

# the SCREE

Mountaineering Club of Alaska

February 2013

Volume 56 Number 2



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*"The mountains will always be there, the trick is to  
make sure you are too."*

*Hervey Voge*





# The Mountaineering Club of Alaska

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

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

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

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

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## Cover Photo

Jerami Marsh descending Mount Williwaw.

Photo by Tyndall Ellis.

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## Article Submission

Text and photography submissions for the *Scree* can be sent as attachments to [mcasree@gmail.com](mailto:mcasree@gmail.com). Articles should be submitted by the 25<sup>th</sup> of each month to appear in the next issue of the *Scree*. Do not submit material in the body of the email. 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 orientated photo for consideration for the cover. Please submit captions with photos.

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## Monthly Meeting: Wednesday, February 20, at 6:30 p.m.

Program: Joe Stock, a local and fully certified mountain guide, will present on The Alaska Factor: Backcountry Skiing in South-central Alaska. He will show photos and tell stories from skiing traverses, chutes, tours, and powder in the mountains around Anchorage.

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## Hiking and Climbing Schedule

- ⇒ **February 9-10, Resurrection River Reconnaissance.** Backcountry Ski Touring. Round trip about 24 miles with approximately 1,600 feet of elevation gain. Possible open river crossings. Trip leader Greg Bragiel, email [unknownhiker@alaska.net](mailto:unknownhiker@alaska.net)
- ⇒ **February 23-27, Seward to Cooper Landing.** Backcountry Ski Touring. Avalanche terrain. Distance of about 37 miles with 5,201 feet of elevation gain. Possible open river crossings. Cabin rental fees apply. Trip leader Greg Bragiel, email [unknownhiker@alaska.net](mailto:unknownhiker@alaska.net)
- ⇒ **February 27 - March 3, Cooper Landing to Hope.** Backcountry Ski Touring. Avalanche terrain. Distance of about 41 miles with approximately 3,700 feet of elevation gain. Cabin rental fees apply. Trip leader Greg Bragiel, email [unknownhiker@alaska.net](mailto:unknownhiker@alaska.net)
- ⇒ **April 3-7, Scandinavian Peaks Hut Maintenance Trip.** We are looking for a few more fun people with glacier travel experience. The trip objectives are hut maintenance, glacier travel, ski touring, and climbing. Trip will be six people maximum and a flight into the hut is required (estimated at \$350 per person). There will be a flight deposit. Group meals. Contact either Travis Taylor via email at [alaskantrav@hotmail.com](mailto:alaskantrav@hotmail.com) or via cell phone at 907-382-4823 or Greg Bragiel via email at [unknownhiker@alaska.net](mailto:unknownhiker@alaska.net) if interested.

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## Belmore Browne Presentation

On Tuesday, February 12, from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., Brian Okonek will give a Denali history presentation for the National Parks Conservation Association at the Z.J. Loussac Library in the Wilda Marston Theatre. The early exploration of the Denali region and attempts to climb Denali culminating in Belmore Browne's 1912 expedition will be discussed. Historical photos will be shown to illustrate the remarkable journeys undertaken by explorers of that region 100 years ago.

Online? Click me!



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

## White Princess (9,800 feet) - Delta Range, Alaska

### New Route on the West Face, Snow 70-80 degrees, 3,000 feet

*Text and photos by Jason Stuckey, unless otherwise indicated.*

I awake to the sound of something hitting my cabin roof. It's early in the morning and pitch black outside. Half asleep, I hear the sound again. As I gradually come to, I realize that it's already 4:45 a.m. and I've overslept. Well, sort of.

The day before, I told Chad Diesinger and Kennan Jeannet to meet me at my cabin at 4:30 a.m. to go climbing down in the

Delta Range. In my mind 4:30 a.m. was pretty early and having climbed with them for the past four years, I didn't think they would be on time. So with that in mind, I set my alarm for 5 a.m. thinking I would get a little extra sleep. But they were on time, and they've been outside my locked cabin throwing snowballs onto my roof to wake me up. I head downstairs and let them in, giving some sort of apology while I heat up breakfast burritos in an effort to smooth things over.

We head out the door, throw everything in my truck, and with burritos in hand, start driving. For those not familiar, the Delta Range is located east of the Hayes Range and just south of Delta Junction. It has long been the training ground for Fairbanks climbers, as it's been for the three of us. Our objective was an unclimbed line on the west face of White Princess. The original inspiration for this climb had come from my friend Peter Illig, but since he moved back to Anchorage we decided to give it a try. I hadn't been back to White Princess for many years, but what I could see from photographs was that the route would take us up a snow ramp through a rocky buttress, onto a steep snow arête, and then to the upper slopes directly to the summit. Good snow conditions would be crucial to our success.



*The West Face of White Princess. The route goes up the left-trending snow ramp through the rock buttress in the center, then angles right to the sun-shadow line bypassing the rock steps on the left, heading directly to the summit. Photo by Galen Vansant.*

After a quick stop for donuts and coffee at the Delta IGA we arrived at the Castner Creek pullout at 8:30 a.m. The weather wasn't looking great, but it was supposed to improve the next day. Feeling optimistic, even with overcast skies and light snow, we began our approach. White Princess is located 6 miles up the Castner Glacier, and then 3 miles up the M'Ladies

branch gaining almost 3,000 feet of elevation. Nothing too difficult. After a few breaks we stop and set up camp around 4 p.m. Our plan was to brew up, eat, rest, and get an early alpine start. The route was threatened on either side by seracs near the summit. We would be climbing underneath one of them in order to access the snow ramp, and wanted to be well beyond this point by the heat of the day.

