

# the SCREE

## Mountaineering Club of Alaska

June 2016

Volume 59 Number 6

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Peak 1430

“Westman’s World” on The Citadel

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Eureka to Valdez

Peak of the Month: Peak 1080



*"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

Monthly meeting: 6:30 p.m., Tuesday, June 21. **Change of Venue**

The June MCA monthly meeting will be a hike and climb. Meet at the McHugh Creek Trailhead at 6:30 p.m., hike south on the Turnagain Arm Trail to Resolution Bluff. We will rock climb and socialize for an hour or so, then return. If weather is poor, we will hike and not climb.





# The Mountaineering Club of Alaska

[www.mtnclubak.org](http://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 Tuesday, June 21, Anchorage, Alaska, at the McHugh Creek Trailhead.

<http://dnr.alaska.gov/parks/aspunits/chugach/mchughckpicartl.htm>

For the MCA Membership Application and Liability Waiver, visit

<http://www.mtnclubak.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=members.form>.

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## Cover Photo

Ian McRae and his dog Lucy below Tog 3 in Crater Creek Valley. The North Arete is the right skyline.

Photo by Phil Westcott

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**Article Submission:** Text and photography submissions for *the Scree* can be sent as attachments to [mcascree@gmail.com](mailto:mcascree@gmail.com). Articles should be submitted by the 24th of each month to appear in the next issue of *the Scree*. Do not submit material in the body of the email. Do not submit photos embedded in the text file. Send the photo files separately. 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 oriented photo for consideration for the cover. Please submit captions with photos.

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## Hiking and Climbing Schedule

**June 10 - 12:** Symphony Tarns. Contact Matt Nedom at 278-3648 or [mattnedom@yahoo.com](mailto:mattnedom@yahoo.com) for details.

**June 11:** Pioneer to Eklutna Traverse. This traverse takes advantage of trails to access great ridgeline hiking and scrambling with zero bushwhacking. It's approximately 20 miles with 12,000 feet of elevation gain. Participants should be fit and prepared for a full day in the mountains. We shouldn't need any technical climbing gear, but everyone should have plenty of water - up on the ridge there won't be opportunities for re-supply - and lots of snacks. Participants should also prepare for a wide variety of weather, as temperatures on the ridgeline can vary dramatically from the valley floor. Trip leader is Katie Strong ([kgstrong@gmail.com](mailto:kgstrong@gmail.com)).

**June 18:** Flattop Mountain sleepout. No leader.

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## Choate's Chuckle

Overheard at a recent club meeting: "I prefer to base out of a hut. It's much more relaxing climbing. Sleeping outside is much more in-tents."

Submitted by Tom Choate

Online? Click me!



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

## Peak 1430: Rain, Wind, and Sleet

Text and photos by Ben Still



*Peak 1430 from Pigot Bay*

Sitting in the Pigot Bay Cabin at the shore of Prince William Sound, I found it hard to motivate for a hike up into the wet and drippy woods. Heavy rain and wind continued all day. Just before 4 p.m. we finally motivated, left the cabin, and began our trek into the woods. Jill Still, Jon and Holly Cannon, Lee Helzer, and I got dressed for the wet adventure and ventured into the forest on April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016; our objective was Peak 1430.

Highbush blueberry bushes were blooming in abundance and skunk cabbage, which was already a foot tall with their large tropical looking leaves and yellow flower-like stems, blanketed the mossy forest floor. We traversed northwest, paralleling the bay to avoid the cliff band behind the cabin. After a quarter mile of traversing, we began our mossy, brushy ascent southward up through the green, mossy woods to the northeast ridge. At about 500 feet in elevation, we broke out into a muskeg meadow with a sudden increase in snow. Several feet of wet, sloppy snow was in front of us. We had snowshoes, but the intermittent nature of the snow and variety of brush sticking out kept them off our feet for the time being. The snow continued to increase in depth, but the consistency was better. We were only post-holing between the ankle and mid-shin. Not worth the effort for snowshoes yet. We were getting close to

gaining the upper ridge and trees were becoming quite intermittent as the rain pelted us from above. The wind picked up significantly as we climbed higher up the ridge, but luckily the wind was at our backs. The slopes mellowed out and we could see higher up the peak all the way to the summit. Lots of snow and an easy path forward, except for the occasional bottomless post-hole.

My “waterproof” Gore-Tex jacket seemed to have sprung a leak along the way. I was completely drenched underneath it. The fabric was fully saturated and the water had nowhere to go as the rain continued to pelt down. Jon and Holly stopped to put their snowshoes on as I continued forward. The snow was a little deeper now, but not quite worth it yet for me to put on snowshoes. A pair of skis would have been much nicer.

We took a short snack break and Jon and Holly caught up to us. When we continued on Holly quickly passed me and began breaking trail with her snowshoes. We continued up the mountain in the increasing wind and gained the large flat area of the summit, which was completely buried in 10 feet of snow. We slogged over to the highest point in the snow. The cloud layer was just above us and the wind was blowing at a steady 30 to 35 miles per hour. The rain had changed to sleet on this highest

point and we quickly turned around into the stinging sleet and followed our tracks back down the mountain into the green forest. It felt good to be out of the wind and the wet snow and into the protection of the wet forest. We made it back to the warm cabin just after 7 p.m. for an excellent spaghetti dinner! The next day was nearly calm with just intermittent rain, but I couldn't convince anybody to go hiking with me and, really, I didn't want to go either.



*Skunk cabbage and Pigot Bay*



*Early April blueberry blossoms and devil's club*

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## ***Geographic Names***

At its March 10 meeting, the Domestic Names Committee of the U.S. Board on Geographic Names approved the name change from Thachkatnu Creek to Łach Q'atnu Creek. The stream flows into Eklutna Lake.

At its May 5 meeting, the DNC approved the following name changes: from McKinley Park to Denali Park, from Deadman Creek to Kacaagh Creek (this stream is in the Talkeetna Mountains and flows to the Susitna River), from Deadman Lake to Upland Kacaagh Lake (this lake is in the Kacaagh Creek drainage), from Deadman Mountain to Kacaagh Mountain (this 5525-foot peak is in the Upland Kacaagh Lake drainage), and from Big Lake to Lowland Kacaagh Lake (this lake is in the Watana Creek drainage). At the same meeting, the DNC approved the new name of Rotary Falls for a waterfall on an unnamed stream at about the 2300-foot level on the south-southeast side of Government Peak in the Talkeetna Mountains.

