



MOUNTAINEERING CLUB OF ALASKA

BOX 2037

ANCHORAGE, ALASKA 99510

March 1984

Volume 27, Issue 3

### MARCH MEETING

The meeting will be held Wednesday, March 21 at 7:30 p.m. in the multi-purpose room of Central Junior High School, 15th and C Streets, Anchorage, Alaska. After the business meeting Willy Hersman will present a slide show on two recent climbs on Mt. Spurr.

### MINUTES FOR MCA FEBRUARY MEETING

The meeting was held on February 15, 1984 at Romig Junior High. The meeting was called to order at 7:40 p.m. by president Mark Skok. Minutes of the January 1984 meeting approved as published in SCREE. New members and guests were introduced and welcomed.

Treasurer Bernie Helms reported:

|                   |                                |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| \$ 304.93-        | Petty Cash                     |
| 1089.29-          | Bank Account                   |
| 3636.14-          | Money Market Rate Plus Account |
| <u>\$5030.36-</u> | Total                          |

#### I. COMMITTEE REPORTS

##### A. Library: Mike Frank 243-7645

The library, located at AMH has no formal check out policy for books but members are encouraged to drop by and browse. Thanks to Peggy Michaelson for her help in organizing the library.

##### B. Hiking Committee: Bill Wakeland

Nothing to report.

#### II. OLD BUSINESS

##### A. Membership Directory

Members are encouraged to fill out the questionnaire mailed in the February Scree. (Also in this newsletter.) The directory should be printed in April.

### III. NEW BUSINESS

#### A. Practice Climbs

For March and April are being planned by Willy Hersman. Sign up sheets available during break for the following:

March 03,04 Flattop, Boy Scout Rock...Ice Axe Arrest  
Crevasse Rescue

March 17,18 King Mountain...Overnighter

Mar.30-Apr.2 Mt. Silvertip...Glacier Travel, 4 day trip  
Sign up at Mar. meeting

For more information call Willy or Doug Van Etten, 338-5132.

#### B. John Dillman is soliciting support

to counteract Doug Buchanan of the Alaskan Alpine Club (not to be confused with the Alaska Alpine Club), who has criticized the Alaska Avalanche Workshops. Doug has argued that the schools are a poor use of state funds. House Bill 110 in the Alaska Senate, if passed, would terminate funding for the workshops. Mark read a personal interest letter written by himself in support of the schools. MCA members are encouraged to express their support for the program by calling 278-3678 and leaving a one minute message for local legislators. The status of HB110 is unknown at this time.

#### C. Hut Committee: Tim Neale

Tim reported on the need to develop a reservation system for use of the MCA huts. Currently there is none. MCA maintains 4 huts and members are entitled first rights to use them for club activities. The concern over MCA hut policy is due to increased use of the area around the huts and plans of the Nordic Ski Club to build a facility on upper Eagle Glacier, one mile from an MCA hut.

It has been proposed that MCA work with the Nordic Ski Club and the Parks system to establish a reservation system. Membership input is needed to assist Tim and Mark draw up options for a reservation policy.

#### D. Climbing Wall

Terry Becker reported on plans of the Municipality of Anchorage to build an artificial climbing wall. The wall would be centrally located and provide an area for instruction and practice. A statement of support from the MCA has been requested by the Municipality. A motion was made, voted, and approved by the members that we support construction of a climbing wall.

#### E. Club Equipment

Terry Becker reported that the club has only 4 working avalanche transceivers at this time. It was moved that the club purchase 4 new Ramer transceivers at the cost of \$320. The motion was seconded and

approved by the members.

#### IV. ANNOUNCEMENTS

- A. The Talkeetna Mountain Trip, July 3-10 is full.
- B. Graham McDonald will be conducting waterfall and orienteering classes in March.
- C. Allen Carter urged MCA members to support HB84 which would stop smoking in public places.
- D. Members are encouraged to review policy for borrowing MCA equipment printed in SCREE.(See Feb. Issue)
- E. Thanks to Rick Derrick for a slide show on his recent climb of the Salathe Wall on El Capitan.

The Meeting was adjourned at 8:20

Respectfully submitted,  
Eileen Cavanaugh, Secretary

#### EXPERIENCE BAD WEATHER

Naomi Uemura's climb of Mount McKinley presents a lesson that should be taken to heart by anyone who goes in to the back-country: weather must always be a serious consideration when preparing for a wilderness trip.

Uemura made the first solo winter ascent of Denali. But he reached the top in deteriorating conditions, and disappeared during a prolonged stormy period. At the time of this writing it was speculated he had died during the storm.

Uemura is one of the world's foremost and respected climbers. He approached Denali with a conscious appreciation of its hazards. Years of mountaineering experience went into his selection of food and gear. Yet, somewhere, he made a mistake. Perhaps he didn't carry enough food, or fuel to melt snow for water that would allow him to survive an extra week. Perhaps he didn't build a shelter soon enough to protect him from high winds.

