

the SCREE

Mountaineering Club

of Alaska

February 2017

Volume 60 Number 2



"Only if you have been in the deepest valley, can you ever know how magnificent it is to be on the highest mountain."

- Richard M. Nixon

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Joshua Foreman presents a random smattering of imagery encompassing skiing, climbing, and portraits of those who partake.

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, February 21,
at the BP Energy Center at 1014 Energy Court in 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

Josh Hutchison starting the second pitch of Bridal Veil Falls.
Photo by Pat Schmalix

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, February 21, at 6:30 p.m. Joshua Foreman presents a random smattering of imagery encompassing skiing, climbing, and portraits of those who partake.

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. Contact Greg at unknownhiker@alaska.net or 350-5146.

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 February MCA meeting.

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 February and March MCA meetings.

Choate's Chuckle

- Tom Choate

The falling climber who grabs his ice axe wrongly gets the shaft.

Online? Click me!



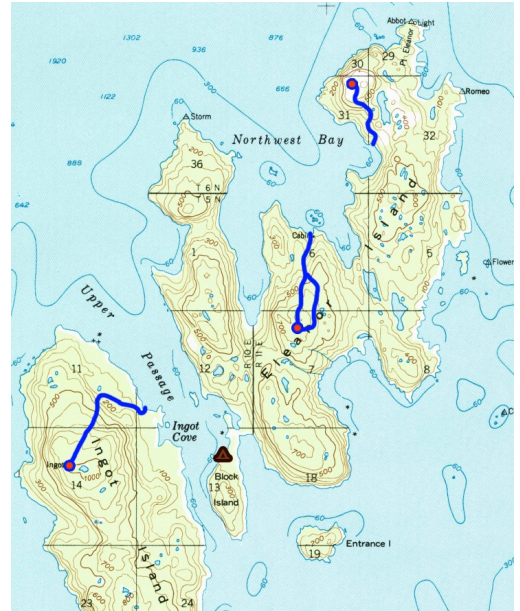
Check the Meetup site and Facebook for last minute trips and activities. Or, schedule one that you want to organize.

Peakbagging with a Gun

Text and photos by Lee Helzer



Peak 750 from the top of Eleanor Peak.

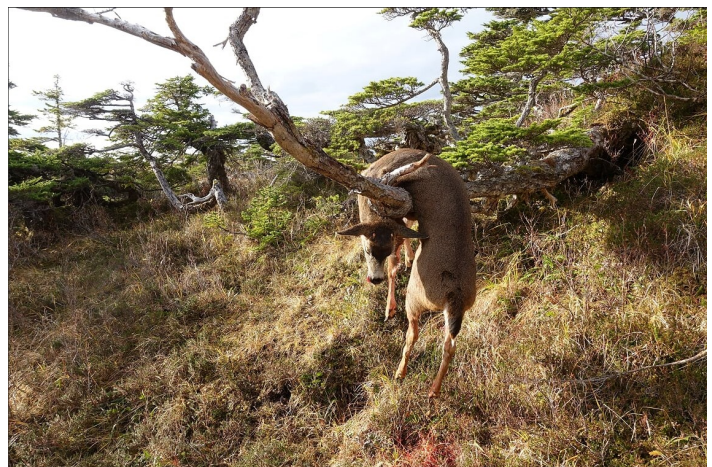


As many trips do, ours started in the dimly lit back corner of our favorite dive bar. A group of buddies were planning to boat out to Eleanor Island in Prince William Sound to go deer hunting for an extended weekend. One of the guys slated to go had a last-minute change of plans, opening up a spot. I'm not a hunter by any means, but I have gone on a few walks through the woods with a gun. I was about to pass, but I thought I'd check www.ListsofJohn.com to see if the island was big enough to have some good highpoints. Sure enough, there were three 500-plus-foot prominence points on the island and another on the neighboring Ingot Island. I was in; I could bag peaks and maybe take a shot at a deer. After a few more beers all the logistics were worked out.

A couple days later and a little delay from the Whittier Tunnel cave-in, we were on our way out to the island. We safely arrived to our anchorage with Admiral Nelson (aka Jon Cannon) at the helm. We set up camp on the southwest side of Block Island, a misnamed peninsula on the southernmost end of Eleanor Island.

The next morning the hunters in the party were setting out just as I was poking my head out of the tent to a beautiful sunrise. Admiral Nelson and I took a more relaxed approach to the morning. My plan was to get dropped off at the northern end of the island and bag highpoints all the way back to camp. I took my extra-large pack nearly empty with only the bare minimum hunting gear.

The Admiral taxied me around to the northern end of the island, where he skillfully dropped me off on the smallest of rock bars. I bushwhacked my way up, avoiding small cliffs, and after an hour or so I started reaching small clearings. I kept an eye out for deer, but none were around. I assumed I was making too much of a racket and just kept trudging up toward the northernmost high point. At around 550 feet, the trees disappeared and I could see the top. Just then a deer popped up about 10 yards in front of me. I think we both scared the bejesus out of each other. Of course, I had my gun strapped to the back of my pack. I dropped my pack and fumbled to get the gun ready, but by the time I got it free the deer had wisely retreated to the nearby thick underbrush and disappeared. I again looked



Just a little guy, hanging tight after field dressing, while Lee Helzer went to tag the summit of Peak 750.

up toward the high point of Peak 750 and figured I could just leave my pack here, tag the peak and come back. I grabbed my camera, gun, and GPS then headed up. Toward the top there were some small undulations, and with about 50 vertical feet to go, another deer popped up and darted up toward the summit. Ready this time, I scrambled for a better shooting position and shouldered my rifle. The deer continued up, turned broad side to me and froze. "This is the time!" I thought, took a deep breath, aimed, and pulled the trigger. Nothing happened. F--k! Forgot to take the safety off. I quickly slid the safety, exposing the red ring and repeated, but this time finishing with a loud bang. The deer immediately fell to the base of the small undulation. The shot was clean and deer dead by the time I reached it. I field dressed the young buck and hung it from a tree while I bagged the peak and returned. I managed to load the buck up in my pack and labored back down to the rocks where I had been dropped off. I InReach-messaged Admiral Nelson for a pickup.

An hour later we were loaded up. There was still enough time in the day to give a go at the island high point, 850-foot Eleanor Peak, so we boated over and I was dropped off near some cabin ruins. I followed a nice deer trail through relaxing meadows. I was able to keep linking up meadows nearly all the way to the top where a cliff separated me from the true high point. I scrambled down a short, but interesting rock band, then back up to the top. I returned to the boat via a slightly different route, which included topping out on a small high point overlooking the bay.

The next day brought low clouds and a light, but persistent rain. The Admiral and I ferried the other hunters around to the west side of the island, then headed the short distance south to Ingot Island, where we had good beta on a relatively brush-free route up to the island high point, 1050-foot Ingot Peak. We worked our way through some light bushwhacking and then followed meadows up to a cold, windy summit. The deer were smartly hunkered

down out of the wind and rain. We didn't see a deer, despite our sneakiest walking, so we returned to the boat.



The Admiral (Jon Cannon) working his way down from Ingot Peak on the northeast side of Ingot Island.

The Admiral (Jon Cannon), fully clad in Grundens and rifle shouldered, working up a very moist Ingot Peak.



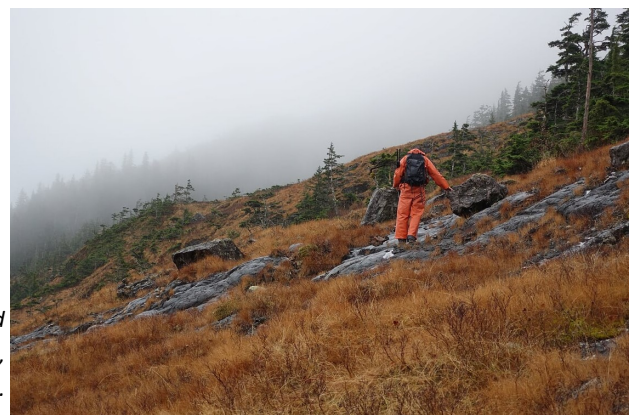
View south from Peak 750 looking toward Eleanor Peak.



A mink kit checking things out while Lee Helzer waited for The Admiral (Jon Cannon) to pick him up.



The cliff and small ravine visible from the summit of Eleanor Peak.



