

the SCREE

Mountaineering Club of Alaska

October 2018

Volume 61 Number 10



"Wilderness is not a luxury but a necessity of the human spirit, and as vital to our lives as water and good bread."

— Edward Abbey

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October monthly meeting: Wednesday, October 3, at 6:30 p.m. at the BP Energy Center at 1014 Energy Court in Anchorage. We will have elections and voting for 2019 MCA Calendar photos. Bill Long will present "Decade of Antarctic Exploration," including first ascents as well as geographic and scientific discoveries in Antarctica.

"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."

This issue brought to you by: Editor—Steve Gruhn assisted by Dawn Munroe

Cover Photo

Kneely Taylor (left) and Richard Baranow down-climbing Peak 6010 in the Lake George Glacier drainage of the Chugach Mountains.
Photo by Ed Smith

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

Hiking and Climbing Schedule

December 21 - Flattop Mountain Sleepout. No leader.

Choate's Chuckle - Tom Choate

Q: How could a mistake in describing a new waterfall ice-climbing route not matter?

Answer on page 21

Climbing Notes

On September 3 Joe Nyholm emailed to report that the previous week he had made a solo ascent of the western and highest summit of Peak 5450 in the Exit Glacier, Kaknu Glacier, and Lowell Glacier drainages of the Kenai Mountains. He found no evidence of a prior ascent. We look forward to including a detailed trip report in an upcoming issue of *the Scree*.

Article Submission: Text and photography submissions for *the Scree* can be sent as attachments to mcascree@gmail.com. Articles should be submitted by the 11th of each month to appear in the next issue of *the Scree*. Do not submit material in the body of the email. Do not submit photos embedded in the text file. Send the photo files separately. Send high-resolution file photos separately, including captions for each photo. We prefer articles that are under 1,000 words. If you have a blog, website, video, or photo links, send us the link. Cover photo selections are based on portraits of human endeavor in the outdoors. Please submit at least one vertically-oriented photo for consideration for the cover. Please don't forget to submit photo captions.

For the MCA Membership Application and Liability Waiver, visit <http://www.mtnclubak.org/index.cfm?useaction=members.form>.

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Online? Click me!



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

Peak 6010, Chugach Mountains

Text by Kneely Taylor

I saw Richard Baranow at an MCA meeting in May and then picked up the conversation later at the Moose's Tooth. After a beer I was foolishly proposing climbs that were beyond my abilities, but, as usual, Richard encouraged me.

Several days later I was boarding a helicopter in Girdwood, headed for the Lake George Glacier to spend several days skiing and climbing with Richard and Ed Smith. After landing near the high point between the Twentymile and Lake George Glaciers, Richard spent several hours instructing Ed and me on the construction of a perfectly laid-out camp with a large, sunken cook tent, two well-protected tent sites, and a latrine, all built to Richard's exact specifications.



*Camp on the Lake George Glacier.
Photo by Ed Smith*

The next morning dawned with perfect weather, but of course, we didn't get an early start, but instead loafed around sleeping late and eating breakfast. Then Richard spent about two hours giving Ed and me a refresher on crevasse rescue and climbing technique. I really needed that and thank Richard for that especially.

Peak 6010 was an obscure peak to the north and west of where we were camped. Richard had wanted to climb it for some time because his research revealed it was unclimbed. Both Ed and I were eager.

We set out for Peak 6010 at 2:10 p.m., intending only to check out the route. After all, it was late. At about 7 p.m., we reached a high ridge about 500 vertical feet below the summit. Above



*Richard Baranow (left) and Kneely Taylor approaching Peak 6010
across the Lake George Glacier.
Photo by Ed Smith*

that highpoint it got very steep, and then there was a large bergschrund, and above that a very steep slope. That slope looked very prone to a nasty avalanche. We took pictures, ate something, and decided to turn back.

But then summit fever took over, and we decided to go up to the bergschrund and take a look. We took off our skis and started climbing. It turned out that there was a way around the bergschrund, and soon enough we were climbing the steep slope above it; I'm guessing the slope was 55 degrees. The upper ridge above the bergschrund was nasty. I say that because just to our left several wet snow avalanches rushed by, while immediately to our right was a cliff dropping off to a glacier several hundred feet below. Falling that way would not have been survivable.

As we went up that thing, Richard was burying pickets as much as three feet down, as Ed and I followed, roped of course. Richard deserves great credit for leading. It was so steep, and the

snow so soft that he was waist- or chest-deep on the uphill side. To go forward, he first pushed down the soft, wet snow with a knee and then somehow got a foot up in the depression, pushed down, and somehow made a new step, about six inches forward of the last one. Exhausting. I was in the middle of our rope team, and so for me it was a piece of cake, except for my fear of being in a very scary place. At one point I thought to myself, "Mark this moment, Kneely, because you aren't going to be doing this again."

We made it to the summit of Peak 6010 at 10:30 p.m on June 9. There was no evidence of previous climbs, and Richard had done his research. It probably was a first ascent. I was thrilled and changed my mind about "never doing this again."

Richard led the descent back the way we had come, placing pickets as we descended. It had been necessary for Ed to pull all the pickets as we climbed because we had only five pickets. Pulling the pickets and then carrying them was not easy, Ed did an amazing job doing that. Especially on the descent. I don't think I could have. It was steep, and a misstep at the back of the rope, after pulling the protection, would not have been nice.

Eventually we got back to where we had left our skis, but by then it was 11:30 p.m. and the previously soft snow then had a hard crust. The ski back was difficult, at first, but the lingering light of midnight in June up high in the Chugach Mountains was extraordinary. We were all inspired and felt good all the way back to camp, where we arrived at 3:15 a.m.



View from the summit of Peak 6010, looking north.

Photo by Kneely Taylor



Richard Baranow, on the summit of Peak 6010 looking south.

Photo by Kneely Taylor



Steep snow below the summit of Peak 6010.

Photo by Ed Smith



Left to right: Ed Smith, Kneely Taylor, and Richard Baranow on the summit of Peak 6010.

Photo by Ed Smith

Tee Peak (1545 feet), Coast Mountains: Rainforest to Winter

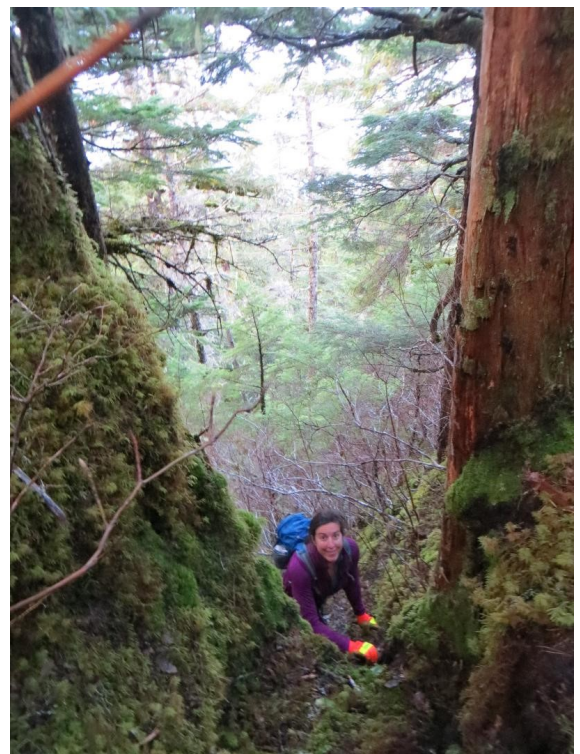
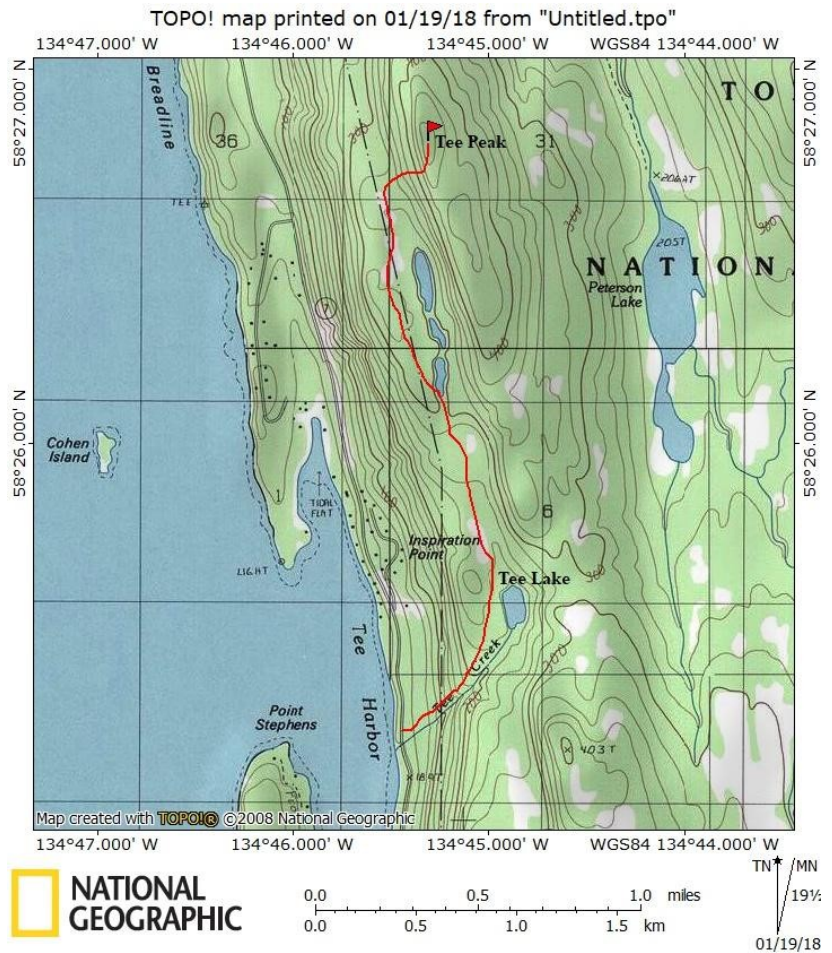
Text and photos by Ben Still

