

# the SCREE

## Mountaineering Club of Alaska

October 2012

Volume 55 Number 10



### Contents:

Little Indian Creek Peaks  
(Kenai Mountains)

Baleful Peak, July 10, 2012

A Hike in the First Snowstorm  
(Up the Eagle River)

Book Review: Canyons and Ice:  
The Wilderness Travels  
of Dick Griffith

Peak of the Month: Scenery Peak

### Monthly Meeting:

Wednesday,  
October 17,  
at 6:30 p.m.

Program: Cutting  
corners and  
covering ground,  
by Luc Mehl

*"Keep your sense of  
proportion by  
regularly, preferably  
daily, visiting the  
natural world."  
--Caitlin Matthews*

# The Mountaineering Club of Alaska

[www.mtnclubak.org](http://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 meetings the third Wednesday of the month at the BP Energy Center, 900 East Benson Boulevard, Anchorage, Alaska  
[www.akpeac.org/conference/BPEC\\_map\\_06-04-03.pdf](http://www.akpeac.org/conference/BPEC_map_06-04-03.pdf)

## Contents

**Little Indian Creek Peaks  
(Kenai Mountains)**

**Baleful Peak, July 10, 2012**

**A Hike in the First Snowstorm  
(Up the Eagle River)**

**Book Review: Canyons and Ice:  
The Wilderness Travels  
of Dick Griffith**

**Peak of the Month: Scenery Peak**

**Cover Photo:** Ross Noffsinger on the summit of Baleful Peak. Photo by Charlie Sink.

## October Program

**October 17 (6:30 p.m.)** Cutting corners and covering ground: fast-and-light self-supported traverses of Denali and Mount Logan by Luc Mehl. Luc and friends have been attempting long mountaineering traverses using techniques learned on the Alaska Mountain Wilderness (Ski) Classic races. In 2011 the team biked, skied, and rafted up and over Denali (200 miles, 25 days). This year they used their packrafts as sleds to travel from Yakutat to McCarthy over Mount Logan (340 miles, 30 days). Luc will discuss motivation, challenges, and strategies.

Bio: Luc grew up in McGrath, Alaska, and is a professor at Alaska Pacific University. Luc has completed five Winter Wilderness Classics and three Summer Wilderness Classics. A typical pace is 40 miles per day and the initial pack weight is 25 to 30 pounds. He has logged over 1,000 miles of wilderness travel in both 2011 and 2012; visit [thingstolucat.com](http://thingstolucat.com) to see his other trips.

## Article Submission

Text and photography submissions for the *Scree* can be sent as attachments to [mcascree@gmail.com](mailto:mcascree@gmail.com). Articles should be submitted by the 25<sup>th</sup> of the month to appear in the following month's *Scree*. Do not submit material in the body of the email. 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 captions with photos.

## Assistant Scree Editor Needed

The MCA is looking for a volunteer to be the assistant newsletter editor, responsible for doing the layout of the newsletter each month, beginning in

March 2013. This is a great opportunity to unleash your inner creativity! Contact Steve Gruhn at 344-1219 or via email at [mcascree@gmail.com](mailto:mcascree@gmail.com).

## Club Elections in October – Nominations Needed

It is that time of year again. We are looking for nominations for Officers and Directors for the MCA. Elections will be at the October Meeting. There are two board positions open, and all the officers (President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer) are up for election. Officer terms are for one year; Board members are two-year positions. Several of the officers are not planning to run for re-election. Volunteering as a club Officer or Director is a great way to give back to the MCA and to influence the direction of the club. If you would like to run for one of these prestigious positions (or if you would like to nominate someone else), please contact Vicky Lytle ([victoria.lytle@gmail.com](mailto:victoria.lytle@gmail.com)). It is a great way to help out the club, and get to know other members.

## Hiking and Climbing Schedule

**Winter Solstice Flattop Peak Sleepout:**  
December 21, 2012. No leader.

Don't forget to check the Meetup site and the Facebook page for last minute trips and activities. Or, schedule one that you want to organize.

## On-line? – click me



**For best viewing of the *Scree* on a monitor using Adobe Reader, click on 'View' and 'Full Screen.'**



**Steve Gruhn on the summit of Peak 4167 with Anchorage in the distance.**

## Little Indian Creek Peaks (Kenai Mountains)

By Steve Gruhn

Photographs by Ben Radakovich

I've looked at Hope Point (3705) and the peaks to the south for decades. I had climbed some peaks about eight miles south of Hope Point (see the September 2006 and December 2007 *Scree*s), and I had enthusiastically read Tim Kelley's account in the January 1999 *Scree* of ridge-running with Wiley Bland along the ridge west of Resurrection Creek, but until this year I'd never really explored the mountains in the area. Finally

on June 16, Doug Hamilton and I ventured up the Hope Point Trail from the new U.S. Forest Service trailhead south of the Porcupine Creek Campground. This new trailhead is a combined trailhead for both the Hope Point Trail and the Gull Rock Trail. We climbed both Hope Point and Peak 3966 (1209 meters) about a mile to the southwest, but instead of sating my hunger for peak exploration in this area, that trip only served to whet my appetite for more.

So, on Saturday, September 8, I met Ben Radakovich at 5 a.m. at the lower hillside Carrs. The

skies were clear, but it had snowed in the Western Chugach and Kenai Mountains earlier that week. We drove to the Hope Point/Gull Rock Trailhead northwest of Hope, arriving about 6:45, just before dawn. Our goal was Peak 4167 (1270 meters) about 2-1/2 miles southwest of Peak 3966. I couldn't find any record of an ascent of Peak 4167. Tim and Wiley had climbed Peak 3966 and Hope Point during their June 1998 trip along the ridge west of Resurrection Creek, but they had bypassed Peak 4167, which is between Big Indian Creek and Little Indian Creek about a mile and a half west of their route.

We started out hiking quickly so that we would spend as little time as possible in the brush. Ben was concerned about possible bear encounters. After his mauling on June 10 near Penguin Creek (see the July 2012 *Scree*), I was willing to do everything I could to alleviate his concerns. We talked loudly as we hiked along Porcupine Creek. Periodically Ben hollered to avoid surprising any bears. Soon enough we were hiking up the steep, well-established trail above timberline and enjoying the views of the sunrise over the frosty Chugach Mountains and Turnagain Arm.

We reached a 3100-foot saddle east of Hope Point and noted six mountain goats to the south. Instead of continuing up the trail to Hope Point, we side-hilled over to Hope Point's south ridge and descended to the 2800-foot saddle between Porcupine Creek and Johnson Creek. We ascended partway up the ridge to the south where we encountered a dusting of snow from the storm earlier that week. The day was sunny and I figured that once the sun heated the ground, all of that moisture on the ground would evaporate and we would find ourselves in fog. At about 3600 feet we departed from the ridge to the left and contoured around the southeast ridge of Peak 3966 (the one that leads to the green tower known informally as "dat thang;" see the August 2001, October 2001, and December 2001 *Scree*s). Once around the southeast ridge, we descended to the 3000-foot saddle between Cripple Creek and Little Indian Creek. At the saddle south of Peak 3966, the Cripple Creek drainage was on our left and the Little Indian Creek drainage was on our right. We would follow the ridge above the Little Indian Creek drainage for most of the day.



