

the SCREE

Mountaineering Club of Alaska

May 2008

Volume 51 Number 5



50 years

'The manners of mountaineers are commonly savage
but they are rather produced by their situation
than derived from their ancestors'
~Samuel Johnson

Ripinsky
Blackburn Journal #5
Hurdy Gurdy
Susitna Flats
Death Valley
Hat Trick Mountain - POM

Monthly Meeting
Wed, May 21 @ 7:30
Program: Classic climbs
in the Alaska Range by
Brian McCullough of Talkeetna

The Mountaineering Club of Alaska

"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 meetings the 3rd Wednesday of the month at the First United Methodist Church, 9th Avenue and G Streets next to the ConocoPhillips Building (you may use marked parking after hours)

Contact information is provided on the back page or visit us on the web at www.mcak.org

Cover photo: Wayne Todd reflects on the words of Samuel Johnson in the last installment of his Blackburn Journal series. Self Portrait

Article Submission: Articles and photos are best submitted on the web at MCAK.org. You can also attach a word processing document to an email. Due to formatting problems please do not submit material in the body of an email. We prefer articles that are under 1,000 words. To get on the cover, a photo should convey the feeling of mountaineering and show human endeavor.

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Hiking and Climbing Schedule

July 18 to Aug 3, Survey Pass and Shivering Mountain Gates of the Arctic National Park, Class C, \$200 air charter deposit per person due by May 1. Costs: \$320/person Fairbanks to Bettles and

return, estimated air charter \$610/person Foley Lake drop off from Bettles & Natak Lake pickup Party limit 5. Leader Don Hansen 243-7184, donjoehansen@msn.com

Ice Sculpture



Ripinsky in Twilight

by Greg Higgins

Clouds and rain ruled the morning of April 5th as Kathy Halloran and I planned our day in Haines. We were supposed to help some friends move to their summer home across Mud Bay with the low tide in the late afternoon, so we elected to drive out the highway to Mile 33 so that Kathy could see the helicopter skiing setup there. En route we stopped to view and take pictures of eagles on the preserve.

When we got back to town, we learned that our assistance wasn't needed for the move. Much to our surprise the sun also made an appearance. We grabbed our head lamps and some snacks and headed up Mt Ripinsky around 4:15. A breakable snow crust convinced us to put on our snow shoes early in the hike. The deep thrumming of many Blue Grouse entertained us in the woods as we slowly made our way to meadows past all of the new trail signs placed by Paul and Annie last year. Several years ago I was able to draw a grouse to within 20 yards of me in Olympic National Park by imitating this thrum. It proves the adage: "Love (or least Desire) is blind!"



Blackburn Journal

by Wayne Todd

Editor's note: This is the fifth and last of a series of articles that constitute a journal kept by Wayne Todd of an ascent of Mt. Blackburn by Billy Finley, Ben May, Carrie Wang and Wayne Todd from May 5th, 2005, through May 18th, 2005. The series is a direct transcription from the journal and no editing or corrections have been made to the original.

5/16/05 Awake @ 4A into still good weather skies!! Our evacuation plan to get off the ridge was on. Night had only minor brief gusts so I had ~3 hrs sleep.

Pre-sunrise was cam, cool (0-10° maybe -10 that night) but peoples adrenaline was keeping them warm. Lovely morning as especially we could see & were psyched to evacuate at a safer pace.

Cold, no-stove breakfast of bars, & we headed down @ 6 A.

50 yards down from camp @ lip edge B&B set a double picket anchor (re-set once).

As we climbed above the gargoyled trees just before tree line we encountered goat tracks and ptarmigan prints. I actually got to see one ptarmigan flying away from us still in his white coat with the prominent black side tail feathers. The goat tracks continued high onto the slopes despite no open ground showing. I guess they were just out walking and thinking about warmer weather to come.

Just after 8 we reached the summit as the last rays of the evening sun were tucking behind the Fairweather Range in the distance. We cell-phoned a friend in town to let her know we were starting down, and then began to retrace our route as we watched the new storm approaching from the south. Thickening clouds obscured some of our down climb below the south summit, but we were able to get past all of the steeper terrain before resorting to head lamps above the meadows. The trudge through the woods in the dark was slow, but we finally walked back into the house just before midnight. Where else but in Alaska can you walk out your door and have such a wonderful spring climb?



