the SCREE

Mountaineering Club of Alaska

May 2013

Volume 56 Number 5

Contents

Monthly meeting:

6:30 p.m., Wednesday, May 15

Program: Pebble Wrestling by Todd Helgeson - A lazy man's introduction to the mountains - a view from the inside of a self-confessed boulderholic.

"You never climb the same mountain twice, not even in memory. Memory rebuilds the mountain, changes the weather, retells the jokes, remakes all the moves."

-Lito Tejada-Flores

The Mountaineering Club of Alaska

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 May 15 at the BP Energy Center, 1014 Energy Court, Anchorage, Alaska

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

Contents

Cover Photo

Harold Faust and Stephen Rideout on the north ridge of Mount Fellows.
Photo by Darren Hull.

Article Submission

Text and photography submissions for the *Scree* can be sent as attachments to mcascree@gmail.com. Articles should be submitted by the 25th of each month to appear in the next issue of the *Scree*. Do not submit material in the body of the email. 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 orientated photo for consideration for the cover. Please submit captions with photos.

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Hiking and Climbing Schedule

⇒ ***June 21, Flattop Solstice Sleepout.*** No leader.

⇒ ***July 6-15, MCA Summer Mountaineering/Instructional Trip.*** If you are an experienced backpacker and wish to learn basic mountaineering skills, this is the trip for you. Learn: snow travel, glacier travel, ice climbing, navigation, route finding, rock climbing, leadership, and more while hiking the Bomber Traverse in the Talkeetna Mountains. Tom Choate and Greg Bragiel invite your inquiries at the May MCA meeting.

⇒ ***August 5-11, Lake Clark National Park, Twin Lakes.*** Set up base camp at Upper Twin Lake and go on day hikes, exploring the area and visiting the former cabin of Richard Proenneke, author of One Man's Wilderness and film "Alone in the Wilderness." To sign up, contact Don Hansen at donjoehansen@msn.com.

On the Web

Alpinist.com reported that in early April Clint Helander and Jason Stuckey made the first ascent of The Apocalypse (9345) in the Revelation Mountains. We hope to have an article on their ascent in an upcoming issue of the *Scree*. Read more at http://www.alpinist.com/doc/web13s/newswire-apocalypse-revelations.

A Big and Sincere Thank You Goes to Ray Helot for Helping with Hut Maintenance

Ray was kind enough to contact me to see if anything needed to go to or from Rosie's Roost the weekend of April 20 and 21. We arranged to have him haul in an empty 30-gallon plastic barrel to replace the full human-waste barrel and then return the full one to me for hazardous-waste processing. **Thank you, Ray!**

Sincerely,
Greg Bragiel - MCA Huts Chairman

Online? Click me!

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

Mount Fellows

Text and photos by Darren Hull, unless otherwise noted

Some of my best mountaineering takes place without ever leaving the couch. It usually goes something like this:

I begin by intently staring at a map until something catches my eye. I will then proceed to run my finger along the contour lines on what appears to be an "easy route to the top," studying the features throughout the "climb" and imagining the terrain represented. This will generally be followed by looking at pictures online with any blogs about the area. Finally, I end up closing the map and falling asleep dreaming about adventures to come. I have found my way to the summit of innumerable mountains in this fashion.

Occasionally, the stars align and climbing partners are found, weather is favorable, work doesn't interfere, and these trips become reality.

Mount Fellows was one of these trips. However, it had several things going for it. First, it is a dominant mountain in the scenery surrounding Denali National Park. Secondly, work had taken me to Denali the weekend before and revealed a dirty little secret: spring had already cleared most of the snow from the ridges and lower elevations! After surviving over 130 inches of snowfall in Anchorage over the past few months, dry ground sounded very enticing. The climate is considerably different here than in the area around Denali State Park where the storms drop most their snow.

Stephen Rideout (lower left) and Darren Hull (upper left) ascending the final part of the north ridge. Photo by Harold Faust.

I began to research Mount Fellows. As my finger climbed up the valley to the north of the peak and to the summit, I recognized the river to the south, the Yanert Fork of the Nenana River. I knew the Yanert was a splendid little packrafting river from several friends who had completed the Alaska Wilderness Classic over the past few summers. The prospect of climbing Mount Fellows and floating down the Yanert to the Nenana River and back to the car was appealing.

I was able to convince Harold Faust and Stephen Rideout that the plan was a) safe, b) possible, and c) entertaining enough for the lengthy drive. We left after work on Friday, May 18, 2012, and pulled into Denali Park just before dark. Put off by the high costs of the public campground in Riley Creek we headed north and found a wonderful camping spot on the Nenana River. All of this is unremarkable except for the fact that we spent the night staring at the Nenana River, observing its power. I had convinced myself that the Nenana River would be a kinder and gentler version of itself without the glacial melt coming in. It was. However, a kinder gentler Nenana River was still more than we were able or willing to handle on this trip.

We got up early and headed to the Montana Creek trailhead. It is a hidden gem off the road to the Denali Bluffs Hotel. There is a small parking area and a crude sign to mark the trailhead. Harold wasn't convinced that the car would still be

there when we got back. However, I assured him that I had hiked the trail on several occasions and hadn't ever had a problem. Silently, I hoped he wasn't right.

The trail was in great shape and traversed through 3 miles of birch and spruce forest to an old cabin. We took a few moments to scope out the cabin and prepare for the rest of the climb. The trail continues for a little ways beyond the cabin where it crosses Montana Creek several times. Luckily spring hadn't completely arrived and with some remaining ice, combined with some acrobatic maneuvers, we kept our feet dry.

About 6 miles from the trailhead the trail ended at a moose camp with an elegant outhouse made of spruce poles. It never ceases to amaze me that as men we can go to such great lengths in the wilderness to improve the quality of our bowel movements. After the moose camp we traveled another mile or so up the canyon and then began the harrowing bushwhack to the ridge.

When choosing a route I usually do my best to avoid areas that will require long sections of post-holing or extended bushwhacking. Unfortunately, we had managed to find both – simultaneously. Time had softened my memory of this stretch until I began to review some of the pictures. Then it came rushing back to me. There were moments where you were thigh deep in spring snow while wrestling with an alder and trying to climb a 30-degree slope. There were moments where you were encouraged by shaded sections of snow that would hold your weight long enough for you to gather hope that you could stay on top…only to fail again, triggering words that would make a sailor blush.

Eventually we were able to access the bare ridge and had a relatively easy ascent for the last 1,000 feet of elevation. The clouds covered the view to the west, only giving us brief glimpses of the true mountaineering objectives that lay in the distance. Fang Mountain was visible with many of the larger peaks surrounding Denali coming into view briefly as the wall of clouds opened and closed.

From this point it was a simple ridge walk to the top. We were greeted by a herd of Dall sheep off the east side of one of the fingers. With the sheep under the general assumption that danger only comes from below them, we got to watch them graze for quite some time.

As we looked down on the Yanert Valley we realized that leaving the packrafts behind was a prudent decision. The craggy north face would have required a lot of travel in sketchy terrain to navigate for a relatively short stretch of river. A motivated paddler could probably continue up Montana Creek to ease the descent to the Yanert and lengthen the paddle.

We compared our maps to the terrain and speculated routes the wilderness classic racers took on their approach to the Yanert. The views of Pyramid Mountain and Mount Deborah were spectacular. With one summit completed, the mountains in every direction conjured up more dreams of trips to come.

Our descent was overall uneventful. We chose to drop into the next valley to the west rather than retrace our steps. This proved to be a wise and time-saving decision. We were able to make decent time back to the car (that was still there and intact). We made it down in plenty of time for some great food and a sufficient sampling from the 49 taps at Prospector's Pizzeria in Denali Park.

Harold Faust and Stephen Rideout (foreground) on the north ridge of Mount Fellows.

The Top of Frosty Peak

Text and photos by Matt Nedom

The top of old Frosty was hidden in clouds. To climb this volcano would make me feel proud.

My job requires me to travel regularly. Many trips are to remote locations around Alaska, giving me a chance to explore many places few persons have been. One of the towns I visited in the summer of 2012 was Cold Bay. The only thing I knew about Cold Bay was that it was on the Alaska Peninsula surrounded by volcanoes.