After dinner, Kennan and I decided to ski over to take a look at the route while Chad took a nap in the tent. There was a small cliff band to get into the upper cirque below the route. Always with the overly ambitious plans, I wanted to do



*High on the face.*

the "direct start" up the WI3 flow coming down the center. Kennan thought it would be wiser to head up the snow ramp just to its right. After a bit of discussion (read disagreement), sensibility won out and I agreed that taking the easiest and quickest way would be best. We headed back to the tent and try to sleep.

At 1 a.m. my alarm went off. We got up, made hot water, and left shortly thereafter. We got to the small cliff band and dropped our skis, put on crampons, and roped up. Chad led up the snow ramp as Kennan and I followed behind. While it seemed like it would be a trivial approach, it took us three hours to reach the snow cone at the base of the route. We

assessed the snow conditions, and decided whether we wanted to keep the rope out or not. (The rock in the Deltas is mostly junk; and pickets don't usually do much.) We found the snow conditions to be stable and

decided to put the rope away. We started up the snow cone at 4:30 a.m. just as it started to get light. The sky was still over-

cast, but the temperature was cool. I reached the bergschrund and searched for an easy way over it. I found a good snow bridge, planted my tools above the lip of the 'schrund, and high-stepped over it. We moved fast up the snow cone before breaking left toward the rock buttress. We were now protected from the serac as we began to head up the ramp that splits the buttress. Kennan led us around the corner and then I took over. Steep snow took us up to a short step with a small cornice. I chopped some of it away, stemmed out, and pulled over it. Chad took over and led up more steep snow to a rock step. He didn't like the way the left side looked, but we headed out right and it didn't look any better. We went back

and continued up. The day began to break along with the weather. As we approached the seracs at two-thirds height, we suddenly climbed onto a beautiful snow arête. It was amazing. The mountain

dropped off for 2,000 feet on either side. I

stopped quickly to grab my camera and take a photo. The arête ended and we reached what appeared to be the upper summit slopes. Chad and Kennan stopped to take a break and

I continued upward, thinking that we only had a little ways to go before reaching the summit. But in the moment, I forgot about foreshortening and what it could do. Up and up we went. Every time it looked like the angle was going to roll back, the slopes kept going. After I stepped one of my feet into a crevasse

*Left: On the snow arête approaching the summit slopes.*



*The weather began to break.*





we stopped and roped up. Shortly after, things finally kicked back and we reached the top at 10:30 a.m. We dropped our packs and celebrated on the summit. We took our time and enjoyed the views before heading down the west ridge, the standard route on the mountain. Some down-climbing, a short knife-edge section, more down-climbing, and then a pleasant glissade to finish things off. We arrived back at our skis just past 2 p.m., a little over 12 hours since we had left. Once back at our camp we brewed up and enjoyed some food before heading back to the road.

The ski down the M'Ladies is always a pleasure, smooth and downhill for 3 miles. We made it to the Castner in less than 30

minutes. Things continued to go smoothly until we were a few miles from the road. By this time of day, the snow had started to become isothermal. Toward the bottom of a hill, Chad's skis sank deep into the snow and he fell over. Kennan and I started having the same problem, too. On one of the larger hills, Chad skied down cautiously, but still sank in and fell. Kennan decided to just point her skis downhill and hope for the best. Arms out to the sides for balance she barely made it. I decide to follow her lead. I was almost down and thought I was going to make it when SLAM!!!!!! Head first, tips down, tails up. My 50-pound pack compressed the snow onto my hands and ski poles, which were jammed underneath me. I

was completely stuck and barely able to move except for some useless thrashing. I yelled for assistance, which Kennan gladly provided, once she stopped laughing. I must say, it was not the most enjoyable part of the trip. But that's what you get when you try to ski late in the afternoon on a warm spring day.

The rest of the way out was fairly uneventful and we reached the truck around 7 p.m. Somehow

I managed to convince

Chad to drive us home. I don't remember what I told him, but I probably said that I would drive the second half if he drove the first. After stuffing my face with copious amounts of Barbara's Cheesy Puffs and other tasty snacks. however, I quickly passed out. Kennan as well. I'm not sure how he did it, but at 11 p.m. we pulled into my driveway, exhausted after our long weekend. By far, this was one of the best trips I'd ever had in the mountains. Good friends, new terrain, a big adventure... it doesn't get much better than that.



*Beginning the descent.*



*Heading back to the road on the Castner Glacier.*

## Mount Williwaw

*Text and photos by Jerami Marsh, unless otherwise indicated.*

I am at a point in my life where it's a struggle to make time to get away. House, bills, and job responsibilities seem to grow with age, but when city life starts to eat at me my girlfriend Eloise Robbins and her dog Isla are there to remind me of what's more important. We aren't die-hard, but we are somewhat above the average fitness level. We like to hike, so the Mount Williwaw trip offered a mix of challenging and relaxing sights and activities for the three of us, plus a few friends who get out a bit more than we do.