Morning Descent

Wayne Todd Photo

With the 2 60m ropes we had 200' of retrievable rappel rope. Ben, then Billy, Then Carrie rapped down into the shaded NW face. I pulled the 2' back-up picket rapping on just the 3' (yes, leaving pro on the mtn). Safe I believe except for the initial getting over the lip as when standing by the picket tended to pull it up. Ben & I were in radio contact.



Preparing to Rappel Wayne Todd Photo

Glad to be moving even though into shade and uncertainty, to be headed for safety and hopefully warmth of movement.

The 200' rap did not quite reach our upper bench but w/ the many feet of drifted snow we were fairly secure. Moving just a few feet horizontally required effort.

Billy human anchor belayed Ben down to our horizontal bench & then across. I likewise belayed Carrie.

From the horizontal bench Billy led out but heard whoomping so he went high & anchored to a serac. Once clustered there it was my turn for action. I rapped down the questionable slope, not tremendously worried as about 1/2 was steep permanent? ice/snow. Running the rope to the end in the gully I traversed behind a massive stable serac. While Carrie, then Billy & Ben rapped a placed a V thread anchor in semi-rotten ice. Ben had pulled one of the two rap anchors when he rapped (leaving a titanium screw).

I then belayed /rappd myself back into the gully of 25-35° slopes of knee deep snow over a

few filled large crevasses. Untangling the ropes as I went. 200' left me in the middle of the gully & very vulnerable to wash from above so I exited the rope & walked down the gully & around a corner to where we'd been cramponing/de-cramponing, staying mostly on avalanche debris for safety over crevasses.

Carrie arrived, we de-cramponed, then Billy & Ben went by roped delivering our rope. We went full length behind Billy & Ben who when not on debris, were leaving a large-step whollering trail.

Ben led down the last steep slope before the flats leaving a fine trench. When the slope lessened substantially the progress slowed to a crawl w/ Billy even trying to drag, rather than carry, his pack through the waste deep snow.

Once to the flats where we thought out of avalanche & serac-fall harms way we took a quasi-relaxed food, water & de-clothing break. The weather still held & now back in the sun w/ trail-breaking it was hot.

To expedite return to camp I dropped my pack & broke trail back to base camp (740 steps of knee + deep snow, not too much effort w/o pack, a damn good cardio).

Ben's tent was 1/2 drifted in but seemed intact except for maybe one pole. Rest of camp was drifted over w/just tips of wands protruding. I arrived at noon. 6 hrs to make 8/10 mile.

My first business was to locate & uncover the cooler for a deserved rest seat. Upon hearing a plane though, turned my attention quickly to the intentionally collapsed but now very buried, w/parachute anchors, Hex Nest. Plane of course was a false alarm.

For the next 3+ hours, & for Carrie ~2hrs, we carefully shoveled snow off the hex nest & dug out anchors. By gloved hand, under baking sun I removed the last few inches of snow, some water-snow, and troublesome ice globs from the nest to not harm the fabric.

Under a temporarily re-erected nest for drying purposes, Carrie & I took a break. Carrie then re-dug out a platform for the large-luxurious Trango 3. whilst I headed out w/ a sled & snow shoes for my pack.

After resting & drying & unpacking & digging out their tent, Billy then Ben began stomping a runway.

Travelling down-slope on s shoes on our up-trail was near effortless but for my stepping opposite of the boot holes. A slight breeze & cloud had forced me to put on fleece & overmitts & b hat. I slowly loaded the pack on sled relishing the views

of BB, the field of jumbled seracs & our route down through them.

I traversed up to the tromped runway, dropped pack-laden sled in camp, returned to runway for dropped hat, making another stomp run.

Rest of the day was spent melting snow, digging more-go Carrie!, & setting out gear to dry & near gorging ourselves on food.

Just before the sun slid behind the ridge behind camp the weather turned so we all scurried about consolidating, covering & throwing gear in the tents.

So the fantastic blue-sky day was over as snow fell from the sky but 4 extremely relieved mtneers were quite content to be safely back in base camp.

A small brown songbird that was breathing quickly, made me tired observing him, took temporary refuge at our camp (first on HN then on a wand) before heading SW over the pass. Probably 10 minutes later it was down in forest in its native habitat.

