



DECEMBER 1996

A Publication of the Mountaineering Club of Alaska

Volume 39 Issue 12

Box 102037, Anchorage, Alaska 99510

DECEMBER MEETING

Wednesday

December 18, 7:30

Pioneer Schoolhouse, 3rd & Eagle Streets
Downtown Anchorage

Potluck: Club provides turkey and drinks. You bring the following categories, according to your last name:

A-D Casseroles / Veggie Dishes

E-I Salads / Fruits

J-N Relish Plates / Breads

O-Z Desserts

Slides: Bring in 10-15 slides from trips you did during the past year. Your chance to share something special or humorous.

HIKING AND CLIMBING SCHEDULE

Dec 21 Flattop Solstice

Traditional overnight. Class C.
Contact: Mark Miraglia 338-0705

Jan 1 The Wedge

Class C. Western Chugach.
Leader: Steve Gruhn 344-1219

9-29 Hawaiian Hikes

Classes A, B & C. Several hikes on Kauai and Hawaii (big island). We will be flying to Kauai on Thursday, January 9 and returning from Hawaii on January 29. MCA members may join us for any or all of the activities. Hikes range from a few hours to a few days in length.
Leader: Curvin Metzler 333-8766

TRIP REPORTS

Vampire Peaks 1994

a poem by Tom Choate

We were dropped off in mountains, vampire was their name,
on a turquoise little lake, beneath the cliffs of fame.
Nobody had flown before us, was the pilots claim.

We walked across the meadows, under waterfalls of white,
then climbed a red rock peak, freckled with snow patches bright,
which was capped with steep granite, the mountaineer's delight.

Base camp days were varied, with relaxing and climbing too,
and afternoon thunderclouds soon filled the sky of blue.
But soon it was time to backpack, and explore horizons new.

Some of us pulled forward, while others were holding back;
like a leader needing tension, then calling for some slack;
we crept across the glaciers, some smooth, without a crack.

We climbed into the clouds, surrounded by wind and rain;
we navigated the bergschrund, the pass at last to gain;
we glimpsed the mountain spires, and forgot about the pain.

Dropping down from high places, leaving the mountain towers,

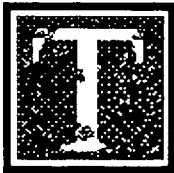
we crossed the loose moraine to tundra and its flowers:
there we fully appreciated that life has tenacious powers.

The last days were alternating, sleet and peeps of sun,
while we scrambled over boulders till the last pass was done,
and we waited at our pickup lake, hoping the plane would come.

I remember not the problems, just the beauty of the spires,
and the climbing and exploring, of which one never tires:
surely the finest of wilderness is in Canada's Vampires!

Circle of Iron

by Soren Orley



To celebrate turning 39 in 1995,
starting at sea level, I rode my
bicycle to the Glen Alps parking lot,
climbed O'Malley and rode my
bicycle home. I named this the "Sea
to Summit to Sea." Without having
to beg I was able to convince Mark

Williams and Kit Callahan to join me on this one day
adventure. It was a wonderful day spent with crazy
friends. The birthday party afterwards was enjoyed
by everyone.

For my 40th birthday I decided to up the ante.
It took a little searching, but finally I came up with a
worthy opponent. I would go from Girdwood to Eagle
River by bicycle and then go from Eagle River to
Girdwood, via Cross Pass, by foot. I named this the
"Circle of Iron." I would like to mention to all you
mountain bikers out there that the Crow Pass traverse
is closed to bicycles. Please do not attempt to make the
"Circle of Iron" an all biking event. The state rangers
will issue a citation if they catch you bicycling on the
trail.

The first thing to work out was would I start
out bicycling or hiking? Next I had to decide would
Eagle River or Girdwood be a better place to begin? I
decided to commence on the Girdwood side and ride
my bicycle to the Eagle River visitor center. I did this
for two reasons. First, the prevailing winds blow out
of the south. I decided that I wanted to have a tail
wind rather than a head wind. Second, I was con-
cerned about the amount of traffic on the highway. By
starting out riding I could control what time of the
day I would be on the highway. I figured early in the
morning there would be less traffic.

The next question was how long will this
take? By my rough calculation it would be approxi-
mately 75 miles of bicycle riding and 26 miles of
hiking. Since I had done the Crow Pass Traverse in a
day in the past, I figured with a little extra training I

could do the "Circle of Iron" in one long day.

The last thing I needed to take care of was
finding people interested in joining me on this long
one day adventure. I immediately called both Mark
and Kit, but due to scheduling problems they could
not join me. I was able to persuade another three of
my friends to join me. However, when it got close to
the scheduled date, all three suddenly had to clean out
their garages and could not join me. I finally accepted
the fact that I would have to do the "Circle of Iron"
solo.

