

# the SCREE

## Mountaineering Club of Alaska

November 2019

Volume 62, Number 11



### Contents

Nulato Hills

Kichatna Mountains to Lake Creek

Exploring Ridges between the Chickaloon and Talkeetna Drainages

Peak 801, Kenai Mountains

Andy Simons Mountain

Devils Thumb

A Harrowing Descent off Yudi Peak

Peak of the Month: Mustang Peak

**NOVEMBER MEETING:** Wednesday, November 6, at 6:30 p.m. at the BP Energy Center.

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"We are made to persist, to complete the whole tour. That's how we find out who we are."

— Tobias Wolff

**"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

Katie Libby near the summit of Peak 6910 in the Clear Creek drainage of the Talkeetna Mountains.

Photo by Dennis Ronsse

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<https://www.google.com/maps/place/BP+Energy+Center/@61.1900534,-149.8658586,17z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m5!3m4!1s0x56c897b71cddb81d:0x5058f26b0a2567f1!8m2!3d61.1900534!4d-149.8636699>



David Stchyrba  
ascending  
White Lice  
Mountain.  
Photo by  
Ross Noffsinger

### Choate's Chuckle - Tom Choate

**Q:** The climber (client) was very surprised he needed to put out many slings as he climbed. Why?

*Answer: on page 23.*

**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 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>.

### Contents

Nulato Hills: Nulato to Unalakleet by Foot and Packraft.....	5	Andy Simons Mountain (6407 feet), Kenai Mountains .....	12
Kichatna Mountains to Lake Creek, Alaska Range.....	7	Devils Thumb (9077 feet), Coast Mountains – Saltwater to Summit via East Ridge Direct.....	14
Exploring Ridges between the Chickaloon and Talkeetna Drainages, Talkeetna Mountains .....	10	A Harrowing Descent off Yudi Peak (6540 feet), Western Chugach Mountains .....	17
Peak 801 in the Salmon Creek and Sawmill Creek Drainages, Kenai Mountains .....	11	Peak of the Month: Mustang Peak (6710 feet), Coast Mountains	20
		September Board of Directors Meeting Minutes .....	21
		October General Meeting Minutes .....	23

Online? Click me!



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

## Announcements

### Hut Needs and Notes

If you are headed to one of the MCA huts, please consult the Hut Inventory and Needs on the website (<http://www.mtnclubak.org/index.cfm/Huts/Hut-Inventory-and-Needs>) or Greg Bragiel, MCA Huts Committee Chairman, at either [huts@mtnclubak.org](mailto:huts@mtnclubak.org) or (907) 350-5146 to see what needs to be taken to the huts or repaired. All huts have tools and materials so that anyone can make basic repairs. Hutmeisters are needed for each hut: If you have a favorite hut and would like to take the lead on checking on the hut and organizing maintenance, the MCA would greatly appreciate your help!

### Trips

**December 21:** Flattop Mountain Sleepout. No leader.

**February 21-29, 2020:** MCA Winter Mountaineering School

A comprehensive training program for individuals who are accomplished backpackers who wish to START learning mountaineering skills.

Course of instruction: Trip planning, food preparation, leadership, winter travel, gear selection/preparation, navigation, leave no trace, snow travel, snow anchors, running belay, rope handling, communication, terminology, knots, gear essentials, route finding, glacier travel, crevasse rescue, belaying, avalanche recognition, avalanche rescue, staying warm, nutrition/hydration, winter camping, snow shelters, wilderness medicine, rappelling, ice climbing, winter survival, stream crossing, confidence building, and more. NO course fee; however, students share trip expenses. Certificate of Participation issued when student fulfills course requirements. Lead Instructor: Greg Bragiel.

Preparation for this trip starts with an organizational meeting **Sunday, October 13, at 5 p.m.** at Fred Meyers Abbott Road at Starbucks; interested MCA members must attend.

### Amendment to the By-Laws

The amendment to the MCA By-laws that was adopted at the annual meeting of the MCA on October 2, 2019, is as follows (adopted change underlined):

#### IV. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

A. Composition. The officers and directors shall comprise the Executive Committee, and their number and duties shall be:

President: (1)

Vice-President: (1)

Secretary: (1)

Treasurer: (1)

Directors: (minimum 4, maximum 6)

Past President: (1)

### Something's Different in *the Scree*

Did you notice something different about the October issue of *the Scree*? It was the first time since the December 2004 issue that Stu Grenier's name did not appear in *the Scree* – a span of 178 consecutive issues, approaching Willy Hersman's record of 225 consecutive issues set between October 1983 and April 2002. Stu's service as chair of the Calendar Committee was the primary reason for his name routinely appearing in *the Scree*, but his photographs graced four covers – twice as the subject and three times (including one selfie) as the photographer – and he authored 20 trip reports, led 20 trips, and gave a presentation during that nearly-15-year period. A big thanks to Stu for his service to (and involvement in) the MCA. Vicky Ho has assumed the role of the new Calendar Committee Chair, but there are still plenty of other opportunities to serve and become involved with the MCA. Contact the President at [president@mtnclubak.org](mailto:president@mtnclubak.org) if you'd like to serve or become more involved. Trip reports and other submissions for *the Scree* can be emailed to [mcascree@gmail.com](mailto:mcascree@gmail.com). Contact the Vice-President at [vicepresident@mtnclubak.org](mailto:vicepresident@mtnclubak.org) to volunteer to give a presentation at an MCA meeting. To lead a trip for the MCA, contact the Hiking and Climbing Committee Chair at [hcc@mtnclubak.org](mailto:hcc@mtnclubak.org).

### Climbing Notes

Wayne Todd reported that on April 30 Carrie Wang and he climbed Peak 5825 north of Blowhole Pass in the Central Chugach Mountains and that Meg Inokuma and he had climbed Peak 2330 in the Finch Creek and Sparrow Creek drainages of the Western Chugach Mountains on August 2 as well as Far Out Peak on August 3. We look forward to reading detailed accounts of these trips in future issues of *the Scree*.

### Mentorship Program

Interested in furthering your skills? The MCA has a volunteer-driven Mentorship Program that connects beginner and intermediate folks seeking technical experience in specific mountaineering disciplines with mentors who help you gain and work on new skills.

If you would like to become a mentee or mentor, please email [mentorship@mtnclubak.org](mailto:mentorship@mtnclubak.org).

## Mint Hut Outhouse

Instructions for using the outhouse. Please help the MCA keep this system operational. Guide others that are uninformed.

The outhouse is ONLY for depositing human waste in the barrels, NOTHING else (i.e., trash, food, grass, toilet paper, foil packaging, etc.)

- Guideline: #1 in the sun, #2 in the loo. A urine diverter is installed to prevent urine from filling the barrels.
- In metal container burn toilet paper and nothing else (i.e., trash, foil packaging, etc.). Scatter ashes in rocks behind outhouse when flames are completely out
- The MCA expends considerable funds (approximately \$1,300) every time full barrels are helicoptered out. We CANNOT fly out urine, only solid human waste.
- There are two barrels in the holding chamber. If one of the barrels is near full (i.e., about 3 inches from the top), PLEASE do not place more human waste in OR cause overflow.
- Procedure for changing to empty barrel: Be careful when handling outhouse parts. Heavy gloves and eye protection are in the hut foyer.
- Remove blank cover (opposite side of seat / no hole).
- Lift cover containing seat/urine diverter. Remove diverter hose at connection.

- Place seat/diverter side cover over empty barrel, reconnect hose.
- Place blank cover over full barrel side.
- If both barrels in outhouse chamber are full: Remove both full barrels from outhouse chamber. Wear heavy gloves and eye protection.
- Place lids (inside outhouse) onto full barrels and secure with locking band.
- Place full barrels to right side of outhouse approximately 30 feet away.
- Place empty barrels (from hut foyer) into outhouse chamber.
- Secure chamber doors properly. No gaps. (Rain/water running down back of outhouse can leak into and fill barrels if improperly secured.)

Other considerations: If the holding chamber or inside of the outhouse needs cleaning, please take the initiative to clean it yourself. No one comes to the hut to clean. We are responsible for all hut maintenance. Bleach is in the hut foyer.

Additionally: Please clean up, straighten up when departing the hut. Leave nothing except extra liquid fuel ... NOTHING (i.e., bottles, food, canisters, clothing, etc.) ... PACK IN and PACK OUT.

If the hut is damaged ... do what you can to facilitate repairs. Tools and repair items are in the foyer.

THE MINT HUT OUTHOUSE SEES SIGNIFICANT USE BY LESS-EXPERIENCED USERS. MISUSE RESULTS IN INCREASED EXPENSE FOR THE CLUB, AND A LESS SANITARY AND ENJOYABLE OUTHOUSE EXPERIENCE FOR ALL USERS. AS PART OF AN EFFORT TO REDUCE MISUSE, THE BOARD AND HUTS COMMITTEE HAVE BEEN WORKING TO IMPROVE SIGNAGE TO EDUCATE USERS IN STYLE. LOCAL ARTIST (AND CLUB MEMBER) SARAH GLASER CREATED THIS SIGN (WHICH HAS BEEN MODIFIED TO FIT THE SCREE'S FORMAT). INSTALLATION SHOULD BE ACCOMPLISHED BEFORE THE SNOW FALLS.

- JONATHON STRONG

### EVERYTHING YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT MINT HUT'S USER-MAINTAINED OUTHOUSE



#### ONLY FOR POOP

NOT TRASH, NOT FOOD. IT COSTS \$1300 TO HELICOPTER A BARREL OUT. WE CAN ONLY FLY OUT HUMAN WASTE. (NO PEE!)



#### BURN TOILET PAPER

(AND ONLY TOILET PAPER) IN THE METAL CAN SCATTER ASHES BEHIND THE OUTHOUSE (AFTER FLAMES ARE OUT).

