



MOUNTAINEERING CLUB OF ALASKA

BOX 2037

ANCHORAGE, ALASKA 99510

OCTOBER 1981

Volume 24, Issue #10

OCTOBER MEETING

The meeting will be held Wednesday, October 21, at 8 p.m. on the top floor of the Pioneer Schoolhouse, Third and Eagle, Anchorage, Alaska. During the meeting, the election of new club officers and two new board members will be held. After the business meeting, Tom Choate will present a slide show on his 1977/78 climbing and exploratory expedition to the Himalayas.

MINUTES - SEPTEMBER 16, 1981 MEETING

The meeting was called to order at 8:10 p.m. by President John Lohff. There were no corrections or additions to the minutes of the previous meeting.

- Vice-President - No nominations
- Secretary - Sandy McDonald
- Treasurer - Reggie Buchanan

Two board member positions are also open - Lavonia James' and John Dillman's
 Nominees were - Tom Choate
 - Tim Neal
 - Ernie Borjone

Treasurer's Report as of September 15, 1981:

Money Market	\$2,916.23
Checking Account	469.22
Petty Cash	57.10

Royalty income from 55 Ways was \$80.00.

Introduction of new members and guests included the parents of our President, John Lohff.

Committee Reports - Hut Committee - ran out of time and weather to do Mint Glacier; will begin again next Spring.

Programs - there will be a program next month, but it was not announced.

Old Business - Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs: a motion had been open that we not continue membership. After some discussion, a vote determined that we will no longer be a member of FWOC.

ANNOUNCEMENTS included the upcoming Ice Climbing/Glacier Travel School to be held September 26 & 27. School will cost \$5.00, and all equipment except some ice axes, crampons, and helmets must be provided by the student. There should be an excellent student/instructor ratio and it promises to be a very good school. Cut off date for registration is 9/22/81. For more info, call Pete Sennhouse at 345-5571 or John Dillman at 278-3537 days or 279-1247 evenings.

Reggie Buchanan encouraged guests who are interested in taking the class to inquire about Club membership during the break as the class was for members only.

RELIVING HISTORY ON THE CHITISTONE GOAT TRAIL
July 25 - August 1, 1981

The Ahtnas, the Athabascans and the Eyaks used the Chitistone Goat Trail because it was a good way to get from the coastal regions through the Wrangells or vice versa, and maybe drum up a little copper trade enroute. The miners of '98 were looking for an all-American trail to the interior, evidently somewhat disenchanted with the Canadian customs officers waiting at the top of Chilkoot Pass. The stampedeers of 1913 believed it was the easiest route from Cordova to the Chisana gold fields. Our group of ten Mountaineering Club hikers were just looking for a good hike. My summation of the trek included the adjectives: awe-inspiring, terrifying and exhausting.

A number of USGS types recorded their impressions of this area and some of the words used were "impassable, rugged, forbidding..." And in 1916, S. R. Capps talked about a "somewhat dangerous trail known as the goat trail.." Oscar Rohn in 1899, used sherpas to help him carry two 11-foot canvas folding canoes. He also mentioned securing two sleds at Nikolai House, and carrying as much bread and bacon and dry spruce timber as possible. As nearly as I can figure, Nikolai House must have been located near the present Dan Creek mining camp. Capps also mentions that there were accommodations every 15 to 30 miles, so that a packer could travel from one roadhouse to the next each day. Lodging and meals were about a dollar and the fare from Cordova to Chitina on the railroad was \$15.60, from Cordova to McCarthy \$22.80. Roadhouses are now as extinct as the dodo and Cessna 180's fly at \$130 an hour.

So much for history. Obviously ten backpackers from Anchorage could have done a bit more research. Probably just as well they didn't. They may never have taken on the Chitistone Goat Trail July 25, 1981.