Curious about trips in this area, I asked other members of the Mountaineering Club. Three people each told me about the local volcanoes, Frosty Peak being closest, within range.

Since I expected snow on the mountain, even in August, I wrapped my ice axe and glacier crampons to include with my packed bag for this three-night trip. The Penair flight approached Cold Bay from the northwest, arriving over Bristol Bay, heading to the southeast over the west coast. Sitting on the left side of the airplane I wasn't able to see Frosty (5803 feet) south and west of town. Still I kept my eyes open, peering through the clouds, seeing some fishing boats on the many lakes in the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge.

The view south and west from Cold Bay.

The site tech met us at the airport, arriving in the SUV. He greeted us with a warning about the brown bears, telling us that staying inside the truck is the best defense. I felt a heightened sense, knowing I'd have to stay alert for this danger. This trip would be an adventure! Cold Bay is a small town with not many people. It is there to support the airport. The land is wide open, with no trees, sloping down from the nearby hills, into Cold Bay.

The tech left us with the truck, showing us the short drive to the Cold Bay Lodge. The lodge is owned and operated by Mary and her husband. Mary was very friendly, business like, presenting a friendly lodge with wonderful food. After checking in, another guest and I took a short walk to the dock on Cold Bay, checking out the buildings and structures while keeping our eyes open for animals. We met a group of fishermen on the dock with a couple of large fish. I was having fun.

Along the walk to and from the dock, I looked toward the mountains rising to the west of the bay where I knew Frosty Peak stood, seeing only the landscape rising into the clouds. I could also see the volcanoes to the east, separating us from King Cove. So much to explore!

Over the next couple days the clouds would sometimes lift high enough so that I could see a wide saddle separating two peaks. The north peak was a simple rise. The left (south) peak, the summit of Frosty, was hiding in the clouds above a large cirque, intriguing my interest. How would I access the peak? Maybe I could go up the back (west) side. From the saddle I might be able to climb the ridgeline. It didn't appear to be too steep. It would be an exploration! I was glad I brought my snow gear.

I asked people in town about climbing the mountain. No one seemed to know anything or even be interested in the mountain. Many seemed doubtful of the climb. Many were worried about the presence of bears, afraid I would be attacked. Mary, expressing her doubts, finally insisted that before I go for the hike, I speak with Gary Ferguson, the electric utility man in town. So after a quick phone call, I drove over to meet him. He was the local mountaineer.

Gary told me that he had climbed Frosty every year since the 1960s until a few years ago since now he was older. One of Gary's adult children was planning to hike there, but next month, after I would be gone. Gary told me that it was a hike easily done in a day. Gary had never reached the summit as it is a rock climb to the top. (This is now readily seen in recently posted Google Earth photos. These photos, and the detail of the satellite images, were not there in 2012.)

Gary also assured me that there were no bears. He had never seen a bear on his years of hikes on the mountain. Bears were smarter. They would be down at the river catching salmon!

Gary directed me to the starting point, a place to park the truck off the road. From there I would follow the ridge up past the foundation ruins of some Army housing built during the Cold War. The airport and town were originally built as a military base to support the nation's defense. Gary asked me to report on the condition of the water cistern there when I returned.

I drove up the road, past the second bridge where Mary had suggested we go to see bears. The evening after work that we had driven up there, we saw no bears. Of course there were no bears. They were where others reported seeing them, down closer to the fish in the bay. The steep narrow 50-year-old gravel road had me wishing I was riding my mountain bike! I was happy to have had the truck. The last hill to the turn off the road was so steep I wasn't sure if I could make it.

After parking the truck I looked up the ridge to plan my hike, seeing the ridge veer to the right, opening up into another smaller cirque. The ridge rose up to what I thought was the

Lupine north of Frosty Peak.

north peak. Instead of climbing up, then back down, then back up, I made the decision to start hiking to the right, the west side of the ridge. I checked my compass heading to get a sense of directions, and my watch to note the time to begin my return. If I followed that heading on the return, at least I would be able to make it back to the dirt road.

The hike began over the tundra – low, scattered brush, rocks, and grass. There was no vegetation to hide any wild animals, such as the bears about which I had been warned. What I began searching for now was some wind to blow away those other, pesky animals that we all love here in Alaska. No one warned me about the bugs!

A short way up the ridge, in the flats to the right, I came across ruins and boardwalks across the tundra. After a brief look, I continued up the ridge, hoping to find moving air to blow away the biting flies. My goal was to explore the volcano. I'd check out the ruins if I had time on my return.

Hiking the first ridge, I felt like I was in the Talkeetna Mountains. The scenery, the rock, the plants all reminded me of what I had experienced there. Reaching the ridge crest, I saw it opened up to more valleys descending from the ridgeline at the top, now hidden in the clouds. There were many of these shallow washes, wide and deep enough that I couldn't see the next until I began climbing the other side. I looked back to verify my position, so I would recognize landmarks while headed the other way. Since there was no trail, to be safe I picked through the plentiful rocks to make cairns on the larger, sofa-sized rocks. Hiking farther south and uphill to the east (climber's left), I continued to take the time to make cairns on the undulating mountainside.

I was getting a full body workout – aerobics and legs exercise from hiking, arms and chest from swatting the bugs. Where was that breeze? After a couple ups and downs, I decided to hike straight up the valley, into the clouds, to gain the ridge and find some wind. I made a definite mark here as I noticed the visibility decreasing rapidly. I knew that once upon the ridge I'd have a straight line to follow, leading to the peak! When I came back down, I didn't want to hike past the turn off, going downhill farther than I needed.

The scary part was that when I'd look back, the cairn was lost in the flat light of the gray background.

Once on top of the ridge, all visibility was lost. I looked to the left. All I could see was the ridge rising to that first peak. With the compass I verified my directions. To the south the ridge dropped, more than I wanted, toward Frosty. I would lose all the elevation I gained! Before I continued, having learned my lesson from decades of hiking, I made another massive pile of rocks so I would be able to see it to guide my way down.

What I could see was marvelous. I loved the barren rock, splotched with lichen and moss. I was all alone up there, far, far away from anyone. Being so remote was a unique feeling, a sense of how small I was. Occasionally I'd find flowers adding a burst of color to highlight the gray light of the ridge. One garden of lupine was so beautiful I took the time to hike over for a few photographs.

I hiked along, following a classic ridge hike, seeing the world drop off below me on each side. Because the visibility was limited, my imagination took off. I was on the crest of the world, walking a tight wire. Most often it was a gentle slope, though parts were the tops of the cirques, the top of a steep cliff. Hiking this ridge reminded me of hiking along the top of the ridge between Arctic Valley and Eagle River in the Chugach Mountains, our backyard. I could look over the edge of the cliff and see the cirque filled with snow, wearing a crown of rock.

Often the clouds were so dense that I couldn't see all the way across the cirque. I had no idea which way was which. I looked at my compass again, questioning its accuracy. As I taught my flight students, always trust your instruments. Sometimes I'd look at the compass thinking there must be an iron deposit inside this volcano, because the needle was not pointing to the north! Which way was I walking?

Trust your instruments, Matt.

At one point the fog thinned enough to allow me to see the sun's outline, reassuring me that the compass was correct. That made me feel a lot better.

Aside from the flowers and some birds, I didn't see much else. I felt all alone in this vast wilderness. Then I came across a spent cartridge showing me that I wasn't the first one here. The only sound was the occasional whisper of air moving through the pass. I felt peaceful in the serenity of the mountains.

A check of my watch showed me that it was now time to start back, though I had not reached my goal. I could not even see the peak through the clouds. After some brief thought, I decided to hike back along the east wall, the side visible from Cold Bay, the side of the valley above the second creek - the creek where the bears were!

I was on the top of a cirque. I peered over the edge, seeing no safe way to descend. Through the fog I could see another ridge dropping from the cirque, going down the way I wanted to go.

Fog obscured much of the route.