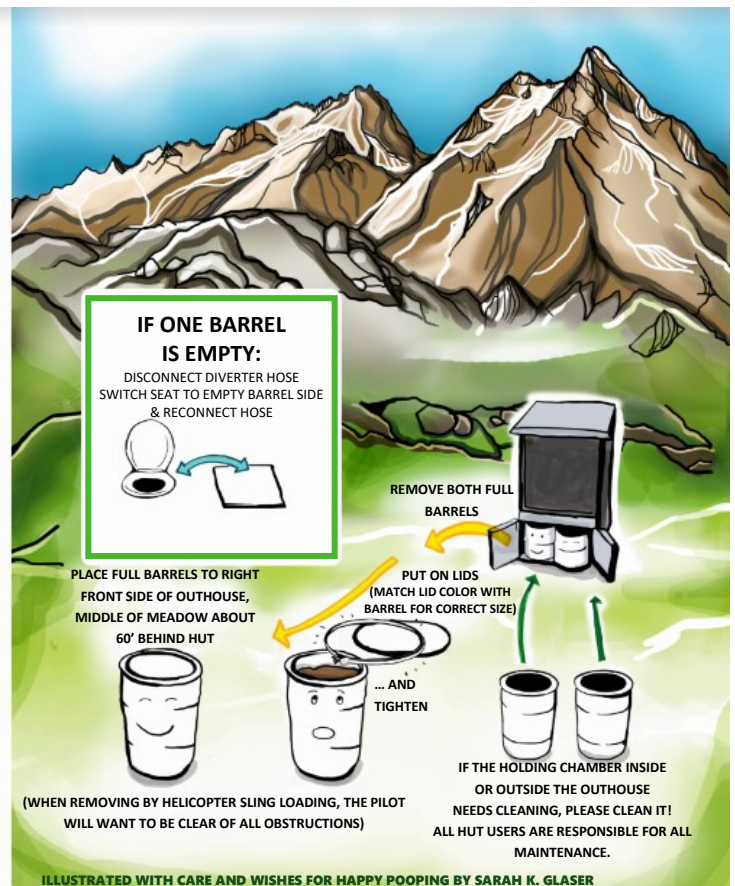


#### PEE OUTSIDE

URINE DIVERTER IS NOT PERFECT.



CHANGE WHEN FILLED TO 3-6" FROM TOP



ILLUSTRATED WITH CARE AND WISHES FOR HAPPY POOPING BY SARAH K. GLASER

## Nulato Hills: Nulato to Unalakleet by Foot and Packraft

Text and photos by Luc Mehl



*Sarah Histan enjoying the best of the ridge walking in the Nulato Hills. Histan and Luc Mehl saw old caribou antlers, but nothing new and weren't sure what made the game trails.*



*Sarah Histan floating past "island in the middle," as the locals call it, on the North River in the Nulato Hills.*

During a wedding at Arctic Valley, I took a break from the dance floor when one of the guests started to tell me about the Nulato Hills. I had never heard of the Nulato Hills and needed Andy Angstman to fully describe their location ... "pinned between the Yukon and Norton Sound." Andy thought I would be interested because he knew I had traveled through (and really appreciated) the Wood-Tikchiks. Andy grew up in Bethel, and spent much of his childhood at a family cabin in the Wood-Tikchiks. He had also spent time in the Nulato Hills and considered them another hidden gem ... wild, remote, and hard to get to.

At home I pulled out the "Alaska Atlas & Gazetteer" to locate the Nulato Hills. What struck me was a nearly continuous ridge, 130 miles, that connected the villages of Nulato on the Yukon River, to Unalakleet on the Bering Sea. The ridge looked free of vegetation, so smooth it might be bikeable.

A few months later I convinced Eric Parsons (owner of Revelate Designs, the bikepacking company) that we could bike the ridge. I was wrong. We turned around after three days of bad brush, no visibility, and, shockingly, no water. Eric and I did manage to reach bikeable ridges, and those parts of the route were excellent. But we weren't carrying enough food for our pace, I had misjudged how quickly we could move by a factor of two.

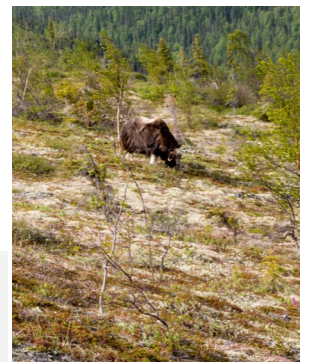
That winter, I obsessed over the line connecting Nulato and Unalakleet. I considered trying it on skis, but decided the best travel was by foot and packraft, in early summer when we could count on pockets of snow for easy water. I suggested the trip to Sarah Histan, my girlfriend, and she reasoned, "If they thought it was bikeable, it must be really easy walking."

We received a very warm welcome in Nulato. Martha Turner met us at the airport and brought us to the Tribal Council. This was one of the highlights of the trip. Everyone that dropped by was excited about our hike and offered advice on the route. The locals offered us guns, bear spray, and mosquito repellent. We took the bear spray and mosquito repellent.

The Nulato Hills ridge starts eight miles from the village. In 2017 I had misinterpreted the gray texture in Google Earth as rocky soil, but it turned out to be recent burn, a pick-up-stick disaster of black spruce and dense new growth. I thought that Sarah and I would have an easier go, without bikes and mentally prepared for a difficult section, but hot temperatures and thick bugs made it pretty unpleasant. We only had one headnet, so I improvised by wrapping my packraft combing, a loop of PEX tubing, with Sarah's thin pair of long johns. We reached the ridge that evening and collapsed into the tent.

During the night we heard the wind pick up, but also some sort of clomping sounds. In the morning we noticed musk ox qiviut on the shrubs around the tent, and a few minutes into our hike we crested a ridge to see a dozen or so musk oxen with calves. A fierce headwind made standing around unpleasant, but we were able to watch the musk oxen without them noticing us. Eventually we hitched our packs and headed up the ridge.

*Musk ox in the transition from forest to tundra in the Nulato Hills. There were 10 to 12 musk oxen in this herd.*





*Sarah Histan had high morale after fighting through the forest to access the ridge-walk section of the route. The hills reached nearly 4000 feet, respectable, having come from the 100-foot elevation of the Yukon River.*

with lush flanks of spruce and birch spilling down to the valley floors. We lost sight of the Yukon pretty quickly, and could see an endless series of peaks and ridges along our route. The relief was respectable, 4000-foot peaks just 20 miles from the Yukon River.



*Sarah Histan descending slippery talus. The tundra ridge turned into steep climbs and descents on slippery talus. The worst weather corresponded with the hardest part of the route.*

had low visibility on the ridge). Traveling the rough ridgeline on foot made me really glad Eric and I hadn't pushed on with bikes. The weather degraded, to match our moods, as we logged too many vertical feet for minor horizontal gains. We moved through that section in cold rain, often post-holing the last of the winter's snow, anxious to reach the North River and transition to our boats. We made the classic mistake of pushing late into the night just to get "that last mile" out of the way, stumbling and irritable on the third and fourth of those last miles.

We chose the North River instead of the Unalakleet River because the North looked like it had fewer meanders toward the coast. That was the right decision. The North was excellent boating, Class II at most, crystal clear, scenic canyon sections that weren't scary, and a ton of birds to keep us entertained. Travel was easy and excellent, the weather improved, and so did our morale.

We reached Unalakleet on day 10 and tracked down our friend Timm Nelson. Timm gave us a ride to his in-laws, who happened to

The ridge gradually gained elevation, but initially, each dip brought us below timberline for a thick bushwhack. But those passages were short, the wind kept the bugs away, and the views were excellent.

Each peak along the ridge had a bald summit, tundra,

Not long after we passed the bikeable section where Eric and I had turned around, the ridge peaks became steeper, more distinct, and progressively rockier. This section would have been completely unbikeable (Eric and I

be hosting a Solstice/Anniversary feast. I've never come off a trip in such style! Fresh bread, fresh king salmon, caribou, sausage, a full spread. The Ivanoffs were incredibly generous with us and made our time in Unalakleet feel very special.

I generally anticipate reward to match challenge, and that was the case for our route from Nulato to Unalakleet. But I had seriously underestimated how challenging the terrain would be, which inadvertently misled Sarah to mentally prepare for an easier trip. If it weren't for the very extremely pleasant float down the North River, our relationship probably would have been strained for some time. The beautiful float, warm welcome, and incredible feast helped heal our strained relationship, and hopefully we finished as a team better prepared to manage expectations on the next trip.

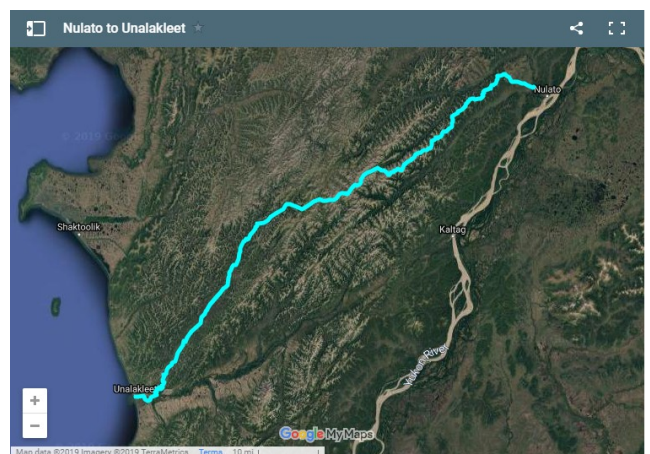
Check out more photos and the route map at <https://thingstolucat.com/nulato-to-unalakleet/>.



