

# the SCREE

## Mountaineering Club of Alaska

April 2015

Volume 58 Number 4



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**Monthly meeting: 6:30 p.m., Tuesday, April 21**

**Program:** Tom Choate will give a presentation on his 50th anniversary ascent of Mount McKinley in 2013 that made him the oldest person to stand on the summit.

*"It is not the view from the summit that matters as much as overcoming the challenges of the mountain and receiving the blessings it confers on the soul."*

- Tom Choate

# 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, April 21, 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

Jason Maki (right) and Noah McKelvin approach Camp 3 on the East Ridge of Mount Logan.

Photo by Matt Grabina.

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**Article Submission:** Text and photography submissions for *the Scree* can be sent as attachments to [mcascre@gmail.com](mailto:mcascre@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. Contact Greg Bragiel at [unknownhiker@alaska.net](mailto:unknownhiker@alaska.net).

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## MCA Huts Human Waste Protocols:

Mint Hut – #1 in the sun, #2 in the loo. A volunteer is needed to do outhouse maintenance this summer. Contact Huts Committee Chairman Greg Bragiel for details.

Bomber/Dnigi Huts – Use outhouse for #1 and #2.

Scandinavian Peaks Hut – Trash-compactor bag in portable loo (5-gallon bucket), haul out with Meekin's Air Service.

Eklutna Traverse Huts – Trash-compactor bag in portable loo (5-gallon bucket), haul out or place in human-waste barrels or use wag bags and haul out. No garbage, food, glass, cans, etc.

Online? Click me!



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



## Peak 7430: Don't Say Riches

By Wayne L. Todd

With Matt Hickey and Cory Hinds

September 28-30, 2014

This is a guy's trip. So it's Cory, Matt, and I sidestepping across the Matanuska River with poles in hand, and testicles dragging in the ice cold water. This is made more uncomfortable as we'd just seen a motorized Rolligon crossing the river with the occupants sitting up high and dry. The weather is fine and, other than a 20-percent chance of precipitation tomorrow, the forecast is sunny, sunny, sunny.

We have the route and logistics down getting into Glacier Creek, so two hours later we're setting camp a few miles up the valley. Pleasantly, only one crossing of Glacier Creek is required this year. The myriad moose tracks and ample bear tracks remind us we're not alone. Stargazing is enjoyed by campfire, along with a light sky to the north (the moon?).

We're out of camp at 7 a.m. en route to our peak valley destination. We hear, and then see, moose. At water-crossing time, our stiff, frozen water-crossing shoes require cold stream soaking to soften them. Transferring back into dry, comfortable hiking boots feels so nice. We mark our shoe cache with webbing and a GPS point. We catch a moose trail that traverses into our desired valley, avoiding significant brush. The only real slowdowns are gravity and the bountiful blueberries.

Traveling is good for a couple gentle miles up cobblestone, but I note that they are a bit annoying (as opposed to say head-high brush?). Shafts of light spot the hillside.

Though we're mostly environmentally minded, we somehow get started with ideas of environmental riches. I suspect Mother Nature dislikes such talk.

As we round the valley corner to the south side of Peak 7430, the clouds look to break up for more astounding views, and we glimpse an ascent route. A frozen alpine lake supplies brief entertainment with "Star Wars" sound effects from rocks thrown on top. Rock ptarmigan flit and flat, cackling away.

Riches this and riches that, ho, ho, ho, haw, haw. The clouds sink low and solid. We transition to steep talus and scree, and light snow, graupel, and then heavy snow. By the summit block, there are inches of snow, so crampons and axes emerge for the 20-yard scramble to the top. The black-and-white 100-yard views are disappointing, though enough to glean a ridge



*Cory Hinds and Matt Hickey on the summit of The Rich Tit.*

*Photo by Wayne Todd*

route from the north would be dicey, even when dry. A register is left on the possibly unvisited summit (The Rich Tit, 7430). The steep, rocky descent is more fun with the wet fresh snow (this is sarcasm, if wondering). We all have slip-and-slide moments. The three of us, along with some cairns, keep us on route for the steep descent. As we drop, the whiteness goes

on and on, down to 3000 feet. The annoying cobblestones are now treacherous from the white, wet blanket. I avidly use my two poles to keep upright. Matt slips on ice and destroys his pole (wait, that was my pole). We try a field repair, but manage to drop the critical screw in the snow. Mother Nature is laughing at us.

As we traverse out of the valley on the moose trail, the sky is already bluing and, oh, we now have a side view of what we climbed, albeit now white. Becoming a bit superstitious on the way down, we haven't said "environmental riches" for several hours now, and the weather is improving. Hmmmm, a coincidence, or Mother Nature's disapproval wearing off? We clean up our language just in case.

Bearing down on our shoe stash, Cory reports a moose is bedded down there. Damn, sure enough, those dark, definitive raised ears are literally at our shoes. What, did it eat our shoes? We continually saunter forward, we need our water shoes. Unbelievable, that cow is right on our shoes and not moving. What battle will ensue to regain possession of our footwear? A little closer, "Oh, those ears are my insoles sticking out of my shoes," states Cory. The cow WAS our shoes. That's #2 "humor" from Mother Nature.

Soon after reaching camp, we're using headlamps, then stargazing, then northern-lights gazing of large green areas with occasional streaks (that's what we saw the first night). Too

much gazing, and wishing for dry clothes, as miscellaneous footwear and handwear melt, mis-shape, and catch on fire next to the campfire.

After a well-below-freezing night (with an inadequate bag on my part), I have a rather difficult time getting my feet in my stiffly frozen hiking boots, so tromp around camp wearing boot high heels (refusing to soak these boots in the creek). Mother Nature #3.

Under blue skies, we hike out the frozen sand and silt, imprinted with animal tracks and our ingress tracks. At the valley exit, we surprisingly encounter a tent with two occupants and dog.

The beaver pond now has a skin of ice on it, so we get to step through that down into 18 inches of cold water and 6 inches of mud. Along the beaver dam to the game trail we go.

Logically the Matanuska River should be lower as the early morning temperatures are still brisk after the hard freeze of last night. Nope, she's still crotch deep, only now there are ice chunks floating on the surface and subsurface, and there's slush mounds on the bottom (felt not seen). Mother Nature #4. The crossing is definitely colder, but we're soon donning dry clothes at the cars (after struggling with frozen boot laces) and then eating Glacier Burgers and sipping hot drinks at the Long Rifle, while debating which point in the distance we climbed.



*Matt Hickey (left) and Wayne Todd crossing the Matanuska River.*

*Photo by Cory Hinds*



## Misty Mountain Hop

By Sam Zmolek

with Candice Young

July 16th, 2014

In the middle of 2014, after a year of solid peakbagging in the area surrounding the road system of Unalaska, I realized there was only one more substantial peak that had not been climbed in the areas east of Pyramid Valley that were within dayhiking distance of the road. Further review of my previous photographs and maps of the area revealed Peak 1954 to be an interesting hike, far enough away from the more readily accessible terrain to avoid much attention, but with a reasonably straightforward approach. The map suggested a potentially stunning view due to the summit's protrusion eastward into Beaver Inlet.