Steve Gruhn



## “Westman’s World” on The Citadel

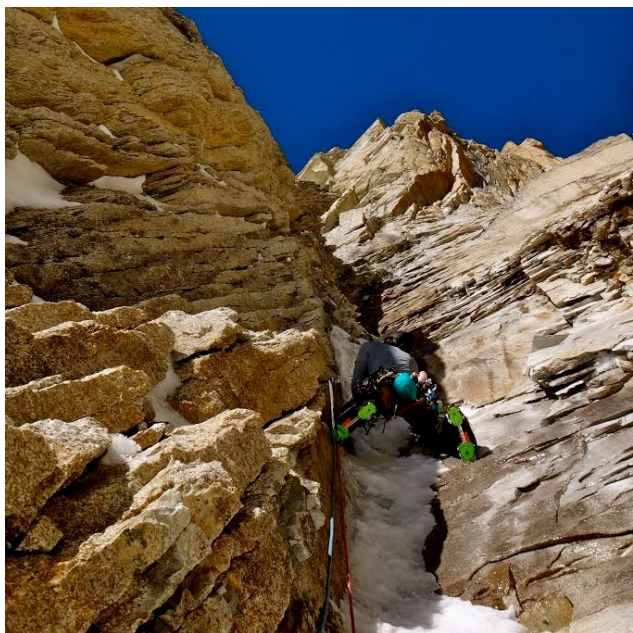
Text and photos by Ben Erdmann



*West face of The Citadel.*

With support from the Mugs Stump Award, Jess Roskelley and I were aiming at a futuristic ice to big-wall line that we had been keenly watching conditions cycle from five seasons ago when we first climbed in the Cathedral Spires of the Kichatna Mountains. This line would be involved, just approaching it would require using a light-weight cloth-skinned Super Cub bushplane equipped with fat powder skis to land and turn in the 100 feet of solid and level snow of the upper Sunshine Glacier. For the better part of March, I waited at my small cabin an hour from the runway, living by the wood-burning stove and watching meteograms for a split in the classically horrid Kichatna forecast. The Kichatnas were like the whistling gunsight notch of the great Alaska Range; wind seemed to magnetize there, funneling through this group of particularly pissed granite towers. And the forecast was apocalyptic for weeks. We spotted a 12-hour window and flew in for the first reconnaissance condition check and to attempt opening the technical landing. Ken MacDonald was a talented pilot while paragliding, flying fixed wing, and in a helicopter. He charged the little craft across the wide Susitna River basin and toward the spires where several circles put us into the zone we'd been yearning over. We sat at the very base of the line and pulled back our heads to glass the whole thing. It worked, we're in. The landing was full value, and repeatable, given good conditions.

The weather ebbed back in from the warm moisture generators of the Pacific Ocean and shut the gates to the entire range. I drove back to Washington where Jess and I had plenty of blue-collared work that needed to be done with our welding business together. We compared several forecasting models a dozen times a day, looking for the split, straight Chaltén, Patagonia, style. Two more weeks passed with the persistent patterns socking in the spires. Seeing it open into the freeze/thaw cycles that we wanted had us on the next flight back north. The weather was slowing momentum. We were gaining. All this precipitation in the high mountains meant rain down low and the essential snow runway we used a month before had melted out. Our main project would have to wait until another season. On the successful recon I had photographed another line that Jess and I had been aware of since we made the first ascent of the “Hypa Zypa Couloir” (1,300 meters, VI 5.10R AI5+ M6+ A3, Erdmann-Roskelley-Szilas, 2013) on the east face of The Citadel from the Shadows Glacier. The two lines would meet each other some 300 feet below the summit and come from opposite sides of the mountain. We flew in with Talkeetna Air Taxi to the Cul-de-sac Glacier to attempt the west face. No previous routes had been completed on this side of The Citadel; in 2008 Josh Wharton and Zach Smith, after completing the first ascent of “The Message or the Money” (VI M6 AI4, Smith-Wharton, 2008)



*Jess Roskelley on lead through steep, runout, mixed terrain on the lower wall.*



*Jess Roskelley descending back to base camp.*



*Upper snow couloir with the north ridge of Kichatna Spire owning the horizon.*

on Kichatna Spire, attempted a line on this side of The Citadel that ended in a fall and gear pulling with an injury to the belayer from flying crampons. We were on something completely different. Jess and I landed and launched. The first few pitches were super technical; Jess in full form floated sections of overhanging rock. Midway through, a foot blew out a serving-tray flake of rock that saw-bladed down the pitch and past the belayer. Jess was up there getting busy not falling. I thought to myself with a laugh of how Jess can tiptoe on hard ice and mixed terrain, but two days before rushing up here, he slipped on the wet tile of the bathroom floor and split his head requiring a half dozen stitches. Classic.

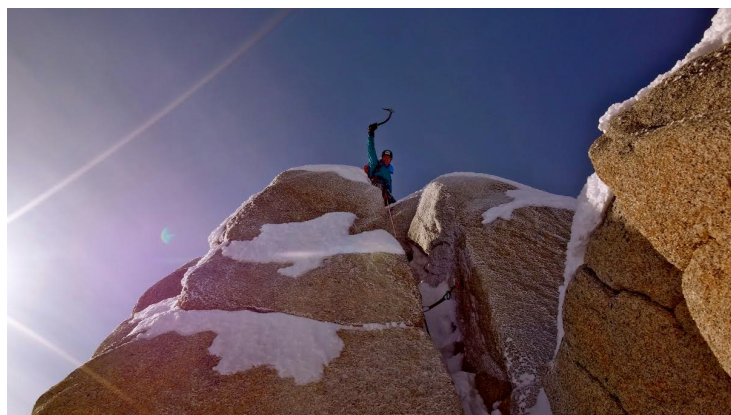
Fixing our two 8-millimeter ropes we rappelled to the ground in the waning acute Alaska light and threw down on a fatly rationed dinner, eating for the hunger to come. There wasn't much sleep that night, as we started at it again at 3 a.m. We regained our highpoint and continued up the lower rock wall through more mixed and aid climbing to access the traversing snow ramps. While brewing up halfway through the day, we watched clouds materialize before us and the wind started to rage against us. Seeing our next ice runnel pitches pouring with spindrift and the gates closing, we hunkered down on a single-mat ice ledge and spooned each other tightly under one sleeping bag. Sixteen hours were survived, and while it was totally f---d, Jess and I were well versed in those situations. Many times during the stretch we coughed with laughter at the audacity of the bivouac. The isolated squall screamed through the night and blew itself out by morning, opening cold to us in the first hours of the day. Unfolding our frozen bodies, we racked

up and headed to the thin ice that was flushing the day before. The ice, although not incredibly steep, was an inch thick and blew out at any wild swing. Getting into simul-climbing terrain above, we quickly made upward progress to familiar ground below the top.