Dona Agosti, son David Agosti, Bill Barnes, Mary Pat Brudie, Don Hansen, Paula Gifford, Pablo Lippe, John Nevin, Jim Schiewe and Bill Wakeland drove from Anchorage and set up tents along the Gulkana air strip. Our pilot, Ken Bunch, showed up at 8:00 the next morning and seemed to be in a somber mood. He had spent the previous day searching for the body of a 16-year old boy who had drowned in the Kotsina. It had been raining in the Wrangell-St. Elias area for four weeks, rivers were high and he was much concerned for our safety. I assured him that we had rope and carabiners and did not intend to cross any stream beyond the capability of the weakest member of our party. We loaded four persons and gear into a Cessna 206 and three persons and packs into a Cessna 180. The remaining three persons were ferried in a second trip. Our destination was Glacier Creek strip at an elevation of 2300 feet, located in the newly designated Wrangell-St. Elias National Park. It had been the site of a gold mine and lay in a broad valley upstream from the confluence of the Nizina and Chitistone rivers. Enroute, we passed over mud flows and a recent many-acre burn. We could see Copper Center, the Copper River, Edgerton Highway and Chitina off to the south. We flew over the imposing Kennicott and Root Glaciers and then, just below us was the historic Kennicott Mine and the village of McCarthy. We noted that the cable across the Kennicott River used for access to McCarthy had gone the way of the flood. Passing over Nikolai Ridge, we traced the route an MCA group had attempted to hike some years back. (One of our group, Mary Pat Brudie, had been with Helen Nienheuser when she researched the hike for "55 Ways to the Wilderness..."). Off to the southeast, the Nizina bridge, built in the early mining days, abruptly ended half way across the river. So much for any plans to drive to May or Dan Creek mining camps. Before landing at Glacier, I asked Ken to fly upstream on the Chitistone so I could take a look at Toby Creek which was one of the major obstacles of the trip. We saw that it had widened into about ten braids and was boiling right along.

When Don Murphy flew in with the last load, we hoisted packs and walked upstream along the Chitistone. The trail was visible and wound through willow and brush over flat outwash plain. Intermitten showers cooled us off. We paralleled the Chitistone for about five miles and heard the Toby long before we reached it. A few elected to pick their way up and down braids further upstream, but the majority found more shallow water close to the confluence. All but two of about ten braids were knee high or lower; the two main braids were approximately thigh-high and swift. Those of us who took off our boots and rolled up our pants legs came off with dry boots; others not so. Mary Pat, crossing in neoprene foam diving boots had the most comfortable crossing of all.

Because of extensive washout, our next ordeal was finding the trail whenever it disappeared at the river's edge. This usually meant beating brush. About 3/4 mile upstream, it was necessary to climb about 100 feet straight up through birch and alder, where we intersected a game trail of sorts. The next mile and a half was a nightmare of downed trees, deadfalls, lost trail and finally a gully descent to the outwash plain. It didn't take long to decide to camp in the first, well-drained flat spot and to get into dry, wool clothing. Continuous rain during the night made us pessimistic about crossing the Chitistone the next day. Our spirits improved as the sun came out and with it, wet rain flies and other gear. Hiking across the Chitistone flats was not difficult, though crossing braided Porcupine Creek caused momentary delay for boot removers. About 2½ miles further upstream, we turned northeast and up a rock glacier valley towards Chitistone Glacier. This was an ideal way to avoid crossing that fork of the Chitistone. We were indebted to Dr. Gerald Wright of the University of Idaho for this information which he set forth in a trail guide prepared for the Park Service. There may come a day when these rock-ice bridges over the river will recede, but for the present, we were relieved to cross this fork of the Chitistone on an ice-rock bridge. A half mile of boulder hopping to the west brought us to the raging, roaring, boulder-rolling, chocolate brown Chitistone coming out of the westerly canyon. There was another sudden, uncontested decision to make camp for the night and hope that the stream would fall by morning. Fresh water was discovered trickling from a scree slope near the canyon entrance.

At 5 a.m. inspection revealed that the river had dropped during the night and about 6 a.m., it had again risen two inches. Though we were yet in shadow, the sun had been shining for several hours on the glaciers feeding the headwaters. I prevailed upon 200-pound Jim to cross first, belayed by 200-pound, 6 foot Pablo. These two provided a fixed line into which each subsequent crosser attached his carabiner. It was necessary for each to loop several coils of rope around his waist in a bowline-on-a-coil knot. The carabiner was attached to this coil and then into the fixed lined. Each crosser also used a hiking staff held with both hands. Each person was cheered when he reached for the hand of helper, Bill Wakeland, and stepped to solid land.

Finding the original Goat Trail involved a 1-mile walk downstream to a large fresh-water stream outwash. Up this gully about a half mile, we climbed the bank into the trees and eventually discovered a trail switching back and forth to a grassy bench 700 feet above. But be warned that here again, the beginning of the trail is hard to find. Cairns and identifying posts had been washed out in four weeks of rain.