What is clear is that even the best cannot always be too well prepared for Alaska weather.

Few of us will attempt a feat similar to Uemura's. But all of us spend varying amounts of time in the bush, either hiking or climbing. Many of us have been caught by rapidly deteriorating weather. How we handle the situation

depends upon our skills and our equipment. The ones who fare best have contended with storms before; they know what to expect, and they know how to calmly deal with the wind and driving snow.

Which brings me to my point: know what to expect. You can learn much simply by meeting a storm head on. If the clouds are boiling down the Chugach, don't stay home. Instead, take a friend or two and head up the hillside. Ski to Near Point, or hike up to exposed areas around Flattop. Get a feel for the wind, the blowing snow, the quality of your clothing.

Find out how the clothing you wear protects you--or leaves you exposed. Can you wear mittens and get gear into and out of your pack? Or do you find you need glove liners that protect your hands while you fumble for a candy bar?

Does your hood protect your face, or should you have goggles? When you pull your balaclava down over your face, does your head get cold because you've lost the extra fold of wool or pile? Maybe a light silk balaclava, to be worn under your heavier hat, is the answer to a warm head and protected face.

Can you readily set up your tent in the wind? Can you light your stove? Can you remain relaxed? All are questions you should be able to answer before you undertake an expedition.

Apart from learning how your gear works--and figuring out just what gear you need--playing in storms prepares you psychologically for getting caught. When the time comes, you'll have more self confidence, and confidence born of experience rather than a sales pitch, in what you carry.

So much for the utilitarian value of experiencing storms. On the other hand, you'll probably find the bad-weather outing kind of fun. Take a lesson from John Muir. When he first visited Southeast Alaska, he not only went out into a strong storm, he climbed to the top of a tall spruce to fully savor the wind. Then he went home and wrote about the beauty of it all.

Mark Skok

### BIAFO SPIRES EXPEDITION

(Editor's note: During May and June of this year, Andy Embick, a long time MCA member, will lead an ambitious climbing and kayaking expedition to Baltistan, in northwestern Pakistan. The group plans to attempt two feats never before accomplished...to successfully run the 60-mile Braldu River and climb the awesome Biafo Spires. Despite sponsorship by the American Alpine Club and interest by the National Geographic Society, the expedition still needs contributions. If you would like to contribute, please send a check to the address shown in the article. We all wish Andy and the expedition total success.)

## 1984 AMERICAN BRALDU RIVER

### BIAFO SPIRES KARAKORAM EXPEDITION

In a unique and unprecedented way, our expedition has both climbing and kayaking objectives of the first magnitude and a team to match. In May and June, 1984, we will travel to Baltistan in northwestern Pakistan, to an area called The Throne Room of the Mountain Gods in Galen Rowell's book of the same name. Your support and assistance are enlisted.

From the heart of the Karakoram Range flows the giant Baltoro Glacier, draining the flanks of 28,250-foot K2 and the greatest concentration of high peaks in the world. From the Baltoro's icy terminus at 11,224 feet flows the Braldu River, half-grown. After 25 miles, the Braldu's volume is doubled by a torrent of melt water from the Biafo, another of the major Karakoram glaciers. The Biafo's rubble-covered snout juts almost into the river a few miles upstream from the village of Askole, the highest human habitation in this arid, remote valley. Downstream, the river, icy cold and brown with glacial silt, continues to drop at more than sixty feet per mile, and then enters the narrow Chokpo-Chongo Gorge. The tortured water of the Braldu, constricted by rock walls and obstructed by boulders, sixty miles from the Baltoro's snout finally joins the gentler Shigar, which flows another sixty miles to join the mighty Indus at Skardu. The Braldu because of its speed, altitude, length, flow and temperature, presents one of the most formidable technical whitewater challenges in the world and has never been successfully run.

Less than twenty miles up-glacier from the Biafo's terminus at the Braldu lies a challenge of a different sort but no less great, a collection of awesomely spectacular rock towers of the finest red granite, whose fantastic summits are in the range of 17,000 to 20,000 feet. Though individual peaks, such as nearby Uli Biaho Tower or Nameless Tower in the Trangos are comparable, as a group the Biafo Spires are unsurpassed, and as a technical rock-climbing challenge, these virgin peaks are unparalleled in the world.