We made it to that wild and far-reached summit, again.

Rapping the route toasted most of the rack and the diurnal weather cycle slammed in again hard that night. We completed the 3,000-foot route at VI M7 AI4X A3, 70 degrees, naming it "Westman's World" in honor of our dear friend, mentor, and captain, Mark Westman.

Flying out the next morning put us at four days in the mountains, a very well-timed trip.



*Jess Roskelley on the summit of The Citadel.*



## Old Geezers Get the Goat – 4502 Feet

Text by Dano Michaud



*Northwest aspect of Goat Mountain from the Snow River.*

*Photo by Harold Faust*

Goat Mountain, unlike its namesake animal, is visible every cloudless day to folks who reside in the quaint seaside town of Seward, Alaska. Like that agile mountain monarch, the peak's summit is very seldom seen up close and within touching distance. Goat Mountain is the western highpoint of an extended ridge line that reaches 5840 feet at its highest east end. When the ridge is viewed from town it is easily dwarfed by the imposing beauty of Paradise Peak, and appears to be a large foothill or base of Paradise, which rises to 6029 feet.

May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016, promised to be a warm, bluebird day, so the plan was an early 6:00 a.m. start to get onto the high snows before they completely turned to mush. After the short drive to Mile 13, Harold Faust and I donned our packs and were hiking by 6:30. Five minutes into the trek, we encountered the first braid of the Snow River. We busted out our trusty Wiggy's lightweight waders. These have proven themselves quite handy

over the years for accessing areas of this country, saving time and the aching headache I get from crossing glacier-fed streams. We continued trekking up the gravel river bank with all of the telltale signs of locals who come to this area to cut wood,

run 4-wheelers, hunt, and just camp out. After a half mile the second crossing came into view and we proceeded with the waders ritual. Harold's eager dog pal Gina made the swim without a problem. Noting that the water was just below our wader tops, Harold cautioned that on our return after the day of warmer temperatures the stream might rise; duly noted, we carried on. After the river, we crossed a large bog where grass

tussocks provided for fancy footwork to keep momentum and dry feet. Before long we were among the trees and busting through the brush, an eclectic array of spruce, alders, and the mountaineer's favorite rite of passage: devils club. In our favor, the brush was in the new-growth stage of spring; challenging all the same.

In a mile we reached the base of the mountain and the start of our ascent through the huge Sitka spruce and lush moss that carpeted that area and all the surrounding mountains.

As is always the case, elevation in-

crease in this coastal terrain was anything but casual, and with mammoth downed trees crisscrossing the forest floor, the array of challenges increased as we moved upward. To avoid any mishaps we applied our "slow and steady is the order of the day"



*Southern aspect of Sheep Mountain with the North Fork of the Snow River at center and Paradise Valley at right.*

*Photo by Harold Faust*

mentality as we made our way upward. Reaching a bench-like area we transcended the spruce forest into the all mystical hemlocks. That area had some history: hemlocks stands were eagerly sought after and laboriously removed from many of the mountain slopes in that area over 100 years ago for use in the beginning construction of the Alaska Railroad system. The work of the tie hackers was evident, with old cut stumps seen throughout the area. We followed the bench south as it progressed at a comfortable grade upward to where the hemlocks began to thin out and the snow patches became more continuous. Before long the short snowshoes



*Harold Faust rounding the corner on a goat trail near the summit of Goat Mountain.*

*Photo by Dano Michaud*

were pulled from our packs, and the fun began. Many fellow travelers seem to dislike snowshoes and avoid these tools for the mountaineer and backcountry skier or snowboarder in Alaska. We not only relied on them for access to otherwise inaccessible winter terrain, but found joy in the ease they provided for travel in our steep, heavily-treed country. So when we put the shoes on it was an indication that we were about to get into and explore areas seldom seen or reached; to us the fun just began.

We continued our gain in altitude up a series of open, rolling benches. It was obvious that the author of [Skiing Alaska's Back Forty](#) [Ed. note: Dave Thorp] was correct in labeling that area as an outstanding terrain that few people ever got around to seeing, let alone skiing. Our desire to climb Goat Mountain was not for some extreme challenge, but to satisfy a dual desire: first, simply because neither of us had ever been up there before and also the knowledge that this quaint mountaintop and the upper ridge line were going to afford us some of the most spectacular views of the surrounding mountain terrain. Again, we were not to be disappointed.

Our ascent through the forest base and onto the open slopes

was a long, rising diagonal from the north to the south. As we left the trees, we followed a set of animal tracks that we first assumed would be sign of the resident goats, but with further examination it was revealed to be the trail of a solitary wolverine, making his typical beeline route over ridges, cliffs, and glaciers. Reaching 3500 feet and the south face, we stomped left up onto the ridge that would take us to the summit proper; the views opened up immediately. To the south was Resurrection Bay and the town of Seward, with Bear Lake seemingly just below us. Coming into view, east and 1000 feet below us was the upper Fireside Glacier. This

glacier, to our knowledge, had seen only one team of explorers on its surface, a MCA team in March 1989. They used the Fireside for their direct route to the summit and the first ascent of Hearth Mountain, 6182 feet. The team, consisting of Willy Hersman, Rick Maron, Mike Miller, and Todd Miner, was not to be duplicated in its climb of that magnificent peak until Harold Faust, George Peck, Tom Gillespie, and this author would do it again some 19 years later from a different and more-remote route.

[Ed. note: See the April 1989 and April 2011 Screens.]

The next spectacle as we moved on up was the west ridge of Paradise Peak. This peak was seen by passing vehicles daily and photographed at highway viewing areas by thousands every year because of its incredible north face

and proximity to the road system. She afforded armchair explorers with a glimpse of a mammoth pillar of rock formed by the centuries of glacier passages.

