

MOUNTAINEERING CLUB OF ALASKA

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MEETING, MONDAY, JULY 3

The MCA will hold a picnic on Monday, July 3rd at 7 p.m. on the hillside above the rocks - approximately 22 miles from Anchorage on the Seward Highway. This will be a "do-it-yourself" affair. Bring your own supper and refreshments. The MCA will provide NOTHING ...except the idea of having a picnic instead of an indoor meeting.

CLIMBING SCHEDULE:

July 8-9: Montana Peak. Overnight. Backpack. Helga Bading leading. BR 7-7822.

After the July 3rd meeting further climbs will be arranged. If in doubt call the Schucks (BR 2-9448) or the Wilsons (BR 4-7833).

TRIP TO SPENCER GLACIER May 5, 1961 by Howard Schuck

We had been looking for a trail which would be free of snow this early, so hikers could enjoy a hike without being burdened with their long winter companion --the snowshoe. All interesting trails were still snowbound at this date, but the idea of hiking the railroad tracks came to mind. Spencer Glacier, 9 miles up the track toward Seward from the Portage Glacier Road was selected as the objective.

Dire predictions as to the difficulty of walking on railroad ties scared most of those who had expressed interest and only three hikers made the trip: Marguerite St. Falley, Linore and Howard Schuck.

The track and roadbed made an excellent trail, much better, in fact, than the average Alaskan trail. In most places it was possible to use the roadbed as the trail. This was a cobblestone surface, but not too uncomfortable for hiking.

The round trip of 18 miles was made in about 8 3/4 hours. This included many stops along the way to observe the moose, beaver, birds, ducks, fish, scenery, have lunch and watch huge snow avalanches come crashing down the mountainside and, of course, to take pictures.

It was a beautiful clear, warm day and as we hiked up the track we progressed through different stages of spring. Near Portage all ice in the swamps and streams was gone; trout and young salmon could be seen in many of the side streams; beaver and Canada geese were observed at close range and many species of birds, including the sparrow hawk, were seen.

As we progressed upward and in from Turnagain Arm, we entered winter conditions, with streams still frozen and snow covering the ground (all except our friendly railroad right-of-way). Ptarmigan were seen here and we enjoyed watching several substantial avalanches crashing down the mountainside, happy in the knowledge that we were a good, safe distance from their destructive force.

Now that the Alaska Railroad no longer* runs passenger trains to Seward, the only way to get into this country (without an airplane) and to see this rather spectacular country of Alaska is by foot --and we proved to our own satisfaction at least, that the railroad right-of-way is a suitable foot route into this country.

We were sorry more hikers had not come as we all felt it was a successful and enjoyable trip on a beautiful spring day.

There will, however, be one passenger train trip through this country in 1961. On July 4, the Alaska R.R. will run a special excursion from Anchorage to Seward and return.

MIDDLE GOAT PEAK (5401') May 21, 1961 by John Dillman

On May 21st, at 7:30 a.m., Helga Bading, Leona Wilkerson, Betty Alleman, Wayne Rhoades and I met about a mile from Eklutna Lake. Leona and Betty were going to hike around the lake while Helga, Wayne and I were planning to climb the Middle Goat Peak and maybe the smaller peak to its left if time permitted. We climbed straight toward the peak and after an hour or so we were at 3600'. Here we decided to have a little to eat. On we went, and after two hours of climbing on snow and rock we were on top. To our northeast we could see Marcus Baker on a mountain which Helga believed was Mt. Goode. After a short lunch, we found the cairn and Bill Crews and Joe Cummings had made the first ascent in 1954. After signing our names we climbed down the ridge on the left which brought us to the col dividing the two peaks. It was pretty steep on this side, though we did find a route that might have gone. However, it was out of the question because we had to be back at the cars at 3:30 p.m. So we decided to go down the ridge and have a sun bath. After a nice long glissade on both snow (slush) and rock (talus) we were back at 3500'. As we came up over a ridge we ran into two large boulders who immediately took off upon seeing us. We snoozed for an hour or so and then headed for the cars. Leona and Betty were waiting for us, and we were off for Anchorage.