**Hope from the Hope Point Trail.**

As we ascended the ridge to the south, we found a goat trail that contoured to the east around the 3845-foot (1172-meter) bump south of Peak 3966. The goat trail easily brought us to the 3400-foot saddle southeast of Point 3845. Although a goat trail led to the south, we ascended the ridge to the southwest and easily reached the summit of Peak 3955 (1205 meters). We found the cairn that Tim and Wiley found in 1998. There was no register and we didn't bother to leave one.

We descended the southwestern slopes of Peak 3955 and contoured southwest around Point 3655 (1114 meters) and crossed a small tributary of Little Indian Creek about a half mile west of Point 3655. I hiked west-northwest down the steep, icy snow remnant from last winter's record dump that filled the creek. Ben side-hilled above me along the verglass-covered rocks. We each thought the other had made the better route choice. As the slope of the icy snow remnant increased, I made my way to the rocks and contoured with Ben to the southwest where we



**Steve Gruhn on the southwest ridge of Peak 3966 with Chickaloon Bay and the Chickaloon River in the background.**

could hike on tundra. We stopped at a flattish area and planned our route to the southeast ridge of Peak 4167. We settled on a tundra slope to the right of a small gully. This route brought us to the 3500-foot saddle about a half mile southeast of the summit.

We followed a goat trail up the southeast ridge to the summit block. Fog began to obscure our views, complicating route-finding, but we found that the easiest route was to depart the ridge to our left and ascend the southern aspect of the summit block. Easy scrambling brought us to the summit, but the fog prevented any views. We found no sign of a previous ascent. We did not build a cairn and did not leave a register.

Concerned that route-finding might be a bit challenging in the fog, we didn't tarry long on the summit. We retraced our steps to the saddle and then continued along the ridge to the east. While plotting our route from below we had noted a cliffy area along this ridge and we were now concerned that in the fog we might not be able to navigate around the cliffs. However, we followed a goat trail and the route on the ridge proved trivial. At about 3700 feet, we decided that the daylight was too short this time of year for us to attempt either Peak 4045 (1233 meters) or Peak 4550 to the south. Earlier we had thought about climbing these two peaks, but they would have to wait for another day.

We descended the rocky tundra to the north and contoured around Point 3655 as we had previously. Once at the 3400-foot saddle between Point 3655 and Peak 3955, we decided to follow a goat trail across the east face of Peak 3955. That brought us to the 3400-foot saddle northwest of the peak.

We had talked about climbing Peak 3966 on



**Steve Gruhn ascending the southeast ridge of Peak 4167.**

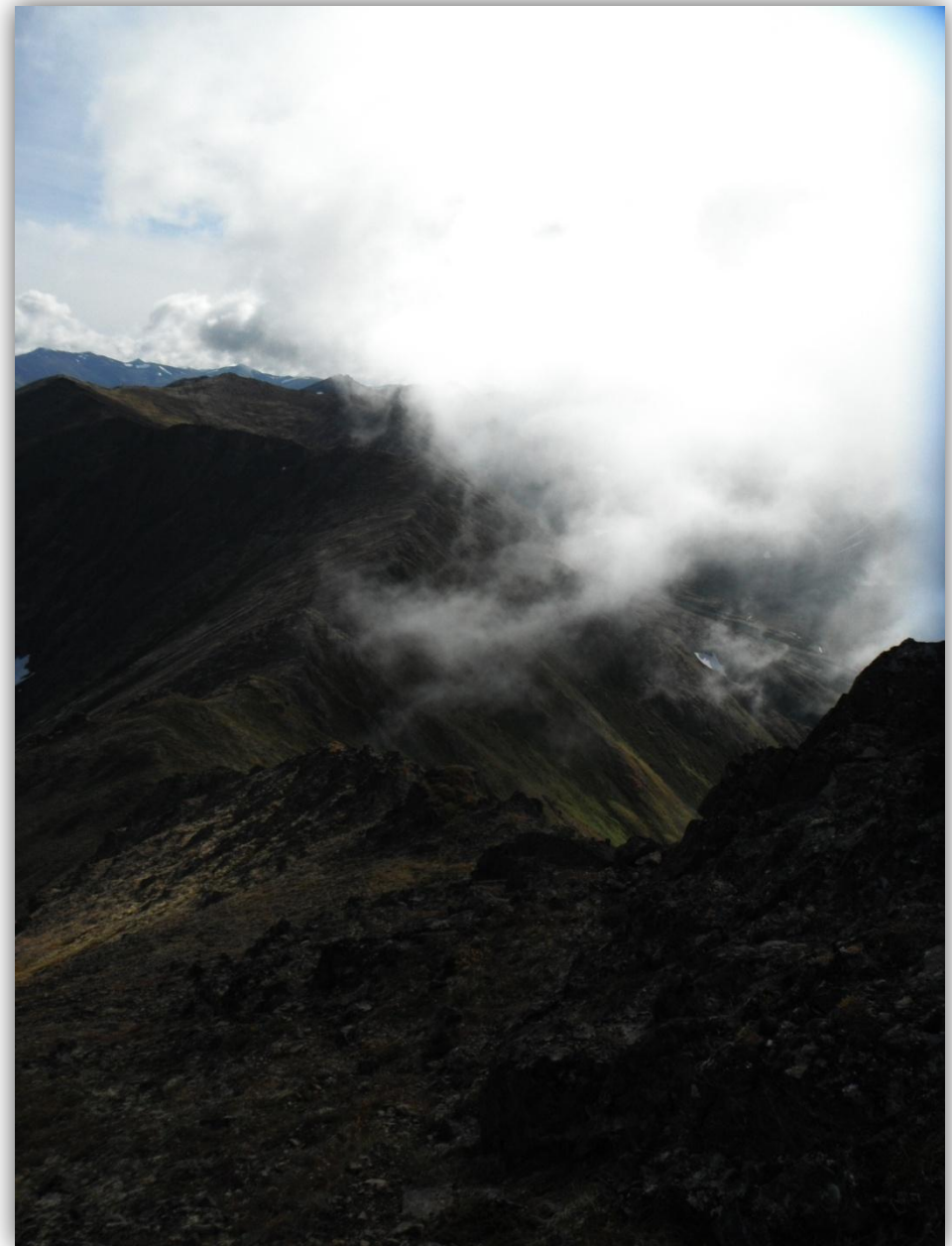
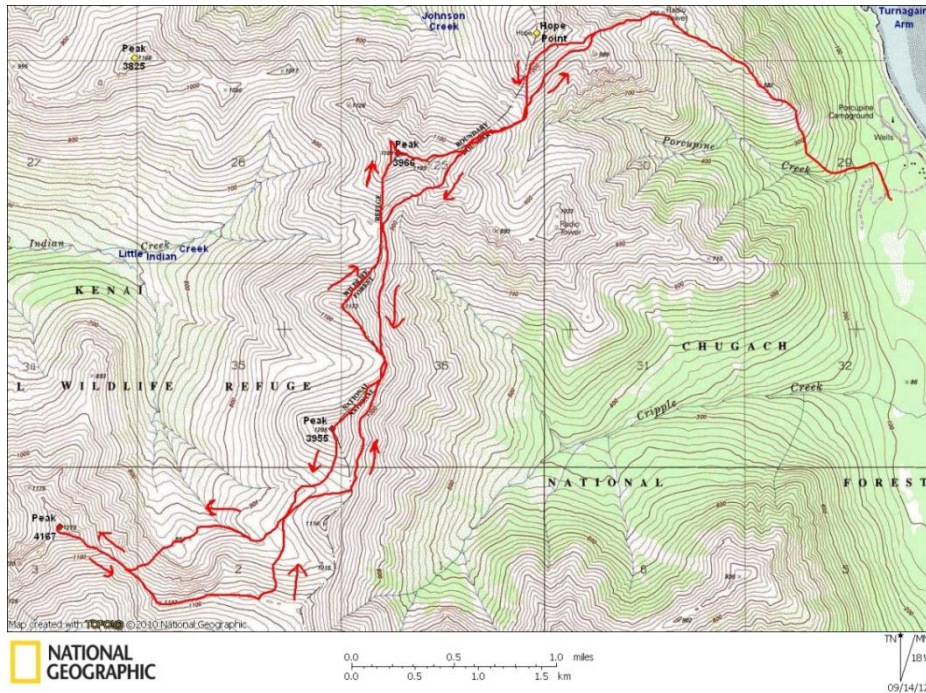
the return, so I led us up the slope to the northwest of the saddle. However, the slope northwest of the saddle didn't lead to Peak 3966. My fatigue-induced poor map-reading skills had us climb Point 3845. Only when we were on top did I realize that it didn't look like the Peak 3966 I had climbed nearly three months earlier. A quick check of the map resulted in my sheepishly admitting to Ben that my tired brain had caused us to climb an extra 400 feet that we didn't need to. Ben was good natured about this, but I'm sure he would have rather followed the goat trail that contoured to the east of this point. We descended northeast along the ridge to the 3000-foot saddle between Cripple Creek and Little Indian Creek south of Peak 3966. We ascended the ridge to about the 3800-foot level and then side-hilled along the west face to the northwest ridge. We followed the northwest ridge to the summit of Peak 3966. Tim's and Wiley's cairn was still there.

