

MOUNTAINEERING CLUB OF ALASKA

Lois Willard
- 8th Ave.
Anchorage, Alaska
7833
3, No. 8

SCREE

SECRETARY
Lois Willard
1107 I Street
Anchorage, Alaska
BR 8-5929
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MONDAY, JUNE 5

There will be a meeting of the Mountaineering Club of Alaska on Monday, June 5th at 8 p.m. at the Willow Park Recreation Hall.

ALASKAN MOUNT GILBERT EXPEDITION REBUFFED ON MT. REDOUBT by Helga Bading

June 14th to 19th, 1961

Disregarding the disguiding adventures, disgusted with civilization and tired of level streets, vowed to conquer Mount Gilbert, Prince of the Chugaches. On a cloudy Friday afternoon, Vern the pilot loaded Don Fell and Erik Barnes into his One-Eighty and valiantly attempted to fly up Knik Glacier. But a solid, inhospitable cloud put a stop to the enterprise right there. Hours later they met the remaining four conspirators, Paul Crews, Rod Wilson, Bob Bailey and Helga Bading, and - in a galeforce wind - they tied the precious bird to the ice of Anger Lake with their pitons. All seven could be seen beating a retreat to civilized Palmer where they roughed it out in a restaurant and spread their sleeping bags in a hangar.

Morning dawned dull-grey and very early (5 a.m.). Back in the Metropolis a shrill telephone bell roused a weatherman from his office-sleep. "Can't give you any flying weather on the Knik", he said, "why don't you try getting in at Redoubt." The day remained cool, foggy and blustery and by nightfall nothing had been accomplished. They all spent the night in their own beds and felt humiliated.

The weatherman hadn't reckoned with the stubbornness of the truly desperate. By 3:30 the next morning they woke him again. Reading the weather map he said, "Looks good around Redoubt", so off to the races they went. Vern finally completed dumping all the adventurers on a small lake south of Mt. Redoubt and with the words, "Be back Tuesday about noon", he was off.

The sky was brilliant and a million snowflakes sparkled. Redoubt Peak, King of the mountains (10,197') loomed high above them, a small white cloud drifting around its crown. At 5 p.m. at 3,500 ft. on the glacier, up came the tents and soon the stoves began to roar and stink the way they ought to. And the sun sank in full glory behind the craggy mountains, leaving a little candle to illuminate a camp on the cold blue glacier.

At 2:15 a.m. (!) Paul duly woke his alarm. She, in turn, woke everybody else and started the stove. Two hours later everybody was full of porridge and determined to get to the top. They circled around crevasses, chopped a way up some ice covered rocks and when the sun peeked over the ridge everything looked rosy. Redoubt Peak beckoned and Iliamna Peak to the south smiled. What was to stop them now?

The weatherman didn't like this at all. He pulled the curtain over Mt. Iliamna and the other peaks. Slowly the whole landscape disappeared in a damp ugly grey-out. But our six climbers kept moving uphill in their slow unbroken rhythm. The wind leaped forward and snowflakes drifted down. They kept going, dropping brightly painted willow-wands behind them. They knew they were on a plateau a thousand feet under the peak.

"Enough", thought the weatherman. Howling, the storm leaped forward. It hurtled snow and ice pellets at the climbers till their faces stung. There were no more willow wands. Both ropes turned back. Slowly they groped their way downhill along the lifeline of wands and found the camp...and ate heartily...and rolled up in their bags...and talked about the day they would come back to try again.

On Tuesday morning, another early start was needed to get packed for they had seven miles to go before noon. And while they lost altitude quickly, slipping and sliding on slick snowshoes, the sun looked over the mountains with its warm, innocent smile. The group had to wade through alderbrush, but it was the "boulderhopping" across a creek they clearly hadn't practiced enough. On the crossing, Helga cast her pack into the icy drink with a flyfisherwoman's precision. Then she jumped - a snowbridge broke - and Paul, clasping the ice axe anchor with his left hand, tried to prevent her plunge. When both were rescued it was Helga who was dry and Paul was dripping. Everybody reached the trapper's cabin on the fair shore of Grecian Lake, one hour ahead of the airplane schedule.

The cabin was filthy and so they built an igloo shelter against the strong wind, built a fire, and indulged in cleaning up the "gooddies". (ED. NOTE: "Gooddies" are a sticky, unsanitary but delightful trail lunch consisting of such items as dried fruit, nuts & Chocolate.) Hour upon hour passed, and when it was evident that they would have to spend the night, the lazy ones put up the tent; the workers among them cleaned up the cabin. And when the sun set red and cold and the wind rattled the old stovepipe, they all assembled in a nicely cleaned and moderately heated cabin to have spaghetti and sauce and stewed apricots. It was really rough!