*Sam Zmolek near the summit of Misty Mountain, starting the descent of the northwest ridge.*

*Photo by Candice Young*

I was set to give it a go the week of July 13<sup>th</sup>, 2014, and got lucky enough to have a decent weather window on the 16<sup>th</sup>, with Candice Young as a hiking partner for a long evening. It was the first time I'd hiked with her, so I had to ask the usual probing questions to make sure she knew what she was in for, but I decided we may as well go for broke.

We were able to start our hike on the Ugadaga Bay Trail, one of the few trails shown on the Ounalashka Corporation hiking map

that actually is a regularly traveled, identifiable path. We started down to the bay, hiking around a mile or so before we started traversing the mountain on our right, riding out as much of the contours as possible to conserve elevation. After another half mile of side-hilling, we crossed a lovely stream and worked our way to the flanks of Peak 1954.

We had to ascend a steepening green ramp to attain the east ridge, which was the most approachable route to the summit. After this tiring stretch, we stopped to enjoy the view and



*Candice Young ascending the ridge to the summit of Misty Mountain, with Ugadaga Bay in the distance.*

*Photo by Sam Zmolek*

ponder the options, all the while the low ceiling came in to obscure the last 800 feet of the mountain. It was a lovely walk along this ridge into a deepening mist, though unfortunately this shroud also made it difficult to be sure of our exact position. In fact, it was only later that I realized we weren't on the gentle ridge I had scouted, but on a more meandering line to the north that was starting to get steep enough to cause some mild concern.

As the visibility continued to drop, and the cold mist started taking its toll, we realized we were on top of something. After some brief scouting, I located the true summit to the south, and we sat down to enjoy a celebratory meal and put on some layers. While hungrily devouring sandwiches, we observed small openings in the clouds passing by for seconds at a time, injecting flashes of brilliance into our cold grey existence. That's when Misty Mountain suddenly seemed a very appropriate name for Peak 1954. I didn't observe any signs of previous ascents, such as any cairns on the summit, but it was hard to believe anything this close to town hadn't been

climbed before.

Eventually we had our fill of food and of the lush lupine-covered summit, and we planned our descent. As the visibility improved, we realized a descent of the northwest ridge was possible. This ridge was a lot steeper and more dramatic than our ascent route, but after working our way down a few hundred feet from the summit, we realized the worst section was brief, and it would be a worthwhile endeavor. We even considered continuing along this ridge to the higher Storm Queen Mountain to the west, but the variable weather was making that a risky proposition, so we got off the ridge instead and descended into the bowl immediately north of Misty Mountain, proceeding to intercept our inbound route at the stream crossing.

From that point, it was a simple stroll to the trail and back to the car, with that last long uphill to the trailhead a reminder that we actually did a lot more than just a walk in the park. It was a walk to remember, for sure, though I still have an itch to return and take in the full summit panorama on a clear day.



# The Boys of Brogan: Three Coloradans Venture into the Unknown

Text and Photos by Matt Grabina

with Noah McKelvin and Jason Maki

May 25, 2014



*The main (central) summit of Mount Logan (19,541 feet).*

I have always been fascinated by true adventure and by mountaineering's progression over generations. What is cutting edge in one decade becomes par for the course in the next. Way up north, yet close to home for us in Colorado, lie the most expansive icefields outside of the polar regions, and nestled within this group of four ranges is the great, wild, and unforgiving king of them all: the Saint Elias Mountains. Barely 40 miles from the ocean, in a land forgotten by time, rises the biggest mountain (by mass) on Earth: Mount Logan.

A short blurb on MountainProject.com gave me the idea for my route choice: I wanted to climb Mount Logan, but to throw in a flare of exploration, I decided to attempt a traverse, east to west, hoping to ascend the technical East Ridge, cross the plateau, and descend the standard King Trench route.

Historically, the route had been climbed in expedition style with fixed lines, stocked camps, and acclimatization. Unlike Mount McKinley (Denali) there is no walk-up route to work with, and the sustained difficulties had proven too much for many parties over the years. To date I estimated that less than 20 parties

had completed the ridge, and even fewer had made it to the summit. Despite the likelihood of failure, it didn't take much for me to get some of my crazier Colorado ice- and mixed-climbing friends to sign on. I believe the quote from Jason was, "This sounds like a terrible idea, and I will not miss out!" And so it was, Noah McKelvin (22, Denver), Jason Maki (28, Nederland), and I (28, Boulder) set out into the unknown.

Collectively, we didn't have a ton of experience in the Greater Ranges, but we hoped to make up for it in determination and old-fashioned Colorado pride. The East Ridge is huge, bigger than anything that any of us had ever seen before. In its entirety the East Ridge route is over 12,000 feet of vertical climbing. For reference, the Rupal Face on Pakistan's Nanga Parbat is 15,000 feet and is commonly considered to be the biggest route in the world. Again and again on our trip we would experience the Logan Effect: from our base camp six miles away it would be impossible to grasp just how big the route was, and many times we would feel as if we were "almost there." I had experienced this feeling on big mountains before, but not to the same degree.

For months we planned and planned, thought about every ounce we would carry, and studied just how close we could really push it, up north and up high. The “New Testament” as we had come to call it, Training for the New Alpinism, was invaluable, and in mid-May 2014, we set out to Anchorage, intent on bringing fast-and-light alpine-style climbing to the Saint Elias Mountains.

### Alcan Adventures

From the start things went splendidly. Though it would be almost two weeks from the time we left Colorado until we landed on the upper Hubbard Glacier, the sense of adventure really took shape. A few well-spent days in Anchorage with a close friend and an eventful drive in the Brogan Van (a 1985 beater van we bought off of Craigslist) had us in Silver City by the early morning hours of May 19th. Even there at the airstrip we felt outside of time. So far we had gotten all that we signed up for, and more. It would be seven days of anxious waiting, trips to Haines Junction and countless hours mulling over every detail of our plan as we gazed out over Kluane Lake. We took a great sense of pride knowing that some of the true hardmen of all time had done the same ten, twenty, thirty years before.

On the 24th of May, the living legend, Andy Williams, made an attempt to land Noah and Jason on the glacier, but uttered the words “no good.”

On the 25th of May 2014, my 28th birthday, we flew onto the glacier.

Immediately, the silence was deafening and the heat overwhelming. Noah and Jason ran over to the plane to take advantage of the “wind” from the propeller. The extremes were impossible to ignore. We were about to experience the coldest and hottest temperatures of our climbing careers, and all the while we would be completely and utterly all alone. Alone – what an idea, a necessary component for

modern alpinism. In stark contrast to its more popular brother, Denali, which attracts hundreds of climbers from all over the world each year, Logan can barely stay in business. In fact, during 21 days on the glacier during prime season, including a descent of the standard route, we would see no one. Not a soul. As the plane left and we were left to our solitude, we loaded up our sleds, skied several miles up the glacier toward the East Ridge, and set our base camp at 6,900 feet. Setting up base camp in the Yukon is a project in itself, and we wanted to be comfortable before the alpine-style portion of our climb, during which we would have far more limited supplies. Our camp wasn’t complete until it had a football, an inflatable palm tree, and of course, a selection of top-shelf liquor.