*The western aspect of Mount Williwaw bathed in glory.*

In mid-August of 2012, we were lucky to time our adventure with great weather. Following an abnormally high snowfall the winter before, temperatures seemed cooler last summer. In my memory, it was one of the rainiest I had experienced, so for someone whose enjoyment of a trip is often at the mercy of the elements, I was elated to see so much sun.

It was nice to have Liz Russo and Tyndall Ellis along. They've quite a bit more experience, so I found myself eyeballing their gear, their food, and the efficiency with which they operated, and hopefully learned something. With as much terrain as we would cover, 15 to 20 miles, we decided to play it safe, and make a weekend out of it. We would hike in on Saturday, spend the night, climb something and hike out on Sunday.

It sounded easy enough, but there were challenges to be had. At the time, I was seldom getting out of my routine

city life, so I usually found myself struggling to get back into shape at the start of each trip. The approach was test enough to see if I was capable of summiting the highest of the Chugach peaks west of Ship Creek.

It was a short drive to the trail-head from my house. We parked at the Glen Alps parking lot, strolled down the powerline, crossed the bridge, and headed north on the Middle Fork Trail. Though we had entertained the option of cutting across the higher route – the Ballfield – we decid-

ed to hike the valley up because of the mixed skill levels present, and because our packs were to the point of being too heavy.

The valley approach was a nice gentle slope, but led through low-lying areas adjacent to the Middle Fork of Campbell Creek, where runoff and groundwater collected in marshes. Vegetation and mosquitoes congregated in large numbers, but they didn't present too much trouble. It seemed only our efforts to avoid the worst of the muck slowed us down.

On a dry year the trail is probably passable without getting wet. One could easily get by wearing a pair of galoshes, but I was wearing mid-cut leather Asolo boots and gaiters. They kept my feet almost dry, as long as I selected my route carefully to avoid water above ankle-deep.





*Front to back: Isla, Liz, and Eloise approaching the campsite.*

Past the low-lying areas, the trail was pleasantly clear and dry, with a cascading view of the creek. Mount Williwaw and its valleys lay ahead of us. The mid-section of the trail followed drumlin-esque formations with wind-bent hemlock dwarfed by long winters. Their roots intertwined with rocks of all sizes across the trail, and seemed to test my concentration for a solid hour. The path then swept up the south side of the valley, crossing a field of boulders that cascaded into the first of the Williwaw Lakes we encountered.

Shortly after, we tussled with the last of the waist-high brush, and encountered remains of the previous winter's snow. As expected, we were refreshed by the snow. The dog chased us across, and we threatened each other with loose clods of dirty white slush. By this point, we had seen two small tents in the lakes area, and a handful of hikers heading out at the start of our trip. As we negotiated the series of lakes and standing waters, we realized we had plenty of options for a picturesque campsite.

As we neared the highest lake, we had to cross the creek's headwaters. Because I didn't want to risk having wet socks and boots, I took them off and negotiated cold

water and sharp rocks with bare feet. Eloise, Tyndall, and Liz went ahead as I fumbled around securing my gear, placing Isla and myself in the rear. She always waits for the stragglers. Good dog.

Isla, a Chihuahua-dachshund mix, is less than a foot tall and only has a hand's-width of clearance between her belly and the ground, but can hike with ease for hours through snow or about 15 miles over dry ground. However, water isn't her thing whatsoever. I'll give her credit. She gave it her best shot to cross, but her bare little belly must have gotten cold in the mere shin-deep water. She stopped in the middle and started to whine.

I went ahead, thinking I could encourage her from ashore. Everyone started laughing – except me. My patience wore thinner with each painful step across. I was starting to realize that that this time, no amount of encouragement would budge little Isla, and no one else was going back into the water to get her but me.

I could look back and say I made a few technical mistakes. Going with people that know what they're doing, and having a variety of options minimizes the impact of bad decisions. We did well on the most critical decisions that weekend. I don't regret that we decided not to climb Mount Williwaw on the first night. We could have, but we were tired. We weren't sure of the route, so we didn't. Our first two choices of routes weren't safe.

From everything we read, we expected to follow a chute/draw up the southwest face. However, it was hard-packed with snow and we didn't have any snow or ice gear. We explored past the draw, parallel to the creek, to the adjacent rock face. While there seemed to be an easy path zigzagging up, it ended up being full of dead ends and dangerous outcrops of loose rock. We scouted a large crag that disappeared around a corner a





*Tyndall on the summit.*

few hundred yards up. It appeared to have an exit route up top, but also looked as if it might be closed in by a sheer rock face on all sides. Even if we could reach the exit, we would be hiking in the path of loose falling rock the whole way up.

We debated for 10 minutes before calling the route a no-go, and decided to traverse west on the outcrop, back toward the draw. Again, we were stopped by a lack of options, and our lack of rock-climbing gear. On the way down, we spotted a roughshod path up through boulders that could well have been nothing more than a sheep trail. We decided to scope it out before heading back. Our persistence paid off. We went only a hundred yards before we made it to the top of the crag we had scouted from below. It became clear that we had found our best shot at getting to the scree field above, but we'd have to wait until morning to find out for sure.