After Billys cheesecake dessert, I was going to write then read , which became write, which became crash at 9P (finally able to truly relax after many days).

5/17/05 Had a very beautiful restfull sleep, from 9P to ~ 6A w/ only nano wakes of C shaking the tent, concerned about 7A sat phone call. Making up for days of sleep deprivation. Had sat phone on from 6:50-7:15A but received no call from Paul C.

Slept again from 7:30-9 ahhh). Cookies then oatmeal then cookies.

Received 9" of snow during the night w/very little wind. Snow had settled within inches of the tent vents. I took the first shovel detail, fairly relaxing.



Scrabble

Wayne Todd photo

Heard song birds numerous times during the morning taking rest breaks at our camp. None seemed to eat on the bagel on the wand I left. Tried viewing them, just once had a glimpse of 2 glitting away. Tent zippers must spook them.

So nice & peaceful to be back to a safe spot, in a bigger tent, w/better food, having summited, w/only responsibilities being melting snow, clearing off the tent (food & shelter).

20.75 bar @ 4P in snow w/mild wind baro farely flat.

Read & wrote.

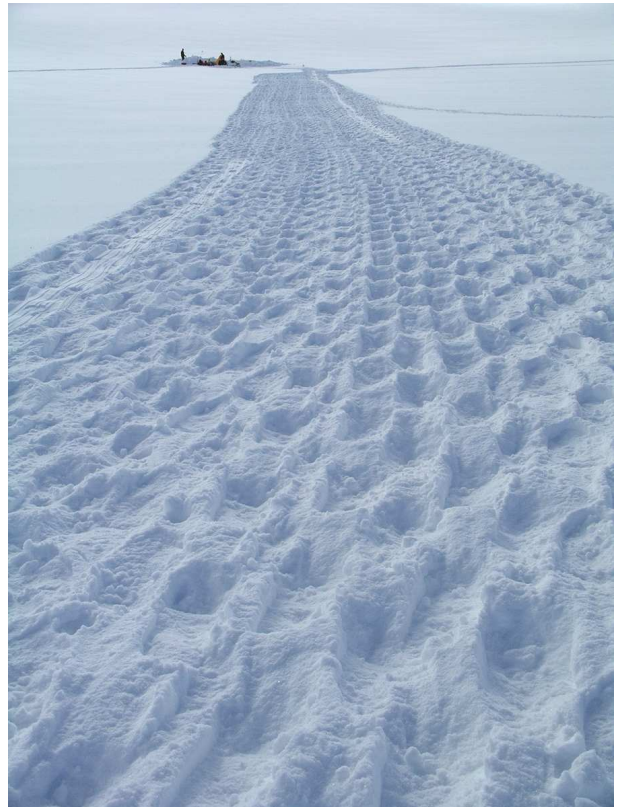
All four congregated in Ben's tent from 5P-9P for scrabble & chat. Ben won.

Ate late pasta after that & then late to bed 11:30P.

Mostly cloudy day.

5/18/05 Up 6:30ish after so-so sleep. Was concerned about not having a stomped runway.

In the fog i stomped runway for about 2 hrs, Carrie over an hour. My initial lines were wavy but then having reference lines, straightened the path out.



The runway

Wayne Todd photo

Initially BB was mostly visible w/a slight N breeze but it socked in more, began snowing & wind picked up a bit.

Perterbed w/the weather, & slightly tired, I followed Carries lead of returning to bed for over an hour.

I was half asleep but even over Billys XGK I heard Pauls plane, yelling 'plane' & 'crap, the upper part of runway isn't stomped! I exited my sleeping bag in super-hero time Carrie close behind.
10:30AM.

But alas, still to foggy so he flew on, dashing our hopes of immediate pick-up.

Should have packed then but due to perceived 'still-to-foggy-to-land' we continued to lounge around. Around 12:30 we heard the T otter again, still not thinking he could land though. After a few circles he came in low from down-glacier

touching down bypassing the runway circling the camp on ground @ 50' & parked that distance from camp to the south.

After initial brief greetings w/Paul, we pressure packed packed camp in ~20 minutes, then waited ~ 15 minutes for the fog to dissipate for take-off for the 13 minute flight back to Chitina. Sweet!

Back to chameleon burgeoning green & flowers & birds & insects & consistent warmth & running water & flush toilets.