I continued south to swing around to the left, below where I hoped the peak was. This way I'd get to glissade over the snow. I hiked with my ice axe in case I needed to make a self arrest, or to fend off any bears. I hoped to not discover that these snowfields were glaciers, with unexpected crevasses, or even a bergschrund I'd have to circumnavigate! I headed downhill, around the crown, over the rock, looking for a place I could safely climb down onto the snowfield. Reaching the point I chose, I found the rock climb descent too dicey to reach the snow. I knew that I had to be back in town, that people would be worrying about me being up here on this mountain! Without panicking, I looked back up the hill, finding another place where I could safely reach the snow.

The next challenge was the condition of the snow! Would it be firm enough to support me, or would it be a continuous post-hole expedition back to the truck? I also dug a pit, checking the stability of the snow to make sure it wouldn't slide. I was in luck. The first of the many snowfields was in great condition! I would not have to backtrack along the ridge, the route I had already traveled. Plus, it was steep enough that I could glissade, making turns in August, continuing my turn-of-the-month-club membership!

I picked a route and headed down. Of course going downhill is much faster than climbing up, especially if one is sliding on the snow! I kept in control, never having to make a self arrest. I was having so much fun, I wished I could be doing this more often. I continued over the snow, making my way over rock fields, still traveling to the north, keeping the ridge when I could see it through the clouds over my left shoulder, not descending too far down the hill, not getting stuck on top of some cliff. The visibility was improving, but I often could not see across to the other side of the valley.

Though there was still so much to explore, I kept moving, wary of the time to not arrive later than I was expected. Plus, I wanted to be back for dinner. I had a cell phone with me, loaned to me for the hike. I wondered what coverage was in the area, if it would even work. I descended below the clouds seeing the creek valley open to the north, Cold Bay far away. I was on the right track, still scrambling up and down, around corners, over the snowfields and rock. This reminded me of hiking in the Talkeetna Mountains.

As I neared the east side of the first ridge I spied a trail of bones left on the snow. They were vertebrae, I guessed from a caribou. As I carefully made my way around some rocks, hoping to not encounter any carnivores, in the next wash sat more bones and a caribou rack! The antlers had been gnawed all over and that there was no meat or hide showed me it had been there for some time. Still, I kept on my eyes open.

I stepped into this hollow where the bones lay to get a closer look. Turning my head to check my back, I nearly jumped out of my skin! Right behind me I saw fresh dirt dug from a den under a large rock! I quickly jumped away from what I thought could have been a bear's den. I unleashed my ice axe in case I needed protection, carefully peering over at and trying to look into this hole. I didn't get too close!

Nothing was there. I was later told it was most likely a fox den. That surprise was the only scare I had on the trip, within 10 minutes' hike from the truck.

I sang out loud as I began the walk back to the truck and to check out the water cistern and foundation ruins on the other side of the ridge. It was 5 p.m., time to get back to the lodge for dinner and report back to those checking on me.

I hope the next time I'm in Cold Bay, the visibility will be better.

Mount Drum Journal

Text and photos by Joe Chmielowski unless otherwise noted

Dates: May 28, 2004 – June 3, 2004

Climbing Time: Seven days total (five up, one down, and one for pick-up)

Party: Josef Chmielowski and Todd Shearer

Difficulty: Alaska Grade II+

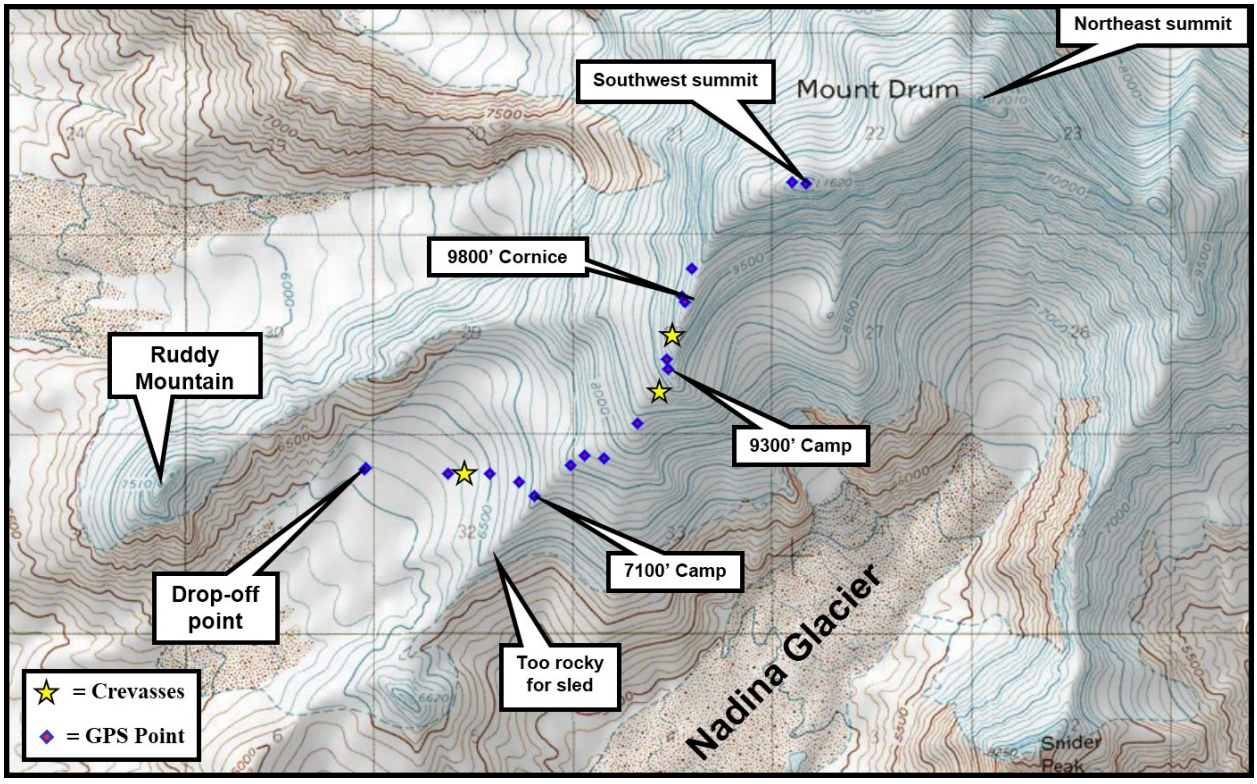
Route: Southwest Ridge

Weather: Very Poor (limited visibility, clouds, snow, graupel, high winds, etc.)

Temperatures: 10 to 20 degrees Fahrenheit (^{o}F) during the day, 0 to 10 ^{o}F at night, wind chills during storms approximately -20 ^{o}F to -30 ^{o}F (note, we did not have a thermometer; temperatures were estimated).

Drop-Off Point: Klawasi Glacier (NAD 27 Coordinates: 62° 05.378' North, 144° 43.959' West at 6,100 feet).

Day #1 (May 28, 2004): Paul Claus of Ultima Thule Outfitters picked us up at the Chitina Airport (about an hour drive south of Copper Center) at 13:00. After loading a snowmachine into his Otter aircraft (there was a Japanese-Russian scientific expedition studying the volcano and taking a 200-meter ice core for climatological studies) on top of the 14,000-foot Mount Wrangell, he flew to Mount Drum and dropped us off just below a thick layer of clouds. Our drop-off elevation was 6,100 feet and right in the middle of the sticky Klawasi Glacier. We made a cache of two days' food, fuel, snowshoe tails (the snow didn't look too deep), and a bottle of Graham's port. We carried our large packs and Todd pulled the sled northeast across the low-angled glacier. We chose to stay on the glacier despite crevasse risks and the extremely limited visibility because the southwest ridge between 6,000 feet and 7,000 feet has a lot of rock spires, which would have been impassable with our sled. The sled was very difficult to pull as the glacier became steeper. I took over pulling it the last 500 vertical feet and it was heavy. Once we reached the 7,100-foot elevation we stopped to make camp where the glacier intersects the southwest ridge. Three factors kept us from progressing: 1) the sled could not be hauled further due to increased steepness; 2) we had nearly zero visibility due to thick cloud cover; and 3) we were very tired from hauling the sled up such a steep incline. When we could finally see the southwest ridge below our camp, it turned out that we had made the right decision to stick to the glacier because the ridge below this elevation was