Heading down, we followed the creek back to camp, passed so close to a herd of sheep, I was convinced they were domestic. Away from the hustle and bustle of the city, the wildlife I encountered seemed a bit more relaxed. We saw sheep, ground squirrels, spruce grouse, and a variety of other soaring birds, probably scouting Isla. There were dozens of flowers I had scarcely noticed on the way up – pink, blue, purple, green, and even black-petal varieties. I refrained from picking any. The trail back to camp was soft and the down-slope let us recoup some energy, saved for the next day.

Forty minutes later, we arrived back at camp. We settled into a spectacular sunset as we prepared dinner, ate, and relaxed. A wonderful display of red hues on boulders cast shadows over a placid valley. The glaciers, long gone, had carved a perfect cradle for the string of crystal clear lakes that reflected the surrounding scene so perfectly. We slept on pillows of enthusiasm and started the next day fresh, ready to explore the next challenge.



*Campsite*

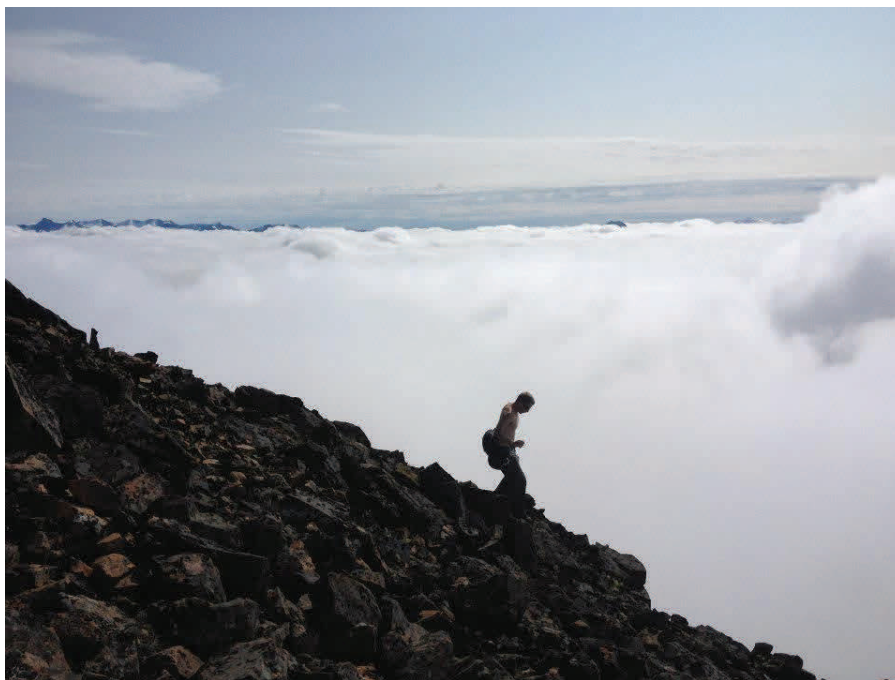


I used to scramble up McHugh Peak and hike the hills behind Tustumena Lake as a kid from time to time. I am still not as skilled, trained, comfortable, or efficient as I'd like to be in the situations I've often put myself. As a novice with limited experience accumulated from inconsistent years of dabbling, I feel like I know nothing about mountaineering. Admitting that seems to keep me in check when I'm going places I've never been. It's exciting to discover places like Mount Williwaw, where I can get out and ease back into my outdoor education, despite my busy schedule.

Though Mount Williwaw is so close to Anchorage, it's still a formidable journey from the trailhead. It offers a variety of areas to test one's skill level and helped me learn a bit more about myself, my skill, and areas on which I need to improve. My personal key to improvement is repetition and remembering, so when I can, I take notes and try to be consistent. This is especially true when it comes to packing my gear and food, or learning new means for finding food. It's amazing how quickly I could evaluate my new gear in the field after having no clue back at home, just a few miles away.

The second day, we made breakfast. The small multi-fuel camp stove seemed adequate. The new tent held up. It didn't rain overnight, and it was a clear day. I was happy.

Eloise brought plastic ware. She wanted to find blueberries so we decided to split up into two teams. We guys headed for Mount Williwaw, while the two ladies went toward Walrus Lake, up the



*Jerami descending. Photo by Tyndall Ellis.*

valley where a large cauldron of glacial landscapes was overlooked by Mount Williwaw and the scores of mountains beyond. We thought she would certainly find blueberries there.

Tyndall and I followed the creek back up to the southwest face and found the same trail that traversed the rocky outcropping once again. It was quick the second time, but getting across the notch over the crag proved intense. Though the crag was walled off by boulders and a vertical face that channeled water and debris over the edge, there was a smidgen of a trail that cut across. We had to climb loose rock to get to it, and we took our time. I went first this time. I climbed the 10-foot stack of boulders as Tyndall watched from below.