Central Tower of Rapa Nui: “The Northern Belle”

Text by Tyler Botzon, photos by Will Wacker

On June 18 Chris Moore, Cooper Varney, Will Wacker, and I completed the first ascent of the Central Tower of Rapa Nui (7015). That formation was the centerpiece of a collection of granite towers two miles east of Klukwah Mountain (7050), to the north of Haines.

The Central Tower caught my eye while scouting for rock around Haines by air and ground over the past three years. I began that search after reading Will Wacker’s report that exposed the area he called Rapa Nui (see page 162 of the 2013 *American Alpine Journal*). I’d since become fully obsessed with the broad exploration of climbing in that part of Alaska.

All the rock towers in that region were truly remote, and ski-plane access was what made that whole dream possible. Drake Olson, the owner and operator of Fly Drake, had been with us every step of the way. In the same spirit that alpinists heard the calling toward unclimbed terrain, Drake enjoyed the challenge of finding new landing zones in those unexplored areas. He’s a pure adventurer and was the best and only option for climbing access in that emerging area.

After flying in on June 9 and establishing our base camp on an unnamed glacier below our objective, we got right to work, utilizing the endless light of the Alaskan summer. Over several days we worked through mostly marginal weather, pushing our high point up through immaculate steep, white granite. We deployed a capsule-style tactic for the first two-thirds of the route. We’d work the pitches free during the warm hours of the day, establish a high point by evening, then rappel down to our skis and ride back to base camp at night.

A few nights before the mythical full-moon summer solstice of 2016, we set up our portaledges high on the tower and enjoyed incredible views of the Fairweather Range. The following day we established two more pitches to the top, completing “The Northern Belle” (1,500 feet of climbing, V 5.11+ A2 50°). The route featured a 300-foot approach pitch of snow, followed by seven long pitches of pure rock. It was our intention to establish a pure free line to the top, but we were forced to aid a steep headwall section at A2. I’m positive that under the right conditions a variation could be established around that section, which could turn that climb into one of the wildest, steepest, and cleanest free routes in Alaska. The free climbing crux was the steep 220-foot third pitch – made up of sustained, sport-like climbing on gear and bolts through highly featured terrain (5.11+). All the belays were bolted and equipped for rappelling.



The Central Tower of Rapa Nui, the most prominent formation in a cluster of granite spires outside of Haines. “The Northern Belle” (1,500 feet, V 5.11+ A2 50 degrees) on the right-hand snow ramp and follows weaknesses up the right side of the tower.

That was one of the best trips any of us had ever been on, and each team member had to draw upon all of his past experiences to make our goal a reality. Seeing our strategies, teamwork, and climbing skills prove effective left us even more inspired than before. That was certainly just one of many more expeditions to come in that powerfully beautiful area of Alaska.

View more photos at:

<http://publications.americanalpineclub.org/articles/13201213964/Central-Tower-of-Rapa-Nui-The-Northern-Belle>



Cooper Varney rappelling the Central Tower of Rapa Nui under the bright Alaskan summer sun.

Chris Moore on the fourth pitch of “The Northern Belle” (1,500 feet, V 5.11+ A2 50 degrees), which Tyler Botzon, Cooper Varney, Will Wacker, and he completed capsule style over nine days in June 2016.

The Lessons I Learned from Not Summiting Mount Whitney

Text and photos by Sway Soturi



Lone Pine Lake.

As I rushed forward on Cottonwood Pass Trail, a sense of calm and peace filled my heart. Perhaps it was the thought that I would soon be united with my family. Perhaps it was the sun's ray piercing through the forest by Horseshoe Meadow, casting beautiful warmth. Perhaps it was me stepping over the last creek on my 40-mile journey, grateful for what Nature had provided for me, feeling content.

It all started on Tuesday, September 13th, 2016. The day we checked out of the hotel we stayed the night prior in the small town of Lone Pine. Damian Mark (my man), Lucious Mark (my son), and I drove our car north to Onion Valley, where we were supposed to end our five-day (originally four-day) backpacking trip. It started snowing soon after our arrival. It was beautiful. And then we locked our car key in the car. Instead of trying to figure out how to get the key out, we decided to enjoy our trip and get into the shuttle van where our driver Tanner dropped the three of us off at Whitney Portal, base camp #1 at a little over 8000

feet. From there, we started our hike toward the top. Each of us had our own backpack, mine weighed about 50 pounds (What the f--k was I thinking?). Lucious quickly began his whining and I forged up, leaving behind Dad and boy to their "negotiations." After a couple of hours I arrived at the sign pointing to Lone Pine Lake. Straight ahead of me, I could see a couple of hikers coming down the trail passing by a couple of deer.

"Are you guys heading down?" I asked. "Yeah!" they replied.

"Could you please do me a huge favor?" I said.

"Sure!"

"My husband and my son are on their way up, would you please tell them to turn down to Lone Pine Lake when you see them on your way down?"

"Of course, no problem!" the two gentlemen replied happily and moved on.

I turned down the lake trail and soon was greeted by a magnifi-



Lucious (left) and Damian Mark.

cent view of Lone Pine Lake. It turned out that Lucious started showing symptoms of altitude sickness - vomiting, so we camped by the lake for the first night, elevation about 9000 feet.

Wednesday, September 14th, 2016. It was Damian's 40th birthday. This was his birthday trip. But now we had a decision to make. Obviously our son was not physically able to move on to 14505 feet; would we turn back as a family? Or would I hike on my own? It was a hard choice. I would have loved to stay with the boys; it was Damian's birthday, after all. But with a huge project ahead of me, I did not foresee any more time off in the near future. And so we said our "See ya soon," and up I went.

Lesson #1 – Sometimes you have to make the hard decisions.

The goal of Wednesday was to make it to Trail Camp, elevation 12000 feet. It took me about four hours, but eventually I arrived at Trail Camp, considered base camp #2. Most overnight hikers would make it up there, camp for a night, summit Mount Whitney the next day, and then go back down to Whitney Portal. However, my itinerary was much longer than that. I planned on summit, descent on the other side of the mountain, and finish up my hike at Onion Valley. Immediately I scouted a campsite, claimed it by setting down my heavy-ass backpack on the spot. (If your plan is staying over there, keep in mind that that campsite gets crowded.)

Then I took off my boots and socks, walked about 60 seconds down to the lake with my bare feet and plunged them into the cold water. I slowly situated my butt on a rock and began to cry ... I felt lonely. The supposed birthday hike with my partner of eight years had suddenly turned into a "woman-up, tough-luck-with-your-amateur-backpacking-skills-out-in-the-middle-of-nowhere" adventure, and "oh, by the way, don't forget your backpack weighs 50 pounds; have fun!" I was not afraid of being in the wild, after all, this was what I'd dreamed of doing for so long, but I missed my boys. I missed that one of us would set up the tent and one

of us would make food while the crazy little person ran around acting like a crazy little person.



The Trail split offs. The North Fork of Lone Pine Creek is the "Mountaineers Route."

"Time to get back and set up my tent, make dinner, and turn in early, as tomorrow is a big day," I thought to myself, not realizing "big" was not big enough of a word to describe what was to follow the day after. I filled up my water pouches and headed back. One of the hikers saw how full my hands were and offered to help, one of many kindnesses I encountered on the trail. I later made him miso soup as a thank you.

As I was setting up my two-person REI tent, four women hiked up and one of them recognized me from the small climbing store in town. We started chatting about how Damian and Lucious had to turn back and I gave them a hand on the finishing touches of their tent setups. Feeling lonely, I grabbed my freeze-dried pouch and invited myself over to dinner with the ladies. I had gluten-free penne that night, which was not very tasty. Lights out was 7 p.m. I cried a little before dozing off.



Dinner, socks, and marmot. There is a yellow glow stick left behind by Lucious that Sway Soturi carried around for the remainder of her trip.

It was cold, but not as cold as the first night. Soon I woke up with a pounding headache like nothing I'd ever experienced before; "11 p.m." said my iPhone. And so I caught the altitude sickness at 12000 feet. It was dark out. "I don't think I can summit tomorrow if this persists." I took out the emergency-aid kit in the side pocket of my backpack, hoping to find some type of headache meds within. "YES!" Neatly laid in the pouch were two small packets of non-aspirin. I didn't think I'd ever been so happy to take those tiny little pills. I laid back into my sleeping bag like a mummy with my hat and gloves on, tightly zipped all the way up

to my face, and closed my eyes. I knew I had to wake in just few more hours and I needed all the rest I could get.

