



MOUNTAINEERING CLUB OF ALASKA

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FEBRUARY 1989

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FEBRUARY MEETING

The next monthly meeting of the MCA will be held Wednesday, February 15th, 7:30 pm, at the Pioneer Schoolhouse, BOTTOM floor, Third and Eagle Sts., downtown Anchorage. Dave Whitelaw will be showing slides after the business portion of the meeting. His subject will be Ice-Climbing in Southcentral Alaska.

The next board meeting will be at John Baker's house on February 9th. If interested, call John, 274-0105.

HIKING AND CLIMBING SCHEDULE

Mar. 18-22 MATANUSKA GLACIER SKI TRIP

Exploration of the upper Matanuska Glacier and proposed hut site. Celebrate spring break and the Equinox! We'll fly in with pilot Mike Meekins, and ski out down the glacier, 16-18 miles. Glacier travel skills are required. Weekend warriors can make arrangements to fly out early, if weather allows.

Trip is classed TECHNICAL (in so far as glacier travel requires some technical skills). Windy and cold conditions are a possibility. \$75 one-way. Leader: Dan O'Haire 561-1141

Mar. 18-19 MINT GLACIER HUT

Ski 9 miles to the hut and haul in aluminum siding. Call leader. Leader: Gretchen Reeve 344-3986

TRIP REPORTS

Snow Shelters

Willy Hersman

Cold temperatures this year kept the number of students willing to spend the night out down to just a few, but that's what snow shelters are all about, and that's also what Alaska is all about in the winter. Tents really become a nuisance in the cold; frozen zippers, frosted tent walls, wind-whipped fabric keeping you awake wondering if it will rip, stoves and candles threatening to melt away your fun if they aren't watched, drifts building up outside that push in the walls, not to mention how cold they get, how heavy they get, and how bulky they get. And you have to carry a shovel anyway.

Granted, there are cases where tents are nicer. Sometimes there is a shortage of snow, such as on ridgelines, sometimes there is only ice. Othertimes

fatigue sets in and you just want to get something up. If you aren't imaginative enough to take advantage of what's there, that's where snow shelter classes come in. They're a sharing of imagination and art. The loose art of making a home out of all those white flakes.

Six students and four instructors refined their skills a bit more this MCA weekend and came away further convinced that shelters are - quick: three people made a trench fit for six in two hours (George Rooney directing) - warm: minus 15 outside the trench and 32 inside (dripping, in fact), - and fun: Rick Maron kept making igloos he didn't need. The skiing by moonlight wasn't too bad either. Thanks to those who participated.

Pyramid Peak Ski Tour

Pete Sennhauser

January 15

Mysteriously, Sunday dawned nearly perfectly clear, which was surprising after a Saturday of skiing in something slightly less than a whiteout at Arctic Valley, where I ran into Geoff Radford and Helen Farnstrom. We all kept skiing because the forecast called for clearing in the afternoon, but by the time the lifts closed the place was still socked in.

With the oncoming Northerly on Sunday, we gambled on a trip to the Turnagain Pass area to do something different than Tincan, etc., and decided to try Pyramid, which can be a real powder keg in every sense imaginable. We were hoping for the powder SNOW variety. Geoff and I drove to meet Dan and Dave in Girdwood and proceeded to the proper pullout along the Seward Highway to gain access to Pyramid's lower slopes, which we found quite well-consolidated and handsomely laden with the soft white fluff.

The original idea was to climb the summit proper and perhaps do some exploration along the ridge, which runs along above the highway and gives glimpses of Seattle Creek valley to the west. That valley has some most desirable aspects from a skier's point of view, with its numerous bowls and lower ridges so utterly untouched by most, and yet not all that far away from roads. The only obstacle is to get over the separating ridge.

Once we reached the upper slopes we realized that the north wind had started the vicious play of clearing away skiable snow a long time before we got out of the sack, all there was to ski on were crableg ice crystals. Dan, who was smart enough to wear single boots found that they work well in assuring that ones feet rarely reach temperatures above 32 degrees, which made him real anxious to ski down; the sooner, the better. Due to this small inconvenience we decided not to push for the summit, half a mile to our northwest, but instead to get an eye full of what was visible of Seattle Creek and then to find a reasonable descent route.

With the snow conditions developed this winter, some of us felt not too keen to head straight for the biggest and steepest slopes. A small slide, which one of us released near the leeward ridgetop, prompted two of us to be sensible and to attempt a more moderate route while the others chose to do a high traverse to a powder slope. Luckily, we all got some great skiing in on the way down and met on a sunny bench, where we had lunch in shirtsleeves before skiing down a protected slope to the trailhead below.