The night before I was scheduled to do the
"Circle of Iron" I stopped by to see Norm Thompson,
a friend who had graciously volunteered to provide
assistance. I handed him a T-shirt I had custom made
which identified him as a member of the "Circle of
Iron" team. He was so impressed with the shirt that
he decided he would join me on the "Circle of Iron."
Besides, he figured it had been a while since he had
abused his body. When Eric, his roommate, found out
what we were doing, he volunteered to go along. As a
category three bicycle rider he figured he could use a
little training. All of a sudden I had gone from solo to
a party of three to do the "Circle of Iron."

On July 6, 1996, we left Anchorage at 4:00 a.m.
and drove down to the official starting point in
Girdwood. I was beginning to have doubts for the first
time. Would my bicycle holdup? Would I hold up?
Did I get enough rest? Did I get too much rest? The
longest distance I had ever ridden before was only 40
miles. In retrospect it was just the normal pre-race
jitters. The first six miles were all downhill on a gravel
road. We went at a leisurely pace. It took us about 2.5
hours to ride 37 miles. I felt great and learned lots
from Eric. He explained and then demonstrated to me
the principle of drafting. In no time at all we were
riding like a team. More than once we came around a
corner to see Dall sheep feeding along side the high-
way. They did not seem to be bothered by our bi-
cycles. We stopped in Anchorage to eat breakfast at
my house. After breakfast we took off for the Eagle
River visitor center. We arrived in Eagle River 2.5
hours later. We had traveled a total of 75 miles.

I hit 45 mph on one downhill section just
outside the visitor center. It was the fastest I had ever
gone on a bicycle. It amazed me how easy it had been
to travel 75 miles.

Now it was time to start the 26-mile hike up
and over the Chugach mountains. I had talked to
someone who had done the traverse the week before
and they had seen bears everywhere. I decided to
bring along some pepper spray since Eric was a little

tentative about bears. We ended up not seeing one bear on the traverse. This was when I found out that the longest distance Eric had ever hiked before was 12 miles. Norm on the other hand had done 50-mile hikes as a member of Special Forces.

I had last done the traverse in 1991. In the fall of 95, flooding had caused considerable damage to the trail. I was amazed at what that storm had done to the trail. It certainly made things interesting. We were lucky that the trail was well marked, or otherwise I am sure we would have become lost. In the past the river fording at the midway point involved water at the mid calf level. However, this year because of the flood damage it was up to our waists. Norm and Eric laughed at me when I pulled out my neoprene waders, but after fording the river it was I who was laughing.

This was when, 13 miles into the traverse, Norm and Eric begin to noticeably tire. At this point it was just as easy to go forward and complete the "Circle of Iron" as it was to turn back. We decided to rename our adventure from the "Circle of Iron" to the "Circle of Idiots," because only an idiot would do something like this. The "Circle of Iron" ceased to be fun and became a trudge.

Normally the miles going up the Raven Gorge are my favorite. This time was no disappointment. The scenery was magnificent. Even though Norm and Eric were hurting they were glad they were there. The last three miles before Crow pass, like always, were the hardest. As we arrived at the pass Norm mentioned that he now remembered why he got out of Special Forces. The "Circle of Iron" was beginning to remind him of some of the forced hikes he had taken. Since it was all down hill from here I now knew we were going to complete the "Circle of Iron."

We reached the car 21 hours after we had started. We had covered 101 miles. My feet hurt, my ankles hurt, but I was happy. However, I did feel bad that I had made Norm and Eric suffer just so I could achieve a selfish goal. I felt OK about what I had accomplished, but I felt I had taken unfair advantage of my friends. Somehow the Circle of Iron had dulled. I think I learned a valuable lesson, one I vowed never to forget. I just hope Eric and Norm will somehow, someday forgive me for being so selfish. But wait, I am justified, because I turned 40 this year. For a while there I thought I was getting soft.

As far as what awaits me for next year? Only my imagination will limit me. I have looked at the map and there are an endless number of circular/traverse type adventures one can do in Alaska. You

can include technical climbs in the middle if that is your bag. They can be one day or multi-day events. If one includes sea kayaking it adds another whole dimension to the types of "Circle of Iron" one could create. I wish you well on your adventures and look forward to reading about them in future issues of the Scree.

Peak 7350

by Tim Kelley

Talkeetna Mountains,
Chickaloon River and Boulder Creek Drainages,
Anchorage D-4, T22N, R7E, Section 22.



fleeting doubt-ridden thought crossed my mind: "The climb is over!"

