

# the SCREE

## Mountaineering Club of Alaska

March 2015

Volume 58 Number 3



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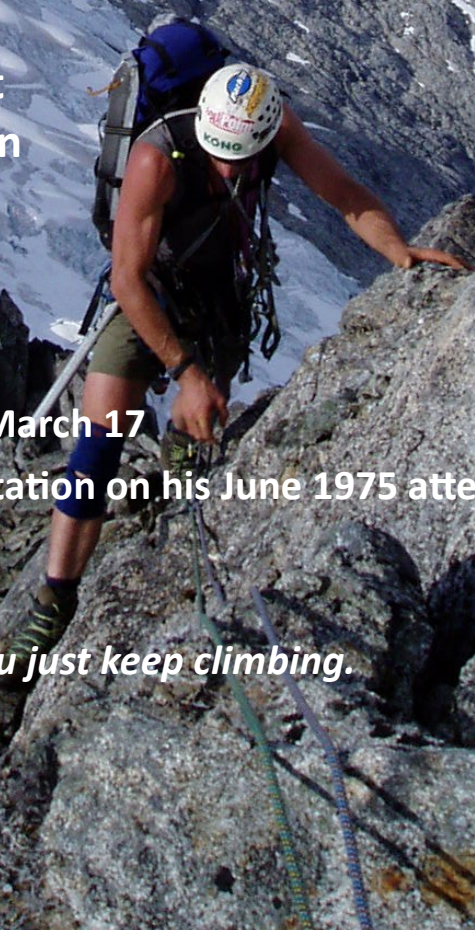
Peak of the Month: Great Nunatak

Monthly meeting: 6:30 p.m., Tuesday, March 17

Program: Mark Fouts will give a presentation on his June 1975 attempted traverse of Mount Marcus Baker.

*Every mountaintop is within reach if you just keep climbing.*

-Barry Finlay





# 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 Tuesday, March 17, at the BP Energy Center, 1014 Energy Court, Anchorage, Alaska.

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

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

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## Cover Photo

Mike Miller cresting onto the summit ridge of Sophia Peak.  
Photo by Ben Still.

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**Article Submission:** Text and photography submissions for *the Scree* can be sent as attachments to [mcascree@gmail.com](mailto: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.

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## Hiking and Climbing Schedule

⇒ **Eklutna Traverse.** April 12-19. Mandatory traverse training days March 21-22. Contact Greg Bragiel at [unknownhiker@alaska.net](mailto:unknownhiker@alaska.net).

Online? Click me!



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

## Hut Needs and Notes



*Pichler's Perch*

If you are headed to one of the MCA huts, please consult the notes below to see what **needs to be carried to the huts or fixed**. All huts have tools and materials so that anyone can make repairs. If you have a favorite hut and would like to take the lead on organizing maintenance and repairs for that hut, Greg Bragiel would greatly appreciate the help. If you can help out, contact Greg at [huts@mtnclubak.org](mailto:huts@mtnclubak.org) or call him at 350-5146.

- **All Huts** – MCA members are requested to adopt a hut, help out with maintenance and keep the Huts Committee and officers informed on what is happening there. Encourage any non-members at MCA huts to become MCA members. **THESE ARE YOUR HUTS! PLEASE VOLUNTEER TO HELP! GREG BRAGIEL IS NOT ABLE TO COMPLETE ALL TASKS HIMSELF!**
- **Scandinavian Peaks Hut** – **URGENT! Evaluate and repair broken window. Supplies for repairs are on site.** Supplies that need to go in: two lantern globes, lantern generator, trash-compactor bags, and portable loo. Maintenance needs: painting door frame, window frames, and deck. Outhouse needs to be found, replaced to original position, and secured.
- **Mint Hut** – Evaluate and repair inner door/hinges/ frame. **Stove reported to “...be barely working and really gross...” Bring your own stove.** The MCA has replaced this stove many times in the last 10 years. It is apparent that hut users do not know how to use the Coleman stove.



*Mint Hut*



- **Pichler's Perch** – Maintenance needs: **BIG PRIORITY – Repair missing roof metal.** Reinforce loft floor near ladder. Look for missing 5-gallon poop bucket around the hut and to the northwest. Supplies that need to go in: updated human waste system instructions, wag bags, and renovation project planned for summer 2015.

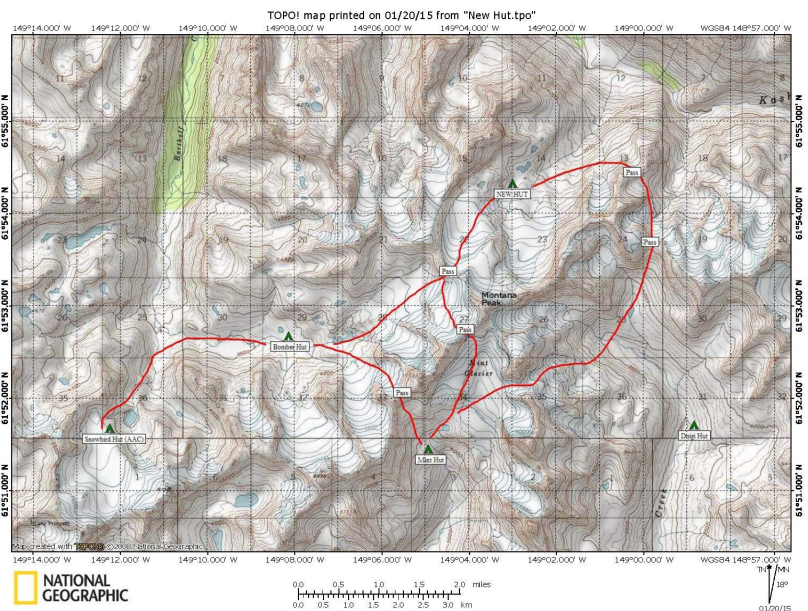


Hans' Hut

- **Rosie's Roost** – All hut users be sure to secure waste barrel and lid.
- **Bomber Hut** – Evaluate right side (north) window that was recently found off track/ loose. Repair, secure, and/or cover window with available materials. Reinforce the door latch. Caulk left side (south) window.
- **Dnigi Hut** – Supplies that need to go in: two lantern globes, driver for metal siding. **This hut needs major structural repairs in the near future.** Assistance of local snowmachiners and Anchorage Snowmobile Club is requested. A team needs to go in to assess needs and plan repairs.

Greg Bragiel, MCA Huts Committee Chairman, updated February 7, 2015

The MCA Board has decided to relocate the Dnigi Hut. This summer a team will evaluate the condition of the existing hut and will make a recommendation whether it is worth taking apart and transporting panels to the new location. The proposed new location with possible access routes from the Mint and Bomber Huts is shown on this map. The Board has determined that in order for the relocation to be economical and to avoid the need for a new lease agreement, the new hut needs to be within a 5-mile radius of the existing hut. The proposed new location is located “deeper” in the Talkeetna Mountains and the location opens up more options of ski touring and connecting loops with our other huts. The Board is accepting member comments on the proposed location of the new hut. Comments will be received through April 21. Please submit comments in writing to the MCA President or one of the other Board members, and include your contact information so we can contact you. Relocation of the hut will occur in summer 2016.



Cory Hinds, MCA President



## Gulch Peak (4650) and Peak 4430 (Kenai Mountains; Granite Creek and Gulch Creek)

*By Steve Gruhn*



*Steve Gruhn hikes through blueberries. Photo by Ben Still.*

I've looked at Peak 4650 for decades while driving on the Seward Highway southwest of the East Fork of Sixmile Creek. I tried to find information on potential routes, but I could find no record of an ascent having been attempted. In October 2013 I attempted to climb its southeast ridge with Frank Baker by first ascending Fiddlehead Mountain (4940; see the January 2014 *Scree*). Although we reached the summit of Fiddlehead, we aborted our attempt to descend to the saddle to the northwest due to snow conditions, waning daylight, and a less-than-favorable-looking ridge. But despite the unsuccessful attempt (or perhaps because of it), my interest in climbing Peak 4650 had only increased.

