

the SCREE

Mountaineering Club

of Alaska

September 2013

Volume 56 Number 9



Monthly meeting:

6:30 p.m., Wednesday, September 18

Program: To be announced.

Contents

Kootznoowoo Peak

Mount Prindle

Z Bump 1150 ±

Looking for LeMaitre

Accessing the Eklutna Glacier

Neacola Nightmare

Peak of the Month: Hound's Tooth

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 September 18 at the BP Energy Center, 1014 Energy Court, Anchorage, Alaska.

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

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Cover Photo

Left to right: Ross Noffsinger, Stan Olsen, Wayne Todd, Tom Choate, Sally Balchin, Larry Oliver, and Vicky Lytle by Hans' Hut. Photo by Wayne Todd.

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. 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 orientated photo for consideration for the cover. Please submit captions with photos.

Monthly Meeting: Wednesday, September 19, at 6:30 p.m. Program: To be announced.

It is that time of year again to start gathering great shots for the Mountaineering Club of Alaska's 2014 Calendar. The 2014 calendar will be horizontal in format again. The categories are Climbing, People, Scenery, and Hiking. Bring your 8 x 12 photos to the September meeting or right at the beginning of the October meeting. Have your name, email address, and telephone number on the back. Have a plastic cover if you want them in mint condition when returned. Contact Stu at stugrenier@gmail.com if you have questions. We will be voting on them at the October meeting.

Proposed Geographic Names: The MCA received a letter from the Alaska Historical Commission requesting comment on a proposal to name a 4698-foot peak in the Lake Grosvenor drainage of the Aleutian Range as Mount Ray Petersen. This peak is within the designated Wilderness Area of Katmai National Park and Preserve. Written comments should be provided to Jo Antonson, the Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, by email at jo.antonson@alaska.gov or by fax at (907) 269-8908.

Climbing Note: Ben Still wrote to say that on July 20 his sister Kathy Still and he climbed Washington Peak (4810) and Devils Peak (4450±50) southwest of Devils Pass in the Kenai Mountains. We look forward to a detailed report of this ascent in a future issue of the *Scree*.

Correction: Rob Garneau submitted comments regarding the July Peak of the Month, Mount Galen. His July 1980 solo ascent of Mount Galen was via the long east ridge, not the northwest ridge stated in the Peak of the Month column. His ascent from the Stony Creek drainage involved bushwhacking through willows and several brown bear encounters. His first encounter was with a bear on a kill in a stream. He was 30 feet away and retreated slowly. His second encounter was a sow with two cubs. Fortunately the bears retreated and he continued to the summit, where he did not see any evidence of a prior ascent. He descended the southwest ridge, camping on a narrow spur ridge with a southern aspect and bushwhacking through willows to return to the Denali Park Road.

Hiking and Climbing Schedule

- ⇒ **September 25, 7:00-9:00 p.m., BP Energy Center, 900 East Benson Boulevard:** All potential or registered participants are required to attend this mandatory MCA Ice Climbing School Meeting and Gear Inspection. Participants are required to bring their harnesses, boots, and crampons to this meeting for inspection. Late registration is available at this meeting for \$90 (doesn't include membership fees, equipment rentals, transportation, or food). Contact Jayme Mack at either (907) 382-0212 or mcaicefest@gmail.com.
- ⇒ **September 27, 6:00 p.m. - September 29, 5:00 p.m.:** Annual MCA Ice Climbing School on the Matanuska Glacier. If you have never climbed ice and want to learn or if you have already been ice climbing and want to improve upon your skills this weekend is for you! Contact Jayme Mack at either (907) 382-0212 or mcaicefest@gmail.com.

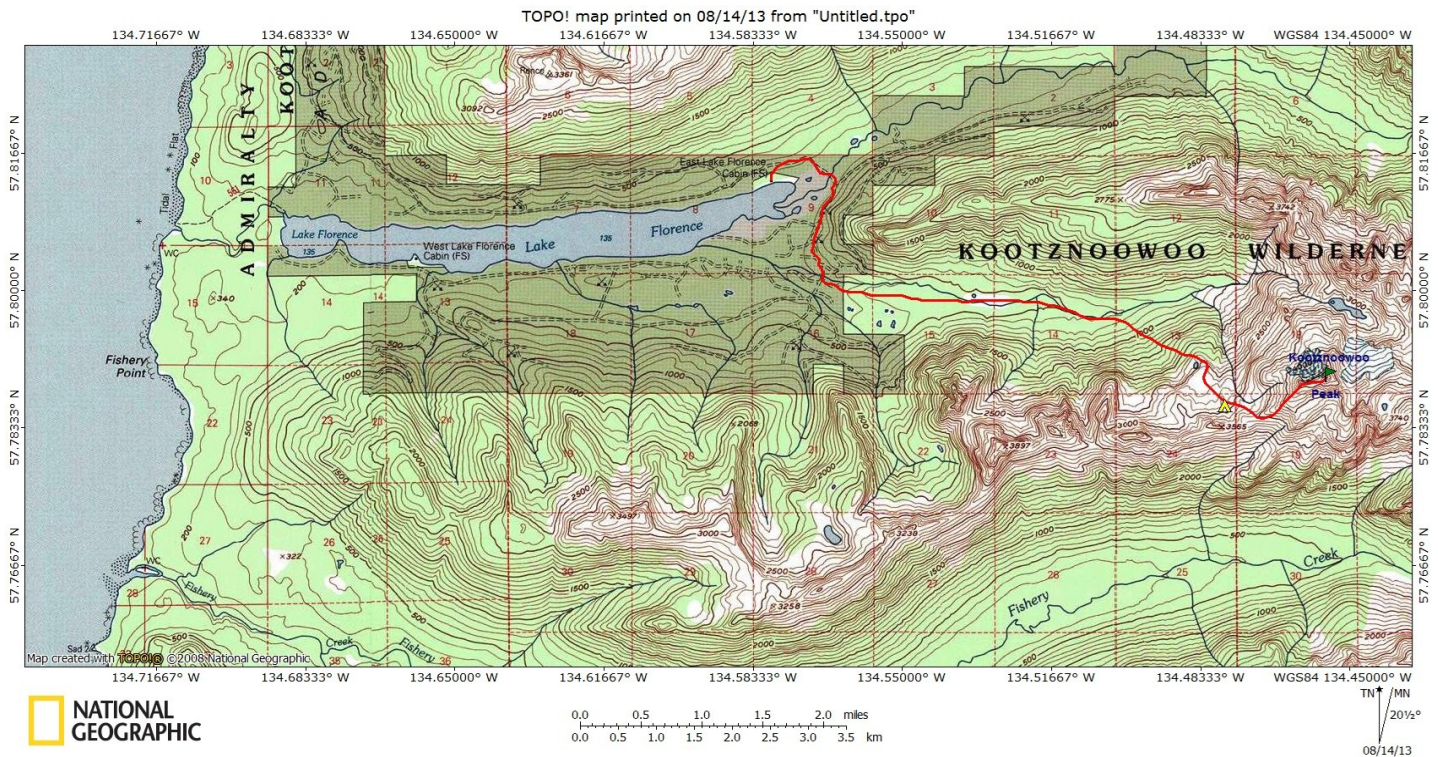
Online? Click me!



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

Kootznoowoo Peak: “Fortress of the Bears”

Text and photos by Ben Still



Mike Miller and I thought we had climbed the highest point on Admiralty Island south of Juneau, Alaska, years ago when we climbed Eagle Peak (4650) on the north end of the island. I had heard from others this was the high point of the island. I didn't own all the topographic maps of the island, so I took their word for it, but once I installed the National Geographic Topo! program on my computer several years later I realized this was indeed not the case and a peak 40 miles south was in fact higher, a 4800-foot unnamed peak, located in the very rugged heart of the island. Several years of consistently putting this on the back burner resulted from being slightly apprehensive about going into the densest population of brown bears in North America with nearly one per square mile along with difficult access.

We determined the western side of the mountain looked the best for an ascent and flew into Lake Florence (135 feet) on August 11th, 2013, at 8 a.m. We had our pilot drop us off at the East Lake Florence Forest Service Cabin at the east end of the lake. The area around Lake Florence was logged in the '90s and has become very thick with small spruce and hemlock trees competing for the sunlight along with the standard devil's club and alders. We started off at 9 a.m. with bear spray in hand, cutting directly behind the cabin and hoping to hit an old logging road for access to the valley and old growth forest beyond. One hundred yards and lots of cursing got us to the road, which was getting quite overrun with alders, but still a decent bear trail in

the middle. The logging road proved to be relatively easy travel and we made quick work to the start of the valley. We crashed through some more extra-thick brush for a quarter mile and made it into a beautiful brush-free moss-covered old-growth forest. The different shades of green moss – dark green to bright neon green – were very pleasing to the eyes.

