

the SCREE

Mountaineering Club of Alaska

June 2013

Volume 56 Number 6



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Iceworm Peak

The Crystal Drizzle

Peak of the Month:

Cut Mountain

Letter to the Editor: Huts

Monthly meeting:

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

Program: To be announced.

**"Every mountaintop is within reach
if you just keep on climbing."**

-Barry Finlay



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 June 19 at the BP Energy Center, 1014 Energy Court, Anchorage, Alaska

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

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Cover Photo

David Martindell on the summit of Iceworm Peak.
Photo by Brook Kintz

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.

Monthly Meeting: Wednesday, June 19, at 6:30 p.m.

Program: To be announced.

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. Greg Bragiel invites your inquiries at the June 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.

Dave Hart reported that on May 20 Greg Encelewski, Ben Still, and he climbed Peak 10540 in the Bear Glacier drainage of the Saint Elias Mountains. We look forward to reading a full trip report in a future *Scree*.

Online? Click me!



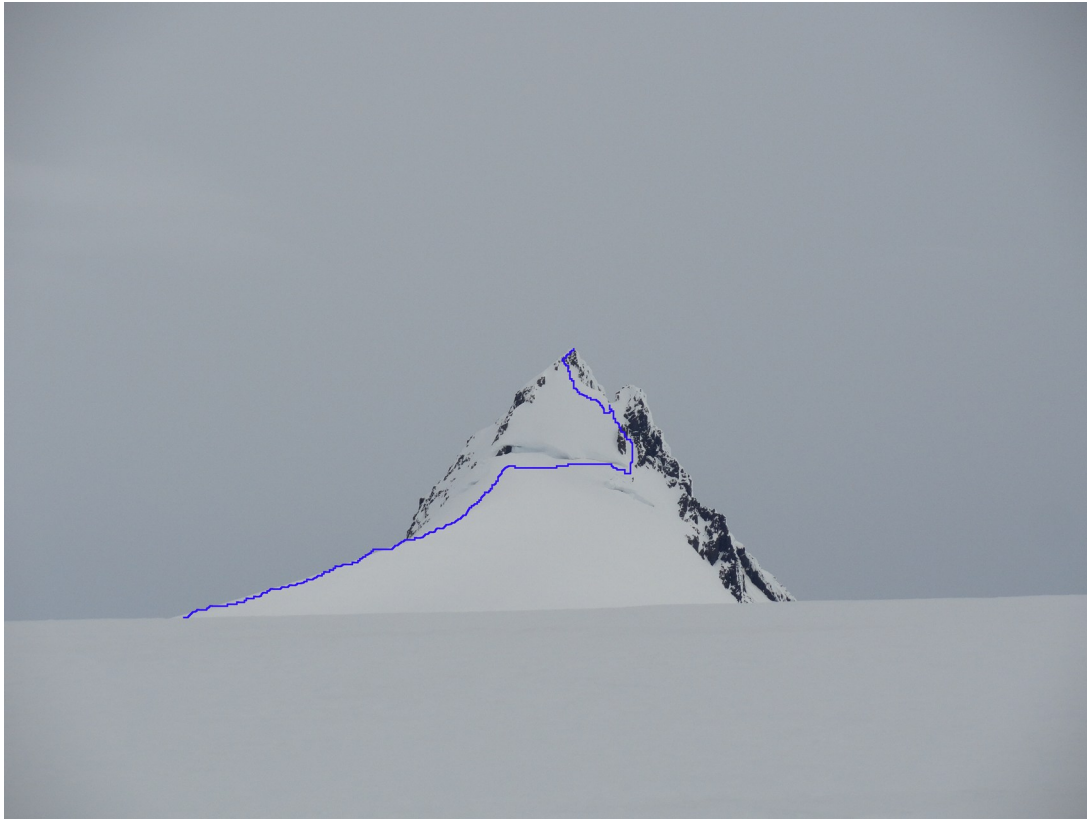
Check the Meetup site and Facebook for last minute trips and activities. Or, schedule one that you want to organize.

Iceworm Peak – May 9th-11th

Text and photos by David Martindell

I had just moved to Homer when I first heard Iceworm Peak mentioned in an online mountain climbing forum. I would scan the icefield across Kachemak Bay, trying to catch a glimpse of it. One day I finally saw it, standing higher than the other peaks nearby, cloaked in white, steep and seemingly too far away to ever reach.