Geoff and I are convinced the area has great possibilities and plan another trip, perhaps on overnighiter reconaissance. A word of caution to the potential

visitor to this place: once you get out of the woods, it's difficult to stay on low-angle slopes for a while. A week of high winds later, we found frequent settling action and huge slabs sitting on surface hoar up high; not a great playground at this time, unless you want to play dead.

MINUTES OF THE JANUARY MEETING

The January meeting was held in our traditional place, the Pioneer Schoolhouse, on January 18, John Baker presiding. Reading of the December minutes was waived.

TREASURER'S REPORT:

Petty Cash	-	77.88
Checking	-	399.30
Money Market	-	<u>3641.45</u>
Total Monies	-	\$4118.63

Annual dues are \$10 - single, \$15 - family (co-habs). For payment by mail, please include a self-addressed envelope along with a signed club waiver (found in the newsletter) and we will send you your membership card. The club offers free gear rental, like helmets, crampons and ice axes, stored at AMH, and a library of outdoor readings.

Out of 300 regular members (1988), only 99 had paid dues as of last meeting. Scree will continue to be mailed to delinquent members through February, after that...pay up!

COMMITTEES: Hiking and Climbing. Kathy Burke, who has been the chairperson of this committee, has to resign due to other obligations. She asked that some other good soul take over the job. Thanks for your involvement and good work Kathy!.....John encouraged folks to volunteer and share some Winter Trips, if they have any planned.....A trip from Portage to Whittier is planned for Super Sunday, with a train trip to return from there. Phil King was to be contacted at the meeting..... Training. Willy and Rick announced the upcoming snowshelter class at Manitoba Mt., Jan. 21-22, and gave some last minute advice as of what to bring; especially because of the unusually abnormal winter cold spell, which has blessed us lately.....Rick also announced an avalanche beacon practice, which he and Marcy Baker will hold on Jan. 24 at Russian Jack.

Hut Committee. Gretchen Reeve explained that we were to vote on two hut location proposals, the Matanuska Glacier and the Bomber Glacier. Two slide presentations on these locations made up the evening's entertainment, with folks voting for the Matanuska Glacier proposal.....A club trip is planned to the Mint Glacier Hut on March 18, the main purpose of which is to be the hauling of aluminum siding and its installation to protect the hut from plywood-chewing critters.....The long-talked-about cups for huts are still en route, I don't know from where to where, but eventually they will get here.

OLD BUSINESS: Alan Julliard told us that Todd Miner has ended up with some 150 Climbing Wall surveys and is interested in more if you have something to comment about.....Neil O'Donnell hasn't heard from the Chugach Advisory Board if accepted as a new member yet.....We're still waiting to hear from the IRS on our tax exempt status.

NEW BUSINESS: The Feb. meeting will be downstairs.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Rick Maron explained that Chugach State Park will hold a public meeting on the Army's proposed use of Eklutna Glacier and their wanting to stick with their original number of 140 troops. This hearing will be on Jan 31, and should be attended by everyone concerned. Rick had some flyers to distribute, the written comment period was to give an additional two weeks....Mike Miller, ice climber extraordinaire and media star promised to buy everyone a beer after the meeting at Simons due to his recent success (in the paper, not on the ice).

The Valdez Ice Climbing Festival will be held on President's Day Weekend. AMH will have more info.....Mark Findlay encouraged use of the club recorder.....Marlena Mooring, who has taken care of the refreshments for some time now, is unable to continue due to classes this semester. We need another volunteer for that. And to Marlena - thanks much for a great job.

Respectfully Submitted,
Pete Sennhauser

ADZE

Wanted: 2 or 3 climbers for 9-day Mt. Sanford climb in mid to late May. Will be on skis, with sleds most of the time. Glacier travel will be slow, with some long days. Please call Niles Woods at 344-5223 for more info.

Climbing Notes

Ray Commisa announced that he, Alan Colter and Doug White climbed Flattop on Solstice weekend, finding tracks of folks who had been there shortly before, but found nobody camped on top, not even Dave Staeheli and Gretchen Reeve. Looks like no one stayed the night this time.

Tips...Ideas...Techniques

Mike King

To prevent your headlamp from turning itself on inside your pack, try reversing one of the batteries before leaving home. Then, when you are ready to use the headlamp, just switch the battery around and you turn it on.