We descended east from the summit. The ridge curves to the north and we followed it to the

2800-foot saddle between Johnson Creek and Porcupine Creek. As we were descending we saw a man and a dog side-hilling north across the east face below us. He was the first person we had seen on our trip. At the saddle we cut across the open tundra to the 3100-foot saddle east of Hope Point. There we met the Hope Point Trail, which we descended, following the man and dog. After perhaps 15 minutes we caught up to them. We traveled together to help ease Ben's concern about bears. Along Porcupine Creek we were startled by a black animal in the woods. It turned out to be a Labrador retriever, but we were thankful to be traveling with a larger party nonetheless. We reached the trailhead about 7:15 p.m., about 12-1/2 hours after we had started.

rain clouds obscured Hope Point. We had made the most of a nice weather window.

But my appetite remains unsated. I'm already dreaming about Peak 4045 and Peak 4550.



**Southeast ridge of Peak 4167.**

While driving back to Anchorage, we noted that



Ross Noffsinger on the summit of Baleful Peak, capturing the moment with his video recorder.

## Baleful Peak, July 10, 2012

Text and photos by Charlie Sink

About three miles up the East Fork of the Eklutna River, Ross Noffsinger offered to take the rope he gave me to carry. I did not argue and gave it back to him. I had been moving significantly slower than he. My packed weighed too much. Old habits gave me permission to bring whatever I wanted. Ross had measured eight pounds of food. I did not measure the food or other items. I had even tossed in my tennis shoes. Now, I could not keep up with Ross, even with the rope added to his pack.

We had biked in along Eklutna Lake late in the morning of July 6, 2012. Earlier that day, another party consisting of Dave Hart, Steve Gruhn, and David Stchyrba had come in.

The weather was good. We had delayed our departure so that our climbing day could occur during one of the two days forecasted for good weather – Monday and Tuesday, July 9 and 10, 2012.

Along the trail, we found it to be dry and summer-like. Last winter's heavy snowfall had been very heavy and had knocked down or bent many more slim alder trees across the trail, at mid-height and pack height, making it difficult to maneuver heavy packs.

Late in the afternoon, we made it to the gravel bar alongside the East Fork of the Eklutna River. The mound, the end of the developed trail lay ahead of us. Above us, we spotted two black bears. One was feeding on grasses just below the end of a scree slope. The other bear was much higher, trying to cross steep ground to get above two sheep resting on perches below a conglomerate of cliffs. As we approached the mound, Ross suggested he would now call this area the "Bear Lair" due to the number of bears he had seen the last time he was here and the number we would see on this trip.

Ross had originally planned for us to make it all the way to Baleful Creek Valley to camp. By 7:00 p.m., after we came out of the brush just below the mound, however, I was spent. Ross said it was another 1,500 feet of climbing up a slope and a few more miles. I declined after Ross said that this was the last good spot to camp and access water. Before bed, as I

customarily do, I went around our camp area and 'marked' our territory making it fully around the camp.

I went to sleep early. Later, Ross heard vigorous slapping and cavorting of some creature or creatures near the spring and beaver pond below our campsite. The activity kept him awake for a while, while I slept peacefully.

We woke early around 6:00 a.m. and left camp by 8:00. The climb up the south-facing slopes was steep and the grass was high. The decision not to climb these slopes the previous night was the right one. After another climb upslope, we came to Ross' purported sheep's trail that would lead us along a high traverse. Looking back down, we saw a third black bear in the valley below us heading toward our recently-left campsite.

Across the valley stood the The Mitre, Ovis Peak, and White Lice Mountain on a long-spreading wall with a long waterfall diving off the ridge. Bounty Peak formed the headwaters up the valley. We worked our way around the left side of the valley to begin a traverse into Baleful Creek.



Ross Noffsinger near the waterfall.