Moving forward along the ridge, down-slope a ways to avoid the cornice hazards, we noticed a huge crack some 30 feet from the ridge crest and could see where that behemoth hunk of snow was sagging and was preparing for a sudden collapse to



*Northwest face of Hearth Mountain with the Fireside Glacier below, the route of the first ascent.*

*Photo by Dano Michaud*



the cirque below. With the utmost caution and curiosity, we moved up close to peer into the crack of this death trap. We then backed off and proceeded to a visibly safe destination, an area of sun-baked rock another 500 feet above us. There was not a breath of wind. We removed our gear, laid damp clothing out in the sun, and rested with some drinks and snacks before heading the remaining ¼ mile and another 500 feet to the highest point, leaving behind everything but our cameras, trekking poles, and a summit register.

Once on top, the mountain world opens up to a 360-degree viewing extravaganza of our favorite peaks and valleys: Sheep, Paradise, Hearth, Godwin, Kindling, Fourth of July, Alice, Eva, Bear, Marathon, Benson, and Resurrection Peaks, Lost Lake, and Kenai Lake, the Harding Icefield to the southwest, the Sargent Icefield to the east, and distant unclimbed mountains in the far distance in any direction. As we gazed, a squawk from above caught our ears; a flight of 13 trumpeter swans glided about 500 feet overhead, headed for open water somewhere to the south. This summit, as benign as it might seem compared to the surrounding giants, was still worthy of our effort and a summit register. The day prior I had pulled a plastic bottle from my stash, accompanied it with pencil and a piece of paper inscribed “Goat Mt. 4502’,” the date and our names, Harold Faust, Dano Michaud, and Gina – Mountain Dog, and stuffed the bottle deep into my pack. We placed it in a rock outcrop down some 30 feet east of the highpoint.

Harold was gazing around and with a slight emotion in his tone said, “You know, we are certainly lucky to live here, especially on a day like today.” Not saying a word, but absorbing the comment, I thought, “Don’t I know it?”

[Ed. note: Peak 4502 has also been known by the name North Andiron, a name reportedly proposed by Vin Hoeman in 1960 and used by Greg Higgins in his trip report in the August 1986 Scree after having made the first ascent. According to Harold Faust, however, the name Goat Mountain has been in use by local residents for even longer.]



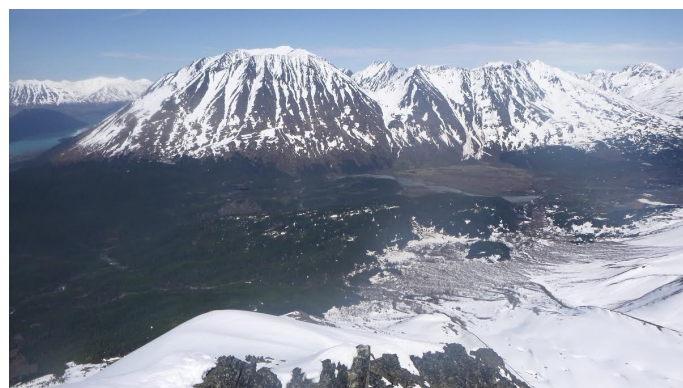
*Dano Michaud stomping alongside a wolverine trail.  
Photo by Harold Faust*



*Harold Faust (the other old goat) on the summit holding the register,  
with Paradise Peak in the background.  
Photo by Dano Michaud*



*South face and west ridge of Paradise Peak.  
Photo by Harold Faust*



*Sheep Mountain with the North Fork of the Snow River below.  
Photo by Harold Faust*



## “Slimedog Millionaire” on Tog 3

Text by Ian McRae



“Slimedog Millionaire,” (III, 5.7)

Photo by Phil Westcott

*Slog Ratio = number of miles hiked on the approach divided by the number of pitches on the climb.* Thus we obtain the unit “slog-miles per pitch” to measure the horrendousness of the approach hike relative to the quality of the climb. If you hike 8 miles to do an 8-pitch climb, as we did for “Slimedog Millionaire” (III, 5.7) on the Third Tog in Crater Creek Valley north of Nome, you would get a *slog-ratio* of 8:8, or 1.0 “slog-miles.” If we had hiked only a mile to do those same 8 pitches, to “Arrowhead Arete” in Yosemite, say, a climb roughly comparable to “Slimedog Millionaire” in length and difficulty, the *slog-ratio* would calculate to only 0.125 slog-miles, a short walk from the Yosemite Search and Rescue office.

This is an article about the “Slimedog Millionaire,” the best rock climb in the Kigluaik Mountains. In general, Nome climbing is best suited for degraded alpinists who missed all the good first ascents in the big ranges, but are willing to cope with humongous *slog-ratios* in order to pick up first ascents of whatever tiny, desiccated climbing crumbs might still remain scattered about the inner kingdom of Beringia, so it was a surprise to come upon a climb as aesthetic as “Slimedog Millionaire” out in the relative *non-choss* of Crater Creek Valley, about an hour’s drive north of Nome, and a day of slogging to get in – an actual *good climb* with an astounding (tongue in cheek) *slog-ratio* of only 1.0!

The Togs cannot be seen from the Kougarak

Road. From the bridge at Mile 43, you are looking up an eight-mile-long boring valley, and the Togs lie hidden around the corner in the southwest fork. They were only revealed to me after geologist Jeff Amato gave me a copy of his and Elizabeth Miller’s beautiful “Geological Map of the Kigluaik Range,” which showed little pink fingernails of gneiss hidden in the southwest fork of Crater Creek where you can’t see from the road, pink being the color of choice always on the Amato-Miller map because pink refers to the granite, or, at least, what used to be granite before it got baked into s--t by one or two geological subductions. Each pink fingernail was designated with the nomenclature, “pC-TOG” – “pre-Cambrian Thompson Creek Orthogneiss” – which shortened after a time to its diminutive, “Tog.” The Third Tog (Point 2650+) might be the coolest of Crater Creek’s gneissic mini-domes. “Slimedog Millionaire” goes up its thousand-foot north arete.

First attempt, August, 2010, solo. A time of periodic showers. I got a pitch and a half up the Tog, felt the showers starting up, drove a piton, and bailed. In my Court of Self-Judgment, I filed a chicken-out suit against myself, but the lawyers in my mind got me off on Justified Bail due to weather.