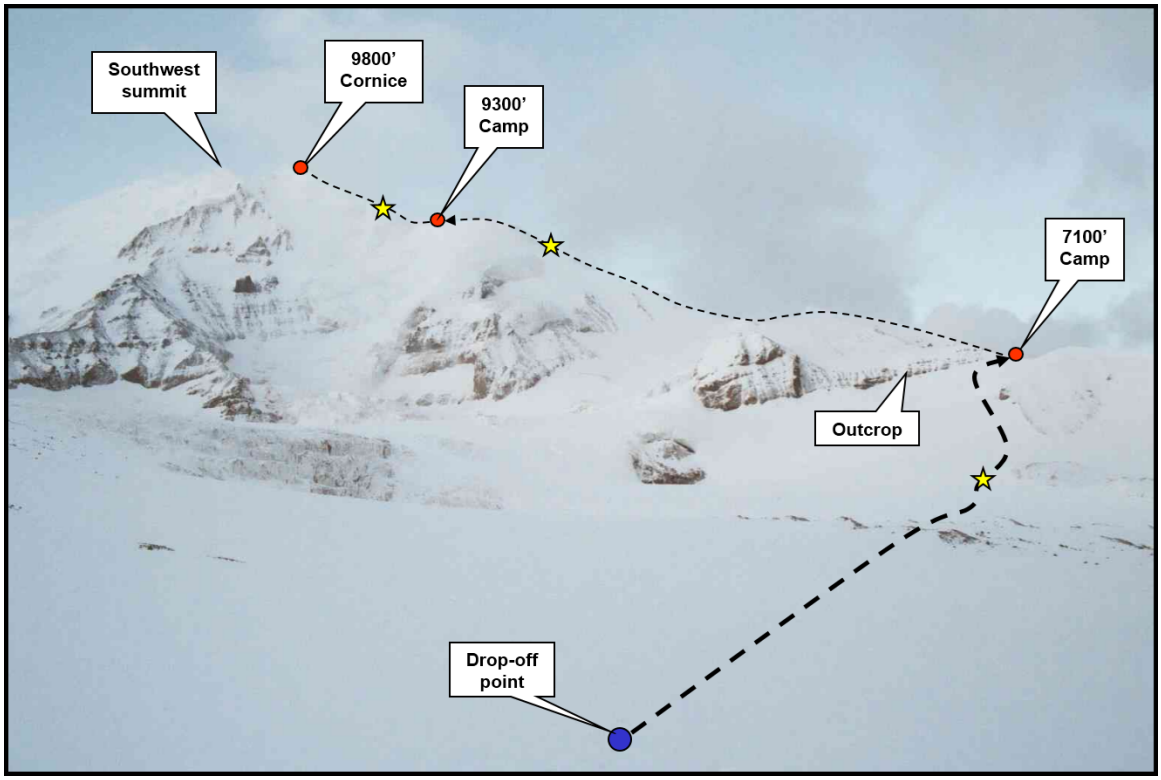


All GPS coordinates are in NAD27 datum, as is the above map. Note that although there are crevasses found along the entire southwest ridge, three sections have been "starred" as especially hazardous. We were not able to successfully probe their locations, but instead found them by stepping into them (usually up to our knees or crotch). Definitely rope together and keep your ice axes ready.

too rocky to haul the sled. We dug in, made a good snow-block camp, ate some freeze-dried food, and hit the sack. We were very happy to actually get dropped off on the mountain due to the poor weather the past week (there had been black clouds and heavy rain in Anchorage, the Copper River Valley, and nearly the entire state. As a matter of fact, there was supposed to be another low pressure right behind the one currently settled upon us). We also felt good that we attained our second goal of making the low camp at 7,100 feet. Note: when we were dropped off on this day, the small 6,000- to 7,000-foot mountains to the east and west of the glacier were brown and almost snow-free. The snow line (freshly fallen snow, that is) was probably close to 7,000 feet. This observation was important, because toward the end of our climb we were hammered by a three-day storm and these small peaks were thereafter totally white and the snow line moved down to 4,500 feet onto the tundra!

Day #2 (May 29, 2004): Woke up to thick cloud cover (no wind) and poor visibility. At most we could see 50 to 150 feet ahead of us, but sometimes the clouds shifted slightly and we could see 200 to 500 feet above us for a minute or two – just long enough for us to mentally photograph the ridge and make some progress. Instead of hauling the sled, we decided to put all of our extra gear in our packs and hike to the 9,300-foot level and leave a cache. Due to visibility, the progress was slow. We placed wands on the way up and made all the right decisions as we worked our way up the southwest ridge. There are a few things to note on this section of the climb. First, Mount Drum scree is extremely loose and walking on it is difficult (it makes the Chugach Mountains scree seem like a paved walking trail). Thus, when there was a choice of walking on snow or scree, we inevitably chose snow. This was not always possible, because the northwestern side of parts of the ridge were heavily corniced. Second, the upper portion of the section has a somewhat steep glacier pitch. We put in a few snow pickets when possible and stayed roped up. We found several crevasses in this section by stepping into them up to our thigh (they seemed somewhat small – 1 to 2 feet wide and 10 to 30 feet deep). We couldn't see anything of a view on the way up or down, but both sides of the ridge were steep and fell off quickly according to the map. We followed our wands down the ridge (and placed additional ones for the next day's climb), came back to our 7,100-foot camp, ate, and rested. Note: there is a good spot for a camp at 7,500 feet just above the rock outcrop. Due to the visibility and distance, we were disappointed, but not surprised, that we couldn't move camp to the 9,300-foot elevation. It was unrealistic and, therefore, we decided to move camp early the next morning.

Day #3 (May 30, 2004): Woke up to thick cloud cover again with no wind. We broke down camp and without visibility we followed our tracks and wands to the 9,300-foot elevation. Climbing today was easy because we could follow our tracks, re-use the steps we cut into the high-angle ice walls, and we knew where the crevasses were in this section of the climb.



A view of the southwest ridge from the drop-off point. Our trek crossed the broad Klawasi Glacier, several glacier moraines, some crevasses, a steep section of glacier and finally, it paralleled a rocky outcrop before actually attaining the southwest ridge. We could not haul the sled past the rocky outcrop, so we set camp at 7100 feet instead of 7500 feet.

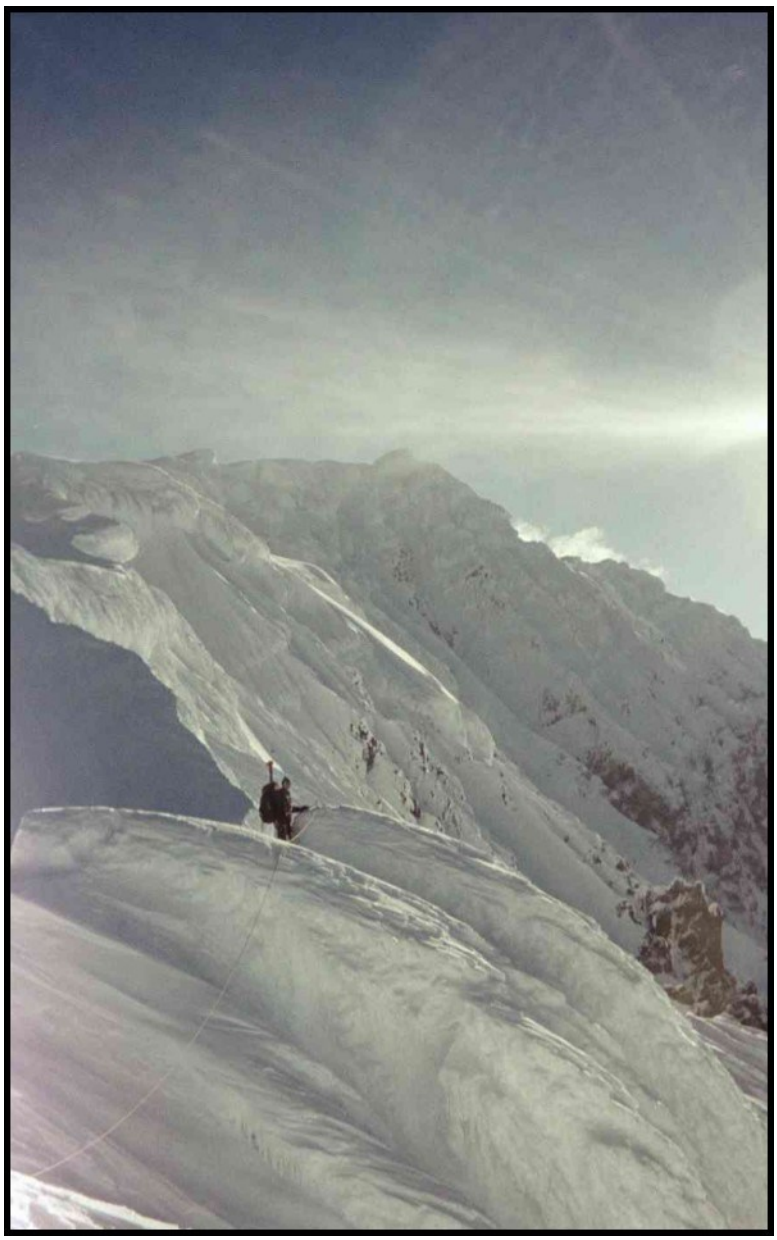
When we reached our destination of 9,300 feet, we had a little break in the clouds and made a bomb-proof shelter. The snow-block walls of our camp extended a full foot above the tent and our kitchen walls were a foot above our heads while we were standing (a snow saw is a definite *must* for making a quality camp quickly). It took three to four hours to set up camp, but this proved well worth the effort as the next three days of weather were brutal. Shortly after setting up camp the clouds rolled in and we had no visibility. We could just see a section of the southwest ridge above us and we mentally photographed it for the next day's summit attempt. Note: the clouds were persistent and sometimes would shift enough to allow us to see the Chugach Mountains and Copper River Valley, which were perfectly clear! These clouds seemed to cling close to the mountain and they got worse throughout the day (they were thinnest in the early morning and near sunset, but they were *always* present). Todd and I were happy that we were at high camp and even though visibility had been extremely poor, we were right on track with our climb. We played some backgammon on my Thermarest game sleeve and read our books.