*Noah McKelvin leading early on the crux.*

During our first few days, we simply tried to exist in the scorching sun of midday, as we continued to set up what we expected to call home for over a month. At that time we figured we would be coming back down the East Ridge at least once before giving it the old go, but in the meantime, as we waited for the perfect weather opportunity, we had other venues to play on. Climbers can only stay idle for so long, and within a few days we were looking around for other adventures. We set our sights on a 5,000-plus-foot

face on a sub-peak of Logan. As far as we knew the face (and the ridge) remained utterly untouched by humans, which we found to be very appealing. We geared up, set out, and were quickly shut down. The snow conditions were so horrid we were only able to move at night. It was quite clear to us that there were no warm-ups in the Saint Elias Mountains.

### Moderate 5th Class, AI2-3, Steep Snow

Our weather advisor called via our satellite phone to tell us that a strong, high-pressure system was moving in. He said in no uncertain terms that this was our window. Everything went out the window: scouting, stocking, acclimatizing; there was simply no time. We would be given the opportunity to



test our plan and our system we had spent so much time developing back home. As a team we packed for our attempt, carefully considering each item. If we wanted to single carry this entire route and move quickly, we needed to accept certain hardships — for example, we would plan not to eat if we were stopped on bad-weather days. I used a 40-degree synthetic sleeping bag in combination with a down suit to stay warm. We used a canister stove to supplement the traditional white gas. We chose small lightweight single-wall tents for their footprints and weight.

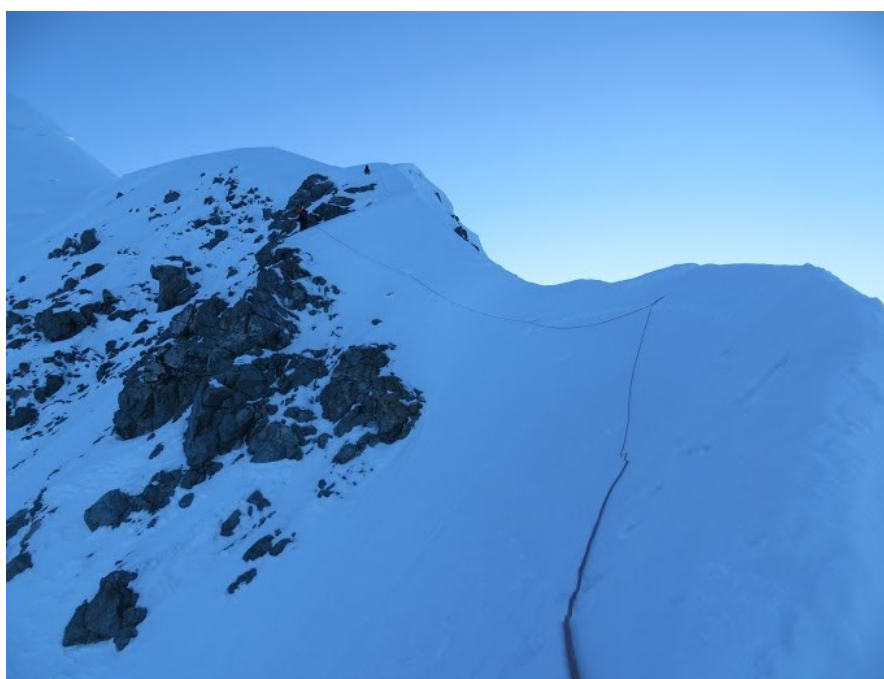
It was just before 2 p.m. on June 1st when we started the adventure of a lifetime. Right away we felt the weight of our packs; Noah could barely stand on his skis. The going was slow, and we didn't

feel entirely comfortable about the basin we were heading into. We hoped that with a little luck we would find ourselves safely on the ridge by nightfall. The entrance couloir drifted in and out of visibility, and it was every bit as scary as its reputation. Later we came to find out that not only had no one been up the East Ridge in over five years, but also that no one had even

gotten on it. Now we knew why — though the angle suggested easy climbing, the slope was unconsolidated powder, ready to slide. To add to the situation, we encountered two serious bergschrund crossings. These difficulties hit us consecutively and we named them the Satan 'Schrund. It took us a long time and conditions were extremely challenging, but we eventually crested the East Ridge proper in the middle of the night. Our success can be attributed to years of experience in Colorado's horrid snowpack combined with our strategy to protect sketchy snow with rock protection. Atop the ridge we took a rest in the form of a 90-minute sitting bivy. Though challenging, the climbing was classic moderate terrain in a beautiful setting rising continually toward the sky. The route has been called the best route anywhere in the world and it is

a strong argument — if the route doesn't kill you. In a marathon of alpine climbing, we pushed continuously for twenty-two hours, finally arriving at our first at camp around noon on June 2nd. We could hardly believe that we were only just above 9,000 feet.

Over the course of the next week, the difficulties never let up. Day after day we battled dangerous avalanche conditions coupled with fatal exposure on terrain that required constant diligence. Every step higher was a step closer to full commitment, and after going beyond the knife-edge ridge's crux (12,000 to 12,500 feet), we understood that the moment had come. Never in my life, in the Andes, in Alaska, in the Lower 48, have I ever experienced such a ridge. The right side



*Jason Maki leading the final sections of the knife edge ridge.*

dropped off vertically to the glacier for every bit of 6,000 feet. The left side was 75-plus degrees of powder over hollow ice. The protection was marginal to say the least; the climbing was physically and mentally taxing and was almost too much for me. Our retreat would now be up and over the top. Finding safety and sending the route would be one and the same.

After the crux section, a three-day storm spelled the emotional low of the trip, but we otherwise experienced fantastic weather and moved continually up the ridge, never climbing the same ground twice. Our hand-drawn topo (climbing term for route description) was 15 years old and it showed, but still we pushed for the mark that exclaimed "end of major difficulties" just below 14,000 feet. A climber that saw our request for beta on an internet message board had provided us with the topo — as it turned out his map was the only beta available for our route. The third camp was our finest, and offered up awe-inspiring views and a mostly-safe sleep for once. Throughout the trip, all eight of our camps would leave us with some degree of uneasiness.

There were some moments that, though rewarding, I would prefer to forget as they put me at an uncomfortable level of risk. For example, the great feature known as the Snow Dome was truly sinister. It rose over 500 feet as the ridge transitioned from a narrow technical ridge to a wider glacial mess. Climbers more experienced than we had died there, and the feeling of commitment far outweighed our ability to truly assess the danger. I set out on one end of our two 60-meter ropes tied together, Noah and Jason tied next to each other on the other. We simply hoped for the best.

### Forever Upward into the Unknown

The final section below the plateau was one of the more difficult glaciers I've navigated, but it was doable and on the afternoon of June 11th, we found ourselves on one of the most unique landscapes on the planet. The gigantic plateau of Logan boasts a 12-mile diameter, all above 17,000 feet. On Denali, one might flirt with altitude, but on Logan one enters into a long-term relationship with it. It was a rocky relationship given our style of ascent, limited supplies, and time to acclimate. As soon as we arrived on the plateau we knew we needed to get off of it, though that meant a long traverse at altitude. The complicating factor was that Jason was developing a nasty case of High-Altitude Pulmonary Edema (HAPE) and the only cure was to descend, which we could not do until we crossed the plateau. When we found ourselves exhausted and freezing above 18,000 feet on the "Cuddle Col" (aptly named by us), I truly wondered if we had pushed too far. My only hope was that Jason would be able to move in the morning: he had to. We spent our first night above 17,000 feet.