I was woken by the sounds of hikers unzipping and zipping their tents. I looked at the time – 3:00 a.m. Still dark. I unzipped my sleeping bag and sat up. Technically my alarm would not have gone off for another 30 minutes. But I felt good. The headache was gone; I felt energized, regardless of the little food I had at

dinner. "All right, let's do this!" I put on my headlamp, which I had set out the night before for easy access, and went to work on making some hot water. I made some coffee and gooey eggs (they were gooey because I didn't read the instruction correctly). Then, it happened ... I had to go number two. For those who have not been on the Mount Whitney Trail before, this is what's up: due to the popularity of the trail, everyone is required to carry a "wag bag." Yes, you poop in a bag and stuff it back into your backpack and carry it with you until you leave the trail. Yes, that's how we keep that place beautiful. So, at the most crowded campsite, where the f--k do you go to lay out your nice-ass wag bag and do your business? Anyway...

I quickly broke camp and repacked my backpack, made sure I had enough water for the next hike, and set out in the dark onto the infamous 99 switchbacks of the Mount Whitney Trail. Soon the sun started to rise and it was incredible....ly heavy with my backpack. Seven out of 10 hikers passing would make a comment about it and I would reply with, "Yeah, it's heavy" or "Um, 40 or 50 pounds?" or "Well, I'm not coming back down this way." Most of the hikers would leave their stuff behind at Trail Camp, carrying only enough water and food for the summit, descend, break camp, and go down to Whitney Portal. However, my plan was to finish my trip hiking the John Muir Trail, which began on the west side of Mount Whitney. Each step was coupled with great effort. The encouragement of other hikers pressed me on. By the time I reached Trail Crest, about 13800 feet, I was spent. It had been six hours. I felt I made little progress. I had met Jesse (thanks for the ibuprofen), who was showing a bit of altitude sickness and decided to stop at Trail Crest, forgoing the last two miles to the summit. I had made the same decision, uncertain if the four-mile round trip to the top would benefit the rest of my trip. I had a timeline to follow, after all. And so we bid our goodbyes and went on our separate ways.



The beautiful sunrise.

Lesson #2 – You meet people along the way, and most of the time they are glad to lend a hand, especially if you have the same goals or ideas.

Lesson #3 – When something does not support the bigger picture or the long-term goal, don't be afraid to change course, even if it may pain you to do so. It is best in the long run.



Two miles up to Mount Whitney's summit.

The scene of downhill hiking was so welcoming that I completely forgot about the pain from my hips. I guessed I could be skipping down singing merrily if not for my heavy-ass pack. The hike down was pretty easy after the six-hour climb on the east side. But I was running out of water. I could see lakes

from where I stood, so I kept on, passing a marmot taking a sun bath. Then I had to... again... Imagine this: you are on the side of a mountain (Mount Whitney, in this case). There is the trail you are traveling on, that's it, nothing and nowhere else. Where do you go? Lucky for me, the trail on the west side is less traveled (but you gotta "time it" right, regardless).

I stopped by the first water source, which was a pond, filtered some water and made lunch. Lunch was not very appetizing... So, I supplemented with a green smoothie. (Yes, I love my greens so much I made sure they would be available to me no matter what. That, ladies and gentlemen, is dedication.)

Lesson #4 – Do your research on your food before heading out. Actually cooking a pouch of freeze-dried food (for each brand) at home to make sure you can stomach it.

Time to move. I repacked my backpack and onto the John Muir Trail I hiked. I'd wanted to get on the JMT and the Pacific Crest Trail for quite a while, so I was really happy to be walking along that famous trail. My goal for the day was to get to Crabtree campsite. I heard there was a "restroom" at said site. The sun was starting to set. I kept re-checking my map to see how much progress I had made. I hoped that I was close, because night hikes were just not that appealing to me. I heard footsteps approaching behind me, and there he was: the gentleman I had crossed path with on the west side of Whitney. He had men-

tioned that he was camped at Crabtree and invited me to stop by if I made my way there. He introduced himself as NTN (No Trail Name [*Ed. note: Also known as Shaun Sexton*]). I followed him to Crabtree; he showed me his tent and invited me to set up close by. It turned out that he was from Alaska, retired, and had been hiking the PCT for a while and had covered about 1,500 miles. We had dinner together and talked about our hiking plans. I told NTN that I was planning to hike through Kearsarge Pass and exit Onion Valley on Saturday.

"You'll have to hike through Forester Pass, which is back up to 13000 feet," said NTN.

"Well, I really don't wanna do that after today's climb..." I replied.

"It's unlikely you'll get out by Saturday if you stick with your original route," he said.

And so we went on looking at the maps, trying to figure out what other trails I could take to leave the park on time. I had no cell reception and there was no way to get in contact with the boys. We decided that in the morning we would talk to the ranger at Crabtree to see if he had any suggestions and communication with the outside world. Therefore a partnership was created.

Oh, by the way, did I mention that I got to pee in a toilet?



You don't need to dig your own holes with this thing around!

Lesson #5 – When others offer you help, take it. Especially if they have walked the path before you.

Day 4. I slept in compared to the day before. I didn't get out of my sleeping bag until it was actually light out. It was much needed. I was glad the 10 tough miles on Day 3 were behind me. I said good morning to NTN and boiled some water for us for coffee. Then I looked at my trash bag and decided that some of that stuff can go into the toilet to lighten my load. The half-eaten food and, um, whatever was in the wag bag. I dumped

whatever I could down in the hole, tossed the non-compostables back in the trash bag, and sighed with relief. "Hopefully two pounds lighter," I thought to myself.

"Horseshoe Meadow is actually only 20 miles away," NTN stated, realizing that the route he had planned for himself was 10 miles shorter than originally anticipated.

"You are welcome to join me if you like; we get there by Saturday morning."

"That would be amazing!" I replied, glad that a solution was found.

Lesson #6 – There are different paths that will lead you to the same destination, some will be easier, some will be harder; some will be shorter, some will be longer. All you need is a bit of flexibility.

I did my best to break camp as soon as I could, but I was moving slowly. I was tired, wishing I could just sit around for a little bit longer. As much as I enjoyed being self sustaining and being in the wild. It was taking a toll on my body. I didn't train for 10-mile-a-day hikes. I was undernourished. But at least now I was not alone. I had a new hiking partner. NTN and I walked toward the ranger station and were informed by another hiker that the ranger was out on patrol duty and would not return for a few more days. So NTN whipped out his GPS device and said, "Try to send a message to your husband with this; hopefully it'll work."

"Hi Love, it's Sway. I'm using NTN's GPS. Will not arrive at Onion Valley tomorrow. Be at Horseshoe Meadow instead. ETA noon. Reply to confirm," and pressed the send button.

Back on the PCT we went, along the beautiful creek, with my heavy backpack still on my back. Minus the wag.

We decided to hike to Rock Creek for lunch, which was about five miles from Crabtree. On the way we met a nice family of four; we stopped for snacks and chats then headed to Rock Creek. While there we chatted with other hikers who were setting up camp for the remaining day and checked the GPS to see if Damian had gotten my message.

"Horsehair Meadow," said a reply text, which put a big smile both on my face and in my heart.

After restocking some water supply, NTN and I continued moving forward, we had to make it to Soldier Lake to camp for the night. We passed a beautiful meadow when the sun started to set, casting a photo-perfect image with the grazing family of deer in it. Regardless of being in his sixties, NTN was trailblazing in front of me for most of the trip. Seeing my struggle, he offered to switch packs to lighten my load. Boy, did this guy know how to pack for the backcountry, I hoisted NTN's back-

pack on my shoulders and immediately let out a sigh of relieve, glad to have half of the weight off of my back.

Soon we saw the bear vaults and knew that the night's rest was close by. We made it just in time before the dark sky completely took over and went down to the creek for water to make dinner: miso soup and more freeze-dried pouches!



One of the meadow passings.

Day 5. I woke to the sound of the alarm urging me to get up and get on with my day. Although pretty tired, I was also eager and excited, as this was the day that I would sleep in a real bed, eat some real food, and use a real toilet! I excitedly made the rest of my egg crystals for NTN and me to fuel for the day's hike.