We had made several attempts to cross the scree slope, but turned back each time. The scree was densely packed shale chips with a coating of sand on top. You couldn't kick steps in the stuff, it was too tightly packed for crampons and trying to walk on sole-edge was too precarious. Slipping would mean a quick sand lubricated slide to the canyon walls waiting below. There was nowhere to place decent protection for roping up. "Damn!" I muttered. Being turned back three thousand feet below the summit by a scree slope was not part of the plan.

As often is the case for me, the idea for this trip was triggered by studying maps. In this case, it was maps of the Talkeetna Mountains. The backbone of eastern Chickaloon River drainages is defined by a long ridge of 7000 foot peaks. When looking at these peaks on a map, the one that stands out the most is the highest - Peak 7350. An ice covered anomaly, it is the only peak with a summit blanketed by ice for many miles.

Gazing at this peak on the map left no doubt. Any peak that looked this cool on the map just had to be climbed!

The weekend of September 7-8 was a gift from the autumnal gods. It was cool and cloudless when Wiley Bland and I left from the Purinton Creek trailhead on the Glen Highway. Our packs were jammed with what always seems like too much camping and climbing paraphernalia. We began the trip by pushing our mountain bikes up the steep



switch backs that define the start of the ATV trail to Boulder Creek. This ATV trail is part of the Chickaloon-Knik-Nelchina trail on its way to the western point of Anthracite Ridge.

After the initial mile of grunt vertical, the trail enters open areas that offer jaw dropping views of the Northwest Chugach peaks. Recent snows had frosted the higher elevations of the Chugach and Talkeetna and the dryads had begun their fall leaf painting tasks.

On our way up the steep switch backs we had been passed by two hunters driving 4-wheelers. Once the trail began following gentle rolls in the terrain, we picked up the place. Giving chase to the 4-wheelers, we eventually reeled them in. They pulled to the side of the trail and stared in disbelief as we blasted by. Usually there's no hanging with the fossil fuel crowd, so this one-up with the four-wheeler crowd was a kick.

After 6 miles or so the trail veers north along the base of the cliffs that define the western end of Anthracite Ridge. Here there is often a good source of entertainment. At the base of the cliffs dwells a monster mud pit that relishes sucking unsuspecting 4 wheelers into it's bowels. There is a whole lot of ad hoc engineering, winching and cussing that goes on here as hunters struggle to resurface their Suzukis, Polarises or themselves from this feisty quagmire. Captured hunters especially grumble when they watch mountain bikers quickly dance around the edge of the pit and disappear down the trail!

Just past the mud zone the trail hits Boulder Creek. Boulder Creek is aptly named. There are lots of boulders. Not big ones, but millions the size of your fist. What this means is that mountain biking Boulder Creek is rough. Slow bump and grind pedaling on loose gravel and stones - with full packs to maximize the butt-bash factor.

The map says there is a trail along the left back of the creek as your going up it. The only remnants of a trail we found went up the middle of the creek bed. This trail crossed every braided channel of autumn-chilled water, twice. A few of the channels we could ride through, but most we had to wade.

A pack that minimizes side-to-side slop is a must when mountain biking technical terrain. My Arcteryx pack works well. It stays centered quietly on my back. But Wiley's Mountainsmith randomly would thrash from side to side, throwing him off-balance. I would watch and wince as the crampons

strapped to the top of Wiley's pack would routinely bang into the back of his head.

Wiley's stoic demeanor under this hardship was commendable. No whimpering for this guy! He did however swear that this was the pack's last trip. He vowed that once back in Anchorage the pack would be dumpster bound. Come to find out later, this was a vow that Wiley would keep.

After 7 miles of biking up Boulder Creek, we stashed our bikes and headed north into the valley that leads to the col of Section 26. After 3 miles of easy going, through cottonwoods, aspens and along stream-side gravel beds, the valley quickly narrowed to a canyon. We tried to follow the canyon floor, but waterfalls and steep, smooth wet rock deterred this plan. Our other alternative was to side-hill the steep scree slopes above us. This choice led us to the scree slope crux.

It seemed that we weren't the only ones that troubled by this scree slope. You could see a game trail coming to this spot and then dispersing. From this point on it was everyone for themselves, even for the denizens of this valley.

Not wanting to be turned back so early in the climb, I resorted to a mountaineering first for myself. I started hacking steps in the scree with my ice axe. Ten chops per step made a bomber foot pit. After 50 yards of excavation the scree again turned soft and footing became somewhat secure. Looking back at the furrow across the scree slope Wiley and I imagined that sheep, caribou, wolves and bears of the area will appreciate their new trail across this nasty slope.

Though the rest of this canyon section had better footing than the initial section, it was an effort getting through the maze of erosion gullies carved in the scree slopes. Where the erosion gullies abutted each other the terrain was like sand dunes on a 45 degree plane. After navigating a convoluted route though this mess we crested the col and took a short break. We ate, re-hydrated and hoped we could find and retrace our route during our exit the next day.

