

MOUNTAINEERING CLUB OF ALASKA

SCREE

EDITOR  
Mrs. Gwynneth Wilson  
1215 - 8th Ave.,  
Anchorage, Alaska  
Phone:- BR 2-6153

SECRETARY  
Mrs. Helga Bading  
c/o Jonas Bros.  
700 - 5th Ave.  
Anchorage, Alaska  
Phone:- BR 7-7822

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MEETING, OCTOBER 5, 1959

The Mountaineering Club of Alaska will hold a meeting on Monday, October 5th at 8 p.m. at the Willow Park Recreation Hall (9th and Fairbanks).

The election of officers for the next year will take place at this meeting. Officers to be elected are: President, Vice-President, Secretary-Treasurer, and one or two members of the Board. Nominations will be made from the floor. Those eligible to vote must have paid their dues for the 1959-60 year. Dues can be mailed to Helga Bading (c/o Jonas Bros., 700 - 5th Ave., Anchorage, Alaska) or may be paid on Monday the 5th prior to the meeting. Dues are \$6.00 per person or \$7.50 a family including children up to age of 18. Junior members pay \$2.50.

It is hoped that all the present Mountaineering Club members will want to join again for next year. The Board is interested in any comments members have to make regarding club activities, the climbing schedule, Scree, entertainment at the meetings, etc.

MEETING, OCTOBER 5, 1959

REDOUBT

"First Ascent of Mount Redoubt (10,197') ..... Aleutian Range"

by Jon Gardey

Prior to the climb I was able to take a flight around the mountain and determined that the only feasible route led up the glacier emanating from the NE face. This glacier actually ends up in a southeasterly direction and the river coming from its snout, the Redoubt River, proceeds for about 10-15 miles east and empties into Cook Inlet about 12 miles N of Polly Creek. This was the route we picked. The other ridges are either too steep and narrow or end on false summits.

On Sunday, August 23rd, we were flown in two loads to Polly Creek and the second load was deposited on the beach at Polly Creek by 2 p.m. We were four ... Gene Nescott and Charles Deehr of the Alaska Alpine Club in Fairbanks, Finley Kennell of Illinois and me.

The first leg along the beach toward the Redoubt River, about 9 miles, was completed by 6 p.m. with the tide at its maximum and large breakers running, thus forcing us against the rocks at the base of the cliffs.

The next day we entered the brush and with an average speed of 1/4 mph we reached the river about 1 p.m. The river was very high since the freezing level was near 10,000' and the entire mountain was thawing. We proceeded upstream, staying on one side at first; but waist deep wading and the brush forced us to cross. The crossings, although harrowing, did enable us to make much better time and we camped for the night about 10 miles from the glacier.

The following day began with a light rain; but being soaking wet from the river, the rain was irrelevant. Good progress was made up the river bar and we camped on the moraine by 7. The morning was a grey oozing fog that obscured all beyond 100 ft. Undaunted we groped our way among the moraine hills not knowing exactly where we were going - just that it was up ... this was important. After a couple of hours of this dismal prospect we stopped and consulted the nearby rocks but they told us nothing. So we ate. Then the clouds drifted apart and we could see that the ice we were on didn't even appear on the map and that it turned abruptly and thence upward in a series of unclimbable ice falls. We did see though that a route was possible over to another glacier that would get us to a large snowfield below the east face. Then the clouds returned. Climbing on instruments we made it over an intervening moraine and to the other glacier and up to the snowfield. By this time it was 7 p.m. and the clouds had lifted so we could see the lower 1000' of Redoubt i.e. to 5000' from our vantage point of 4000'. This particular 1000' looked very bad.

The next day we had allotted to the climb ... only one day, but the extra day was delegated to possible bad flying weather for the flight to Anchorage. Thus the next day had to be clear. It was.

When we awoke in the morning blue skies and the entire mountain greeted our gaze. The thing thoroughly revealed no complete route to the top. Each possible route apparently halted by an icefall or avalanche danger. Nevertheless, off we went, pitons and all.

As we threaded our way among the seracs and crevasses the routes' intricacies were fascinating. Every apparent stopper had a way either through or around it, and we had a very good time in the continuing wonderful weather. The views across Cook Inlet of Homer and Homer as well as the mountains beyond were excellent. As we continued upward we reached a large avalanche debris area under a huge icefall. Even though the time of day was wrong - noon and the debris was recent - we went across anyway, always casting anxious glances upward. We survived and reached the summit ridge at about 9500'. The ridge continued upward and about 500' from our position was crossed by a crevasse. At this point climbing became too steep for crampons and we cut a few steps which brought us to the summit about 2 p.m., 6 hours and 6000' from our base camp. The descent was made along the same intricate route, still in good weather, and the base camp was reached by 6 p.m.