On January 3rd, 2016, Jill Still, Mike Miller, Mary Aparezuk, and I set out to hike up a small peak north of Juneau near Tee Harbor, Peak 1545. We started just to the north of Tee Creek along the Glacier Highway. Entering the forest, vibrant, green moss greeted us along the first 500 vertical feet with random patches of brush and fallen trees to slow progress. We admired the cascading waterfalls along Tee Creek as we hiked along the north bank of the stream. At 500 feet in elevation Tee Creek split into two branches and we followed the northern creek up toward Tee Lake. A few inches of wet snow blanketed the forest floor in places, hiding the beautiful moss carpet.

At 700 feet we entered into a large muskeg meadow and found the going much slower as we began plowing through wet, heavy, knee-deep snow. I was hopeful there would be significantly less snow up there, but alas, I was wrong. We continued to the back of the meadow until we had a view of frozen Tee Lake. The snow depth did lessen to shin deep for quite some time. We continued post-holing through the wet, heavy snow, linking meadows together, and slowly gained elevation while mountain views of the Chilkat Mountains to the west opened up.

After a mile of knee-deep snow in the meadows, we came across snowshoe tracks and they were heading in the direction we wanted to go. Excellent! The tracks came up from a frozen lake just below us. I am not sure I would have walked across the slushy-looking ice on that lake, but they did not fall. We followed the snowshoe tracks through the meadows until the summit of the peak was due east of us and 500 vertical feet above us. The snowshoe tracks looped around and followed the drainage back toward the slushy lakes, so we veered off. One hundred feet of thigh-deep, wet snow really slowed us down until we reentered the forest and were down to ankle-deep snow. As we climbed up, the forest steepened and the snow slowly inched up our legs. The final 40 vertical feet was steep enough we were all using our arms to pull up on small pieces of brush or dig into the snow for a moss handhold.

Once we crested over the final steep lip, the forest opened back up into near sub-alpine conditions. The

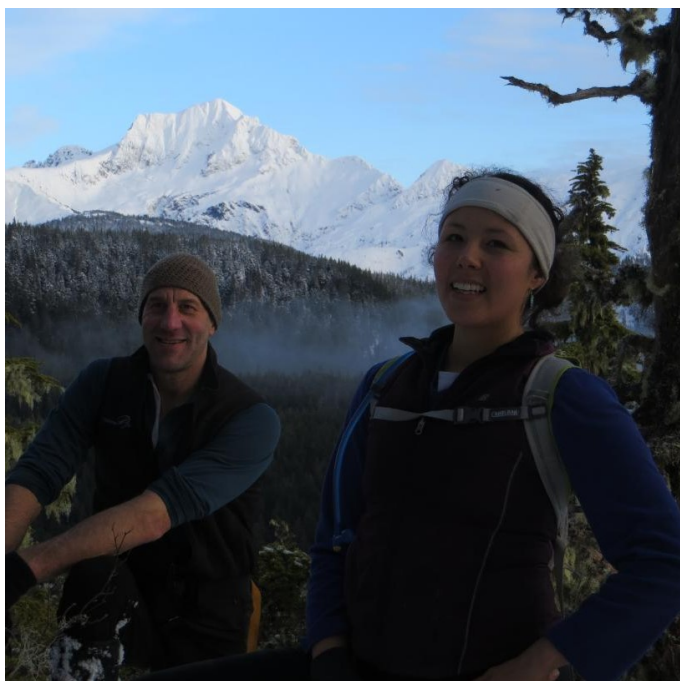


Jill Still climbing up through the mossy rainforest.

snow was really deep there and we were all wallowing around in sections of waist-deep powder. We wallowed up the final tenth of a mile along a ridgeline of stunted mountain-hemlock trees and beautiful views of the Coast Mountains to the east, the Chilkat Range to the west, and the island peaks to the south. The trees got a little bigger right at the summit and our view to the north never appeared. Wow, that was a lot of work for such a small little peak. We spent a very short time on the summit taking photos and followed our tracks back to the car for the sunset. Tee Peak seemed like a reasonable name for the peak, being the only true summit near Tee Harbor and Tee Creek.



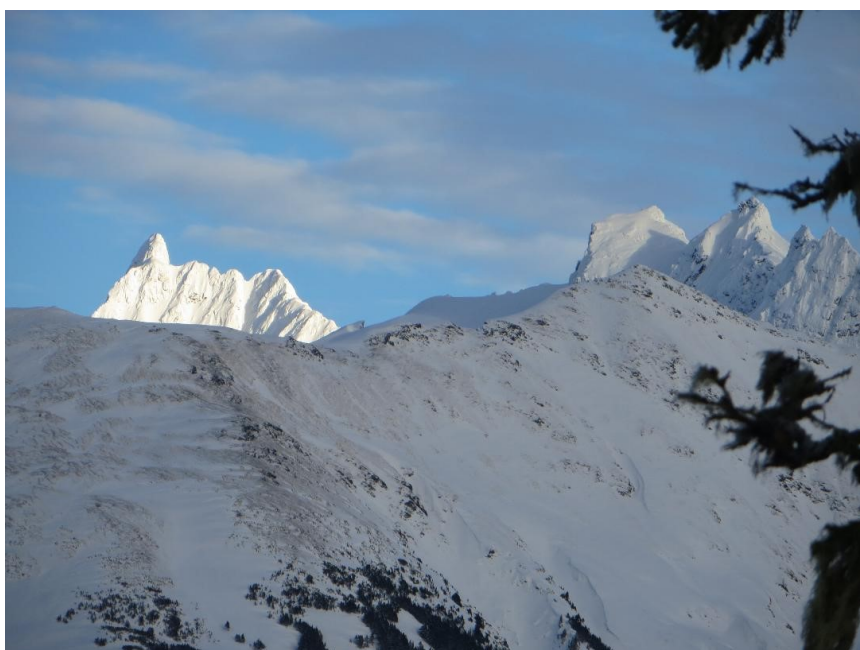
From left: Jill Still, Mike Miller, and Mary Aparezuk cruising through the snowy meadows.



Mike Miller (left) and Mary Aparezuk near the top of Tee Peak with Stroller White Mountain in the background.



. From left: Mike Miller, Mary Aparezuk, Jill Still, and Ben Still on the summit of Tee Peak.



Minor Peak on the left and Lillian Rae Spire on the right.

Shakespeare Shoulder (3501 feet) and Bard Peak (3850 feet), Kenai Mountains

Text by Steve Gruhn; photos by Charlie Sink



Steve Gruhn hiking up the northeast ridge of Shakespeare Shoulder with Whittier in the background.

In the 1960s Vin Hoeman chaired the MCA's Geographic Names Committee. Among the last names that he worked to make official were the names Bard Peak and Shakespeare Shoulder. The former was made official by the U.S. Board on Geographic Names in August 1969, four months after Hoeman's death, and the latter wasn't approved until April 1977, eight years after his death. Both names reflected on the theme of poets in geographic names in the immediate vicinity, aligning with the Burns Glacier, Byron Glacier and Peak, the Lowell Glacier, Shakespeare Creek and Glacier, and Whittier Creek and Glacier. An unfortunate misspelling on the Seward (C-5) USGS quadrangle has resulted in a fair amount of confusion regarding one of the names. Suffice to say, it's Bard, not Baird.

On July 29, 2017, Wayne Todd and I had attempted Shakespeare Shoulder. We encountered thick brush down low. Exposed, steep, wet, grassy slopes turned us back at about 1600 feet. But my thirst had not been slaked; I needed to return.

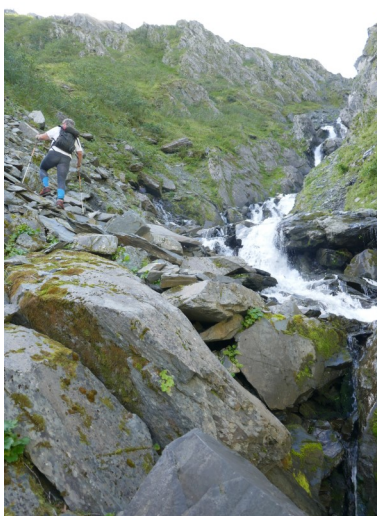
On October 1, 2017, Charlie Sink, Kathy Still, and I attempted to climb Bard Peak from Portage Pass. We got to the pass in dense

fog and realized that we would be going no farther that day.