Later, I asked the most prolific climber in the area about the peak. He said someone had climbed Iceworm, but had used a helicopter to access it. “If you ever do it,” he said, “you need to start from sea level.” And thus the seed was planted. I spent the next few years trying to broaden my experience and abilities to travel safely in the glaciated terrain of Alaska.



Iceworm Peak with our route drawn on it.

In May I got a call from my friend Brook Kintz. He was bored, stuck at home, in a funk. He wanted to put together a trip, maybe go across the bay and climb Sadie Peak again. “Or how about a Seward-to-Homer crossing?” Intrigued, I entertained the idea for a minute. Then I realized that I had 10 days before I’d leave to go fishing...and neither of us had ever been on the icefield, let alone any of the glaciers that it feeds. Sometime later that evening I found myself contemplating Iceworm Peak. Maybe we could run up there and have a chance at it? I quickly started planning a route.

Homer is a wonderful place to live, with friends and loved ones, the quaint feel of the town, and its open and accepting community. For me, though, the only downside is accessing

the backcountry. All year we stare across the bay and dream of the myriad peaks and glaciers begging to be explored. But getting to those places can be a nightmare.

There are a number of options for getting to Iceworm, including the Grewingk Glacier, as it’s a fairly straight shot up once situated on it. A 1-mile hike on a well maintained trail can bring you to Grewingk Glacier Lake. If it’s frozen, ski across. If it’s not, packraft. At this time of year, it’s somewhere in be-

tween frozen and not frozen, so I had no faith in it as an option.

If you do manage to cross the lake you’ll be greeted by a most impressive wall of fractured ice and hanging seracs.

Steep rock and choss line either side of the toe of the glacier.

Hours of route-finding and technical ice climbs will ensue as you pick your way through the first two miles of ice.

With the lake being out of the question and the first couple of miles of heavily crevassed glacier on my mind, I began searching for an alternate route. The Alpine Ridge Trail is well maintained and parallels the Grewingk Glacier. Beginning at the Saddle Trail just inside of Halibut Cove you can turn right at about 0.5 mile, continuing up above tree line and onto Alpine Ridge. I decided to take the well maintained Kachemak Bay State Park trails up onto Alpine Ridge, follow the ridge while keeping an eye on the glacier, and – once the major crevasses were passed – find a couloir to down-climb and access the Grewingk.



Looking up the Grewingk Glacier. Iceworm Peak is barely visible as the snowy peak on the skyline on the left.

Brook was onboard, excited for the adventure. Our schedules weren't ideal for such a thing, but we managed to finagle our responsibilities around and tentatively plan on a May 9th departure, leaving the harbor at 6:30 a.m.

We found the initial few hundred feet walkable, but within an hour we were putting on skis and skinning up. I remember feeling optimistic. I knew that we had long days ahead of us and the chances of everything coming together well enough to summit were probably unlikely, but somehow I managed to avoid thoughts of the endless slog that would soon commence and instead enjoy the spring air and wonderful views. Conversation passed the hours. We were soon high on the ridge and scanning the glacier below.

It became apparent that most of the crevasse fields were behind us, so we began to search for a way off the ridge. According to my GPS, our elevation was roughly 3700 feet, and we really wanted to be able to see a clear path all the way down. Brook managed to find a section we could possibly down-climb – steep snow, some simple traverses, then exiting onto a grassy plateau just above the glacier. It looked like an easy option to get on the ice.

Decent snow conditions allowed us to kick steps as we down-climbed. Within a short time we were on the glacier at 1340 feet. In order to avoid bushwhacking and an endless maze of icefall, we climbed about 2,400 feet of unnecessary elevation onto Alpine Ridge. An even trade, I surmised, as we roped up and began to ascend the Grewingk.

Beautiful views of steep moun-

tains shone brilliant in the evening light as we skied farther and farther toward the first peaks on the Grewingk. Our goal was to travel as far as we could on Day One in order to put us as close to Iceworm as possible. We began to tire and the light was receding, so we settled on a campsite about two miles below Peak 4350. It was a 14-hour day. My feet were hurting and blistered, but our spirits were high as we made hot drinks and marveled at our surroundings.

We awoke to a gorgeous morning. Feeling like we had plenty of time, we started slowly. Drinking coffee...watching a lone wolf dart in and around crevasses with amazing agility.... Finally, we prepared for the climb.