Ben Still had shown interest in visiting obscure peaks, so I conned him into showing up at my doorstep at 5:30 a.m. on Saturday, September 27, to join me in another attempt. By going a month earlier than my last time, we hoped that snow would not be an issue, but that the leaves would have already fallen off the alders.

We arrived at a small parking area on the north side of the Seward Highway immediately east of the Granite Creek bridge at about 6:30. In the dark we walked across the bridge and turned to the northeast on an old logging road. We followed this road for about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile until it made a hairpin turn. At this point, just as the sky grew light we departed the road and began our bushwhack through the frosty hemlock forest and then through tall grass and occasional alders, which still held their leaves. We noted a fog bank in the Bench Creek, Center Creek, and Lynx Creek valleys to the southeast. It seemed to be coming our way. We hurried up the slippery slope as quickly as possible. I feared that we would become soaked if the fog bank caught up to us while we were still in the tall grass. For most of the time we navigated through meadows around the alders. As the fog rolled in below us, we breathed a sigh of relief; we had managed to stay reasonably dry for the ascent. The fall colors were past their peak, but were still gorgeous. And we found a blueberry patch that mandated a short break to enjoy our surroundings.





Gulch Peak is the right skyline peak. Photo by Ben Still.

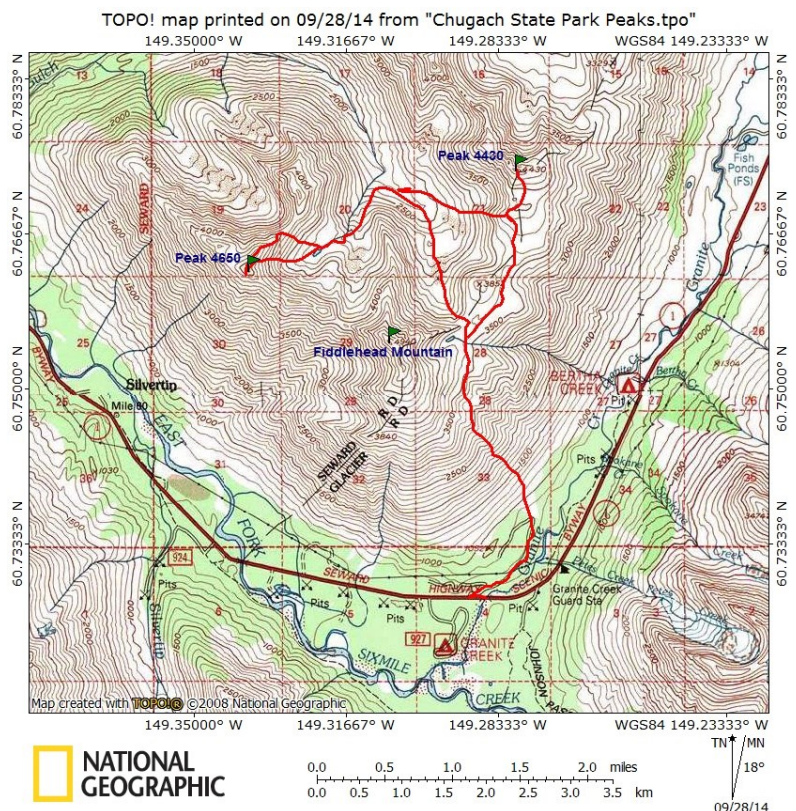
find a cairn or any other evidence of previous human presence on the summit. We suggested the name Gulch Peak after the nearby Gulch Creek.

After a short rest we descended the rocky east face of the peak. And as we reached the tarn, the clouds lifted, the wind died, and the weather again became pleasant. We retraced our steps as we descended the tributary valley and ascended the valley we had initially entered. At about the 2600-foot level, Ben decided we had enough time to try another peak, so off he went and I slowly poked along behind. We headed east toward the south ridge of Peak 4430. After the long climb out of the valley floor up to the ridge, we boulder-hopped up the south-facing slopes to the summit. And just as we reached the ridge, the clouds descended and the wind picked up. But eventually we were on top in the late afternoon, looking for a register in the cairn. We didn't find a register, so I don't know who made the first ascent of Peak 4430, but Vin and Grace Hoeman found a handkerchief in a cairn when they climbed it on June 15, 1968.

We descended the south ridge, skirting Point 3852 on a bench to the east and attempted to rejoin the route we had used to ascend up to the ridge in the morning. Shortly after we began our descent the clouds lifted and the wind subsided. The weather was certainly fickle with us that day.

Although I'd been up the slope three times, I still managed to navigate directly into alder thicket after alder thicket on the descent. But the fog had lifted and the grass had dried, so we had a pleasant alder-filled descent to the logging road. We returned to the car around 6 p.m. We had traveled about 13 miles with about 7,300 feet of elevation gain.

As we ascended the slope, we angled northward toward the terminus of the east ridge of Fiddlehead Mountain. At the 3650-foot pass southwest of Point 3852 we decided to drop into the scenic Gulch Creek drainage. The rocks on the west-facing slope were coated in verglas, so we took our time descending to the valley floor. It was rather pleasant hiking on the tundra once we reached the gorgeous valley floor. We descended to an elevation of about 2400 feet and then sidehilled on the southwest side of the valley to reach a tributary valley, which we ascended to a tarn in the cirque at the head of the valley. Up until this point the weather had been pretty favorable. But as we ascended the ridge to the northwest of the tarn, the ceiling lowered and the wind increased. At a break in the clouds, Ben noted a black bear sow and cub below us and headed in our general direction. I wasn't too concerned because I figured the steep slopes between us would convince the pair to move in a different direction. We followed the ridge southwest to the summit of Peak 4650. On top Ben pulled out his GPS unit to determine the elevation on the summit. He let the unit rest for several minutes to obtain a reading. He repeated the process for several more minutes and got a different reading. We didn't





## Hideout Hill (2858)

*By Steve Gruhn*



*Wayne Todd on the summit of Hideout Hill with Russian Mountain and Bear Mountain to his left. Photo by Ben Still.*

Ben Still had been itching to climb Hideout Hill for some time. Although that peak wasn't of particular interest to me, Ben had accompanied me on a recent climb of Gulch Peak, which was of more interest to me than it was to him. So, I decided it would be good karma to return the favor and join him for a trip up Hideout Hill in the Kenai Mountains. I'm glad I did.

We met at Carrs Huffman at 7 a.m. on November 14. Wayne Todd was also there to join us on the trip. By 9 a.m. we had reached the eastern end of Skilak Lake Road. Because there wasn't a trail up Hideout Hill, we drove slowly along the Sterling Highway, looking for a reasonable route. Jean Lake lay between the peak and the highway. Cliffs on the eastern and northeastern faces caused us to continue driving westward. As we drove out of the mountains we spied what appeared to be something of a reasonable bushwhack. We parked at a wide pullout on the north side of the Sterling Highway south of Dogteam Lake.

We crossed the highway and began our bushwhack through the black spruce forest. We planned to intersect the northwest ridge of Hideout Hill by traveling southward. This sounded like a reasonable plan in the car, but once we entered the spruce forest, we couldn't see the northwest ridge. We continued southward, stopping at the occasional brush-free vantage points to reorient ourselves. The spruce gave way to devil's club and alder as we left the flats and started to gain elevation. Fortunately, most of the leaves had fallen off the vegetation. This allowed me to try some shortcuts to reach our goal. However, each time I finished one of my shortcuts I found Ben and Wayne waiting for me.