We passed this one on last year, it's worth mentioning again. If you prepare a pot of water before sliding into your sleeping bag on these wonderful winter nights, bury it 4 to 6 inches in the snow without packing the snow down upon it too hard. In the morning it will have only a paper-thin layer of ice and be ready to bring to a boil for some hot drinks. I have had this work in at least 30-below temps.

If you're not familiar with seal-a-meal bags, maybe you should be. This is an inexpensive and very easy way to have good food for winter camping meals. The device itself (with a supply of bags) can be found at most stores in the general merchandising/kitchen supplies dept. All you do is prepare your meal, let's say chicken stew or mac and cheese, put the desired serving into a bag, and seal it tight with the seal-a-meal machine. When in camp, just put the whole bag into your water pot even before it's boiling. By the time it is at a boil, you'll have hot food and boiling water for drinks. Seal-a-meals cost around \$12 - 15.00 and are a great investment. Nice gift idea too!

Hatcher Pass Citizens' Advisory

Todd Miner

As you know I have been serving as backcountry user representative on the Hatcher Pass Alpine Ski Area Citizens' Advisory Committee. Mitsui recently unveiled its Conceptual Development Plan (CDP) as required by DNR lease stipulations. Very new information was made available. Mitsui presented little hard data as to how the massive \$220 million year-round resort will meet the myriad problems such a development will entail:

- 300-room hotel and daylodge
- 9 lifts with a gondola
- 50-acre campground
- tennis courts, gym, theatre, spa, stores, museum
- miniature golf
- dude ranch
- motorcycle race track
- archery and trapshooting
- 18-hole golf
- heliport, airport
- 1000 condo units
- renaming a local mountain after a Japanese skier

My feelings are that most of these are incompatible uses for an area as special as Hatcher Pass. There is a need for lift-assisted skiing, but not a huge resort. Projected skiers at one time (SAOT) for the proposal is 15,000, six times Alyeska. DNR's consultant estimates a max of 22,500 for the overall resort. Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation estimates a million visitors annually.

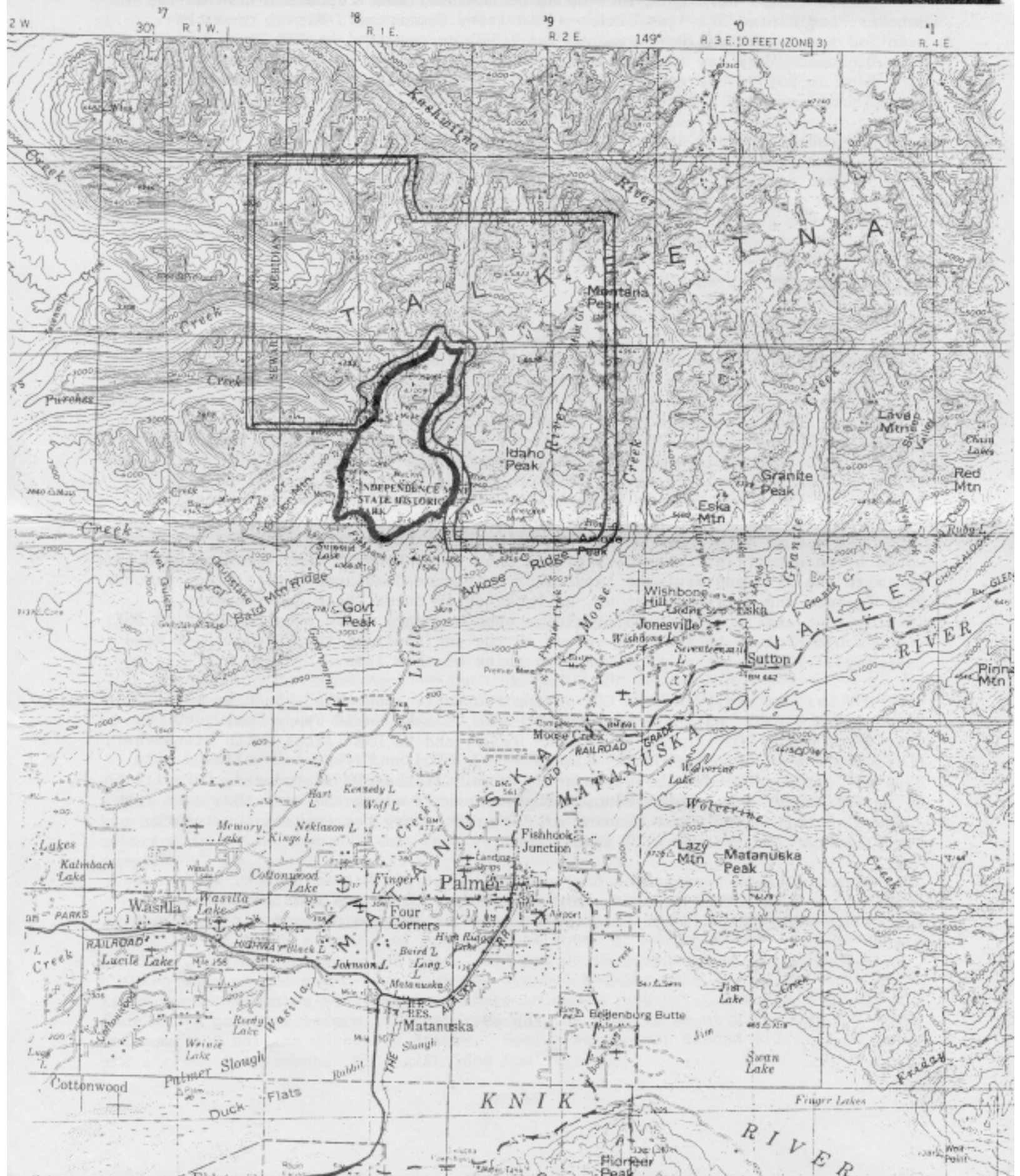
It's not easy to say how this will impact the backcountry, but Hatcher Pass would be an utterly different experience than it is today. I am fighting hard to minimize the size and mitigate impacts of this mega-development to protect Hatcher Pass freedom and solitude that we, as backcountry users, have come to love. Towards that end, a wilderness/primitive area has once again been proposed to DNR, which would protect backcountry values in the periphery of the Hatcher Pass area (see map). Please let me know what you think of this idea.