We encountered ideal snow conditions which made the climb possible in the time we had. The snow was perfect for crampons all the way to the top. There was no new snow. The route should be marked on the ascent if the weather is at all questionable, and it becomes very dangerous under avalanche conditions more severe than those we encountered. Only a third of the route lies across avalanche debris.

The return along the river was made in clear weather with the river lower. We passed many many enormous bear and moose tracks but the only animal we saw was one moose (sic). We arrived at Polly Creek 7 days after we left it. Bad weather held up the return for an extra day but we were able to stagger back at 300' over Cook Inlet.

ENDING, OCTOBER 5, 1959

✓ MARCUS BAKER

"1959 Mount Marcus Baker Expedition"

by Helga Bading

This was the fourth time for Paul and Johnnie to make plans to climb Marcus Baker (13,176'). Their knowledge of the unmapped area obtained on previous attempts aided greatly in shaping plans for this trip. It was planned to have an airdrop about 10 miles up the Matanuska Glacier near the foot of the north ridge of Marcus Baker. A party of five would start up the glacier from the Glenn Highway on August 29, 1959. They would walk the entire length of the glacier and then try to climb the mountain via the north ridge.

But it didn't work this way. The first blow came when Johnnie was called "inside" and could not go with us. This left Paul Crews, Gregg Erickson, Hans Metz and Alf. Second, the neatly packed airdrop parcels (159 lbs!) didn't go up the glacier by itself. They went on our backs. Twice our pilot, Dwight Robinson, and Paul tried to get rid of them, but the weather was too poor to fly in.

Monday, August 29th: We left town at 5 a.m. When everything was ready, all but my pack weighed over 70 pounds. I was carrying better than 50. At Mile 102 a cable is strung over the Matanuska River. The owner, Mr. Marshall, has a house near the highway, but he was not at home. So we helped ourselves to his facilities. Once across, late in the afternoon, we started up the terminal moraine. After an hour and a half of ups and downs we reached the ice and made good headway for a while. At seven it started to rain. We were about 3-4 miles from the road. A rocky nest between two ice ridges served well for camp I.

Tuesday: Up at 4 a.m. No rain, but it was cold. At 6 we had breakfasted and hit the glacier for more. Another hour's walk took us to the "Matanuska Glacier Highway". This is a moraine that winds all the way up the glacier right to the BIG BEND ... a distance of about 20 miles. By lunchtime, we were a good 10 miles up the glacier and celebrated with hot jello and cheese. Wild sheep grazed on the east slopes, and a hawk winged over His Majesty, Mt. Marcus Baker, was well hidden from our view. It had only been climbed in 1938 by Bradford Washburn. The Matanuska Glacier is the most feasible route to the mountain, but also the longest .... 30 miles as the crow flies. We'd have to walk at least 40 miles on the ground, one way, and we knew we were the first people ever to walk this glacier's full length. By 5 we were about 16 miles up the glacier.

Wednesday: It takes a lot of energy to get out of the sack at 4. Particularly with all bones cracking inside and a damp, heavy fog lingering outside. Soon we were off, following the directions, determined from the compass he held in front of him. The compass route worked very well. When the fog lifted we were exactly where we wanted to be ... right at the BIG BEND close to the foot of Mount Schmaps (named for Johnnie's dog). But we were in a mess of crevasses. After three hours we managed to get untangled. On we went in weary determination. Ahead through the clouds loomed a rocky ridge. Whether it was the one we were to climb to the summit on or not, we headed for it anyway because the icefall directly up the glacier is magnificent and the ridge was an easy way through the seracs.

It was 5 before we got to the foot of the ridge. Hans started chopping steps up the icy slope, one by one. It was almost dark when we reached the top of the ridge and it started snowing. Ahead we saw a small mossy plateau. It was too inviting to resist.

Tuesday: When I woke at 4, the tent walls were sagging into our faces from the weight of new snow. But at 7 a.m. I felt a ray of warmth. Within seconds, I was out of the tent (the entrance was right over a 40 ft. cliff), shaking powder snow off me like a poodle. Hans was already up. The world around us shone like diamonds. One by one the mountains unrolled. In their new snowy robe, they seemed to rise vertically from the glacier bottom. Even Gregg (the sleeper) emerged from the tent to see what all the "ah's and oh's" were about and he exclaimed: "Where else but in the Chugach and the Himalayas can you find such a sight!"

Paul and Hans ran up the snow covered ridge (we had 9 inches of it over night) to get their first view of our mountain. They came back with the news that we were on the wrong ridge. The right one was up the glacier, another 5 miles at least. We lost no time packing up camp. First we climbed higher up the ridge, then dropped down to the glacier. The new snow had covered all but the largest crevasses. Every foot had to be probed with an ice ax. The late afternoon found us at the foot of a steep ridge. It was almost dark when we found the ideal campsite for Camp IV at about 9000' elevation. While the tents went up I started the stoves. We had hardly gotten into the tents when the wind velocity increased. Even with all the hatches closed it would blow out the primuses. Every few minutes Gregg would grab the stove, shield it with his body while I opened the "tunnel" to scoop up more snow for water. Each time an icy blast of snow would hit my face. It took hours to cook supper and melt snow for the morning. We fell asleep to the continuous roar of avalanches.