Returning to have another go at our nemesis, Charlie and I set out from the Portage Pass Trailhead sign south of the Whittier airstrip and immediately south of the railroad tracks at 10:20 a.m. on Thursday, August 9. We walked northward for a few hundred feet, looking for a potential route up Shakespeare Shoulder that might be less brushy than all the other routes

that presented themselves. Sentries of rusty menziesia, devil's club, salmonberries, stinging nettles, cow parsnip, willows, and alders stood ready to pounce, waiting for us to make our decision.

We ultimately selected a route that had the shortest distance between the railroad tracks and a copse of spruce and hemlock. I dove into the brush; Charlie followed in my wake. The first wave of vegetation inflicted only minor damage on my exposed skin. And then I got to the toe of the slope, muddy from recent rains. I stepped upward, grabbing a fistful of vegetation – and promptly slid backward. That continued for several attempts until my hands and arms had been properly inflicted with cuts, scrapes, and embedded



Steve Gruhn beginning the hike up the rockslide en route to Shakespeare Shoulder.

thorns. We hadn't been away from the car for even five minutes.

Eventually, we worked upward to the mature trees. We had been on the go for twenty minutes and I could still count the lug nuts of passing RVs. Navigating through the krummholz was by no means easy, but it was much easier than swimming through the brush. But we soon reached a point where

our route left the refuge of the trees. Again we dove into the brush, descending to a stream. We attempted to walk up the streambed, hopping on rocks, but a small canyon thwarted that attempt. So, we crossed the stream and ventured into the gaping maw of the brush. The brush bit back. Charlie re-crossed the stream to the west side, but I slipped as I attempted to follow him. Not wanting to start out the trip soaking wet in addition to having my skin flayed by the razor wire of brush, I opted for a dry skin flaying and continued upstream on the east side.

Separated, we called to one another – and to scare off any bears that might have been in the area. Bugs took the opportunity to fly into my mouth, causing me to cough and choke.

Such an experience gave me pause to wonder why I partook in the hobby of bushwhacking. Other people enjoy having backyard barbecues, watching movies, going fishing, and simply relaxing. How did I develop such a character flaw, I wondered. Was it curable?

After some more brush bashing, I met up with Charlie on the streambed and we were able to hop from rock to rock until we reached a large rockslide on the southeast side of the stream. We ascended to a bench where the rockslide split into two. In July 2017 Wayne and I found that the eastern route led to exposed, steep, grassy terrain. On September 11, 2017, Wayne had returned solo and found a route up the southern branch of the rock pile (see the February 2018 *Scree*). We followed Wayne's route to the south. We had



Steve Gruhn on the northeast ridge of Shakespeare Shoulder overlooking the Whittier Glacier.

streams and waterfalls descended from above. We crossed the main stream up high to avoid a chasm and headed southeast on snow patches. From the upper snow patches, it was pretty easy to gain the northeast ridge of Shakespeare Shoulder at about 2600 feet. We immediately noted both the steep drop-off to the Whittier Glacier to the east and a series of old cables that followed the ridge crest to the southwest.

The cables functioned as a handrail of sorts, leading us southwest up the easy northeast ridge of Shakespeare Shoulder to the debris of a fallen-down shed that was only a few dozen feet from the summit. En route we spooked a mountain goat. By 2 p.m., we could climb no higher. We found a cairn on the summit, but no register. With recorded ascents dating to 1954, the summit had seen many visitors before us.

All of the ascents of Shakespeare Shoulder that I'd known of had been via the northeast ridge, but Wayne had mentioned in the February 2018 *Scree* that he thought that the south ridge might be a reasonable route. We aimed to find out. After a brief break we descended the south ridge of Shakespeare Shoulder, again following a mountain goat. Soon we were following the



Steve Gruhn descending Shakespeare Shoulder's south ridge. Bard Peak forms the backdrop.

been on the go for an hour and had gained about 400 feet in perhaps a quarter mile.

Charlie led us along beautiful mountain-sorrel-covered benches with great views of streams, waterfalls, glaciers, mountains, lakes, and Prince William Sound. There were a couple steep places that might have been slippery if the vegetation had been wet, but we were fortunate that it was dry.

A basin opened up and

route we crossed numerous areas where the mountain had fractured (perhaps during the 1964 earthquake?) and seemed poised to collapse to the Shakespeare Glacier to the north. By 3:30 we were on top of Bard Peak. From the summit we noted Mount Applegate (3650 feet) above the Ripon Glacier; Begich Peak (4623 feet); Billings Peak (5990 feet) above the Billings Glacier; Blackstone Bay; the Burns Glacier; Byron Peak (4750 feet) and Carpathian Peak (6020 feet) above the Portage Glacier; Cummings Peak (3609 feet) above the Whittier Glacier; Divide Lake; Esther Island; Learnard Peak (4550 feet), Lowell Peak (4728 feet), and Maynard Mountain (4140 feet) above the Learnard Glacier; Passage Canal; Portage Lake; Portage Pass; Shakespeare Shoulder across the Shakespeare Glacier; Turnagain Arm; Port Wells; and many other features. I was on an emotional high and was giddy at the surrounding views and the long-awaited culmination of attempts.

I found a register in the summit cairn. It was in the same 89-cent, Marie's-Blue-Cheese-Dressing glass jar that had been placed by Grace Hoeman in August 1969 (see the September 1969 *Scree*) and noted by Tim Kelley in the December 2001 *Scree*. After noting several familiar names, I signed us in, replaced the register, and followed Charlie as he began to descend.

We made quick work of the descent to the saddle. Our second ascent of Shakespeare Shoulder of the day was uneventful, save for a pair of ptarmigan that posed for photos on the ridge. On top I began to make some quick estimates as to which tunnel opening we might be able to make. It was nearly 6 p.m. I figured we'd be down by about 7:30, which would have us ready for the 8:00 tunnel opening. But if we could finish a mere 15 minutes faster, we might be able to make the tail end of the 7:00 tunnel opening. With that as an incentive, we set off on the descent, retracing our steps.

At the stream we tried taking a dry (-ish) channel to the west. That worked well until the vegetation and rocks choked us off and forced us into the brush. Fortunately, the venture into the evil salad was but a sojourn and we reached the spruce and hemlock after only a couple minutes. I led us through the forest, chasing that 7:15 chance to transit the tunnel. And then I descended straight into a brushy hole that seemed to have no bottom. I hollered to Charlie to find a better route while I tried to extricate myself. He found a way to the railroad tracks and I found a different one.

But it was 7:30 and we were too late. We had to sit and wait for the next tunnel opening at 8. Fortunately, I was able to keep myself busy by picking thorns out of my flesh for the next half hour. Despite the vengeful vegetation, it had been a great day

with a great partner. And my thirst had been quenched by poetry and emotion.



Steve Gruhn hiking up the east ridge of Bard Peak with Whittier in the background.



Steve Gruhn resting on the descent of Shakespeare Shoulder's northeast ridge with Passage Canal in the background.



Communication-tower debris on the northeast ridge of Shakespeare Shoulder.

Knowing When to Turn Around is Crucial in Climbing Survival

Text and photos by Frank E. Baker



Frank Baker on Hurdygurdy Mountain (5994 feet) in the Western Chugach Mountains -- July 2011.

The Flute Glacier is below.

Photo by Brent Voorhees

I approached the rock face slowly, tentatively. The painful truth: I lacked the skill to climb up it or around it. Yet I stood there staring defiantly at the obstacle, as I had so many times in the past. Reluctantly, I turned and headed back down the ridge, trying to reconcile myself to the fact there were places I'd never go.

I know firsthand about "summit fever." It's a very real and visceral phenomenon among outdoor adventurers, particularly goal-oriented climbers. It drives one to pursue the objective despite imminent danger. Learning how to overcome that "fever" takes time, patience, willpower, and experience.

The motto of Alaska outdoor survival and rescue instructor Brian Horner is "Learn to Return," and I fully embrace that philosophy. Famed mountaineer Ed Viesturs, who has climbed the eight highest mountains in the world without supplementary oxygen, says: "Getting to the top is optional. Getting down is mandatory."

Planning a trip: When planning a hike or climb, it's important to gain as much knowledge (beta) as possible about the route, distance, and conditions, especially conditions that might be changing, such as weather. One needs to assess how much time

the trip will take and weigh that against the amount of daylight available. The availability of water is also an important thing to consider, as well as the difficulty of stream crossings and other objective dangers.

More challenging, however, is determining if you are in good enough physical condition, or experienced enough, for the route's demands. I have overextended myself on some trips and had difficulty returning, especially when required to down-climb in steep terrain. Most climbing accidents, as is commonly known, occur on the descent when bodies are tired. I try to keep some strength in the reserve "tank." Such a reserve greatly increases the chances of a safe return.

When in a difficult situation, take your time, rest, evaluate your route alternatives, and then slowly make a move. Learning how to pause and not hurry is harder than one might think. In most of my climbs, I've nearly always "found a way." In other words, with time and patience I have found a relatively safe way to proceed – up or down.

Mark your route: I usually hike and climb in good weather because as a retiree, I can pick my days. Working folks, however, have to go when they can, and weather doesn't always cooper-

ate. Before climbs I used to rely on aviation-weather forecasts that provided more detail on cloud ceilings and wind directions. If you're going up high and it looks as if clouds are coming in, mark key points of your route with rock cairns or red survey tape. Of course, carrying a compass, GPS, or an InReach satellite communicator is a good idea. I rely more on landmarks, some of which I create myself and leave behind.