We battled the alder and downed timber up to a low point on the northwest ridge. From the saddle the slope steepened noticeably. We tried to find paths through the alder, but the alder fought back and pushed us toward cliffs. We scrambled up the cliffs and, after fighting more alder, broke out above the brush into alpine tundra at about 2100 feet. We rested on a





*Steve Gruhn (left) and Wayne Todd enjoying the brush. Photo by Ben Still.*

knoll at about 2200 feet and noted some sort of communication station some 50 feet above us and south of a saddle. A small, frozen lake sat to our east.

After investigating the communication station, we continued up a trail through the steep tundra toward the summit. Snow began to obscure the trail around 2600 feet. I moved out to the west face to admire views of Hidden Lake and Skilak Lake to the southwest while Ben and Wayne continued up the northwest ridge to the 2858-foot summit. Soon I joined them on the summit, atop which sat another communication station. We definitely weren't the first people on this summit. There were tremendous views in all directions from this prominent summit.

After some photos in the brisk breeze, we turned and headed back down the northwest ridge to the brush. Down through the defensive fortress of the brush we swam. Into the minefield maze of downed timber we stumbled. I tried some more shortcuts and I'm sure Ben and Wayne appreciated the break while they waited for me to complete my shortcuts. Our return route took us a little east of our ascent route and we were fortunate to travel along a muddy creek surrounded by devil's club and wet logs. We staggered out to the Sterling Highway just east of where we had parked. Our three-and-a-half-mile trip with 2,200 feet of elevation gain had taken us six hours. But there were smiles on our faces as we enjoyed the memories of a taxing mid-November trip and a great time together.

*Wayne Todd, Ben Still, and Steve Gruhn (left to right) on the summit of Hideout Hill. Photo by Wayne Todd.*





## Russian Bear

*Text and photos by Wayne L. Todd*

*November 22, 2014*



*Carrie Wang on Bear Ridge with fog-covered Skilak Lake to the right.*

As we're leaving Hideout Hill, Ben Still notes the adjacent peak also has 2,000 feet of prominence (this is his list).

Checking a map the next week, I note that even though Russian Mountain is higher than Hideout Hill, the Russian Lakes Trail travels close by, the miles are reasonable, and there would simply be a "creek" to cross between trail and peak. And it's probably frozen now anyway. And while we're up on the plateau, there are two other close-by mountains that we would be simple to ascend.

No convincing is necessary, so the following Saturday, Ben Still, Carrie Wang, and I leave Anchortown by 6:30 a.m. to maximize limited daylight. The Russian River Campground Road isn't even closed yet, so we drive all the way to the trailhead, knocking off a couple more miles. This is going to be even easier than imagined.

Under hints of daylight, we hike up the wide, snow-free gravel trail, wondering if bikes would have been worthwhile. Soon we pass a trail exiting right and minutes later, return to hike the side trail, which leads to the base of Russian Mountain. So easy. As I'm trailing behind dinking with GPS and camera, I see Ben and Carrie waiting for me. That's nice of them.

Oh, I see they're stopped due to water, a lot of moving water. Ahh, this is the Russian River, which folks had mentioned as an obstacle. It's not a creek and it's not frozen. To underwear and bare feet we go, sitting amongst smelly salmon carcasses to undress. Hmm, guess the bears probably aren't hibernating yet. I don't think the thigh deep water is that cold with neoprene socks, but putting on dry socks and boots feels very good.

We follow Ben (as most do) upslope through tolerable brush and occasional downed trees. The real brush problem here is rusty menziesia, which snares our feet. In full clouded daylight we exit into grass fields dispersed with trees. Grass segues to alpine to various ball-sized rocks, covered with just enough snow and ice to make for slowed hiking. The pronounced rime is photogenic.

Just before the top of Russian, we lose visibility of Bear Mountain due to snowfall. The stay is brief on the windy, rimed summit. We now descend the modestly-steep, slick rocks to the southwest, finding the sporadic snow patches for best footing. The clouds disperse enough to see Bear and a snow-filled trail down the valley of Surprise Creek to the northwest. Wonder if that's a decent route and where it starts? (Looking at a map later, we passed within ¼ mile of an old cabin or site; should have looked more closely at the map.)



*Ben Still crossing the Russian River.*



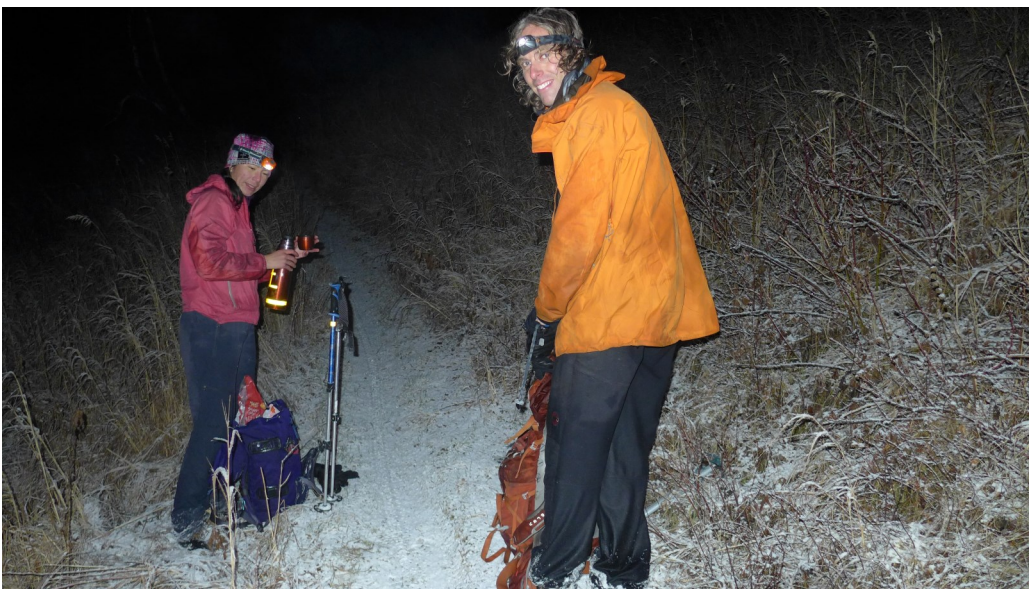


*Ben Still on Bear Ridge.*

On Bear, in waning light, we have splendid views of lightly-cloud-veiled Skilak Lake. Views from the larger-prominence peaks do have advantage. A cloud bank over the westerly Kenai Mountains collects sunset rays.

We travel east. Surprise Mountain (4094 feet [1248 meters]), just two miles distant and only needing 900 feet of elevation gain, taunts for the third ascent of the day. Common sense overrules due to quickly diminishing light with an unknown steep (by map) descent, so we pass on by. Light snow adds to a sense of expediency.

The terrain is quite steep, and slick, but we find a possible quasi-ridge route. With Kahtoolas, Whippets, and axes engaged, we descend as quickly as terrain allows. With little light, we move off ridge and with surprisingly little brush, make it to the flats of the marsh, which is not quite frozen. The leader, typically Ben, finds occasional wet and muck holes, which the followers vainly try to avoid. Soon by headlamp, the valley bottom seems extra wide (the trail is on the far side of the valley). Seemingly frozen ponds only sustain pole weight, the brush thickens; we skirt more ponds.



*Carrie Wang (left) and Ben Still taking a deserved break just after encountering the trail.*

Abruptly there is smooth darkness ahead. Oh boy, the Russian River again. Though narrower, this crossing feels a wee bit colder. A passing light on the assumed trail seems to be nearby, but soon we're ascending. A check with the amazing GPS unit confirms the trail is still just ahead.