As there was still another hour before sun-down, we pushed upward to the 6300 foot level. This brought us to the top of the ridge 1/2 mile west of the 'Snag' benchmark. After 10 hours of traveling we finally got the first view of our destination peak. Immediately evident was the fact that much ice in the area had disappeared from this area since the mapping of 1948. Most of the glaciation between Peak 7350 and its sister 6872 foot sub-peak was gone. Left

behind were steep rotten rock ramparts darkened by the late evening shadows. But there looked to be an ice route that led diagonally up the peak above these cliffs.

We set up a bivouac in cloudless, windless 40 degree temperatures. Every Talkeetna and Chugach peak that could be bathed in alpenglow was lathering up. With conditions so dry and still, the lying in my sleeping bag the only sound I could hear was my pulse.

Arising before sunrise, we set off on our summit attempt. Our plan was to climb Peak 7350 and return to our bivy site by noon so that we'd have time to travel back to the Glen Highway before dark. Westward we descended 1000 feet of snow dusted scree and felsenmeer to the valley floor. Hiking past frozen mud patches pock marked with caribou and wolf tracks we crossed the valley floor and began the final 2000 foot ascent.

Soon we reached the tongue of the glacier on the north west side of the peak. We roped up and began making tracks up the glacier through 5 inches of this years snowfall. The glacial ascent route proved to be straight forward, with one airy section when we obtained the southeast ridge.

The mesa-like summit, now protruding above any glaciation, was mostly wind-swept clean of snow. Morning convection winds were banishing wisps of valley fog to the heavens. Other than these dispersing mists, there were killer views in every direction. What was impressive from this vantage point is the magnitude of the Chickaloon River drainages. Here there is a lot of land that offers tough access for human-kind and therefore good habitat for animal-kind. Finding no sigh of previous visits to this summit, we left a cairn.

Retracing our route the 22 miles from the summit back to the Glenn Highway went smoothly. We got back to our vehicle by 5:30 in the afternoon. Thrashed to satisfaction, we were grateful to have such ideal conditions for one last late-summer climb. Summer was indeed almost over. And fall was soon to be ignored. In a mere 10 days this area would receive a foot of snow.



MINUTES

NOVEMBER MEETING

Since there was a problem accessing the Pioneer Schoolhouse, the meeting was conducted at British Petroleum's main facility. The business portion of the meeting was abbreviated as much as possible to accommodate the program on Avalanche Hazard Evaluation. A motion was made to dispense with the reading of the minutes of the previous meeting as they will be printed in the Scree. The motion was immediately seconded and passed. There were five visitors, and total attendance of about 40. The new members of the board were introduced.

TREASURY REPORT

Kirk Towner reported that we have a total of \$7093.92 in all accounts.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Hiking & Climbing

Steve Gruhn announced that his goal for the year will be to arrange a trip to each of the clubs huts. Any interested trip leaders should see him.

Huts

Mark Miraglia needs stove and lantern numbers from MCA huts. Supplies for hut repairs will be flown in this winter.

Geographic Names

Tom Choate requested that anyone with names of lesser-known peaks should see him.

Training

Aze Azegami reported that he will continue to focus on the popular glacier travel and ice climbing training courses. There will be a second ice climbing class in December; a sign-up sheet was posted. The concept of a Help Desk for training was introduced. Forward any requests to Aze and he will work on accommodating your request.

OLD BUSINESS

Mark is looking for addresses of people who participated in the first ice climbing workshop.

NEW BUSINESS

The librarian's request for approximately \$150 to purchase new books was unanimously approved.

A reimbursement of \$68.25 was unanimously approved to cover the cost of a pizza dinner for last years trip leaders. It was reported that this total did not include beer.

A reimbursement of \$89.10 was unanimously approved to cover the cost of a pair of Footfangs as a gift for last years

president James Larabee. Thanks again James.

A majority of members approved the sending of a letter to **Bradford Washburn** supporting the theory that Cook never made it close to the summit of Denali.

The proposal to develop **snow machining** in Denali State Park was discussed. The public meeting on this proposal was held prior to the meeting, but information was posted for folks interested in getting involved. A proposal to designate a quiet area within the Park was also discussed.

Willy Hersman provided order forms for bulk freeze-dried **food orders**. Completed forms are due at the December meeting.

An excellent interactive discussion on Avalanche Hazard Evaluation was given by **Doug Fesler**.

Respectfully Submitted,
Cory Hinds

ADZE



Partners Wanted
Looking for people to climb.
Call Jeff 783-1370

For Sale
Koflach boots, 8 1/2 mens size
For mountaineering, with buckles
\$700
Call Wayne 522-6354