In April we had failed to get near Mount Gilbert, but on May 26th we were luckier. On a beautiful evening Lowell Thomas, Jr. took Paul Crews and Hans Metz to Surprise Glacier in his ski-wheel equipped Cessna 180. Bob Bailey, Steve Foss and I followed. It was a bit breezy on the glacier, and we climbed for several hours until, about 10 p.m. at 3500', we put up the two tents and turned in.

Saturday was nice, but still windy. By midmorning we were entangled in the fangs of a monstrous crevassed area. Hans climbed cautiously up the lip of a crevasse and then hauled our packs up. Fog settled in and we didn't see a way out. Only after a long search did we find an exit from the mess, but we had wasted much of the day. Late that afternoon a formidable icewall stopped our progress. Above it we could see the beginning of the "chute" which was to be our way to the saddle below the summit. It seemed sensible for three of us to make camp and send Paul and Hans to explore the possibilities. They returned at 9 p.m. with the news they had just finished climbing the "Bottom half of the Eiger North". They recommended we take the long way round to the South. There were no objections. All through the night we heard ice and rocks tumble off the "Eiger".

We planned to climb Gilbert on Sunday and pick out the route for an ascent of Mt. Gannett on Monday; then shoot straight for Surprise Glacier where we were to meet Lowell Monday night. But it didn't work out that way.

The 2-man tent wouldn't even stand up in the wind, so the home-made Logan accommodated all five of us, uncomfortably so. We spent the next 30 hours pinned down in the sacks waiting for a storm to subside. Those were tedious hours and on top of all we managed to get some gasoline into the soup. But Paul reassured us, "this won't hurt you, just don't belch into the fire!" We had only one book among us ("Hawaii" by Michener) so I tore off the pages as I read them and passed them down the line. Twice the tent tumbled into our faces; the pole shot clear through the aluminum plate we used for a base and sank 6 inches into the snow.

Monday at 2:00 a.m. things looked brighter. At 4:15 a.m. we were off, tramping through very deep snow and dropping willowwands behind us. It was cloudy but there was visibility for several miles. Mount Gilbert loomed straight above us with its formidable South Face which we planned to skirt and then go up the steep southwest ridge. Breaking trail was much work and we changed leads frequently. At 7 we reached the bottom of the chute, crossed a gigantic bergschrund and strapped on our crampons. Steve hadn't been feeling too well and now decided to call it quits. Paul and I chopped a platform in the rocks and Steve crawled into the sleeping bag and the 2-man tent we had brought along. Paul tied him to the rocks with our spare rope.

Meanwhile Bob and Hans had disappeared with a "See you, Steve", we charged uphill after them. Climbing the icy chute was much fun. It was steep and we had to chop platforms frequently to give our legs a rest. When we reached the saddle we were greeted by an icy blast. Stuffing some candy into our mouths we followed the tracks of the leading couple. They were happy to see us and let us take our turn in breaking trail up the steep slope where deep powder and windblown ice alternated. There was another bergschrund where the ridges meet and we knew we were close to the top. Yes, there it flattened out ...and dropped away on the other side.

It was 12:15 p.m. when we reached the summit in driving snow and now only half-mile visibility. The event was duly celebrated the Bavarian way (ask Hans for details) and after the usual picture-taking we turned and left.

We had barely made it to the top of the chute when the tempest erupted. I saw Hans turn his broad shoulders against the wind and I did so, too, whipping my hood over my head. We couldn't go fast to escape since we had to belay each other down, step by step. Steve had thought we'd never return, but there we were. Now it was a matter of getting down fast. Down across the bergschrund and then along the glacier and all we could see and feel was the whirling snow and the wind tearing at us. Finding camp was a nightmare. It seemed every second willowwand had blown away. Our eyes hurt from the strain of searching for them in all that grey nothingness where one didn't know which was up and which down. After what seemed to be an interminable descent we arrived at the plateau where camp was. But where? Ice pellets whipped into our faces and stung. We tried walking backwards, spreading out along the rope. There! A miserable remnant of orange roof stuck out of a snowdrift. But this was home. Paul engineered the thing back into shape placing a snowshoe inside the tent to hold it up. One by one we crawled in and oh! what a relief to be out of the wind. There was less room than before and we were all wet. What a decrepit crew in a real bad situation!