Second attempt, August 2011, with Andy Sterns. A time of periodic showers. Downpours, actually. Swollen Crater Creek tore off Andy’s pants. We



Andy Sterns on “Slimedog Millionaire’s” first pitch during the slimy second attempt.

Photo by Ian McRae



bivvied in pools inside a leaky tent we named *Icky Woods*. My new puppy got hypothermia. Finally, we got on the wall. A hard rain began a-fall. And so down, for another technical chicken-out.

*Third and successful attempt, June 2012, with Phil Westcott.* Phil came to town, a guy with perfect assets for dealing with the Kigs' enormous *slog-ratios*: first, a good-natured naiveté. Second, the crucial, but surprisingly rare, attribute of being actually *willing* to climb something. Third, a super incredible huge expensive camera, which he dropped in the middle of our "Slimedog Millionaire" climb, and which rolled toward the abyss and stopped, poised on the ledge's lip, held only by Phil's inhalation of breath, which he held the whole time as climbed down

toward the flapping bundle of technology while simultaneously belaying me on easy ground above with the rope reeling out. At full extension of the belay anchors, he plucked the camera from extinction. Into his pack went the wonderful camera for the rest of the climb, which is why we have few award-winning action shots from "Slimedog Millionaire." "I was too scared to be afraid," said Phil later, but admits now the "Slimedog Millionaire" was the climb of a lifetime.

The joy started with 500 feet of atrocious scree and Class 4 scrambling, aiming for the general vicinity of the north arete on Tog Three. Be sure to visit the excellent bouldering formation at the base of the Third Tog, composed of huge fallen fragments of the climb you are about to do. We roped up where the terrain steepened. I have taken two different routes through the mossy corners for the first pitch, but the true, unclimbed first pitch of "Slimedog Direct" goes over an attractive overhang to the left, and awaits its first send. Underneath the moss and debris-infested slime coating the first pitches, Phil and I detected good, 5.6 "moves on granite."

We entered an amphitheater of vaulting gneiss, with poppy-carpeted floors of tundra deep Kiggy chasms on three sides, as if the interior of the mountain were knotted together by an array of rock tubes. The third pitch made a horizontal traverse over one such chasm, the black maw of the Slimedog itself, a sort of fungal oozing waterfall, the route's namesake and primary source of slime, to reach the main arete on the left again.

Pitches 4, 5, and 6 were the main feature of the climb. Three excellent pitches out on the rail of the ridge. Overhangs, laybacks, incuts, jams, slab, chickenheads, a move of off-width ... Scree—June 2016



*Andy Sterns following pitch 1 of "Slimedog Millionaire."*

*Photo by Ian McRae*

nuts, runners, cams behind flakes, a piton every now and then because they're the only thing that really works in the Kigs ... Unlike other climbs in the Kigs, applicants to the "Slimedog Millionaire" need not burden their packs with a hammer ... nor rope. The rock felt so uncharacteristically solid on these pitches, the whole route was begging a solo.

The last two pitches topped out on a tower that had looked from below like a Tyrolean, but easy simul-climbing led over to the main summit of Tog 3, the proverbial bump on the ridge. The worst epic of the day began for Phil hiking down. He damaged his feet for the next six months by descending the Class 2 western slopes of the Tog in his "flower bowl" climbing slippers, and all during the next few months

of fun-hog adventures that lay in store for him on the Seward Peninsula, could not feel his toes. When finally we reached the base of the climb, my dog Lucy had been waiting on a ledge sit-stay for 15 hours while our voices echoed on the wall above.

Phil and I attributed our success on "Slimedog Millionaire" to a warm-up climb we had done two weeks earlier. Two valleys over from Crater Creek at the Sinuk River headwaters, we had repeated one of my old favorites, the "East Arete of East Tig" (II, 5.4) on Tigaraha Mountain, and this climb had created an instant Terray-Lachenal level of trust between the two of us which served us well on the greater "Slimedog Millionaire." On the long hike out, a perfect sidewalk of late-spring aufeis paralleled Crater Creek, lowering the *Slog Ratio* a few points, and what lowered the ratio further still was that, for once, each pitch in the denominator had been a good one.



*Phil Westcott manteling onto the belay ledge at the top of pitch 5, "Slimedog Millionaire."*

*Photo by Ian McRae*

## Whittier to Tebenkof Bay Ski Tour

Text and photos by Timm Nawrocki unless otherwise indicated



*Kaj Lynøe and Timm Nawrocki ascended the rocky slope on the left side of the Portage Glacier between the ice and rock to avoid the lowest portion of the glacier.*

A warm and early spring seemed to have many people hanging up their skis early this year. Anchorage has a climate of its own, and snow was disappearing from the Front Range in April. For some, of course, Anchorage's early summer was welcome. Outside of Anchorage, though, there were still spring snow conditions to be found either for turns or touring. Kaj Lynøe and I set out to ski a partial loop on glaciers around western Prince William Sound. One major benefit to the route we chose was that it was highly accessible: Whittier does not require any lengthy road trip from Anchorage and the boat ride back to Whittier is cheap compared to trips that require transportation by plane or helicopter.

After waiting out a rainstorm until early afternoon on May 9, Kaj and I hiked up and over the Portage Pass Trail from Whittier to Portage Lake. We crossed a small river (Burns Creek) with water about 1.5 feet deep. In mid-summer, I've seen the water depth rise closer to 3 feet, but the river is always easily walkable. My dog accompanied us on this trip, so we opted to skirt the bottom of the Portage Glacier by ascending the steep, rocky, brushy slope to the east of the glacier. Although the alder was thick at times, the route up this slope presented no major obstacles. Ascending the Burns Glacier would also be an option, and the bushwhack to the Burns Glacier is of comparable length and terrain. I feel that the Portage Glacier route is more interesting, though. Another possible alteration to our route would

be to crampon up the ice portion of the Portage Glacier. We decided not to do this even though it appeared possible because I wanted to avoid cutting up my dog's paws at the start of the trip.