Historically, the Braldu Valley has been travelled for centuries, first by legendary Central Asian traders, and more recently by climbers making the approach march to the giant Karakoram peaks. Though the lower stretches on the Shigar were navigated in the past by Baltis in "zahks" of inflated goatskins, on the Braldu itself the only serious kayaking attempt was in 1978. A strong British team, veterans of the Dudh Koshi in Nepal, was led by Dr. Mike Jones. Making the mistake of putting on the river at peak flow in August, Jones was almost killed in what probably approached 20,000 cubic feet per second going 30 mph. Not taking the precaution of wearing a wet suit, and burdened with a heavy movie camera built into his helmet, Jones died trying to rescue a team member in trouble and the attempt was abandoned, though the film footage obtained was turned by the BBC into the movie Search for Excitement. (A video cassette copy

of the film is available on loan from the expedition.) Dave Manby, a member of the 1978 team, returned in the fall of 1983 for a solo reconnaissance and confirmed that the river was potentially runnable at low water, though he had several serious mishaps, lost his boat and ran only parts of the river.

In both kayaking and rock climbing, techniques, equipment and attitudes have developed enormously in the last few years, and only recently has it become possible to consider running whitewater like that of the Braldu or climbing Karakoram super towers such as these on the Biafo. The Hispar-Biafo region was explored and mapped in 1939 by Eric Shipton's party, and his map, now 45 years old, is still the only good one of the area. At that time, however, such "small", highly technical rock peaks were virtually ignored as impossible, and neither photographed, named, mapped, or even mentioned. Even now, the Biafo peaks are close to unknown and remain not just unclimbed but unattempted. It remained for Galen Rowell, during a 300-mile ski traverse of the Karakoram in late winter, 1980, to photograph the incredible spires and bring them to the attention of the American climbers in a position to attempt them.

The nucleus of our climbing team is a small group of veterans of multiple expeditions to the Kitchatna Spires in Alaska, whose huge, steep granite walls and nasty, nasty weather have been a crucible of new techniques and equipment for superalpine walls there and elsewhere. An advanced wall tent, developed initially for Kitchatna Spire's overhanging Northwest Face will be used in Pakistan for the multiple hanging bivouacs we expect.

Team members have also climbed extensively elsewhere in Alaska and the Lower 48, and in Canada, Scotland, the Alps, Patagonia, Tibet, Nepal, India and Pakistan. Two are veterans of Everest expeditions in 1983, George Lowe reaching the summit via the previously unclimbed East Face from Tibet, and Galen Rowell serving as the climbing leader of the West Ridge attempt, also from Tibet. Latok I; the Eiger; Cerro Torre; difficult ice routes in Scotland and Alaska; McKinley and the Moose's Tooth; extreme free aid routes in Yosemite; first ascents in Tibet and the Alaska Range; Trango Tower and Kichatna Spire; the Matterhorn's North Face, and much much more, form the basis for the team's vast experience.

The kayaking members, who are in many instances also climbing members of our expedition, share a similar training ground: the trio of legendary huge, fast and cold Alaskan class VI rivers, namely the Susitna, the Alsek and the Stikine. As is true for the Kichatnas and our climbers, very few runs of these rivers have ever been made by teams that did not include our members. And besides Alaska, our kayakers have extensive backgrounds in river running throughout North, South and Central America, as well as New Zealand. They have pioneered multiple new runs at all water levels and contributed greatly to the sport in a variety of significant ways over the last decade.

Our combination of two mountain sports—climbing and kayaking—will be a synergistic one in several ways. The close juxtaposition of spectacularly beautiful mountains and an awesome river will permit unparalleled photographic opportunities, both still and film. Because of the double appeal of this combination, we have been able to recruit both seasoned Karakoram veterans and intensely ambitious younger members, whose talents complement each other. The support which members of the climbing team will be able to provide the kayakers will be not just useful, but crucial for scouting, photography, portaging and rescue.

The logistics for our two-month long trip will be complicated enough to be modeled on a computer, but will be flexible enough to permit careful acclimatization; a speedy approach to base camp at 14,000 feet on the Biafo; well-supported, careful river running; several major climbs in a light, fast, self-contained style; some trekking, and even a luxurious return to civilization on a raft down the Shigar River. Our early (May 4) departure from the U.S. is calculated to put us on the river at low water, and on the peaks before the monsoon hits.

Our team, led by Dr. Andrew Embick, is a very strong one, not just in individual technical brilliance, but also in cohesiveness and in diversity of talents. We have in our team of a dozen: three past competitors in NBC's Survival of the Fittest competition; a physician; a U.S. Army captain; three professors (of forestry, geology and electrical engineering); experts in computer design and artificial intelligence; a lawyer; a gourmet chef; and several wilderness photographers and writers. Most wear, in fact, more than one hat. Several of our members are current or past members of the Board of Directors of the American Alpine Club.

