

SCREE

MOUNTAINEERING CLUB OF ALASKA

BOX 2037

ANCHORAGE, ALASKA 99510

OCTOBER 1974

VOL. 15, NO. 10

OCTOBER MEETING...Wednesday, October 16, 1974...8:00 PM...Pioneer School House...3rd & Eagle. ELECTION OF OFFICERS WILL TAKE PLACE - COME AND VOTE! Tom Meacham will show slides of his Brooks Range trip.

BOARD MEETING: Time and place to be announced by new President.

HIKING: SATURDAY, OCTOBER 12, RAINBOW CREEK, Leaders Dave and Carol DeVoe, 333-5492. Will climb to Helga Mountain. Meet at ValuMart at 8:00 AM.

MINUTES OF GENERAL MEETING, September 18, 1974, 8:00 PM, Pioneer School House, 3rd & Eagle, Anchorage, Alaska.

Meeting was called to order by Acting President, Dona Agosti, because of the absence of Bill Barnes, Jr. and Gil Todd. Tom Meacham showed slides of the Club hike to Skilak Overlook.

Minutes of the August meeting as they appeared in the September issue of SCREE were approved. The Treasurer's report was as follows: Expenses \$199.63. Income \$55.15. Checking \$796.40. Savings \$382.83 and Cash \$47.00 for total of \$1226.23.

Tom Meacham reported for the Conservation Committee on the progress of the Ekiutna Claim; he also mentioned that the Sierra Club was sponsoring a hike into East Creek Cabin on the Resurrection Trail, with a cleanup planned on the outward trip. This hike was scheduled for September 21-23.

The Climbing Chairman was not present, but various individuals reported on the Tikishla, Monarch and Yisbo climbs. (The latter did not take place, but several peaks in the Reed Lakes area were substituted).

The Hiking Chairman reported one change in the September schedule. Instead of the Knik River hike, Bill Barnes Sr. planned to hike in on the Canyon Creek trail to Devil's Creek Cabin, then out the Devil's Creek trail on September 21 and 22.

It was noted that the Club had purchased 100 copies of the Trails book put out by the Mat-Su Borough. They will be on sale for 50¢ each.

Tom Meacham, Past President of the Club, was presented with an engraved ice axe in appreciation of his services to the Club.

Tom Meacham then presided in order that nominations for the positions of President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer and two Board Members could be accepted from the floor. In addition, the names of as yet unverified nominees suggested by the Nominating Committee were noted as follows: Pros.-Barry Kircher,

Eiven Brudie, John Samuelson; Vice-President - Dave DeVoe; Secretary-Roseanne Stauffer; Treasurer - Kit Kenny. Board Members - Gil Todd and Dale Hagen.

After refreshments, Leo Hannan, Roseanne Stauffer and Terry Rees showed slides of the club-sponsored hike over the Chilkoot Trail in July. Meeting adjourned.

Dona Agosti, Secretary

President's Pen

This year was the year that the Mountaineering Club of Alaska extended formal recognition to that lowly breed known as the "Hiker." With the formation of a Hiking Committee (Dona Agosti), the Club initiated an extremely successful program of back country walks in all of the mountain ranges near Anchorage, including the Alaska Range. Our climbing program was also quite active during the summer months, although not nearly as active as the hiking program. This is not really too remarkable, since most climbs are organized on a private basis and, in the case of short one or two day climbs, with little formal organization. The one true shortcoming of the year was the lack of a climbing school, which in past years has proved to be one of the most popular club functions. I attribute this to my inability to find a person willing to chair the school's committee, a post which is very demanding timewise and particularly of weekends. Perhaps the lack which I felt the most this year was the lack of our friend, Mark Rainery, who gave much promise in his new post as chairman of the Huts and Cabins Committee.