Our dreams of a brush-free southeast forest were stamped out quickly as devil's club and many large windfalls literally slowed our progress to a crawl. The map showed what looked like open meadows on the north side of the creek and we could see a clearing in that direction. We crossed the creek on one of the many wind-felled trees and made it to open meadows, well, not really. A series of old beaver dams with waist-to-chest-deep black water impeded our way. Weaving around these deep water crossings proved to be slower than the brush of doom in the forest, so we opted out as soon as we could.

Several hours later we began the uphill battle to the alpine slopes. Luckily this part of the forest was open and mossy. At around 2,000 feet, the hillside steepened. We began climbing up steeper and steeper moss-covered slopes, traversing out over large vertical rock walls, at times sinking our ice axes into the moss and hooking out-of-reach trees. After several hundred feet and really beginning to feel the exposure, we pulled out the rope. The final 150 feet steepened substantially and had sparsely spaced trees. Mike led up the pitch to find tree line and grad-



Northwest aspect of Kootznoowoo Peak

ual alpine slopes above. We hiked up beautiful alpine slopes with many blooming sky-blue glaucous gentians.

At the 3,000-foot elevation, we decided to make camp at the early hour of 5 p.m. The eight-hour bushwhack took its toll and the peak above looked like a time-consuming maze of gendarmes and crumbly rock. We fell asleep by 9 p.m., watching the sunset over Chichagof Island.

After a quick breakfast and coffee, we were off at 5 a.m., gaining the west ridge at 3,400 feet. The super-rugged peaks of the heart of Admiralty Island were visible to the east. Easy going terrain to about 4,000 feet led us to a good viewpoint of the rest

of the ridge. The ridge proper was riddled with overhanging sharp gendarmes of doom. The north face was a sheer drop, but the south side of the ridge offered a series of grassy ramps and ledges around all the less-desirable terrain. We scrambled around several gendarmes only to startle three deer acting like mountain goats high on the mountain. The deer sprinted away, climbing over cliffs with ease. We scrambled around the rest of the gendarmes regaining the ridge just before the summit. A couple Class-4 moves and we made it to the top of Admiralty Island, with views of the many layers of peaks in this rugged wild landscape. We built a cairn on the summit and took many photos, recognizing many peaks to the north and east we had previously climbed and many more we dream

of climbing. My GPS gave a summit elevation of 4842 feet. The upper part of the mountain proved to be easier than anticipated and we were on top at 7 a.m. a short two-hour trip from camp. We saw five more deer on the descent back to camp; maybe we should be calling this peak Fortress of the Deer with very minimal bear sign, but deer everywhere.

We quickly made it back to camp and then reversed the amazing bushwhack, doing four single-rope rappels down the near-vertical moss and then crawling under devil's club down to the creek. We opted for hiking out in the creek, as this proved to be a much easier area to walk through, encountering knee-to-thigh-deep water with the occasional detour into the brush around fallen trees.

We were back at the East Florence Lake Cabin by 4 p.m. We ate an early dinner and fell asleep by 6 p.m. We were picked up in the early afternoon the next day in time for my evening flight back to Anchorage and as the clouds began converging on this lush-green wonderland of mountains.

Ascent Summary: Kootznoowoo Peak (4842 feet), highest point on Admiralty Island and of the Kootznoowoo Wilderness, West Ridge, Class 3-4 with Class 5 brush to access the ridge, eight hours to camp at 3,000 feet from East Florence Cabin, two more hours to summit, and eight hours of travel time on the descent to the East Florence Lake Cabin.



Looking down the west ridge with Lake Florence to the right and Chatham Strait beyond.

Mount Prindle

Text and photos by Barry Weiss

Last summer I had to attend a meeting in Fairbanks, so while my wife Joyce and I were there we decided to check out some backpacking opportunities in the Fairbanks area. We'd been to Eagle Summit and hiked for several days on the Pinnell Mountain Wilderness Trail. We'd also done a number of day hikes in the area of the Granite Tors. But, we wanted something new.

After asking around and making contact with hikers in Fairbanks, we settled on Mount Prindle, whose trailhead is located a few hours north of Fairbanks in the White Mountains. Although the trip to Mount Prindle is written up as a highlight trip in Kyle Joly's book Outside in the Interior, few people in Anchorage

seem to have heard about it. So, I prepared this trip report for the *Scree* to share information about Mount Prindle with others.



Trail in Nome Creek Valley, heading to the Mount Prindle Ridge in the distance at right.

Access is off the Steese Highway from a good dirt road that leaves the highway at Mile 57.1. After driving to a parking area, the trip starts immediately with a crossing of Nome Creek and then a short time later, a crossing of one of its tributaries. The crossings were easy when we were there in August, even though it had been a wet summer, but I've heard that sometimes the Nome Creek crossing can be challenging.

After the crossing, there is a straightforward trail that goes several blueberry-lined miles, paralleling Nome Creek, back into a large open bowl at the base of the ridge that leads up to Mount Prindle. The scenery is nice and the hiking is easy enough.

Our plan was to camp in the bowl below the ridge, climb Mount Prindle the next day, camp out again below the ridge, and then

hike back to the car on the third day. But, Mother Nature had a different idea for us and she hadn't told the National Weather Service, which had predicted nice sunny weather for the whole three-day trip.

On the evening of the first day after setting up camp at the base of the ridge, it started to rain and then rain harder, and then harder and harder. We managed to eat dinner out in the rain before it really began to pour, but after that the rain continued all through the night and all through the next day. We spent more than 24 hours lying around in the tent. It's amazing how long you can do nothing if you really try. We'd not brought any

books to read, so instead learned all kinds of profound things from reading the label on the inside our tent – like it's not a good idea to start a fire inside the tent.

But, one of the highlights of the trip occurred when we spent the day in our tent. In the middle of the day, we thought we heard something brush against the side of the tent. Getting our pepper spray in our hands and talking loudly to scare away a suspected bear, nothing further happened. Maybe it was the wind.

A few minutes later, however, a shadow moved across the plastic window of the front vestibule of the tent and blocked the light coming through the window. Something had passed in front of the tent for sure. When it happened yet again, we were in hyper-alert mode. But, at that point we saw that the animal outside our tent was large and white. Fortunately, it wasn't a polar bear. It turned out to be one of many Dall sheep that had



Tors in the fog on the ridge to Mount Prindle.

moved into the area to eat the vegetation and found our tent to be a curiosity worth checking out. A few more brushes against the tent made us concerned that the sheep might tear or knock over the tent, but with a bit more yelling they moved away. When the rain finally stopped and we went outside, there were a dozen or more sheep in the area, with a few that really liked hanging around our tent. They made for great photo subjects.

Fortunately, the rain did eventually stop and on the third day we were able to walk the ridge through all the impressive rock outcroppings (tors) to the peak of Mount Prindle. All the recent rain had left a fair amount of fog in the area, so the distant views from the peak were not as spectacular as they might have been. But, walking in the tors along the ridge to the peak was really impressive – way more impressive than the tors on the

more well-known Fairbanks-area Granite Tors hike that brings in so many people.

As mentioned, our original plan after climbing to the peak was to camp out again and walk back to the car the next day. But because we lost a day to rain and I had to be at my meeting, instead of camping after walking to the peak on the third day, we hiked out to the car on that same day. The extra hiking was easy enough and the views nice enough. So, combining our hiking plans for Day Two and Day Three into one wasn't a big problem.

In the end, the whole experience was really wonderful – rain and all. It's worth a trip to Mount Prindle if you find yourself in Fairbanks.



Good view of the endless tors on the ridge after the fog cleared.

⚡ Bump 1,150+

Text and photos by Wayne L. Todd



Storm over Prince William Sound during ascent to the ridge.

Who leaves camp at 8 p.m. under stormy skies to climb a peak? An Alaskan who disbelieves the forecast near solstice.