Navigating up the Portage Glacier was straightforward. After cresting the Portage Glacier, we descended onto the upper Spencer Glacier. From the upper Spencer Glacier, the route possibilities are numerous. One could ski to the Spencer Whistle Stop to take the train back to Whittier (starting in late May) for

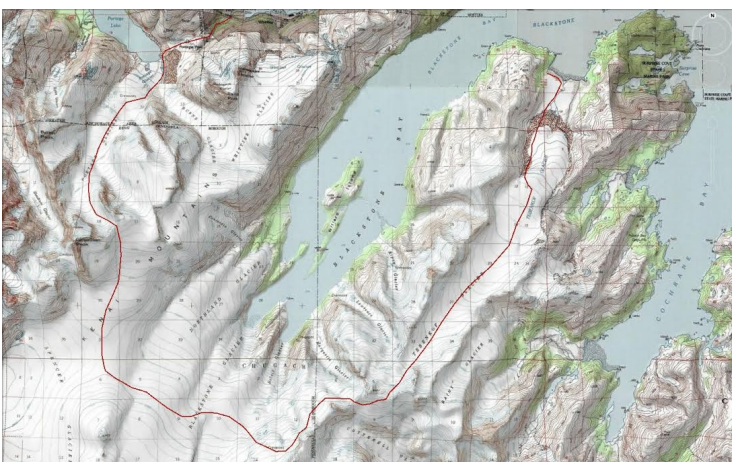


*The route of descent onto the upper Spencer Glacier.*



a shorter trip. One could ski to Moose Pass via Grant Lake with several miles of bushwhacking required to get to the shore of Grant Lake from the ice. For this trip, Kaj and I wanted to stay above Prince William Sound, so we toured around Blackstone Bay. We changed our route plans midway through our third day and also made some poor route choices on that day that resulted in a highly inefficient route. The most efficient route to the Tebenkof Glacier crosses the Blackstone Glacier relatively low and then traverses high along the ridge above the Beloit Glacier to the top of the Marquette Glacier. At the upper Marquette Glacier was a pass with a small (40-foot) headwall that we booted up. Kaj and I switchbacked up the southern slope of Point 4327 to reach a gentle ridge. The Tebenkof Glacier is a mellow descent from the ridge. Numerous routes from various points above Blackstone Bay descend into Kings Bay. The boat ride back to Whittier from Kings Bay would be more expensive than from Tebenkof Bay, but the area looks worthwhile for a larger group that could split the transportation cost.

Near the bottom of the Tebenkof Glacier, it is possible to head to the east and descend off the glacier to Cochrane Bay. This is not the route we chose, but appears interesting and is likely easier. We descended the middle of the Tebenkof Glacier until we were able to transfer off the ice onto a rocky slope to the west. Thick alder bushwhacking was required to descend the slope. We hiked out along the terminal lake and then followed the Tebenkof River to Tebenkof Bay. Getting to Tebenkof Bay required some bushwhacking through dense riparian willow, and our travel speed was quite slow. It was possible, though, to walk in the water for much of the way. There was a beautiful area to camp with nearby access to fresh water on the westernmost edge of the bay. The western edge of the bay is also the best spot for a pickup by boat. From there Kaj and I spent two days bushwhacking along the coast to the east. A group with more limited time could do the glacier portion of the route in four days, keeping one day in reserve as a weather day for a total of five days, and skip any hiking along the coast except for a day trip if the weather day were not used.



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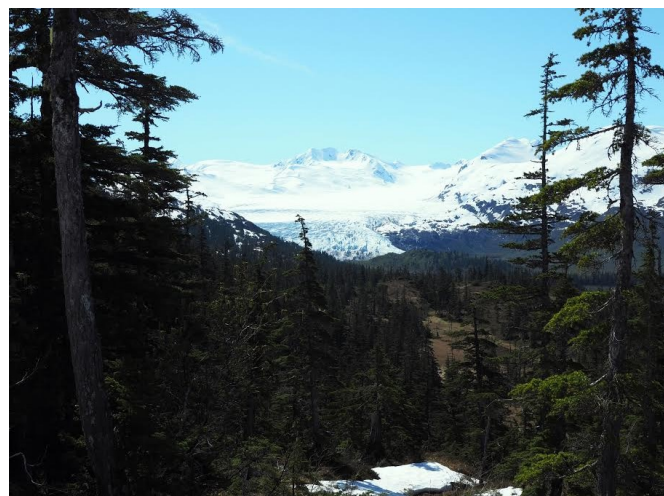


*The sunlight was relentless during the trip, so Timm Nawrocki opted to cover his face with athletic tape.*

*Photo by Kaj Lynöe*



*The route to Tebenkof Bay followed the rock slope to the west of the Tebenkof Glacier down to the lakeshore and then out along the Tebenkof River.*



*View back to the Tebenkof Glacier while hiking out along the coast.*



## MCA Snow Travel Class

Text by Charlotte Foley



*Hiking in from Glen Alps.  
Photo by Andrea Gilstad*

On April 9th, 2016, about 15 MCA members met at the Glen Alps trailhead for the club's snow climbing class. The leaders included: Dave Staeheli, Tom Choate, and Cory Hinds. Despite the sun in town, per usual, it was a blustery day in the mountains, so the class headed for a sheltered area at the base of Flattop Mountain where the students spent the day learning the ins and outs of snow travel.

The tone for the class was set early on by the lead teacher, Dave. Dave had just finished listing off the topics to be covered that day, when he said "O.K., guys ...," pulled off his glove, and continued, "this is what happens when your partners don't know how to properly self arrest." He revealed his hand which had been damaged in an accident five years prior. That talk was enough to convince most to participate in the self-arrest portion of the class and to take each topic seriously.

Other topics included: basic and complex anchors, footwork, knots, belay technique, and basic crevasse rescue.

Throughout the day the class split into small groups to go over each skill area. A small group gathered to learn complex anchors from Cory and Dave, while the rest of the group joined Tom on the slope to practice self-arrest from every angle. Footwork was taught as a large group with each participant walking up and down the slope using various techniques (both French

and American). Belay technique was tested as Dave barreled into each climber as their partner held on for dear life. Knots were covered throughout each topic. And finally, the group gathered toward the end of the day for a brief lesson on crevasse rescue.

The class was a great introductory into basic snow-travel techniques and set the attendees up for further skill building.