The problem which is always a plague to volunteer organizations such as this one has become particularly acute this year in spite of an increasing membership. This is, of course, the problem of a lack of volunteers for various club posts. Normally, this only results in some of our committees lying dormant throughout the year. However, this year the problem has manifested itself in the inability of the nominating committee to recommend to the general membership anybody to fill the posts of Secretary and President. Fortunately, the nominating committee has found four very able people to run for the posts of Vice President and Treasurer and the two Board positions. The nominating committee takes pleasure in nominating Kit Kenney for the post of Treasurer, Raj Bhargava for the post of Vice President and Dave DeVoe and Bill Barnes Sr. for the two two-year Board posts. Nominations for the posts of Secretary and Treasurer will be taken solely from the floor at the October meeting.

My thanks go particularly to Dona Agosti and Tom Meacham for all of their help in running things this year. My thanks also go to the committee chairmen. Last but not least, I thank our phantom Acting-Treasurer, Kit Kenney, the wonder lady who finally balanced our books and kept them that way.

REED LAKES AREA

September 15, 1974

Ulrich Luscher
Brian Smith

The Yisbo climb announced for Saturday, September 14, was postponed to Sunday (the pouring rain on Saturday morning may have had something to do with it.) On Sunday, four of us (Brian Smith, Shawn and Danny Oxford and Ulrich Luscher) met and decided to make some climbs in the Reed Lakes area. The hike to the Reed Lakes (see Way No. 44 in "55 Ways") was very scenic and would make a great future Club hike. For us, this was just the warm-up. Near Upper Reed Lake, the party decided to split. Shawn and Danny chose to climb Higher Spire (el. 6135), which they did successfully with a few rappels off the summit. Brian and Ulrich preferred to attempt Lynx Peak (el. 6536) and were also successful. On

the way back they also climbed toward Higher Spire and got as far as Liar's Spire (elev. about 6000'). For both parties, the granite in this area was a most welcome change from the usual Chugach "crud". The weather was generally partly cloudy, with sunshine, fog and some hail thrown in. We got back to the car in darkness at about 9 o'clock and concluded the great day with dinner in Palmer.

TAKISHLA

June 30, 1974

Ulrich Luscher
Brian Smith

Five of us, finding no appointed leader in the Valu Mart parking lot at 8 o'clock left on our own to climb Tikishla and Knoya by the route described in "55 Ways." Marilyn Swanson, Ulrich Luscher, Shawn and Danny Oxford, and Brian Smith, plus three Irish Setters who followed us faithfully all day thoroughly enjoyed the climb in beautiful weather.

BROOKS RANGE TREK

August 4-20, 1974

Tom Meacham

I had long wanted to spend some time climbing, hiking, or just exploring Alaska's remote, northernmost mountain range, the Brooks Range. When Bill Quirk called me late in July asking if I knew of any MCAer who might like to accompany him to the Brooks, he had found his man. We decided on the Arrigetch Peaks area, 80 miles northwest of Bettles, as our destination. The Survey Pass map (USGS, 1:250000 scale) is the only available map of the area, which has not yet been mapped in larger-scale, inch-to-the-mile maps. The remoteness of this area was brought home to us when we examined the map: on the Survey Pass map, covering 5600 square miles (82 miles by 70 miles), there were only two signs of human beings, two isolated cabin sites 30 miles apart. So we expected isolation and we found it, except for two instances.

We left Anchorage on the afternoon of the 4th, driving to Fairbanks where we crashed for the night in University housing, ready for an early start the next day. We spent the next morning (Monday) sorting gear and re-packing loads. We flew commercial from Fairbanks to Bettles by Weir, viewing the meandering, mudhole pocked and abandoned Hickie Highway as it snaked north of the Yukon, as well as the newer pipeline haul road complete with construction camps, airstrips and gravel pits. It was clear that civilization, or the less desirable aspects of it, had already breached the Brooks Range, a psychological conquest that has reduced the almost mystical aura surrounding the Range for some people. We hoped that some of the magic remained.