I don't like getting my visibility obscured by clouds and fog because it's very easy to become disoriented. If bad weather is closing in and it looks as if it is going to last, I usually descend without delay. I nearly became disoriented on Gunsight Mountain (6441 feet) on a couple of occasions because clouds moved in quickly. It's also happened to me in other Southcentral locations, where weather can change quickly because of our proximity to the Gulf of Alaska.

Getting outside of the moment: I have a Buddhist friend who lives on the island of Kauai. On a hike with her, she mentioned that instead of "staying in the moment," I'm constantly thinking about what's up ahead, what the weather is going to do, etc. My response to what I perceived as a criticism was that in Alaska, we *always* have to be thinking ahead. If we aren't cognizant of what's ahead of us, weather-wise or otherwise, we might get

into serious trouble.

So, back to my climbing nemeses, where I turned around: It occurred on the col between the south and north peaks of Pioneer Peak. It was on the eastern face of Mount Marathon, the larger peak that lies behind Race Point above Seward; it happened on the northern ridge of The Watchman at the south end of Eklutna Lake, the southeast side of Baneful Peak above the East Fork of the Eklutna River, at the top of the big rock slide coming from a gnarly peak *way* out of my league: The Mitre.

And there have been several others. I might have started climbing too late in life and never acquired the technical skills needed for serious alpine challenges. But as a non-technical climber, a scrambler, I've made it up quite a few peaks in the Chugach, Kenai, and Talkeetna Mountains. And I'm happy with that.

But I'm mostly grateful that I've learned to return, as Brian Horner teaches, and to go forth again. My friend and hiking buddy Pete Panarese, an accomplished mountaineer, feels the same. The mountains will always be there. To be out there among them, not always on their summits, is good enough. In fact, it's awesome.

Frank E. Baker is a MCA member and freelance writer who lives



*Anchorage climber Steve Gruhn leads on the ridge near Fiddlehead Mountain (4940 feet), on the Kenai Peninsula --
October 23, 2013.
Photo by Frank Baker*

Mismapped Mountain (4650 feet), Chugach Mountains: A Very Good, but Disappointing, Trip

May 31 – June 3, 2015

Text and photos by Wayne Todd

After hanging our boats in a large cottonwood tree, Andrew Boudreaux, Josh Mulkey, Carrie Wang, and I make our way northeast from Twentymile Lake. With the warm, calm, blue-sky day and the lakeshore views of bergs, swans, and glaciated peaks, we lightly consider just hanging out at the lake. The plan is to climb five peaks nestled in the Twentymile Glacier and Lake George Glacier corner.

While not heavy bushwhacking, the progress in the rainforest is deemed slow enough that we discuss returning to the boats and paddling to the glacier end of the lake. We don't. We are surrounded by early summer green, brush, and trees (and bugs). After a few hours we gain elevation and surrounding views, gradually leaving shrubbery and such behind (and a bear spray canister). The Twentymile River drainage and Kinnikinnick Mountain are prevalent to the south and large, serious-looking peaks across the Twentymile Glacier loom to the east.

The ridge is a mix of alpine and snow, with convenient Josh tracks leading upward. Bear tracks are noted and Josh reports seeing that track maker. By early evening, Carrie and I are ready to camp. A snow-free mound provides views of our objectives and the serious easterly peaks. We bed down under impeccable weather.

Early morning we awake to reasonable cloudy skies, but the rolling cloud bank flowing onto the Twentymile Glacier is concerning. Up the ridge we go, encountering segments of Class 4 scrambling. I'm grateful all group members are comfortable in this terrain. When the ridge gets quite narrow and steep, we carefully scramble above and on "serious-consequence-if-you-fall terrain" (and where are our helmets?). After this the terrain drastically moderates and soon we're following Josh's tracks up a pleasantly angled snow slope.

From the broad top of Mismapped Mountain, the weather still looks OK, and we now view all the other four objectives. A camp and routes are mostly determined. We locate the summit register, Tim Kelley and Bill Spencer from 1994 [*Ed. note: see the November 1994 and January 1995 issues of the Scree*], and no one has signed in since! (Though who knows who's been here whilst snow covered). This is where the anti-register crowd can give a heavy sigh.

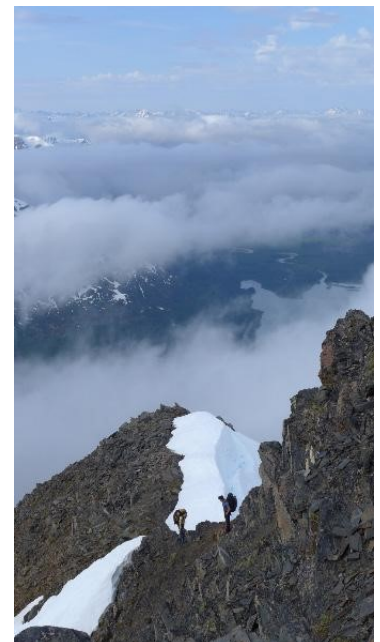


Josh Mulkey and Andrew Boudreaux ascending Mismapped Mountain.

As we descend to the north basin and rope up, our views lessen as clouds descend. Across the glacier we pass by unhealthy/ugly, receding glacier faces; up over older avalanche debris; and by serac chunks. At a dry alpine mound/nunatak deemed safe, we set camp. We discuss heading out for one of the nearby objectives, but we get totally enveloped by clouds and then precipitation. "Tomorrow then" as we're set in a great position to access all four peaks. I took numerous pictures of our exit direction as we'd all agreed a preference of not descending our upper ascent route, especially if it is wet.

Andrew's and Josh's laughter punctuates the tent rain patter. The occasional rumbling of avalanches and/or serac fall is the most pronounced sound, however. An InReach inquiry is sent to Cory Hinds (THE man) regarding forecast. When?

With the dismal forecast we acknowledge the up-climbing



Andrew Boudreaux and Carrie Wang ascending Mismapped Mountain's upper ridge.

part of the trip is over, but we still have much exit ahead of us. We agree to try a valley south of us, but north of our ascent ridge. The risk is getting cliffed out or crossing avalanche terrain, now rain saturated. Soon we're unroping and edging into our valley. A mix of snow-free slopes is punctuated by seriously-wet snow. At a couple higher-angle slopes, we travel one at a time. We accept this risk, as down lower looks very brushy and cliffy, and the glacier much less walk-able.

We work many steep rollovers before accessing our valley, which pays off well with an excellent, moderate-angle snow slope (to our northeast ridge). Up high to the left, a steep avalanche gully confirms our route choice (the ridge above was yet another option). The weather is wet 'n' windy, but we have appropriate gear and are glad to be beyond most of the trip dangers (I don't take any pictures for eight hours; that's inclement weather). Constant rain keeps the bugs mostly grounded.

After retrieving the boats we decide to camp, though the views are a bit lacking compared to two days previous. Some effort goes into campfire making, but it's aborted as everything is wet.

In the rainy morning we inflate and load four packrafts (mine the only skirtless* one, always trying to save weight). The river is fun* and splashy Class 2. The constant heavy rain is punctuated with even heavier visible water sheets. Once on the main river, we encounter the known slower pace with mandatory paddling (helps slightly with warmth). As for the entire trip, Andrew is most pleasant company and is still upbeat about the entire trip, "Where can you climb in a gorgeous area, and boat from a glacial lake to the sea?" Well said, though we were four wet, mildly-hypothermic rats by the exit at the Seward Highway.

*More fun with a skirted boat.

More than a year would pass before we climb in that area again.



Admiring the views of the peaks to the east of Mismapped Mountain.



Left to right: Wayne Todd, Carrie Wang, Josh Mulkey and Andrew Boudreaux on Mismapped Mountain with Vigesimal Peak as the backdrop.



Left to right: Carrie Wang, Josh Mulkey, and Andrew Boudreaux starting the extra-wet float.



Carrie Wang ascending past debris with Vigesimal Peak at upper left.

Salt Peak (5455 feet) and Pepper Peak (5423 feet), Western Chugach Mountains

Text by Marcin Ksok

I find myself once again heading for civilized Chugach destinations that escaped my interest in the past. The above peaks are a great day outing from the Eklutna Lake parking lot. Easier than either of the Twin Peaks, very accessible, and lacking any of the regular Chugach obstacles. I waited for good weather in order to take in the views and pointed the car in the correct direction. The Twin Peaks Trail takes one above timberline, then a user trail heads right and up the south shoulder of Pepper Peak. The elevation gain is over 4,000 feet and makes for good exercise. Braided paths deposit one on scree and rock slopes, which lead to the summit of Pepper Peak. From there a pleasant ridge walk leads over an intermediate point to Salt

Peak. The lake shimmers in sunshine, if any is available, and on a good day one can see mountain giants farther inside Chugach State Park, hopefully whetting ones appetite. I highly recommend continuing in that direction and, time permitting, not stopping there either. The ridge line offers opportunities for all sorts of adventures. One can reach Yudikench Peak or continue to Pioneer Ridge and make a through trip to the Pioneer Ridge Trailhead. My time was limited and only allowed me to visit the next bump. Bushwhacking potential persuaded me to retrace the route, as I was more interested in the phenomenal views and sunshine. Some days are just to be enjoyed; no need to suffer.