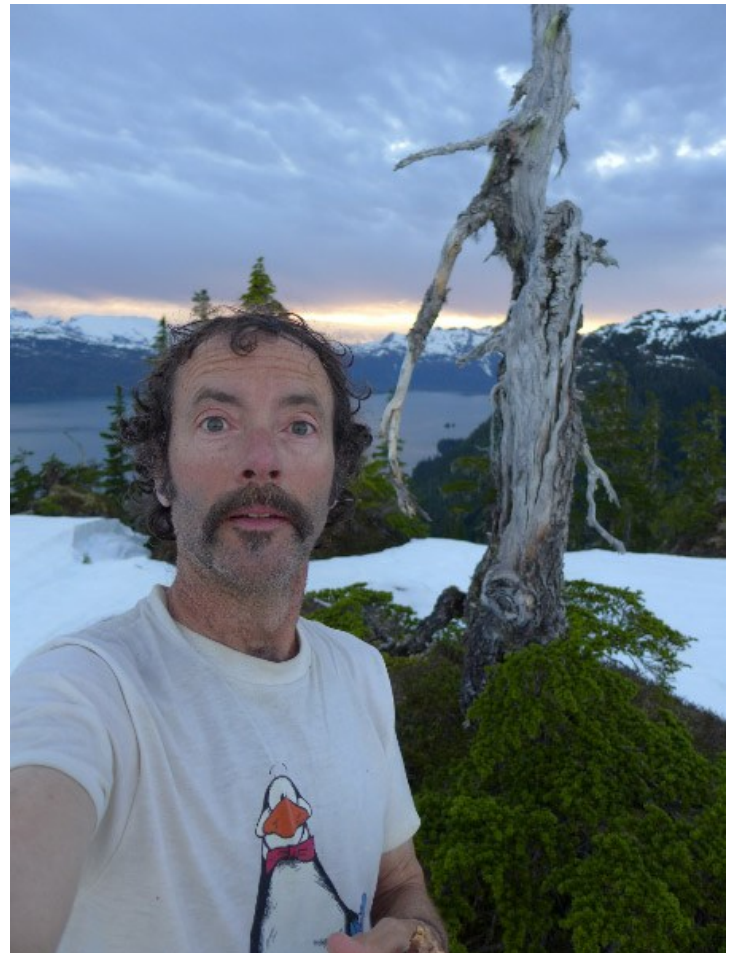
In just a couple hours, our weeklong blue sky transforms to completely grey tube-and-wave clouds. Tim and I scoff at the forecast of showers and lightning. After a tasty camp dinner of Out-back Oven pizza, I venture inland from shore with plans to climb Peak 1921 (a mere one and a half miles and 1900 vertical feet distant).

Within yards of our camp on the east shore of Unakwik Inlet, I realize this will be a shrubby 'shwack. Though not as bad as dense alders, the Prince William Sound mix of tossed rusty menziesia and wild rose dressed with a bit of devil's club still makes for slow progress. After days of mostly sitting in a sea kayak, though, this full body workout is welcome. Occasional bear scat is incentive enough for whistling and whatever noisemaking comes to mind, an advantage when traveling solo (dang, I should have brought my magic harmonica).

After 45 minutes I've gained only 500 feet, but have crossed the flats. The terrain consistently nudges me to the right, especially short open sections (though I want to go left). The indispensable Whippet and small brush hand anchors are used more and more as the slope steepens. Planting the Whippet head in dirt, and tree and branch hooking are standard uses (along with the third sharp carbide tip for traversing wet slick slopes). The bay views, peaks behind, with forefront cedar and birch trees, get more scenic with elevation gain.

Twenty yards from the ridge I suddenly encounter much more snow and, "Is that thunder?" I pause and definitely hear more loud sky-crossing booming, not that distant. The sky now seems to have a more menacing look. I wait, checking head and hands for static electricity, unsure of head static after the bushwhacking. I very slowly creep on up, still on terrain where a slip has consequence. A few more Whippet moves and brush grabs and

I can see southeast over the ridge to re-bluing skies. With thunder still posturing, I level out in a crouch under an abrupt hail/rain deluge. I quickly don rain gear and am definitely staying for this dramatic and dynamic sky show. For the next half hour I witness and photograph a slowly northwest-moving distinct sun back-lit grey-and-white rolling cloud wave. "Fluorescent" lighting, diffused by precipitation, emits between the wave and grey clouds. Dappled white clouds and clean blue skies, with a



Wayne Todd during ascent to ridge with views of Prince William Sound.

peeking moon, are left in the wake. As the storm rolls on, filtered low-angle sunlight bathes peaks and the landscape to the southeast, ever moving closer.

The wide ridgeline, studded with trees, is mostly snow covered with pockets of blue and green water pools. Blooming lupines protrude from small snow free islands. The exquisite light and scenery is stunning. Making my way around for more pictures, I realize the snow is firm below two inches of slush. Due to time, reduced light, more photo opportunities and wanting to sleep comfortably in a bag tonight, I abandon the plan of Peak 1921 and head south for Bump 🏔️ 1150.

The snow traveling is good, but the terrain undulates and curves so I compensate for time by loping. I'm careful where traveling over streams, up steep inclines or over snow bergschrunds. I scan possible descent routes while on the fly. The storm rolls on. The rolling descent curves to ascent. On Bump 🏔️ 1150 at 10:30 p.m., a quick de-clothing, photo, water, and Snickers-ing (really does satisfy) transitions to descent mode.

From a nearby point with views of camp, I whistle by numerous methods, thinking I'll be heard. Trying to remember the terrain from camp, I hurriedly descend, skirting cliffs as necessary and utilizing dozens of plant rappels and Whippet third points. After the hail and rain, everything is slick. Numerous scouts with short re-routes slow the descent, but nothing completely blocks

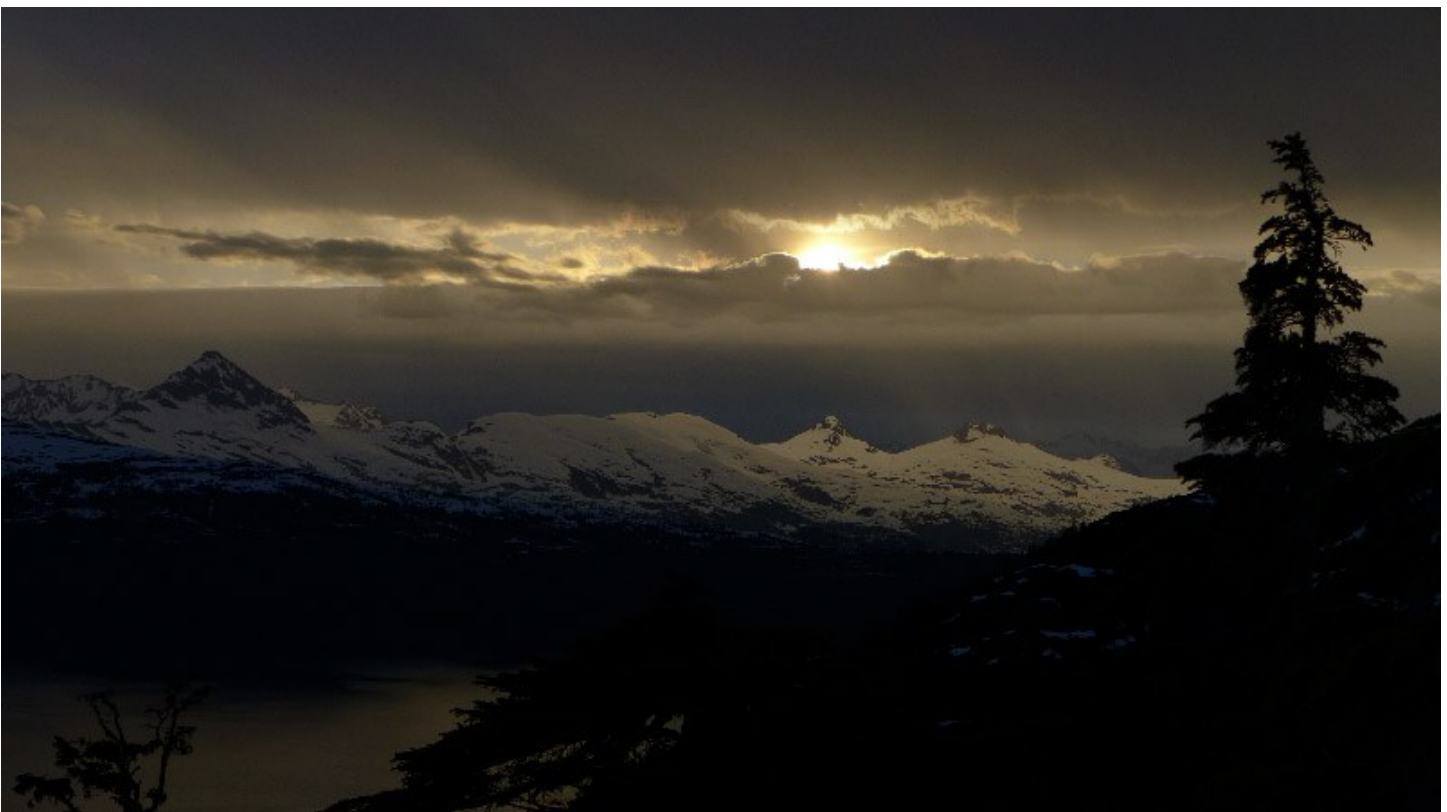
my progress. "Hey," and "Hey, bears," become part of the routine. The amazing water-barrier-lined boots have more than met their match. The sunset has ended, but light is still good.

I make my way too directly down, reach shoreline, and then get to 'shwack above near the high-tide line at times on wet sea rocks (crawling included). Passing the rinsing waterfall and the tied-off kayaks, I'm excited to tell and exchange storm stories. Hmmpphhh, camp is asleep. I graciously reflect upon my mini-adventure (only three and a half hours) as the moon reflects on the smooth water and a few thin, wispy pink clouds line the now-blue sky. Nice, an extra pizza piece waits at my tent door.