Bettles was a busy place, with passengers coming and going in almost every imaginable type of aircraft. We met a "commercial" tour group led by Bob Waldrop which had just returned from some time in the Phillip Smith Mountains. They said they enjoyed it, but wanted to see something spectacular next time, like the Arrigetch. So we knew we were headed for the right place. We found on our return that this brief but intensive exchange of information at Bettles, between arriving and departing mountaineers, is the customary method by which wisdom and sage advice is transmitted from group to group, and we were similarly pumped for information by a Juneau hiking party when we returned to Bettles two weeks later.

Bill had made advance arrangements with Jerry Koser of Merrick Air Service for our flight, and Jerry was ready with the DeHavilland Beaver on floats at his Koyukuk River dock. We shared the ride with three hunters flying in to a sheep camp at Walker Lake, the only really "populated" recreation site in the entire Brooks Range. The takeoff was unusual - accelerating up the short straights in the river, slowing down for the bends, with the passengers in the

hold unable to see forward, and consequently wondering what the heck was going on. But we were heading north, and soon we could see the foothills of the Range. After dropping the hunters off at Walker Lake, a beautiful 15-mile-long sub-arctic gem, we persuaded Jerry to fly us directly over the Arrigetch Peaks to our landing site at Circle Lake. Bill and I originally planned to traverse from Circle Lake to Walker Lake, and we wanted to see the country we would be passing through.

Within minutes, we had changed our plans. The country was too vertical, too spectacular, too interesting to attempt a point-to-point trip. "Arrigetch" in the Eskimo tongue means "Fingers of the Hand extended, and the description is a vivid and apt one for the country we saw. After crossing low over the heart of the Arrigetch in a rain squall, we landed in the shallows of Circle Lake in the Alatna River valley and told Jerry to pick us up in two weeks at the same spot. We unloaded gear, set up camp, and began swatting mosquitos. The high peaks were hidden by the foothills, and our twilight view was of the Alatna River crisscrossing the broad valley, with the ridges of the Brooks Range receding into the distance in every direction.

Tuesday morning we packed up and immediately assaulted the 4000-foot ridge behind camp, the most direct but most exhausting way to reach the high peaks. We were soon out of the brush, but we ran out of water on the unseasonably dry hillside, and the 70-degree weather was also a surprise. After hiking uphill for eight hours with our 70-pound loads, the Arrigetch group of peaks were in view. Another three hours and we were camped by a shallow alpine tarn, hitting the sack shortly after midnight, a pattern which repeated itself throughout the trip.

In retrospect, we see the value of reading every available reference about an unknown area like the Arrigetch before venturing into it. The area has seen less than 8 climbing expeditions, and the ones who have climbed there have left unofficial names for the major peaks and spires, as reported in the American Alpine Journal of 1965, 1970, and 1972. The first peaks we saw, we later learned, were the Maidens, Xanadu, Caliban and Ariel, just a few of the fanciful but unofficial images conjured up by climbers since the first party entered the area to climb barely eleven years ago. Other names are Wichmann Tower, Diamond Head, Disneyland, the Camel, the Battleship, Shot Tower, Badile, Parabola Peak, the Citadel, the Albatross, Melting Tower. The Arrigetch was first seen by a white man when Philip Smith, pioneer USGS geologist, visited in 1911. Bob Marshall wrote of seeing the area in 1931 in his book, Arctic Wilderness. They were again visited in 1962 by Tom Hamilton, another geologist. But documented visits between these dates are not known, and the first climbers came in 1963 and again in 1963.

The next morning we slept in, and after noon hiked to the head of a small cirque to look over the ridge for a view. The view was mind-boggling - a valley even more spectacular than the Arrigetch, we later decided, with at least seven cirques emptying into an unnamed creek, and dominated by narrow, sheer granite aretes and that unbelievable pillar of rock called Shot Tower.