First stop, Chicken Spring Lake, about five miles without water source. I realized my snack source was scarce so I dumped the rest of my chia seeds in my water bottle for some sustained energy along the way. We broke camp and made our way back on the PCT and followed the trail toward our destination. It started off with a lot of climbing, again... We were passed by two pack teams of horses, which was super fun (and got me kinda jealous)! I made a joke to the man leading the first pack team about giving me a ride, but he didn't seem to be amused... My steps were heavy, but the PCT was beautiful, and as soon as I got to the top (at this point NTN was probably waiting for me at the lake already), I stopped for a few minutes to take it all in. "It is all worth it..." I thought, my emotions took over and tears once again ran down my face. The sun, the smell, the trees, the cold nights, the lack of water, the aches, it was all worth it.

Lesson #7 – The climb might be hard, but the journey and the view – oh, how amazing the view atop!

Smiley soon became my best friend as I looked down to see Chicken Spring Lake, I started booking down the trail, as at this point I had already consumed all of my supply. I was thirsty and

hungry. I had never been so happy to see water; even if it was still a hike away, the view of it gave hope.

Lo and behold, the sight of NTN sitting and chilling on a tree log entered the view. This kind soul promptly offered his freshly filtered water to me, reminding me to not be shy, as there was a huge supply close by. I quickly gulped down the bottle and went on to fetch more. The only snack I had left for the day (energy jelly beans) was already digesting in my tummy at that point, so I took courage and asked NTN if he had any additional snacks I could have. He gladly handed me a power bar, which I gobbled down within a couple of minutes, yum.

After a short rest we headed back on the trail again, the hardest part of the day was over. I was leading this time around, because it was mostly downhill, yay! After about 15 minutes, we came upon the signs with the trail split offs. I had decided to take Cottonwood Pass, so I could be out of the wilderness a couple of hours earlier. For NTN, it was best for him to stay on the PCT for a little longer to re-connect back on the trail after the weekend. So we exchanged big hugs with each other and said quick goodbyes, and I promised to come back to give him a ride to town in the evening.



Sway Soturi takes a selfie with guardian trail angel NTN (aka Shaun Sexton).

Lesson #8 – We may not have the same goals or destinations, but that doesn't mean we can't offer support to each other for some parts of the journey.

The descent on Cottonwood Pass and the thought of reuniting with my boys brought plenty of joy to my heart. With each step I took toward modern convenience, I reflected. The mental and physical challenges in the past few days presented the opportunity for growth in self-awareness and spirituality. The kindness I had received from numerous strangers and Mother Nature was truly affirming. I was full of hope. I was humbled. I was so, so grateful.

With each step I took, I was holding on. I was keeping the smell of the trees and dirt close to my heart. I was holding onto the feelings of the wind caressing my face and my arms. I was holding on to those lessons I'd just learned.

With each step I took, I was letting go. I was crushing all the burdens underneath my feet. I was letting go of years of fear and uncertainty. I was letting go of those lessons of "success" that were taught to me growing up (those lessons didn't mean s--t when you were out there by the way).

After about an hour of hiking, I came to the bottom of the mountain, I was already running behind the timeline I had told the boys, so I sped up. It was truly a bittersweet moment. Oh, did I mention that I saw a couple more hot guys on horses?

As I walked toward the clearing of the meadow, confused by the different sets of footprints going two separate directions, "You must be kidding me!" I said out loud to myself. But I soon recognized the makeshift arrow sign that pointed to the right passage. I charged on and knew that I was close to the trail-head when I started passing more and more hikers.

And there it was, the first sign pointing to the parking lot, I got emotional again and started to tear up. My steps quick-

ened. Soon I would make out the outlines of cars and the color of the asphalt; soon I would be hugging my husband and my son; soon I would be eating hot fries and fresh salad and sleeping in a warm bed.

It was truly a bittersweet moment.



This makeshift arrow saved Sway Soturi a couple of hours of getting lost.



The MCA's Pete Panarese basks in the setting sun on December 10, 2016, atop 5001-foot Harp Mountain above South Fork Valley, near Eagle River. Mount Yukla and the other big guys are to the east.

Photo by Frank E. Baker

Valdez Ice

Text and photos by Pat Schmalix

Date: February 13, 2015



Bridal Veil Falls (right) and "Keystone Greensteps" (left) being attacked during the Valdez Ice Fest.

Photo by Pat Schmalix

After last year's trip we decided that there was so much ice in Valdez that we would skip climbing in the Anchorage area and spend the entire time in Valdez. We still wanted to hit the born-again Valdez Ice Fest over Presidents' Day weekend, so we skipped out on work on Friday and flew out that morning.

Researching rental cars, I found out it would be \$110 a day to rent a car in Valdez or \$210 for the entire week out of Anchorage. This, added with the extra cost into flying into and out of Valdez, made the decision easy. We flew into Anchorage and would be driving to Valdez.

Becky Hutchison, Josh Hutchison's wife, was going to join us for the first part of the trip this year. Because she wasn't staying the whole time her ticket was to fly into and out of Valdez. The three of us left Sacramento on the same flight. In Seattle Josh and I were flying direct to Anchorage while Becky took the "milk run" through Juneau. This would allow us to arrive in Valdez all about the same time. Turns out our flight in Seattle

had mechanical problems. After the delay we all ended up in Anchorage within 5 minutes of each other. Becky decided to join us for the ride instead of flying to Valdez. When reserving the rental car I opted for a compact, thinking the only time the three of us would be in the car together was headed to the

climbs and back. Once seeing the rental car we all laughed. It was more of a roller skate with a steering wheel than a car. It took us a while to get everything packed into the car and we headed out, calling Moose's Tooth and ordering pizza for the road. The drive was uneventful and we got into Valdez around 10:30 that night, making for a long day.

Day 1

It was the first day of the Ice Fest, so we headed out to Keystone Canyon early and jumped on some top ropes that were set up on the first pitch of Bridal Veil Falls. During our first lap a few others started showing up. By the time we got our second lap in, it was downright crowded, so we decided to head out to 19-Mile Wall.



Bridal Veil Falls with "Glass Onion" at upper right.

Photo by Pat Schmalix

When we got out there we got excited to see that there was a trail heading up the hill. Unfortunately that was short-lived, as we noticed it was a snowshoe trail and we didn't have snowshoes. We post-holed up the hillside for about 45 minutes to the base of "Oosik" (WI4, 90 meters). I set up a top rope on the bottom 30 meters and we each ran a few laps. Becky told Josh and me that we could top out if we wanted to. Josh gave me the lead and I continued above our anchor to increasingly steeper ice.

After getting to the car, we decided to see if there was anything open to climb. We headed back into Keystone Canyon and saw "Triangle in the Cleft" (WI3, 30 meters) was free. Becky stayed in the car while Josh and I headed up to it. Josh took the lead up some thin ice. He got up about 20 meters and decided there wasn't much worth climbing above him. He put a couple screws in and lowered off. I climbed up to the screws and decided to continue up just for the hell of it. I found a couple V-threads and brought Josh up. We rappelled back down and headed to the car.

We went to the Ice Fest party that night at the Visitors Center where some awesome prizes were given out. We split before the dance party began.

Day 2

We woke up and headed into Keystone Canyon hoping to get on "Hung Jury" (WI4, 55 meters), but when we got there we noticed a couple heading up to it. We decided to climb Horsetail Falls (WI3, 80 meters) because Josh and Becky had never done it and it was right there. I gave Josh the lead, as I led it my first trip to Valdez several years ago. It was pretty much an uneventful climb except for one 15-foot section leading up through a couple bells. When

we were rappelling after we reached the top, others showed up to enjoy the top ropes set up by the Ice Fest crew.



Josh Hutchison and Becky Hutchison gearing up to climb "Hung Jury."

Photo by Pat Schmalix

We cleaned up and headed over to "Hung Jury" where the first party was just topping out. We decided to start the climb under the bells instead of on the right side. Josh started up, being protected by the bells as the party above rappelled. When they started below us Josh waited for them to get all the way down to the river so we wouldn't knock ice down on them. While Josh was leading another party showed up, they went to the right side and impatiently waited for us to finish, constantly looking around the corner and up at Josh, trying to rush us. Once Josh made it to the top Becky and I started climbing. I love this climb and you can't describe what it's like climbing through and around the bells. We made it down and headed to the car. As we drove by the climb, we all had a good laugh as the guy that was in such a hurry for us to

get done wasn't going any faster than Josh was.