We very gladly intersect the narrow trail and, after a short break, follow bicycle tracks out in the fresh snow, making it to the car almost 12 hours after starting (and 16 miles with 6,500 feet of elevation gain). A good day as always in the outdoors, but admittedly not as short or easy as expected.



## Sophia Peak from Beach to Summit

By Ben Still

On August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2004, Mike Miller and I left Echo Cove, at the north end of the Juneau road system, in the afternoon bound for a rocky beach on the east side of Lynn Canal some 20-plus miles away. Our objective was to climb a granite peak which rises nearly 6,000 feet out of the ocean in 1.5 miles. The east side of Lynn Canal offered little to no protection for an anchored boat and dropped off very quickly to depths of over 1,000 feet so Mike and I liked to beach the *Nunatak*, a 20-foot long fiber-form boat. Typically we used some sheet metal siding, a few round logs found on location, and a rope-along attached to a tree to pull the boat up just a touch at high tide. We arrived and left at high tide. The water was calm and we cruised out of Berners Bay into Lynn Canal and arrived at the base of the mountain. High tide was in a half hour, so we had to quickly unload the boat, find a suitable anchor in the woods, clear out the rocks that stuck up too much, put down the sheet metal, and find a couple of round logs to help keep the boat



*Sophia Peak from the beach. Photo by Ben Still.*

off the rocks. Our anchor ended up being the only spruce tree within half a mile as we were at the base of a 6,000-foot avalanche path and alders were the predominant tree. The spruce tree was only slightly larger than the alders, but provided just enough to pull the boat up.

After a successful boat extraction we had a leisurely evening fire and slept out under the stars. We awoke at 5:30 a.m. and had a quick breakfast and began the journey up the mountain. From the beach we were able to see several phases of this peak: the initial bushwhack up through alders to about 500 feet in elevation, a large cliff and canyon had to be circumvented, then a series of cliff bands and waterfalls had to be negotiated up to nearly 4000 feet, and a steep glacier would lead us to the final 500 feet of vertical granite to the summit.

The bushwhack began easily as the alluvial fan collected most of the snow from many large avalanches and several large snow patches just off the beach took us up through the first 500 vertical feet of alders. All the water from the upper mountain funneled into this narrow canyon with awesome waterfalls

cascading several hundred feet. We traversed around the cliff and canyon to the north and noted a bunch of mountain goats on the cliffs to the south of the canyon. The slopes steepened, the alders and devil's club thickened and our pace slowed considerably, but we made headway and eventually found ourselves above the cliff and canyon looking up at very steep terrain with lots of cascading waterfalls. We crossed the steep creek and followed a steep heather slope that steepened into some easy class three scrambling. We scrambled over several rock steps between large benches, eventually accessing low-angle slabs that got us up to the upper glacier.

The glacier was steep and crevassed; we got the rope out and put our crampons on for a fun climb. We were able to get a good look at the summit pyramid from halfway up the glacier and decided there was a weakness to the north of the summit up a nice-looking crack system. We continued up the

steep snow with Mike in the lead and climbed around several large crevasses to the far right and then weaved back and up to the crack system.

A deep, but narrow, moat guarded the rock. Mike pounded a snow picket into the hard snow and put me on belay as I climbed down into the moat and took a big step to a nice rock ledge. Thin seams were all I could find for anchors, so I pounded in a piton and belayed Mike across the moat. About 15 feet of near-vertical rock with small, sloping holds led to the crack system above. I carefully balanced and smeared up the rock 10 feet to a bomber six-inch ledge for my feet. I pounded in a pin in a thin seam for protection and made a couple of 5.8-ish moves over a bulge. I scrambled up some easy terrain and quickly ran out of rope. I led two fun, low-fifth-class pitches up nice cracks and gained the north skyline ridge. Mike took the lead with two more fun, scrambly ridge pitches up to the summit. Amazing views awaited us on that beautiful, sunny day, with mountains in all directions and beautiful Lynn Canal to our west sat nearly





Ben Still on Pitch 2. Photo by Mike Miller.

6000 feet below us. My GPS read 5984 feet on the summit. We built a small cairn and began thinking about our descent.

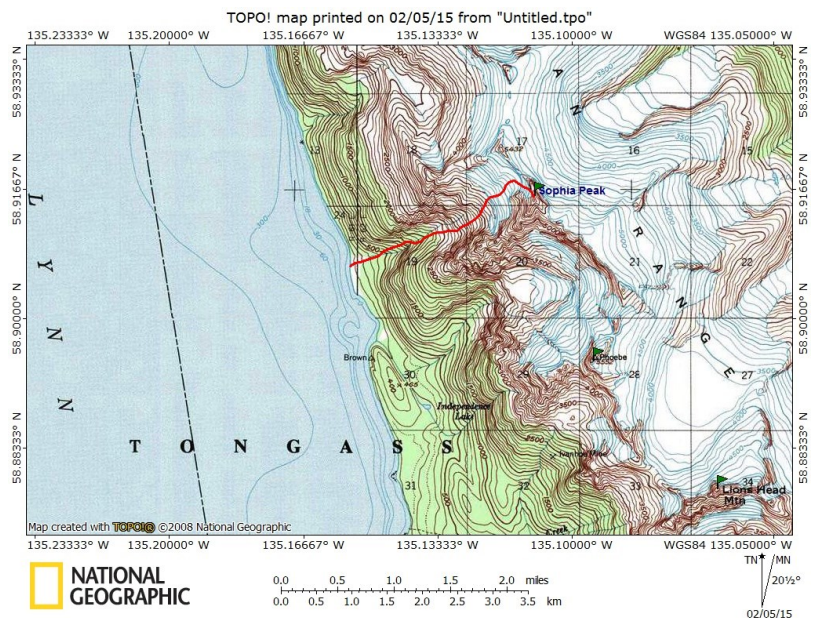
We rappelled straight down the west face to the highest-reaching snow in two long raps. From there we down-climbed the long, steep snow slope placing the occasional snow picket or ice screw. I did not bring gloves, and as I down-climbed through the steep snow and ice, my hands froze. Several times I had to stop and attempt to rewarm my hands even though it was a balmy 60 degrees Fahrenheit. I was quite relieved when we made it down to the easier, lower-angle glacial slopes. Although my hands were finally warming up, the sky was darkening and we had quite a complicated, scrambly route down through the maze of cliffs and waterfalls.

We were able to reverse our route in the waning light, making down to the brush line just as the remaining light disappeared. We found a small flat area and put all of our clothes on and our legs into our backpacks and hunkered down for the night. Four hours of shivering later the light was coming back and we restarted our descent around 3 a.m. and remembered that high tide was at 6 a.m. Three hours was plenty of time to get to the boat, no problem.

We crashed through thick alders and twisted, broken mountain hemlock trees that seemed almost impenetrable. I saw there was an awful lot of daylight in front of me and realized we had dropped down too early and did not traverse far enough around the large cliff near the canyon. We were both tired and couldn't imagine fighting those bushes any longer, so we decided to rappel over the cliff. I could see several ledges of alders that broke the cliff into sections. Two evil rappels later we realized we had missed the high tide and could only watch as the water receded as we were still untangling the rope from all the devilish alders, which continued to beat us into submission. I had to scramble back up the cliff 50 feet to get the rope to release from the last of the alders. We crashed through the last of the brush and emerge on the beach exhausted two hours after high tide.