Wednesday we hiked over the pass into the unnamed-creek valley, eager to camp among the spires and glacial remnants. This valley is known as "4662" creek in some climbing articles, based on its elevation. Crossing endless talus and rubble slopes, amid some evidence of recent rockfall and hillside washouts, we camped near the creek, and directly opposite the Battleship, a vertical granite monolith of Yosemite proportions. After the usual late supper, we turned in. It really didn't get dark during our first week on the trip, but toward the end of the second week the nights were noticeably longer, a sign that autumn was fast approaching.

Thursday was a rest day, with another late breakfast. In the afternoon Bill hiked up the talus slope behind camp for a view, and found himself staring

down into Arrigetch Creek valley between the Camel and Maidens, just a bit of vertical relief.

Friday we hiked to the head of the valley, hoping to find a pass leading out of the valley and into the upper Kobuk drainage on the other side. Nothing looked passable from our angle, and we returned to camp, crossing enough granite rubble to build a hundred million fireplaces. Imagine our surprise when we sat around camp after a 10 pm. rain shower, only to look up and see six wet and heavily-laden climbers descending the valley toward us! They were from Reed College, Oregon, and had spent the last three weeks in the upper Kobuk, getting several first ascents. They were on a Mazamas climbing fellowship, and included one Alaskan, Brian Forbes of Fairbanks.

The next day Bill and I located the pass between "4662" and the Kobuk headwaters, and it turned out to be the maximum type of traverse I care to do with a Kelty and without protection. The register at the summit indicated we were the fifth party to ascend the pass, the first one being the Cass-Westmacott party in 1964 (AAJ, 1965, p. 315). We got a glimpse of the fascinating and virtually untouched contry of the upper Kobuk, with many peaks and spires. The only climbers to spend any time in the area were the Reed College group we had met, who settled for the upper Kobuk after learning that a Hampshire College team had climbed Xanadu, the highest in the Arrigetch (ca. 7500') earlier in the summer.

We were lucky to glimpse the upper Kobuk from our high camp, for we could tell our good weather was changing. The next morning we were engulfed in low clouds, with 50-foot visability, and they remained for three days. On the third day, the weather seemed to lift momentarily, and we broke camp. We planned to find two passes and descend into Arrigetch valley between Ariel and Galiban, which looked possible on the map. But the weather settled in again, and after three hours and several blind alleys we realized that it was impossible to navigate in the fog with a 1:250000 map. So we backtracked, climbed over the pass into "4662" valley, which after three days of rain was uncomfortably slick, and camped at our previous scenic camp.

Wednesday was a marathon day, in which we moved camp from high up "4664" valley, across the low pass we had crossed on our second day, and all the way up to the creek fork in Arrigetch Creek Valley. As we walked the last half-mile to the forks, the population explosion hit us: ten people, including three 61-year-old tourists, were camped by the creek! They were members of an REI (Co-op) - sponsored commercial tour to the Arrigetch, led by the well-known photographer, Wilbur Mills. We exchanged pleasantries the next day, and learned that they planned to spend some time in the area, hiking and sight-seeing, followed by a 10-day canoe trip down the Alatna to Helpmejack Creek. They were disappointed with the deteriorating weather, and we didn't help matters by telling them of the perfect week we had just spent.

Bill and I spent out last two days deening the sights in Arrigetch Valley, the sheer granite faces, symmetrical spires, deep turquoise lakes, and lush meadows. Autumn was several weeks late, since we had no fall colors yet. The August Sierra Club calendar picture for this year was taken by Mills in the valley in 1971, and has lots of the russet and gold colors we had been anticipating. This was the 18th of August, and we had been expecting some change in the sub-Arctic climate. Dave Roberts wrote in 1970 that they had a killing frost prior to August 5th in the area, so there seems to be the possibility of a 30-day leeway between an early fall and a late one. The weekend after our departure, however, the Brooks Range got its first snow down to the 3000-foot level, so autumn this year was something like one week long.