Day #4 (May 31, 2004): Again, woke up to thick clouds and no visibility. Hung around high camp until 13:00 when they dispersed a little. We started a summit push hoping that the small hole would grow and turn into a blue-sky day. As we started up the ridge the clouds settled back in on us. We worked our way to the 9,800-foot mark setting out a few wands and finding a few more crevasses by breaking through them. We had to set some snow pickets and kick in steps on several steep ice sections. The ice was too rotten for ice screws and sometimes too hard for snow pickets. At one point an eerie event transpired – no visibility, silence, and then a massive rumble as a series of avalanches crashed down the southeastern face. We couldn't tell how close or far they were, but the sun was working on the ice and snow despite the thick cloud cover. Eventually, we had to turn around because of no visibility, worsening weather and we were unable to see how to down-climb an at-least-15-foot cornice (couldn't see what waited for us below). About halfway back to camp, the weather turned utterly foul and the wind picked up, driving graupel horizontally into our faces. Our tracks were covered up and we had to wear goggles as we slowly made our way down the narrow ridge (2- to 4-foot cornices overhanging a 1,500-foot drop on the northwest side and a 1,000 to 2,000-foot drop on the southeast side). We made it down around 19:00 and shoveled out 1 to 2 feet of drifted snow that had accumulated in our campsite. We dove into our tents to eat a cold meal and wait out the bad weather. We were a little disappointed to get turned back so quickly on our first summit attempt, but happy that we climbed the steep section directly above our tent without any trouble.

Day #5 (June 1, 2004): Woke up at 04:00 to check the sky and found that it was clear and the temperatures were very cold (perhaps 0 ^{o}F). We could see that the snow line extended well onto the tundra to about the 4,500-foot level (we later found out that it was 28 ^{o}F in Copper Center on this morning). Keep in mind that when we were dropped off, the freshly fallen snow line was at about 7,000 feet (old snow, snowpack, and

Day #3 – Looking northeast at our 9300-foot camp. Note that our camp walls are more than a foot higher than the tent. This proved invaluable when storm #1 – and especially storm #2 – hit. The snow eventually filled our walled encampment to a level higher than the tent.

glacial snow was present down to about 5,500 feet). After eating, making water and gearing up, we set off for the summit at 05:30. We followed our wands (our tracks and steps we kicked into the walls were gone) back to the 9,800-foot level and armed with visibility for the first time on this mountain, we easily down-climbed the cornice and pushed onward up the southwest ridge. As we progressed, we encountered deeper and deeper snow, drifts, and the usual crevasses. A couple sections were fairly steep and took some time to kick in steps and set pickets (once again, the ice was too rotten for screws and sometimes too hard for snow pickets). Today was difficult because the sloughing snow made the near-vertical sections tougher to climb. Around 12:00, the sky was still clear above us, but I noticed some cumulus clouds materializing around 7,000 to 8,000 feet. Up until this point we had great views of the valley, the Chugach Mountains (we could see Mount Marcus Baker), Denali, Mount Blackburn, and Mount Wrangell. We pushed on up the southwest ridge and in about 30 minutes were totally socked in again! The snow got deeper and was about thigh deep in places. At 13:30 we placed a wand on what we thought was the northeast summit. The visibility was so poor that we weren't sure if we were on the southwest or northeast summit. We waited for 20 minutes and after seeing about 200 to 500 feet below us dropping off and seeing the rocky eastern sawtooth ridge, we convinced ourselves that we made it and turned around to try and beat the bad weather back to high camp. We didn't. About halfway down it hit us hard. No visibility, high winds, and horizontal graupel/ice/snow assaulted us. We donned our goggles, pulled up our hoods and trudged slowly back by following our wands (our tracks were again covered up and down-climbing the steep ice walls was difficult and slow). At 18:30 we were on our last wand and Todd "found" three crevasses about 200 feet above our high camp. Each time he went in up to his knee, thigh, or hip. We were thankful to get back, but were faced with snowdrifts in our camp higher then our tent! Once again, we had to dig out camp and then eat a cold dinner. We didn't say too much, but were happy to have summated Mount Drum (although we each harbored a tiny bit of doubt because we couldn't see exactly where we were located at while on top).



Day #5 – Todd prepares to down-climb the 9800-foot cornice that we couldn't see on our first summit attempt (Day #4).

Day #6 (June 2, 2004): Woke up at 07:00 to zero visibility and howling winds (constant winds, not gusts, about 40 to 50 miles per hour; it sounded like a wind tunnel). We waited three to four hours for it to abate, but no luck. Snow was piled in our camp higher then the tent again. It wasn't actively snowing, but the wind was blowing it around and driving intermittent graupel horizontally. Todd wanted to break down camp and get off the ridge where he was convinced the winds were absent. I voted to stay in the tent and wait out the windstorm. We compromised by agreeing to pack our spare food and gear down the ridge to the 8,500-foot elevation and cache it just below a steep ice section (the most difficult section between our high camp and low camp). Walking on the ridge in these high winds with our large backpacks was difficult and slow and several times I was blown to my knees. We set a couple pickets and worked our way down in extremely tough conditions and limited visibility. Once at

our cache point, it was still very windy with horizontal graupel, but it was a *little* better then high camp (or maybe we were just getting used to the punishment). While climbing back up to our high camp I finally started to get warm and feel my toes (the wind chill must have been -20°F or colder). We broke down camp in the unrelenting wind and cold (sometimes our carabiners were iced up and frozen). It took about twice as long to break down camp as it should have in good weather. Nonetheless we hiked down from our 9300-foot camp and at our first snow picket I fell into a crevasse up to my hip. Todd couldn't see me or hear me in the weather and I struggled to free myself with my big pack. Eventually I got free and we pushed on down to our cache. We hauled the gear bag down through the wind, graupel, and low-visibility conditions. We thought it couldn't get worse, but it did. We then started encountering 1- to 3-foot snowdrifts at 8,000 to 8,500 feet. On the ridge I started a small slough below me, but we kept moving. I started another small avalanche and my feet fell out from under me. I stopped myself with my axe as I watched the snowslide disappear down and over a steep drop-off. We kept heading down and then hit constant 1- to 3-foot deep snow. We put on our snowshoes and plodded on. Eventually we got to the 7,100-foot camp, which was nearly filled in with snow. We stopped for five minutes to drink and eat. I had difficulty opening my frozen Nalgene bottle and when I was able to do so, I had to strain the ice crystals and chunks with my teeth. I gnawed on a third of a frozen beefstick for lunch. We picked up our sled and moved on down the glacier (the wind was less, but the visibility was still extremely poor due to clouds instead of wind-driven snow/graupel. I was leading, pulling the sled and I couldn't see up, down, left, or right). We made good time down the glacier. Todd tried to guide the sled behind me with a leash, but the damned thing would push me forward so I had to take long, quick steps. Sometimes it would get stuck and literally pull me off my feet where I would roll around helplessly on my back like a dying beetle. When not struggling with the sled, I found a couple crevasses hidden by the new snow. Finally, we got to the 6,100-foot drop-off point, set up camp, ate, and drank some port. This day was the toughest on the mountain and seemed like an epic struggle. Every little task seemed difficult (watching my ice-cold hands trying to perform delicate tasks with large gloves and limited visibility was very frustrating and time consuming). Todd and I agreed that the mountain pummeled us good and threw everything it had at us. What else could Mount Drum do to us? This question was answered the next day.