After a long traverse, we found a small bench above Baleful Creek Valley to take a break. Below us, a herd of sheep grazed contentedly above the canyon that cut into the East Fork of the Eklutna River. A grand basin spread panoramically around us from Brittle Peak to Bounty Peak and on around to The Mitre, topped by glaciers, snowpack, and summits.

We descended before crossing Baleful Creek. Once there we collected water while Ross pointed out the pass that we would ascend. The lead to the pass was up a steepening snowfield that Ross kicked steps up for us. A small point release sent a small, slow-moving surface slough of snow between us, passed harmlessly by, and spilled over a small, but significant, cliff below. Ross climbed to the ridge but descended before moving off to the right having dropped some 200 feet. This route seemed improbable, but having been here before, Ross knew it was the right way.

At the pass it was snowing small-particle flakes with blustery wind that was not yet strong, but cold. Thankfully, the clouds had not closed out our visibility. Before us lay the West Fork Hunter Creek Glacier and Valley bordered by Hunters Peak and Troublesome Peak playing with the clouds. To our right was Peak 6325 feet that Ross had previously climbed. To our left, the north peak of Baleful Peak had several towers on it that we could see. One of the towers appeared bent and crooked. I hoped then that was not the summit.

Descending the pass we heel-kicked down steep slopes, thankful that the snow had softened enough for this technique. We headed toward the lateral moraines off to our left to avoid any convex bends in the glacier surface.

Soon we could see the bench where Ross said that Blissful Lake lay. Above us and over to our

left, a hanging glacier valley between the two summits of Baleful Peak opened with giant glacier-blue seracs hanging out into space above us threatening any approach. The northeast ridge



**Ross Noffsinger at the Turning Boulder.**

and false summit of Baleful Peak dropped down in an arc toward the bench where Blissful Lake resided. The ridge from this view stood steep and very high along its length and descent.

A short time later, we began the climb to the bench to Blissful Lake. Ross had cautioned not to begin the climb until one is just below the bench, as any attempt of traversing in higher and earlier would be an unnecessary exercise. We came out high on the bench and got a wonderful view of the blue-green lake and lower West Fork of Hunter

Creek Valley and the Knik River Valley off in the distance.

Around 7:00 p.m., we set up our tent near the boulder field on the south side of Blissful Lake. We walked down to the lakeshore to peer up the ridge we intended to climb on Baleful Peak. The ridge rose steeply, exhibiting many rock faces that led to what we could only determine was the false summit. We could see steep snow and cliff bands and escarpments off Baleful's northwest face and ridge.

The winds that night came in gusts and beat about our campsite. By morning, clouds were low and the same small granular snowfall that we saw at the pass befell our camp. It was a good excuse not to get up for the climb and we slept in knowingly committed to taking a rest day. By early evening blue sky appeared and the winds had begun to abate.

Even though we slept most of the day, we turned in early that night, Monday, July 9, 2012. We agreed to get up by 4:00 a.m. and were off by 6:30 a.m. The climb from Blissful

Lake to the north summit of Baleful Peak at 7990 feet is close to 4,600 feet of elevation to gain.

We quickly gained a snow basin hedged in by the northeast ridge of Baleful and a point of rock that held back a hanging glacial basin between the northeast and northwest ridges of Baleful Peak. Between the point of rock and Baleful's northeast ridge, a tongue of blue glacier ice descended a steep cliff like taffy that was stretched but not broken and dropped in front of us into the basin we were ascending.

To mount Baleful's northeast ridge, a snowfield raised before us that zigzagged first left, then right, passing between two rock bands. The snow

was hard. We both climbed first by using “French” technique side-hilling up the first snow slope. As we neared the first rock band on our leftward traverse, we began to mix front-point technique of the 40- and 45-degree slope. After getting around the first rock band, we began using more front-point technique. Clearing the second rock band brought to mind the commitment that Ross and I had made to climb most of the route unroped unless either felt we needed one.

Traversing over the top of the second rock band brought us before the last finger at 45 degrees, which we climbed with front-point technique.

The exit brought us to steep scree on a shallow face. A short traverse brought us to three grass-covered perches, which were good places to take off crampons. We easily climbed up to the ridge on steep, but broken, ground. From this interception, we began to look down and into the glacial basin from where the taffy blue glacier ice had descended. The view had also opened up and we could see a high shoulder on Siwash Peak to our east and nearly our level. We had probably ascended more than 2,000 feet above camp.

Pointing ourselves up the northeast ridge, we climbed the next step up steep and broken ground that was a fun scramble. The light granular snow that we had experienced the last two days began again and clouds began to swirl. Near this step’s top, we skirted the shattered rock on the ridge by turning it on its right on shattered scree following the beta given us to ‘go right when in doubt’ on this ridge. Reaching a shallow notch, the next step loomed above us.

This next step had better rock, but its steepness began to form the more difficult rock-climbing sections on the route. Off to the right, the steep face dropped off into the glacial basin below. To the left was scree slopes at our level and formed a cliff that we began rock climbing. Ross said the crux was to be in this section. After the initial climb up, we came to a gully system that led up. From its top, we crested the ridge.



**Ross Noffsinger traverses the terrane near the summit.**

After cresting this rise, a short section of modest ground led us to a group of boulders on the ridge. A steep snowfield dropped off toward the glacial basin to the northwest. This short section of ridge ended at a steep bolder. The snowfield abutted the bottom and right side of the boulder that we

used to start an ascent and moved into lie backing off it and the steep snow by kicking slight steps. We cleared some scree before stepping on top of the boulder. When I had gotten up, I shouted down to Ross, whom I could not see, that he would need at least his ice axe to come up around the boulder. He added his crampons.

Looking for a passage upward, I looked left under a boulder and was able to get around to the left of the ridge. I found easier ground and had Ross follow me. Farther up and around, we got away from the shallow broad face of the ridge and found two gullies that led directly up.

To get into either gully, a block of rock formed a ‘V’ starting at the top of the scree slope. The crack on the right hand of the ‘V’ had a shelf at chin level that we tried first. It immediately felt awkward. I moved over to the left hand crack of the ‘V’ block. As I was talking to Ross, I started to climb up explaining to him that this could probably be climbed by stemming moves. When I had finished my sentence, I had climbed some 15 feet. Ross soon followed.

After topping out this gully, we came to what Ross described as the false summit’s “scree fields.” Ross built a cairn at the top left side of this gully. Ross tried to shout out something to me, but his voice was hoarse, as was mine in response. He had been warned that it would be difficult finding cairns on one’s way down off the false summit.

Ross made two more rock cairns on the way up the slope. He gained the ridge below what appeared to be the false summit. Looking over the ridge to the northwest was to look down sheer walls that plummeted to the glacier basin below us. I felt a strong tug of vertigo, and then moved on. We turned a couple false summits before gaining it. Here we again peered down sheer



walls and were at 7400 feet. The snowing had stopped and some clearing had begun.