With the morning sun came brightness in our future and our "summit day" was quite memorable, a 12-plus-hour ordeal complete with a backdrop of Mount Saint Elias and the Hummingbird Ridge. We were all moving at snail's pace, feeling the altitude and carrying all of our gear. Over the

previous days we had rationed our food in order to prevent catastrophe, so we were all feeling weak. Typically on storm days we limited ourselves to just a few snacks and no meals. On climbing days we had one dinner each. In the back of our minds, we always knew that the airstrip could make a drop should the situation call for it, and that knowledge helped us to push farther in our chosen style.

The easy terrain gave way to some final avalanche slopes and some fall danger that only added to our frustration. We were well into the evening by the time we found ourselves below the true summit of Mount Logan, a mere 500 feet above us, but none of us were interested. When one pushes that close to the limit of what is possible, some things just do not matter, and none of us have regretted the decision not to top

out. Finding the way down and a safe camp was our priority. Plus, our goal had always been to ascend the East Ridge and traverse the mountain – a goal that we achieved. For us, the summit was not everything.

By midnight I was puking and crawling into my sleeping bag, feeling as utterly exhausted as I had ever been. We nestled into our camp for our second night above 17,000 feet.

The next day, our third day on the plateau, the weather flirted briefly with disaster. Twice we tried – like a bunch of fools – to move camp toward Prospector's Pass, but the wind and snow made it impossible. Fortunately, a true Alaskan storm never materialized, and we utilized the bad-weather window to rest an extra day and night.

When the weather cleared, we called the airstrip to let them know that we had traversed to the west side of the mountain and that hopefully it wouldn't be too long before we were ready for pickup. The King Trench has a reputation of being a walk up (or down) and technically easier than the West Buttress on Denali. Still, it was not easy. The route was completely broken up, and there were no tracks. We would each take several crevasse falls, perhaps a dozen in total. The



Noah McKelvin (foreground) and Jason Maki enjoyed the terrain on the early plateau...

*until this happened.*



final bit onto the pass was rough, once again climbing above 18,000 feet, and the wind was howling. We built a rappel station; I punched through a cornice, rappled off the end of the rope, and solo down-climbed a steep slope for several hundred feet before finally arriving at the King Trench. From there, we began our glacier adventure – the fall count made it up to a baker’s dozen, and the route finding was infuriating. The silver lining was that this route was truly spectacular with the best views I have ever seen.

The 14th day of the trip was as hard as any other, and we felt another huge victory when we pulled into camp at 13,500 feet just below the great North Face of King Peak. Part of the sense of urgency and danger left us, though by now it was clear that we would not run into any other parties on Logan’s standard route. We got a late start on June 15th with no intention of going anywhere far; the terrain was mellow and the snow was deep, going a quarter mile seemed like an eternity and we had huge packs to contend with. Still we endured, step after step. None of us even considered the remote possibility of flying out that day. Days before when we had made contact with the airstrip, our forecaster told us of a large front moving in that could shut down air operations for over a week. The last thing any of us wanted was to hunker down and wait out a storm after enduring the climb of our lives. Sure, we could get resupplied, but our morale would plummet. Motivated, we continued down, making more progress than we had hoped, given the deep snow.

Having traveled farther than expected, I called the airstrip again at 4 p.m. on June 15th. Lance at Icefield Discovery gave us the exciting news that we had a chance of being picked up later that day, and we took the opportunity. We would try to make it to our pickup location that same evening before conditions made it impossible. We broke into a run, leapfrogging every 10 minutes to take turns breaking trail, allowing us to keep our pace as fast as our legs would carry us. Just before 7 p.m., Lance notified us that the plane was on the take-off roll. We were committed now – come hell or high water we would need to make the final trek out of the trench and onto the lower glacier. It seemed impossible, but by now impossible was a word we chose not to use. We ran – despite the deep snow, despite the weights on our backs, despite our food-deprivation, despite our accrued 15-day fatigue – and just as our plane touched

down we reached the beginning of the lower glacier. Graciously, the pilot waited 45 minutes while we made our way to it.

By 8 p.m. we were flying between the giants of the range, and by 9 p.m., we were safely back in civilization. Our welcome party was two people, a dog, and three cans of beer. I tell you, we are in this for the glory. Our trio slowly started to process what had happened. We each reflected on the simple fact that we were just three friends from Colorado, forever tied to one another.

I understand now that in life you can only experience this feeling of true transcendence a handful of times, and the immense risk that accompanies it can exact the ultimate price without a moment’s notice. In the days spent on Mount Logan, I climbed beyond my wildest aspirations that had so long occupied my thoughts. My future of big-mountain climbs of which I had always dreamt became the present moment. The mountain engulfed my entire reality. We gave everything we had to Mount Logan, and though it would never know our presence, in return it gave us more than we could have hoped. The biggest lesson for me is that it is possible, it is all possible. In the grand arena of the Saint Elias Mountains, I came to truly believe that I should be always pushing higher, harder, and faster.

My full photo album is available on Facebook at

[https://www.facebook.com/mgrabina/media\\_set?set=a.10155122074870475.1073741849.588000474&type=1&\\_nc=805886a319](https://www.facebook.com/mgrabina/media_set?set=a.10155122074870475.1073741849.588000474&type=1&_nc=805886a319).



*One last look at our route on the flight out.*

# Descent into the Grand Canyon is a Journey back in Time

By Frank E. Baker

*“You cannot see the Grand Canyon in one view, as if it were a changeless spectacle from which a curtain might be lifted; but to see it, you have to toil from month to month through its labyrinths.”*

*John Wesley Powell (Grand Canyon expedition, 1859)*



*The Grand Canyon at sunset from the South Rim.*

*Photo by Frank Baker*

The two main trails leading into Arizona’s Grand Canyon from the South Rim are gradual, wide, and painstakingly well-constructed, with switchbacks to ease a descent of some 5,000 feet to the Colorado River. These trails – the Bright Angel and South Kaibab – are so hiker friendly that people might overlook a deep and fundamental aspect of the experience: hiking the Grand Canyon is not simply an excursion from one destination to another. It is a journey back in time.