Day #5 – After down-climbing the 9800-foot cornice, Joe enjoys a breathtaking view of Mount Wrangell to the east. Photo by Todd Shearer.

Day #7 (June 3, 2004): Woke up to semi-cloudy skies (the 9,300-foot camp and higher was obscured as usual). Paul landed on the 6 to 8 inches of new powder and picked us up early at 11:00, much to our surprise. We scrambled to break down camp quickly and we didn't have to pack too well be-

cause his Otter plane is so huge. I got in the co-pilot seat up front for a good view and he flew us off the glacier. As we progressed upward, we found that the clouds had formed a little hole around the summit and he offered to show us the mountain we had climbed but never really saw. We circled the summit and it was no surprise that we couldn't see our tracks (there was probably a few feet of new snow or drifted snow there by now). But we did look for a wand we planted and could not see it. We circled again and saw it on the southwest summit. Due to the dense cloud cover on summit day we thought we were on the northeast summit, but were not. Thus, Mount Drum had the last laugh! Upon reflection, we could not have stayed another day, as the winds persisted and so did the clouds. And even had we stayed in high camp after the storm, if the weather ever cleared, we would have had to battle feet of new snow and all of our tracks and steps cut in the ice walls would have been gone. Thus, we did what we could, given the foul conditions and considered the climb a success. The flight back to Chitina was nice and we talked with Paul as we passed over the sunlit green Copper River Valley. One final note, I returned to the Copper River Valley two weeks later to float the Gulkana River with my brother and friend. For four days the weather was hot (in the mid 80s to low 90s) and Mount Drum was perfectly sunny every day. It just goes to show you that the weather is the key to this mountain and if I were to try it again, I would wait until solstice weekend when summer has securely settled on the Wrangell Mountains.

General Comments: The most difficult part of the climb was the bad weather. At one point or another during our journey, we encountered the following conditions (many of them occurring at the same time): zero or limited visibility, whiteout, graupel, ice-crystals, rime, falling snow, high winds, snow drifts, intense ultraviolet radiation, heat (despite the clouds and lack of visibility), and finally about six hours of sun out of seven days of climbing. Moral of the story: use lots of wands, stay roped, and use climbing protection. The second most difficult part of the climb was the natural hazards. Crevasses were not only on the lower glaciers (between 6,000 and 7,100 feet) but also were found along the entire southwest ridge. They were especially abundant throughout the steep ice climb

Day #7 - Paul Claus (left) of Ultima Thule Outfitters picked us up at 6100 feet. Todd Shearer is at right. Although the skies were somewhat clear, notice the clouds and windblown snow on the southwest ridge where our 9300-foot camp was located.

from 9,000 to 9,500 feet and between the 9,500-foot camp and 11,000 feet. Even when the ridge was just a few feet wide, they were still present. Perhaps they were not as big as the ones on the large lower glaciers, but a twisted ankle or broken leg on this remote mountain would be very dangerous. Finally, above the 9,500-foot camp there were a lot of cornices that were overhung anywhere from 3 to 7 feet.

Keep in mind that conditions not only change from year to year, but also from day to day. Do not count on re-using ice steps or following tracks even in the same day. I'm sure those who have climbed this mountain in the past and perhaps in the future who have good weather will say, "It wasn't that tough." I expect that it should have only taken four days. But I am glad we packed food and fuel for 10 days, because the weather is so fickle in the Wrangell Mountains things can change quickly. As a matter of fact, Paul Claus believes that the Wrangell Mountains have a monsoon effect similar to the Himalaya Mountains. He said, and it makes sense, that they receive most of their snow in the summer when the interior heats up and pulls in moisture from Cordova and Valdez. I asked if it were clearer in the spring and he said that it was clear in late March and April, but then you have to battle –20 to –30 ^{o}F weather. Pick your poison: foul weather or extreme cold. I grew up in Sourdough and went to school in Gakona and Glennallen and watched Mount Drum every day of my life and I clearly remember seeing clouds molded to it when the skies were perfectly blue all around. I have seen clouds clinging to only Mount Drum, but not Mount Sanford or Mount Wrangell. The opposite is true as well (I have seen a single nasty cloud cling to Mount Sanford, but not Mount Wrangell or Mount Drum). Each mountain seems to be an independent entity. Sure, they typically get socked in together, but anything goes in the Wrangell Mountains and it is best to be over-prepared.

The only pieces of equipment that we didn't use were the overboots (it never really got cold enough to warrant them) and ice-screws (rotten ice prevented their use). Until Day #6, we didn't think that snowshoes were necessary, as we had only used crampons until that point. After the two-day storm, however, the snowshoes proved valuable. Three pieces of gear that were absolutely necessary were the: wands (our only means of "seeing" anything on the mountain), snow pickets, and the satellite phone (light, as big as a normal phone, rented it for $90 in Anchorage and allowed us to report our movements to our contact). The phone was necessary as there was, and typically is, no one else on the mountain. Unlike Denali, there were no other climbing parties, rangers, or medics. We were on our own so this was a good piece of insurance and we made a 60-second call whenever we moved camp, made a summit push, or needed to contact the pilot.

Day #7 – We circled Snider Peak, which on a map is an unimpressive 8250-foot mountain. Viewed in real life, it is an extremely menacing and near vertical three-sided peak that looks impossible to climb. Paul said, "No one has climbed Snider Peak and no one will." Has *anyone climbed it?* [Ed. note: The top of Snider Peak may well remain unvisited, but John Giraldo and Mark Henspeter reached the base of the summit spire in May 2010. See the February 2011 *Scree* for details.]

Peak of the Month: Mount Providence

By Steve Gruhn

Mountain Range: Alaska Range

Borough: Matanuska-Susitna Borough

Adjacent Pass: South Col

Latitude/Longitude: 62° 53' 48" North, 151° 3' 6" West

Elevation: 11250 (±50) feet

Prominence: 1100 feet from Mount Stevens (13966)

Adjacent Peaks: Mount Stevens and Thunder Peak (10920)