*The class learning snow anchors. From left: Jared Purcell, Ben Loeffle, Cory Hinds, Dave Staeheli, Tom Choate, and Luke Hodges.*

*Photo by Cheyenne Oyen*





*The class at a brief crevasse-rescue lesson. Clockwise from left: Charlotte Foley, Jared Purcell, Ben Loeffle, Tom Choate, Cory Hinds, Luke Hodges, Andrea Gilstad, and Dave Staeheli.  
Photo by Cheyenne Oyen*



*Students taking belay lessons. Clockwise from foreground: Ben Loeffle, Cheyenne Oyen, Shaun Sexton, Dave Staeheli, and Cory Hinds.  
Photo by Andrea Gilstad*



*Students at the ice axe belay session. Clockwise from foreground: Dave Staeheli, Jared Purcell, Candy Purcell, Shaun Sexton, Janetta Smith, and Tom Choate.  
Photo by Andrea Gilstad*

*View from the field: Tom Choate's helmet.  
Photo by Andrea Gilstad*



## Eureka to Valdez

Text by Zack Fields

Photos by Hollis French



*Team shot from Cashman Pass: (from left to right) Andrew McNow, Khalial Withen, Zack Fields, Tony Dimarco, and Hollis French.*

The traverse of the Chugach Mountains from Eureka Lodge to Valdez has been a relatively well-traveled route since at least the mid-1980s, when it was the site of a winter Wilderness Classic. In mid-April, Khalial Withen, Hollis French, Andrew McNow, Tony Dimarco, and I headed out to replicate this trip during a winter in which temperatures were 10 to 15 degrees higher than historical averages.

We got lucky with travel conditions. There was just enough snow to ski from Mile 126.5 of the Glenn Highway down to the Nelchina River on a well-used snowmachine trail. The groomed trail heads almost directly toward the mountains, then turns to the east and flows downhill a couple miles to the Nelchina River. The packed snow resisted isothermal rot, unlike all the other snow in the surrounding spruce forest. We also were fortunate that the river hadn't broken up yet, and made good time skiing up the old river ice toward the Nelchina Glacier, generally following the path snowmachines had packed during the winter. With good conditions including a frozen river, it is possible to ski from the Glenn Highway to the toe of the glacier in a day. This route would be extremely laborious if the river had broken up, necessitating tedious travel through brush along the hillside. Once one makes it to the glacier, there is peaceful camping at the toe of the glacier, where birches are colonizing the old moraine. We experienced conditions that might have

been typical for late May in the old days, with highs in the 50s and the river on the verge of breakup.

Snowmachiners used to travel regularly from Valdez to Eureka and back in a day, blazing up and down the nearly crevasse-free Valdez, Tazlina, and Nelchina Glaciers. According to workers at the Eureka Roadhouse (a snowmachiner watering hole), snowmachiners haven't made the journey in years.



*Khalial Withen enjoying the expanses of the upper Nelchina Glacier.*



With the retreat and thinning of the Nelchina Glacier, smart routefinding can avoid a slog up and over numerous piles of moraine. One easy route up was to bypass the terminal and medial moraine, sticking to the smoother ice on the glacier's eastern half, though not too close to the hillside, which seemed to have been a common snowmachine approach this year. After approximately three miles, crevasses on the eastern side of the glacier made crossing to the western side more efficient, and the western side remained nearly crevasse free for many miles more. However, at least the first crevasse field could be threaded on the center-right (climber's perspective) to avoid veering around to the right.

The Nelchina was a single large tongue of ice for more than 10 miles. Higher up, its tributaries converged in a great amphitheater. There were many possible routes from there, including access to peaks toward Mount Marcus Baker or passes toward the Science Glacier. The traditional traverse route was to continue in a more-or-less straight line over Audubon Pass, a low, easy crossing. There were very few crevasses on the upper Nelchina approaching Audubon Pass.

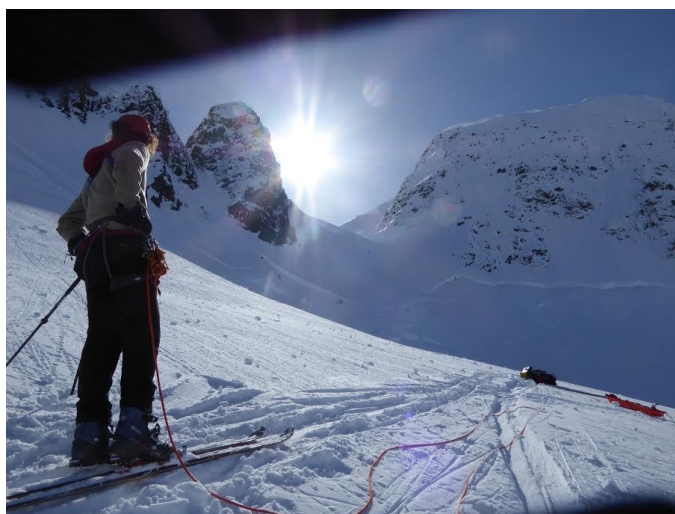
Audubon Mountain looked like a spear's tip emerging from the mellow icefield. Below it, a few bands of crevasses necessitated easy (in good visibility) navigation down smoother ice toward the vast basin of the upper Tazlina Glacier. The upper Tazlina was an otherworldly place. It was a nearly perfectly flat 10 miles of ice, with thousands of feet of ice below the glacier's surface. The topography illustrated how powerful storms slam into the mountains from Prince William Sound, dumping dozens of feet of snow on the upper Tazlina. Toward its southern boundary, a row of imposing nunataks lined the Tazlina amphitheater, and would be outstanding ski destinations.



*Zack Fields moving steadily uphill in full glacier regalia.*

This was a land of easy travel, as wide glacial sidewalks stretched east, west, and south. Crevasses on the upper Tazlina near Audubon Pass could be bypassed by sticking generally to skier's right. In spring, hardly a crevasse was visible on the flat, expansive Tazlina Glacier. On a clear day, the Alaska Range was visible to the north, across the toe of the Tazlina Glacier.

Near the east end of the Tazlina Glacier, Cashman Pass presented one of the more technical (probably easy by standards of people reading this newsletter) challenges to the traverse. Approximately 600 feet high, Cashman separated the Tazlina from the Valdez Glacier. Typically, a bergschrund stretched across much of Cashman and we travelers had to find a snow bridge to get across it. The hillside below the pass was definitely avalanche terrain, and it was not simple to assess avalanche conditions in such a remote area, far outside typical avalanche forecast zones. A rock pinnacle divided Cashman Pass. Both sides were navigable, but the southern side of the pass looked less avalanche prone, as it lacked the large convex rollover that was on the north side. The south side of the pass also had a simpler, mellow descent onto the Valdez Glacier. However, the pass was a significant potential obstacle in a trip, as it would have been inadvisable to cross it during or right after a storm loaded it with snow that could avalanche.