Ross climbed over the top of the pinnacle. I went lower and left of the crest on a ramp. Soon Ross was about to join me. I had him go below me as my ramp ended. Ross' lower ramp ended at a step above a gully. Here we decided to make a belay and down climb this step. I led down protecting the step above the move with a small stopper and moved down placing our large stopper behind a chock-stone and the gully wall. Afterward, we found a modest sloping perch behind a boulder on a shallow rib.

On this perch of grass, we had lunch while the weather began to clear and the sun came out to make a good picnic spot. It was a pleasurable time looking off to the east and down the eastern slopes of the north summit of Baleful Peak. Below us, the slopes led down to the hanging glacier that resides between the north and south summit of Baleful. We were high above the hanging blue seracs and could see the gully leading up from the hanging glacier to the notch between the false summit and the north summit.

Looking over at the summit block, it looked like we were on a different mountain. The cliffs were covered in hoarfrost. Ross said there was supposed to be some hidden gully that would lead up to the summit ridge. Looking over at the ridge where a small notch lay below the summit tower and the false summit, we looked left to where a gully may lie hidden. However, at its bottomed shone a frozen waterfall. If this was the lower part of the hidden gully, then we were in for some interesting climbing. Who said this was summer climbing?

We next traversed over to the notch between the summit and the false summit. Looking down the small notch and off the northwest side appeared a narrow and harrowingly steep gully whose darkened face led to the glacier basin far below.

Just below the hidden gully and along the edge of a snowfield we put our crampons back on and pulled out our ice tools. Ross led up, moving away from the frozen waterfall to rocks on the left.



**Ross Noffsinger in the gully.**

Returning to the gully, we found it narrow, but not more than 40 degrees. Surface snow hid ice underneath and I began to front-point up it.

Ross crossed the gully and moved out right onto more of a rock-and-scrree slope. He climbed up right away from the gully. I continued up the gully after climbing rocks on the right to bypass a step in the

gully. After a few hundred feet, as my right hand began to tire on my ice axe, I crested the summit ridge. Ross shouted at me after he, too, had crested the summit ridge after exiting his rock climb.

I looked down the northwest face of the summit ridge and felt vertigo again. I looked up the ridge. One could climb on rocks on the ridge and traverse right over 60-degree snow above a huge face, or traverse left on 40- to 45-degree snow above a thousand-foot drop. I went up the left side of the ridge traversing left and below the rocks before gaining the ridge again.

Experience on many of the Chugach Mountains proves that the summit spire often eludes one. Baleful's summit ridge was no different as I passed several false ones. I could tell there was a grand view about me yet instead I concentrated on finding the summit. I crested another summit point and I was sure the next would possibly be the summit point. I descended toward a ramp above a steep snowfield on the left. As I turned a rock on the ridge, I scraped hoarfrost off the rock and down my neck. The chill was short-lived as the summit was now close and the sunshine felt warm.

Cresting the slope, I walked over to a small point of rock, thinking it was the summit and stood briefly on it before backing off. I looked over to the dreaded crooked summit tower, one tower away, and the slope off the west face and could thankfully see that it was not the summit after all. On the south side of the north summit was a small wind-formed snow perch where Ross and I could take off our packs and enjoy our summit visitation success.

Now, we could peer 360 degrees around us at this magnificent panorama. We could see the Eklutna traverse over the Eklutna Glacier and the high peaks west of us including Bashful Peak.



**Ross Noffsinger down climbing.**

The Mitre, and Bellicose Peak, among all the others. To the east, we could see Hunters Peak and the glacier it shared with Troublesome Peak. The south summit of Baleful Peak was partially hidden by the crooked tower before us.

The temperature was pleasant with little wind, but we knew it was a precarious perch and a long way back down. We got to the summit just before 3:00 p.m. We took many photographs of the view and hero shots of ourselves. We ate a smaller snack and drank. It had taken us about 8-1/2 hours from camp to get here. Ross had me look for the summit register in the snow, but we could not find one.

Before descending, Ross asked me to hold up in a few places so he could catch me on video recording as I began to prepare for the descent. I would wait in places for Ross to arrive and start his video recording before descending. The summit ridge had a nice knife-edge and the view was spectacular so we assumed the pictures would be good.

Instead of descending the snow and ice gully I had come up, we both went down the broken rock and scree face that Ross came up to ascend the summit tower. Soon we were across the ice gully and descended the rock past the frozen waterfall step and onto the snow.

We stopped again and ate and drank water at our previous picnic spot, for we knew we still had a long way to go. The sun began to lose its luster and I thought I heard thunder off in the distance.

We reversed our belayed-move pitch, moved around the false summit, and descending the scree field. We could not find Ross' cairns that he had made. Ross spotted what he thought was tape that marked the regular descent route. We continued past looking for our cairns and could not find them. We halted and climbed up to the tape location only to find a rappel sling that would allow one to rappel over an upper snowfield on the broad shallow ramp face we had avoided earlier.

Deciding not to rappel here, I pointed out to Ross that a point off to our right that held a scree gully. We descended. Ross suggested we go across the top of a snowfield where it met a cliff face after descending the scree gully. It came out below our two gullies below the 'V' cracks, one of which we had climbed.

Turning that corner onto the northeast ridge, we found the passage to the boulder that I had ducked under to get up. After finding that passage, we came to the top of the boulder that we had stemmed around and thence rappelled over that boulder. Next, we came to a crack that I had missed on the way up that Ross called the "No Pack Crack." I tried it facing outward, maneuvering my shoulders and got my small pack through. Ross had to take his pack off to get through.

Once through the crack, we came to the longer section of the rock climb where the crux lay and began descending. There was a rappel sling at the top of the gully. Part way down, I moved left away from the gully and down-climbed some boulders before moving right back into the gully.

Afterward, we down-climbed to the left before moving across this cliff face on a ramp back toward the crest of the northeast ridge.

Before getting off this section, we knew the lower exit lay off the edge of the ridge. I found myself down-climbing vertical rock and moving right toward the edge of the ridge before going down. Once over to the right, we found the route down.

At the bottom of this face, we joined on the left side of the ridge. We came to a modest broad area that was nearly flat. I suggested to Ross that we take another break there. Ross pointed out the summit of Boisterous Peak peering above the northern ramparts of Bashful Peak, now hidden in the clouds. Boisterous Peak nearly touched the descending cloud level, but its two summits appeared through the distant haze of rain or snow. I took a picture.

We were overlooking the grassy perch where we first took our crampons off. The perch was some 600 to 700 feet below us and another rocky pitch that we needed to descend. After another snack, I ran out of water. It was 10:00 p.m. before we started down again.



**Ross Noffsinger at the base of the rock climb.**

Afterward, we began the descent to the last snowfield. We were in luck as the snow had softened. After clearing the last rock band, I finally turned out facing down and tried to catch up to Ross, who was below, taking his crampons off.