*Sarah Histan on the headwaters of the North River, which featured clean water and comfortable mini-canyons. This bank was filled with swallow nests.*



*Sarah Histan approaching Unalakleet after an enjoyable float on the North and Unalakleet Rivers.*



## Kichatna Mountains to Lake Creek, Alaska Range

Text by Frank Preston



*Frank Preston looking up at Augustin Peak.  
Photo by Chris Erickson*



*Frank Preston descending the Trident Glacier.  
Photo by Chris Erickson*

We have an entire wall in the Walter Harper Talkeetna Ranger Station dedicated to USGS 15-minute topographic maps of Denali National Park. It is old school and incredibly helpful for planning searches, coordinating rescues, and learning place names. It also provides a space for the imagination to run wild with off-the-wall ideas of unrealistic trips in some of the most rugged terrain in the state. Every once in a while, those point-to-point lines get refined into traverses that take us through vast and infrequently explored terrain. That was the case for fellow mountaineering ranger Chris Erickson and me as we traveled from the Kichatna Mountains to Chelatna Lake and then down Lake Creek this past July.

First, we picked our ending point – Chelatna Lake. Just outside Denali National Park, Chelatna Lake is turquoise blue, incredibly scenic, landable for float planes and wheel planes, and dotted with small cabins around its perimeter. Next we considered our starting point. Little Switzerland? Base camp on the Kahiltna Glacier? Mount Russell? Unknown (to us at least) glaciers, rivers, and bushwhacking protected Chelatna Lake on all sides. We wanted to start as far away as reasonable, given our five-day schedule – a chance to see as much of Denali as we could. Our eyes soon drifted toward the far western edge of our map, and after some deliberation and careful route discussion, the Kichatna Mountains began to come into focus.

Kichatna to Chelatna had a nice ring to it, and neither one of us had ever been to the legendary Cathedral Spires. We have a map of “routes” through the area with hand-drawn lines by legendary mountaineering ranger Roger Robinson. Did they still go? Was the glacier terminus melting and a travel disaster like so many others

in the area? What about the numerous hunting strips and camps in the southwest preserve? Were there all-terrain vehicle (ATV) trails encroaching into the park? Were people accessing the boundary and hunting inside the park? Were there truly cabins and trails near the Midway Lakes? And how bad could the bushwhacking *actually* be? All these questions begged answers, and it began to sound like the perfect trip.

We landed on June 30<sup>th</sup> on the Trident Glacier, which is not an official name that shows up on maps. It is where teams have landed to access routes on Augustin Peak and some of the northeastern Kichatna Mountains. Frankly, we were blown away by the Kichatnas: splitter cracks, huge granite spires, and an ocean of seemingly climbable terrain. It was only fitting that we stared up into blue skies and perfect climbing weather ... and began to walk down the glacier. We’re convinced that had we brought racks and ledges we’d have sat in the rain for a week.

The firm line was easy for us to navigate with supportable snow giving way to bare, late-season ice with little challenge. We did encounter a knee-deep slush pond on a flat section of the glacier that was colder than I thought possible for water in its liquid state. But we found a route through without having to swim (though we considered wearing a personal flotation device in the event of a water-filled-and-covered crevasse fall!) and proceeded to weave a route off the glacier to the west, accessing a northeast-running ridge between the Trident and Shadows Glaciers. We traversed over Peak 4905 and Point 4825 on easy walking with spectacular views. Despite the stable and hot weather all over Alaska, the Kichatnas reminded us that they take the brunt of all bad weather,

and we soon found ourselves getting pounded with heavy rain and 30-mile-per-hour wind.

We picked a route to the West Fork of the Yentna River below the Shadows Fork, and were able to avoid bushwhacking for the most part. We were really happy with the way the day had turned out – great views on the way in, easy glacier travel, a fun ridge walk, and an amazing gravel bar complete with fresh, clear water for camping. We traveled somewhere between 8 and 10 miles, gaining 3,000-plus feet and descending over 6,000 feet of elevation, and we were excited to be camping at our next day's put-in.

In the morning, the weather was beautiful, and we inflated our packrafts and put in on the West Fork. Daytime temperatures in the upper 80s/lower 90s put the Yentna at flood stage for our float. The West Fork of the Yentna is big, silty, flat, and braided into many channels, providing easy and fast floating even at high flows. We paddled for about 22 river miles, although it is hard to say how many with accuracy as there were so many new channels and braids forming constantly. Along the way, we stopped at a few spots to check for human use, access fresh, clear water, and we even found some old trash that we picked up. With high hopes for a trail across the Midway Lakes section between the West Fork and the East Fork of the Yentna River, we took off the river and deflated our packrafts. The mile-and-a-half crossing quickly deflated our hopes of an easy day.

That was the worst section of bushwhacking that I had seen in Alaska. If you have ever thought to yourself, "I like traversing out of the Alaska Range, but there just isn't enough challenge and misery in the routes I have found," then this might be the trip for you. With no slope in this section, the alder grew in all directions, creating a spider web of strong woody-stemmed plants. Just when we thought it was getting



*Chris Erickson on the ridge north of the Trident Glacier.  
Photo by Frank Preston*



*Frank Preston crossing Kliskon Creek.  
Photo by Chris Erickson*



*Chris Erickson near Mount Kliskon.  
Photo by Frank Preston*

hard, we ran in to a patch of devil's club that pin-pricked our hands and legs as the alder continued to bruise our shins. Amazingly, the bushwhacking took so long that we also managed to run out of water. It was near 90 degrees, and the Midway Lakes weren't much help as the lake water was protected by a deep, muddy swamp. That said, it was the best tannin-colored water either of us had ever tasted.

Five hours after setting out on a mile-and-a-half hike to the East Fork of the Yentna, we emerged, with nothing left to do but laugh and inflate boats. I don't know if there is a better route across this section of land between those two forks of the mighty Yentna, though having flown over it since that trip, we highly doubt it. We ferried across the East Fork, happy for a few easy miles. The relief we felt from being done with the Midway Lakes section might have been overshadowed slightly by the thought that tomorrow's move had five miles and 2,000 vertical feet of what looked to be the same vegetation before we would get to the alpine.

Day three began with a walk up what we referred to as Kliskon Creek. That tributary of the East Fork of the Yentna flowed off the north side of Mount Kliskon and was a beautiful creek with open gravel bars for easy travel. We utilized Kliskon Creek for a couple miles until we decided we were ready to move up through vegetated slopes to get to the tundra above. We found good travel up steep, alder-free slopes for much of our ascent and kept the bushwhacking mellow. The most challenging type of terrain there was steep, grassy, fern-covered slopes that we were able to finally get above after numerous slips and stumbles. We were excited to reach our destination in the tundra – a knob at about 3500 feet south and west of Mount Kliskon. The views from our camp were next to none. From The Mooses Tooth in the east, all the way to the Tordrillo Mountains in the west,



the entire Alaska Range was spread out with Mount Foraker at the center of it all.

The Kliskon Range, as we were then calling it, lived up to our hopes of easy travel and spectacular views. We traversed over Peak 3970, Point 3860, Mount Kliskon (3943 feet), Peak 3950, Points 3620 and 3890, and Peaks 3950 and 3920. There were no technical sections, and the views were amazing every step of the way. Down in the basins below us, we saw large moose and lots of snow lingering despite the heat. We crossed the boundary from national park to state land, and only after leaving the park did we start to observe human development. We saw a seismic sensor in one of the saddles that had been installed via helicopter and a summit stake on the top of Mount Kliskon.

We knew we would have to leave the ridge at some point, and fearing the worst in terms of bushwhacking, we took our time to scout a route from our view as well as using satellite imagery that we had loaded on our phones prior to the trip. We found a nice descent into the California Creek drainage, and walked moose/human trails for a little bit to get to Sunflower Creek. We found great camping on a gravel bar at the confluence of Sunflower and California Creeks. Sunflower was cold and clear, but jumping in was mandatory after about 3,500 feet of elevation gain and 12-plus miles along a no-shade ridgeline.

On our fifth morning, we inflated packrafts and floated Sunflower Creek. Sunflower had plenty of water to float, and easy paddling led to a bend where we discovered that Sunflower Creek had one rapid in a small canyon. As we continued downstream, we chatted about the options for getting from Sunflower Creek to the airstrip at Chelatna Lake. Would there be a trail of any sort? Would we be wading through swamps, or bushwhacking? Which would be worse – the swamps or the bushwhacking if there were no trail? We are both optimists, however, and manifested an ATV trail at what we thought was the logical spot for one if someone were to walk to Chelatna. The trail didn't exactly go where we needed to go, and we ended up walking through swamps and bushwhacking before arriving at the airstrip on Chelatna Lake. The lake was full, and the water looked inviting enough that I swam with all my clothes on.

Arriving at Chelatna Lake ended the patrol portion of the trip. Now that we had exited the park, we were off the clock and on personal time. We closed out our backcountry plan with our dispatch center and welcomed three new team members (Alisa Royem, Amanda Erickson, and Joyce Jenkins) who flew in with pizzas, beer, and fishing rods for a paddle down the poorly named Lake Creek. Chelatna River would be both more descriptive of the volume and less generic than the current name, and we suggest calling it such. We floated and fished two days down the Class III sections of the Chelatna and took out above the somewhat notorious canyon. We

hiked easy terrain over to Shovel Lake on the east side of the river where we had arranged a floatplane pick-up back home to Talkeetna. We were surprised to find later that Shovel Lake was not a common pick-up point, as traveling farther downriver required running the Class IV canyon, which at our high water level would have been pretty exciting.

This trip had a little bit of everything we were looking for. It was an area where we didn't often have rangers on the ground, so we were able to gain some insight on how much use the area got and how impacted some of the areas were. We saw no evidence of climbing teams in the Kichatnas and saw little in the way of recent activity in the areas that had hunting potential. The Yentna River was reported as being in flood stage, but that reach was easy to navigate and had no wood hazard when we floated it. There was no evidence of a trail across the Midway Lakes area, and no sign of human activity within the park boundary on the western side of the Kliskon Range.