Straightforward travel greeted us as we ascended the ramp to the left of Peak 4350 and onto the icefield proper. Blue skies, sun, zero wind, and warm weather surrounded us. Various peaks with stunning lines loomed above us, one after the other. Clearly this was not going to be our last trip into this wild terrain.

Iceworm began to show herself more and more the closer we got. The bergschrund was obvious and exposed. We skied as high as we could, and booted up the last quarter mile before stopping at the huge gaping hole. Traversing to the right al-



Brook Kintz following up the rocky chute prior to traversing left onto the upper snowfield.

lowed us to down-climb, traverse farther right, then cross a snow bridge and leave the bergschrund behind. A steep snow pitch led to a narrow rocky chute with minimal snow. Fun moves allowed us to exit into the upper snowfield. Soon we found ourselves on the south ridge line, cliffed off and at the obvious notch. Another pitch of steep snow out onto the face, up into one more short couloir, and with a quick scramble, I was on the north ridge. Ten feet led to the summit. We'd made it!

Stunning views in all directions. We gazed down to the ocean on the opposite side of the Kenai Peninsula. It was shocking, how quickly the land dropped. We stood on the summit one at a time, and only long enough for a few pictures before we began the careful down-climb.

The five-mile ski to Iceworm, the climb, and the five-mile ski descent took nearly 12 hours. Retracing our path, we returned to camp.

Feeling as though the "real work" was behind us, we lay around camp until late at night, drinking tea and eating every-

thing warm that we had. Finally lying down at 1:30 a.m., it seemed all our work had paid off.

But the next day turned sour. The 2,400-foot climb back up onto Alpine Ridge felt much harder than the down-climb we had done two days prior. On the ridge we were met with near-total whiteout conditions. Rain began to fall as we skied carefully down, 50 feet at a time while constantly watching the GPS to be sure we were on track. Below the clouds the snow had deteriorated to 18 inches of total slush. Soaking wet, falling down, cursing, occasionally laughing, still elated with our success yet horribly blistered and tired, we arrived at the beach 10 hours after packing up camp.

We remarked numerous times how it seems that Alaska is always trying to screw with you. True, most times I grossly underestimate the nature of what it means to travel in the backcountry around here, and I often end up coming home without meeting my objectives. Even for this trip I traded a possible bushwhack/icefall debacle for 4,800 feet of extra climbing, and I would do it again, no questions asked. This time, however, even with the third day's rain and difficult traveling conditions, we feel like we were blessed with a rare opportunity to sneak up and climb something cool. For that I am most grateful and honored.



Brook Kintz negotiating the exposed bergschrund.



Rick Hagen and Amy Murphy build a snow bridge on the Arctic Valley to Indian trail, February 2013. Photo by John McCormick.

May 15, 2013, General Membership Meeting Minutes

Treasurer's Report: As of April 30th, the MCA has \$39,965 in CreditUnion1 assets. Expenses upcoming are \$428 for hut land-lease permit renewals to the Alaska Department of Natural Resources. Also, a budgeted ~\$8,000 for hut maintenance this summer.

Revenue: The MCA took in \$525 in dues April through May 14. This includes a donation of \$200 from Jack Waters out of Chicago, Illinois. Jack writes, "Thanks for a great stay in the Scandy Hut."

Committee Reports:

Huts: Greg Bragiel highlighted the importance of continued vigilance of MCA members watching out for huts and participating in general upkeep. This includes ensuring users are MCA members and hiking out small bags of trash/fuel bottles if possible. Human waste is an ongoing issue and various options were discussed, including the high cost of helicopters to remove waste containers.

The option of publishing MCA members' names quarterly in the *Scree* was discussed.

Parks Advisory: Ralph Baldwin educated members on the issue of snowmachine use in the Hatcher Pass area. There is an increasing conflict of interest of snowmachiners accessing areas that are zoned as non-motorized by State Parks. Through public forum, members in attendance decided the best course of action at this point is to continue to document cases of misuse and work with State Parks to keep strong enforcement of use-area boundaries.

Announcement: The MCA Picnic and barbecue will be July 17th at 6:30 p.m., tentatively at Abbott Loop Community Park. The club provides burgers and hot dogs. Members are asked to bring a side dish to share.