The stories and more Alaska marvels wait until the next day.

Sea kayak travels with Galen Flint, Tim Griffin (organizer), and Wendy Loya.

June 18, 2013



View of the storm over Prince William Sound.

Looking For LeMaitre

Text and photos by Tim Kelley

Just over a year ago, Michael LeMaitre [disappeared while participating in the 2012 Mount Marathon mountain running race](#).

The last time LeMaitre was seen was as he was nearing Race Point, the 3022-foot turnaround point of the race course. LeMaitre was in last place in the race, struggled to reach the turnaround point, when he met a race official that had been manning the turnaround point. The race official had tired of waiting for LeMaitre and decided to head down the mountain to the post-race party. The race official briefly talked to LeMaitre, and then he turned his back to him and left a soaking-wet race participant alone on the mountain in the clouds and cold drizzle.

After the race official's encounter with LeMaitre, what happened next is anyone's guess. Much effort was put into searching for LeMaitre, but no sign of him was ever found. The end result is that this tragic, avoidable and inexcusable loss of a human life in Alaska's biggest party-race has created one of Alaska's most perplexing unsolved mysteries.

Trying to solve problems that others have struggled with has always intrigued me. So of course, this mystery is one that I have thought about a lot. Last year, with my wife, I looked for LeMaitre. This year I gave it another try, as I will describe later.

Of course, there are many theories as to what happened to LeMaitre. It seems like you can break the theories down into three categories. Below, I list these three categories in descending order of likelihood, based on my opinions. Here are the theory categories:

1) The "conspiracy theories." With any unsolved disappearance and presumed death, there are always a number of "conspiracy theories" that pop up. These theories are often good fodder for television documentaries or bantering at barbecues, but they are unlikely to have happened.

The reason more conspiracy theories were spawned from this incident that one might imagine is likely due to an action on the part of LeMaitre's wife. His wife filed for a death certificate just a few days after he went missing. And while searching, especially by their daughter, was still in progress. This action made people wonder what was up. And as a result, theories of a life-insurance scam, using LeMaitre's military connections to quietly leave the country or hopping on a blue-water sailing boat to sail off to Mexico came to life.

Honestly – I wish one of these conspiracy theories were true. That would mean LeMaitre would be still alive. But the chance of any of these theories being reality is likely very remote.

2) The "LeMaitre reached the turnaround,

headed back down, got lost and perished" theory. This theory is probably the most widely embraced explanation of what happened to LeMaitre.

But I don't think this is what happened.

The major focus of the search efforts were done on areas below the turnaround. Meticulous grid searches were done all over the lower mountain. My wife and I searched this area too. And we could see survey tape everywhere left over from grid searches. So in my opinion these search efforts were exhaustive. Yet no sign of LeMaitre was found.

Some speculated that LeMaitre encountered a bear on the lower part of the mountain, and this was the cause of his demise. But I doubt this. Sure it's possible that he happened onto a brown bear and it attacked him, killed him and buried its "kill." But I've seen bear-kill stashes before and there is no way a search team would miss such a digging area. And encounters with an aggressive bear protecting its kill would have undoubtedly occurred on the lower mountain with all the people searching the area. But no such encounters were reported.

That no sign of LeMaitre was found in the areas below the turnaround, after extensive and exhaustive searching, seems to prove something. It likely proves that LeMaitre didn't end up on the lower mountain.

3) The "LeMaitre reached the turnaround and kept going up the mountain" theory. I believe that this most likely is what happened.

Before I go on, one must realize that LeMaitre had never been



The Race Point turnaround rock. Behind the rock is the well-defined trail that heads west toward the summit of Marathon Mountain.

to the race turnaround before. So he didn't know what to look for or what to expect. It was cloudy and there were no people at the turnaround, not even a race official, to let him know he had made it to the far end of the race course, and to turn around and head back down.

So likely, LeMaitre kept going past the turnaround point.

But wasn't it obvious the trail looped around the Race Point rock and headed back down?

No! The only "obvious" trail, especially when you are in the clouds and have never been to this place before, is the trail that goes past the turnaround and rock continues UP the ridge.

Even in clear weather you can make the mistake of going past the race point turnaround rock. I remember the first time I went up the Mount Marathon race trail. It was back in 1981 (yeah, a long time ago). I was new to Alaska and was training with a few cross-country ski racing friends. I got to the Race Point rock and kept running on the well-defined trail that went past the rock. My friends yelled at me that I had passed the turnaround. I was confused. Didn't my friends tell me that we were going to the "top?"

The picture on page nine shows the trail that continues uphill, just past the race course turn-around rock. You can see how well defined the trail is. This trail could easily convince a tired race newbie, alone in the clouds, that it is the "main" trail to the "top."

Another point I'd like to make about the above picture is that this trail beyond the turnaround rock is gaining elevation. The trail is still going UP. And this leads me to an issue of cultural ignorance that has forever surrounded the Mount Marathon race. And that is the knowledge of what the "top of the mountain" actually is.

It's endless, the numbers of times you hear people say, or even journalists write, that the Mount Marathon race goes to the "top of the mountain" and back down. Such statements are very ignorant and completely false. The sum-

mit of Mount Marathon (actually "Marathon Mountain" on USGS maps) is 2 miles west and about 1,800 feet higher than Race Point, a location on the east ridge of Marathon Mountain where the race course turns around. The race doesn't even go close to the top of a mountain. It goes to a random point on a ridge. This highpoint was chosen a long time ago merely because you could see it from a downtown Seward bar. Not because it was the "top of a mountain."

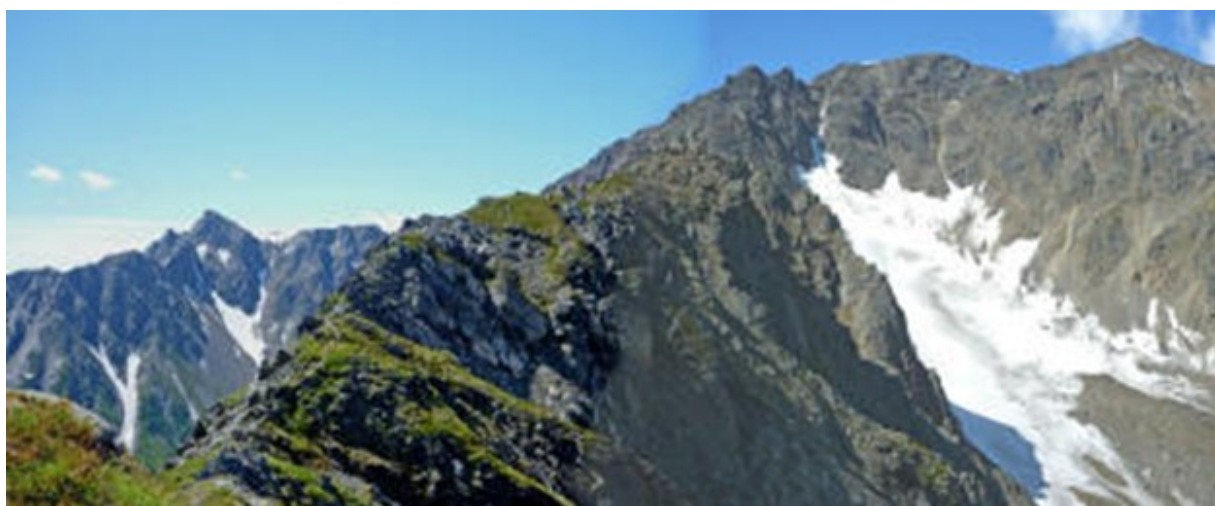
So, say you are Michael LeMaitre. You have never hiked to the turnaround point of the Mount Marathon race course before. And even if you had been to the top of the course, it is very likely you weren't there in weather as soaked in and crappy as this day, which makes everything look unfamiliar. But you have read about people racing to "the top of the mountain." And you have heard countless Alaskans talk about racing to "the top of the mountain."

After this barrage of misinformation, it would be easy for LeMaitre to think: "I turn around when I reach the 'top.'" But when he gets to the Race Point rock, in thick clouds and when no one is there, and he sees a defined trail going UP and continuing west, he says to himself: "I'm not at the top yet; I've got to keep going up." It is no stretch of imagination that this never-dying ignorance about what the top of a mountain is could have been a factor in LeMaitre's demise.

As often is the case with outdoor tragedies in Alaska, deaths can be attributed to not just one mistake, but a series of mistakes. And often with such tragedies, people don't realize they are making a series of mistakes. Such was possibly the situation LeMaitre ended up in.

At Race Point Lemaitre could have made his third mistake. The first mistake was to trust that the Seward Chamber of Commerce had even the management competence to put on a safe race for slow competitors like him. The second mistake was to assume that people he talked to had a clue as to what the term "top of the mountain" meant. So as a result of these previous mistakes, alone and unmonitored, he continued up and westward toward precarious terrain, his third mistake.