The view from the bench was superb. Chitistone Glacier loomed to the east; the upper Chitistone gorge was visible to the north and the lower valley which we had ascended could be seen to the south. After the emotional exhaustion of crossing the river that morning, it was decided that we'd camp at the northeast end of this bench. Those with excess energy climbed the ridge above camp and explored the area of Hole-in-the-Wall Glacier. They also found the camp of a four-person party ahead of us and left a note asking them to notify our pilot to pick us up at Skolai Creek rather than back at Glacier Creek. We had originally intended to return to Glacier Creek but now had no intention of re-crossing Chitistone and Toby Creeks. We didn't know then that we would be adding a few obstacles to that list in the days to come.

The fourth day's climb was a slow ascent of some 1300 feet to a level crossing of what I named Hole-in-the-Wall Creek. It appeared to emanate from that basin. However, the water was clear which belied its origin in the glacier itself. After jumping rocks to cross this stream, we moved upward about ½ mile to another scenic knob. The early-arriving hikers seemed a little somber, and I was greeted with remarks such as "Wait til she sees this one." I elected to eat lunch before looking. This was fortunate. One look at what lay ahead turned by stomach upside down. Here's where the real Goat Trail began. It traversed a precarious, steep scree slope. The trail was about 12" (inches) wide and the exposure thousands of feet down to the Chitistone canyon floor. We used up an hour deciding whether to use the upper or lower trail which 17-year old David had checked out. (The party ahead of us were resting from the ordeal of crossing when David came around the corner from above. It is reported there were threats of physical violence). We also used the time to psyche up. Finally, one by one, we cautiously moved across the exposure, most of us with eyes only for the trail. There was mass rejoicing when the tenth person cleared the exposed slope. But our joy was short-lived. About a half mile up valley, we again caught up with Mike Smith's group of four. Mike had already done a reconnaissance of the second goat trail. Only this time, the wall was steeper and he had to stomp out the trail in finely grained scree and clay. Evidently the long rains had kept the goats at home also.

Again, our group spent an hour trying to locate a less dangerous route to the river bench lying so tantalizingly below. We speculated about using a less pitched scree slope directly down to the river, but decided against it because we could not determine whether canyons along the river might block our route. Finally, with help from the three young giants of the trip, several packs were carried across the most exposed section, and ten hikers again beat the odds. We also prayed a lot. Camp was set up on the bench in record time and for some reason, there were no side hikes that evening.

Eroded trails, boulder terrain, fog and tributary stream crossing posed no big problems the next day. We alternately walked the Chitistone flats, then the banks above, occasionally spotting cairns marking the historic trail. Soon the Chitistone turned east to another gorge, and it was necessary to follow a tributary upstream about a half mile. We crossed it on boulders and followed the trail upward toward Chitistone Pass. The views at this altitude were forever. Glaciers, peaks and lakes were everywhere and the click of cameras sent ground squirrels into a chirping frenzy. A mile before arriving at the pass lake, we encountered seven sheep who were unmoved by our photography. Crossing a large, open level expanse, we arrived at a lake where an accumulation of trash was attributed to a 1960 Arctic Institute field study. The chill wind and intermittent periods of fog reminded us that we were at 5850 feet. Temperature was in the forties. Later that afternoon, side-trippers John and David climbed a ridge and watched several caribou. They also gazed upon a sleeping griz 200 feet below. About nine that evening, John looked out of his tent door and spotted Ole Griz making evening rounds. There was instant mobilization in a camp that had been sleep-silent seconds before. Bear jokes and bear stories proliferated as the sleek brown monster worked his way toward our camp. At 200 yards, I blew my whistle and was totally ignored. I asked for help, and a cacaphony of sound erupted. Eventually Griz stopped, sniffed our upwind man smells and begrudgingly detoured over the ridge. But not without a few stops to look back and wonder. Mike's party, camped a mile away, told us the next day they heard our big band sound with impressive clarity.

Fog accompanied our sixth-day hike to Chitistone Pass and on most of the downward trek to Skolai Valley. Because of it, we occasionally lost the trail, but when the fog lifted momentarily, cairns again put us back on track. Russell Glacier loomed ahead, and soon we were switching back to the west and the valley floor. Some decided to try the outwash plain, others stayed at the 4500 foot contour. At the 4500 foot level, one contended with boulder fields, small streams and scrub willow; at the plain level, you

had to like wet feet. We could see the faint outline of an airstrip three miles down valley near a no-name lake which I called Lower Skolai Lake. It was about the same size as Upper Skolai Lake. The south side of the valley near this lake was high and dry and tundra-covered. There were signs of old campsites among the tall willows and water was just a few hundred feet away. Castle Mountain could be viewed up valley and when the weather cleared, we thought we saw Mt. Churchill and Mt. Bona to the southeast of Russell Glacier. Closer to camp, conversation momentarily ceased each time the glacier above our heads calved off.