We got to camp right at midnight. We made dinner and decided not to get up early before going to bed around 2:00 a.m. By morning, it was raining hard. It was a good excuse to sleep in. We got up before noon after it had quit raining and were ready to go around 12:30 p.m.

We set out for the pass between the West Fork of Hunter Creek and Baleful Creek. After clearing the pass and descending into Baleful Creek, the afternoon sun had begun to unfold into a panoramic Technicolor view of the basin. The south summit of Baleful Peak lay hidden above, displaying fresh snow hanging beneath its heights. Finding our goat trail, after following a false higher trail, we came to the corner that would lead us to the slopes above the mound.

Ross looked down and spotted a bear moving parallel to us some 800 feet below. Its hair was not black like the black bears we had seen and its long body was not compact either. Its long dark-brown fur slid over its powerful muscles in a shimmering gloss as it seemingly turned the world in its long powerful strides. Ross asked how long it would take a bear like that to reach us. Minutes, I said. Soon it disappeared and occasionally, I would glance back to see if the bear had followed us.

Once above the mound and our old camp, we saw a black bear come from down-valley, head toward our old campsite, and after sniffing our camp moved on. Loading our packs again, we began our descent to the mound. We immediately discovered two fresh bear tracks moving in panic just downhill from our perch on a snowfield. We estimated a sow and cub were startled by us just before our arrival.

We were glad to reach the mound, but

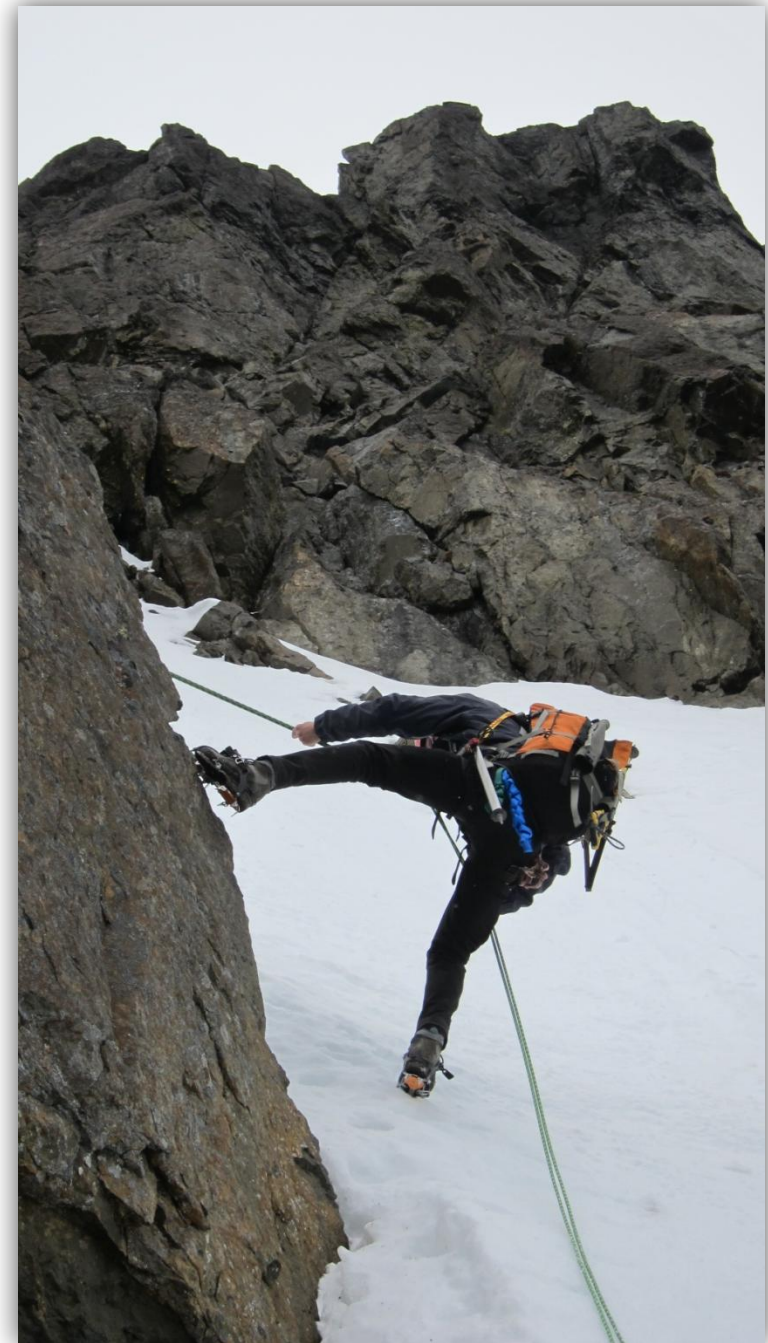
unthankful that we confirmed that this was also the Bear Lair. Moving off the mound, we made it to the gravel bar by the river to look up the hill at the same scree field and grass slope at probably the same bear we first spotted on the trip. We decided to load up on caffeine and sugar energy Gu packs for the remaining hike out.

It had begun to darken and the woods made it darker underneath. A white moth fluttered up from the forest floor and I hoped that I was hallucinating. The trailhead came after a time and we found our bikes. We were beyond zombie mode by the time we made it back to Ross' SUV. Around 4:00 a.m. on the drive back, Ross decided to call his wife, whom he was worried about worrying about us.

I woke about noon Wednesday, July 11, and found that I could not talk nor could I go back to sleep. I had a horrible cough. By Friday, I could talk some and called my doctor who got me into his office by 1:00 p.m. and treated me for pneumonia.



**Charlie Sink (left) and Ross Noffsinger on the summit of Baleful Peak.**



**Ross Noffsinger during rappel #2.**



## A Hike in the First Snowstorm (Up the Eagle River)

Story and photos by Tom Choate

The mountains slowly disappear as the grey cloud advances. Below the rocks, once-red tundra fades to nothing as the cloud lowers. Soon wisps of the cloud weep to the ground. Tiny white flakes appear: The first snow of the Alaska autumn is beginning.

Traveling up the river into the oncoming storm, larger and larger flakes fill the air, blending and swirling in the wind. Spirals of trees appear and disappear, forming flashes of yellow and orange, which fade to pastel and then vanish.

The ground is still warm, melting every flake at once, making puddles. Dark leaves are dripping with snowmelt, but the pale yellow aspen leaves are starting to accumulate little collections of snow in the center, but still melting at the edges. A light breeze makes a thousand yellow pendulums swing under white-hatted twigs on the nearby trees.

Walking the trail, we follow a black serpent that wiggles and bends through

the woods and rocks. On each side the trees are rows of Greek columns, rising up, each one topped by dripping gold. Here and there bands of color and strange sculptures pass by as we walk. On the left there is a clump of greenish pink, spotted with redder leaves, and banded by brown twigs, each one bearing a candelabrum of shiny scarlet berries. If you inhale deeply there will be a pervasive odor of rotting leaves and fermenting fruits.