Once past Race Point the trail along the ridge heading west does something that would have endangered LeMaitre. And that is, it



Approaching the "sketchy" section of the east ridge that leads up to Marathon Mountain.

gets easy for a while.

At this point LeMaitre, dressed in shorts and a T-shirt, was no doubt soaking wet from sweat and the cold drizzle of the day. As the terrain eased, LeMaitre's heart rate would have gone down. He would have been generating less body heat and wouldn't have been able to offset the chilling effects of temperatures in the 50s and light rain. And if there were a breeze on

this exposed ridge, that would have increased his rate of heat loss even more.

Dehydration, from two hours of exertion without drinking anything, would also start playing a factor. You get colder faster when you are wet and dehydrated. And when you get cold and your body temperature starts declining, your thinking is often impaired as you approach the realm of hypothermia.

Just under a mile past Race Point the ridge narrows and starts getting steep and sketchy. I used to peak bag mountains a lot with Bill Spencer, and in areas like this we would talk about our "sketch-o-meters." Often the person climbing in front would encounter problem terrain and make the comment like: "Hmm. Looks like my sketch-o-meter is getting close to 10." That would mean the terrain is getting really gnarly and exposed and its passage is going to require roping up. In this area my sketch-o-meter was in the 4 to 5 range. But it would have been in the 7 range if it were a wet day like the day LeMaitre was on the mountain.

If LeMaitre got to this point, I can't believe that he would have continued on. If he did, he probably soon figured out he was off-track and turned back. But being in such climbing terrain has dangers if you are cold and tired. Slow and careful climbing will cause you to get even colder.

Perhaps this was the case if LeMaitre were at this point. If he

were here and he finally figured out that he had gone too far up the ridge, he would have known he was in trouble. He would have known he was getting too cold. And he would have known he had to get down off the ridge.

Should that have been the case, he could have easily made his next mistake. And that was to not retrace his route, and to descend down one of the gullies to the north.

I'm no expert on mountain running. But this part of Marathon Mountain, beyond the mountain runners' realm, is the terrain where Alaskan peakbaggers like me spend a lot of time. So, one thing I have a lot of experience with is making BAD route decisions high in the mountains. And I know how easy it is to be lured into making bad route decisions.

If LeMaitre was at this point and getting hypothermic, he would look to both sides of the ridge for an escape route. There are



Climbing up into a gully from the snowfields. Note the dust being whipped up. Winds cause a lot of erosion and rockfall here.



Looking for signs of LeMaitre in snow wells in a gully next to cliffs. It would be hard to spot someone in these places from a helicopter.



Looking down a gully to the snowfield (glacier) below. It looks like it would be easy to drop down. But it's deceptive.

snowfields in the valley to the north, steep tundra and cliffs to the south. In my opinion he would have dropped down to the north. He would have been lured by the “snowfield sirens,” as I call them.

Snowfields always look inviting. They are easy to travel on and seem to always have the illusion of being “not that far” below you. And when you are in the clouds, the side of the ridge that has snow always seems brighter and more inviting than the dark and foreboding snow-less side.

It’s conceivable that LeMatitre, if he were in this predicament, would have tried to descend one of the several gullies in this area to the snowfield at the base of the valley to the north. He might have thought that once he got down to the snowfields he could start running again and get warmed up. Maybe he remembered the race director telling everyone to “go right” (i.e., north) once you reach “the top,” to get on the descent trail. So, perhaps this directive was a factor in him deciding to descend here.

But these gullies are tougher than they look from up on top of the ridge. While in this area, I hiked down into a few gullies from the top and then hiked around and up into the same gullies from below. Even though these were “logical” gullies one might descend, you could see that they would be challenging to descend on wet rock like the conditions were on July 4th, 2012.

When descents like these get sketchy, due to wet rocks or unexpected cliffs, you can end up spending a lot of time slowly working your way around problem spots. And if you are hypothermic, you are likely not able to be make good route decisions or balance well.

So perhaps this area is where LeMaitre’s Mount Marathon run ended. From what I have learned from sources close to the search efforts, this area was not a focus of ground searches as much as the lower sections of the mountain. There is a lot of extreme terrain here that could hide a body. And this is unstable, “active terrain” where frequent rockfall could cover a body.

Like I said before, trying to solve problems that are tough to solve has always intrigued me. As I searched the gullies on the

north side of this ridge, I hoped that my logic would lead me to solve the LeMaitre disappearance mystery. But it didn’t. I, along with many others, would like to see this mystery solved one day. Hopefully this account will spur others that like to solve real-life mysteries to come up with their own scenarios as to what happened. And then go out and look for Michael LeMaitre.



I wish I could speak mountain goat, because these Marathon Mountain residents I met might know what happened to LeMaitre.



Below: An inscription on the Race Point turn-around rock, made by LeMaitre's daughter at the end of her month-long search effort for her father last summer.



Accessing the Eklutna Glacier

Text and photos by William Finley, unless otherwise noted.

[One hundred years ago](#) getting on the Eklutna Glacier was a total stroll. Ride your pack horse around Eklutna Lake and well before the valley chokes you could get up on the glacier and be tromping up ice with nary a thought about rockfall. Even in the '60s you could still drive around Eklutna Lake and get a glimpse of the glacier from the river. Of course, things changed rapidly in the past 50 years. And anyone who has been climbing back there in the past 20 years knows that it has been changing really, really fast in the past few years.

My first glimpse of the glacier was in the mid-'90s. We biked around the lake and then hiked up the climbers' trail to the bench overlooking the basin below Miter Mite. The glacier, broad and easy to access, was a stone's throw away. I didn't actually get up on the Eklutna Glacier until a few years later. We did the Eklutna Traverse and came down the glacier, which was a simple tongue of blue ice leading to easy moraine leading to the basin below Miter Mite. It was a mindless descent, which in mountaineering speak means you can zone out and enjoy the views and focus on what kind of pizza and beer you're going to order instead of worrying about anchors and moulins.

A couple years later I went back and climbed Freer's Tears – that wonderful ice climb that is at the top of the Bellicose Peak/Benign Peak drainage. To access the gully we had to traverse just below the tongue of the glacier and glacier ice extended well past the base and partially up into the gully. Since then things have gone changed fast. The ice has made a hasty retreat out of the basin, which has in turn exposed the bottom of the Bellicose/Benign Gully, which has turned it into a nasty gully of steep, loose, car-sized boulders. Even before the glacier was in full retreat mode this gully was terrible. The top was 60-degree frozen kitty litter; now it's 60-degree loose car-sized boulders topped by 60-degree melted kitty litter. Go near it and you can understand why it has seen at least one [near fatal accident](#).

Apart from those two forays onto the glacier, it had been nearly a decade since I had last been up on the glacier. And so when we headed up there in May 2013, we asked around and were told what gear to bring and what to expect. Gear included steel crampons, ice tools, ice screws, and v-thread tools. In other

words – expect the worst. We set out with all the above, plus more, and found pleasant ski conditions from the river all the way to the glacier. Once at the toe of the glacier, we harnessed up, but left the rope in the pack. We were then able to z-track up climbers' right side of the glacier and traverse along the toe of the glacier until reaching a ramp that put us within spitting distance of the flat ground above. Skis on pack, one short simple step over an ice fin, and we were on the glacier with little effort.

Retreat down the glacier was just as easy. We carved turns unroped down to within 50 feet of the ice step, roped up, placed one screw for protection and then down-climbed to the moraine bench where we threw on the skis and carved turns down the side to the glacier toe.



Eric Parsons approaching the Eklutna Glacier in July 2013. Note the rock glacier and gully.

All the woes of accessing the Eklutna Glacier were forgotten, and before we knew it we were back down to the flats and focusing on pizza and beer.

A couple months later we opted to head back up on the glacier with the intention of climbing Benign Peak via the "Flatiron Gully" route. Supposedly the Flatiron Gully route is moderate and safe(r) – whereas the other route that has become standard, the waterfall route (a gully in the vicinity of Serenity Falls), has a long, exposed section of 3rd and 4th Class and some vertical alder

climbing. Note that I don't mention the Bellicose/Benign Gully. This shouldn't be attempted anymore. This route has become a death trap and even in mid-winter this route remains a death trap. If you're dying to climb Freer's Tears, be aware that the objective danger on the approach is through the roof. The same goes for The Shroud route on Bellicose Peak. Bellicose should be accessed via the Wall Street Glacier instead of via this gully.

Anyway, we headed back in July to try the Flatiron Gully route, which is the gully that is south of the Bellicose/Benign Gully and it is accessed via a bench on the west side of the Eklutna Glacier at roughly 3500 feet. And because we had easily accessed the glacier in May, I thought it would be easy, and thus to save weight, packed lightweight crampons, a third tool (instead of a legitimate ice tool), 30 meters of rope (instead of 60), and left the v-thread tool at home.