Though much of the cost (about \$50,000) of the expedition will be borne by its members, several of our very strongest members have turned from budding professional careers to be more able to pursue their outdoor sports, and are consequently close to the poverty level. In addition to air fare to Islamabad (about \$1500 per person), we will face the costs of air freight and truck and bus transport up the Karakoram Highway, of jeep and tractor travel up the Shigar Valley, and (largest of all) the approximately \$700 per day cost of hiring about 100 Balti porters and providing their food. We will need some special equipment, such as a water-purifying filter pump and large base camp tent, as well as the best modern kayaking and climbing gear. Because several members of our team are prolific, first-rank photographers and writers with multiple published photographs, books and articles (some translated into other languages) to their credit, we will be able to provide excellent exposure for our sponsors. We need and would greatly appreciate support, in the form of equipment, food and (most usefully) money, to be able to push the limits of the possible in climbing and kayaking in the Karakoram. Checks should be made payable to the American Alpine Club and mailed to: AAC/Braldu-Biafo Expedition, 113 E 90th St., New York, N.Y. 10128. Correspondence may be sent to: Box 1889, Valdez, Alaska 99686.

Thanks and cheers,        Andy Embick

EXPEDITION ROSTER

climber-kayakers

Andrew Embick (AAC 1972)

George Lowe (1968)  
John Markel (1983)  
Bob McDougal (1983)  
Ron Peers (1983)  
Graham Thompson (1966)

climbers

Rob Milne (1976)  
Galen Rowell (1968)

climber alternates

Jim Bridwell (1970)  
Roman Dial (1983)  
George Schunk (1976)

kayakers

Rob Lesser  
Bo Shelby  
Kathy Blau

trekkers

Barbara Rowell  
Eloise Thompson

OCEAN KAYAKING NEWSLETTER

As the days get longer and summer draws near, more Alaskans than ever are preparing to spend time ocean kayaking in Prince William Sound, Resurrection, and Kachemak Bays, and other Alaskan coastal waters. In mid-April you can expect to see a new newsletter, tentatively named Blue Water Paddler, to serve Alaska's ocean kayakers. Coverage will include equipment, safety, weather, environmental issues, trip information, coastal history, and classified ads for equipment and partners.

If you are interested in receiving and/or participating in production of this



newsletter contact Doug Van Etten at 338-5132, or 272-4565 or by mail at Box 105032, Anchorage 99510.

MEMBERSHIP DIRECTORY QUESTIONNAIRE

For the second month we're running the membership directory questionnaire in the SCREE. The idea is to compile a listing of MCA members and publish it in booklet form later this spring. Information to be printed will include your name, work phone (if desired), home phone, address and interests.

The questionnaire also asks your profession and age. These will not be printed in the directory. Rather, I'm curious to find out who you are. We'll pop professions and ages into a computer and come up with an MCA profile.

Along with the directory questionnaire is a trip questionnaire submitted by John Nevin, a member of the hiking committee. His intent is to gather information on your favorite hike or climb. Those trips can then be offered as club outings. Lost Lake near Seward has been mentioned by several. Feel free to list trips other than your favorite if they stand out.

So far about 60 questionnaires have been returned. You can detach the sheet and mail it, or bring it to the next meeting. I hope to get at least 100 responses.

Back to the business of the MCA profile. Judging from a quick perusal of early returns, most of us are between 27 and 35, and are professionals. Ages range from 22 to late 60s. Professions range from boilermaker to "photographer and bon vivant".

Mark Skok

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A Special Thanks goes to Dayle Sherba. For a year now she has donated her time to type this newsletter without a whimper and without fail, and she's not even a club member. It's someone else's turn for a while. Thanks Dayle.  
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Please fill in the information you want printed, and mail this or a facsimile to Mountaineering Club of Alaska, Box 102037, Anchorage, Alaska 99510, or simply remove this page from the SCREE, fold in thirds (allowing the address on the other side to be visible), staple or tape, stamp, and mail.

MEMBERSHIP DIRECTORY QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Profession (not to be included in the directory): \_\_\_\_\_  
Age (Not to be included): \_\_\_\_\_

Outdoor interests

- |                   |                          |
|-------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Backpacking    | 5. Outings with children |
| 2. Climbing       | 6. Backcountry Skiing    |
| 3. Ice Climbing   | 7. River Touring         |
| 4. Mountaineering | 8. Ocean Kayaking        |

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TRIP QUESTIONNAIRE

Favorite Backpacking Trip, Hike, Climb, River Trip, etc.

Brief Description:

Best Month(s) for trip: \_\_\_\_\_  
Approx. distance/No. of days: \_\_\_\_\_  
Max. No. of people (considering campsites, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_  
Any difficult streams to cross: \_\_\_\_\_  
Access to trailhead (problems, if any): \_\_\_\_\_

Type of trail (Park Service, moose, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_  
Possibility for family with little kids: \_\_\_\_\_  
Willing to lead and when: \_\_\_\_\_  
Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Contact Phone: \_\_\_\_\_