We covered somewhere between 60 and 65 miles from the Kichatnas to Chelatna Lake, with about half being on foot and half being on non-whitewater rivers; the Chelatna River added another 20 to 30 miles. We took five days to Chelatna Lake and seven overall, with most of those being full days on the move. We found some good routes through sections that could have made for slow bushwhacking, and with some minor route-finding changes, some sections could have been much slower and more challenging. Potentially, there might be a better route through the Midway Lakes area, but I would count on that area being a slow and frustrating move. It would be hard to imagine either fork of the Yentna River being too low to make steady and easy progress, but if Sunflower Creek were too low to float, it would make for an extremely long walk down a willow-filled valley. That route, unlike traversing out of the Pika Glacier or the Ruth Glacier, did not have a logical roadside ending point, so it necessitated a flight into the range and a flight out from Chelatna Lake or somewhere down Lake Creek.



*Chris Erickson in the Sunflower Creek canyon.  
Photo by Frank Preston*

# Exploring Ridges between the Chickaloon and Talkeetna Drainages, Talkeetna Mountains

Text by Dennis Ronsse and Katie Libby

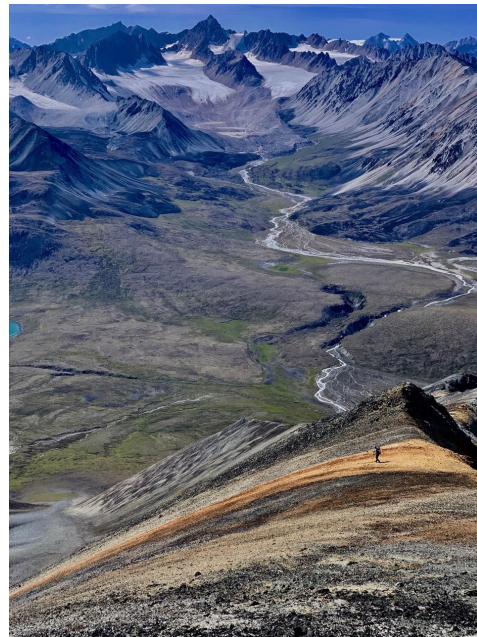


*Katie Libby on the windy summit of Peak 6910. Peak 7850 is visible in the background at right.  
Photo by Dennis Ronsse*



*Dennis Ronsse on the ridge between base camp and Peak 6910. The upper Talkeetna River valley is in the distance.  
Photo by Katie Libby*

On August 6 we were flown to Cunningham Airstrip, located in the pass between the Chickaloon River and Talkeetna River drainages [Ed. note: James Kari and James A. Fall reported in *Shem Pete's Alaska* that the Upper Cook Inlet Dena'ina called this pass *Dzel Ggeyi*], and set up camp at a beautiful stream flowing out of a rock glacier. We stayed six days and hiked ridge lines overlooking spectacular country, everyday something different close to camp. We had no previous trip reports, mountaineering equipment, or knowledge of the area, and were fortunate to find easy-enough access to several prominent points on the surrounding ridges. Every ridge involved 2,000 to 3,000 feet of scree, and most had prominent pillars of sharp, black rock along the way and on top. We learned to be very careful traversing these, normally unstable footing with no solid handholds, and potential cascades from above. In those places, ropes would have been no help to us, but glacier-travel equipment would have been a nice option; maybe next time for that! Accompanying this trip report are a map and photos of some places we visited.



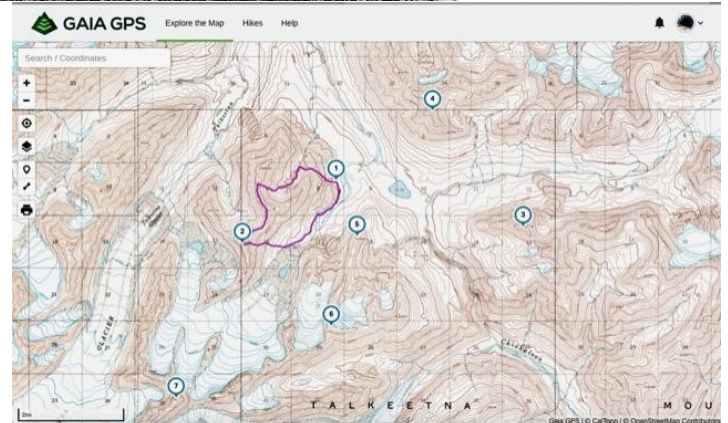
*Katie Libby stepping onto the high-speed escalator of scree down toward a tributary of Clear Creek. We found the red rock scree great, safe descending vs. black rock with sharp, flesh-eating appetite often covering shallow bedrock. Peak of Many Couloirs (featured in the September 2019 Scree) is the highpoint on the skyline.  
Photo by Dennis Ronsse*

Map waypoint numbers to mark our travels:

1. Base Camp, about 4400 feet.
2. USGS map Peak 6910.
3. USGS map Point 6778.
4. GPS Point 6868 on ridge (not able to reach nearby USGS map Peak 7044)
5. USGS map Point 5954.
6. USGS map Point 6950.

We did not go to:

7. Peak of Many Couloirs, featured in the September 2019 Scree.



## Peak 801 in the Salmon Creek and Sawmill Creek Drainages, Kenai Mountains

Text and photo by Duane Nelson



*West aspect of Peak 801, as viewed from the road.*

I just returned from my first trip to Alaska, which started with a side trip to Seward. I wanted to climb an "easy" peak the afternoon we arrived, and selected Peak 801 east of Salmon Creek as a logical choice. My climbing partner was David Martin, also from Colorado.

We could not find any public places to park, so we asked some people that were out in their yard if we could park our car on their property, and access the peak from their back yard on the west side of the peak, just south of spot elevation 44T (144 feet) on the topographic map. In an act of Alaskan hospitality, they allowed us to park, and even lent us bear spray. As soon as we entered the flat area behind their house, we knew the hike was not going to be as short or easy as we had hoped, due to downed timber and our first encounter with the dreaded devil's club shrubs. There were no use trails nor even animal trails to help us. The slopes became very steep before we got to a north-south ridge we had to cross. We hiked south after

gaining the ridge, and got up to almost point 157T (elevation 515 feet), noting that the true peak was still high above us. We did a slight descent to cross the valley separating us from Peak 801, and began climbing steeply to our east. The going got easier when we found ways to miss some of the thicker areas of devil's club. Just before gaining the ridge at about 700 feet elevation, we bypassed a band of cliffs to our north. Walking north on the ridge was much easier, although there was no sign of previous traffic. We crossed a false summit and made it to the true, north summit. There were no trails, cairns, or register anywhere on the route, and, due to the unpleasant nature of the terrain, it is possible no one had been there before. We could not find a way down that bypassed the ridge north of the peak. What I had expected would take only an hour ended up taking about 2-1/2 hours. There were no views from the top.

## Andy Simons Says, "You're Over-Equipped"

### Andy Simons Mountain (6407 feet), Kenai Mountains

Text and photos by Wayne Todd



*Tenting on the east ridge of Andy Simons Mountain.*

Most of the trips I plan from a topo program are practical and pan out in the field. This was not one of those trips.

A late exodus from Anchorage, coupled with road construction and slow traffic, leads to a post-11 a.m. start from the Victor Creek Trailhead. The only other limited hikes on this trail have been in winter for ice-climbing access. We are not too concerned about the late start, as we're planning on a multi-peak and -day outing. Because of unknowns we have helmets, poles with Whippets, harnesses, glacier-travel gear, axes, crampons, and even a bit of rock protection, plus the standard lightweight overnight gear (tent, bags, pad, and stove), the standard clothing and of course, food.

The U.S. Forest Service (I presume) has put much recent work into the start of this 2.4-mile trail. Initial flowers are dogwood, shy maidens, and amazingly plants I know. We pass over a couple sizable avalanche debris (avbris) piles and note there are more on the north side of the steep valley. Despite our heavier packs, we make reasonable (?) time until the end of the trail, which truncates at another sizable gully, also filled with avbris. I'm almost disappointed with the lack of annoying insects as I'm sporting a bug shirt.

Not having route beta, we opt for the path of least resistance, which is up the avbris. Goat-hair tufts on the snow get larger until we find a rather large hole in the debris with just more goat hair. This was the work of a bear. Whether discovered by the bear or buried by the bear, who knows. The gully narrows and a waterfall replaces the snow.

We opt left and soon are in mild scrambling terrain, which Carrie Wang doesn't appreciate, so she goes hard left while I think the terrain looks fun, so I continue upward. My route gets "more than fun," but I'm appreciative for the helmet, as otherwise I'd have a

couple scalp lacerations from rising up into sharp rocks. One little bump, of course, leads to a couple more, but ends on a friendlier angle and mostly brush-free terrain. The myriad wildflowers easily surpasses my plant memory.

No Carrie, but within a few minutes she emerges from greener slopes below. More wildflowers sprinkle the hillside (blues, purples, brown, yellows, oranges, whites

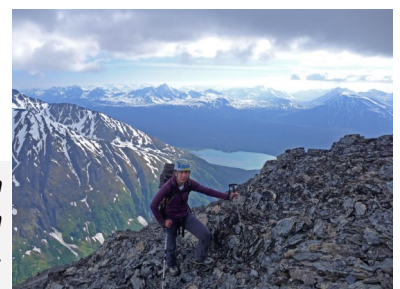


*Carrie Wang ascending the gully above the trail.*

[there are so many different little white ones], and orange) as we slowly angle up and right. The right part is important, as the summit lies two miles to the east. A long, enticing snow slope leads directly up, but we opt right and luckily find a goat trail. On this approximately-45-degree-angle terrain, the trail eases our progress. The poles are very useful. In addition to slight mountain indentations, we also cross numerous snow slopes, which have very rotten (isothermic) edges. The unsupportive snow leads to smaller, hesitant steps, but I still manage leg abrasions from collapsing through to awaiting rock teeth.