On the right there are clusters of dwarf birch bushes. Each rough-edged leaf is a patchwork of brown and orange, not standing out, but blending with myriad neighbors. Where does each bush end? Together they form a giant choir, singing to the eyes.

Farther on, in a field of brown and green alders with grey trunks bent at all angles, there is a sudden burst of huge pale-yellow leaves. The whole scene glows under the darker canopy as if each plant contained its own pale sun. Each prickly, tan stem is crested by a brilliant crimson spray of berries, pointing upward as if daring the storm to hide them. But the snow has become relentless; the swirling flakes are slowly blotting out these spots of color, pushing them down into white winter obscurity.

The cold, snow-laden breeze no longer chills me as I warm to the walk through this special forest. We move slowly along the dark pathway, which here and there is now showing white flanks where the trees and shrubs allow snow to land on the grasses. Ahead the sound of a river swells until we burst out of the forest onto a grey beach, bisected by white cascades and swirling pools of silty, glacial water.

Layer upon layer of grey mist rises above us, and there, a thousand feet up, a faint dark profile peers out, then slowly fades until we are not even sure that a mountain cliff had been there at all. The river winds out of sight up the valley, where the patchwork of golden trees is emphasized by dark clumps of spruce. At each bend the colors fade more and more, blending with the clouds, yet always beckoning us onward into the distant, mysterious wilderness. We must follow the water's call, and keep exploring the depths of the autumn snowstorm world.

---September 25, 2010





## Book Review

By Frank E. Baker

### Canyons and Ice: The Wilderness Travels of Dick Griffith

Author: Kaylene Johnson

In Canyons and Ice: The Wilderness Travels of Dick Griffith, Eagle River author Kaylene Johnson recounts the adventures of Dick Griffith, an Alaska resident, who over the past six decades has undertaken a series of remarkable wilderness journeys across Alaska, Canada, Mexico, and the American West.

Johnson worked with Griffith on the biography for more than a year, poring over the meticulous journals (about 500 pages, single spaced) the adventurer kept over the years.

After reading Griffith's diaries, Johnson set out on her own epic task of figuring out what stayed in the book and what had to be cut.

"That was the hardest part, figuring out what to put in and what to leave out," Johnson said.

With detailed maps and extraordinary photos that received a special chemical restoration treatment prior to publishing, the book first follows Griffith's incredible river-running trips down the Glenn and Colorado Rivers; and most notably, his 1952 rafting expedition down the Barranca del Cobre's (Copper Canyon) Urique River in northwestern Mexico. Prior to his trip in 1952 in a small pack raft, no one had ever mapped or descended this river system.

Among his many accomplishments, Dick Griffith is considered the father of pack rafting, both inside and outside of Alaska.

During Griffith's extensive Arctic sojourns, many of the Inupiat and Inuit Eskimos he encountered were awestruck by his wilderness prowess. Griffith walked the entire Arctic Coast from Point Hope in Alaska to Hudson Bay, in Canada, with very little outside support.

In addition to those travels, mostly alone, Griffith participated in 17 Alaska Wilderness Races, each ranging from 150 to 200 miles in length, and finished his last race at the age of 81. He hiked 300 miles from Glacier Bay to the mouth of the Copper River, trod over the Iditarod Trail's 1,000 miles, and put on countless miles in Chugach State Park, including numerous Crow Pass Crossings.

Griffith, who currently lives in Anchorage, is in every sense a true explorer. If he had lived hundreds of years ago, he would have been one of the people who insisted on setting out for uncharted lands. I'm certain he would have made untold discoveries. But he probably wouldn't have achieved fame like Shackleton, Amundsen, and many others, for Dick is a humble, modest person not interested in glory or fanfare.

Noted outdoor adventurer Roman Dial, often referred to as Griffith's understudy, commented in a review: "There is much more to Dick than these wilderness adventures and fortunately for the rest of us, this book captures much of the human and family side of this great man.

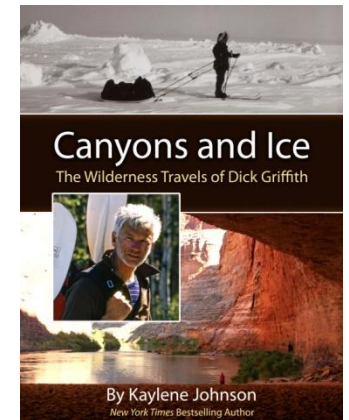
"Having been fortunate enough to know Dick and read some of his journals, I feared that something of the unique quality of his voice, the "aw-shucks" wit and humor would be lost. But his insightful one-liners are there and all the stories are well-told and true."

Poet Robert W. Service referred to "the great alone," but he only touched its fringes during the Klondike gold rush. Griffith penetrated far into its depths. He lived and breathed it for thousands of frozen miles.

Griffith has often been asked why he ventured forth and what did he find? We can only conjecture, and perhaps even Griffith himself cannot completely answer those questions.

I only met Dick Griffith once, but I can clearly picture him answering the "why" question the way he did in the book, with an unassuming glance and a shrug of the shoulders: "Every so often, it's time to walk."

Canyons and Ice: The Wilderness Travels of Dick Griffith is available through Amazon.com and local book stores.



# Peak of the Month: Scenery Peak

By Steve Gruhn

Mountain Range: Coast Mountains

Borough: Unorganized Borough

Drainages: Cascade Creek and Upper Scenery Cove Lake

Latitude/Longitude: 57° 2' 12" North, 132° 33' 27" West

Elevation: 6270 feet

Prominence: 1220 feet from Shelob (6350±50)

Adjacent Peaks: Peak 5650(±50) in the Patterson Glacier and Witches Cauldron drainages, Peak 5650(±50) in the Cascade Creek and Upper Scenery Cove Lake drainages, Peak 5650(±50) in the Witches Cauldron drainage, and Peak 4640 in the Patterson Glacier and Cascade Creek drainages

Distinctness: 1220 feet from Peak 5650(±50) in the Patterson Glacier and Witches Cauldron drainages

USGS Map: Sumdum (A-2)

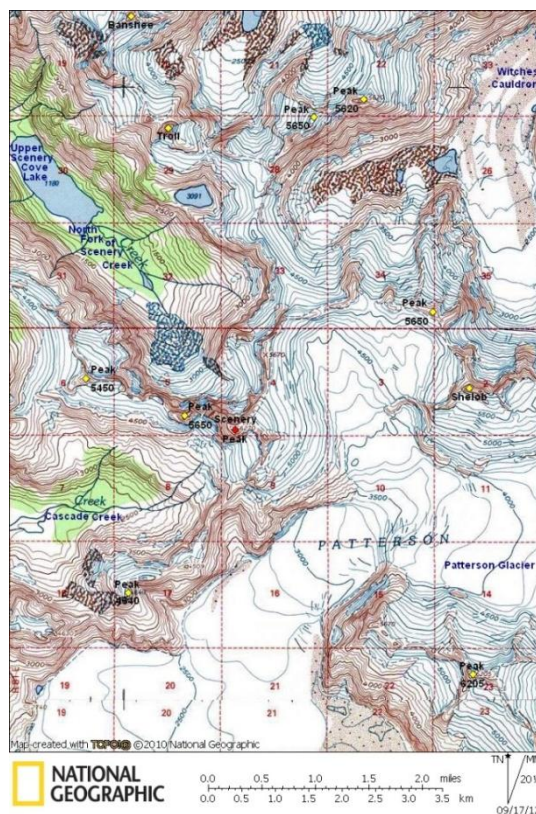
First Recorded Ascent: This peak might be unclimbed.