All a wonderful thing.

Closure to a challenging, rewarding, at-times frightening & frustrating expedition with a great group.



Hurdy Gurdy

by Martin Ksok

There I was, hiking up The South Fork of the Eagle River Valley again, on another attempt, sixth to be exact. Quite an embarrassment for such a small mountain, but every previous trip was stopped by some obstacle. On the first one, our two person team ran out of time and daylight. The next time we encountered fresh snowfall and post-holed in snowshoes for six miles, once we reached the base, our steam ran out and a decision to turn back was reached. Number three was a winter overnighter and was abandoned after a lost contact lens resulting in loss of 3d vision. On the fourth trip I found myself climbing over recent debris up an avalanche run out zone, above was an overhung cornice, so I turned back. Five started an avalanche on the mountain's southern slope, turned back. So there I was, the sixth time in this valley, hiking towards Eagle Lake.

It was a warm June day. Full of hope, I quickly reached the lake, followed the trail on it's left side, bushwhacked a bit and crossed a couple of small streams. Half a mile later I started gaining the mountain's southern slopes and ended up in a massive gully. This gully is hard to spot from the valley floor, I had to gain a slope to the right of it avoiding a steep ravine, and then descend down and left. Going up this natural elevator was quite easy. The moderate angle allowed for quick gain of altitude with minimal strain.

6

About two-thirds of the way up, I spotted smaller gullies going up the right side, towards the western ridge of the mountain. I chose the farther gully which formed just above a rocky bulge-like feature, went up the scree and some snow, shortly arriving at the ridge between the summit and point 5764. A bit of scrambling put me on the wide summit proper. Thanks to the great weather I could enjoy the panoramic view of all surrounding mountains. For half an hour I was basking in the warm sun and planning my next trips.

It was quite funny to think how many tries it took to get here, considering how easy it was on the successful bid. Maybe I had finally earned the privilege of standing on the top?



Susitna Flats, May 2007

by Stu Grenier



East side of the Big Su

I envisioned this trip as sea kayak trip from Ship Creek to see the belugas that are said to congregate in the mouth of the Susitna River for the hooligan run and possibly an attempt on Mt. Susitna. What I got was a windy nine day tour of the Susitna Flats and a three mile hike up the east side to the Susitna River. My partner Dan Byrnes had more luck actually paddling up the Susitna River and seeing over a hundred seals but no beluga. The team split up on day two because I got out ahead and decided to paddle up a slough. When I tried to flag Dan down to get him to turn into the slough he continued off into a fata morgana. I ran after him on the beach but more sloughs prevented me from making contact. Other efforts at contacting him failed. A few days later we crossed paths again and spent a night together near Maggot Point. We compared notes and then Dan paddled back to Anchorage while I stayed on for more exploring.

Spending time on the flats means watching your water supply. I gathered about four gallons in a tarp on the one day it rained hard enough to collect water. Before that I had to hike to trees over two miles of marsh and swamps to get water from small beaver creeks. In route I ran into a brown bear and many sandhill cranes and other birds. Most of the

water on the flats is brackish because some of the high tides cover the flats.

The flats are dotted with duck shacks that are in various states of repair. A few are locked up but most are in the process of collapsing. For agoraphilic people like me, that is people who love open spaces, spending time on the flats can be a very satisfying experience. It seems every year of so, in an effort to access the mountains across the inlet, I find myself spending time on the flats. It seems the more exploring I do out there, the more I want to push deeper into that very wild area. So very close to Anchorage but yet so very far.



Duck shack house boat

When the 45 mph winds from Turnagain Arm finally let up I fought the tide back to Anchorage. This trip did not live up to any of the expectations I had for it but as my kayak pulled into the Ship Creek boat launch I had no regrets. I am sure to try Mt. Susitna again from Anchorage at a later date, and if I find myself exploring the wild areas on the way instead of going for the summit, so be it.