The narrow valley slowly reveals views of our planned loop. Wow, steeper and snowier than anticipated. The

*Carrie Wang ascending the south ridge of Andy Simons Mountain with Kenai Lake as a backdrop.*



north face of Sheep Mountain is comprised of rugged terrain smattered with glacier remnants and hanging seracs. With easy route options from the west, any attempts from this side seem foolhardy. Two sizable and precariously hanging seracs will surely break off during our visit for some sound excitement.

We glimpse the trail makers well above us. Angling more upward, now beyond the goat trail, we enter "stacked-dinner-plate slate" terrain. This unstable surface hinders reasonable forward motion as the plates tend to slide backward, encouraging human forward upper torso acceleration (falling forward). The top of the ridge line is not much better.

We top out around 7 p.m., which is impressively ... s-l-o-w, but with impressive cloud-dissipating views of many of the Kenai Mountains, many glacier surrounded, and a few lakes. We're not going much farther today and a reconnaissance beyond the top reveals A) we're not continuing down the ridge as planned, as a 500-foot, extremely-steep "slope" lies beyond, plus the prevalent water/snow, and B) I'm not even entertaining the idea of exiting today, so we find a suitable spot for our mini two-person tent just east of the top (perhaps the goats will appreciate an expanded platform).



*Carrie Wang at the tent site on the east ridge on the east ridge of Andy Simons Mountain.*

The outdoor-gear-worthy photo ops, calm wind, great weather, and prevalent water-intense snow (for water melting) makes a kick-ass ridge

camp. If it weren't for the added weight ☺, we should camp high more often. As we approach bag time, a shifting wind brings so much smoke lower that we can barely see Mount Ascension. A headband makes a fine eye cover. It is almost summer solstice after all.

Morning brings some light wind-created summit cloud, but the sun soon burns that off. We head back over the summit (two climbs in two days ☺) to retrace our ingress route. The early sun warmth is impressive, but shadowed areas maintain moisture, which makes the black lichen rather slick. Added to the dinner-plate slate, we travel down barely faster than our "up." Our day-old snow tracks are useful, both for route and for stepping confidence. I'm still awed by the wildflowers, so take some minutes for pictures (some which look rather similar to the previous day's pictures). The two hanging seracs still cling to the glacier face.

We utilize the goat trail until needing to drop along the gully. We

both disliked our "fun" up-route enough that we veer more right (west) and then get to enjoy some greenery whacking (includes alder swinging and dead-grass boot trapping). Working left, we attain the gully/greenery interface, which seems to have an animal trail (note for future climbers). Back to the gully snow and then the official trail. The hike out, still mostly sans bugs, is especially pleasant below the massive fir trees, with lush green understory (attempting to infiltrate the trail) and a gentle breeze. One of the streams supports the addictive face rinsings.

Approximately 11 miles, 6,000 feet in 13 hours :O (That might be a slow record for us on summer terrain.)

Most folks, doing this as a day trip could probably ascend in a little over five hours and descend in four, if using the human and goat trails, and traveling appropriately light. I recommend, and wouldn't do this with someone without, two carbide-tipped poles with good straps, one preferably a Whippet, high-top boots with stiff soles, and helmet. Depending upon time of year, Kahtoolas or crampons (we never used ours due to shortened trip and soft snow), and snow axe (especially if Whippetless). I would not consider this trip unless the alpine and rock were dry (the sustained angle could cause serious and long human slides).

And for the prominence folks, Sheep Mountain looks very close in elevation ☺.



*Above: Wayne Todd and Carrie Wang on the summit of Andy Simons Mountain with Kenai, Trail, and Ptarmigan Lakes as the backdrop.*

*Below: Carrie Wang descending the south ridge of Andy Simons Mountain.*



# Devils Thumb (9077 feet), Coast Mountains – Saltwater to Summit via East Ridge Direct

Text by Patrick Fowler

July 28 – August 5, 2019



*The sunrise view from 9000 feet, looking out over the Sitkine Ice Cap.  
Photo by Patrick Fowler*

The plan started to take shape one year ago while watching an especially gorgeous sunrise over Devils Thumb from our alpine viewpoint on top of Porter Peak on a neighboring ridge. Just as the rising sun revealed the features of Devils Thumb, the coffee-fueled exchange between Alex Jahn and I revealed the mutual calling the mountain had on each of us. With a realistic view we discussed our abilities, potential routes, how we could prepare, and other real-world challenges like work schedules, weather, and cost. By the time the sun was above the horizon, our course was set toward Devils Thumb. As both Alex and I have lived in Southeast Alaska for some time, it's no wonder how we couldn't resist the pull of Devils Thumb; if Jon Krakauer was first inspired by a photo of the mountain, imagine looking up to that view from Petersburg on every clear day.

A few climbing trips together over the next several months confirmed our climbing abilities and worked to smooth our teamwork for efficient belay transitions, rappels, and other particulars. Co-chise Stronghold, Leavenworth cragging, Mount Stuart ... we decided preparing for Devils Thumb was a great excuse to make fun climbing trips a priority and we should consider establishing goals more often. Over the course of that time, we also decided on the specifics of our approach. While a helicopter is the most common

and thoroughly enjoyable way to arrive at the base of Devils Thumb, we couldn't resist the allure of approaching on foot from the coast of the Pacific Ocean. As Anna Chotzen (Alex's fiancé) put it, "You guys wouldn't be happy to do it any other way but the hard way."

On July 28 we departed Petersburg with a short boat ride to Thomas Bay and the terminus of the Baird Glacier, our highway toward Devils Thumb. We hiked across the short glacier moraine and faced the first major challenge of crossing the terminal lake to attain the glacier. After the unseasonably warm winters and lower-than-average snowfall in Southeast Alaska over the last two years, the terminal lake looked much different than our aerial imagery from 2017 and significantly more complicated to climb onto. With one packraft and one kayak we paddled, portaged, and climbed through several large islands of ice separated by moats of water to obtain the contiguous glacier. With no other option we left the boats on the ice, guessing at how fast that ice would calve off and how far back we should haul the boats to ensure they would still be around two weeks later. The lower Baird Glacier was a labyrinth of crevasses, requiring us to move back and forth until we found a bridge of ice or the walls of each crevasse narrowed enough to allow a crossing with technical ice

tools and crampons. At the end of the first day, we looked back on our progress of approximately one mile, cried a little on the inside, and doubted whether the eight days of food we had with us would get us anywhere near Devils Thumb. With some resilience we pushed onward, and by the afternoon of the next day, we were through the worst of it and made good time up to the junction of the Baird and Oasis Glaciers. On day three we walked into the Witches Cauldron under overcast skies, the thundering sounds of rock and ice falling from all sides and a lone seagull screeching a warning above us. We didn't feel especially welcome and compared the journey to traveling into Mordor. The terrain was tough to move through, essentially an ice cube covered in gravel and boulders of all sizes amongst large moats of standing water. Trekking poles were worth their weight there as we concentrated hard on not taking a minor slip, where a twisted ankle or tweaked knee would be trip ending.

On the morning of day five we started up the icefall on the southern aspect of Devils Thumb, where the Stikine Icecap at 6500 feet elevation flows 4,000 feet down into the Witches Cauldron (2500 feet). We stayed on climber's left to avoid the largest seracs and most hazardous terrain. We were feeling optimistic as we sped upward, only to encounter a wall of overhanging ice after 1,700 feet with evidence of recent collapsing. At that point we moved left onto the rock and followed a 4<sup>th</sup>-class ramp for a further gain of approximately 500 feet in elevation before rejoining the ice. Then things got tricky ... while the terrain was not consistently steep, several bands of



*Alex Jahn and Patrick Fowler (right of center) paddling toward the Baird Glacier.*

*Photo by Kelly Bakos*



*Alex Jahn takes a break while on the approach to Devils Thumb through the Witches Cauldron.*

*Photo by Patrick Fowler*



*Patrick Fowler ascending the southern icefall on Devils Thumb.*

*Photo by Alex Jahn*

heavily crevassed sections barred upward progress. Some of those we crossed on extremely thin snow bridges; others we climbed in, over, and around. Two close calls with rockfall and the consistent noise of collapsing ice urged us to move fast to exit that terrain. We opted to continue upward under haste rather than spend more time and more exposure it would take to descend. After a very tense day, we topped out onto the Stikine Icecap, gave each other a hug, and Alex asked, "How do you feel about not going back that way ... ever?" With so few reports of climbing the southern icefall, it is hard to quantify, but after speaking with Dieter Klose, Zach Hoyt, and Cole Taylor, I think it is safe to say that the southern icefall is not getting any easier and objective hazards are increasing under the warm regime and lower-than-average snowfall of recent years.

The impact of the low snowfall was again confirmed for us after arriving on the icecap near the 6500-foot level and seeing the famous Hog's Back where the first ascensionists, including Fred Beckey, Bob Craig, and Cliff Schmidtke, climbed steep snow and ice to attain the summit ridge [Ed. note: see Beckey's account on pages 269 through 277 of the 1947 American Alpine Journal]. The snow they climbed is now a large band of bare rock with some dirty-blue ice, significantly less snow and ice than what parties observed in the summer of 2017. The amount of rockfall coming down onto and from the Hog's Back also made us wary of using that as a descent route.

We had previously arranged an airdrop of food and fuel to be delivered at some point

between day six and day eight, which would allow us time to wait out adverse weather and feed us on the four-to-five day walk out. As day 6 dawned clear and sunny, we called for the drop and enjoyed a rest day. Seeing those boxes of food come out of the window of the Cessna was better than Christmas morning. Although the snow was soft, and despite our best engineering efforts of carboard, bubble wrap and duct tape, we did have one casualty. Seeing a golden-brown stain on the snow and smelling the whiskey-scented air, we dropped to our knees and enjoyed what we could of a whiskey snow cone before it all seeped down into the depths of the Stikine Icecap.