On my second-to-last heave upward, the face started to vibrate. The boulder I had just grabbed shimmied out, revealing its tonnage, and gave in to gravity. It knocked me off balance, but settled on slipping by without taking me with it. My heart jumped, but I did what I could to find a solid hold. "Test every hold," I shouted to Tyndall as if he didn't know. Fumbling for a way up, I scurried across a patch of wet rock and grit to a wider spot on the trail, tucked under the wall, just a few yards from the other side. We looked up at the inverted face. "We could totally rappel down that," we half-heartedly chuckled.

Around the corner, we found safety and a good water source. We drank and opened our eyes to the surroundings above and below. It was the first time I fully noticed either. "Four thousand feet?" I wondered. I could see up to the scree field above, the route, some more boulders, and a straight shot to the summit. "That's it," Tyndall said. I was getting tired.



We crossed the scree field to the south ridge and followed a loosely formed trail between scree and boulders for a good 20 minutes. The last hundred yards sweat poured. The last ten yards I hung my shirt around my neck. I loosened the waste pack I was wearing – a fancy Osprey pack top converted, very handy. The clouds started closing in and I feared losing the view. I raced the mist to the top. Tyndall had been resting five minutes when I arrived. The wind whipped over the crest and down to the valley below, toward Anchorage. Tyndall was snacking on smoked salmon. I felt around for my snack pack, a granola bar, but nothing. Ugh. I forgot my rewards.

Tyndall offered a bite of salmon. I accepted. We rested there. It reminded me of Scotland, on a grander, more-snowy scale. Of the long approach to Ben Nevis, the highest peak there. I failed to summit because of weather. The friends who offered to share their food they brought out each time we rested. “People climb this in flip-flops,” they said. I wasn’t amused. I felt selfish and lonely, and compared myself to the people who made it their life to climb around the world, to share and to be part of something. I resolved to make a modest step in that direction and start sharing my food.

I looked down next to where Tyndall sat, at the black PVC cylinder at his side. “What’s that for?” He unfolded a yellow notepad stuffed inside. “The roster.” I listened to the breeze as he scribbled his name in it with a Number 2 pencil. He turned a few pages then handed it to me. I looked through every page. I spotted familiar names of acquaintances. Wow, I thought. I knew them from the Outdoor Club at the University of Alaska. The date wasn’t recent, however, 1997.

We graduated college three years ago. They must have been kids back then, with their parents. “On their own?,” I envied them quietly. I turned to thinking about how many people had been here before and why I hadn’t. I pictured kids that came and signed, and those that came before the roster existed, and remain unaccounted for. They are long gone, could probably do this in their

sleep now.

I again recalled the Scotland adventure a few years back. Climbing, hiking, and placing stones on cairns are a tradition over there. The bigger the mountain, the smaller the cairn. Some were really old. Friends talked about six layers of human history deep. How those first stone-layers must have felt so accomplished, climbing, living naturally, appreciating lush views from up high, few people, thinking “What can I do that will connect me with others that come after?” Those that did come later probably needed no instruction to set their own stones on top of old. It was instinct, a means for self-expression, and reflection.

Years later, on the opposite site of the world, I’m here signing a roster, claiming my stake in Clan Williwaw. There are probably only a few thousand of us, so I felt pretty good about that. I wondered why there weren’t more people on the trail, more in the mountains. I wasn’t disappointed, though. I realized we are still working on the second layer of history in Alaska, at best. For someone like me, it is something to remember. Though it isn’t a way of life, it’s still an adventure, and it motivates me to join new clans, more exclusive and accomplished clans.

I wonder who of the most experienced started here, this close to home, climbing Mount Williwaw and the Chugach as kids. Looking around, I realized we were only a hundred years into our second layer. There is much left to pioneer, and I am still young.

*[Ed. note: Mount Williwaw was first climbed on June 11, 1965, by Mike Judd, Dave Meyers, and Nick Parker. See Meyers’ article titled “‘Frustration Peak’ (5445’) First Ascent; June 10-12, 1965” in the July 1965 Scree.]*



## Chugach State Park Offers Spiritual Refuge

By Frank E. Baker

With nearly one-half million acres, our big back yard called Chugach State Park is more than a recreationist wonderland. It is a spiritual refuge, or what I like to call a “sanctuary for the soul.”

On a hike several years ago to one of the park’s more remote locations, Grizzly Bear Lake, I thought about how removed this place was from events, both past and present. Except for the fact you might see or hear an airplane once in a while, you get the feeling you are outside time and removed from the mayhem of the world.

Grizzly Bear Lake is located at the headwaters of the North Fork of Ship Creek. Sitting alongside the lake in the warm July sun, I thought that if someone had somehow remained at this single spot for a century, they would know nothing about world wars, natural disasters, disease, or other human catastrophes.

At the same time, the person would be oblivious to human triumphs over the past 100 years, such as scaling Mount Everest, going to the moon, discovering DNA, and mapping the genome. If “ignorance is bliss,” as poet Thomas Gray observed, it would be a rather quiet, unfettered existence. One would begin to focus on simpler things, like the different kinds of snow, movements of wildlife, changes of the seasons, and positions of the stars.

Dick Proenneke (1916-2003) lived alone for 30 years in a cabin on Twin Lakes, within Lake Clark National Park and Preserve, in western Alaska. While he wasn’t totally isolated from humanity during that time, he experienced a kind of solitude and peace most of us will never know. Because he received little if any news from the outside

world, his inner world – the natural world around him – became his focus, along with keeping a journal and documenting his life on film.