Program: **TODD HELGESON** presented "PEBBLE WRESTLING IN AK" and spoke about the simple freedom and camaraderie he finds through bouldering. Todd recently published a guidebook: [Bouldering in Alaska](#).

Submitted by Seth Weingarten.

THE CRYSTAL DRIZZLE

*The cloud grows bright, streaks of white weep;
Wreaths of floating light swirl in the breeze.
Tiny droplets make pinpricks of sound
On the tight surface of my rain parka.
Listen! Now the sound begins to change,
From tiny splashes to stardust symphony
As a million notes are blended together.
It is snow music, rising and falling.
A swirling chorus sings in the wind.
The crisp drum-sound becomes soft melody.
Surrounding me, yet distant and ethereal.
Now watch the mists turning and twisting,
In flowing curves, sweeping downwards,
Glowing and moving; pirouetting dancers
Out of the heavens, spinning round and round,
Across the dark rock and among green leaves.
Little bright streaks bounce up and leap
From flower and twig in a frantic ballet;
Before the death throes, before the music ends;
Before the great melting upon the lake shores;
A dramatic ending as Romeo and Juliet
Sink into the waters and slowly disappear.*

II

*The whiteness spreads, the sky is filled
With starry brilliance, glowing so brightly
That mountain shadows are overwhelmed,
Fading into obscurity, replaced by light.
The myriad droplets have frozen into letters,
A mysterious message from the gods above.
Each tiny letter now turns, and drifts
And touches others, forming bright words.
White sky-words are swirling down
To touch the earth and listening souls.
A mysterious message from the gods above.*

*What are these words that cling together,
To form thoughts that hint at universal truth?
Are these the words and soaring phrases
Of a great poem that the human soul
Has spent millennia trying to understand?*

III

*Look closely, magnify the sparkling stars,
The tiny galaxies and suns of a micro-universe.
Perhaps these tiny wonders made of ice
Are sent to nourish those earthly artists that
Can see and hear, and understand them.
How can we bear to touch that message,
That inspiration, which then vanishes before us?
Could we capture it, would it nourish us deeply?
Would it feed the soul, inspire our deep creativity,
Make artists and poets out of ordinary men?
How else can we explain the exquisite and infinite
Forms of the snowflakes that dance and fly high
To the soft and profound music of all eternity?
And can we understand the sparkling jewels
So small a thousand melt on my hand
As I open my palm to catch the treasure?*

IV

*All this deep inspiration cannot be sent in vain.
I must quickly get a pen and let a painted poem
Fly across this page before it, too, can fade
And melt down to be only a lovely memory.*

Tom Choate, August 9, 2011

4200-foot Camp, Talkeetna Mountains

Peak of the Month: Cut Mountain

By Steve Gruhn

Mountain Range: Tanana Hills

Borough: Unorganized Borough

Drainage: Charley River

Latitude/Longitude: 64° 48' 5" North, 143° 38' 20" West

Elevation: 6435 feet

Prominence: 2985 feet from Mount Harper (6543)

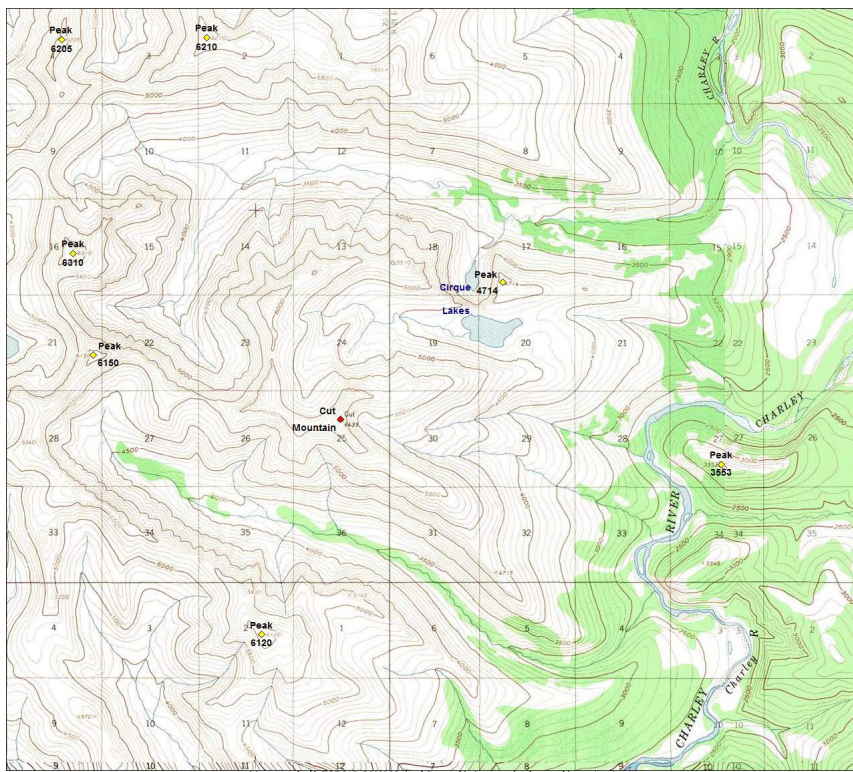
Adjacent Peaks: Peak 6150 in the Crescent Creek and Charley River drainages and Peak 4714 in the Charley River drainage