West Twin Peak (5472), Western Chugach Mountains

Text and photos by Marcin Ksok

There are often multiple ways to gain a summit, and on this outing Greg Encelewski and I did not choose the easiest one. At the time I only knew of the approach we took, and learned later of an easier one. It worked anyway and provided extra training "for something." The Twin Peaks Trail took us above timberline; then a user trail took us down to the left and crossed a small drainage. Immediately it disappeared; therefore we took blueberry meadows and low-level bushwhacking, therefore not really bushwhacking, around the base of East Twin Peak. Shortly we were looking down a sizeable gulch of loose scree and rocks that spilled from the base of West Twin Peak. It was a large garbage chute, which we crossed, cautiously looking above our heads. We aimed for a scree slope spilling from the west ridge of the West Twin. Things got more enjoyable from that point; we ascended the slope, veered around some gendarmes, and trended left to gain the ridge. Features felt smaller there than other Chugach peaks; progress was faster. The ridge was steep on both sides, very fun to ascend to the summit. Passing clouds offered intermittent views as we gained the top. There were voices below on the col between the two twins, seeming to be searching for a way up the steeper east ridge of the west peak; they didn't succeed and we failed to run into them on the return trip to have our questions answered. As the way up was fairly quick, we lingered on the summit and descended our path to the parking lot. It wouldn't be wise to follow our route, though, as I am told there is a trail from the ice cream shack and one from all-terrain vehicle parking lot, which take more direct, shorter routes.

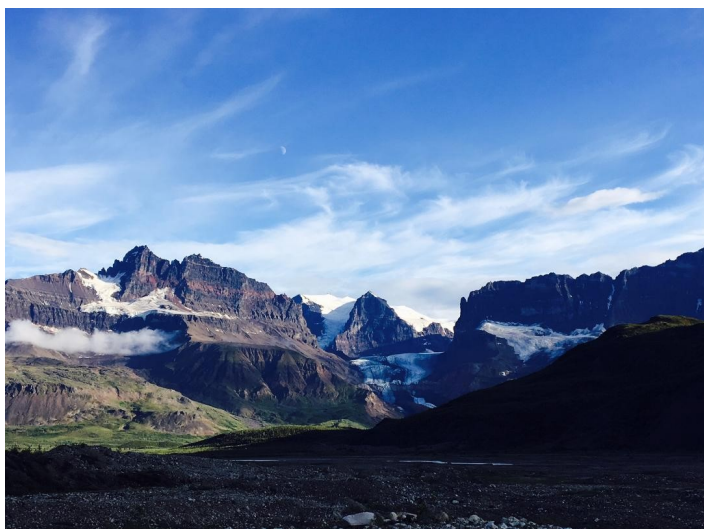
*Right:
Greg Encelewski
going up the scree.*

*Below:
Greg Encelewski
just below the sum-
mit of West Twin
Peak.*



Eleven Days in Wrangell-Saint Elias National Park: Wolverine Mesa to the Nizina Glacier

Text by Colleen Metzger



The Hole-In-The-Wall Glacier emerging through the hole in the wall.

Photo by Colleen Metzger



Heading to the Rohn Glacier.

Photo by Colleen Metzger

The trip didn't exactly get off to a smooth start.

First, my feet were ripped to shreds. An overly ambitious (and overly damp) training hike two days earlier in the wrong boots had left my feet looking like expired slabs of meatloaf. Even armed with tape, Sportslick, and a variety of socks, I was worried I might be in for a hobble, not a hike.

Second, Maureen Peterson forgot her hiking boots in Anchorage. She only realized this blunder as we were nearing Chitina on the drive to McCarthy. Our small plane was slated to drop us off in Wrangell-Saint Elias National Park the next morning to begin our hike from Wolverine Mesa to the Nizina Glacier ... and now, four hours into the drive, the most crucial item of her gear was not in the car.

Then, as if the start of the trip had not been stressful enough, on day two it *poured* rain. And that was when Mike Mitchell realized his "new" tent from Hoarding Marmot wasn't as waterproof as he had anticipated. Day three dawned bleary and drizzly. Mike wrung out his sleeping bag, Maureen made another cup of coffee to combat the fatigue of her all-night hiking-boot reconnaissance mission, and I hoped the extra time had allowed my blisters to scab over.

Finally, our hike could really start.

Wolverine Mesa is a wide, grassy plateau, making it a convenient airstrip and our drop-off point on July 25. Wolverine is 5000 feet above sea level, and the valley beyond looked bottomless, thanks to clouds swirling far below the lip of the

mesa. It was a cold, sunny morning, and as far as we could see, there were glaciers frosting the blunt mountains. One glacier, instantly my favorite part of the landscape, hung off a mountaintop like a damp, panting-dog's tongue, rivulets of glacial drool puddling lazily down the mountainside. The valley unfolded in front of us, beckoning, and we started hiking with anticipation.

Our route quickly morphed from a grassy stroll to death-defying side-hilling. We were soon picking across precariously stacked shards of jagged scree, all poised to come winging downhill at the least provocation. Heavily laden with 11 days of food and supplies, we inched along, cautious of each footfall.

At long last the sinister scree slope ended, and after dipping into a gully, crossing a waterfall, and climbing up a steep scree slope on the other side, the terrain opened into a goat trail winding through a grassy expanse: finally our pace could pick up. We meandered over the rolling tundra, admiring a mountainous feature reminiscent of crumbling castle wall, where one deep gouge allowed a teasing view of a massive glacier snuggled behind. We reached a long grassy expanse where we decided to camp for the night, and the inner four-year-old in me gleefully sprawled in the lush grass, overwhelmed by the stunning landscape and my small place in it.

By midnight, it was raining. Pouring. Sopping, soul-crushing, fogged-in rain. In the morning I grudgingly exited my tent, and by the time I had sprinted over to the cook tarp, I was already soaked. The rest of the crew – Maureen, Janetta Norvel Smith,

Shane Docherty, and Mike (despondently dealing with his sodden bedding) – were already jet-boiling breakfast and looked as miserable as I felt over the weather. We decided to wait out the rain, which could be a welcome break on day six, but on day two was demoralizing. After breakfast I retreated to my tent and attempted to while the day away. I was so grateful I had brought a book, but even with a good book, tent time is only entertaining for so long. By 4:00 it was clear the rain wasn't letting up. I dipped into my emergency stash of Vicodin and drugged myself into an early night of sleep.

I awoke groggily at 4:00 a.m., and the ceaseless patter of rain was still pelting my tent. I unzipped my vestibule and, although it was still pouring, the navigation-thwarting fog had lifted. It would be squishy, but we could leave our damp tents at last! We struck off with excitement, our trail still mostly grassy tundra, now extra springy with the onslaught of rain. We passed towering rock structures, eerily evocative of Stonehenge. We crossed several creeks, swollen from the rain. A few hours later we reached the most dreaded part of the trip: *The Goat Trail* (cue scary music). I know, it doesn't sound that terrifying. But from the videos we had previewed online, we expected a narrow, winding, treachery of a trail with a sheer, deadly drop 4,000,000 feet into the flames of hell.

In spite of our trepidation, the trail pecked into the talus slope provided solid footholds. Goats peered at us, baffled, as we wound through the mountains. It felt like a movie set, the swirling mist and ominous spears of mountaintops thrust into the iron sky. As the trail meandered, the rock beneath us shifted with kaleidoscopic whimsy: yellow gravel transformed into powdery red dust into blue scree. Geodes glittered in the diffuse light, and every once in a while a fossil announced itself. Janetta pulled a fossilized snail the size of a Chihuahua out of the prehistoric grit.

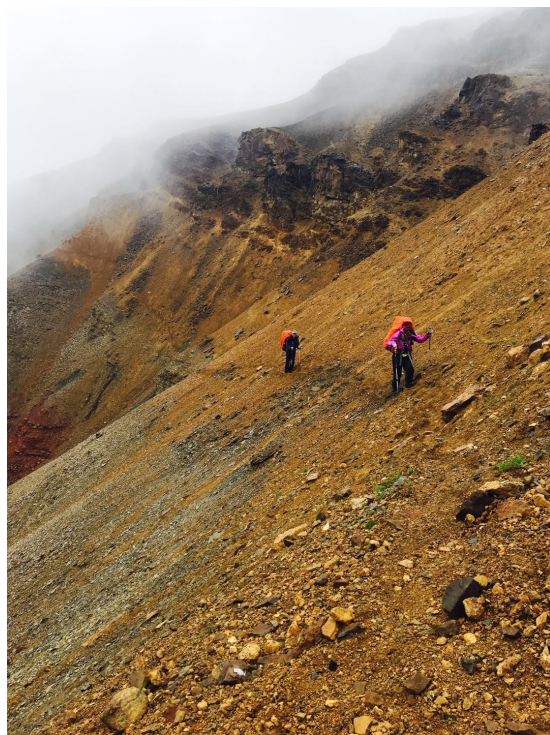
We all breathed a sigh of relief after *The Goat Trail*: it was over! And – more importantly – it hadn't been the death-defying feat we had feared. Far more onerous were the next terrain features – water crossing after water crossing after water crossing. As much as I appreciate a forced backcountry bath, the drudgery of find-a-place-to-cross and pull-off-your-sweaty-socks and

where-did-I-put-my-water-shoes and omigod-it's-really-fast-don't-fall and wipe-your-feet-and-get-in-between-your-toes-and-re-boot-up becomes a bit tiresome when it happens four times in an hour. Our route crossed several robust waterfalls, cruising downhill at a nerve-wracking rate in some cases. After several water crossings, we decided enough was enough for one night. We pitched our tents in the ongoing drizzle, and fell asleep to the plunking of raindrops against our tents.

