

SEPTEMBER 1993

A Publication of the Mountaineering Club of Alaska, Inc.
Box 102037, Anchorage, Alaska 99510

Volume 36 Issue 09

SEPTEMBER MEETING

Wednesday

September 15, 7:30

Pioneer Schoolhouse, 3rd & Eagle Streets
Downtown Anchorage

Slide Show: Bill Wakeland will show slides of the club's recent trip to the *Grand Canyon*

TRIP REPORTS

Chitistone Goat Trail

by Julia Moore and Mike Miller

After planning for, training for and climbing Denali in June we were looking forward to a relaxing hike in the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park for a week.

Our friends Gretchen Colonius and Paul Weatherby made our group a nice foursome. The Chitistone valley is east of McCarthy about 15 miles [McCarthy, Alaska 1:250000].

We flew from Chitna into the Skolai landing strip, on the northeast end of Chitistone valley, with Paul Claus. It was a beautiful setting with alpine tundra, glaciers, caribou and sheep. We set up camp by the airstrip and hiked up into the valley on the north side of the Hole-In-The-Wall Glacier. Six glacier tongues fell a couple of thousand feet into the bowl, providing spectacular scenery.

The next day we gained about 1400 feet into Chitistone Pass and made camp at about 5800 feet amsl. We saw tracks of sheep, caribou and bear, but few people. In fact we never saw anyone else during the entire trip.

On day three, we had weather good enough to do the high traverse of the Chitistone Gorge. The route, as there is no *trail* in a lot of places, goes down the north side of the river to above the 140-foot Chitistone Falls. The route is relatively easy to follow at this point, then climbs about 1000 feet and traverses high above the falls and the river for about a mile.

HIKING AND CLIMBING SCHEDULE

- Sept 11-12 Bird Peak
Class C. Chugach State Park. Third annual attempt to beat the weather.
Leader: Neil O'Donnell 274-5069
- 25-26 Ice Climbing School
See description in this issue.
Coordinator: Paul Denkwalter 272-1811 (AMH)



At times this trail is tough, with hard, down sloping dirt and rock, little actual scree, and a vertigo-inducing drop below. We really did not want to slip. We discussed self arrest techniques on hard dirt and rocks, and did not want to talk about what to do if one of us got hurt. My boots had nearly smooth soles from previous wear and were not gripping well, but my ice ax was my security blanket.

At one point we had to make a decision. The trail split, the lower going below a red band of rocks and into a black band. Through the binoculars it looked real dangerous with vertical drops below, but shorter than the upper trail. The upper trail did not look much better as it climbed high on real steep slopes. But the information we got from the Park Service in Copper Center suggested the upper trail as the better one, so away we went. In general, the trail is not as bad as it looks from below. We passed bear tracks that went to a way-enlarged pika hole. Maybe we did better than the gopher, eh? We finally came out into a valley that climbs into the south side of the Hole-in-the-Wall Glacier. Here we found heaps of geodes, and had fun searching for leaverite. We made camp on a spectacular bench at 3800 feet, below the valley, looking straight up into the maw of the falls. In fact, this is a fairly critical camp spot to break up the time and the hazards of the trail. Fresh water can be found here, too.

With a hard rain all night I was real worried about the river crossing the next day. We had been following the Chitistone River from the pass and had seen its violent, ugly, dirty character. Now we had to cross it. From camp above, I could not see a good spot to cross, and I got little sleep that night worrying. Could we do it? Would the rain stop? If we wait too late in the day the glacier will melt, I don't want to go back up the trail we just came over (although I heard that others had once they saw the river crossings).

We dropped off the bench, finding a real crucial trail that prevented horrendous bushwhacking and back-tracked up the river. Just before a vertical rock cliff that drops into the river, the water was braided just enough to allow us to cross. The water wetted us to our waists, and the flow was so swift that footing was difficult among the boulders on the bottom. Two-by-two we crossed without incident, but were glad to have it over. That proved to be the hardest crossing of the trip, although others were not far behind. After warming up some, we walked a quarter of a mile and crossed the river that comes out of the Chitistone Glacier. This was not quite so fast, but we nearly froze our feet and legs wading five channels and dodging icebergs floating down.