Dan high and dry on the flats

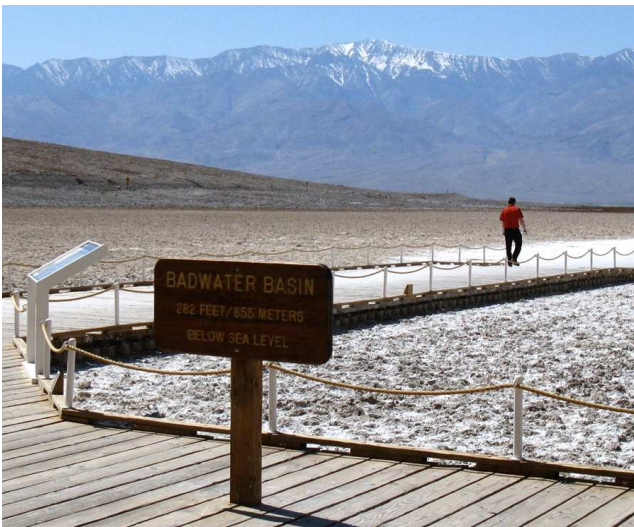
Death Valley National Monument

by Amy Murphy

This was my first trip to this amazingly beautiful park but it won't be my last! After a long-term relationship ended, I needed to get out of town for a change of scenery and mind-set, preferably someplace warm and sunny. I visited friends who live in Pahrump, Nevada, near Death Valley, and used their house as a base camp to make day trips to the valley while they worked. They graciously loaned me their 4WD pickup with a canopy so I could travel back roads and sleep in the truck. The canopy had lots of windows so I could star gaze and watch the sun set and rise over the desert without worrying about creepy, crawly things. Below are a few trip highlights.

Badwater: This dry, exceedingly hot, vast bed of white salt flats is the lowest elevation in the Western Hemisphere at 280 feet below sea level. A sign high up on a cliff indicates where actual sea level is. Telescope Peak (11,049' high), 20 miles away, is the highest point in the park and part of the Panamint Mountains. The difference in elevation between Badwater and Telescope Peak is one of the largest in the Lower 48 states.

Badwater



Dante's View: This high overlook provides spectacular panoramic views, including a 5,755-foot drop to the salt-flats of Badwater, the Black Mountains and towering Telescope Peak, and is a popular spot to view sunsets and sunrises. Temperatures here are much cooler than down on the hot valley floor and different hiking options include Dante's Ridge (1 mile RT) or Mt. Perry (8 miles RT).



Dante's View

Golden Canyon/Gower Gulch: This trailhead has different options, starting with an easy two-mile hike through the golden-colored badlands that gave this narrow, twisting canyon its name. You can hike up smaller, narrow canyons feeding into the main canyon or take an extra ½ mile trail to see the Red Cathedral. I took the more-challenging option, which provided an interesting variety of scenery and colors. After viewing the tall flutes of Red Cathedral I took a trail that goes up to the base of Manly-Bacon point, drops down into Gower Gulch and ends back at Golden Canyon trailhead. It's fun exploring meandering canyons with tall, colorful walls!



Golden Canyon

Titus Canyon Road: Titus Canyon is one of the largest and most scenically diverse canyons in the park, with lofty walls, multi-colored volcanic deposits, a ghost town and Indian petroglyphs.

Driving this bumpy dirt road was such an exhilarating experience that I was sorely tempted to drive through it again. If you like driving narrow, steep, twisting, mountain roads with sheer dropoffs and curves that double back on themselves, don't miss this road! In some places the road was so narrow my truck had to hug the side of the mountain. It is 26 miles long and one way, except for the last three miles. High-clearance vehicles are recommended. The road climbs into the Grapevine Mountains and enters Titanother Canyon. Red Pass, the high point, marks the divide between Titanother and Titus Canyons. The view up here is spectacular and is a convenient place to stop and give your fingers a chance to relax from gripping the steering wheel so tightly! Continuing down the road you pass the ghost town of Leadfield and enter the main fork of Titus Canyon, where limestone cliffs rise high above the broad wash. The final 1.5 miles of the canyon is the most narrow and is often the roughest section. The towering walls squeeze down to less than 20 feet apart in some places. If you don't have a high-clearance vehicle, park at the trailhead at the end of Titus Canyon and hike up the road.