I awoke to silence. I am not a morning person, but I sprang out of my tent to confirm – the rain had ended! I immediately decorated the bushes with anything soggy to dry in the sun, and when we left camp, I was warm and dry. But about 15 minutes into our morning, we reached a water crossing. "There go my dry pants," I lamented. The creek was boiling and deep brown, a turbid version of Willy Wonka's chocolate river. We inched across the expanse, longer and deeper than any of our prior water crossings. We had a few more water crossings that day, but none as harrowing as the chocolate river of death. As hazardous as the water crossings were, we were grateful the creeks were passable at all – long stints of warm weather frequently render the creeks impassably swollen.

A few watery miles later we entered Chitistone Pass. Several rolling tundra undulations fed into the broad pass, surrounded by towering walls glistening with glaciers. We trekked along, passing a cluster of sheep overlooking a lone, wrecked plane (unnerving when you're on a fly-in). Past the plane was a large silver lake, and then the terrain started pitching downward, leading us into a new valley where we scared three deep-brown caribou grazing below. We also passed the pulpy, bloody remains of a caribou carcass – a less lucky sibling. After our long day we were rewarded with a campsite overlooking the epic Russell Glacier.

I awoke elated. Brilliant sunlight was flooding my tent. I peeled open my vestibule ... and my heart sank. There was a powerful beam of sun focused on my tent ... but low, steely clouds clustered around that anomaly, promising rain. As we hurriedly packed up camp, hoping to beat the rain, we saw an ominous silhouette on the ridge above us ... a massive, golden grizzly. Then the grizzly launched off the ridge, loping down the slope



The Goat Trail.

Photo by Colleen Metzger

toward us. “We should start hiking ... NOW,” Shane intoned, breaking our reverie. Straps un-cinched, shoes untied, we started hauling our asses as far from our furry visitor as we could handle.

Once we reached the valley – in record time, I might add – we followed Skolai Creek to the Skolai Airstrip, feeling slightly comforted by the thought that we were briefly in reach of civilization. That was fleeting, however, as we traipsed across sluggish Skolai Creek and pointed ourselves toward the Frederika Glacier.

Now, we knew there was an abandoned prospector cabin en route to that glacier. A cabin sounded awfully appealing, but we also had no idea what state this mystery cabin was in. The rangers vaguely mentioned it, calling it tolerable (a dirty lie!). So, in spite of passing a few agreeable campsites, our curiosity pushed us doggedly on. It was getting late, and starting to drizzle, but the GPS showed the cabin was tantalizingly close – we expected to see it around every corner. Finally, it appeared. As we approached, we saw a giant, ragged hole punched into one wall. The rotted door lay several feet from the doorframe, ripped right off the hinges. We peered inside with trepidation. That was not a cabin. It was a shack, a hovel, the gateway to hell. There was no way we were sleeping in there, let alone having a cozy card game while enjoying hot drinks out of the rain. Floorboards were ripped up, the walls were ragged and rotten, and there was something resembling the nest of an oversized, nightmarish rodent lurking in the corner.

We couldn’t stay there. And the cabin was ringed with thick trees, so there were no logical campsites nearby. We hiked onward, more of a dispirited trudge by this point. We hiked ... and hiked ... and finally found a lumpy expanse that was our best option for the night. As we combed the site for the least bumpy places to sleep, we noticed two men bounding down the hill with teeny daypacks strapped on. They came over to say hi, but didn’t linger long. It was about 9:30 p.m., they had just been dropped off by small plane, and were planning on running and packrafting to Nizina (also our destination) in one day. We were slated to arrive in six days. Isn’t that Alaska? You feel like you’re doing something badass and remote, and then there’s always someone doing it in a quarter of the time. Backwards. While

juggling flaming batons.

By unspoken decree, the next day was pretty chill to make up for the long haul the previous day. We had a long, lazy morning in camp before meandering along the rolling terrain, the gravel bars indicating how close we were getting to the Frederika Glacier. It was blissfully warm and sunny for most of the day, and soon we could see the glistening ripples of the glacier in the distance, beckoning us, framed by two spindly peaks. The Hole-In-The-Wall-Glacier was behind us, a lovely terrain feature with craggy walls blocking all but two glaciers oozing their way through the “hole in the wall.” There were seven glaciers nestled behind Hole-In-The-Wall, named the Seven Sisters, who surrounded Mount Baldwin. Two of the sisters were the visible glaciers from Hole-In-The-Wall. We set up camp overlooking the Frederika Glacier, primed to start crossing it the next day. From our campsite, we were surrounded by beauty – I counted 10 glaciers visible from camp, reclining snugly into the furrowed mountains. The stunning terrain made me feel like I could never



*Exiting from the Frederika Glacier.
Photo by Colleen Metzger*

return home – how could I go back to brushing my teeth in a dingy sink or peeing in an industrial bathroom when I could be peeing or brushing while examining these frosty expanses glinting in the brilliant eternal daylight? When I could stare at flowers, smears of color electric against the gravel? When I could watch icy, clear streams burble over jumbled rocks and flow into a glacial lake? I mean, my apartment, my office, a restaurant ... they could never compare. But, as we were

reminded that evening, that beauty masked the danger of backcountry travel.

The view and the sun made me reluctant to go to bed, but finally our coterie disbanded and we started drifting toward our tents. I had just snuggled into my sleeping bag, when I heard a rustle. A snuffle. Now, I am cognizant enough of the dangers the backcountry holds that if I hear a noise at night, my brain immediately goes: *BEAR!* Sometimes it gets creative and goes *RABID MOUNTAIN GOAT!* Or *DERANGED HOBO WITH A RUSTY KNIFE!* So my initial thought was, “Bear!” but the rational voice that allowed me to actually fall asleep in a tent chimed in, *There are several other people in this camp, it’s probably one of them walking around.* Then I heard the snuffling again. I just started to un-burrito myself from my sleeping bag, intending to peek out of my vestibule to calm my nerves, when I heard

Janetta call, “Bear!” In a low voice. Then, raised in decibel and panic, “Bear, BEAR, BEAAAAAR! THERE IS A BEAR IN CAMP.” I heard it lumber away, and as I peered out of my tent, I watched its massive back in full, panicked retreat.

We cooked far away from our tents, all our food and scented items were stored properly, we had seen no evidence of bears anywhere ... but yet, there he was, still visible high on the ridge, reminding us all that we were susceptible at any time. I slept fitfully that night, the utter beauty of the day overwhelmed by the certainty a claw would slash through my tent at any moment.

Bear scare aside, the next day was awesome. We spent the first portion of the day on the Frederika Glacier. It was easy to get on the glacier, and easy to exit the glacier, to our great surprise – sometimes the bulk of our day is spent picking cautiously across moraine. Once we were on the glacier, we could enjoy the super-highway of the backcountry: four and a half miles of trekking flew by, with no bushwhacking, bouldering, or water crossings to slow us down. It was wide, barely crevassed, and gently canted uphill. We reluctantly exited the Frederika and started climbing uphill, wandering into terrain that could have been made of fossilized slabs of Wonderbread. Seriously. All the rocks were flat, toast-colored, and shaped like slices of bread. As we hiked on, the Wonderbread dissolved into mud so gloppy and thick I imagined one wrong step could send me sinking up to my neck. My feet did find a few sinkholes where I sank nearly to my knees, having to forcibly yank my foot free, slowly, concentrating on not losing a boot or gaiter in the process. Luckily we escaped the mud by briefly traversing across a small, glacial cap just below the Rohn Glacier. Once across the glacier, we headed toward Lake 5470, looking for a good camp spot in the muddy, rocky terrain. We finally found a campsite with a glorious view of the Rohn Glacier, our next destination.

Turns out the Frederika was a tease. It was so easy to get on and off her ... and in exchange, the Rohn Glacier posed more of a challenge to access. The day started off sunny and stunning, with the Rohn sparkling invitingly in the distance. We trotted our way across rolling, spongy tundra, practically springing along. Soon the terrain became more and more snarled with foliage, and we needed to bushwhack. The trees got denser, and thicker, and the terrain became hillier, resulting in our favorite type of bushwhacking: bushwhacking uphill! Moraine can be exhausting, but I was excited to navigate the gravelly labyrinth after all the dense bushes.

The moraine wasn’t complicated, it was simply hard to anticipate: the swells of gravel would suddenly transform from squishy, solid footing to a gravel-masked slick of ice in a matter of four inches, making it treacherous. One misstep sent Mike sliding downhill

toward a chilly lake nestled among the gravelly peaks of ice. He caught himself at the last second, and we decided it was a good time to switch to crampons. I almost took a plunge into a pool of meltwater, too, when I misjudged how thick an ice shelf was while trying to inch across the edge of the pool – I was thankful it cracked just as I reached the other side. We finally stepped onto the Rohn Glacier, rewarded with swift travel and stunning views. We crossed the medial moraine, then we picked our way across the second half of the glacier, heading toward towering Chimney Mountain, which had been in sight all day, helping blaze our way. Once we exited the Rohn, we picked a campsite in the mud and gravel just off the glacier. We were camping nestled at the intersection between the Rohn and the Regal Glacier, our destination for the next day.