After one more crossing of a relatively mild river, we had a nice camp about two miles above Toby Creek. We

avoided the bear problems by camping out on the gravel bars of the river where we found clear water. A nice campfire kept the bugs away, even though they were never very bad.

Toby River is one of the few rivers in the area that is actually named on maps. The crossing is described in route descriptions as very tough. We heard that others have had to wait for 36 hours for the water to go down enough to cross. Others wind up hiking up the river several miles and crossing on the glacier. With our new-found experience during the previous day's escapades we found a spot to cross. Luckily it was not raining and it was only about noon, so the melt water was not too high. While changing clothes for the crossing we could hear boulders being carried down by the muddy water every few minutes. Julia and I plunged off, up to almost our thighs and stumbling over the boulders on the bottom we successfully fought our way across the main channel, then a second smaller one. We did it, our last crossing, yea!


About four miles and we were at the Glacier Creek airstrip where we were to be picked up in a couple of days. Julia and I pitched our tent on top of an abandoned 20-ton flat bed trailer, once hauled in there for mining, our Alaskan 'mobile home.' A small cabin offered easy cooking out of the light intermittent rain.

Paul and I hiked up to the Twa Harpies Glacier the next day for great views of some rugged mountains. Only about 10 miles farther on, but just out of site, lies Mt. Bona and University Peak.

Not really the relaxing trip we had thought it would be, but a very excellent, challenging and rewarding trip. We thought it was best to go from the top of the valley to Glacier Creek like we had done, rather than the other way because it was more downhill than climbing. We only had wet feet the last couple of days, airplane pick-up is more assured at Glacier Creek than higher at Skolai, and trails are easier to find. There are a lot of other valleys and basins to explore for day-hikes, and even some relatively easy peaks to climb. Several people have been into this area in the winter for the amazing ice climbing potential. Great place, we'll be back.



TECHNICAL ICE CLIMBING SCHOOL

place: Matanuska Glacier 

date: September 25-26

fees: \$ 5.00 equipment replacement fee
\$12.50 access to glacier and camping

meeting: Thursday, September 23, Pioneer School house 7:30 pm. This meeting is mandatory, so plan to attend.

The school will present the techniques necessary to become at least a competent second on steep ice. We will not emphasize glacier travel techniques.

PRE-REGISTRATION WILL BE REQUIRED.

Sign-ups are at the August and September meetings for MCA members only. If you cannot attend by the September meeting you may call Paul at AMH, 272-1811. We will not be signing up students (or new members) at the organization meeting on the 23rd. All students should be members by the September MCA general meeting since AMH does not collect dues.

An equipment check will be done at the organization meeting on the 23rd. Students are required to bring their boots, crampons and ice axes for inspection. Club equipment will be handed out. (The club has limited supplies of crampons, ice axes and helmets.) Fees will be collected. Questions will be answered. **ALL STUDENTS MUST ATTEND.**

⌚ The school will begin at 9:30 am on Saturday, September 25th, at Matanuska Glacier at the parking lot closest to the glacier. Plan on leaving Anchorage no later than 7:00 am or go up Friday night (no extra charge in the campground).

ICE CLIMBING SCHOOL EQUIPMENT LIST

Everyone must have all equipment underlined.