While we had started our approach in the misty rain so common in Southeast Alaska, five days later we found ourselves on the Stikine Icecap with a forecast of sun and clear skies as far into the future as meteorologists dare to guess. The morning of day 7, we started our ascent of the complete east ridge direct with an alpine start and bivied on a low-angle dome around the 9000-foot level. We found the climbing true to grade and were fortunate that the sun had dried the lichens and moss that would have greatly increased the slimy factor. Gear placements were readily available in the heavily fractured rock, but loose rocks required care. We carried a standard alpine rack up to a #3 cam. On route we encountered about a half dozen fixed pitons from prior groups.

After a glorious red sunrise from our high vantage point, we strolled along the summit ridge to the highest point and looked out over Southeast Alaska and deep into Canada. We located the register left by the British Mountaineering Club and added our own note to the three others that were in the canister. For the descent we reversed course back along the summit ridge to a prominent notch with an existing rappel station then rappelled first toward the Hog's Back. We then rappelled down and to skier's left to avoid landing on the Hog's Back, instead aiming for a spine of rock that ended on the snow with a near vertical angle. The rappels were tense with extremely loose rock and high potential to hang up a rope or dislodge rocks while pulling the rope. We lost count, but somewhere around 13 rappels (45 to 60 meters) with some traversing and downclimbing brought us back to the snow.

With the overwhelming sense of accomplishment after achieving the summit and safely arriving back to our base camp, we gorged on snacks and discussed our options for our return to Petersburg. Ultimately, we decided to helicopter out and avoid the unnecessary risk of traveling through another icefall or falling into bridged crevasses; we regret nothing about that decision. The next morning we were plucked from the icecap by Wally and his Temsco helicopter and soared high above our approach route back to Petersburg.

Feel free to reach out to discuss climbing on the Stikine Icecap or how to best package whiskey for an airdrop: Alex Jahn: [ajahn10@gmail.com](mailto:ajahn10@gmail.com), Patrick Fowler: [fowler.patrick@gmail.com](mailto:fowler.patrick@gmail.com) also on Instagram @bluewater\_bigsky.

Postscript: Two days after returning to Petersburg, we again traversed the terminal lake and lower Baird Glacier to retrieve our packraft and kayak. The kayak was retrieved first, but the packraft was stashed deeper onto the ice to spread our risk of both boats disappearing. Upon climbing up a large fin of ice the scene before us was a complete jumble of collapsed ice, our GPS point indicating the packraft was somewhere in the middle of this. With a quick scan of the devastation, Alex, in the calm tone that comes from the mountaineer's way of accepting what cannot be changed and quickly moving on, turned and said, "Let's get the f\$%\* out of here."



*State of the Hog's Back on June 21, 2017, during an attempt by Shawn McAllister, Quentin Smith, and Sam Wilson.  
Photo by Shawn McAllister*



*State of the Hog's Back on August 5, 2019.  
Photo by Patrick Fowler*



## A Harrowing Descent off Yudi Peak (6540 feet), Western Chugach Mountains

Text and photos by Matt Green

August 18-19, 2019



*Panorama from Pipit Peak, looking (left to right) across the Yudi Glacier, Yudi Peak, Sparrow Peak, and the Pipit Glacier.*

I'd made it, but how to get down was the question. As the sun was setting, I'd just scrambled 800 feet up some really unstable, loose rock where a fall would be rather bad. I vowed that there was no way I was going to descend by that route. Well, time for a bivy – I'll think about it in the morning.

I'd just climbed Yudi Peak (6540 feet), the highest mountain in the Girdwood Valley, on the Girdwood High Five Traverse. I'd been wanting to do the traverse for years since moving to the valley several years ago. With the very hot summer, I figured that the glaciers would be relatively safe to travel and thus was comfortable going solo. I did throw in 15 feet of webbing and 30 feet of 8-millimeter rope just in case, though.

After a late 11 a.m. start, I hiked from the Nordic 5-kilometer loop, up the Winner Creek Trail, then up the Snowcat Trail to the Powder Hut. I packed moderately light and planned for a bivy somewhere on the ridge – just taking a bivy bag, puff pants, and a moderate puff jacket for warmth. For the next few days, the forecast was high 60s, clear, and with minimal wind. I did neglect to check the overnight temperatures, though. Making good time on the ridge, I climbed Notch Mountain (3005 feet), A1 (4950 feet), and Mystery Mountain (5350 feet) and stood on Pipit Peak (6050 feet) at 7:30 p.m. All straightforward hiking thus far, but all that was about to change.

With sunset at 9:45 p.m. and full dark not until 11 p.m. or so, I decided to see if I could make it up Yudi Peak for a bivy. Not far down the north ridge of Pipit, exposed rock became too difficult without a rope and I was forced to descend to the Pipit Glacier. I was prepared for that contingency, but it was a tricky descent down the steep, bare-ice bergschrund and around a few crevas-

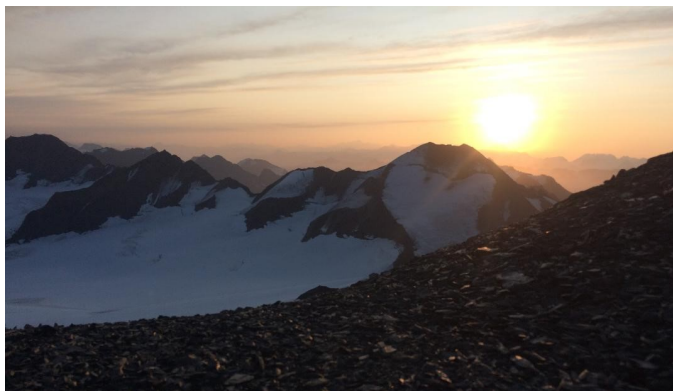
es. The glacier was hard snow with patches of bare ice, and it was easy to see the crevasses to pick a safe path. Up and around a protruding outcrop into the glacier, I regained the east ridge of Yudi Peak with a few ice-climbing moves up a small bergschrund.

From the glacier, this ridge looked about 45 degrees, so I thought it would be good to scramble, but the rock quality was terrible. Just about everything I touched was loose and I was constantly dislodging rock that hurtled hundreds of feet down to the Yudi Glacier that fed Glacier Creek. The sun had set behind the mountain while I was climbing that section and it was with profound relief that I topped out and hiked across a short, easy ridge to summit at 10:45 p.m. A good day. Probably should have started a few hours earlier, though.



*Upper Pipit Glacier and Sparrow Peak. Matt Green's route to the upper névé field was through the middle right crevasses.*

With the sun gone, even with virtually no wind, it quickly turned cold. Fortunately, there was a perfect flat area right near the summit for a bivy. I soon realized that not packing a sleeping bag was a bad idea. That night was the first in the 30s for Girdwood the summer of 2019, and it must have been close to freezing at 6500 feet. The ultralight mattress pad I'd just bought was amazing,



*Sunrise over Sparrow Peak from bivy on Yudi Peak.*

but I was often shivering to stay warm. Sleep was sporadic. My bivy bag is difficult to maintain a hole for fresh air while trying to retain heat, and I often woke up breathing hard. On that long, cold night, I had plenty of time to think about how to get down. After a quick look around the summit area before I turned in, I could see no easy options. I was already thinking about how that bivy area could make a good helicopter landing pad.

I watched the sun rise through dense bushfire smoke over Sparrow Peak to the northeast and lay in my bivy until the sun cleared the haze and I could start to feel some heat. Still wearing my puff gear and trying to warm my feet, I set off down the northwest ridge, but was soon foiled by rocky exposed terrain. The ridge ahead looked very challenging and without a rope and protection it was a no-go. The only possibility was to find a route down to the Eagle Glacier. But how?

I saw a way down a steep, loose scree slope to a bergschrund. Not far down I stopped to put on crampons and shortly thereafter lost my nerve. I watched scree tumble down the slope across the bare ice of the bergschrund and then into the deep, wide moat between the rock and the glacier. Assuming I made it to the ice and wasn't swept over it with all the loose scree I was setting off, I would have to traverse and down-climb the bergschrund, and then somehow climb out of the crevasse. It all looked bad.

Returning to the summit, I scrambled over to and started down the northeast ridge where it looked like a steep snow ramp might connect to the slope. On closer inspection, it would be a hard climb down the ridge even with a rope, then the descent to the ramp on steep rock with few features looked challenging, and then once one was there, the snow ramp was actually not connected to the rock, and there was a 10-foot vertical climb on near-ice-like snow to get out. There must be something better.

Back toward the summit, I investigated the main bergschrund/headwall immediately to the east. It was bare ice that gradually rolled over to about 50 degrees to enter a 10-to-15-foot-deep, 5-foot-wide crevasse with a potential exit on the east end to the

snow slope of the glacier. The ice section was only about 30 feet at the east end, and I started to down-climb. I soon realized that one straight ice axe, and crampons with two horizontal front points are hard to use to down-climb bullet-hard glacial ice. I am sure that it was possible, but when I was on my own in the middle of nowhere, my risk tolerance was low. If I had brought an ice

screw or two, it would have been easy. No place for any natural protection there, either, to use my 8-millimeter cord. I bailed and returned to the ridge.

At that point I briefly contemplated sliding down the bare ice of the bergschrund, clearing the gap to land on the snow slope of the glacier, and riding it out until the slope lessened. It would have been a hard landing and rife with potential for injury. A helicopter ride would be cheaper than the medical bills. I was now seriously considering giving Alpine Air a call.