Our last day we spent bushwhacking down Arrigetch Creek, finding the trail and loosing it many times, getting thoroughly soaked in two rainstorms and wet grass, hoping to catch enough grayling for supper. We finally caught five, but by then it was cloase to midnight, and we floundered, in darkness and soaked to the skin, over a mile of grass-sedge tussocks to a clump of spruce where

we built a fire to dry out. We were quite close to Circle Lake, our pick-up spot, and the next morning we arose at 8 to be sure to catch the plane, which didn't come until 2 pm. On the way out we flew into Ernie Lake to pick up a couple and their year-old baby, who had been catching 28-inch lake trout on a week's vacation, we were told. At the lake we explored the old cabin and cache built and used for many years by Ernie Johnson, Bob Marshall's lifelong friend. (Arctic Wilderness is an excellent reference for an introduction to this area, though Marshall was less a climber than an explorer).

Back in Fairbanks, after sweating out too few seats on the Bettles plane with the next plane not due for three days, I bought a newspaper. References to "President Ford" on page 3, with no Watergate news on page 1 or 2, caused us to realize for the first time just how isolated we had been. The downfall of Nixon had occurred two weeks before, and we knew nothing of it! But the world continued to turn for us, and the sun, when we could see it, continued to mark the same path through the sky, leading us to believe that the truly important events on the earth are not measured by the petty chicanery of human beings.

It is difficult to recall a trip into the Brooks without mentioning too much detail and forgetting the spirit, the mystique of place. The largest animal we saw was a porcupine, though we saw old bear tracks, caribou antlers, sheep sign and fresh wolf tracks. We were somewhat relieved at the absence of bears, especially since I learned later that the 1964 Cass party had to kill a grizzly which wouldn't leave their camp. Wildflowers and berries were scarce, due to the dry summer. Mosquitos and no-see-ums were bad at lower elevations, but quite tolerable up high.

But the real memories of the Arrigetch are found in the wilderness experience: the virtual absence of signs that other humans have been there before you, even when you know they have; the feeling of space, with mountains stretching to infinity in every direction; the verticality of the rock formations, like ten Yosemite; the purity of the rock itself, and the air and the water. Such an experience must be felt at least once in a lifetime, and more often if one is lucky.

The Brooks Range is a long way from being "used up," but why are not more Alaskans visiting it? All the signs we saw, climbers from Oregon, hikers from Connecticut, hunters from Texas and Washington, indicated that Alaskans don't know of, or don't appreciate, this unique area in their own backyard. Certainly there are other areas of the state more accessible or more familiar to Alaskans, but the special wilderness qualities of the Brooks Range are an exclusive treat for Outsiders at the present. If you want to experience this feeling for yourself before the inevitable hordes of tourists invade the area via the pipeline haul road, you should make plans for next summer. After next year, the Brooks Range will be well on its way to becoming just "another" row of mountains, another tourist attraction for the Winnebago set.

BITS AND PIECES

FOR SALE: Holubar Sleeping Bags, Kelty Pack and Frame, Down Booties, Steel and Wodds Ice Axes, SMC and Frival Crampons, Gerry Down Parka and Sleeping Bag, Holubar Expedition II Parka, Carikit Mt. Parka, Alpine Designs Eiger Pack. Prices negotiable at 4502 Juneau. Gary Tandy and friends.

NO ROOM AT THE TOP

"It was bound to happen. The Zermatt Tourist Bureau reported that on an average day this summer 150 climbers swarmed toward the 14,701-foot summit of the Matterhorn, and those who did not scale the heights early were queuing up on a ledge below. The top, 50 yards long and reasonably flat, could - and sometimes did - accomodate 40 people at a time. Latecomers waited their turn below in a kind of orbit, safeguarded by ropes strung by guides.

"It was disgusting," one disgusted climber said. "The summit was a garbage heap. It stunk to high heaven." Once considered one of the world's challenges, the peak was littered with empty cans and bottles and half-eaten food. Worse yet, a chemical toilet installed on the waiting ledge did not function properly.

High time, Swiss authorities reasoned, to set things in good odor. They ordered helicopters aloft to bring the garbage to earth, because it was there."

-Sports Illustrated
September 23, 1974