We headed to "Hole in the Wall" to get on one of the climbs that we didn't climb last year, "Dire Straits" (WI4+, 50 meters). Josh decided to give me the lead, even though this was the route he had wanted ever since he saw it last year. I left my hardshell at the hotel and the climb was running with water. I gave it a go, but was soaking wet and miserable about 30 feet up. The climbing got a little harder just above me, so I slung an icicle and equalized it with a screw and lowered off. Josh pulled off an awesome lead and finished the route. I was so wet I didn't want to climb it, so he rappelled off a V-thread and we headed to the hotel.

That night was the bonfire at Nick Weicht's place. It was definitely an Alaska-size fire!



Josh Hutchison rappelling "Rain Check."

Photo by Pat Schmalix

They counted more than 160 people that attended the Ice Fest with 15 to 20 of us from out of state.

Day 3

We headed out to Bear Creek in the rain and got on "Rain Check" (WI4, 90 meters). If you read my report of our 2014 trip, you know that we started up this climb and backed off due to fatigue from climbing for nine days straight. We thought the name fit, as we took a rain check last year on it and it was raining at the base. I took the lead and got to where the top split into two curtains. I set up a belay and brought Josh and Becky up. I continued the lead up the right curtain to the spruce tree at the top of the climb. Standing under the tree belaying them up was the warmest and driest I was all day. While belaying them up I counted three or four slides coming down the hillside farther up canyon. Once we were on the ground we were all soaking wet and decided to call it a day. I needed that lead after backing off the climb the previous day.

Day 4

We woke up early, as Becky was flying out that morning. The weather had other plans and the plane couldn't get in, so she was rescheduled for that evening and we went climbing. We headed into Keystone Canyon again and headed up to "Simple Twist of Fate" (WI5-, 75 meters). Josh led the first pitch that was mostly snow slogging. He gave me the second pitch that was steep, blue, hero ice. It was a fun and challenging lead, especially with the water trickling down it.

Once Josh and Becky came up, we rapped down and headed over to "Piece of Shit" (WI3, 25 meters). Josh led up and slung a top rope and we each ran several laps on it. Josh ended up leading the steeper section for the last climb of the day.

We headed to the hotel and got cleaned up before driving out to the airport again. This time, after waiting for two hours, the Scree—February 2017

plane never left Anchorage. Welcome to traveling in Alaska!

Day 5

Again we woke up early and got Becky to the airport. That time she made it out. Josh and I went straight to Bridal Veil Falls (WI5, 185 meters) from the airport. I led the first pitch, making a detour way to the left to avoid a waterfall dripping down the side, getting to the bolts behind the second-pitch curtain. Josh combined the second and third pitches, which started with an exposed step around to the front side of the curtain and upwardly traversed right. I led the third pitch, the "Killer Pillar," which was far less intimidating that year than the name implied. Josh finished the climb with the fourth pitch and we rapped off V-threads. We were both stoked and adrenalin was flowing, because we decided to find some more ice to climb. We headed up toward Thompson Pass, but by the time we got there, the adrenalin had worn off and we decided to call it a day.



*Josh Hutchison and Becky Hutchison coming up "Simple Twist of Fate."
Photo by Pat Schmalix*



*Pat Schmalix on Pitch Three, the "Killer Pillar," of Bridal Veil Falls.
Photo by Josh Hutchison*

Day 6

We started off by hiking into Sheep Creek to check out a couple climbs. We were amazed with how little ice there was in there compared to 2014. "Spring Loaded" was pretty much non-existent. We dropped our packs a way in and skirted around some avalanche debris to take a look at some ice farther up the canyon. I had an uneasy feeling while we were up there. After scouting around and getting back to our packs we decided to pass and head up to Thompson Pass for some roadside climbing. Nothing too tall, but exactly what we needed. We each did five or six routes, one would lead it, we'd pull the rope and the other would lead it with screws in place and get lowered and immediately run up it on top rope, then the first person

would go up on top rope and pull the anchor, making for a lot of climbing for only a few routes. On the way back, we took a good look at the slopes above Sheep Creek, discussing the avalanche potential.

Day 7

The avalanche conditions went down from considerable to moderate, so we discussed going back to into Sheep Creek. We decided that as long as the sun stayed behind the clouds we would be good. We hiked back in and looked at “Tsuru Gane” (WI6-, 170 meters) and “Secret Journey” (WI5, 170 meters). We decided to jump on “Tsuru Gane,” as we felt we needed to climb it early before it warmed up. Josh took the first pitch with snow-covered rotten ice. The second pitch was pretty mellow and a lot of snow slogging. Once at the top of the second pitch we could see the hollow pillar wasn’t formed (not that we would have climbed it anyway). We decided to traverse to the left onto “Tokyo Express” to finish. Josh had a stellar lead on the third pitch, used to traverse over. More rotten ice covered with snow, only steeper than the first pitch. Once I got over to Josh, I took the “easier” line to the top of “Tokyo Express.”

Day 8

We left Valdez for Anchorage around 9:30 a.m. We ran into all kinds of weather on the trip – snow, freezing rain, rain on top of compacted snow, and blue, sunny skies. It delayed us a bit, but we got to town in time to swing by Alaska Mountaineering & Hiking, Moose’s Tooth, and even caught a hockey game before calling it a night.

Day 9

We were at the airport by 9:30 a.m. and had an uneventful flight home.

Gear Notes:

Ten to 12 screws

Approach Notes:

Alaska Air and Dollar Rent-a-Car

Snowshoes would have made it a lot easier to get to some routes!



Josh Hutchison on the traversing Pitch Three of “Tokyo Express.” Apparently the ice on the right touches down to form the top of “Tsuru Gane.”

Photo by Pat Schmalix



Clouds lie in Ship Creek Valley on a cold winter day.

Photo by Frank E. Baker

Yosemite Valley Ice - "Widow's Tears"

Text and photos by Pat Schmalix

December 31, 2015

Great climbing partners always know how to get you out climbing. Three days after we got back from our Ouray trip I got a text from Josh Hutchison saying:

"So serious question....

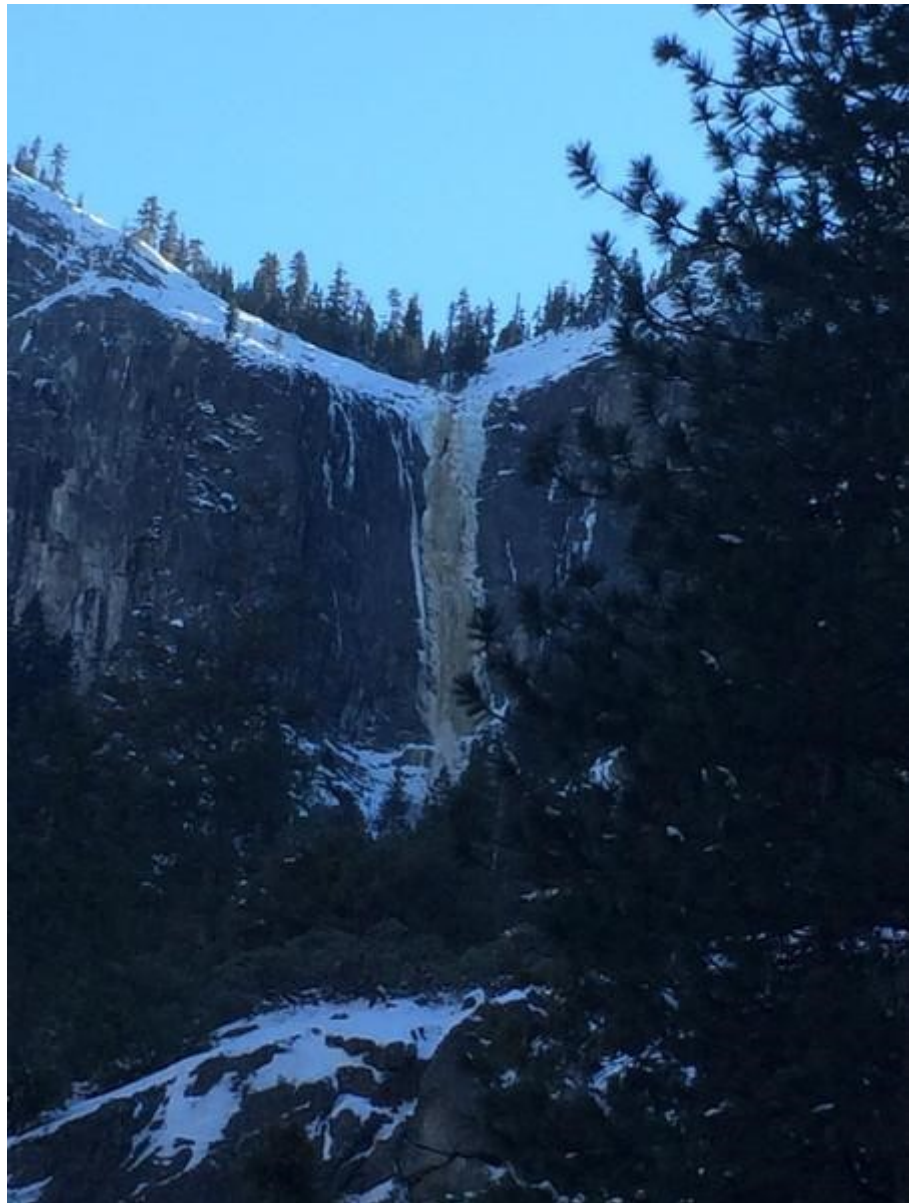
'Silver Strand' on the 27th or 28th?"