Titus Canyon

Wildrose Peak: I originally wanted to climb Telescope Peak (11,049'), which I learned before I left was still covered with snow and required crampons and an ice axe. Unfortunately my ice axe didn't fit into my suitcase and I wasn't able to rent or borrow one. Rangers confirmed the last 1,000' feet of the steep climb was still solid ice, requiring an ice axe. Dang! Since I was alone, only had crampons and also had concerns about the high altitude (no time to acclimate), I decided to climb Wildrose Peak instead (9,084' high). I camped at Thorndike campground, which still had snow patches and temperatures dropping into the low

20s at night (compared to 90+ in the valley). From my campsite I hiked up the steep, bumpy dirt road to the Telescope Peak trailhead, located at Mahogany Flats campground (8,133' high). It was very late in the afternoon but I hiked up the trail for a while anyway. After 45 minutes of huffing and puffing due to lack of oxygen I turned around and enjoyed the stunning vistas so much I debated waiting another 30 minutes or so to watch the sun set. However, after being warned about mountain lions in the area I knew I didn't want to wander around unknown territory in the dark. The next morning I hiked to the summit of Wildrose Peak; 8.4 miles roundtrip with a vertical gain of 2,274'. The trail wanders through pinyon pine - juniper forests and offers awesome views, including Mt. Whitney and the Sierra Nevadas. Unfortunately smog slightly obscured the views, but happily, the peak register now contains a notation from a "Grannies Gone Wild" gang member! (The Grannies Gone Wild gang has a new member; Janet Graham, who wildly scrambled up, over and through some narrow canyons, tunnels and rockfalls with me in Red Rocks Canyon.)

Visiting the desert with a dry environment so opposite of Anchorage was an interesting adventure. It is awe-inspiring to see the "inside" of the earth's multi-colored, convoluted layers displayed so gloriously. It's difficult ending a long-term relationship, but finding solace in back-country solitude rejuvenated my spirit and I look forward to many new adventures.

For more information about Death Valley National Park, contact Death Valley National History Association at www.dvnha.org or P.O. Box 188, Death Valley, CA 92328



Gower Gulch

Peak of the Month: Hat Trick Mountain

by Steve Gruhn

Mountain Range: Western Chugach Mountains
Borough: Municipality of Anchorage
Drainage: Whiteout Glacier
Latitude/Longitude: 61° 11' 23" North, 148° 46' 1" West
Elevation: 6085 feet
Prominence: 635 feet from Peak 6440 near the Troublesome Glacier and the Whiteout Glacier
Adjacent Peak: Peak 6440
Distinctness: 635 feet from Peak 6440
USGS Map: Anchorage (A-5)

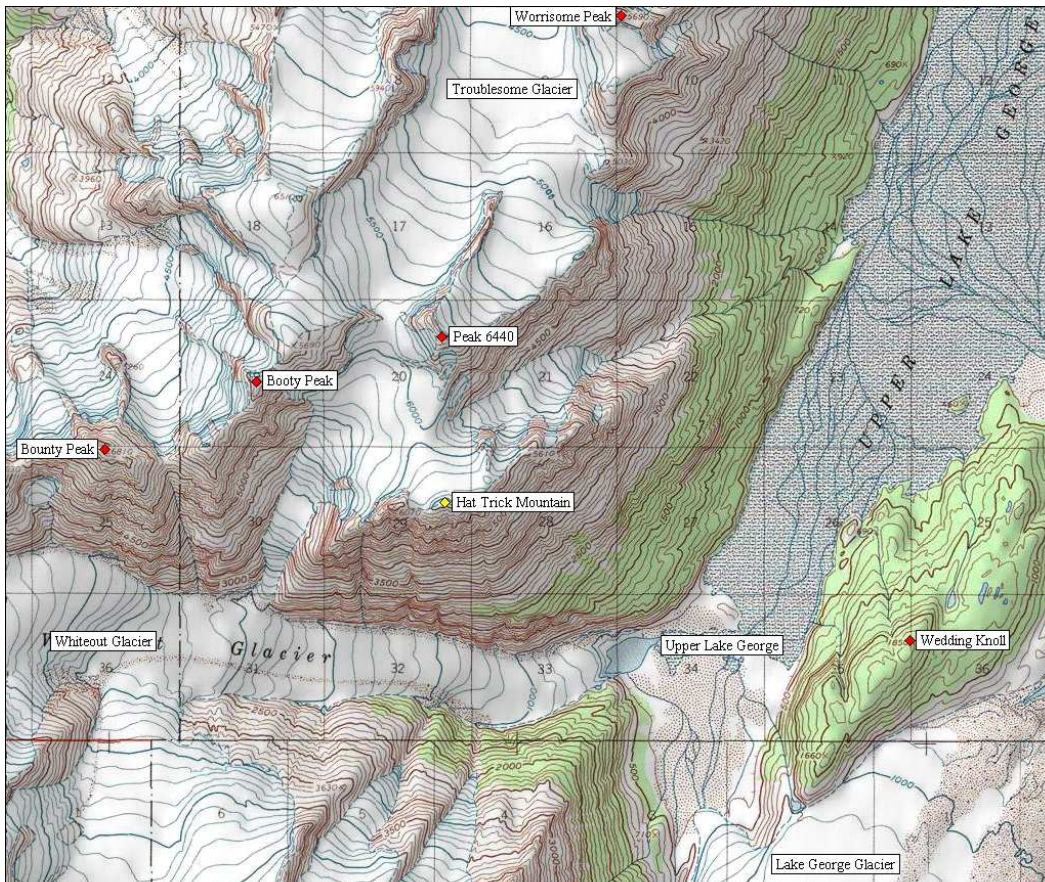
First Recorded Ascent: August 1, 1992, by Willy Hersman and Jim Saylor
Route of First Recorded Ascent: From Peak 6440 up the northwest face to the west ridge
Access Point: Eklutna Lake parking lot
August 1, 1992, saw three first ascents of peaks in the Western Chugach Mountains by Willy and Jim. The day started in the valley of the East Fork of the Eklutna River with an ascent of Booty Peak (6750; which was later named by Tom Choate). The two then climbed Peak 6440 and finished the day by making their third first ascent of the day – a