*Andrew McNown watching the first team of skiers nearing Cashman Pass.*

Cashman Pass was approximately 50 to 60 miles into the trip, and marked the end of the uphill. Like the upper Tazlina, it induced scenic overload syndrome (I did not invent that term), or the sensation of being so overwhelmed by scenic beauty that one's brain ceased attempting to appreciate it. The best way to deal with scenic overload syndrome was to stop, camp, and ski for a little while, taking time to soak it in. If one were reasonably confident in decent weather, Mount Shouplina would be a tempting

climbing destination on the Tazlina side of Cashman Pass.

From Cashman Pass, it was a fast and easy ski down the upper 10 to 12 miles of the generally smooth upper Valdez Glacier. If one had time, it should be spent skiing spines near there. Below its upper, crevasse-free reaches, the glacier dropped through a deep, twisted gorge that produced the most significant crevasse fields of the trip. These were near an area referred to as “Third Bench” on topographic maps. There were two crevasse fields. The upper one was fairly simple, requiring about a half hour of crevasse threading on the center-right of the glacier, crossing perhaps a few dozen crevasses. The next crevasse field was much larger and more complex, requiring about a mile of travel among complex crevasses. To the right (west), the ice descended steeply next to a cliff. On the left, deeper crevasses and seracs blocked passage alongside more cliffs. The most likely passage was threading around dozens of crevasses in the center left of the glacier, just to the right of its medial moraine. The crevasse sinews angled downhill and eastward, and it made sense to walk downhill on ice ridges, cross crevasses to skier’s right, and repeat many times over. Eventually, the crevasses gave way to smoother ice.

Though maps refer to “First Bench” and “Second Bench” crevasse fields, these appear to be anachronisms. The Valdez Glacier was mostly smooth and easily navigable below the Third Bench, with the exception of a few cracks and channels right near its outlet lake. The bare rock walls above the glacier suggested it has lost nearly a thousand vertical feet of ice in the last few years. With luck, the lake would still be frozen at the end and we could skate across to the road on the other side.

Though an easy trip by alpinists’ standards, crossing from Eureka to Valdez was a physically arduous trip that demanded proficiency in winter survival, glacier travel, and avalanche assessment. Like any other part of the remote and exposed Chugach, powerful storms could pin down travelers for days, so it would be wise to have some extra food and fuel. With these precautions, this trip could become significantly more complex and challenging if the Valdez Glacier’s retreat and warm temperatures at sea level precluded an easy exit. Low to non-existent snow in the upper Copper basin and early breakup on the Nelchina River also would significantly complicate and delay traverse attempts.

Logistical notes: Hollis and Andrew towed sleds, while the rest of us stuck with packs. The sleds seemed great for everything except Cashman Pass and the crevasses. Our skis ranged from NNN binding Salomons to Dynafit alpine touring setups. In my opinion, Andrew had the best setup: three-pin bindings on Madshus Annums and Garmont Excursion two-buckle telemark

boots with a removable liner. It was nice to have some wide-ish skis for breaking trail – we encountered a lot of isothermal snow on the lower Valdez. Our five-person group relied on two MSR Reactor stoves, which performed well. In colder temperatures (which we hardly experienced), the Reactors maintained pressure better when sitting in a small pool of water. Overall, they seemed to melt water much faster than white gas MSRs. We used approximately one large container of pressurized isobutane per day. Our old- and new-school Biblers (old: Bomb Shelter; new: Black Diamond Hilight) were fairly light and held up well during one windy storm day on the upper Tazlina.

Eureka to Valdez was transcendently beautiful if one could find conditions to make it work, although it certainly was a slog with little downhill. If winter continued to deteriorate and made the traverse less practical, the higher elevation portions of the traverse would be well worth a fly-in trip. The upper Tazlina and Columbia Glacier complex offered fast travel with outstanding ski and climbing destinations.



*Tony Dimarco bringing up Khalial Withen and Zack Fields to the crest of Cashman Pass.*



# Peak of the Month: Peak 1080

Text by Steve Gruhn

**Mountain Range:** Naked Island

**Borough:** Unorganized Borough

**Drainages:** Cabin Bay and McPherson Bay

**Latitude/Longitude:** 60° 39' 58" North, 147° 25' 12" West

**Elevation:** 1080 feet

**Prominence:** 1030 feet from Peak 1215 in the Bass Harbor and McPherson Bay drainages

**Adjacent Peaks:** Peak 950 in the Cabin Bay drainage, Peak 1215, and Peak 650 in the Cabin Bay and Outside Bay drainages

**Distinctness:** 630 feet from Peak 950

**USGS Map:** Seward (C-2)

**First Recorded Ascent:** April 2, 2002, by Paul May

**Access Point:** Cabin Bay



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



Route to the high country and Peak 1080 from Cabin Bay.  
Photo by Paul Lutus.  
Used with permission.

Peak 1080 is the second highest of the four peaks on Naked Island in Prince William Sound.

From his sailboat *Accomplice*, Paul May climbed Peak 1080 on April 2, 2002.

In 2014 Paul Lutus visited Naked Island in his boat *Teacup*. From Cabin Bay he hiked up toward Peak 1080. In 2015 he revisited the area and launched a camera drone from the *Teacup*. The

resulting photos enabled him to select and use a more efficient route to get up into the high country east of Cabin Bay. The resulting photosphere is available at [http://arachnoid.com/alaska2015/cabin\\_bay.html](http://arachnoid.com/alaska2015/cabin_bay.html).

The information for this column came from my correspondence with Paul May and from Paul Lutus' blogs at [http://arachnoid.com/alaska2014/cabin\\_bay.html](http://arachnoid.com/alaska2014/cabin_bay.html) and [http://arachnoid.com/alaska2015/cabin\\_bay.html](http://arachnoid.com/alaska2015/cabin_bay.html).

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Annual membership dues: Single \$20, Family \$25

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](mailto: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](mailto:MCAScree@gmail.com). Articles should be submitted by the 24th 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](mailto: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.

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