I haven’t made very many extended backpacking trips into Chugach State Park, but when I have ventured into the backcountry for several days or nearly a week, I’ve noticed that all of my senses start to become heightened. One begins to see and hear more things. Everything in the natural environment – the growth of vegetation or the movements of wildlife – seems to take on greater importance.

On some elemental level, I think we really need a continuing connection with the land and respite from the travail of 21<sup>st</sup>-century life. Just as church offers spiritual comfort and sustenance, places like Grizzly Bear Lake or areas even closer, like Eklutna Lake or South Fork Valley, also soothe the restless soul.

When I see people out hiking, climbing, and

skiing, I’m certain that in some way they are doing just what I’m doing. They’re disengaging from their busy, work-a-day world and connecting with that quieter, uncluttered world. Kids live mostly in that world, and it’s great to see adults there, too.

We really need this connection, and we’re fortunate to have endless miles to explore within Chugach State Park. We have to be careful about avalanches during winter, but frozen rivers and lakes within wide-open valleys offer great expanses for us to stretch our legs and rejuvenate our spirits, especially after the long period of darkness.

It’s a new year and the sun is slowly coming back. The best months of cross-country skiing are ahead of us!



*Frank Baker at Eagle Lake in South Fork Valley via long snowshoes.*



## The X Couloir: June 4, 2012

By Keith Sanfacon

Long days combined with low overnight lows allowed me to attempt a ski line that had been calling me for years: The X Couloir. The X is actually two couloirs that cross in the middle forming a perfect north-facing “X” in upper Peters Creek just west of Peeking Mountain.

Work was threatening to thwart this attempt, but I was able to sneak out at 2:30 p.m. and was hiking with skis and boots on my back by 3:30 p.m. I approached via Ram Valley to the Falling Water Creek drainage. Legal access to this area falls into a grey area, but I am fortunate enough to have a friend with land abutting Chugach State Park.

The start of the hike was super nice amongst the Alaskan lupine and budding trees. The trail was dry and snow-free high into the Falling Water Creek drainage. At about 3,500 feet, I swapped out the approach shoes for boots and started skinning. Falling Water is a serpentine drainage that zigs and zags. The ascent up always takes longer than anticipated, but finally I rounded that last buttress and made the final push up with Peeking’s imposing summit on my right.

Two couloirs mean two entrances. The ridge makes a distinct “W” with each low point being an entrance to the X. I opted for the lower entrance (6,100 feet) on the climber’s left. This is also the wider, less-steep option

for the top half. The other entrance is a few hundred feet higher to the east. The lower entrance is marked with a small rock wind shelter large enough for an emergency bivy.

I was hoping the X was high enough, steep enough, and north-facing enough to harbor the last remaining dry powder of the year. From the col (6,100 feet), I got my first look at my descent route. It is wide, but long and steep (about 40° and 2,200 feet). At some point in the prior week, the snow in the couloir got well above freezing and then froze solid.

The snow was in no danger of softening up today. The shot is 100% north facing and was still completely in the shade at 7:30 p.m.

Dropping in, the snow was bulletproof. If the surface was smooth, only my edges would be preventing a slide



*The X Couloir*

for life. Fortunately, someone had skied the shot when it was soft, which roughed up the surface considerably. Jump turns down, down, down, aiming for the trenches and high spots left frozen in place by an unknown benefactor. The angle refused to ease. At the nexus, I had a choice of which leg to descend. The narrow left was about 10 feet wide, but the snow was still very firm. I choose the wider skier's right option. In the lower half, the snow began to soften, but it was a mix of runnels and avalanche debris. I aimed for the smoother sections and got some decent turns as the angle finally began to ease.

From the bottom of the X, I had two options to return to Falling Water Creek. The first was to boot back up the couloir and retrace my skinner. This would be the preferred route, but the hard snow caught me by surprise and thus my crampons were resting comfortably at home. The second option involved a west-facing tundra climb, east-facing down-climb, north-facing climb, south-facing scree descent into Falling Water Creek.

The first climb went without incident. I aimed for the low spot on a north - south sub-ridge.

From the low spot I descended down the steep east face. After a tense hour of down-climbing I reached the bottom of the cirque with frayed nerves and less equipment than I started with. From this cirque I could easily see the error in my route selection.

Next time I will

climb north along the ridge 200 feet higher to a mini-summit. From this mini-summit, there is nothing but mellow tundra to the valley floor.

The final climb was uneventful and I gained the col just southeast of Peak 5320. The route to the valley floor was now obvious and after a quick glissade I was back at my hiking/skiing transition station. It was a glorious Alaskan night. The high peaks were ablaze in the fading light. Due to the high latitude, the Alaskan summer sun moves almost parallel to the horizon this time of night. This makes for a magic hour that actually lasts for an hour before the sun dips slightly out of sight for a few hours of dusk/dawn.

It took eight hours. The snow was poor. I lost gear. I scared the heck out of myself. I was completely exhausted. I questioned my decision-making skills, my sanity, my intelligence, but I had made it. I wouldn't want to put myself in that situation again, but I was happy. However, the fiancé was far from pleased.