Eric Parsons at around 3,000 feet on the second icefall of the Eklutna Glacier in July 2013.

Biking around the lake in July is certainly easier than in May, and within an hour we were ditching the bikes and wading out in the West Fork of the Eklutna River, which is where the troubles started: my partner, Eric Parsons, waded out into the river first, pushed through, and soon was standing on the opposite bank stumbling around trying to get the feeling back in his toes. It should be noted that Eric is about 6 inches taller than I and probably four times as strong. The water came up to his waist. I pushed out into the water and it came to my belly button. And it pushed hard – like stumble-and-catch-myself –with-trekking-poles hard. I made it across without an incident – but noted that below our crossing was a canyon of Grade IV rapids and that there was no way I would repeat the crossing again.

From there we made quick progress up the faint climbers' trail to the basin below Miter Mite. Whereas we had ascended the frozen river in May, we were now forced to scramble over steep, polished rock – but travel was easy enough. Once in the basin, we had to once again cross the river, but this time the crossing was all of knee deep and easy.

Then the fun started. What in May had been a simple skin now required a traverse across a shifting, groaning rock glacier. The traverse started with a jog across the Bellicose/Benign Gully to a *safe-enough* zone where we transitioned from sneakers to mountain boots. Then up and across the rock glacier, which consisted of glacier ice covered with mud and rock that shifted with every step. It should be mentioned that above the rock glacier is a wall of loose rock that is routinely shedding the ubiquitous microwave-sized block.

The rock glacier is one of those glaciers where you can't decide whether to wear crampons or not. If you choose to wear crampons, every step feels like you're going to slip on a rock, rip crampons off boots, and take a tumble. If you opt not to wear

crampons, it feels like every step you're going to slip on ice and take a tumble. It should be noted that taking a tumble is not an option.

And so across the rock glacier we went, with one eye on the wall above and one eye on feet below (occasional glances to the maw of glacier below). The worst of the rock glacier only lasts for about 500 feet and then you're on moraine with less risk of rockfall and can work your way over to the ice fins. Once at the ice fins, dig out the rope, screws, and ice tools. Or if you're like me, and naively thought that getting on the glacier would be easy, stand at the base and sheepish announce that you can't lead this because your crampons are about to rip off with every step.

Getting up the ice fin requires about 75 feet of mellow ice with a short, vertical step at the very top. Once on top, you keep working your way up the fin for about 300 feet of 30-degree ice. Again, a rather mellow prospect with the correct gear, but not so mellow if you're convinced your crampon is going to blow at any second. It should once again be noted that taking a tumble is not an option.

And then you're there. Once up on the flats in mid-summer you can put away the rope and easily walk up the glacier because all the crevasses are well exposed.

We didn't make it anywhere near the Flatiron Gully. It had taken us five hours to get from the parking lot onto the glacier proper, and we estimated that from where we were to the summit would take us another eight hours; so after tromping around on the glacier for a while, we turned and headed down.

Getting off the Eklutna in July requires a rappel off the ice fin. An anchor works best if you carry a v-thread tool. I didn't, so after mucking around trying to grab the rope with webbing we ended up chopping an ice bollard. Ice bollards aren't really that inspiring, but it held – at least for 50 feet. To save weight I had brought a 30-meter rope, which meant we were unroping and down-climbing the last bit off the ice fin. But whatever, it worked. And soon we were working our way back down the rock glacier and eventually across the upper river braids and back to the climbers' trail. To add insult to injury, we opted to bushwhack for a mile back to the bridge and then walk up the road for a mile in order to avoid crossing the river, which at this point was about nipple deep.

All that said, I must now expound on access to the Eklutna Glacier in mid-summer. Gone are the days when you can just head up there with a mountain axe. As others told me (and I promptly ignored), you will want: (1) at least 50 meters of glacier rope, (2) ice tools, (3) ice screws, (4) steel crampons, and (5) a v-thread tool. These will get you on the glacier, but they don't really do anything for you in terms of the rock glacier that you

have to traverse. Traversing the rock glacier is an exercise in trust. Trust that the rock and mud won't slide off the ice under your feet, trust that the rocks won't come bouncing down on your head from above, and trust that you won't tumble down into the maw of the glacier below. Chances are your feet won't fail you and you'd have to be pretty dumb to fall the entire way down to the toe of the glacier (not to say that climbers can't be dumb), but the rockfall is one of those things that you tend to just ignore because there's nothing you can really do about it.

The objective danger is really, *really* high for what should be a fun outing. It's a shame that this access, and the peaks off the Eklutna Glacier, which had been a summer destination for the Southcentral Alaska mountaineering community for decades, have now become too dangerous for the average climber with an average aversion to risk. Of course, some will argue that the current access weeds out the average and beginner climbers, thus making Pichler's Perch a quiet respite for the summer (after the usual busy spring mountaineering season). I can kind of see that side of thought, but digging through the hut logs shows a hut that in recent years has become virtually unused from July to September – whereas only 10 years ago there was a steady stream of visitors from March to September. There should be a balance between a hut that is too accessible (i.e., the Mint Hut) and too inaccessible (i.e., Bock's Den).

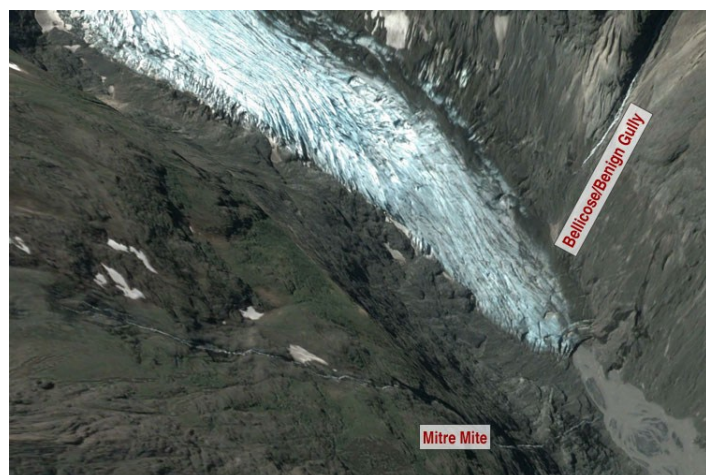
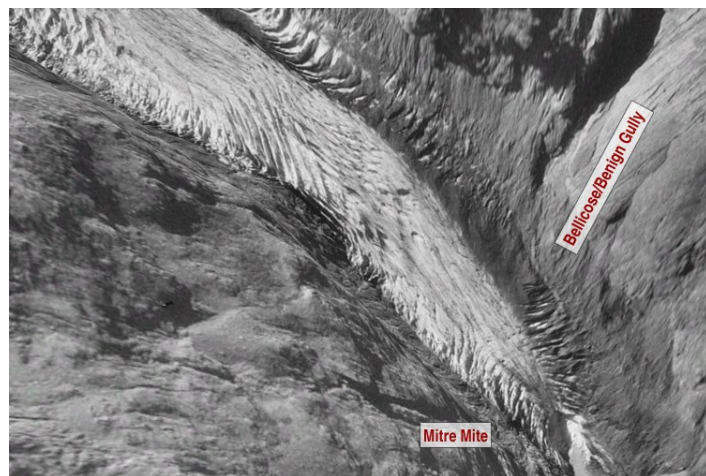
In the recent past, climbers have pioneered a route up the climbers' left side of the glacier – but the route requires delicate 3rd and 4th Classing on gravel ledges and the protection is non-existent. Given that the glacier is just going to continue to retreat and that access will continue to get harder, perhaps it's time to adopt European ethics and bolt some anchors for a running belay up the left-hand side of the glacier. Of course, this proposal will grate on the nerves of some climbers who a) like that the Eklutna Glacier is seeing less use, and b) firmly believe that loose-gravelly fall-you-die ledges are rites of passage in the mountains. Thus, you're unlikely to see any type of consensus when it comes to establishing an easier route any time soon.

In short, getting on the Eklutna Glacier in mid- to late summer requires a willingness to expose yourself to a high-level objective danger. Until we reach the point where climbers are willing to agree to anchor placement for access, you're on your own and you'll need to bring lots of gear and a big bag of tricks if you want to get up on the Eklutna Glacier between July and November.

Right: The Eklutna Glacier in 1915, image taken by U.S. Geological Survey geologist Stephen Reid Capps.



Scree – September 2013



Above: The terminus of the Eklutna Glacier in 1996, 2000, and 2011 (top to bottom). Photos from Google Earth Historic Images.

Right: The Eklutna Glacier in 2010, image taken by Ron Karpilo.



Neacola Nightmare

Text and photo by Carl Battreall

I hate cold water. I always have. When I was a teenager I wanted to surf, but the water in central California was too cold for me, even with a wetsuit. I have never liked like cold swimming pools or swimming holes, no matter how hot the outside temperatures were. When I moved to Alaska, my dislike of cold water grew. I learned that it was possibly the most dangerous thing in the state, more dangerous than the bears or avalanches, cold water was an unforgiving killer and I swore to avoid it as much as possible.