Wednesday, the wind still blew strong out of glass-clear skies. A fishnet set into the water - where the ice had broken away - by Don and Helga yielded no food, only frozen fingers. Paul began teaching the first lesson on "how to build an igloo" when the roar of an airplane engine sent six sunburned and relaxed climbers chasing to the lakefront. Vern grinned, "I haven't forgotten you, but we sure had a bad storm in Anchorage and now I have come to take

ou home." They waved a last goodbye to a lovely, lonesome lake. Redoubt Peak waved back with a plume of snow and, well ... as one of them put it, "it's one way to get away from the telephone."

DO YOU REMEMBER? May 1960

by Joe Pichler

(These notes are from an article on the McKinley rescue written by Joe Pichler on his return)

The pilots made their Beavers ready and by 10 a.m. we were on our way to Summit, where we had rendezvous with two helicopters from Ft. Greely. The clouds were very low and over Lakeetna we flew at treetop height to get under them. As we landed in Summit, it was somewhat better but still we were not able to see the top of Mt. McKinley. We didn't have to wait very long and the two copters came in. The big one was supposed to bring us to the 10,200' level and the little one was supposed to be able to land on the 17,000' level. We were fairly well equipped, but had practically no food.

On a strip of moraine, in the middle of the glacier, our pilot brought the big copter to rest. We had lost radio contact with the other copter and were waiting for a signal from them. After circling to 10,500' and finding no sign of the little copter, we went back to Summit. As we approached the landing field, we saw our little copter sitting below us. They had circled around at 17,000' but were not able to find the climbing party or the camp.

The worst for us was that we had practically no food and there was nothing to buy either. I asked a Sergeant if he would give us a box of "C" rations, which the Sergeant did. In the morning we were asked by a Captain if there were any "C" rations by mistake in with our gear. So I brought the carton of "C" rations back where the Captain promptly accused me of stealing them. But I assured him, it was an honest mistake, and we thought it was oxygen. So again we were absolutely without food.

From then on things began to buzz. All kinds of aircraft started to come in. There were Beavers; a Colonel came in with an Otter. There were three or four different kinds of helicopters. Then came a DC3, and a bigger cargo plane and finally came the big globemaster with the big party of rescue men from Anchorage and Seattle, with them came the supplies that we were waiting for.

We thought the copter would bring us up the mountain so that we would finally see some action, but we were mistaken. We landed on a sandbar at the foot of Ruth Glacier which was the supply depot for our copters. The Captain of our copter ordered us to take our gear off, since they wanted to make a trial run without us. Instead he loaded his full crew and two reporters. Another helicopter came in and landed on the other side of the river. So for a while there were two camps. Then the big copter which had just brought these men in came over to our side and got us and our gear and took us over to their side. In the meantime the copter which was supposed to bring the rescue men up the mountain was sitting on the other side of the river and waited for somebody to bring oil from Summit. They didn't ask the other big helicopter for help because this was the Air Force. The Army helicopter just waited for another Army craft to come in and that took six hours.

Although there was plenty of food in the camp, our own food situation didn't seem to be solved yet. We thought the boxes of food belonged to the Seattle bunch and the only way to get some of that food was to sneak over and steal some. Much later, after I got back to Anchorage, I found that we were stealing our own food.

The trip up the glacier to 10,200' and the landing went smoothly. They didn't set the copter down completely, the rotor was going full blast and here in a cloud of snow, in a blizzard-type atmosphere, we unloaded our gear and as quickly as we could got the 'ell out from under the whirling blades. The weather was wonderful. Ahead of us was the majestic peak of Mt. McKinley.

The camp was a busy place. The first thing which caught my attention was the two Japanese parties and their equipment. Here was skill and efficiency. These people had been here for sometime and everything was in order. They even brought small brooms with them, to sweep out their tents. Their garbage dump was a deep hole in the snow. There was not one tin lying around - until our parties camped there. We got a little better acquainted with our Japanese friends. We got some of their food. They had everything from soup to nuts. We didn't know what we were eating - somebody said that they even had dehydrated beer with them. Those noodles I was chewing on were some of that brew - I never found out.

Two fellows from Seattle and I went up the trail. My companions turned around, but I told them that since the going was good I would like to go a little higher. They wanted to talk me out of it because they were afraid I might get lost. How the hell someone could get lost on a 'highway' in the middle of the day? It was very hot on that glacier. After a while we was out of sight of base camp and as I came over a steep hump, I caught up with another party. They had trouble carrying their gear and I offered my services to help them. Since there was a radio I asked them to call base camp. But we were not able to get base camp. However, we made contact with the camp on top. So we went on. After a while it wasn't possible to go on without a rope because the glacier was full of crevasses. This was as far as I went.

Back at base camp, I met Paul Crews and Chuck Metzger who had brought Helga down and while we was up on the trail, they had flown down from the 14,000' level. Helga and Day got off the mountain that day. The rescue operation came almost to an end. I was asked to retrieve snow-cans which had been cached below the ridge at the 12,000' level. As we were climbing on the trail, a small plane flew over us and dropped a message. It said they had just flown down off the mountain and the Whittaker boys would walk down. So all the rescue was over.