[Ed. note: For Keith's video of skiing the X Couloir, click [here!](#)]



*Alpenglow on Polar Bear Peak*



## Peak of the Month: Peak 2102

By Steve Gruhn

Mountain Range: Brooks Range; Waring Mountains

Borough: Northwest Arctic Borough

Drainages: Kuchuk Creek and Niaktuvik Creek

Latitude/Longitude: 66° 59' 42" North, 158° 28' 2" West

Elevation: 2102 feet

Prominence: 1942 feet from Peak 2109 in the Kerchurak Creek and Rabbit River drainages of the Sheklukshuk Range

Adjacent Peaks: Peak 1285 in the Kuchuk Creek and Niaktuvik Creek drainages and Peak 1215 in the Nakochelek Creek, Tunutuk Creek, and Kugarak River drainages

Distinctness: 1677 feet from Peak 1285

USGS Map: Shungnak (D-5)

First Recorded Ascent: Unknown

Access Point: Kobuk River

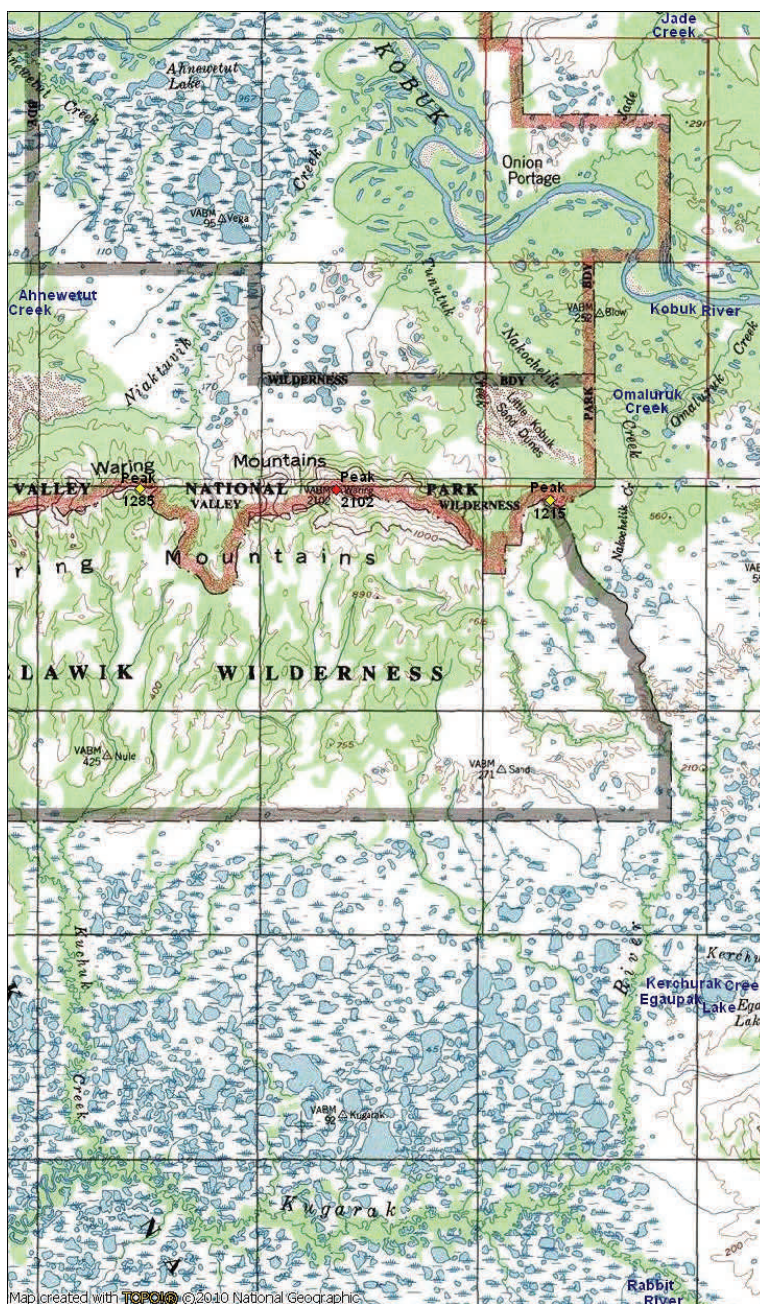
Peak 2102 is the highest point of the Waring Mountains. It straddles the borders of Kobuk Valley National Park and the Selawik National Wildlife Refuge. Peak 2102 is the highest point in both the Kobuk Valley Wilderness and the Selawik Wilderness.

The Waring Mountains were named in 1886 in honor of Navy Lieutenant Howard Scott Waring (1850-1893) by Navy Lieutenant George Morse Stoney (1852-1905) during his exploration of the Kobuk River. Waring served aboard the *U.S.S. Rodgers* during the search for the *Jeannette*, which became trapped in the Arctic Ocean icepack in September 1879 and eventually sank in June 1881.