After resting for an hour and refueling ourselves, we attempted to push the boat down the low-angle beach. After several hours of intense labor we had pushed the boat nearly 100 feet down-slope. That cut off three hours of waiting; I was pushing the *Nunatak* into the water and – crash – a large wave threw the boat onto the rocks and I was lucky not to get crushed. Those seas looked so small from the beach. The next wave came up and both Mike and I pushed the boat back in the water and I waded out to my chest, holding the bow while Mike jumped in and started up the motor. We were back in the water and headed for Juneau, a decision we quickly regretted. After taking several waves over the bow, we realized the water was quite rough and our little boat was having some trouble going against the wind. We made a quick turnaround and went with the waves. Although the seas were only 6 to 8 feet, we felt tiny in the turbulent water. We made slow progress and three hours later arrived in calm Haines harbor, ready to be done. We called our friend Matt Champol, who lived in Haines, and took refuge at his place for the night. The next day was calm, so we drove the boat back to Echo Cove in Juneau without problem.

Several years later, after calling the mountain Peak 5984, we decided to call the peak Sophia Peak after the *Princess Sophia*, a passenger ship that ran aground and sank in a storm on a reef in Lynn Canal.





## From Pumpnickel to Machine Gun

*Text and photo by Sam Zmolek*



*Whalehead Peak, Machine Gun Mountain, and a third, unnamed point from the shore of a large cirque lake.*

Deep in the central spine of Unalaska Island is a landscape characterized by rugged peaks, alpine lakes, and bare terrain that sometimes feels as if the glaciers just retreated yesterday. I had wanted to mount an expedition to this region for some time, and last summer I had a couple days in September to make my first foray into the area.

Just getting back into those distant highlands was an endeavor, and I used the knowledge gleaned from earlier exploratory thrusts to plan the most straightforward route. I started at the end of the road in Captains Bay on the last day of August in 2014, and after a short hike through the chokingly tall vegetation near the mouth of the Shaishnikof River, I turned south up the side of a spectacular waterfall to reach the alpine zone of rocky ridges and barren glacial wombs.

As I picked my way upward along the spine of the island, the elevation gradually increased toward the first big mountain, a monster I referred to as Whalehead Peak because it resembles a big white sperm whale head extending into the air with its jaw slightly agape. I had scrambled to the summit of this 2650-foot peak for the first time a few weeks prior on July 25th, and found it to be one of the more enjoyable scrambles on the island due to the steep flanks of high-quality rock that's almost granitic in texture, and a far cry from the usual volcanic choss that makes

up the majority of the island. This peak had no signs of previous ascents that I observed.

On this day, I skirted the summit of Whalehead Peak and followed networks of moss-covered streams through the drainages to the north, until I came to a large cirque lake that abuts the summit. At this point, the gentle mist that I had been hiking in turned to a more intense rainstorm and I lost visibility of the entire area, including the lake itself below me. I continued on, trying to feel the drainage below me as I attempted to navigate over a series of ridges to reach an even bigger cirque lake about a mile to the south where I intended to setup a base camp. I started up the other side of the bowl into thicker clouds and rockier terrain that made navigation particularly haphazard. The rain continued unabated as I became thoroughly soaked despite my best gear.

After an unknown period of time in the cold, wet, and white unknown, I huddled under a rocky shelter hoping for the revelation of a lake in the distance below me. Sure enough, eventually a still body of water shone through under the fog, and I had a target to shoot for. It seemed the lake wasn't quite where I was expecting, but my shivering body was not in the mood to argue, so I descended and quickly scouted for a place to pitch a tent and warm up. Within minutes, my tent was up and I



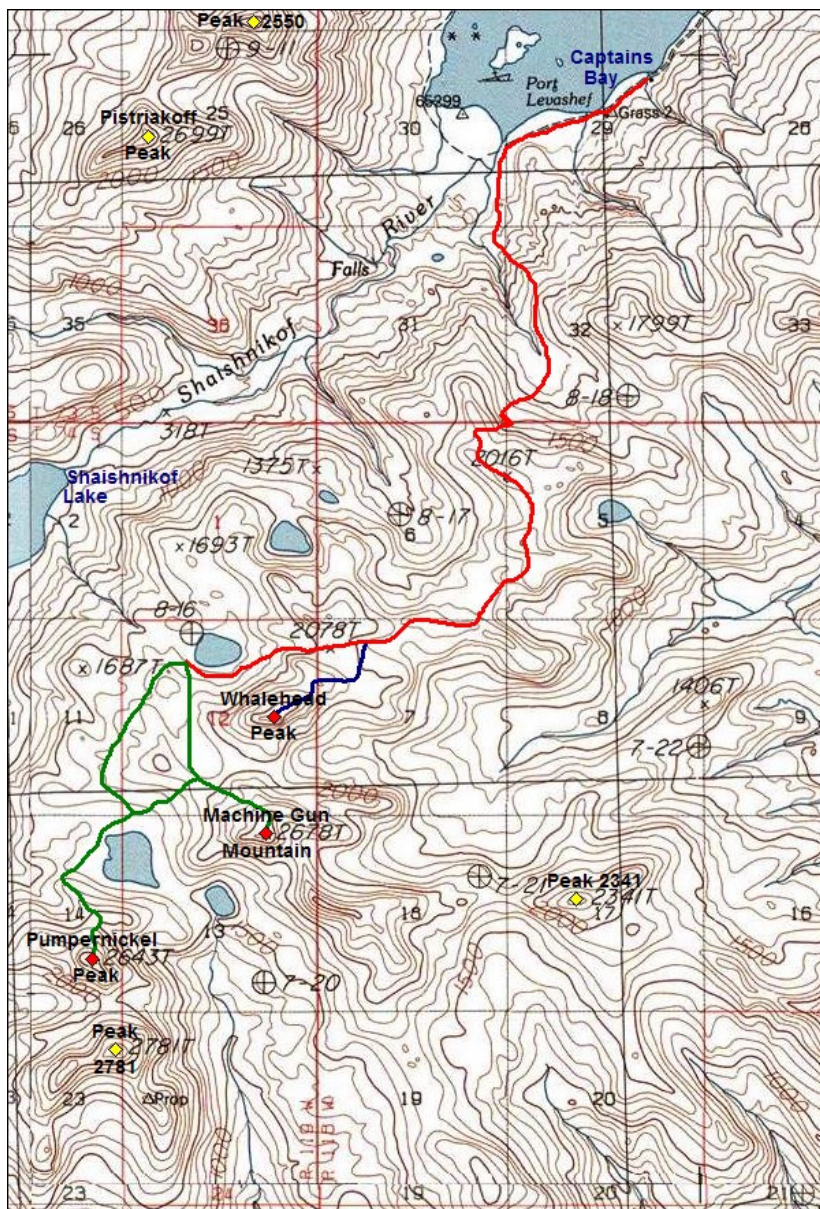
was figuring out how to strip all my soaked clothes in the vestibule and get inside without making everything wet. It felt like an eternal struggle, but I was finally in a dry sleeping bag heating up a cup of tea and wondering when I could start climbing again. Darkness washed over me as I took a well-earned nap.

I awoke in the evening rejuvenated, and began checking to see if the visibility had improved. Eventually I could see the cirque lake in all its glory, and decided to use the remaining twilight to venture out and assess the summit possibilities. Right off the bat, something seemed odd, and I quickly saw a feature that looked familiar but was in the wrong location across the deep valley beyond the cirque. Further explorations away from the lake revealed that I was not where I thought I was, but had somehow backtracked in the fog to the first cirque lake. Disheartened by this discovery, I climbed a high hill between the two lakes and took in the magnificent view before dusk enveloped the mountains. A lone fox followed me back to my tent as I contemplated the next day, curious as to my presence in this landscape untouched by human hands.

