

the SCREE

Mountaineering Club of Alaska

December 2009

Volume 52 Number 12



I will lift mine eyes unto the hills,
From whence cometh my help.
Psalm 121:2

Monthly Meeting
Wed. December 16 @ 6:30 PM
Program: Annual Christmas Dinner
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The Mountaineering Club of Alaska

"To maintain, promote and perpetuate the association of persons who are interested in promoting, sponsoring, improving, stimulating and contributing to the exercise of skill and safety in the Art and Science of Mountaineering"

Join us for our club meetings the 3rd Wednesday of the month at the First United Methodist Church, 9th Avenue and G Streets next to the ConocoPhillips Building (you may use marked parking after hours).

Contact information is provided on the back page or visit us on the web at www.mcak.org.

Cover Photo: Steve Gruhn heading up the glacier south of Thunder Glacier; see "Peak 5940 and Peak 5750" in this issue. Photo by Richard Baranow.

Article Submission: Articles and photos can be sent to johnrecktenwald@gmail.com. Due to formatting problems please do not submit material in the body of an email, instead, attach a word processing document to the email. We prefer articles that are under 1,000 words. You can also submit an article on the web at MCAK.org. To get on the cover, a photo should convey the feeling of mountaineering and show human endeavor.

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Hiking and Climbing Schedule

Dec. 08 Prospect Heights Evening Ski Trip

This is an unofficial Class B after-work ski trip on December 8th. We'll start at Prospect Heights, ski up the S. Fork Rim trail and either ski back down that trail or down the Power Line Pass trail. Bring skis, headlamp, appropriate clothing for the weather, water, and snacks. No dogs allowed. To sign up, contact Amy Murphy at 338-3979 or e-mail: hayduchesslives@yahoo.com

Dec 12 Williwaw Lakes ski and Christmas tree event

This is the (unofficial) annual backcountry ski trip to Williwaw Lakes where we stop and decorate a Christmas tree along the way. Sometimes we have made it all the way to the lake and sometimes we haven't; it all depends on the weather. But, we usually have fun decorating a tree while singing Christmas carols. Bring a non-fragile Christmas ornament, festive holiday attire (like a Santa or reindeer hat), a cheerful holiday spirit and holiday treats to share! And don't forget your skis (or snowshoes) and appropriate gear for the weather. I always return after the New Year to retrieve the ornaments, so if you don't have any ornaments, don't worry - I have plenty of extra ones. Meet at the Glen Alps parking lot on December 12 at 10:15 a.m. For more info, contact Amy Murphy at 338-3979 or e-mail: hayduchesslives@yahoo.com

Dec 19 - 20 Ship Creek overnight trail clearing.

Lots of trimming to be done. If it is too cold or too warm, will reschedule. To sign up, contact Stu by E-mail at oinkmenow@hotmail.com or call 337-5127

Jan 29 - 31 SKI TOUR - Resurrection Trail.

Ski Tour Resurrection Trail-Seward to Cooper Lake Distance-20+ miles Class- D Hazards- Must be able to ski while carrying your gear. (some narrow trails with dangerous drop offs) Sign up at December or January MCA meetings.

Feb 19 - 28 SKI TOUR - Resurrection Trail Ski Tour

Resurrection Trail- Seward to Hope. Distance- 80+ miles Class- D Elevation Gain- A lot of up and down. Hazards- Avalanche, weather conditions. Must be able to ski while carrying your gear. (some narrow trails with dangerous drop offs) Cabin fees to be shared among participants. Sign-up available at Jan. or Feb. meetings.

Feb 27 Indian to Arctic or arctic to Indian

Do the old switcheroo with the cars so everybody can drive straight home. Often a good intro to this trail for competent back

country nordic skiers. Will reschedule if conditions are less than average.
oinkmenow@hotmail.com 337-5127 Stu

Rockfall. Sign up at January or February MCA meeting.

March 21 - 28 SKI MOUNTAINEERING - Bomber Traverse Plus

Ski Tour/Mountaineering- Archangel Valley to Moose Creek Valley Via Bomber traverse. Distance- 30+ miles Class- Glacier Elevation Gain- ~7000' Hazards- Crevasses, Avalanche,

April 24 - May 02 MOUNTAINEERING - Scandinavian Peaks

Scandinavian Peaks Class- Glacier and Some 4th or 5th class. Elevation Gain- Plenty Hazards- Crevasses, Avalanche, Rockfall, Weather. Air transport fees apply. Sign-up at March meeting.

MCA 2010 Christmas Dinner

Christmas Potluck. The MCA will provide Moose's Tooth pizza.

Members may bring the following based on the first initial of their last name:

A-I desert

J-S salad

T-Z any side dish

Members may also bring 10 to 15 digital photos or short video clips to share.



Kala Patthar – Nepal

by Amy Murphy

One of the many special highlights of my life will be the day I stood on top of a hill called Kala Patthar, in Nepal, where I had awesome views of Mt. Everest and the Khumbu Glacier, an area so richly steeped in mountaineering history. Kathy Still and I (the Grannies Gone Wild) surprisingly ended up here when we went to Nepal to go trekking in October. We originally started out doing the Manaslu Peak camping trek, but our friend Katie Hahn had a terrible accident that required evacuation out of the mountains and we flew out with her. Our trekking agent graciously allowed us to do this optional Everest trek (for free) since our other trek came to an abrupt end.