He didn't even ask if I wanted to go, just knew I would be on board! Problem was my wife Ginny and I had just made plans to go visit some friends stationed in Oregon the 25th to the 28th. I told him it would have to wait until the 30th to the 1st and asked if the weather would stay cold until then. His response was "Hopefully it doesn't get too warm."

Now for an explanation of "Silver Strand:" It is located in Yosemite Valley and only forms up every couple years. It is rated WI5 and is approximately four pitches. It hasn't seen that many ascents and is a sought-after climb when it is in. That was about all I knew about the climb when I agreed to go and still pretty much all I know about it.

I started to get sick on our previous trip and was still not feeling good. I tried doing some backcountry skiing with poor results. I was short of breath and even got light headed for a little bit. Ginny kept asking me to go to the doctor, but I kept putting it off because I didn't want to be restricted to the house during my days off work. To be honest, I questioned if I should be attempting this climb. I was nervous, to say the least.

We agreed that we wanted to get down to the valley early and get a look at it and possibly hike up to the base so we wouldn't get lost in the dark on our early-morning start. We left Sacramento around 7:30 a.m. for the three-hour drive. Getting there around 11:00, we drove straight to the east entrance of the Wawona Tunnel to get a good look at it. It looked big, but doable. We drove to another area of the park to get a look at it, but in doing so we saw a climb called "Widow's Tears" (WI5). We looked at both of the climbs from across the valley and they



"Silver Strand" from the Wawona Tunnel.

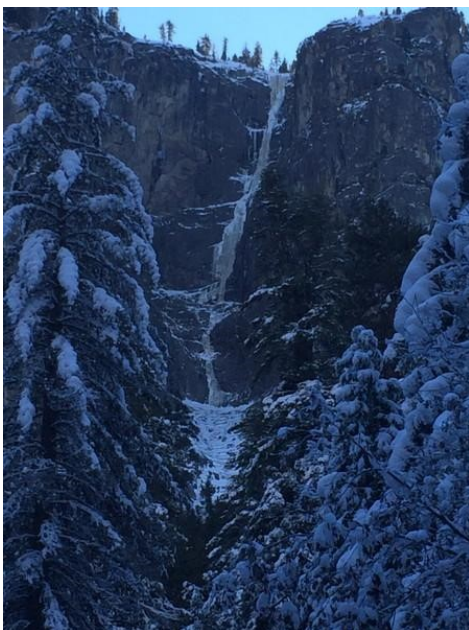
both looked huge, with "Widow's Tears" obviously being longer. We decided to hike up to the base of "Silver Strand" and set the trail. We went back to the Wawona Tunnel and started up the Inspiration Point Trail. After a few minutes we cut off the trail toward the climb, crossing an old road. After a while, we realized that it would be better to take the old road to just below the climb and head straight up from there. We headed back down to the road where I went to get the car and moved it to the Bridal Veil Falls parking area and Josh scouted out the route to the base of "Silver Strand."



View of the Valley from the Wawona Tunnel.

It took him much longer than I figured it would, and after a while I started to hike up to meet him. He said he went to the base of both “Silver Strand” and “Widow’s Tears.” All he really said was “Widow’s Tears” looked doable and it took him 19 minutes to get from the base to where we met. I asked if it looked doable, or doable for us, without getting an answer.

Seeing that I knew little about “Silver Strand” before heading down to climb it, I knew even less about “Widow’s Tears” except it was longer and came in less frequently. We talked about what we were going to do for several hours. Our biggest fear was to climb into crappy ice and not be able to retreat if we wanted. After dinner Josh said that he wanted to give “Widow’s Tears” a try. Hesitantly, I agreed, not really knowing what I agreed to.



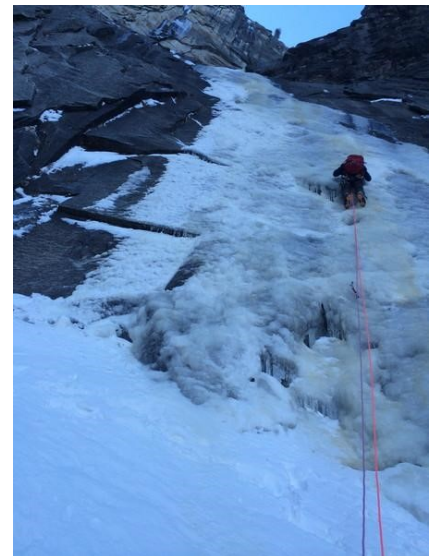
“Widow’s Tears.”

We woke up at 5 a.m. and had breakfast, packed up our camp, and headed to the parking area. When we arrived there was a van in the parking area and a few expletives came out. We changed into our boots, grabbed our packs, and took off up the trail. Just before we turned off the old road to

go straight up, I noticed a headlamp up the hill. Knowing that whoever was in the van also wanted to climb “Widow’s Tears” was disheartening. We continued hiking uphill toward the base. It took us about an hour to get there. Josh got to the base before me, as always, and was talking to two people from Reno that were gearing up to climb. I’ve always said I’d never climb behind another party while ice climbing, but for some reason didn’t put up too much of an argument when Josh said he’d still like to climb it. When the other party’s leader took off running up the first pitch, I figured they would be well ahead of us in no time. Josh and I soloed the first pitch and the low-angle ice between it and “the start of the real climbing.”

When we got to where we would rope up, the other team’s leader was off to the right of the thin first pitch, working his way up the rock. He was having difficulty getting gear in and was moving slowly. Seeing as they were the first to the base of the climb, they had the right of way and we intended to give that to them the entire climb. After a good while Josh asked if they minded if we started up the ice, but allowed them to pass latter on. They said go for it, and up Josh went. Josh used just about every bit of rope (a common theme for both of us on that route) and took a little bit to set up the anchor. The other party asked if I would be mad if they started up the ice while he was building the anchor. Giving them the right of way that they deserved for getting to the base first, I said of course not. Josh got the anchor built and I headed up the thin start.

When I got to the anchor, I took all the gear to lead the next pitch, and then waited for the other team’s second to get to the anchor and for them to move on. Their leader told me I could climb through and, after waiting a little longer, I decided to. I had an awkward, traversing start to over where they set up their anchor and then a short headwall before some easier ice. As I passed them and was slightly above, I somehow slipped and one of my tools came out of the ice. I’m still not sure how it happened, but all I could do was try and hang onto the one tool stuck in the ice. Somehow I managed to hang on, regain my composure, and continue the pitch. I came up just sort of a huge ledge, built



Josh Hutchison on the first roped pitch of “Widow’s Tears.”



Somewhere around Pitch 3 or 4 of "Widow's Tears."



A few pitches from the top of "Widow's Tears."

an anchor, and brought Josh up. He continued to the ledge, where we took a short break.