The next day broke clear and crisp, saturated from the moisture of the previous day without a cloud in the sky. I decided to make my way to the second lake and see what mountains I could climb from there. While descending the drainage, I started sizing up my next move and decided to try the imposing peak that loomed above the south shore. This peak had a rounded profile that went toward vertical on both sides like a loaf of bread in cross section, so I decided to call it Pumpernickel Peak. Because the east and west sides of the mountain were prohibitively steep, I knew I would have to take a line directly up the north face, which appeared to be lined with cliff bands. It was intimidating, but I knew it wouldn't hurt to give it a shot.

After a tricky start to get past the first cliff band on the north face, the rest of Pumpernickel Peak wasn't too bad, though it certainly did involve some zigzagging across the face to find the shallower angles. I was on the summit fairly quickly, enjoying the great views of the three major bays of Unalaska Island – Makushin Bay, Captains Bay, and Beaver Inlet. In fact, that summit happens to be the only point on the island that drains into all three bays.

Before descending, I looked at the imposing angular peak across the lake and decided to try climbing it before breaking camp and heading home. This mountain was the sister of Whalehead Peak, and came in at 2678 feet of elevation. It ended up being a straightforward scramble up gentle grades and good rock as I attacked the northwest face. At the start of the ascent from the lake, I found a couple .50-caliber machine-gun slugs that appeared to be from the World War II era. They were in good



Map created with TOPO! ©2003 National Geographic (www.nationalgeographic.com/topo)

Day 1 and return route in red. The blue line indicates Zmolek's July 25 route up Whalehead Peak. The green line depicts Zmolek's route up Pumpernickel Peak and Machine Gun Mountain and return to camp.

shape, and apparently had settled into a deep snowfield and then ended up lying undisturbed on the rocks after the summer melt. After this find, I decided to dub the peak "Machine Gun Mountain."

This summit was attained quite easily, and I enjoyed the spectacular views of multiple lakes, valleys, bays, and distant peaks amid balmy weather as long as I could before the inevitable return to base camp and reality ensued. After that, it was a quick packing job and a lovely walk back to the car some 5 miles or so away across the trail-free country. Needless to say, I couldn't stop looking back and savoring the experience, and I can't wait for an opportunity to go back to that spot and attack more of those peaks some day.



## Crescent Lake Peakbagging

*Text by Steve Gruhn; photos by Ben Still*



*Steve Gruhn hiking up toward the Right-Axis saddle with Crescent Lake below.*

At 4:30 a.m. on August 20, Ben Still and I started the drive to the Crescent Creek Trailhead near Cooper Landing. I'm not necessarily enthusiastic early in the morning, but I'm even less of a fan of being benighted, and we had a long day ahead of us. The plan was to climb some peaks west and south of Crescent Lake.

The weather forecast had called for clear skies. We arrived at the trailhead in thick fog. By 9 a.m. we were walking along the Crescent Lake Primitive Trail that skirts the lake on the south, looking for a route up toward Right Mountain (5085). I'd climbed Right Mountain twice before on June 29, 2002, (see the September 2002 *Scree*) and thought I could remember the route up the eastern slopes. But the fog was so thick that we couldn't even see the lake, which was 50 feet from us. Without any visual reference, I wasn't much help in the navigation department. So, when we encountered a clearing through the alder we left the trail and headed uphill. The thick fog had coated the vegetation – six-foot tall grass, devil's club, alders, and assorted other plants – in heavy dew. Shortly after leaving

the trail we were thoroughly soaked. This looked to be the start of a very long day.

But eventually we broke out of the fog to a blue-sky day. Ben (quickly) and I (slowly) headed for the saddle between Right Mountain and Axis Peak (5161). Just below the saddle I suggested to Ben that he stop waiting for me and that we would meet on the summit of Axis Peak. So, he quickly climbed Right Mountain's east ridge while I plodded along to the summit of Axis Peak. On top I found the remnants of a 1942 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers bench mark and a cairn with a register. The only entry was from Steve Butkus, Tom Choate, Paul Davis, Jon Evenson, Dwight Iverson, and Carol Jewell on June 29, 2002. Tom had named the peak after the name on the bench mark, unaware that Vin Hoeman had called this peak Apothecary Mountain in the 1960s. I've also heard the name Bear Mountain used for this peak.

I thought I would have a nice leisurely snack on the summit of Axis Peak while waiting for Ben, but he arrived shortly after I did.



We departed to the southwest and followed snowfields on gentle slopes to the 4150-foot saddle between Axis Peak and Peak 4759. On the descent we encountered a shed caribou antler. I hadn't heard of caribou in this part of the Kenai Peninsula, so that struck me as rather unusual. The hike up the northwestern slopes of Peak 4759 was pretty uneventful. Ben reached the summit first and continued to the east. I stopped on top and noticed that he had stopped on a knoll a couple hundred feet to the east and perhaps twenty feet lower than I. He called out that there was a cairn there. I came over to join him, but we didn't find a register inside. We pondered why the cairn wasn't on the summit. Perhaps it was the only snow-free location when it was made. Or perhaps it had a better vantage point for use in a survey. Regardless, we were not the first people on the summit.

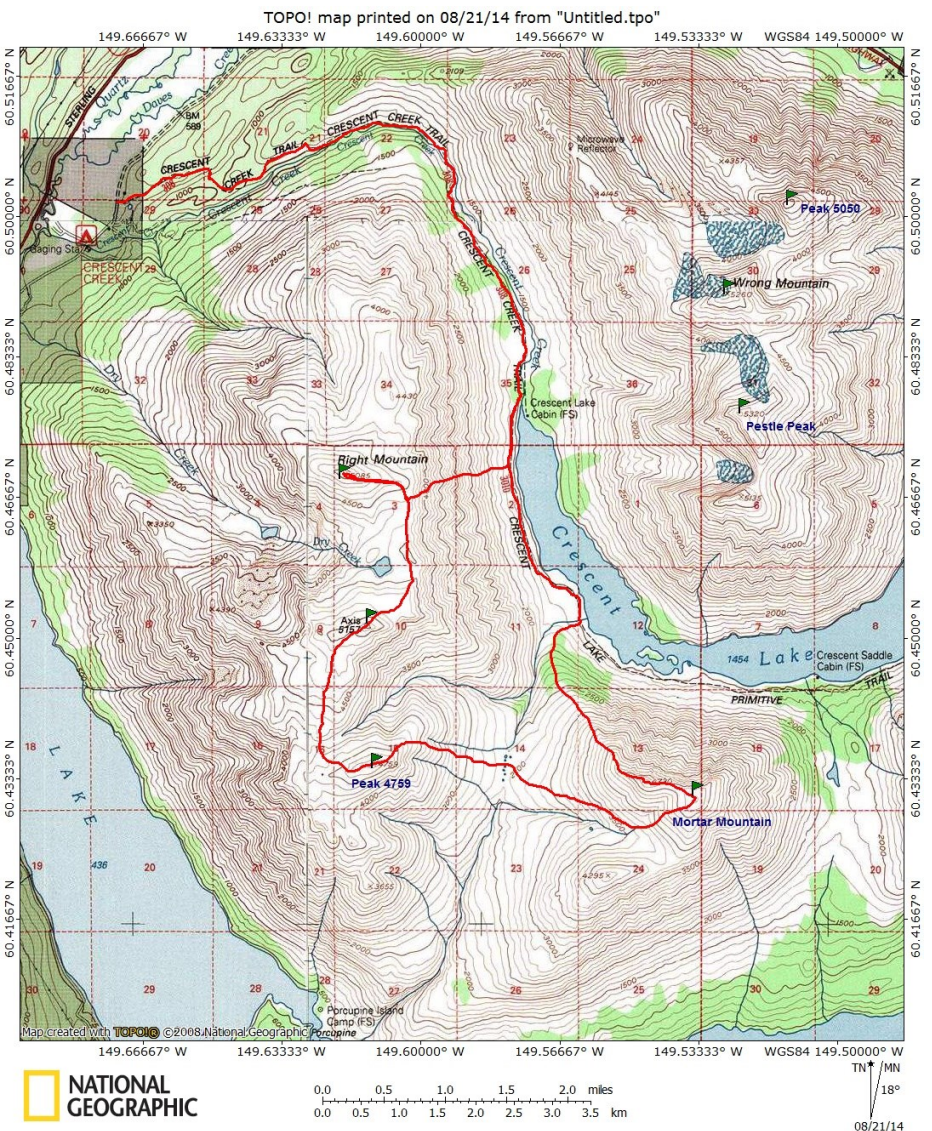
Continuing to the northeast, we skirted a steep ravine and began our descent to the 2650-foot saddle between Peak 4759 and Mortar Mountain (4730) to the east. The fog had by then burned off and we stopped up high and scanned the area below for bears before we descended from the tundra into the tall grasses. Seeing none, we headed for the saddle. The Seward (B-7) USGS map indicated several lakes at the saddle. We figured we'd get re-soaked in a marshy area, but the lakes had all drained. As we ascended the west slopes of Mortar Mountain, I spied what looked like a steep rock step on the northwest ridge. I suggested that instead of hiking the ridge that we follow the stream to the south. We followed the north side of the creek to a rocky gully that led northeast to the saddle between the two summits of Mortar Mountain. A band of ewes and lambs was near the saddle. Up the gully we headed. Thinking the eastern summit might be the highest point, we decided to visit it first. But once we got there, we decided that the western summit was higher. So, off to the western summit we went. Soon we were on top with commanding views of Crescent Lake and Kenai Lake. Thinking that Crescent Lake and the 5320-foot peak to the north looked, respectively, like a mortar and pestle (as viewed on a map), Vin Hoeman named Mortar Mountain and Pestle Peak in the 1960s.