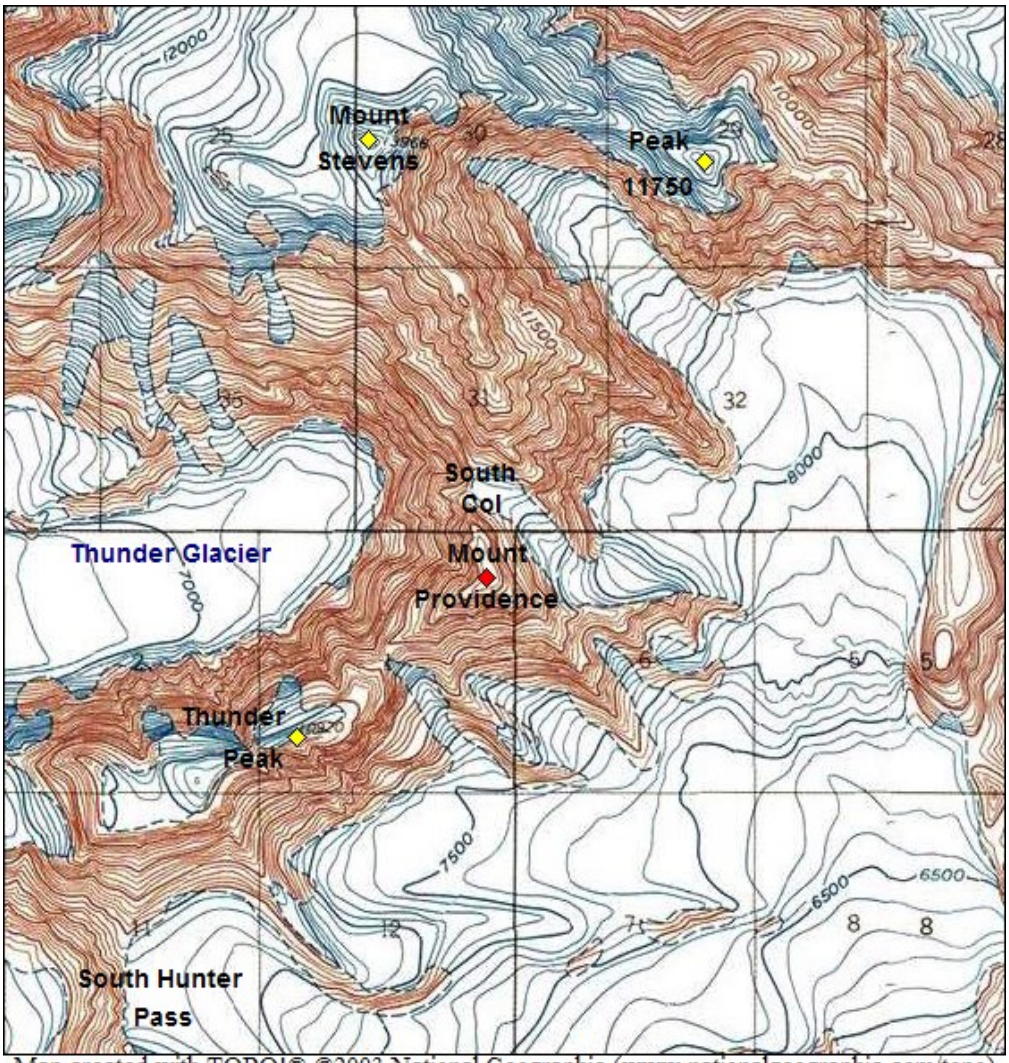
Distinctness: 1100 feet from Mount Stevens

USGS Map: Talkeetna (D-3)

First Recorded Ascent: May 19, 1997, by Jim Hall, Nick Lewis, and Paul Ramsden

Route of First Recorded Ascent: South face

Access Point: Tokositna Glacier south of Thunder Peak



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

On May 5, 1997, Hall, Lewis, and Ramsden flew from Talkeetna to the 7300-foot level of a tributary of the Tokositna Glacier south of Thunder Peak. There they established a base camp and tried on five occasions to climb Thunder Peak. Unsuccessful in the face of repeated bad weather, they turned their attention to the south face of the peak to the northeast.

At 9 p.m. on May 18, they cross the bergschrund and simulclimbed most of the way up the easternmost of three prominent gullies, covering moderate ice and mixed ground. Climbing through the night, they reached the summit at 6 a.m. on May 19 in a storm. They rappelled and down-climbed straight down the south face, returning to their skis by 3 p.m. They rated the 1100-meter route Alpine D, Scottish III. They decided to name the peak Mount Providence due to a lucky escape with a stuck rope while rappelling. Emboldened by their success on Mount Providence, the trio returned to Thunder Peak and reached the summit on the 26th.

In late May 2004 Paul Roderick of Talkeetna Air Taxi deposited Samuel Johnson and Jeremy "Jay" Piggott at the same landing zone. Johnson and Piggott climbed a line on the western half of Mount Providence's south face. The duo found considerably less snow on the lower section of the peak than the 1997 party had encountered. Their 1200-meter route took the middle of the three prominent gullies. The two climbed 300 meters of 40- to 60-degree snow, followed by 900 meters of continuous ice and mixed terrain up a striking couloir and narrow-clefted rock buttress. Most of the difficulties were in the WI2-WI3 range, with several near-vertical ice pitches and a short, well-protected mixed crux in a steep corner that increased the overall difficulty to WI4. They reached the corniced southwest ridge, rappelled short of the summit, and returned to their base camp 13 hours after they had left. They named their route "Divine Providence," rating it V WI4 M6. Sam posited

Above: Northwest aspect of Mount Providence. Photo by Carl Battreall.

Below: Sam Johnson leading a class Grade IV pitch through the first goulotte on "Divine Providence" on the south face of Mount Providence. Photo by Jay Piggott.

that in a year with fatter ice, however, the route might become more moderate.

In 2005 Kelly Franz and Ken Glover reportedly attempted the east ridge of Mount Providence. However, details on that attempt, including whether it was successful, are lacking.

The information in this article was obtained from Nick Lewis' report titled "Thunder Mountain (Peak 10,920'), South Face, Peak 11,200', South Face, and The Moose's Tooth, Southwest Face, Attempt," which appeared on pages 220 and 221 of the 1998 *American Alpine Journal*; from Bill Ruthven's summary report titled "97/22 British Thunder Mountain & Mount Hunter 1997," which was published on page 291 of the 1998 *Alpine Journal*; from Sam's report titled "Thunder Mountain, Paikea's Journey, and Mt. Providence, Divine Providence," which appeared on pages 193 and 194 of the 2005 *AAJ*; and from my correspondence with Sam.

Check out http://tokositna2004.blogspot.com/ for Johnson's more detailed account, including Piggott's short video, of their ascent of "Divine Providence."

Hut Needs and Notes

If you are headed to one of the huts, please consult the notes below to see what needs to be carried to the huts or fixed. All huts should have repair tools and materials so that anyone can make repairs. If you can help out, email Greg Bragiel huts@mtnclubak.org or call 350-5146. Also, if you have a favorite hut and would like to take the lead on organizing maintenance and repairs for that hut, Greg would greatly appreciate the help.

- **All Huts -** MCA members are requested to adopt a hut, help out with maintenance and keep the Huts Committee informed on what is happening there. Also, please encourage any non-members at MCA huts to become MCA members. **THESE ARE YOUR HUTS! PLEASE VOLUNTEER TO HELP! GREG BRAGIEL IS NOT ABLE TO COMPLETE ALL TASKS HIMSELF!**
- **Pichler's Perch – Please repair roof metal that is missing. Supplies at hut.** The plywood floor of the loft near the ladder needs to be reinforced and repaired with available materials so it can hold more weight. Please look for a missing 5-gallon "Poop" bucket in and around the hut and the rocky area and glacier to the northwest. The hut also needs updated human waste system instructions and more wag bags.
- **Hans' Hut – Exterior renovation planned between July 20 and 28 (weather dependent). Hut will be closed.**
- **Rosie's Roost – Look for lost blue human-waste barrel (LIKELY IN THE MOAT TO THE NORTH OF THE HUT). Please drag it back to the hut if at all possible or provide GPS coordinates for retrieval.** Empty human waste barrel to be flown in during Hans' Hut helicopter operations and exchanged. Eye screws need to be brought in to secure human-waste barrel**. (Thank you, John Brueck, for accomplishing this task.)**
- **Mint Hut – 1-gallon safety red oil-based paint in foyer of Mint Hut needs to go to the Bomber Hut. Need to paint exterior areas of wear; door threshold and frame.** Two empty human-waste barrels to be flown in during Dnigi Hut helicopter operations.
- **Bomber Hut – Exterior wood needs to be scraped and painted, red oil-based paint.** Paint will be carried in prior to or flown in during Dnigi Hut helicopter operations.
- **Dnigi Hut** – Toilet needs poop chute repairs. 5-Gallon bucket liner to be installed. Toilet door needs to be painted. Toilet door needs additional hinge to be installed. Lantern mantles and lantern globe Powerhouse 690A048C needed. Need updated membership applications and club business cards. Hut windows are leaking. Need caulking and painting and/or replacement of window guards that do not pool water and snow! **Maintenance trip is planned one weekend starting May 10-13, 17-20, 24-27, or May 31 to June 3 (weather dependent). Hut will be closed.**
- **Scandinavian Peaks Hut – Items that need to be taken to hut: two lantern globes, lantern generator, trash-compactor bags and portable loo. Exterior painting needed; door frame, window frames, and deck.** Outhouse needs to be found, replaced to original position, and secured; find door and replace. Need updated membership applications and club business cards. Second-floor window has ¼-inch gap – may be best to fix with weather stripping. Use care when closing window!