With options dwindling, I had one last look at the west end of the bergschrund through a small crevasse. There I found a vertical chimney between the ice and the rock with an ice horn on the lip of the crevasse conveniently hanging over the chimney. Maybe that could go. I tied a loop in my 15 feet of webbing, slung the ice horn, then attached the 30 feet of 8-millimeter cord to the end. Put together it just about reached the bottom. By then the sun had hit the rock above the bergschrund and small pieces of shale were constantly raining down. It was only a matter of time before something bigger fell, judging by the mounds of shale and rocks in the crevasse below. With no time to waste, I wrapped the rope through my groin, over my back and shoulder, and cautiously descended the chimney using the rope for support. That rope saved the day. I was hanging on it completely at one point. It would have been seriously sketchy to do without it. Then in the crevasse, I made it to the other end of the bergschrund where I could access the snow ramp of the glacier and was able to down-climb with the single ice axe because it could actually penetrate the hard snow.

Wow. It took probably three harrowing hours to descend 200 feet off the summit to the glacier. I wish I had a photo of the bergschrund below Yudi Peak, but my phone battery was too cold and I didn't want to wait to warm it up.

The trip out was uneventful. The Eagle Glacier was hard snow with many patches of bare ice, again making it easy to navigate through the crevasses. It was sad to see all the obvious extreme

melting going on, exacerbated by the dirty snow. I hiked north down the glacier, rounded the rocky rib to the west, and then up the small pocket glacier to try to regain the main ridge. At the top of the glacier I could not see an easy way onto the ridge and did not want any more exposed rock scrambling. Instead, I returned to the main Eagle Glacier, rounded the next rock outcrop then made a direct line for Goat Ridge. I descended the south ridge of Goat Mountain, bushwhacked to the stream, forded it to an old trail, and reached Crow Creek Road near the bridge at 5 p.m. A gruelling descent.

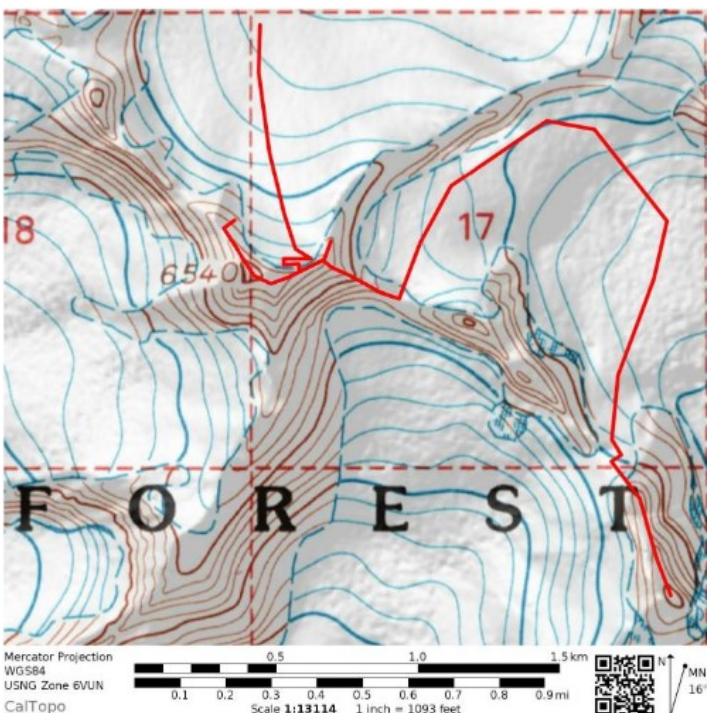
Taking it relatively slow but steady, the travel time was about 22 hours. I am sure it could be done in a long summer day. Next time I might take a sleeping bag, a rope, and maybe a couple of ice screws. It is always a tough balance, though, between light and fast, and comfort and safety. Throwing in my 8--millimeter cord and some webbing was a major decision, but was a trip saver. Going solo on difficult, remote terrain is always a thrill for me. I live in the moment, constantly making risk-based decisions on what to do next. I know that I am much more conservative than if I was with a partner. At no point did I feel in imminent danger and felt that I was always able to recognize terrain beyond my abilities and available equipment and then back up and reassess the situation. In fact, I was acutely aware that travelling up the apparently benign Eagle Glacier and descending Goat Ridge was probably the riskiest part of the trip since I was tired and not concentrating as much as before. A 50-meter rope to descend off Yudi Peak would have been really nice, though.



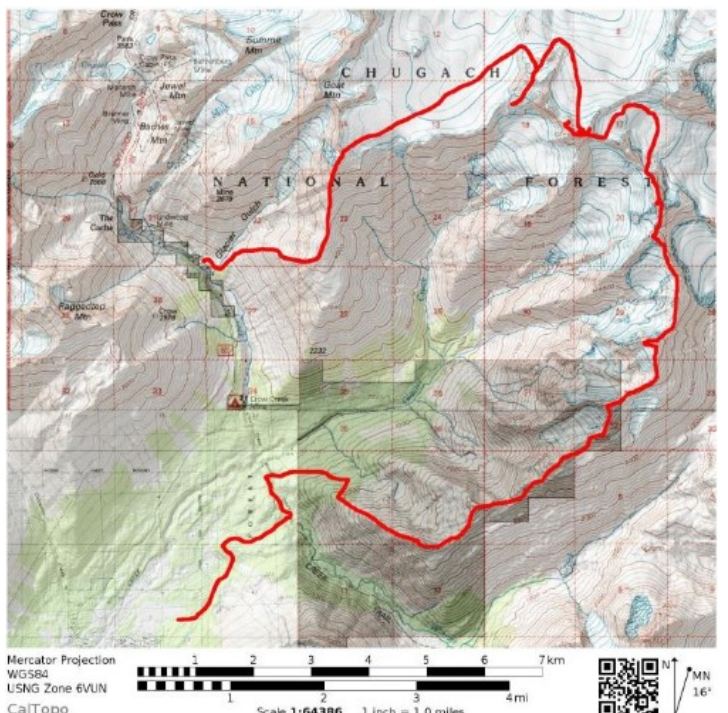
*Panorama of the Girdwood High Five Traverse from Notch Mountain.*



*From Pipit Peak looking south to Mystery Mountain.*



*Approximate route taken from Pipit Peak to Yudi Peak and descent route to the Eagle Glacier.*



*Approximate route taken on Girdwood High Five Traverse.*

# Peak of the Month: Mustang Peak

Text by Steve Gruhn

**Mountain Range:** Coast Mountains

**Borough:** City and Borough of Juneau

**Drainages:** West Branch of the Taku Glacier, Eagle Glacier, and Herbert Glacier

**Latitude/Longitude:** 58° 38' 42" North, 134° 35' 23" West

**Elevation:** 6710±10 feet

**Adjacent Peaks:** Peak 6525 in the West Branch of the Taku Glacier and Eagle Glacier drainages, The Snow Towers, and Colt Peak (5847 feet)

**Distinctness:** 1070 feet from Peak 6525

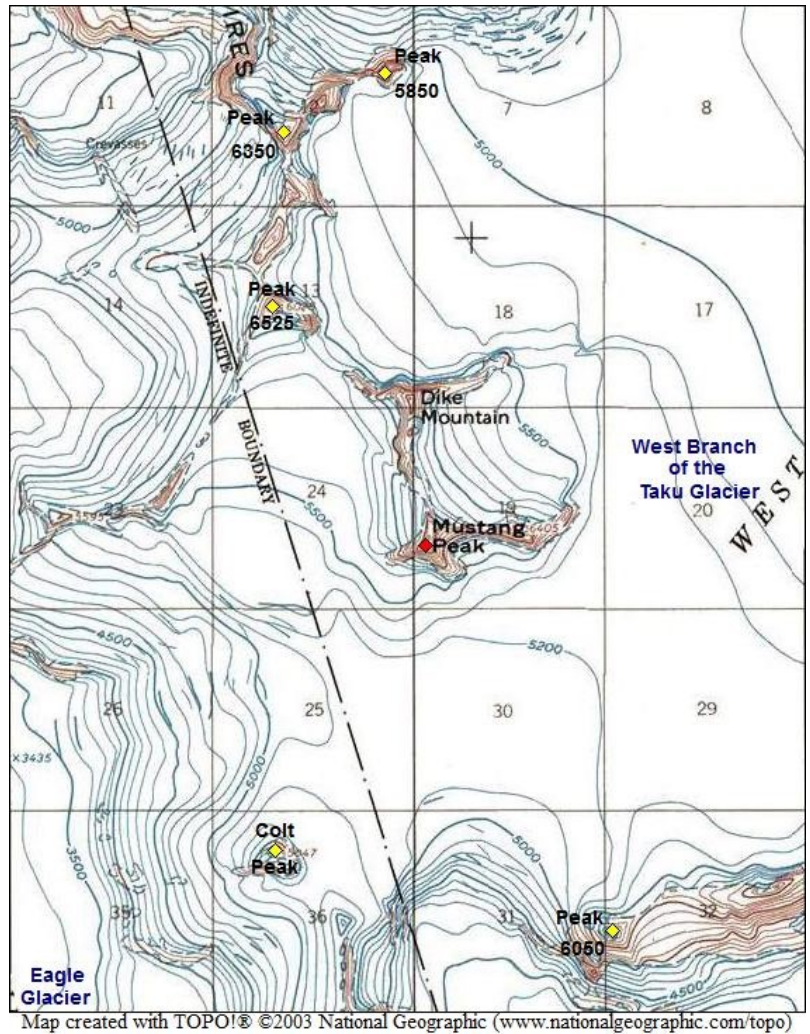
**Prominence:** 1550 feet from The Snow Towers

**USGS Map:** 1:63,360: Juneau (C-2); 1:25,000: Juneau C-2 SW

**First Recorded Ascent:** 1984 by Charles Richard "Dick" Ellsworth and Bruce Tickell

**Route of First Recorded Ascent:** Unknown

**Access Point:** Herbert Glacier



*Southwest aspect of Mustang Peak. Photo by Matt Callahan*

The south aspect of Mustang Peak is a steep 1,200-foot face that catches the sun on clear days, serving as something of a beacon to guide mountaineers to some big-wall goods.