On top we found a cairn, so we weren't the first people on Mortar Mountain, either. After resting on the summit, we headed down the northwest ridge. The north side of the ridge dropped off quite steeply and I recalled the steep rock step I had seen from below, so I kept on the lookout for a reasonable exit to the west. We found a sheep trail that led us through the rock step

without any difficulties and soon we were relaxing on the tundra just above timberline.

We both dreaded getting up from our gorgeous resting spot and battling brush, but we knew we had to make headway or spend a cold and damp night outside. Just as we entered the timberline we noticed some survey flagging. It marked a rough trail through the timber. What we had dreaded quickly became an enjoyable and rapid hike through the timber – until the flagging stopped and we lost the trail. The last couple hundred yards took longer than the rest of the descent from timberline. We made our way over fallen logs and through thickets until we eventually stumbled onto the Crescent Lake Primitive Trail a few hundred feet south of the stream that flowed parallel to our route.

Once we were on the trail it was merely a long slog back to the car. We arrived back at the parking lot just under 15 hours after we had left. And the sun was just beginning to set. Ben figured his total elevation gain was about 8,900 feet and his horizontal distance was about 25 miles. Having forgone Right Mountain on this trip, the figures for me were somewhat less. Our feet were sore and we were tired, but we had experienced another wonderful day in the Kenai Mountains.





## The Shortest and Longest Day

Text and photo by Wayne L. Todd

December 20-21 with Cory Hinds, Sally Balchin, and Stan Olsen



*Cory Hinds looks out on Anchorage's morning glow.*

The MCA winter solstice Flattop sleepout (bivy to Sally Balchin) is resurrected by Cory Hinds, the recently inaugurated MCA president. So he, Stan Olsen, Sally, and I meet at Glen Alps on December 20, for the night hike to the top. Between the ambient light from Anchorage, the mild temperatures, and good company, we wonder why this hike isn't a frequent night hike.

With just a light wind on top, sitting outside is still pleasant. The billions and billions (Carl Sagan copyright; O.K., maybe not quite that many) of lights from Anchorage serve as secondary light entertainment. A couple headlamps bobble about across the plateau, but we are not visited. When snow adds to the wind, Cory and I retreat into a comfy tent ("cheating" according to Sally), while Stan and Sally retreat to bivy bags.

After a peaceful night's sleep (for some) we make an early exodus down the north side, to avoid the crowds. Just four more days of shopping.

Later that evening the Alaska Mountain Rescue Group (AMRG) is called out for an injured subject on the Resurrection Pass Trail (RPT). After a 9 p.m. roundup, 14 members drive carefully on icy roads to the Hope end of the RPT. Members man the trailhead and radios as the majority hike noisily, from metal vs. ice, on the RPT. The only viable transportation for the ¼ inch of ice on frozen ground is Kahtoolas or crampons (a snowmachine is attempted briefly). By 1 a.m., the subject is located and packaged for the human pulled litter "sled." By 3 a.m., back at the trailhead, the subject is released to a driver. A caravan safely makes its way back to Anchorage, arriving after 5 a.m.

For more information about the AMRG, visit <http://amrg.org/>.



# Peak of the Month: Great Nunatak

By Steve Gruhn

Mountain Range: Chugach Mountains

Borough: Unorganized Borough

Drainage: Columbia Glacier

Latitude/Longitude: 61° 6' 25" North, 147° 1' 0" West

Elevation: 3647 feet

Prominence: 3097 feet from Peak 4150 in the Columbia Glacier and Number One River drainages

Adjacent Peaks: Peak 14 (3412) and Peak 3780 in the Columbia Glacier and Number One River drainages

Distinctness: 1197 feet from Peak 14

USGS Map: Anchorage (A-1)

First Recorded Ascent: 2005 by Dan McNamara and Shad O'Neel

Route of First Recorded Ascent: Northwest aspect

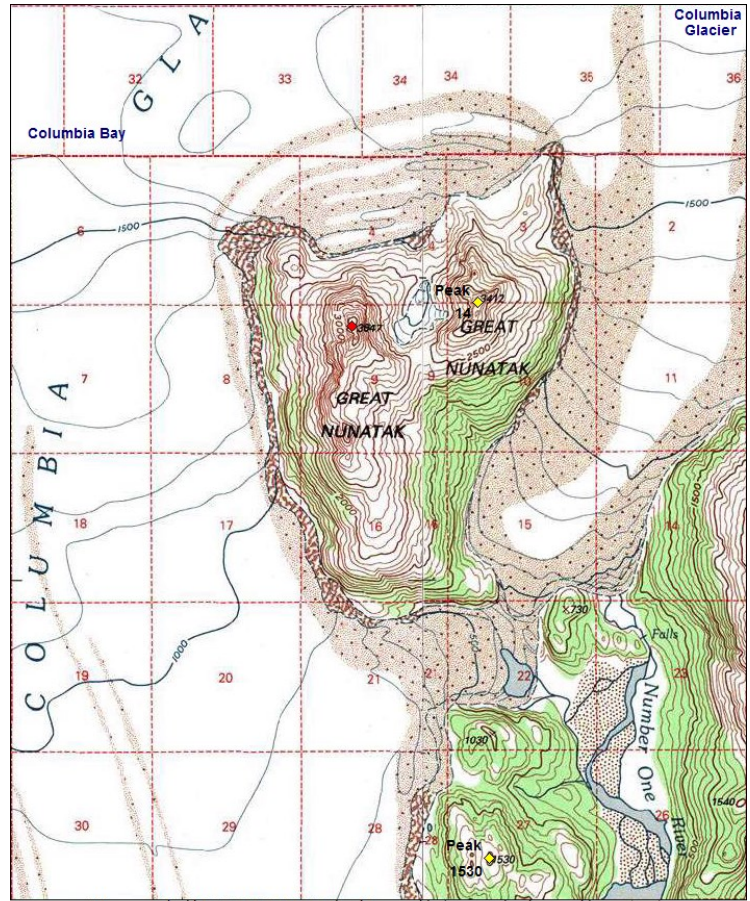
Access Point: Northwest ridge

Great Nunatak was originally called Peak 15 in the field notes of a 1947 U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey party led by Henry Arnold Karo. It was officially named Great Nunatak in the spring of 1975.

