	$0	$0
Club Equipment	*climbing gear, misc, equipment, storage*	$500	$0	$500	$0
Library	*new books, periodicals, storage*	$200	$0	$200	$0
Other:	*miscellaneous expenses*				
Photo Calendar		$2,600	$0	$2,600	$1,488
MCA Products: T-Shirts, Patches, Etc.		$0	$0	$0	$0
Other—Awards		$600	$0	$600	$617
Other—		$0	$0	$0	$0
TOTAL EXPENSE		$42,250	-$250	$42,500	$9,575
DUE TO (FROM) RESERVE		**-$1,925**			**$25,532**

CASH BALANCE—All Accounts	
Beginning Balance—January 1, 2016	$37,891
Increase (decrease) during 2016	$25,532
Current Balance for 2016	**$63,424**
Checking—Credit Union 1	**$41,066**
Money Mkt and CDs—Credit Union 1	**$20,763**
Savings—Credit Union 1	**$416**
18-month CD—in trust for hut lease—Northrim Bank	**$1,173**
Petty Cash	**$5**
Ending Balance—Revised December 22, 2016	**$63,424**

Mountaineering Club of Alaska

President	Charlie Sink	258-8770	Board member (term expires in 2017)	Stephen Austria	402-540-7037
Vice-President	Katie Strong	441-0434	Board member (term expires in 2017)	Nathan Hebda	310-3255
Secretary	Max Neale	207-712-1355	Board member (term expires in 2018)	Ralph Baldwin	232-0897
Treasurer	Brian Miller	517-402-8299	Board member (term expires in 2018)	Jennifer DuFord	227-6995
Past President	Cory Hinds	229-6809			

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@mtnclubak.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. 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@mtnclubak.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: Brian Miller - membership@mtnclubak.org
Hiking and Climbing Committee: Ed Smith - 854-5702 or hcc@mtnclubak.org
Huts: Greg Bragiel - 569-3008 or huts@mtnclubak.org
Calendar: Stuart Grenier - 337-5127 or stugrenier@gmail.com
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Find MCAK listserv at https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/MCAK/info.

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