In 1964 David Alan Brew, a geologist with the Juneau Icefield Research Project, proposed the name Jan Peak for a 6700-foot peak in the West Branch of the Taku Glacier and Eagle Glacier drainages of the Juneau Icefield. On February 28, 1965, Maynard Malcolm Miller submitted a letter to the U.S. Board on Geographic Names identifying the peak as Mustang Peak. Because Miller was

the founder and director of the JIRP, Brew changed his proposal to match Miller's toponym for the peak. In 1965 the BGN made Mustang Peak the official name for the summit.

In 1984 Charles Richard "Dick" Ellsworth and Bruce Tickell climbed Mustang Peak. Details of their ascent were not reported.

On June 28, 2019, Matt Callahan and Dylan Miller caught a ride



*Dylan Miller and the south aspect of Mustang Peak. Photo by Matt Callahan*

with Temsco Helicopters to a spot on the Herbert Glacier below the south face of Mustang Peak. The set out to attempt the face, finding steep 5.10 climbing to the midpoint of the wall. Dehydration and the end of the crack system that they were following prompted a retreat. The next day they ascended the south side of the east ridge with some tricky 5.9 climbing. They scrambled up the east ridge to the summit with a single 30-foot 5.6 crack being the most technical terrain they encountered on the ridge. they rappelled a 400-foot wall to the northwest and returned to their camp.

The following day Callahan and Miller climbed Colt Peak and hiked partway down the Herbert Glacier. They returned home on July 1.

I don't know of a third ascent of Mustang Peak.

The information for this column came from the United States Board on Geographic Names Case Brief for Mustang Peak; from Dylan Miller's trip report titled "Mustang Peak (6750 feet) and Colt Peak (5847 feet), Coast Mountains," which appeared in the August 2019 Scree; and from my correspondence with Dick Ellsworth, Dylan Miller, and Matt Callahan.



*Matt Callahan and the southwest aspect of Mustang Peak.  
Photo by Dylan Miller*



*Southeast aspect of Mustang Peak.  
Photo by Dylan Miller*

## Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

September 25, 2019 at 6:00 p.m., UAA 105A CPISB

### Roll Call

Mike Meyers (President) - Present  
 Gerrit Verbeek (Vice-President) - Present  
 Jen Aschoff (Secretary) - Present  
 Katherine Cooper (Treasurer) - Present  
 Max Neale (Director) - Present  
 Tom Meacham (Director) - Present  
 Lila Hobbs (Director) - Present  
 Jonathan Rupp Strong (Director) - Present  
 Charlie Sink (Past President) - Present  
 Visitors: None

**Scribe:** Jen Aschoff

### Committee Reports

#### President (Mike Meyers)

- Gerrit Verbeek will talk to Kurt Hensel regarding reduced Chugach State Park fee for MCA events.

- Christmas Party booked for December 12th at Matanuska Brewing Company in Eagle River and will serve as the MCA General meeting.
  - Several new folks are interested in serving on the board.
  - Calendar show was a hit. We plan to do this again.
  - Thank you letters were sent to the Holden Hut repair crew (Pete Holden and Randy Williams).
  - Board-member voting will take place at the October 2 meeting and Cory Hinds will announce voting at the general meeting.
  - Additional income will come in from Paxson Woelber's maps.
  - Calendars will be available at the November meeting.
- #### Vice President (Gerrit Verbeek)
- November speaker: Ross Noffsinger

### Secretary (Jen Aschoff)

- Nothing to report.

### Treasurer (Katherine D. Cooper)

- 2019 Year-to-date budget reporting was completed and will be discussed at the next board meeting, and we are under budget for 2019.
- Icefest and calendar sales will bring in additional funds to be determined.
- 2020 Budget needs to be discussed at the next board meeting.

### Liability Committee (Tom Meacham)

- By-Laws revision (two-year terms, trips committee, six directors).
- The revised liability waiver will soon be sent to Chugach State Park.
- Guided trips in the huts.

### Awards Committee (Tom Meacham, Charlie Sink, Max Neale)

- Nomination notice was sent to *the Scree*.
- Max Neale is joining the committee and will replace Steve Gruhn.

### Parks Advisory (Tom Meacham and Ralph Baldwin)

- Kurt Hensel may need input from the MCA regarding bear hunting in McHugh Creek, and individuals will also be able to comment.

### Scree (Steve Gruhn, Dawn Munroe)

- Submission deadline is the 11th of each month.

### Library (Charlotte Foley)

- Rare books were moved into a safe/dry storage unit, as requested by membership.

### Trips (Needs chair; members are Jen Aschoff, Katherine Cooper, Gerrit Verbeek, Andy Kubic, Kelly Whitman)

- Trips committee chair is still needed, and volunteers to train other trip leaders.

### Training (Gerrit Verbeek)

- Gerrit plans to organize crevasse-rescue class with Chugach State Park staff.
- CPR class – REI is willing to help; we need to set a date. MCA will reimburse up to \$80.

- Exploring options to replace some gear, but waiting for feedback from Icefest instructors.
- Motion was passed to spend \$800 to train 10 trip leaders in CPR/First Aid and there are trip leaders waiting for the training to be organized (passed in May).

### Mentorship (Lila Hobbs)

- Prospective mentees are most interested in gaining glacier-travel skills. Would it be possible for the MCA to offer a couple one-day glacier-skills trainings in the coming months?
- Please help put the word out about mentoring, we need more winter mentors. Lila will draft something for the November *Scree* to get people thinking about ski mountaineering, ice climbing, and glacier-travel mentorship.
- Mentorship email address is [mentorship@mtclubak.org](mailto:mentorship@mtclubak.org), please feel free to give this email to folks who are interested in being a mentee or mentor.

### Communications/Calendar Committee (Lila Hobbs)

- Vicky Ho is working on formatting and printing calendars. Calendars will be printed and in-hand by mid-October and available at the November meeting.

### Huts Committee (Jonathan Rupp Strong, Greg Bragiel, Cory Hinds, Vicky Lytle)

- 10-Year Master Plan has been presented to the membership; additional comments from within the Huts Committee. Ready for an adoption vote.
- Hut signs, list of what needs to be on the sign.
- Huts team is currently prioritizing items that might be good candidates for Mat-Su Parks and American Alpine Club grants.
- Rosie's Roost re-skin in 2020. The committee is working toward a budget in the fall.

### **Date and Location of next Board Meeting**

- October 30th at UAA CPISB 105A
  - November meeting: Tuesday, November 19th

# General Meeting Minutes

October 2, 2019

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## Changes to by-laws:

Director positions vote for maximum of six and minimum of four.

- unanimous approval.

## Discounted ice-climbing books

for MCA members as well as Bomber Traverse maps were available at the meeting.

## Voting:

President: Mike Meyers

Vice-President: Gerrit Verbeek

Secretary: Jordan Haffener (new to the Board)

Treasurer: Katherine Cooper

Board members

Tom Meacham (elected for another term)

Heather Johnson (new to the Board)

Andy Kubic (new to the Board)

Nathan Pooler (new to the Board)

Lila Hobbs (serving her 2nd year of two-year term)

Jonathan Rupp Strong (serving his 2nd year of two-year term)

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*View from Point 6950  
(waypoint 6 on the map  
on page 10) overlooking  
the Chickaloon Glacier.  
Photo by Dennis Ronsse*

**Choate's Chuckle** - Tom Choate

**A:** His guide had indicated they had the whole route taped.

## Mountaineering Club of Alaska

President	Mike Meyers	<a href="mailto:mcmeyers24@msn.com">mcmeyers24@msn.com</a>	Director 1 (term expires in 2020)	Jonathan Rupp Strong	202-6484
Vice-President	Gerrit Verbeek	903-512-4286	Director 2 (term expires in 2020)	Lila Hobbs	229-3754
Secretary	Jordan Haffener	<a href="mailto:Jordan.haffener@gmail.com">Jordan.haffener@gmail.com</a>	Director 3 (term expires in 2021)	Tom Meacham	346-1077
Treasurer	Katherine Cooper	209-253-8489	Director 4 (term expires in 2021)	Heather Johnson	<a href="mailto:hjohnson@mdausa.org">hjohnson@mdausa.org</a>
			Director 5 (term expires in 2021)	Andy Kubic	<a href="mailto:andy.kubic@gmail.com">andy.kubic@gmail.com</a>
			Director 6 (term expires in 2021)	Nathan Pooler	<a href="mailto:Nathan.lee.pooler@gmail.com">Nathan.lee.pooler@gmail.com</a>

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@mtclubak.org](mailto:membership@mtclubak.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). Material 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@mtclubak.org](mailto:vicepresident@mtclubak.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: Katherine Cooper—209-253-8489 - [membership@mtclubak.org](mailto:membership@mtclubak.org)

Hiking and Climbing Committee: Hans Schlegel—[hans.schlegel@live.com](mailto:hans.schlegel@live.com) or [hcc@mtclubak.org](mailto:hcc@mtclubak.org)

Mentorship: Katherine Cooper and Lila Hobbs—[mentorship@mtclubak.org](mailto:mentorship@mtclubak.org)

Huts: Greg Bragiel—350-5146 or [huts@mtclubak.org](mailto:huts@mtclubak.org)

Calendar: Vicky Ho—512-470-8640 or [hovcky@gmail.com](mailto:hovcky@gmail.com)

Librarian: Charlotte Foley—603-493-7146 or [library@mtclubak.org](mailto:library@mtclubak.org)

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Web: [www.mtclubak.org](http://www.mtclubak.org)

Find MCAK listserv at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/MCAK/info>.

*Eric Parsons biking through tundra on a ridge in the Nulato Hills. Parsons and Luc Mehl expected to be able to bike the entire distance to Unalakleet, but turned around after 25 miles.  
Photo by Luc Mehl*

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