Distinctness: 885 feet from Peak 6150

USGS Map: Eagle (D-6)

First Recorded Ascent: Unknown

Access Point: [Charley River](#)



In the heart of the Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve, Cut Mountain is one of the higher peaks in the Tanana Hills and the highest peak in the drainage of the National Wild and Scenic Charley River. The nearest higher peak – Mount Harper – is 40 miles to the south.

There is a USGS bench mark on the summit that was placed before 1960. The name of Cut Mountain is derived from the label of the summit bench mark, Cut, which was likely derived from the cut banks along the Charley River east of the mountain.

It would make for an interesting side trip during a float of the Charley River, a National Wild and Scenic River. A possible trip would be to put in at 3 Finger Charley Airstrip about 18 miles southeast of Cut Mountain at an elevation of about 3,100 feet, float the upper portion of the Charley River, climb Cut Mountain, and either take out at Gelvin's Airstrip and Cabin about 6 miles east-northeast of the summit at an approximate elevation of 2,050 feet, or, alternatively, float the remaining 36.5 miles of the Charley River to its confluence with the Yukon River, and continue downstream, taking out at Circle.

A point of interest 4 miles east-northeast of the summit is the site of a December 21, 1943, B-24 Liberator bomber crash. Click on the following link to read the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner account of the crash and the lone survivor's 84-day, 120-mile trek to reach civilization: [http://](http://www.newsminer.com/features/sundays/marooned-soldier-survived-mile-walk-in-the-subarctic-after/article_8fa781da-2b0e-59cb-99bd-f42df3fb410b.html)

www.newsminer.com/features/sundays/marooned-soldier-survived-mile-walk-in-the-subarctic-after/article_8fa781da-2b0e-59cb-99bd-f42df3fb410b.html.

Pat Sanders, an interpretive ranger at Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve, contributed information for this article.



View of the B-24 Liberator bomber wreckage with Cut Mountain in the background. Photo courtesy of Pat Sanders, Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve.

Letter to the Editor

April 28, 2013

MCA Officers, board and all members,

I have been your huts chairman for many years and will continue to labor for the benefit of the organization. I am amazed at the efforts and perseverance of all members. We have a great group of hikers, climbers, skiers, rafters, etc., and I appreciate your friendship. I seek your counsel concerning an ongoing problem with our huts: **failure to clean up after ourselves and pack out what we pack in.**

Almost every time I show up at one of our huts, I am confronted with rubbish, empty bottles, cans, empty gas containers, unwashed pots/pans/utensils/dishes, abandoned plastic containers, bags, lids, graffiti on the hut walls, bear guards not affixed, open entry doors, leftover food and numerous other items that we leave behind. When I see such carelessness I think to myself... "Hut users really should know better, i.e. NO ONE SHOWS UP TO CLEAN. NO ONE SHOWS UP TO LOCK UP. NO ONE SHOWS UP TO RESUPPLY COLEMAN FUEL. YOUR MOTHER DOES NOT WORK AT THE HUTS."