I took the next short pitch off to the left of the flow, as the section above was steep and I didn't feel like leading it. Josh had an impressive lead on the steep curtain above and ended up building an anchor with a hanging belay to bring me up. Somehow the next few pitched kind of blurred together and I was not sure how many we did or what the climbing was like, except that it was never easy climbing. When we got to where we thought we were two pitches from the top, both of us were pretty worked and were cramping up in different areas of the body. My forearms and biceps and Josh's calves were cramping. Josh had yet another impressive lead up some deceptively steep ice that we hoped would be close to the end. He brought me up and I took off gunning for the top of the climb. As it was about to get dark, I remember thinking, "Don't put in screws, as it will just slow you down," but then I would look down and realize I was 25-plus feet above my last screw and would stop to put one in. If that last pitch would have been a single-pitch climb someplace else, I probably would have had no problem soloing it, but after 11 hours of climbing I wasn't too sure I'd make it. I ended up not making it to the top, and Josh got the top out. It wasn't much of a pitch, as it was mostly snow-covered ice and rock, but he was thankful to get it.

We were both exhausted, and I even told Josh, "F--k this sport; I'm selling my ice gear," as I was walking the flat ground to the final anchor. There wasn't much of a celebration; just a limp-wristed handshake and we started to pack up for the walk off. My feet were killing me, but we made it back to the car almost exactly 16 hours after we left. We chugged water and Gatorade and started the drive back to Sacramento, arriving at 1:30 a.m. on New Year's Day.

The next morning while doing research on the climb, I found out that it had been called the longest continuous ice climb in the Lower 48. It was first climbed in the '70s and took three days to complete. My hat is off to those guys! I also found out that only a handful of people had completed the climb. I'm not sure how two average ice climbers were lucky enough to make it up such a climb, but we did it.

Several people have asked if it was fun and my answer is a simple, "No." In the few days after the climb, I had told several people that I never wanted to climb it again. They have said, "Oh, you'll look back on it and say it wasn't that bad and you actually had fun." I honestly don't think that day will ever come! Am I glad I did it? Yes, sort of. Will I ever climb it again? Possibly. Will I ever say it was fun the first time I climbed it? NEVER!

Gear Notes: We brought too many 16-centimeter screws, as we were intending on climbing "Silver Strand." I would recommend bringing more 13s, and even a few 10-centimeter screws.

Approach Notes: Easy to find, just look for the big ice!

A Little Trail Etiquette Goes a Long Way

Text and photos by Frank E. Baker



Ski tracks across Carter Lake en route to Crescent Lake.

You pause as the wind whispers through the dwarf hemlock trees and strain to hear the faint call of a bird unfamiliar to the area. Suddenly, a foreign sound rises over the next hill: it's some kind of hip-hop music. Soon you discover the source: a hiker merrily carting a boom box while talking loudly on a cell phone.

I'm rather easygoing out on the trail. Modern society has weighed us down with more than enough rules and regulations. But as our population increases and we have more and more folks venturing outdoors, I think a modicum of trail etiquette goes a long way toward making everyone's experience better.

If our hip-hop-imbued hiker truly wanted to take the sounds of civilization with him into the wilds, I would suggest that he also bring along recordings of automobile road noise, ambulance sirens, video game bleeps, and explosions.

Destroying the magic: I recall a beautiful day at the top of Angel's Landing in Utah's Zion National Park. We joined a handful of people taking in the breathtaking view. The peaceful moment was shattered by a guy talking loudly on his cell phone, selfishly making everyone within 100 yards a part of his conversation. Thankfully, someone talked to him and he moved away.

On a hike back out of South Fork Valley a year ago, we stopped to observe a drone hovering about 150 feet above the trail. I

stopped next to a woman who looked curiously at the whining object. "Wonder if my 20-gauge shotgun would reach that far?" I commented. "I was thinking along the same lines," she replied.

On a return cross-country ski trip along the Knik River, someone with a fat-tire bike had run over our ski tracks. The ruts had frozen and made our skis flail all over the place – as if they had minds of their own.

And there is nothing quite as invigorating as skiing or snowshoeing back over a trail that's been post-holed by unthinking, uncaring adventurers.

On another winter hike in the same area, a guy's uncontrolled golden retriever jumped up on me and licked my glasses, which immediately froze, making them opaque. I have nothing against folks bringing along their canine friends, but Chugach State Park regulations note that they should be "under control."

One of my pastimes while hiking on the more popular trails is picking up trash people leave behind. I'm starting to think some people believe the countryside looks better, more familiar, if it has some human refuse on the ground. Perhaps it's some form of modern art with which I'm not acquainted.

On a hike near Eklutna Lake with my son many years ago, we approached a fire ring of rocks on the lake shore. We were

both surprised to see there were no tin cans or other garbage inside the fire ring. It sometimes happens.

But on a hike through Crow Pass last summer, we came upon several illegal fire rings and they all contained either cans, bottles, or other refuse. It's not only against Chugach State Park regulations; it's also a blatant affront to the land.

I wonder if anyone else has noticed this, but does it seem strange when you see a road sign *without* bullet holes in it? The classic, quintessential sign, of course, is one that reads, "No Shooting," yet is riddled with bullet holes.

Here's an Alaska classic: While hiking the Austin Helmers-Pioneer Ridge Trail one winter, I came upon a snare trap mounted right in the middle of the trail – absolutely no regard for other hikers or their pets.

Some of the most unbelievable "yahoo" behavior used to occur in the Jim Creek area, near Palmer. But I've heard that in recent years the activity has mellowed some. Back in the day, I was tempted to bring a psychologist friend and set up a desk in the area and have him administer free IQ tests. It's good I didn't, however, because we both might have ended up like Alaska's road signs.

Campgrounds are ideal outdoor laboratories for studying the full range of human behavior, such as: Fire rings full of tinfoil and other garbage; axe gouges on picnic tables, benches, and parking area posts – apparently someone's idea of a ready source of firewood; food remnants spilled upon the ground to attract bears and other critters; and finally, loud music and partying on into the night and wee hours of the morning.

I almost wish that along with the overnight parking fees, campers were required to pass a written test covering the campground's rules and regulations.

But in truth, sarcasm aside, none of the things mentioned are difficult to remedy. A little common sense, respect for others, and sensitivity for our beautiful land are all that we need. As I've said before, we're all stewards of our environment, and that certainly applies to how we conduct ourselves when we're out in it.

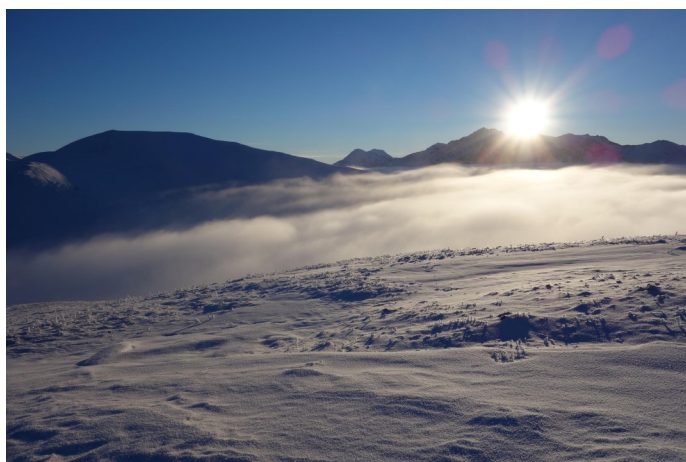
On any given day I'd much rather be instructive than preachy. Many of my friends, acquaintances, and other members of the community know all of this already, so in a way I'm preaching to the choir.

And from what I've seen – from the Eagle River Nature Center to state and federal park officials, as well as volunteers, it's a great choir. We just have to keep singing louder.

Frank E. Baker is a MCA member and a freelance writer who lives in Eagle River. He was recently appointed to the Chugach State Park Citizens Advisory Board.



Trash in an illegal fire pit along the Crow Pass Trail.



Sunlight on a ridge above South Fork Valley (Eagle River).