Hardly had we found room to lie down, tightly squeezed, when Paul's calm voice rang through the uproar, "Let's take down the tentpole now, we've got to save the tent to save ourselves." Now we had the tent material whipping right into our faces, but what was much worse was the threat of being drifted over by the snow. Every 15 minutes or so we raised our feet and kicked and kicked to keep from being covered up completely. Pretty soon we were worn out. The wind must have been at least 60 mph and between gusts we could brace ourselves for a new blast. This is how we spent the next 36 hours. We were hungry but worst of all, thirsty. Cooking was out of question and the "lunchtype" foods had to be preserved.

Next day Paul ventured outside to look into the possibilities of a retreat, but he came back and said, "If we'd try it now we wouldn't survive." But we had to get something to drink to keep our strength up. We all sat up and huddled against the tentwall with our

backs while Paul tied a slingline to the peak to keep it from flying away. Bob slowly dug his way through soggy socks to make room for the stove and then hovered over it for half an hour. Everything inside the tent was an incredible mess; there was hardly a dry stitch anywhere, and we cut a hole into the floor hoping to be able to drain out the worst. Between howling gusts of storm Bob produced some hot soup, one cup for each. He took turns slipping the hot liquid (it felt heavenly) and holding the tent. Then back to the prone position and some more waiting. Lying like that under the tent material, I couldn't see what the others were doing, but I found great comfort in reading the torn-up pages of "Hawaii" inside the cove of my sleeping bag hood. While I commiserated with the layers on Hawaii at least my mind was off my own misery and the thought of what would happen should the home-made tent tear to shreds.

On Wednesday morning the storm seemed to change its tune. While we listened sleeplessly we noticed the gusts had become less frequent. Now it was time. Three of us held up the tent while two packed and somehow we managed to strap the whole soggy mess onto the packboards. One snowshoe was broken, but we all managed to have something on our feet, to be roped up and heave the packs onto our backs. I wasn't the only one whose legs were numb from lack of food and my head swam a little. But once we got going all we had to do was keep marching ...downhill... taking a bearing on the rock ridge to our right which was now visible.

We reached Surprise Glacier, still in the fog, and remained roped up to search for the ski pole we had stuck in the snow to mark our "emergency food cache". And suddenly the clouds broke up - temporarily - and in that one moment we heard the roar of an airplane and Lowell was overhead. What a sight - incredibly beautiful.

We formed a line - still roped up- and stood motionless while Lowell performed a smooth landing. But as we ran up to him, still leaning against a 35 mph wind, we knew, as did he, that he couldn't take off again with a tailwind of such strength. He put up the Logan once more. All the waterproofing had been beaten out of it, and we soon found the driving snow melting and dripping right through the tent. It was a miserable, wet mess but still better to be dripped on than blown away. By the time we had tied down the airplane wings with our climbing ropes, Paul had it all figured ...he sat in the airplane. The rest of us dug into Lowell's C-rations. During that one day we managed to put away the whole case.

It was late that night, and the sun was setting, when the wind decreased and, after much pushing and shoving to turn the plane, Lowell made a take-off with Hans and Paul. The other three stared into the sunset, wet and cold, firmly convinced he wouldn't have a chance to come back for us that night. But just to be sure we packed up and waited. It was 10 o'clock when he came back again. Taking sight along the line of snowshoes and people in the camp, Lowell landed again and soon we were off, too, heading toward the civilization we had been so eager to get away from for a few days.

Sitting out the storm was a bad experience - one of the worst in all my climbing years. But it was valuable, too, for the knowledge we have gained.