DNR will be reviewing the CDP during February. Comments should be made directly to Mitsui: Hatcher Pass Project Team, Alaska World Trade Corp., 600 W. 41st Ave., Suite 203, Anchorage, Alaska 99503) and to DNR (Attn: Helen Nienhueser, DLW/SCRO, Box 107005, Anchorage, Alaska 99510-7005) as Mitsui only allowed nine days for public comments to get to their team. If the CDP is approved, DNR will go on to the Master Development Plan, though somewhere along the line they must face a lawsuit challenging their leasing of Sector B (where the bulk of the resort supplementary activities will take place).

Please give me feedback on how you feel about the Mitsui resort, wilderness proposal, and any other ideas on Hatcher. I want to ensure that backcountry voices are heard and Hatcher Pass isn't looked at only as an easy fix to economic woes.

Wilderness
no motorized use
no commercial buildings, etc.

To remain in present use
patterns with option for
future zoning



NO. 3 Ptarmigan (part I)

There are three ptarmigan in Alaska's mountains and it's possible to find all three sharing a single peak. The different species are unlikely to be in the exact same spot because they seem to prefer somewhat different habitat. Since the higher altitude species, the white-tailed, lives in a broader range of habitat in the Rockies and the Cascades (where it is the only ptarmigan) its restriction to the harshest places here is probably due to competition with the larger, lower-living species. The rock ptarmigan is the other species likely to be found on montian tops, especially in places like Kodiak, where the white-tail is absent. Willow ptarmigan, the most abundant and the typical arctic species, are found in mountain valleys and willow tundra a moderate distance above timberline in summer.

You will have a hard time telling the three apart just by looking, especially in winter, but there are a number of clues which you should be watching for. White-tails tend to form small groups and may not descend to timberline even in winter. If you have anything to compare with they are considerably smaller than the other kinds, normally weighing less than a pound.

Whitetails are typically more approachable than the other two, since they rely on freezing until the very last minute. In only a few cases they might take fright and fly at a distance of 20 to 40 feet (more typical of the other two species). Much more likely, if you have approached slowly (without a dog!), they will freeze motionless until you are within 10 feet, or slowly get agitated and start neck-craning. This is followed by standing up and tail-flicking and then moving away slowly. If you frightened them enough they run away in short bursts. Normally it takes a drastic fright to get them to fly. Stop and remain motionless yourself at the first sign of movement by a freezing ptarmigan and you will be allowed to get quite close (in stages).

At any time of year you can identify the white-tailed ptarmigan as it flies away; both of the other species have black tails. Male ptarmigan change partially to breeding plumage in the spring. The head and neck get dark feathers while the body remains white. Female ptarmigan change a little later to a mottled brown and black over the whole body. White-tail males are blotched with black when breeding and occupy territories high above trees and shrubs on warmer exposures. They begin to make their screaming call from these places at dawn and dusk long before the snow leaves them in spring.