We landed on the shores of the ethereal Turquoise Lake. It was late afternoon and we had many miles to cover. There were four of us: lead guide Andy, clients Colin and Patrick, and me, the tag-along. I was not a client or a guide, however. I was not an outside observer, I was part of the group and I wanted to make sure that everyone felt that way.

There have been many stories of photographers who joined expeditions, brought on because of their mountain skills, not their photography skills, and who later let their teams down, putting photography above the welfare of the group. I was not going to be that photographer. This was not my trip.

We worked our way upvalley, switching between boots and river shoes, crossing braided streams, then rocky cliffs. It was drizzling and I was not amused. Alaska was having the best weather of any summer anyone could remember, except in the Alaska and Aleutian Ranges and except for me. This was my third trip this year and once again the weather was foul. But my mood was still high, this was only Day One of a 12-day trip, the weather would get better.

Our goal that day was to camp near the firn line on the Turquoise Glacier. There is only one way to get onto the Turquoise Glacier and that was on the other side of the river. We marched

on spongy, glowing green moss and around black lichen-blanketed rocks. A fine mist hung on the mountaintops. We felt we were sneaking into the mountains of Mordor; there was a gloomy, dark feeling to everything around us.

We reached the crossing spot, a place Andy had crossed before. It looked big, swift, and scary. Andy went out a third of a way in the brown river and decided that it was too swift. It was already 7:00 p.m. and we were wet and hungry, so we decided to camp at the crossing and tackle it in the morning when the volume would be lower and we would be warm and well rested.

We had a great dinner under the cooking tarp, learning about each other, telling jokes, sipping a little whisky (Colin owns a

popular bar in Washington, D.C., and had brought up some of his finest drink). The rain let up around 10:00 p.m. and I spent the last hours of daylight photographing the moody cliffs and the abundant waterfalls that descended down every gully.



Carl Battreall photographalaska.com

One of the many streams raging out of the mountains and into the Turquoise River in the Neacola Mountains.

We got up early, but had a leisurely breakfast; no one seemed motivated to tackle the river. It had rained all night and the river looked more swollen than the night before. During our after-dinner explorations we had discovered a heavily braided section upriver and decided that would be the better crossing.

We were already a little behind schedule and had a huge day ahead of us, including a high, steep pass. We needed to get moving. We lugged our monster packs to the first of many braids and put on our river shoes, wrapping our boots over the back of our necks. We were only a mile from the toe of the glacier and the water was cold, evil cold; ice chunks were floating by. Quickly my feet went numb as we splashed through braid after braid, looking for a good spot, nothing. My feet slowly became bricks, lacking feeling. I was feeling nervous and apprehensive; I was having doubts the river would go. My feet hurt.

"Can we go another way, the other side of the glacier?" I asked Andy, the only one familiar with the area.

"No, the river is the only way," he insisted. He had crossed the river multiple times before; it would go.

I have always been known as Mr. Safety, the guy who always turns back. I have had many disgruntled climbing partners, not impressed with my lack of courage and unwillingness to push the safety envelope. Part of me wanted to just say, "No, no way," and yet I didn't want to be that guy again, safety boy, the one to alter the trip, end the journey.

We found a spot, 10 feet across, but moving fast. We were all starting to shiver a little; it was time, now or never. We set up a pack line, Andy, then Patrick, Colin, and me at the tail. We listened to Andy's commands: left, right, left, right. I kept my head down, swearing to myself that I wouldn't swim. We were hardly moving, I looked up and witnessed water boiling deeper up Andy, nearing his navel. Colin was shaking; so was I.

And then it all ended.

Andy went first; in slow motion I watched him go by, down the river. Then Patrick, six-foot-four and 250 pounds, gone. Colin and I held our ground, but it was useless, down went Colin.

I screamed; I was going to die the way I told myself I never would, via cold water. The next thing I knew I was underwater.

Proper river-swimming etiquette goes like this: unbuckle your waist and sternum straps before crossing. Take pack off and sit, facing downriver, feet up. You then use one arm to paddle to shore while the other arm holds onto your pack.

What I was doing was textbook, all right – textbook on how to die!

I was rolling sideways down the river, like a big rock. Underwater, then above, under, then above. I screamed for help each time my head was up. What had I done wrong? I had made a stupid, critical decision; I had kept my sternum strap on.

I tried to unsnap it while I was rolling but my hands were unresponsive and I was panicking, Mr. Calm and Collected was freaking out. Then I snapped out of it.

"Shut up, Carl, no one is going to save you; save yourself," my brain said, ignoring my cries for help. I struggled and got myself pointed downriver, looked at the river, and realized I was about to float near the shore, I flipped, swam like hell, and clawed the bank; I made it.

I lay there, halfway in the river screaming at my useless hands as I tried to undo the strap. Finally, I got it unbuckled and dragged myself onto the shore. I put my head in my hands and tried to comprehend what just happened, why I did what I did. I was terrified, but alive. I looked up and saw Patrick way upriver; Andy and Colin were down near me. Andy looked at me and gave me the thumbs up, I returned the signal. Then put my head in my hands again. I looked at my legs, gushing blood, my feet were purple, swollen, cuts everywhere. One of my river shoes had been torn off. My ankle looked broken, but I didn't feel any pain, but there could be no way that I was okay; every-

thing looked bad. I looked up. Andy was still staring at me. Again he signaled, thumbs up or down? Down I signaled this time.

Something else seemed wrong; I couldn't see well, I had lost my glasses. Luckily, I had a pair of prescription sunglasses, too. But something else was not right and then I realized I was on the other side of the river; they were not.

I was shivering and then my years of experience kicked in.

"You're on your own now; time to get moving," I thought.

I stripped naked right there on the rocks, opened my pack, pulled out my dry bag, and opened it with worry, but everything was dry. I put on warm dry layers and socks. I grabbed my tent, sleeping bag, water, and a little food. I looked at Andy; he knew what I was going to do. I also noticed that Colin was jumping up and down and that he didn't have a pack.

"Where's Colin's pack?" I yelled across the river. Andy pointed down the river.

I don't think I have ever set up a tent so fast and within a few minutes I was in my dry sleeping bag, eating food and getting warm. I sat there, angry at myself.

Ego usually plays the main role in mountain accidents. Had my ego played a role? Was being tough and brave suddenly important to me? It was strange. Part of me did believe the river would go and we made a team decision, my gut, however, knew it was a bad idea. No one was at fault, but I couldn't shake the feeling that I had messed up, that I let ego prevail.

And then there was the sternum strap issue that almost drowned me. It was a conscious decision. I knew better, but I still didn't unbuckle it. I think part of what I was thinking was that an explorer never loses his pack; your pack is your life. The other thing was that the pack was heavy and the sternum strap kept me balanced. If I had been calm, I would have unbuckled the strap as soon as I saw Andy swim. But I wasn't calm; I was cold, scared, stubborn, and was NOT GOING TO SWIM! If I would have just relaxed and went with the river, my swim would have been a much less dramatic an experience.

An hour later I heard my name called. I crawled out; Andy was on a gravel bar mid-river.

"Are you okay?" he yelled.

"Yes, I have got food; I am warm and I think I can hike out," I screamed over the rage of the river.

"Okay, we are heading out; I will return, maybe tonight." He waved and the three of them descended into the mist.

While I had a terrible swim, the others did fine. Andy got beat up a little and lost a river shoe. Patrick managed to muscle himself to shore on his hands and knees. His knees were swollen and he had lost his boots, but he was in good spirits. Colin, the one with the least experience, had a smooth swim, calm and relaxed, until a huge rock hit him in between his legs, making him let go of his pack.

They hiked the four miles down to the lakeshore. Colin carried Patrick's pack because he had no boots. On the way down they watched Colin's pack float by and get stuck on a bar in the middle of the river. When they reached the shore, Andy called Lake Clark Air and scheduled a pick up for Patrick and Colin. He also told them to "bring me a packraft."

Back in the tent I kept going over and over the event in my head. I couldn't shake it. I was mad and disappointed in myself. I believed the trip was done, I mean, Colin's pack was gone (I didn't know at the time that Patrick didn't have boots, either). I tried to listen to music, but realized everything on my iPod was sad and depressing. Then I remembered that I downloaded a bunch of "Wait, Wait Don't Tell Me" podcasts – just what I needed to lighten my mood.

I was still very concerned about my legs and especially my feet. They were very swollen, but I felt no pain nor did any of the cuts hurt. I cleaned out as many as I could, but ran out of wound-care supplies. I tried to keep them elevated.