Access Point: Upper Scenery Cove Lake

On the evening of July 17, 1972, Alaska Island Air flew Richard "Dick" Culbert, Fred Douglas, and Paul Starr in a de Havilland Beaver floatplane to Upper Scenery Cove Lake. The climbers immediately set out for their primary objective – Cats Ears southwest of Devils Thumb (9077). Their route involved ascending the long north ridge of Scenery Peak to about 4600 feet. They reached their primary objective in the first six days of their planned two-week expedition. Finding themselves with extra time on their hands, they then set out to explore some of the peaks nearer to their drop-off point. They established a camp at about 3400 feet south of Troll (5650±50). From this camp they climbed

Shelob, sat out five days of storms, and then climbed Troll, assigning names to both peaks. On July 31, the last day of their expedition, they attempted Scenery Peak, the name they had given to the 6270-foot peak at the southeastern head of their valley. Their efforts were stymied by an ice gully, a knife-edge ridge, and at the base of the peak itself, another steep fifth-class ridge.

The information for this article came from Starr's report entitled "The Cat's Ears," which was published on pages 6 through 8 of the 1973 *Canadian Alpine Journal*. Starr described the "fine, unclimbed peaks and huge granite walls" of the area as "magnificent." He surmised that the peaks in the area don't see much attention because Devils Thumb dwarfs them and serves as a magnet to attract the few climbers who venture into the region.



Eben Sargent in a couloir above the Pika Glacier, during a bike-ski-paddle trip up and over Denali. A trip report appeared in the September 2011 *Scree*. Photo by Luc Mehl, who is giving the presentation at the October MCA meeting.

**MCA General Meeting Minutes:  
September 19, 2012**

**Equipment:** Jayme will be asking for help with the rope inventory, this needs to be done before the ice festival.

**Calendar:** Bring any horizontal photos to the October meeting at 6 p.m. before the meeting begins. We'll vote at the meeting. If you know the dates of any events that should be added to the calendar for 2013, contact Stu.

**Parks Advisory:** Pete Panarese reviewed the recommendations from the Chugach State Park Advisory Committee. They are planning to put a separate submission in to the state Capital Budget system in November. When their recommendations are finalized, they will discuss it with the MCA Board and present it to the membership. They will be asking for a letter from the MCA endorsing their budget requests.

**Library:** Part of the MCA's book collection is at REI in a conference room. Kristopher Klein will be helping organize the books and make them more accessible. If you want to help with the organization or maintenance of the library, contact Vicky Lytle.

**Huts:** Greg Bragiel needs people to help with hut maintenance. He cannot do it all himself. Now is the time to form a group and put together a plan of action for next summer maintenance, in addition to any materials that can be taken to the huts this winter.

**Training:** Jayme announced the MCA Ice Festival is September 28 to 30. Everyone is welcome, from novices to more advanced climbers. Mandatory meeting and gear check is Wednesday, September 26 at the BP Center. Cost is \$75, what a bargain! More if you sign up next week at the gear check. A signup sheet for student and instructor interest is up front.

**Elections:** Elections for MCA officer and board positions will be during the October general meeting. All the officer positions and two

additional board positions are open. Galen Flint was nominated for a second term as Vice President, Seth Weingarten was nominated for Treasurer, and Kelley Williams was nominated for Secretary. So far we don't have any accepted nominations for President. Several people are considering their nomination before accepting. If you would like to give back to the club by running for one of these positions, contact a current officer or board member.

Ross Noffsinger presented a video about his climb of Bounty Peak.

---Submitted by Vicky Lytle, Director



**The first snowfall of the 2012-13 ski season occurred September 29. Time to start hot-waxing the skis! Photo by Amy Murphy.**



**A view of the upper Eagle River Valley, where Dick Griffith has spent a lot of time. Photo by Frank Baker.**

# Mountaineering Club of Alaska

President	Tim Silvers	250-3374	Board member	Greg Encelewski	360-0274
Vice-President	Galen Flint	650-207-0810	Board member	Brian Aho	360-4671
Secretary	Mark Smith	868-3155	Board member	Vicky Lytle	351-8246
Treasurer	Randy Plant	243-1438	Board member	John Recktenwald	346-2589
			Board member	Jim Sellers	360-2560

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

Dues can be paid at any meeting or mailed to the Treasurer at the MCA address at right. If you want a membership card, please fill out a club waiver and mail it with a self-addressed, stamped envelope. If you fail to receive the newsletter or have questions about your membership, contact the Club Membership Committee at [membership@mtnclubak.org](mailto:membership@mtnclubak.org).

The *Scree* is a monthly publication of the Mountaineering Club of Alaska. Articles, notes and letters submitted for publication in the newsletter should be emailed to [MCAScree@gmail.com](mailto:MCAScree@gmail.com). Articles should be submitted by the 25<sup>th</sup> of the month to appear in the next month's *Scree*.

Paid ads may be submitted to the attention of the Vice-President at the club address and should be in electronic format and pre-paid. Ads can be emailed to [vicepresident@mtnclubak.org](mailto:vicepresident@mtnclubak.org).

Missing your MCA membership card? Stop by the monthly meeting to pick one up or send a self-addressed stamped envelope and we'll mail it to you.

Mailing list/database entry: Yukiko Hayano and Randy Plant - 243-1438  
Hiking and Climbing Committee: Vicky Lytle - [hcc@mtnclubak.org](mailto:hcc@mtnclubak.org)  
Huts: Greg Bragiel - 569-3008  
Calendar: Stuart Grenier - 337-5127  
Scree Editor: [MCAScree@gmail.com](mailto:MCAScree@gmail.com) Steve Gruhn (344-1219) assisted by Amy Murphy (338-3979)  
Web: [www.mtnclubak.org](http://www.mtnclubak.org) (change your address here)

Mailing list service: [MCAK@yahoogroups.com](mailto:MCAK@yahoogroups.com)

Mountaineering Club of Alaska  
Box 243561  
Anchorage, AK 99524-3561