mountaineering hat trick that they thought provided a suitable name for this peak. Upon reaching the eastern summit, they observed that they were higher than Point 6070 to the west.



Willy Hersman Photo

I think Hat Trick Mountain has not yet had a second ascent. Willy's brief account of their climb was published on page 8 of the August 1992 Scree.



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

Adze

For Rent
Satellite Phone

Iridium 9505A satellite phone for rent, brand new, \$50 a week plus \$2/minute

Dave, 244-1722, david.hart@pxd.com

March MCA Meeting Minutes

March MCA general meeting minutes

1. Treasurer's Report:

3,500 revenue year to date
3,200 expenses year to date (training, scree, room rental) 27,000 total in all accounts

We still have patches for sale \$5

2. Hiking: see trips listed in Scree

Scree arcticle appreciation gift drawing
winner: Lisa Ferber
Trip leader appreciation gift drawing
winner: Amy Murphy

3. Huts: metal toilets are under construction.
One for Mint Hut.

4. Training: Basic Mountaineering School
Completed sucessfully. Graduation hike was
on Ptarmagin Peak.

5. Library: Calendars SOLD OUT!

Next year's will include all vertical photos. Bring in those starting with April's meeting (8x10 preferable - inexpensive at Costco).

6. Shirts: still available \$28 MCA non-cotton shirt.

Thank you to Stu Grenier for presenting at the March meeting on his trip to Lake George.

April's program:

Local climber Steven Davis will share his 1978 1st ascent of Mt. Logan's west ridge made with John

Annette's Corner

Thank you to Steve Davis for his presentation last month on the 1st ascent of Mt Logan's west ridge with John Watermann. This is the 30th anniversary of this climb and is yet to be repeated.

This month the club meeting presentation will be Brian McCullough with classic climbs in the Alaska Range.

Mt. Russell, Mt. Foraker, Mt. Huntington,
Denali, Moose's Tooth, Mt. Silverthrone and Mt. Hayes.

Editor's Corner

I sure would like to get some Ptarmigan (the bird) pictures, one of which could end up in the Scree. Email to johnrecktenwald@gmail.com



Mountaineering Club of Alaska

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Board member Tom Devine 529-0618

Annual membership dues: Single \$15, Family \$20

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 Treasurer. The Post Office will not forward the newsletter.

The 'Scree' is a monthly publication of the Mountaineering Club of Alaska. Articles, notes and letters submitted for publication in the newsletter should be submitted on the web at www.mcak.org or e-mailed to the Scree Editor. Articles should be received by the monthly club meeting (third Wednesday of the month) to be 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.

Missing your MCA membership card? Stop by our monthly meeting to pick it up or send a self-addressed stamped envelope and we'll mail it to you.

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