Peak of the Month: Pease Peak

Text by Steve Gruhn

Mountain Range: Alaska Range

Borough: Matanuska-Susitna Borough

Adjacent Pass: Pittock Pass

Latitude/Longitude: 62° 57' 0" North,
150° 45' 42" West

Elevation: 7750 feet

Prominence: 500 feet from Mount
Dickey (9545)

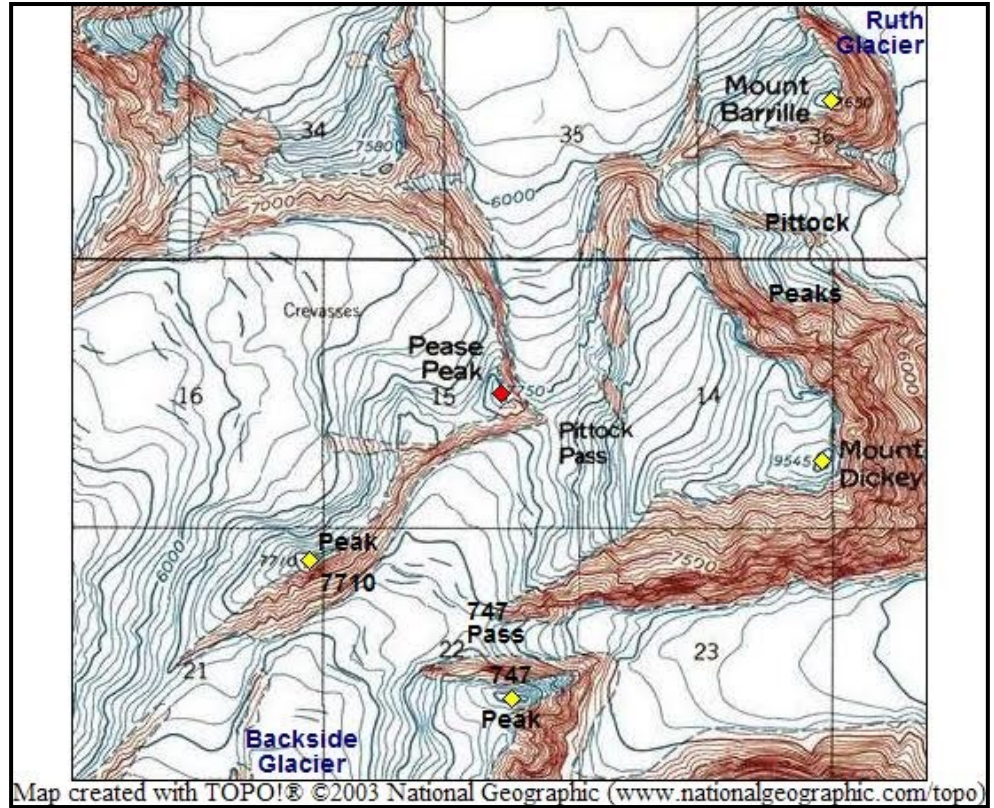
Adjacent Peaks: Mount Dickey, Peak
7710 in the Backside Glacier and
Tokositna Glacier drainages, and The
Rooster Comb (10180)

Distinctness: 500 feet from either
Mount Dickey or Peak 7710

USGS Maps: Talkeetna (D-2) (1:63,360)
and Talkeetna D-2 NW (1:24,000)

First Recorded Ascent: This peak might
be unclimbed.

Access Point: Talkeetna



In 1906 Dr. Frederick Albert Cook set off on an expedition to reach the summit of Denali, then known as Mount McKinley. He returned, claiming to have reached the summit in September of that year. His 1908 book To the Top of the Continent summarized his trip and repeated the summit claim.

In 1910 Claude Ewing Rusk, a founding member of the American Alpine Club (as was Dr. Cook) and a member of the Mazamas, the Portland-based mountaineering club, led an expedition to determine the veracity of Cook's summit claim. With Rusk were three other members of the Mazamas – A.L. Cool, Joseph Ridley, and Frank H. Rojec. The expedition was sponsored by *The Pacific Monthly*, *The Oregonian*, the *New York Herald*, and members of the Mazamas. The Mazamas team set out from Portland, Oregon, on April 25, 1910, bound initially for Seattle, Washington. From Seattle, the party boarded the revenue cutter *Tahoma*, which took them to Port Graham, where they took the sternwheeler *Alice* northward, *Scree*—February 2017

bound for the Susitna River. After reaching the mouth of the Susitna River on May 21, they continued upstream on the sternwheeler, slowed by ice jams, to the mouth of the Chulitna River, where they disembarked on May 29. At the mouth of the Chulitna they loaded the pole boat that they had brought and encountered great difficulty in poling the craft through the rapids of the Chulitna. They returned to Talkeetna and enlisted the assistance of a local Indian named Aleck. Together the five-man team lined the boat upstream, reaching the mouth of the Tokositna River on June 10 and establishing a camp two miles upstream at the mouth of Alder Creek that afternoon. Aleck floated downstream on a raft shortly thereafter. The Mazamas team followed Cook's route up the Ruth Glacier, establishing intermediate camps en route. But the team's supplies had dwindled. To conserve supplies Cool eventually returned to the camp at the mouth of Alder Creek. Ridley, Rojec, and Rusk continued up the glacier to The Gateway.

On July 14, 1910, Ridley and Rusk climbed from their camp in the Ruth Amphitheater to Pittock Pass while Rojec stayed behind to photograph Denali. From the pass Rusk described a peak: “About a mile southwest of our position was a beautiful, inaccessible peak crowned with a wonderful snow cornice. This I have named Mt. Pease.”

Although Rusk’s description on page 485 of the November 1910 issue of *The Pacific Monthly* seems to correlate more closely to Peak 7710, the 7750-foot peak less than a quarter mile northwest of Pittock Pass now bears the name Pease Peak. The name of the peak was undoubtedly intended to honor Lucius Curtis “Lute” Pease, Jr., the editor of the Portland-based *The Pacific Monthly*, which had been one of the sponsors of the Mazamas expedition, and which would later print Rusk’s three-part account of the Mazamas expedition. Pease had lived in Alaska from 1897 to 1902 during the height of the Gold Rush and from 1901 to 1902 served as the first Nome-based U.S. Commissioner of the Kotzebue Sound – Point Hope District. Pease would later be awarded the 1949 Pulitzer Prize for editorial cartooning while working for the *Newark Evening News* in New Jersey.

Rusk’s experiences on the expedition and observations from Pittock Pass and the Ruth Amphitheater convinced him that Cook’s summit claim was inaccurate. Rusk and Ridley returned to their camp in the Ruth Amphitheater and, short on food, began their return to the Tokositna River the following morning. They reached Talkeetna on July 19.

I do not know of any ascents of Pease Peak.

The information for this article came from Gertrude Metcalfe’s article titled “Mount McKinley and the Mazama Expedition,” which appeared on pages 255 through 265 of the September 1910 issue of *The Pacific Monthly*; from Rusk’s article titled, “On the Trail of Dr. Cook,” which appeared in three parts in the October (pages 430 through 442) and November 1910 (pages 472 through 486) and January 1911 (pages 48 through 62) issues of *The Pacific Monthly*; and from Cook’s 1908 [To the Top of the Continent](#).



Ski tracks descend a hill above the Ruth Glacier on June 1, 2006. Pease Peak is in the background to the right. Above the rise is Pittock Pass, which is not generally approached from the north side pictured due to the numerous seracs above it.

Photo by Mark Thomas



A close-up view of Pease Peak and the huge summit cornice along its crest on June 1, 2006.

Photo by Mark Thomas



Pittock Pass from the north on June 1, 2006. It is generally approached from the south as part of a climb of Mount Dickey, as the pictured side has a severe serac-fall danger (left). Pease Peak is to the right.

Photo by Mark Thomas.

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by Carl Battreall

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The Alaska Range stretches more than 650 miles over central Alaska, separating the southcentral coast from the interior of the state. In his new book, Alaska Range: Exploring the Last Great Wild, award-

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*Middle Triple Peak as viewed through Monolith Pass from the Tatina Glacier.
Photo by Carl Battreall*

peak, Denali.

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At the end of his essay, Helander comments: "As I grow, my mind expands to new possibilities and slowly cuts away the impossible. My imagination runs wild, because it has been proven time and time again that the limits of possibility are constrained solely by the limitations of our imagination."

Battreall's Alaska Range is an impressive collection of stories and photos that take readers to the very heart of the Alaska Range. Most of us will never venture to these remote places, but in an evocative and inspiring way, this book does just that.

[Ed. note: The book is available from Battreall's website at <http://www.photographalaska.com/books.>]



*Sy Cloud stands near Monolith Pass framed by Middle Triple Peak (left) and Mount Nevermore (right).
Photo by Carl Battreall*

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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*.

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