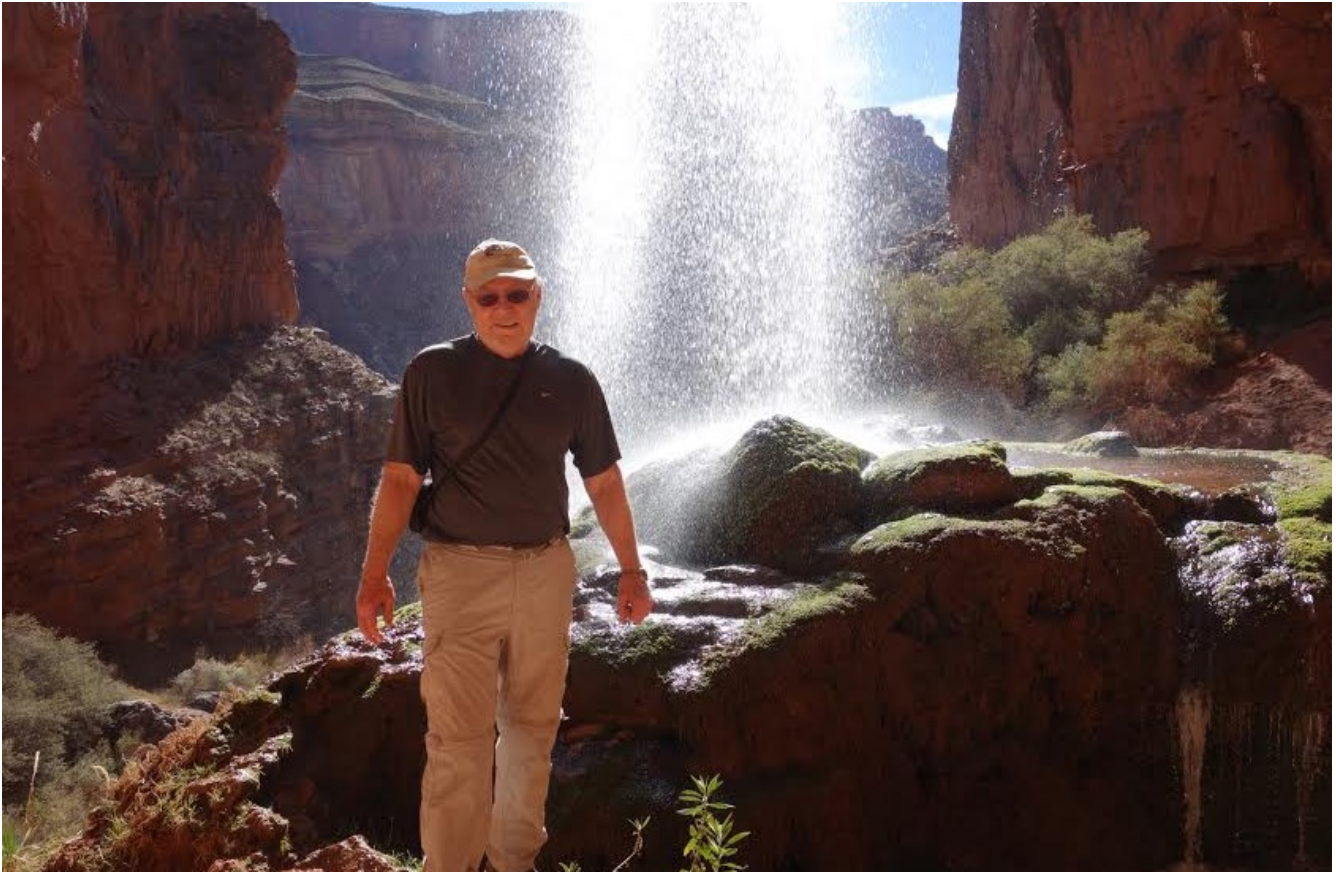
I’ve visited the Grand Canyon four times over the past 12 years, and it wasn’t until the most recent visit, in February of this year, that I finally began to feel my focus shift from the present to the timeless and fascinating realm of the past. The past had always been there, encased in stratified rock layers like a history book spanning nearly two billion years. But I hadn’t really noticed. On several occasions I had unknowingly hiked past rock pictographs made by Indians 1,000 years ago, and marine fossils etched in the rock, remnants of sea creatures that lived in the shallow ocean that geologists say advanced and retreated from this region at least seven times.

Weary from the seven-mile trudge down into the canyon, I barely gave the ruins of old pit houses near the Colorado River a second glance.

I think my perspective began changing after seeing the movie “Grand Canyon – The Hidden Secrets” at an IMAX theatre in the small community of Tusayan, near the South Rim. Produced by the National Geographic Society, the movie described some of the canyon’s earliest inhabitants, the Anasazi, whose history dates back more than 4,000 years and even today remains shrouded in mystery. These hunter-gatherers were nomadic, living off the canyon’s deer, bighorn sheep, fish, and other resources – often entering deep into the canyon’s inner gorge.

The film also highlighted the first explorations in the 1500s by the Spanish and in succeeding centuries by Americans; as well as the epic 217-mile Colorado River exploration through the canyon in 1859, led by Civil War veteran John Wesley Powell, a geologist. More recent history dwells on the area’s first miners, construction of a railroad and the Grand Canyon





*Frank Baker at Ribbon Falls on the North Kaibab Trail inside the Grand Canyon.*

*Photo by Tom Winn*

National Park development.

Experiencing the sweep of thousands of years on a big IMAX screen was compelling enough. But what really struck me came in a single word: hardship. From the canyon's earliest human inhabitants to those who followed in their footsteps, life on the north and south rims, or in the canyon itself, could not have been easy. It is certainly breathtakingly beautiful. Yet it is also an extremely rugged, foreboding place. Summer heat is stifling, and at the high elevations of the canyon's rims, winter cold punishes the unprepared. Scaling the canyon's formidable cliffs, with their unstable, crumbling rock, is death-defying.

Archaeologists have identified at least 4,000 artifact sites within the park area, but they have no definitive answers for why the canyon's earliest dwellers, the Anasazi, never stayed. There is some speculation that changing climate reduced wildlife and that exacerbated their already tenuous existence.

On that fourth and most recent hike down the South Kaibab Trail from the South Rim, I was a different visitor. Gazing upon the canyon's red-tinted, deeply shadowed, tiered horizons, I possessed new eyes. I didn't see a static, dry and



*Pictographs*

*Photo by Frank Baker*

lifeless landscape. I now saw a living place, a home – not only for the Anasazi, Havasupai, Hualapai, Hopi, Navajo, and Pueblo Indians from the distant past, but also for their descendants who today live on nearby reservations. And I now possessed a greater awareness of the area’s wildlife, such as deer, elk, bighorn sheep, California condors, mountain lions, bobcats, eagles, reptiles, and many other creatures.

When one beholds the expanse of air between the canyon’s North and South Rims – in some locations as much as 18 miles – he suddenly feels extremely small and insignificant. And pondering the timescale of how long it took the Colorado River to carve this immense chasm – about 1.7 billion years – the feeling is magnified.

But we are inexorably drawn there. To quote a passage from the IMAX film: “The canyon has no need of man, but mankind may face a moment in eternity when he will have a fundamental need to explore the character and timeless perspective that makes this such a wondrous place.”

The millions of people who visit the Grand Canyon every year experience this natural wonder in their own way. Finally, after many trips down into its depths and back up again, I have found mine. On future sojourns I’ll keep eyes forward as I hike, but I’ll always be glancing backward in time, with my ears tuned for a subtle whisper from the past – hoping the canyon will reveal one of its “hidden” secrets.

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*Frank Baker overlooking the Grand Canyon in February 2015.*

*Photo by Tom Winn*



## Quoth the Raven: “I’m Smart, and I Know It”

Text and photo by Frank E. Baker

You need not spend much time outdoors in Alaska to have witnessed the antics of one of the most fascinating and intelligent birds in the Northern Hemisphere, or the entire world, for that matter: the Common Raven (*Corvus corax*).