- Ice axe - 70 cm or shorter, curved pick with a web sling
- Ice hammer - get one if you can
- Crampons - 12 points, hinged or rigid or foot-fangs
- Helmet
- Harness - 1 or 2-piece or 22 feet of 1-inch tubular webbing
- Locking carabiner - or two regular carabiners
- Rigid-sole boots - plastic boots are best
- Lunch - for two days, a thermos is a good idea
- Wind parka and pants - Goretex or other semi-waterproof
- Pile or wool pants - definitely no jeans or cotton
- Pile or wool jacket - or synchilla, polarguard, whatever they have these days
- Wool hat
- Gloves and mitts - bring extras, it's wet out there
- Overmitts - water repellent
- Gaitors
- Sunglasses, sun cream, bandana, camera, guitar, violin, sax, trumpet, drums, walkmann, post-climbing refreshments, etc.
- Day pack - for all this junk
- Car camping gear, lawn chairs, salmon roasts, barbeque sauce, **campfire stories**



ADZE



Wilderness Writing Course
Alaska Wilderness Studies
Offered for the first time this fall at UAA.
by Bill Sherwonit
Wednesdays 7:00 - 9:00
Sign up for it at UAA (not found in the Fall Schedule)

Himalayan Trek and Climb - October 1994
Trekking peak Mehra (6431 meters) in the Khumbu Valley. With clear weather there is an excellent view of several well-known peaks. Trekking only option will be offered. There are a number of trekking routes possible. Trip length 3-4 weeks. Cost \$3500 including air fare. Call Dolly Lefever 243-7027.



Note from Bertrand

Dear MCA members and friends, If you intend to go climbing in the Alps and especially in France, you are welcome to stay or stop at my house in Lyon (2 1/2 hours from Chamonix). I can lend you my topos and introduce you to some French climbers: Bertrand Poinsonnet, 17 rue Roussy, 69004 Lyon, France; tel (0-11-33) 72-00-04-91. I also wish to say good luck and thank you to all my partners that accompanied me this summer on 15 peaks. Bertrand.

Wanted: Climbing Partners

For September/October 1993. Prefer experience and 35 yeras or older. Possible climbs: Alpenglow, Benevolent, Bounty, Kiliak, Miter, Watchman, Yukla. Pam Kirk 274-2233.

AWS Service Project

Boy Scout Rock, Saturday, September 11
Help brush out the trail to the climbing rock.
786-1468

MINUTES

AUGUST MEETING

August 18, 1993. Joel Babb called the meeting to order, and had new members introduce themselves.

TREASURER'S REPORT.

Total \$7710

COMMITTEE REPORTS.

Huts.

Bomber Hut needs repairs to the table (sheet rock screws).

Training.

Paul Denkwalter will once again coordinate the ice climbing school at the Matanuska Glacier. Sign up at the meeting or call Alaska Mountaineering and Hiking, 272-1811.

OLD BUSINESS.

None.

NEW BUSINESS.

Club Patches were discussed. A new order for 500 was proposed by the Board. No vote taken.

There was a motion to give Paul Berryhill a mug for his past work in doing mailing labels and helping to get the Scree out. Motion passed.

ANNOUNCEMENTS.

Helen Nienhueser is looking for members to help update 55 Ways. Reports of trails previously described in the book would be helpful. Also anyone who would like to see his/her photo on the cover of the next issue should contact Helen. She is looking for a vertical format color slide of Southcentral Alaska. Details of what is needed can be had by calling her at 277-9330.

Thanks to Mark Fouts for slides of Marcus Baker from 1975 when he and his teenage buddies did a Matanuska-Knik traverse.

Respectfully Submitted,

Julia Moore

EDITOR'S COLUMN

Willy Hersman

Who's Being Rescued

Proposals by the National Park Service to collect from climbers or require them to have insurance for rescues may be well intentioned, but it misses the mark. The concern here should be cost to the taxpayer. If you want to talk about paying for rescues then talk about all rescues. One private plane missing or one fishing boat in trouble can potentially cost more for a single rescue than a season of climbers on Denali.

The Park Service spent \$190,000 for search and rescue on Denali in 1993 and \$200,000 on Denali in 1992. A recent Associated Press article gave examples of search figures of \$150,000 in Yosemite for one search, \$50,000 for a two-week search in Olympic National Park, \$66,000 for Grand Teton, and so on. Not very impressive when compared to this taxpayer rescue: \$50,000,000,000 for Savings and Loans risk-takers. And what did we get for that? Nada. Not even a slide show.