All our worries were over now, save one. Would the weather hold long enough to allow the pilot to pick us up? Extra food had been cached at Glacier Creek, but that was 30 miles away. Several were down to their last rations. Ken Bunch was scheduled to fly in another party and take out the Smith party next morning. In preparation, Mike picked rocks off the "runway," stomped some of the larger holes and rigged a windsock by lashing two hiking poles and attaching an orange plastic bag. A high cloud layer next morning looked encouraging. Around 9:30, the faint sound of an engine turned all eyes westward. There was audible relief when Don Murphy, eating up all the tundra strip, bumped to a stop. However, a busy schedule precluded his flying our party out that day, but we were assured that he and Ken would ferry us next day from Skolai to Glacier Creek in the 180 and from there to Gulkana in the 206. Low fog gave us a few anxious hours next morning, but Ken eased his 180 onto the strip right on schedule and we left in twos plus gear for the 18-minute shuttle to Glacier Creek strip. Chitistone Pass was socked in so we were denied an over-view of our six-day route. Instead, we flew down the Skolai Valley, across the Nizina Glacier, down the Nizina River and eastward to Glacier strip. Because of crosswinds there, our pilots opted for Peavine strip a few miles east. This aerial route gave us a chance to compare our Chitistone Goat Trail route with the Nizina River-Glacier route used by some of the early prospectors and geologists.

We had air access, freeze dried food, waterproof tents and Polarguard sleeping bags; they had roadhouses, packhorses and Indian sherpas. Yet, I wonder if they of history and we of the present did not indeed share similar moments of fear and equal portions of awe when viewing nature's untamed violence and breathtaking beauty in these Wrangell Mountains of Alaska.

Dona Agosti, Leader

MCA ANNUAL GLACIER/ICE CLIMBING SCHOOL

The annual MCA Glacier/Ice Climbing School was held on September 26 & 27 at Matanuska Glacier. The weather was very cooperative, clear skies and mild temperatures, and good ice. There were no injuries, only mild boredom and few hangovers.

The following MCA members participated: John Ippolito, Reg Buchanan, Hope Dunlap, Steven Earle, Anita Beeman, Pat Murray, Ted Laska, Sigma Alpha, Janice Hagen, Dianne Dabroski, Ed Goss, Daniel Ohaire, Mike Pumphrey, Roger Hackett, Keith Jost, Mark Collins, Robin Smith, Eric McCallum, Sandy McDonald, Mark Woelber, Trish Herminghaus, Jane Utiger, Mark Findlay, Leslie McDaniel, Bill Ennis, Doug VanEtten, Don Hansen, Joe Durrenderger, Criss Capps, Erin Hobbs, Rick Severin, Erick Bacon, Mary Ann Duggan and Larry Patusch.

The overall success of the weekend event was due to the high instructor/student ratio and I would like to especially thank the following individuals who donated their time, personal climbing equipment and knowledge: Dave Pahlke, Pat McManus, George Ferry, Perry Solomonson, Ernie Borjon, Ned Lewis, Graham McDonald, Jim Morrison, Paul Farmer, Jim Sprott, Mike Frank, Willy Hersman, Jim Huchins, Doug Huvar, Bill Larch, Chuck Knudsen, Malsolm Ives, Jack Duggan and Mike Richardson.

Special thanks goes to Terry Becker for assisting in on-site class organization, Julian Mason and Margie MacNeille from the Alaska Mountain Rescue Group for providing rescue equipment and standby, to Mike Richardson and Jane Utiger for the glacier concert and to Jack and Harriet Kimball for putting up with us.

John R. Dillman

HISTORY CORNER

Since I listed the Club officers for the first 10 years in the last SCREE, I decided it would be timely to complete the listing for the first 20 years of the Club in time for this year's elections. This list represents the elected officers, and does not necessarily include all those who served.