In Alaska Native mythology, particularly in Southeast Alaska, ravens are known as “tricksters” that can assume any form – human or animal. Immortalized in totem poles, stories, and legends, ravens have been described as magicians that could bring gifts and good will. Ravens are also important in Eskimo mythology and culture for their role in creation.

The largest member of the crow family, ravens average 24 inches tall, with a wingspan of 46 to 56 inches. They are found throughout Alaska in just about all types of terrain. The common raven's scientific name, *Corvus corax*, means “raven croaker.” While their trademark call is a deep, resonant “caw,” they are capable of a wide repertoire of vocalizations – some say up to 30.

To hear raven calls click on

[http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/common\\_raven/sounds](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/common_raven/sounds).

I have heard ravens imitate other birds, particularly magpies. I have heard them make barking noises that actually sounded like a dog. They can sound like water. And on more than one occasion, when I have made feeble attempts at “cawing,” I am quite sure they “cawed” back in imitation of me trying to imitate them.

While hiking in the mountains with my food completely stowed in my pack, I have on occasion been dive-bombed from behind by ravens. I doubt they could see or smell my food. Their dive reminded me of “counting coup,” an act once performed by American Indian warriors on their opponents to demonstrate

their bravery and superiority. I recall shouting out to one of them, “show off,” as he winged away.

I’ve watched ravens harass and outmaneuver eagles in flight – an act of sheer defiance, as if to say: “try to do this, big shot.”

The daily migration of ravens to the Anchorage and Eagle River areas, if you haven’t seen it, is from deep in the Chugach Mountains to the east, where they nest. On an early spring climb of Harp Mountain in South Fork Valley several years ago,

about 200 of them soared overhead, heading south toward Eagle Lake and the mountains beyond. They commute to Anchorage for easy dining at the Anchorage Regional Landfill and restaurant dumpsters. Biologists estimate that some of them make a round trip of about 40 miles on their daily commute.

**Fascinating stories:** In addition to their inspiring aerial maneuvers, ravens are capable of logic, problem solving, and relating to

humans. Acclaimed outdoor adventurer Lonnie Dupre, who climbed 20,237 foot Mount McKinley solo in January of this year – the first to do so in this dark month – relates a compelling raven story that was adapted into a children’s book, *The Raven’s Gift: A True Story from Greenland*, Library Binding, 2001.

On an expedition across Greenland several years ago, Dupre was visited by a raven. A stick was stuck to one of the raven’s legs by musk ox hair. The raven danced around a bit, and then dropped a small pebble near Dupre. Recounting his story, Dupre mentions it was almost as if the raven was saying, “This is all I have to give you. Could you please remove this stick?” At that point in the expedition, Dupre was feeling quite fatigued and discouraged by his progress. He said something to the



*Ravens homeward bound over a ridge above the Ship Creek Valley.*

*Photo by Frank E. Baker*

raven like: “If you can give me strength and help me continue my journey, I’ll remove the stick from your leg.” The raven came closer and allowed Dupre to remove the stick. The bird flew off but circled around for a while, as if to say “thank you.”

About six years ago in Fairbanks, ravens made the news. Hundreds of them assembled in a kind of “flying memorial” after two of their kin were electrocuted while roosting on an electrical transformer. Witnesses said it was weird to see so many of them gathered together, some flying, some perched in nearby trees.

**Proven intelligence:** Scientific experiments with ravens have proven their problem-solving skills. For example, University of Vermont biologist Bernd Heinrich and his colleague, Thomas Bugnyar, published an article in *Scientific American* several years ago that explored the intelligence of ravens. One of the experiments cited in the article involved dangling a piece of meat on string from a wire cage. Other birds flew directly at the meat and could not retrieve it because it would move when they touched it. Ravens approached the problem from a different angle. To get this treat, an adult raven first perched at the top of the cage. It then reached down, grasped the string in its beak, pulled up on the string, placed the loop of string on the perch, stepped on this looped segment of string to prevent it from slipping down, then let go of the string and reached down again and repeated its actions until the morsel of food was within reach.

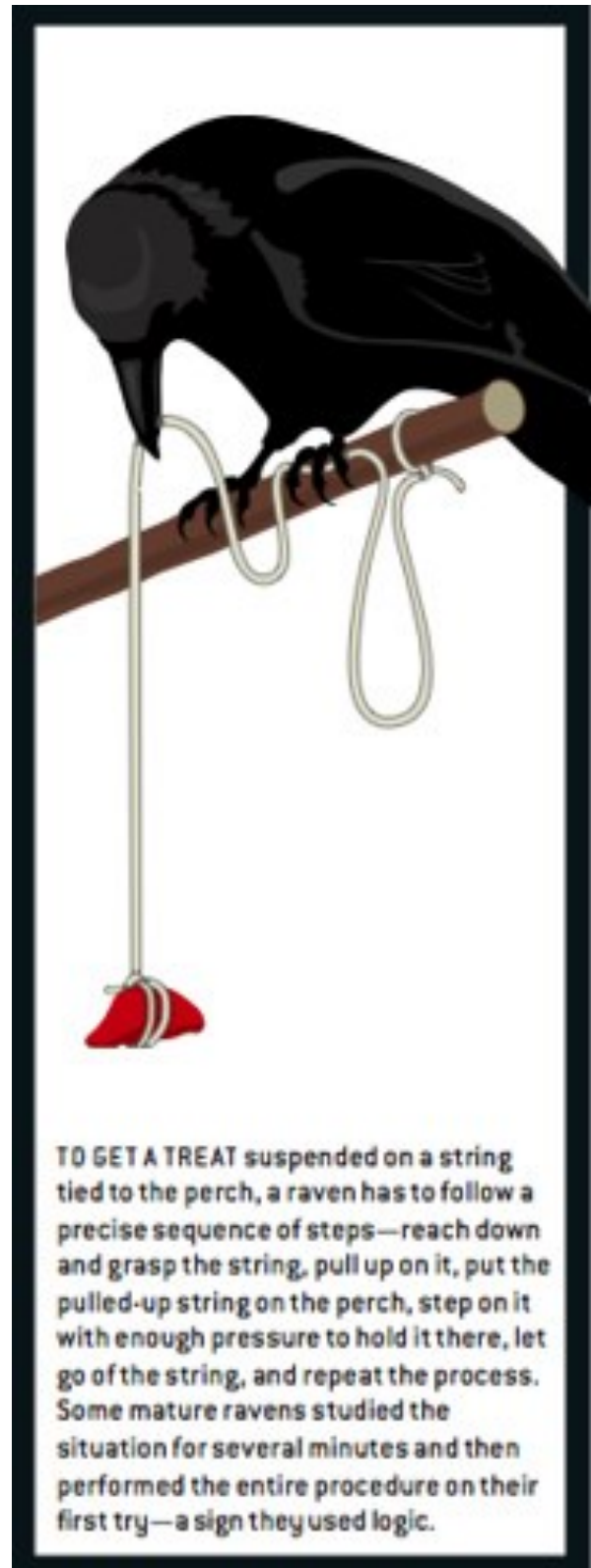
The researchers found that some adult ravens would examine the situation for several minutes and then perform this multi-step procedure in as little as 30 seconds without any trial and error.