It seems clear that making climbers "pay up" will hardly put a dent in the total bill for the taxpayer. So, if the savings will not be very great, why pick on climbers? There is a public perception, long held, that climbing is a frivolous, dangerous, unsafe activity. "What are all those idiots doing up there on that mountain anyway?" The press has often over-dramatized rescues further perpetuating this notion.

The public needs to be educated. Responsible climbers, responsible drivers, responsible pilots, responsible people in any sport or endeavor who know what safe practices are and abide by them rarely need a rescue. Climbing is no more dangerous than a lot of other things if done properly.

In writing its new rules the Park Service will have several definitions and problems to address. If insurance will be required to climb in Denali National Park, then what is climbing? Would one need insurance to ski around on the Kahiltna Glacier? Crevasses, avalanches, frostbite, whiteouts; these are potential rescue problems for more than climbers. How high of an angle must one negotiate to be considered climbing, how high of an elevation, at what level of difficulty? If a climbing party is overdue (for which there could be many legitimate reasons) and did not call for a rescue, should they pay for one that someone else calls out? Maybe they wanted to do a self rescue.

You can write to N.P.S. with comments:

National Park Service
Division of Ranger Activities
Attn: Climbing Docket 1
Box 37127
Washington, D.C. 20013-7027

MCA Trip Classifications

The classifications below do not take into account individual trip hazards such as river crossings, scree slopes, snow fields, bears, etc. Trip leaders are required to inform the trip participants of any such hazards either verbally, on the sign-up sheet, or in the trip description. Leader approval is required for participation on all trips.

NON-TECHNICAL: Following are a few standards used to classify non-technical trips. The classification is made in terms of hiking distance and altitude gain. Many trips are not on established trails.

CLASS A: Easy hikes with a maximum distance of 8 miles for day trips or 4 miles per day for overnight trips. Altitude gain up to 1200 feet.

CLASS B: Trips involving a maximum distance of up to 12 miles for a day trip or 6 miles per day for an overnight trip. Altitude gain of 1200 to 2500 feet.

CLASS C: Trips up to 15 miles for a day hike or 8 miles per day for an overnight trip. Altitude gain up to 3500 feet. Scree, steep grass or other rough terrain problems may be encountered.

CLASS D: Hikes and climbs with an altitude gain of over 3500 feet or a distance of greater than 15 miles for a day-hike or greater than 8 miles a day for an overnight trip. Peaks in this classification may require minimal climbing skills.

CLASS E: Hazardous climbing conditions may be encountered. A basic mountaineering course may be required.

TECHNICAL: Technical trips are open to all qualified climbers. However, the registration on any particular trip must be restricted to a safe and manageable number of climbers. Registration is made directly with the leader, who determines the qualifications needed for the trip.

GLACIER TRAVEL: Trips requiring roped travel over glaciers. Knowledge of crevasse rescue, and ice axe and crampon skills are required. Basic understanding of ice and snow anchors is also required.

FIFTH CLASS: Trips which involve fifth class climbing. A Basic Mountaineering course or equivalent is required. Knowledge of belay and rappel techniques and placing anchors is required. Climbing difficulty varies widely with each trip.

TRIP PARTICIPANTS have the obligation to acquaint themselves with the nature of the trip and to verify that it is within their capability and experience. Anyone wishing to participate in any trip above CLASS A must have completed one or more trips of the next lower classification, or the equivalent.

Approved by MCA Board, March 1987

General Rules for MCA Sanctioned Trips

1. Proper equipment follows this list.
2. No dogs. (Among the reasons are bear problems.)
3. The leader's suggestions are to be followed. Do not go off alone, return or rush ahead without his (her) permission, and don't ford a stream before the leader assesses the situation. Remember, this is a club trip and the leader must know where all participants are. Anyone separating from the group without the leader's approval is no longer considered a participant in the MCA Sanctioned trip.