Yesterday, April 27, 2013, I emptied the human waste barrel that was recently brought out by Ray Helot from Rosie's Roost. The barrel gets emptied and individual bags are transferred into a biomedical waste container for pick up and incineration. In this barrel I found someone's trash that was left at Rosie's sometime between July 2012 and last weekend:

Mountain House dinners that were partially consumed... beef stew, sweet and sour pork, macaroni and cheese, chicken ala king

Backpacker's Pantry meals with partially consumed contents pad Thai, Denver omelet

Trail mix bags

A 12-pack of empty beer cans Natural Light

Trident gum wrappers and chewed gum

Quaker oatmeal bags

Camelback elixir orange – a full container

Snickers wrappers (many)

Swiss mix bag

Susan's dry roast peanuts

Scree – June 2013

Nescafe instant coffee

Starbucks via coffee

Trio bar wrappers

Pringles containers... cheddar, ranch, and multi-grain

Burnt matches

Spiced cider bag

Cheese balls bags, multiple with some contents remaining

Alaska Chip Co. popcorn bag

Cliff bar wrapper

Starkist tuna foil wrapper

String cheese bag

Chocolate wrappers

It continues to amaze me that a hut user would take the time to carry in these items and then leave all this trash behind for someone else to deal with. Do they not think of other hut users? Their lack of consideration disgusts me. I don't need to find out who they are. They know who they are. Here is what bothers me: **USERS THAT DO NOT FOLLOW THE GUIDELINES OF PACKING OUT THEIR RUBBISH.**

Additionally, this barrel did not have a lid, and much of the barrel was filled with snow and ice. This shows carelessness by someone. I also found filled wag bags inside the barrel. Current guidelines are that these bags be packed out. They are NOT to be left on site at any hut.

The MCA officers and Board of Directors have struggled with the human-waste system in the past. They have considered removing the barrels along the Eklutna Traverse and enforcing the pack-out guideline for all waste. I ask the Board to review this issue again. The Board and I ask for input from members. **What can we do that will motivate hut users to follow the hut guidelines and think of more than their own needs? Your comments and recommendations are requested.**

Sincerely,

Greg Bragiel

MCA Huts Committee Chairman

MOUNTAINEERING CLUB OF ALASKA HUT REGULATIONS

1. **Use of the hut is for MCA members only.** If you use the hut and are not a member you are expected to join. Registration can be done online at <http://mtnclubak.org> OR come to the next meeting at the BP Energy Center, the third Wednesday of each month at 6:30 p.m. **Enjoy your stay** and leave an entry about your trip in the hut log.

2. **Be considerate of other users** and the next group to visit here, i.e. smoking, dogs, wet items, use of space, noise, and clean up thoroughly before you leave. Be sure to close and secure all windows, doors and any bear guards when leaving.

2. **If you see something that needs to be repaired or fixed... do your best to help.** Hut users are the best source of assistance. No one is assigned to go to the huts to check and fix things. Report major/other problems to the MCA.

3. **Pack in and pack out**, i.e. food, bottles, trash, empties. **Leave NOTHING behind except surplus stove fuel.**

4. **Use only the fuel you brought for the stove and lantern.** Refill them prior to departing. Be cautious when refueling and using the appliances. A fire extinguisher is provided in the event of an emergency. Leave any fuel you do not need in the gallon canisters. No one travels to the huts to check and resupply the huts with fuel.

5. **Human Waste is to be handled as follows:**

For Pichler's Perch, Hans' Hut, Rosie's Roost, and Scandinavian Peaks Hut:

Pee: Take a long walk downhill and away from water sources to pee.

Poop: Use a trash-compactor bag to line the 5-gallon bucket. Do not poop in the bucket without a liner. **Pack the bag out.**

Alternately, use the bucket system. Deposit the bag in the human-waste barrel attached to the front of the hut. Be sure to secure the barrel and lid. (Barrels and contents have blown downhill and created huge messes in the past due to inattentive users.) Do not deposit anything but human waste in the blue barrel.

Last alternative.... Use the wag bags at the hut and pack them out.

For the Mint Hut: Pee: Take a long walk downhill and away from water sources to pee. Poop: Use the latrine. Do not pee in the barrel.

For the Bomber and Dnigi Huts: Use pit toilets for all human waste.



Mountaineering Club of Alaska

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Treasurer	Seth Weingarten	360-9128	Board member	Elizabeth Bennett	952-9661
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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@mtclubak.org.

The *Scree* is a monthly publication of the Mountaineering Club of Alaska. Articles, notes and letters submitted for publication in the newsletter should be emailed to MCAScree@gmail.com. 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@mtclubak.org.

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

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