Canoeing across a lake on the Kenai Peninsula, a friend and I actually believe we heard a raven call out a greeting: “hello.” And neither of us, I might add, were drinking or smoking anything.

Mount McKinley climbers have ravens follow them to very high altitudes. The obvious reason is the birds associate humans with food. But I tend to think there is another reason. As an intelligent creature, they might become bored and hang around people simply for recreation.

For years my sister wanted a raven for a pet, and I can understand why. After a lifetime of observing these birds, I’m in awe of them. Who knows, perhaps a well-trained raven would serve as a better backcountry route finder than the very best GPS system!

To contact Frank, email: [frankedwardbaker@gmail.com](mailto:frankedwardbaker@gmail.com).



**TO GET A TREAT** suspended on a string tied to the perch, a raven has to follow a precise sequence of steps—reach down and grasp the string, pull up on it, put the pulled-up string on the perch, step on it with enough pressure to hold it there, let go of the string, and repeat the process. Some mature ravens studied the situation for several minutes and then performed the entire procedure on their first try—a sign they used logic.



# Peak of the Month: Mount Siegfried

By Steve Gruhn

**Mountain Range:** Chugach Mountains

**Borough:** Matanuska-Susitna Borough

**Drainage:** Tarr Glacier

**Latitude/Longitude:** 61° 30' 36" North,  
147° 0' 48" West

**Elevation:** 9205 feet

**Prominence:** 755 feet from Peak  
10075 in the Tarr Glacier drainage

**Adjacent Peaks:** Peak 10075, Peak  
8770 in the Nelchina Glacier drainage,  
and Peak 8102 in the Tarr Glacier  
drainage

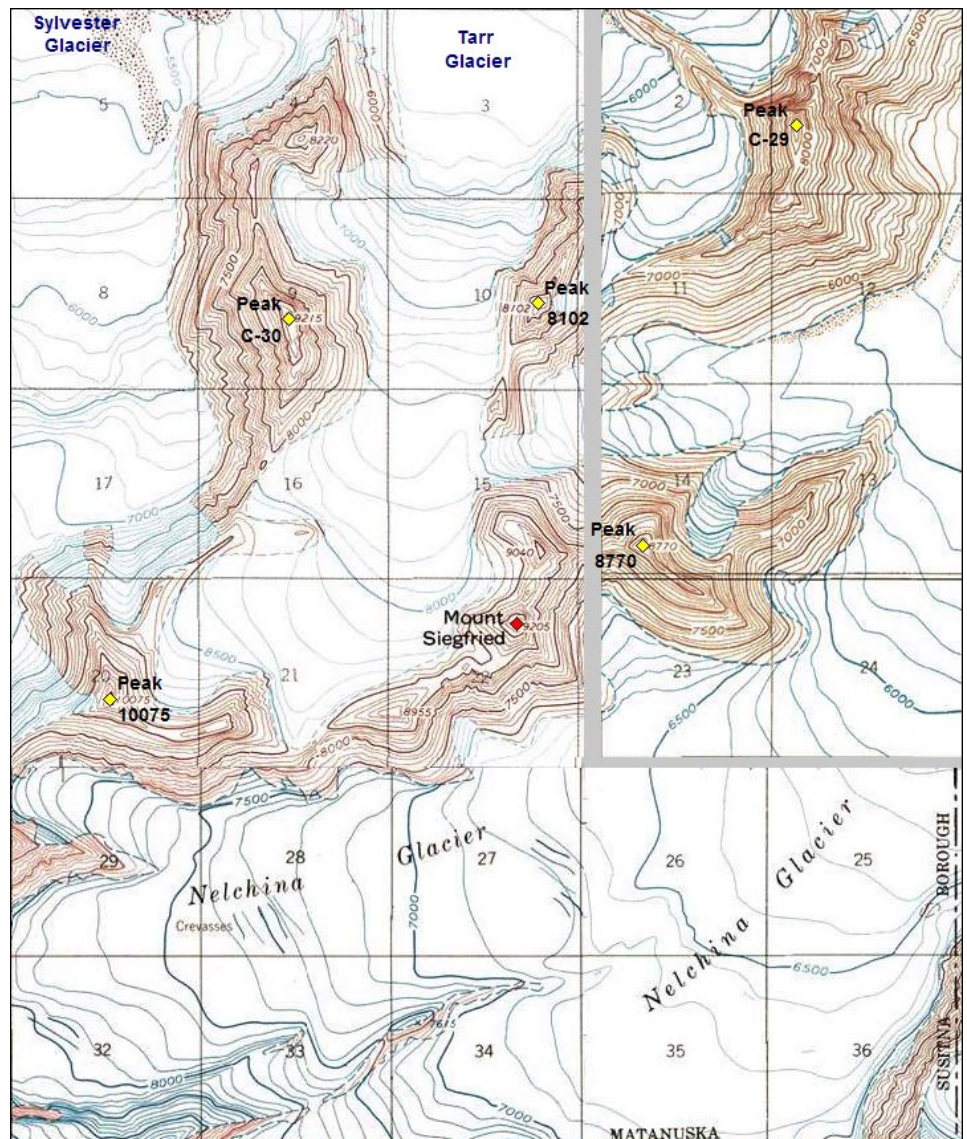
**Distinctness:** 755 feet from Peak  
10075

**USGS Map:** Anchorage (C-1)

**First Recorded Ascent:** May 5, 2004,  
by Glen Hearn, Craig Hollinger, and  
David E. Williams

**Route of First Recorded  
Ascent:** Southwest ridge

**Access Point:** North and east of the  
Old Glenn Highway bridge over the Knik  
River



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

The December 1955 *Appalachia* (the biannual journal of the Appalachian Mountain Club) contained Lawrence E. Nielsen's trip report of his June 1955 Chugach Mountains Expedition and included his route map that identified numerous peaks and assigned names to them. The earliest known use of the name Mount Siegfried was on Nielsen's map. Siegfried was the great and noble crown prince of Xanten in the Teutonic epic poem "The Song of the Nibelungs." In 1965 the U.S. Board on Geographic Names voted to make the name Mount Siegfried official.

On April 24, 2004, Hearn, Hollinger, and Williams set out from the end of a road north and east of the Old Glenn Highway bridge over the Knik River and headed to Jim Creek to start a 24-day traverse of the Chugach Mountains to the Richardson

Highway. Their travels took them up the north side of the Knik River, onto the Knik Glacier, up the Marcus Baker Glacier, through M&M Pass, across the West Fork of the Matanuska Glacier, across the East Fork of the Matanuska Glacier, down the Powell Glacier, and across the Sylvester Glacier to the Tarr Glacier. En route the trio climbed Peak 9330 between the East and West Forks of the Matanuska Glacier and Rhino Peak (10930 feet). On May 5, the three started from their camp below the icefall on the Tarr Glacier, slowly made their way through the chaotic maze of seracs on the west side of the icefall, and established a camp at a col a mile north of Mount Siegfried around lunchtime. That afternoon they skied up the Tarr Glacier and ascended the southwest ridge of Mount Siegfried to the summit. They retraced their route back to

camp.