Dnigi Hut Maintenance - Hut Closed

Pollux Aviation has been requested to be on call for helicopter support the following weekends from Friday 7 p.m. to Monday 7 p.m. **May 17-20, May 24-27, and May 31 - June 3** to fly materials and two workers to and from the Dnigi Hut. Additionally I will request our pilot make a short stop when returning to pick us up at the Mint Hut to drop off two barrels and to fly to the Bomber Hut to drop off painting supplies. We will fly out of their hangar at Wolf Lake.

Hans' Hut Renovation - Hut Closed

I made tentative arrangements with Pollux Aviation for helicopter support for the Hans' Hut renovation. They will be on call **July 20-28** to sling three to four loads of materials and transport four to six personnel to and from Hans' Hut. This is weather dependent, of course. I anticipate four to five days of work at the hut along with a day on the front and back end of helicopter operations. I have arranged to have the Chugach State Park Eagle River South Fork Trailhead or the meadow below Richard Baranow's place as a Landing Zone with Tom Harrison, CSP Superintendent. I will work out the details of this mission with Tom and Pollux.

Greg Bragiel, MCA Huts Chairman

MCA General Meeting Minutes:
April 17, 2013

Huts: Priority methods for disposing of solid human waste on the Eklutna Traverse: 1) trash bags — haul them out, 2) trash bags — dispose in the 35-gallon drum barrels (solids only, no urine), 3) wag bags — haul them out (they cost MCA about $2.50 each and contain chemicals/enzymes that interact with the solid waste and may be legally disposed of with regular trash). The Mint Hut has an outhouse with two drums for solids only. The Bomber Hut has an out-house. Encourage people using the huts to become MCA members. There are supplies that need to be delivered to the Scandinavian Peaks Hut, which will be listed on the MCA website. If you see a repair need while at a hut, fix it if you can. Helicopter flights are expensive. Hans' Hut exterior renovation project being designed and planned with Larry Oliver's, Stan Olsen's, and Ross Noffsinger's involvement. Tentative dates for the renovation planned in July. There may be another barrel lost at Rosie's Roost. Return it if your able or at least take a GPS location. Red paint is at the Bomber Hut, which needs to be painted. Dnigi Hut maintenance projects being planned for a couple of long weekends in May. Please help! These are our huts.

Training: Planning for a crevasse rescue training in May. Greg Bragiel is planning for a summer mountaineering trip.

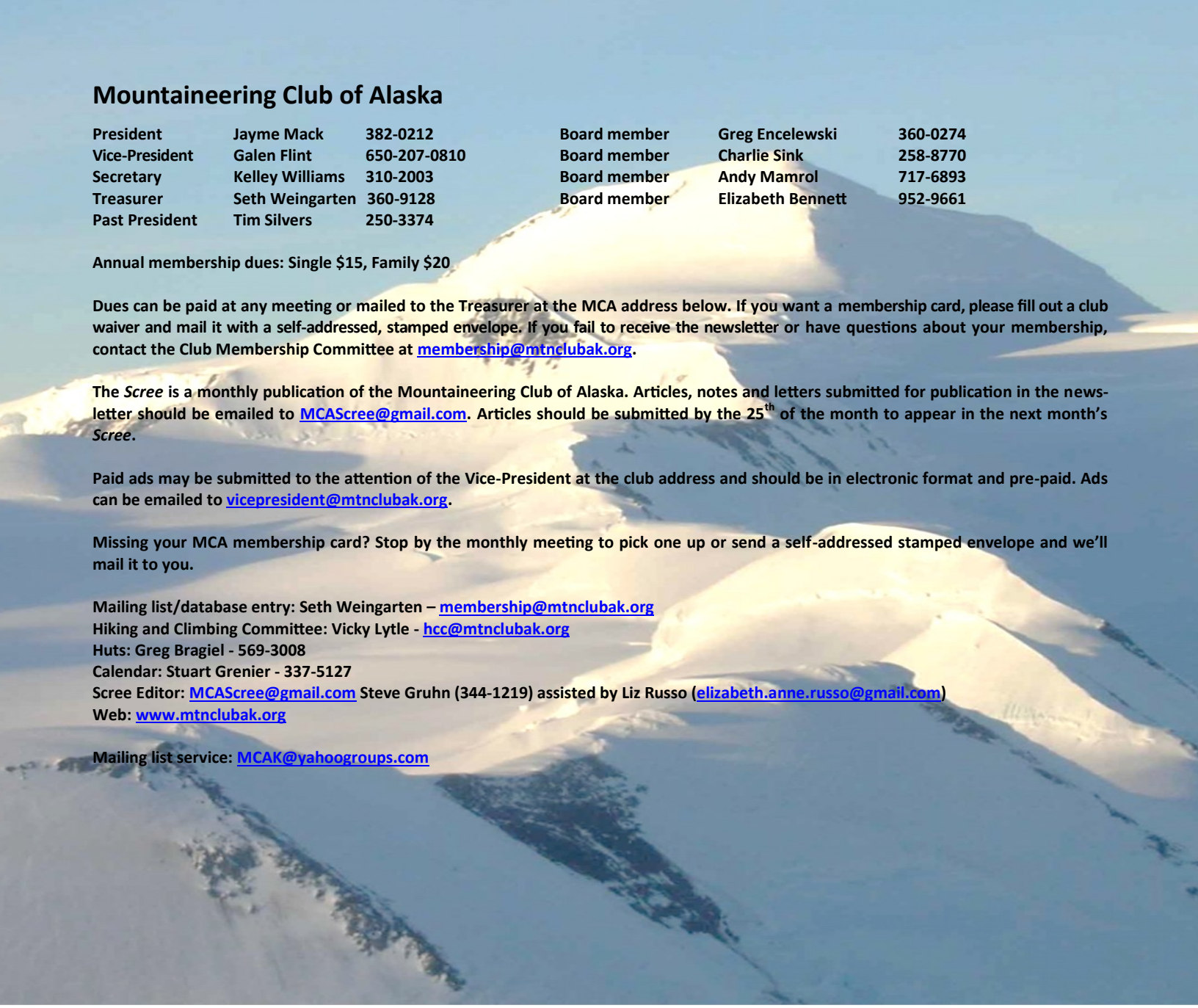
Parks Advisory: Galen Flint attended a meeting regarding Ram Valley access. Homeowners are expressing concern about access options that would cross their property.

Library: Roughly one-third of MCA's books are in the MCA library at REI in a training room. MCA has a list of all books and the plan is to rotate them.

Josh volunteered to house the peak registers.

Presentation: Blaine Smith with Chugach State Park talked about trail maintenance and upcoming projects.

Submitted by Greg Encelewski.



Mountaineering Club of Alaska

President	Jayme Mack	382-0212	Board member	Greg Encelewski	360-0274
Vice-President	Galen Flint	650-207-0810	Board member	Charlie Sink	258-8770
Secretary	Kelley Williams	310-2003	Board member	Andy Mamrol	717-6893
Treasurer	Seth Weingarten	360-9128	Board member	Elizabeth Bennett	952-9661
Past President	Tim Silvers	250-3374			

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 Membership Committee at membership@mtnclubak.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. Articles should be submitted by the 25th 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@mtnclubak.org.

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

Mailing list/database entry: Seth Weingarten – membership@mtnclubak.org
Hiking and Climbing Committee: Vicky Lytle - hcc@mtnclubak.org
Huts: Greg Bragiel - 569-3008
Calendar: Stuart Grenier - 337-5127
Scree Editor: MCAScree@gmail.com Steve Gruhn (344-1219) assisted by Liz Russo (elizabeth.anne.russo@gmail.com)
Web: www.mtnclubak.org

Mailing list service: MCAK@yahoogroups.com

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