Wednesday: Although we started the stoves at 4, it took until 7:30 to get ready to leave. All our boots were frozen solid and they had to be thawed out before we could even get into them. The storm had subsided. It was very grey and light snow fell. We started up the ridge - kicking steps. This is the same route Bradford Washburn took when he climbed Mt. Marcus Baker 21 years ago. Washburn and party were landed on the glacier by Bob Reeve and relayed their camp up to 10,000'. From there, almost a month and many storm later, they climbed the peak we were now attempting.

When going up the glacier the previous day we had debated taking another more direct route than the ridge we were now on. But the new snow was deeper the higher we went and we feared that having to probe and plow every step we took would take too much time. We chose the ridge, though longer, hoping it would be windblown. It wasn't. About 10 o'clock the weather cleared, but only for a while. We strapped on the crampons to climb a very steep icy slope (about 40 degrees). Traversing the slope with aching ankles (the way they wore bent) we began feeling the effects of altitude. Two breaths for every step. I had a headache. By noon we got to the saddle on the north ridge .... now we were looking down the Kaik Glacier. It was like being on top of the world. Mountains were sticking out of the clouds and all were lower than we were. There were heavy black clouds below us and another cloudlayer above us, sometime the visibility would be only 100 ft. We continued on - now in a southeasterly direction - using willowwands to mark our trail every 100 ft. We traversed on the north side of the ridge in deep powder snow, then walked around the south side and headed straight toward the North Peak. The snow was so deep in places that every step was an effort. Every few minutes we stopped, panting. Finally, up on the ridge to the North Peak we were hit by an icy blast of wind. Within minutes Gregg's beard was frozen. Paul was the first one on the peak and we shouted to him, "What do you see," but he waved silently. We crowded onto the narrow ridge that forms the peak and there, three miles south and nine hundred feet higher was the main peak, barely visible in the gray light and drifting clouds.

Three whole miles of deep powder snow lay between us and the south peak. It was 3:15 .... just  $\frac{1}{2}$  hours of daylight left. Tomorrow is another day, we thought, and turned back, following the willowwands and our trail in the rising wind. It took much time to get down the steep icy slope. Paul's crampons broke. In the last remaining twilight we returned to camp. Tired and cold we slipped into the sleeping bags.

Thursday: It snowed light all morning, but at 9 a.m. the sun broke through. There could be no thought of returning to the peak. Paul's crampon was beyond repair and Hans had a frontbitten toe. The skies were deep blue when we climbed down the ridge in the afternoon. Once back on the glacier we could see Marcus Baker. The north peak stood out sharply. Bradford Washburn gives its elevation as 12,250'. The main peak (13,175') is not visible from this point ... one has to be further down the glacier to see it rise above the plateau. The whole Marcus Baker Mountain is an elevated snow plateau of huge dimensions. This is where our big glaciers are made and you can actually see it happen. To the north and south the plateau breaks off on almost 5000' high walls and the ice hangs over the edges on enormous pale blue chunks, all chopped up and ready to fall down. While on the glacier we could see and hear the avalanches roar down the cliffs day and night. Looking back at our mountain, we began feeling the satisfaction and we knew it had been well worth while.

We followed our old tracks rather than search for a new route, even if it meant taking the roundabout way. Again we climbed the rock ridge on the side of the glacier and camped on our old spot, safe from avalanches.

Friday: Every night on our trip it snowed and almost every morning the sun came out again. At 8 we had camp packed and belayed each other down the steep slope to the glacier and headed straight to the foot of Mount Schnaps, roped in two and two, of course. With luck and Hans' "good nose" we avoided the mess of crevasses that had previously taken 3 hours of our time. We were way below our Camp II site and had travelled on the top moraine for several miles before we "dropped dead" and pitched the tents.

Saturday: The last day! It didn't matter if sleeping bags were damp from condensation. Even though we had allowed only  $1\frac{1}{2}$  lbs. of food per man per day, we still had some to spare, so we chose the tidbits: cheese, salami and chocolate to take back out. The day was beautiful. We could see how the hills had changed color while we were gone, and how the snow line had dropped. But for the hurting feet and shoulders the day would have been perfect. We crossed the river about 4 in the afternoon. We had walked and climbed at least 80 miles on ice and snow. With the heavy packs it was no picnic. But it was great. And where, really, would you find such sights and scenery but in the Himalayas and the Chugach?

MEETING, MONDAY, OCTOBER 5, 1959.