The following day they moved camp down to the Nelchina Glacier and continued their ski traverse by descending the Science Glacier, crossing the Tazlina Glacier, and down-climbing through Cashman Pass to the Valdez Glacier. They skied down and across the Valdez Glacier, descended the Tonsina Glacier, descended the Tonsina River, and descended the south side of Stuart Creek to the Trans-Alaska Pipeline and the Alaska Rendezvous Lodge on the Richardson Highway. Along the way they climbed Appalachia Peak (9260 feet), Mount Fafnir (10620 feet), Abercrombie Mountain (7037 feet [2145 meters]), Peak 7086 in the Valdez Glacier drainage, Peak 7150 in the Valdez Glacier drainage, Peak 6120 in the Tonsina Glacier and Klutina Lake drainages, Peak 7250 in the Valdez Glacier drainage, and Peak 6430 in the Tonsina Glacier and Tsina Glacier drainages.

The information in this article was obtained from Larry Nielsen's article titled "Attempt on Mt. Witherspoon, Alaska," which appeared on pages 533 through 537 of the December 1955 *Appalachia*; from the USGS' Geographic Names Information System

([http://geonames.usgs.gov/apex/f?p=136:3:0::NO:3:P3\\_FID,P3\\_TITLE:1409518,Mount%20Siegfried](http://geonames.usgs.gov/apex/f?p=136:3:0::NO:3:P3_FID,P3_TITLE:1409518,Mount%20Siegfried)); from David Williams' article titled "Sunny Days in the Chugach Mountains," which appeared on pages 86 through 88 of the 2005 *Canadian Alpine Journal*; from Williams' trip report titled "Chugach Mountains Ski Traverse," available at <http://bivouac.com/TripPg.asp?TripId=5556>; from Hollinger's photos, available at <http://bivouac.com/UsrPg.asp?UsrId=18865>; and from my correspondence with both Hollinger and Williams.

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## Nuggets in the Scree

### **Mount Isto Reported as the Highest Peak in the Brooks Range**

Thanks to Joe Stock for bringing this to our attention.

In an article on the National Geographic Society's website, Kit DesLauriers, Andy Bardon, and Don Carpenter are reported to have conducted differential GPS measurements atop both Mount Chamberlin in the Franklin Mountains and Mount Isto in the Romanzof Mountains in the spring of 2014 to determine which one has a higher summit elevation. Astute map readers will recall that on the 1955 1:250,000 Demarcation Point USGS map Mount Isto's summit elevation was reported as 9060 feet and that both the 1955 1:250,000 Mount Michelson USGS map and the 1956 1:63,360 Mount Michelson (B-2) USGS map indicated that Mount Chamberlin's summit elevation was 9020 feet, some 40 feet lower than the reported summit elevation of Mount Isto. However, the 1983 1:63,360 Demarcation Point (A-5) USGS map indicated Mount Isto's summit elevation was 8975 feet. The discrepancy resulted in a decades-long question as to which of these two peaks was the highest summit in the Brooks Range. The 2014 differential GPS measurements reportedly revealed that Mount Isto is more than 70 feet higher than Mount Chamberlin. For more information click on <http://adventure.nationalgeographic.com/adventure/adventurers-of-the-year/2015/kit-deslauriers/>.

Steve Gruhn



## General Rules for Participation on MCA Sanctioned Trips

1. Participants shall familiarize themselves with the *physical demands, anticipated terrain* and *potential hazards* associated with the proposed trip. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- **Physical Demands:** Estimated elevation gain, distance and duration.
- **Anticipated Terrain:** Trail hiking; bushwhacking; off-trail hiking on tundra, snow, ice, scree, talus or boulders; exposed hiking on steep slopes covered with snow, ice, slick vegetation, scree, talus or boulders; scrambling on loose rock; exposed scrambling on loose rock; technical snow, ice, rock and/or mixed climbing; stream crossing; glacier travel on snow, ice and/or scree.
- **Potential Hazards:** Avalanche; falling while skiing, hiking or climbing; falling into a crevasse; being struck by falling rock, snow or ice; attack by a bear, moose or insects (bees, wasps, mosquitoes, biting flies, etc); lightning; fire; carbon monoxide poisoning; suffocation; frostbite; hypothermia; drowning from falling through snow, crossing a stream, packrafting or kayaking; injury from use/ misuse of equipment. Note that it is impossible to predict all potential hazards that may be encountered while participating on MCA sanctioned trips.

2. Participants may be required to demonstrate the skills and experience necessary to participate on any given trip.

3. Participants shall sign-up on the club sanctioned trip sign-up sheet.

4. Participants shall read, initial and sign the Release of Liability Agreement prior to departing on the trip.

5. The trip leader may refuse participation to any member for any reason. If someone feels that they have been discriminated against or treated unfairly, they may present their case to the Hiking and Climbing Committee and/or the Executive Committee.

6. Proper clothing and equipment is required to participate on club sanctioned trips. The trip leader can require special equipment and refuse participation to any person that is ill-prepared (e.g. inappropriate clothing, footwear or gear). See recommended equipment list at the end of this policy.

7. Participants shall follow the leader's instructions. Participants shall not go off alone, return or rush ahead without permission from the leader. Participants shall not ford a stream before the leader assesses the situation. Remember, this is a club trip and the leader must know where all participants are. Anyone intentionally separating from the group without the leader's approval shall no longer be considered a participant on the club sanctioned trip.

8. The trip leader has the authority to split the group (fast and slow), dependent upon current conditions and experience level of the participants. The leader must appoint a qualified co-leader to lead the second group using the guidelines specified under Trip Leader Responsibilities.

9. **Glacier Travel:** For trips requiring roped travel over glaciers, knowledge of crevasse rescue, and ice axe and crampon skills are required. A basic understanding of ice and snow anchors is also required.

10. Participants who in the leader's opinion, put themselves or other members of the group in danger, shall be subject to sanction by the club. Sanctions may include, but are not limited to, reprimand at the general meeting, exclusion from future trips, termination of annual membership, or lifetime exclusion from the club. The Executive Committee, and only the Executive Committee, shall have the authority to issue sanctions.

11. Number of people on club trips:

- **Minimum:** For safety reasons, three people minimum. Trips undertaken with fewer than the minimum required participants shall not be considered club sanctioned trips.
- **Maximum:** Registration on any particular trip must be restricted to a safe and manageable number of members. The Leader and/or Hiking and Climbing Committee shall determine the maximum number of participants. In trail-less areas or State and National Parks the maximum number depends upon the trail and campsite conditions, but will generally be limited to 12 people.

12. In general dogs are not allowed. Among the reasons are bear problems. Well behaved, bear savvy dogs may be approved at the discretion of the trip leader and all trip participants. Approval must be unanimous and must occur prior to meeting for the trip.

13. Firearms are not allowed on club sanctioned trips, unless approved by the trip leader and all participants. Approval must be unanimous. Aero-sol bear repellent is preferred in lieu of firearms.

14. If you find you cannot participate after signing up on the roster, please let the leader know as soon as possible, for transportation and gear-planning and so someone else can go. If you are the leader, help find a replacement.

## 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.

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

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