- 1968 Bob Spurr, Pres.; Nick Parker, VP; Karne Courtright, S; Tom Meacham, T; Bill Davis, BOD.
- 1969 Randy Renner, Pres.; Steve Hackett, VP; Margaret Wolfe, S; Dick Snyder, T; Frank Nosek, BOD.
- 1970 Steve Hackett, Pres.; Eivin Brudie, VP; Betty Ivanoff, S; John Samuelson, T; Randy Renner, BOD.
- 1971 Wendell Oderkirk, Pres.; Tom Meacham, VP; Kathy Gorham, S; Pat Freeny, T; Frank Nosek, Marie Lundstrom, Randy Renner, & John Samuelson, BOD.
- 1972 Tom Meacham, Pres.; Bill Barnes, Jr., VP; Gil Todd, T; Dona Agosti, S; Wendell Oderkirk & Bob Spurr, BOD.
- 1973 Bill Barnes, Jr., Pres.; Gil Todd, VP; Dona Agosti, S; Steve Jones, T; Tom Meacham, Bill Stivers, & JoAnne Merrick, BOD.
- 1974 Al Worland, Pres.; Raj Bhargava, VP; Kit Kenney, T; Nina Faust, S; (Fritz Rieger was elected in Feb. 1975 to fill Al's term since he was transferred out of Anchorage in December.)
- 1975 Bill Stivers, Pres.; Paul Denkwalter, VP; Kit Kenney, T; Shawn Oxford, S; John Pinamont, Fritz Rieger, Bill Barnes, Sr., and Terry Reese, BOD.
- 1976 Tom Meacham, Pres.; John Pinamont, VP; David Newcombe, S; Jan Lemke, T; Bill Quirk, Terry Reese, & Paul Denkwalter, BOD.
- 1977 Paul Denkwalter, Pres.; Valerie LaRue, VP; Al Robinson, S; Pierce McIntosh, T; Dave Klinger & Dick Thaler, BOD.

Greg Higgins

CORRECTION TO THE SEPTEMBER SCREE

The names accepted by the Geographic Names Board were: Near Point and Ptarmigan Peaks. A correction to the naming of the Suicide Peaks was also approved. GLH.

SKILAK LAKE TO COTTONWOOD CREEK
September 12 & 13, 1981

Friday night found Lino and Dona Agosti, Esther George and I heading for the Agosti's trailer motel at Cooper Landing. After checking in, we were joined by Karen Forsythe and her own motel.

A hearty blueberry pancake breakfast at the Agosti cafe prepared us for the rigors of the day. The local Agosti taxi service took us to Skilak Lake where Lino put us through several practice sessions of assembling the USS Avon Agosti. A malady of Karen's, called "Avon Syndrome" (one leg goes up and down rapidly) was put to use by slipping the air pump under the foot of the affected leg. The raft was quickly inflated several times. Motor was hoisted into place and gear stowed away at launch time, but not before Pauline Chase roared up to complete the crew. Yours truly was elected to pilot the craft, but after twenty minutes of cranking the outboard with Lino shouting encouragement from shore, I fell ignominiously exhausted on the deck. Karen, whose malady had shifted to her right arm, took over and soon had us under way.

After soaking everyone while crossing Skilak Lake, I nosed the raft into shore at a nice cabin site. The boat and motor stowed, we headed up the well defined trail (previously brushed out by the Agosti forest service) paralleling Cottonwood Creek. I led while confidently but ineffectively flailing my new machete at the iron tough brush. I hiked alone most of the time. The moderate climb steepened as we broke out of treeline, so we lunched while enjoying the fall colored panorama of hills, mountains, and Skilak Lake. Where to camp became the topic of discussion since no one had a map. After the democratic process of discussion and voting where the leader is outvoted, we headed for Twin Lakes across the headwater streams of Cottonwood Creek. Soft muskeg and an abundance of blueberries and cranberries awaited us. While some berrypicked, I hiked up to an interesting bench and secluded lake.

I got up early next morning to climb the nearby ridge and reportedly see the Harding Ice Field. I never saw the ice field and was quickly driven back down by the wind to the rest who were packed up and heading out. Esther and Pauline continued in vain to clear the area of berries. The trip back and lake crossing went well and the weekend topped off by a chicken dinner at the Agosti cafe.

Kudos to Dona and Lino for the logistics and giving up seeing #3 son off to Stanford that weekend.

John Nevin

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR:

SCREE is the monthly publication of the Mountaineering Club of Alaska. I would like to remind you that all items for publication must be submitted at the monthly meeting or mailed to my home at Star Route Box 9204, Eagle River, AK 99577. Your cooperation will be appreciated. Marty Bassett, Editor.

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Dues: Send to Reggie Buchanan at Box 2037, Anchorage, AK 99510.
Family: \$10.00; Individual - \$7.50; Junior and out of town - \$5.00.