Stoney's Kobuk River expedition overwintered at Fort Cosmos at the mouth of Cosmos Creek a few miles downriver from Shungnak. During the winter of 1885-1886, Stoney's crew established a system of triangulation over the valleys of the Kobuk and Selawik Rivers, mapping and exploring these regions. These explorations were the first recorded travels in the Waring Mountains. Because there is no higher point within 17 miles of Peak 2102, the rounded summit serves as a good vantage point to overlook the valleys of the

Kobuk and Selawik Rivers. A bench mark is located atop the peak.

The information for this article was obtained from Marcus Baker's 1906 [Geographic Dictionary of Alaska](#), from Donald J. Orth's 1967 [Dictionary of Alaska Place Names](#), and from Fred Waring's 2009 "Pioneer Waring Family," <http://jefferson.nygenweb.net/waringp.htm>.



NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

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## Cairns – Messengers in Stone

By David B. Williams

### Book Review

By Frank E. Baker

I'm sure most of us have seen piles of rocks called cairns during one outing or another. One of the largest I've ever seen was by Symphony Lake in the South Fork Valley (Eagle River). It was pyramidal in shape and about the size of a human being.

Now, in his book Cairns -- Messengers in Stone (The Mountaineer Books, 2012) author and geologist David B. Williams traces the history of cairns from the moors in Scotland, the pathways of Iceland, all the way to the peaks of the Himalaya.

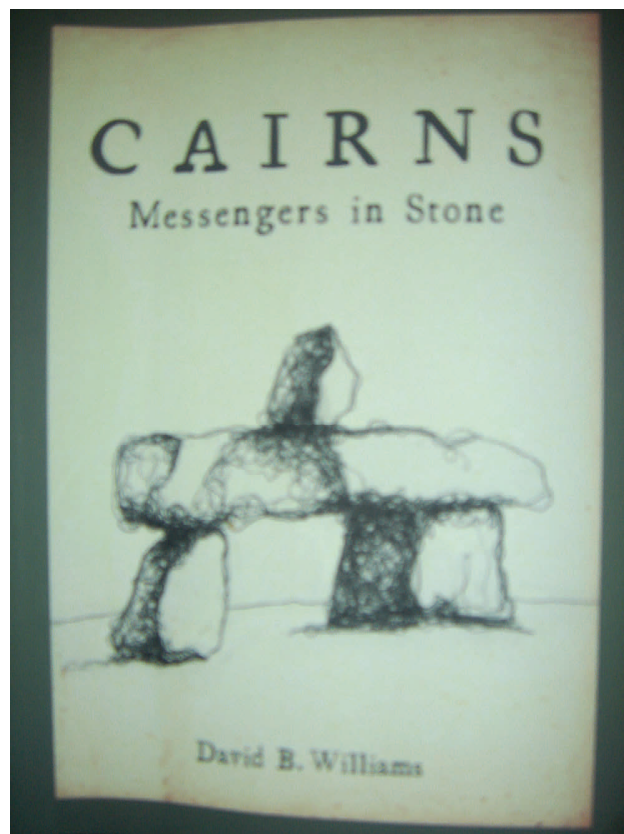
From meadows to mountaintops to wide-open desert, Williams delves deeply into the earliest origins of cairns, what they mean, how they are used, how to make them, and more.

For thousands of years, cairns have been used by people to connect the landscape and communicate with others, and are often an essential guide to travels. These man-made rock piles can indicate a trail, mark a grave, serve as an altar or shrine, reveal property boundaries, and even predict astronomical activity. The Inuit people of northern Canada, for example, have more than two dozen terms to describe cairns and their uses.

Complete with interesting black-and-white illustrations, this collection of stories about cairns, sweeps across a vast span of time, stirs the imagination and in general, is a very fun read. It reminded me of a large cairn on the Little Coal Creek trail en route to K'esugi Ridge, in Denali State Park. That distinctive cairn is topped with a piece of caribou antler and is a good landmark for finding the main trail if fog and clouds obscure the route.

Cairns tell many stories and I'm sure most MCA members have left cairns to recount a small piece of history on various backcountry trips.

Cairns -- Messengers in Stone (192 pages, \$15.95, ISBN 978-1-59485-681-5) is available through Mountaineers Books, [www.mountaineersbooks.org](http://www.mountaineersbooks.org).



### **Geographic Names**

At its November 8, 2012, meeting, the U.S. Board on Geographic Names' Domestic Names Committee voted to change the name of Negrohead Mountain to Tl'oo Hansyah Mountain. This 2809-foot peak is in the Kev-injik Creek and Rat Creek drainages of the Porcupine Plateau.

Additionally, the Alaska Historical Commission requested comments on four proposed geographic names, including a proposal to name a 2850-foot peak in the Log-jam Creek and Big Salt Lake drainages on Prince of Wales Island as Eichner Mountain to commemorate Kenneth Charles Eichner, a Ketchikan helicopter pilot. Contact the Alaska Historical Commission to submit comments on the proposed name.



## Mountaineering Club of Alaska

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Annual membership dues: Single \$15, Family \$20

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

The 'Scree' is a monthly publication of the Mountaineering Club of Alaska. Articles, notes and letters submitted for publication in the newsletter should be emailed to [MCAScree@gmail.com](mailto:MCAScree@gmail.com). Articles should be submitted by the 25<sup>th</sup> of the month to appear in the next month's *Scree*.

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

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

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