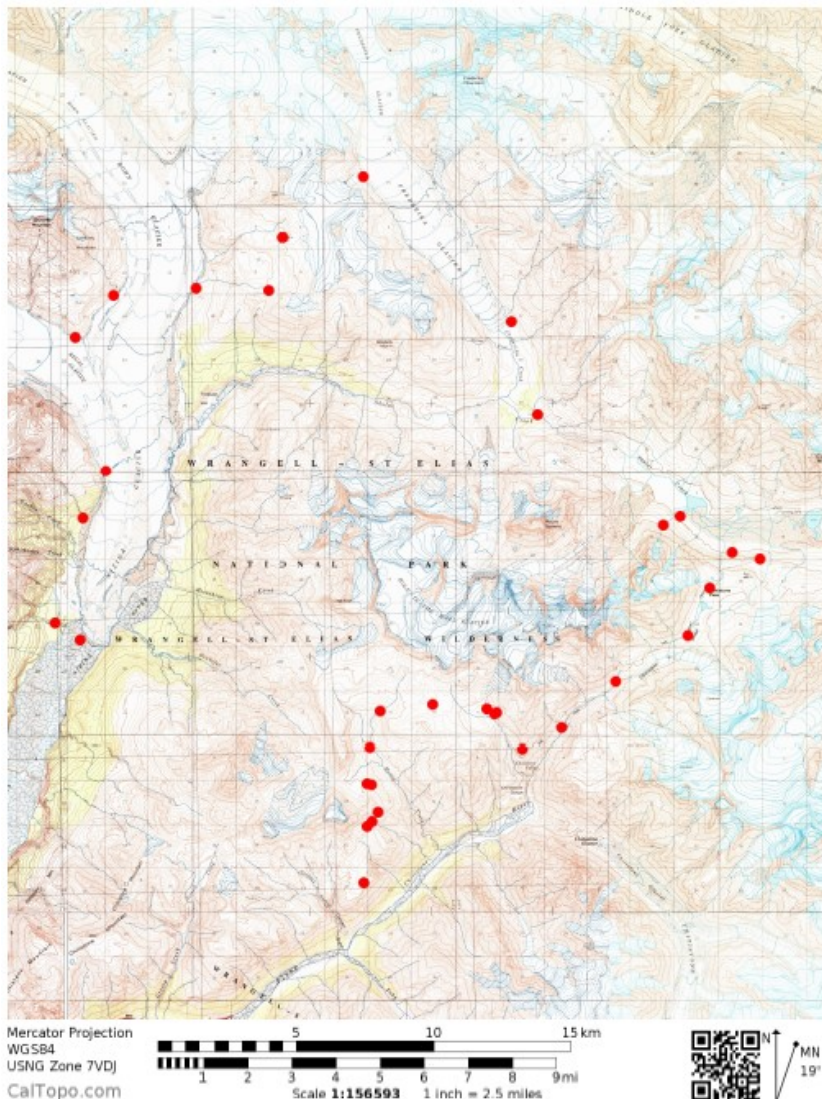
The next morning was day nine of our trip. The adventure was coming to a close, and one of our last obstacles was the Regal Glacier. It only took about half an hour to puzzle our way across the moraine and onto the glacier, but the glacier itself was more of a challenge than either the Rohn or the Frederika. It was bumpy with pressure heaves, making the walking harder, but a lot more fun. The quality of the ice was also different than the other glaciers, more solid – it took a more-powerful stomp to make sure each crampon was secure. As the Regal began to turn into the Nizina Glacier (the Regal and the Rohn join to form the Nizina), the glacier became impassably bumpy, so we exited onto the moraine. We had heard from other parties that that section of moraine was hellish, almost impossible to traverse. So we stayed on the glacier as long as it was possible, then entered the moraine, which at first was like walking in a gravel half pipe but became increasingly hilly and icy. Some sections were a bit arduous to navigate, but when we finally were free of the moraine maze, our reward was a stunning view: we were on top of a long,



*Navigating the moraine of the Nizina Glacier.
Photo by Maureen Peterson*

sloping hill that lead to the Nizina River, clear water piled high with fractured chunks of the Nizina Glacier, glowing rosily in the fading light. A wide, trickling creek was our last water source, so we stocked up on water for the evening and wove our way along the edge of the river until we saw the Nizina Air-strip: our pickup point.

There were rumors of another cabin near the air-strip, but after our last cabin let-down, we decided to not waste time searching and settled in for our last night in the wild. The next morning was warm and dry, so we drank in the view, soaked up the sun, and waited – half with anticipation and half with regret – for the buzz of the plane that would whisk us away from that treacherous and awe-inspiring landscape.



*Nizina icebergs from the plane back to McCarthy.
Photo by Colleen Metzger*



*The team, looking awesome with the Nizina Glacier behind them.
Photo by Maureen Peterson*

Hiking and Climbing: When You Can't Do It Anymore

Text by Frank Baker



Frank Baker above Bear Creek near Hope in August 2015.

Photo by Pete Panarese

This is the story that no one wants to write and, most probably, no one wants to read. It's that day when one realizes that he or she can no longer venture into the mountains, places so sacred and special to us that they are inextricably bound to our spirit.

This might not pertain to most twenty-, thirty-, and even forty-somethings, but it might in some way be instructive for when that day comes. For fifty-, sixty-, seventy-somethings, and beyond, that day might be near, or have already arrived.

I fought failing knees and a bad lower back for the past 20 years. But through two arthroscopic surgeries, periodic knee injections, and rigorous physical therapy, I was able to continue hiking and climbing at a fairly high level.

Early last year it became evident that a knee replacement was the only way forward, and it took place in February. Impatient to get back outdoors, I probably hiked too early and too much, setting my recovery back on several occasions.

By early summer of this year the left knee didn't feel right, with increasing pain. A bone scan of my knee indicated that there might be a loosening of my implants, and that revision surgery might be required.

I have read about knee revisions and it's a difficult procedure with a long recovery and risk of infection. I'm not sure if I want to do it, even it means being sidelined for the rest of my life. And after spending more than 50 years roaming around Alaska's backcountry, that prospect feels almost like death.

Yet, the rational part of me knows it isn't death. But it does offer me an inkling of what America's Indians experienced when their homeland was taken and they were sent to reservations. Their spirits were broken.

Aging Gracefully: Fortunate for most of us, the inevitable physical decline brought about by aging is gradual. We ease into it and begin moderating our activities. We sometimes shift to other forms of physical recreation, such as bicycling, kayaking, parasailing, cross-country skiing, and swimming, if we are able.

But when fate slams the door, such as with a soldier losing a limb in battle, a car accident causing severe injuries, a diagnosis of cancer, or some other debilitating disease, it seizes our brain and almost paralyzes it – especially if we have been physically active all of our lives and made it a centerpiece of our existence.

You get dark thoughts. Movies such as "They Shoot Horses,

Don't They?" come to mind. Thoughts of your wife, children, and grandchildren pull you back. How can you feel sorry for yourself when so many people are worse off than you?

But you stare out of the window at the mountaintops, the alpine tundra now a rusty brown before the first late autumn/winter snows. You know there is nothing more uplifting and powerful than standing on those summits, caressed by the air, immersed in the beauty, imbued by the magic. Not many people venture to the places you do, and that makes those places even more special.

Your entire identity for most of your life has been shaped by the outdoors. Not hiking and climbing will turn you into a different person – different to yourself and others. What will you do with all your time?

You reconsider the options. The medical technology is there to fix things. Do you have the will, at 73, to withstand the pain, to engage in long and arduous rehabilitation? You're lucky to have a wife who will help you.

You drive to the top of Hatcher Pass and watch the parasailers defying gravity and playing in the wind. You look around and see many people whom you surmise have never hiked or climbed to the kind of places you have. But you feel their joy. They are happy seeing this place.

Suddenly, it surges forward like a giant tsunami wave – this will to hike and climb again. You don't know how you will do it, but you are determined to find a way.

Noted mountaineer and author Art Davidson, 74, who was on the team that in 1967 made the first winter ascent of Denali, and later wrote the book Minus 148°: The First Winter Ascent of Mt. McKinley (Denali), offered me some encouragement: "Never give up, and do what you can do," he said. "I've had back operations and don't climb that much anymore, but I've found some great trails down in Colorado. Keep going any way you can."

Frank E. Baker is a MCA member and freelance writer who lives in Eagle River.



*Frank Baker atop Quiniscoe Mountain (8376 feet) in Cathedral Lakes Provincial Park, British Columbia, Canada, in July 2018.
Photo by Mark Fraker*

Choate's Chuckle - Tom Choate

A: It's erased by June.