Using a helicopter, Dan McNamara and Shad O'Neel established a base camp on the northwest aspect of Great Nunatak to support their glaciological research of the nearby Columbia Glacier. After a month conducting glaciological research, McNamara and O'Neel left their camp near the terminus of the Columbia Glacier and proceeded to climb the 60-degree heather slopes of Great Nunatak, occasionally placing rock pro in rock he described as either too polished or too chossy for climbing. They found no cairn on the summit, but O'Neel thought that the late Mark F. Meier might have taken a helicopter to the summit in the 1980s.

Great Nunatak is within the Chugach National Forest's Nellie Juan – College Fiord Wilderness Study Area. Helicopter landings within the Nellie Juan – College Fiord Wilderness Study Area require a permit from the Chugach National Forest.

The information in this article came from U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey party field notes available at <http://www.geocaching.com/mark/details.aspx?PID=UW7742>, from biographies of H. Arnold Karo available at <http://www.history.noaa.gov/>



[cgsbios/biok1.html](http://cgsbios/biok1.html) and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry\\_Arnold\\_Karo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Arnold_Karo), from the U.S. Board on Geographic Names' *Decisions on Geographic Names in the United States: April through June 1975: Decision List No. 7502* and from my correspondence with O'Neel and Tad Pfeffer.



Great Nunatak from the summit of Peak 1530 to the southeast in 2005. Photo by Paul May.



## Agenda

### MCA Executive Committee Meeting, January 2015

Date: January 19, 2015

Meeting convened at 6:00 p.m.

Attendees: Cory Hinds, Elizabeth Bennett, Carlene Van Tol, Galen Flint, Aaron Gallagher, Greg Encelewski, Josh Clark, Rachad Rayess.

1. Secretary's Report (Liz)
  - a. December board meeting minutes
  - b. Action items
2. Treasurer's Report (Aaron)
  - a. 2015 Budget – Vote for approval at Jan 20 general meeting
3. VP - Programs/Speakers (Galen)
  - a. Christmas party was success, but no more Mooses Tooth pizza at BP Energy Center
  - b. January program: Andy Hall – MCA's part in the story of the 1967 Wilcox Expedition Tragedy
  - c. Other upcoming programs – February and March general meeting presentations arranged. Looking for ideas for March presentation, Tom Choate presenting in April, May-July outside venues.
  - d. Summer meetings outside
4. Basic Mountaineering School (Jayme Mack)-Cory presents the idea of cancelling if we are unable to get adequate number of volunteer instructors.
  - a. Discuss lack of volunteers and how to proceed-Possible volunteers: Josh Clark, Brian Aho. Activity possibilities: Ice climbing trip in February at Serenity Falls Hut, avalanche safety, crevasse rescue.
  - b. Info from Avalanche Information Center on half-day avalanche recognition? (Josh)
5. Huts (Cory)
  - a. Pichler's. Starting to organize for the sheet metal replacement. Getting prices from Rain Proof Roofing. – Possible discount; talk with Stan Olsen. Possibly happen mid-summer.
  - b. Dnigi. Hoped to get in to Dnigi for the evaluation in February. Not enough snow. May need to fly in assessment team. Alternate skier-friendly location identified for possible hut move.- possible help (with snowmachines): Harry, John, Ross, Kathy, Eric...If no snow by mid-February, arrange a helicopter.
  - c. Spending funds: better ways to spend money? Cory mentions that MCA members would like us to do something with funds, instead of having them just sit.
  - d. Urine-separating toilet seats (Mint, Bomber, Dnigi). Motion to purchase three seats at \$130 each and install this summer as labor allows.- Only one hut needs this (Mint), Greg Bra-

giel will purchase seat.

6. Equipment Chairperson (Josh) - Arctic storage looked okay.
    - a. Proposal from Best Storage?- Hasn't heard back from company yet.
  7. Mentoring (Rachad)
    - a. Two student signed up, no mentors. Running Scree article. Try to find mentors. Two interested students: Charlotte Foley interested in mountaineering and backcountry skills, Meg McCooma interested in ice climbing and skate skiing.
  8. Managing Liability (Cory) - Cory will speak with Vickie Lytle
    - a. Memo in files from former board member Hans Neidig. Cory's recommendation is to manage liability by avoiding "gross negligence." – ways to avoid this: choose good leaders, good documentation, have checklists for leader skills, list of dos and don'ts. Create a waiver to have signed \*right before the trip,\* mandatory safety meeting and waiver, have board members meeting mentors, speak with Vickie Lytle as she does teacher training, board decides who is mentoring which students. Cory will give a status update each general meeting.
      - i. Board to make sure club-sanctioned trips have approved trip leaders.
      - ii. Document leader orientations/trainings.
        - b. Serenity Falls Hut trip in February
          - i. Somewhat loose format. Come in on your own and go climbing.
          - ii. Safety orientation Saturday a.m. Everyone with MCA signs waiver. Use MCA radios. Let Rangers know we're in there. Bring satellite phone.
  9. Library (Cory)
    - a. Charlotte Foley interested in working on library. Has reviewed books at REI. Will discuss with Vicky Lytle and provide recommendation.
    - b. Former member has contacted Cory to donate books. They will be accepted.
- New Business
1. Motion to amend policy on printing membership application in Scree. Replace with link to website.-If continuing to print Scree, do so in color? Ask Steve Gruhn.
- Other Discussion
- Next Meeting: February 23 at 6:00 p.m. in REI classroom
- Adjournment: 7:40 p.m.



## Mountaineering Club of Alaska

President	Cory Hinds	229-6809	Board member (term expires in 2015)	Rachad Rayess	617-309-6566
Vice-President	Galen Flint	650-207-0810	Board member (term expires in 2015)	Joshua Clark	887-1888
Secretary	Max Neale	207-712-1355	Board member (term expires in 2016)	Jayne Mack	382-0212
Treasurer	Aaron Gallagher	250-9555	Board member (term expires in 2016)	Carlene Van Tol	748-5270
Past President	Greg Encelewski	360-0274			

Annual membership dues: Single \$20, Family \$25

Dues can be paid at any meeting or mailed to the Treasurer at the MCA address below. If you want a membership card, please fill out a club waiver and mail it with a self-addressed, stamped envelope. If you fail to receive the newsletter or have questions about your membership, contact the Club Membership Committee at [membership@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 24th of the month to appear in the next month's *Scree*.

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

Mailing list/database entry: Aaron Gallagher - [membership@mtclubak.org](mailto:membership@mtclubak.org)

Hiking and Climbing Committee: Vicky Lytle - [hcc@mtclubak.org](mailto:hcc@mtclubak.org)

Huts: Greg Bragiel - 569-3008 or [huts@mtclubak.org](mailto:huts@mtclubak.org)

Calendar: Stuart Grenier - 337-5127 or [stugrenier@gmail.com](mailto:stugrenier@gmail.com)

*Scree* Editor: [MCAScree@gmail.com](mailto:MCAScree@gmail.com) Steve Gruhn (344-1219) assisted by Elizabeth Ellis ([elizabeth.anne.russo@gmail.com](mailto:elizabeth.anne.russo@gmail.com))

Web: [www.mtclubak.org](http://www.mtclubak.org)

Find MCAK listserv at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/MCAK/info>.

Mountaineering Club of Alaska  
Box 243561  
Anchorage, AK 99524-3561