Twenty-four hours passed and still no Andy. Plenty of scenarios were running through my head. Again, my self-preservation mentality kicked in; I decided to prepare for my escape. First I needed to decide if I was going to be able to hike. My feet felt really strange; was it a cold related injury, an impact injury, or were they swollen for other reasons? I decided to hike up to the glacier to see if I could cross at the toe and come back down. Andy was positive it would not go, but I would rather take my chances with a glacier than a river, no matter how sketchy it was.

My feet worked, they felt strange, but no pain. The glacier would go; I was sure of it. Unfortunately, on the other side of the river, near the glacier's toe, was one of the most spectacular and frightening waterfalls I had ever seen. It exploded out of the mountain with utter rage and descended to the main river without hesitation; it was impassable. Another option was to head downriver, but at some point the river hugs the cliffs and I would be screwed.

I didn't want to accept it, but I was going to have to cross again.

Survival mode sent me into a series of decisions. I couldn't cross without poles. So I took my tripod apart and created two poles with its legs. My pack was too heavy to cross by myself or to swim with, so I needed to lighten up. The bear canister was drenched inside so I took out all the food. Everything that was waterlogged – rice, noodles, and granola – I dumped in the river. I decided to keep four days' worth of food. I didn't have a stove, so I dumped my fuel.

The rain had stopped and a good breeze came from downvalley. I draped all my wet gear on the bushes. My plan was to watch this small stream on the other side. It would be my judge on how much water was coming out of the mountains. The night before the swim it was just a trickle, now it was flowing really well. When that creek went down, I would look for a crossing.

An hour later I saw two figures heading my way on the other side. It was Andy and Colin. Colin? Why was he still here? He didn't have a pack, but was carrying something in his hands.

Andy had a pack. They walked past me and went to an area where there were no braids in the river. Andy looked at me, made a swimming motion and pointed at the spot.

"No way!" I thought, "He wants me to just dive in and swim?" I packed slowly, trying to imagine the suffering I was about to endure. Then I saw him blowing up a raft. (I would later find out he made a paddling motion, not a swimming one.)

We then shuttled the packraft back and forth, first with my pack and then with me in it. It went without a hitch and the raft ride was fun. Morale shot through the roof as we headed downstream.

"We plan to keep going," Andy said. I stopped.

"What? Colin doesn't have a pack!"

"We rescued it with the packraft!" Colin exclaimed.

With heavy heart I broke the news that I had dumped food and fuel. They had also lost food because of flooded bear barrels, but they were bound and determined to continue the adventure. We stopped at the bottom of a pass that led to a different route. I got caught up in their enthusiasm and agreed to continue with them.

They hiked down to retrieve the rest of their gear and I stayed and rested. They were gone about three hours, long enough for me to come to grips with the fact that the trip was over for mCoe. I was still rattled mentally and my feet were not right. Together, we barely had enough food and fuel for three or four days. We had a ton of extra gear: packraft, paddles, and ropes.

When they returned I told them I was going to head out. It just made sense; I was a third wheel now, possibly injured. I would carry the extra gear out and would give them my food. The fuel would last longer with just the two of them. I decided to stay one last night with them. We ate well and sipped more whisky from the one flask that survived the river.

The next morning I left my two wet friends huddled under a tarp. My pack weighed more than it did when we started the trip, but I was happy to help them out. I wanted Colin to have a good adventure in Alaska. I was jealous that they were able to continue.

I marched for three hours under a heavy burden, both physically and mentally. It rained the entire time. My lifeless feet crossed slippery boulders, skirted cliffs, and crossed braided stream after braided stream. The Neacola Mountains were doing everything they could to encourage my departure. For the first time in my life I felt rejected by the mountains.

I set up my tent on the shore of Turquoise Lake and waited for the plane. Then the rain stopped and brightness overtook my tent. I crawled out to some glorious sun, the first I had seen the entire trip, and at that moment the sound of the plane echoed through the valley. And for the first time in my life I said out loud, "I hate you mountains."

Peak of the Month: Hound's Tooth

By Steve Gruhn

Mountain Range: Alaska Range

Borough: Matanuska-Susitna Borough

Drainages: Buckskin Glacier and Coffee Glacier

Latitude/Longitude: 62° 58' 17" North, 150° 33' 46" West

Elevation: 7550 (±50) feet

Prominence: 1,000 feet from Broken Tooth (9050)

Adjacent Peaks: Peak 7350 in the Buckskin Glacier and Coffee Glacier drainages and Peak 6368 in the Coffee Glacier drainage

Distinctness: 700 feet from Peak 7350

USGS Map: Talkeetna (D-2)

First Recorded Ascent: June 15, 1980, by Dan Cauthorn and Peter Speer

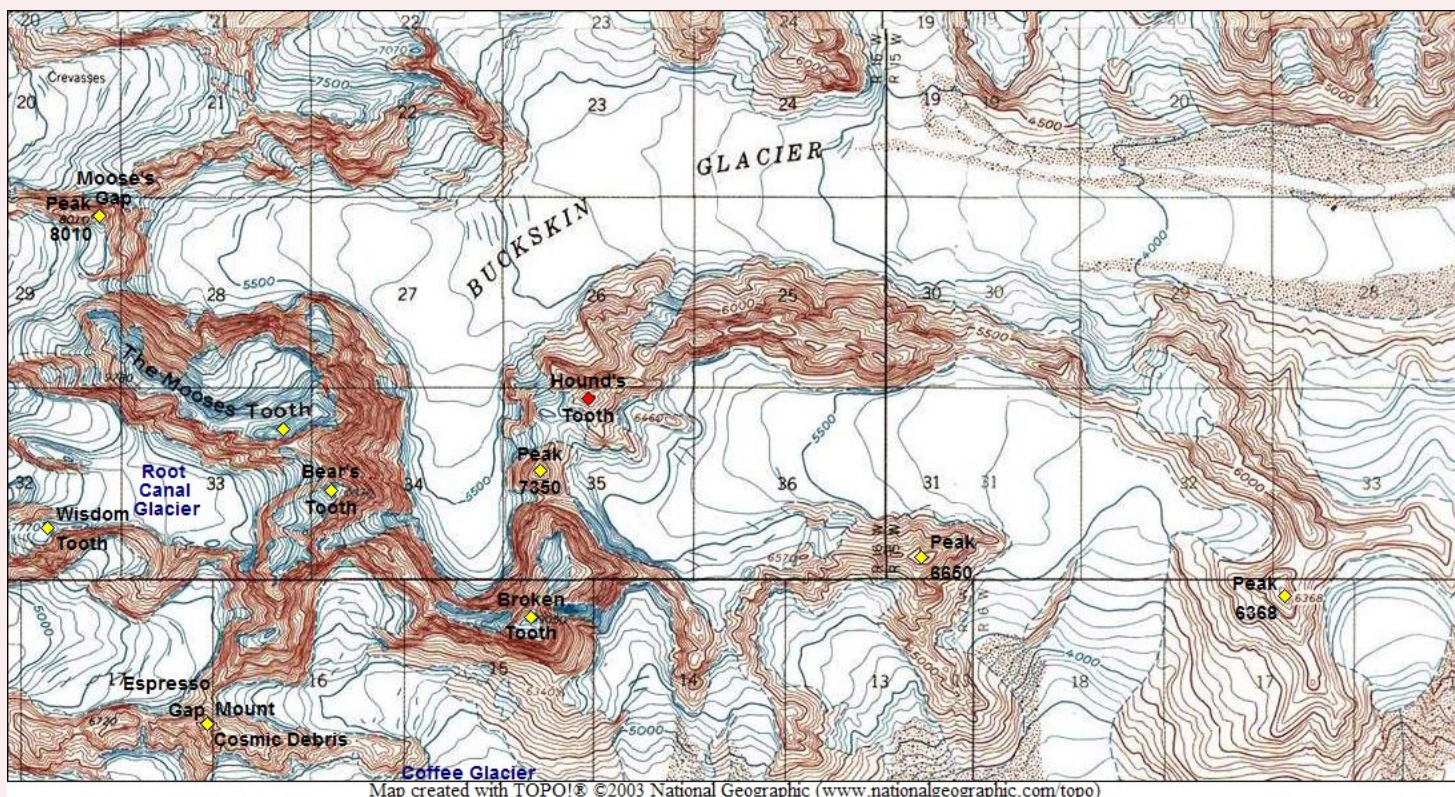
Route of First Recorded Ascent: Western slopes

Access Point: Buckskin Glacier

On June 15, 1980, from the Buckskin Glacier, Dan Cauthorn and Peter Speer climbed the west slope of Hound's Tooth. Their route was a snow and rock scramble that took three hours to complete. Because of the peak's location north of Broken Tooth and east of The Mooses Tooth, they proposed the name Hound's Tooth.

I don't know of any other ascents of Hound's Tooth.

The information for this article came from Speer's trip report titled "P 7500 ("Hound's Tooth")," which appeared on page 158 of the 1980 *American Alpine Journal*.



Mountaineering Club of Alaska

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Annual membership dues: Single \$15, Family \$20

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