Peak of the Month: The Ramp (5240), Front Range

Text by Steve Gruhn

Mountain Range:

Western Chugach Mountains;
Front Range

Borough:

Municipality of Anchorage

Adjacent Pass: Ship Lake Pass

Latitude/Longitude: 61° 5' 24"

North, 149° 32' 32" West

Elevation: 5240 feet

Adjacent Peaks:

O'Malley Peak (5220 feet),
Mount Williwaw (5420 feet),
and The Wedge (4660 feet)

Distinctness:

530 feet from O'Malley Peak

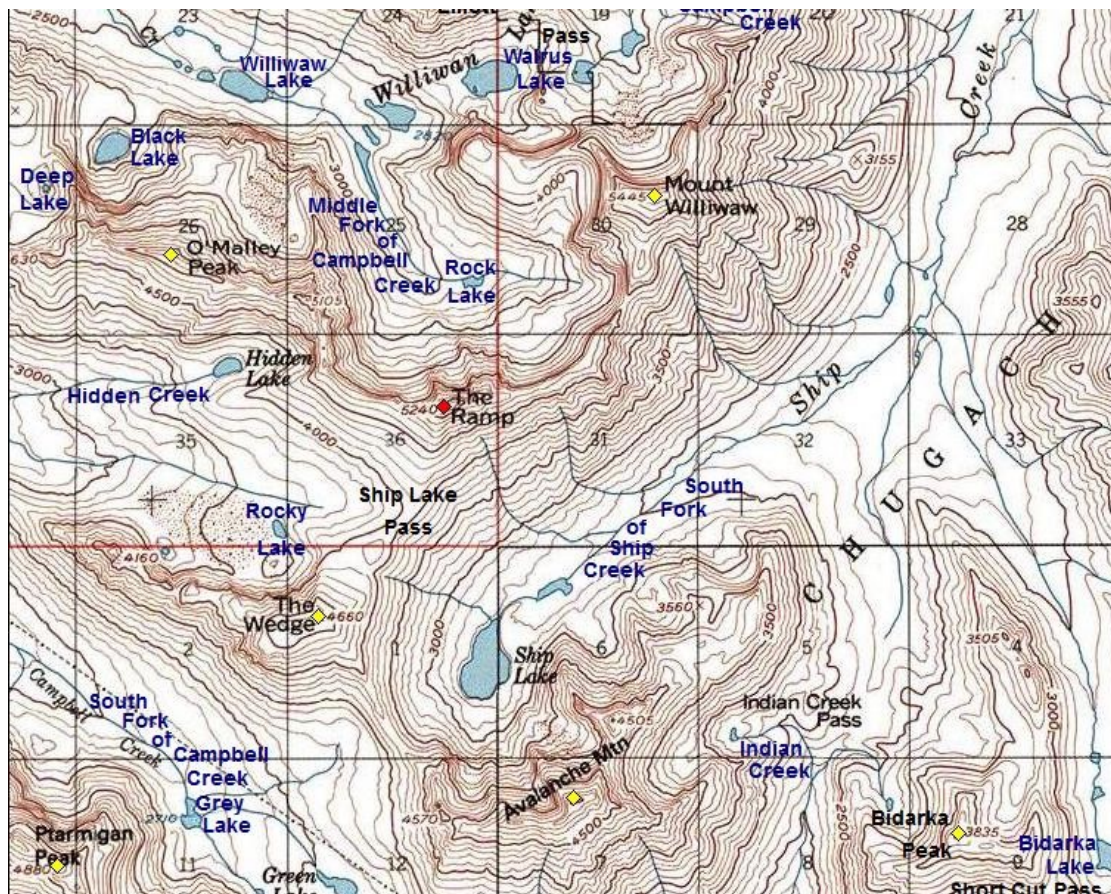
Prominence:

775 feet from Mount Williwaw

USGS Maps:

1:63,360: Anchorage (A-7),

1:25,000: Anchorage A-7 SW



First Recorded Ascent:

August 16, 1964, by Gary Hansen, Clark Philips, Pat Philips, Dixie Pierson, and Ted Rust

Route of First Recorded Ascent: West ridge

Access Point: Powerline Trail

Easily visible from much of the southern portion of the Anchorage Bowl, The Ramp dominates the skyline in the Hidden Creek drainage north of the Powerline Trail in Chugach State Park and is the fourth-highest peak in the Front Range of the Western Chugach Mountains (fifth-highest if one counts a sub-peak included in the popular Chugach Front Linkup). Thus, it was a logical goal for my first 5000-foot summit when I was a teenager. That trip, in the mid-1980s, was the beginning of my lifelong love affair with the mountains.

Before the Powerline Trail became restricted to non-motorized traffic after the 1970 establishment of Chugach State Park, private vehicles routinely drove along the route. On August 16, 1964, by Gary Hansen, Clark Philips, Pat Philips, Dixie Pierson, and Ted Rust drove up the Powerline Road (as it was then called), parked opposite Hidden Creek, and hiked northward to the west ridge of

The Ramp and from there to the summit. Although his trip report in *the Scree* was mislabeled as being of Mount Williwaw, Hansen's route description provided the earliest record of a definitive ascent of The Ramp. However, both Jon Gardey (solo) and Irma Duncan (with partners Jim Messick, Joe Pichler, Elinore Schuck, and Howard Schuck) reported climbing the "Peak Behind the Peak Behind O'Malley Road" (or the "Mountain Behind the Mountain Behind O'Malley Road"). Details of their reported routes were scant, which left plenty of room for interpretation as to whether the peak they climbed was either Hidden Peak or The Ramp. Gardey's climb was in September 1960 and the Duncan-Messick-Pichler-Schuck-Schuck ascent was on January 7, 1961.

In 1967 members of the MCA wrote a guidebook for several hikes in the Western Chugach, Talkeetna, and Kenai Mountains. This guidebook, edited by William E. "Bill" Hauser, was titled "30 Hikes

in Alaska," and included the ascent of the south ridge of The Ramp as the fourth trip described. The guidebook contained the earliest known use of the name The Ramp. The name evidently derives from the steady incline of the southwest face of the peak.

Following the publication of "30 Hikes in Alaska," the popularity of The Ramp increased. (One could say it ramped up.) Nearly all of the approximately two dozen ascents recorded in *the Scree* have followed either the 1964 party's west ridge route or the guidebook's south ridge route. A notable exception was Mark Betts' and Cory Hinds' March 22, 2014, ascent via a snow-filled couloir on the north aspect.

The information for this column came from Jon Gardey's trip report titled "Attempt on Peak Behind O'Malley Road – December 26, 1960," which appeared in the January 1961 *Scree*; from Irma Duncan's trip report titled "Snowshoe and Dog Sled Trip January 7-

8," which appeared in the February 1961 *Scree*; from Gary Hansen's trip report title "Williwaw Peak (5000 ft.) August 16, 1964," which appeared in the September 1964 *Scree*; from the MCA's "30 Hikes in Alaska;" from Greg Higgins' "History Corner" column in the May 1982 *Scree*; and from Cory Hinds' trip report titled "Northwest Ridge of Mount Williwaw," which appeared in the April 2014 *Scree*.



Above: The south aspect of The Ramp as viewed from Avalanche Mountain. Ship Lake is in the foreground.

Photo by Wayne Todd.

Below: South aspect of The Ramp as viewed from The Wedge.

Photo by Wayne Todd.

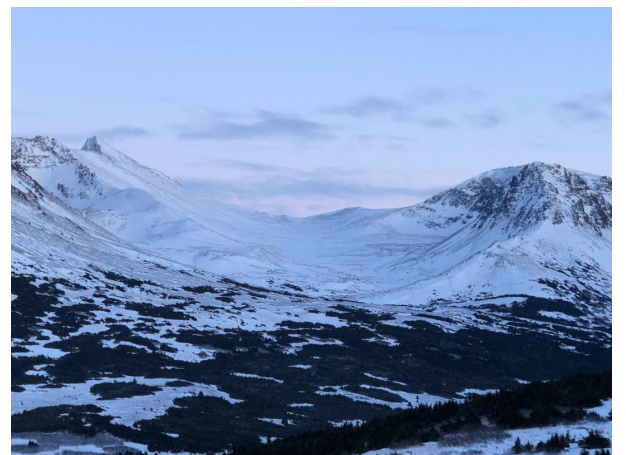


Above: The southwest aspect of The Ramp.

Photo by Wayne Todd.

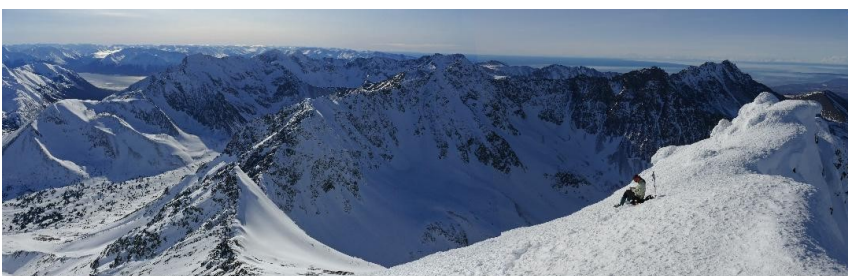
Below: Northeast aspect of The Ramp as viewed from Mount Williwaw.

Photo by Wayne Todd.



Above: The Ramp (left) and The Wedge as viewed from Blueberry Knoll to the west.

Photo by Mark Fouts.



Mountaineering Club of Alaska

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Annual membership dues: Single \$20, Family \$30

Dues can be paid at any meeting or mailed to the Treasurer at the MCA address below. 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.

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. Articles should be submitted by the 11th 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.

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Carrie Wang ascending the ridge on Mismapped Mountain with Twentymile Lake as a backdrop.

Photo by Wayne Todd

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