The Everest trek is a "luxury trek" and we stayed in lodges instead of camping out. We had a guide, DP, and a porter, named Lama. Normally people do this trek in 12 days, but Kathy and I only had 9 days available. This meant we had to really push ourselves physically, while carefully monitoring altitude sickness symptoms, as our ultimate goal was 5,550 meters high, or 18,200' in elevation. (This is higher than the actual Everest base camp.)



Kathy, Amy, and Everest

Luckily we got to fly to the village of Lukla, the starting point, in a helicopter. Another client of our trekking agent had to be evacuated due to altitude sickness, so we got a free helicopter ride – whoohoo! From Lukla we trekked to the village of Phak Ding, setting a record pace, according to our guide. We simply had excess energy

and stress to burn off and it felt great to be out in the mountains hiking again. The next day we trekked from Phak Ding up to Namche Bazaar and there was a tremendous amount of elevation gain hiking up from the bottom of a river valley. I was sure glad when we finally arrived at our lodge, as trekking in the “Nepali hills” requires a lot of altitude loss and gain.



Kathy, DP, and Amy

We spent two nights in Namche Bazaar, taking an extra day to hike around and acclimatize at this elevation (over 11,000'). Most visitors typically spend a rest day here and it's kind of like being in a big fancy ski resort, with crowds of foreigners huffing and puffing and shopping. On our acclimatization day we hiked up to Khumjung and visited a monastery and saw the school that Sir Edmund Hillary helped build.

On our fourth day we trekked from Namche Bazaar (3,440m) to Tengboche (3,860m), where we had lunch. We sipped tea while gazing at Everest. What a treat! This was a grueling day as we dropped way back down to the valley floor to cross the river, then we had to hike really high back up the slope on the other side of the river. We visited the famous Tengboche monastery and then headed up to our next destination – the village of Pengboche (3,930m).

The next day we had an easy day and trekked up to the village of Pheriche (4,270m), arriving there before lunchtime. After lunch Kathy and I did an acclimatization hike, making it most of the way up Nangkar Tshang peak, which is around 5,000m. I was having some altitude problems and didn't get quite as high as Kathy did, but I was close. The stunning panoramas were breathtaking and I was happy and very much at peace.

Our guide had to return to Kathmandu to lead another trek, so we said goodbye to him the next morning and set out for Lobuche (4,910m) with Lama. DP thoroughly reviewed altitude sickness symptoms with us and exhorted us to come down if we had any problems. He was worried about us doing this trek in a short amount of time, but he also seemed to have confidence that the two “Grannies Gone Wild” could make it.

That day we hiked up an incredibly beautiful Lobuche Kohla river valley and up a steep pass, Thokla Pass, with stupendous panoramas of high mountains surrounding us. Our pace was pretty slow due to the high altitude. We saw the memorial walls when we went through Thokla Pass, which is where numerous chortens are placed, honoring climbers and Sherpas who died on Everest. This is an incredibly peaceful, scenic place to leave your remains.

We woke up early the next morning as we had a lonnnnggg, difficult day in front of us. We hiked up to Gorak Shep (5,140m) to eat breakfast, which is the location of the original Everest base camp. We had pushed hard to get to this altitude and did an assessment to see if we had any symptoms of high altitude sickness that would cause concern. We decided we felt well enough to push on, so we began the ascent of Kala Patthar. We slowly made our way up to the summit, stopping to take pictures and gaze at the unbelievable and incredible panoramas surrounding us. I felt like I had died and gone to Heaven, like last time I was in Nepal! The emotions ran deep and are indescribable. We could see Nuptse, Everest, Pumari, Lingtren, Khumbtse and Changtse peaks and the Khumbu glacier and ice falls, while off behind us we could see Ama Dablam and Makalu and other huge snow- and glacier-covered peaks.



Kala Patthar and Pumari from Gorak Shep

Once we got to the top of Kala Pattar we took photos and hung some Buddhist prayer flags in Katie's honor, spreading prayers for her speedy recovery throughout the winds from this incredible place next to Everest. It was difficult to leave this spot, but our bodies were telling us it was time to head down to a lower altitude, so we headed back down. We spent the night in Pheriche and trekked back down to Lukla in two long, grueling but extremely satisfying days.



Everest, Kathy, and Amy



Peters Creek Ski Trip

by Amy Murphy



Tom, Rick, Jennifer, and Amy

I had made tentative plans to go skiing with some friends on Saturday, November 21, and when I woke up that morning to discover it had snowed a little bit and was still snowing, I became excited. I had been skiing a few times already, but the snow cover so far had been pretty minimal, necessitating the use of my rock skis. I made a few phone calls trying to organize an impromptu ski trip on the Peters Creek trail and Rick Hagen, Tom Dolan and Jennifer Duford joined me. We arrived at the trailhead and discovered about 4" to 5" of fresh powder. The temperature had warmed up slightly and light, fluffy snowflakes were lazily coming down. What an auspicious way to start our ski trip!

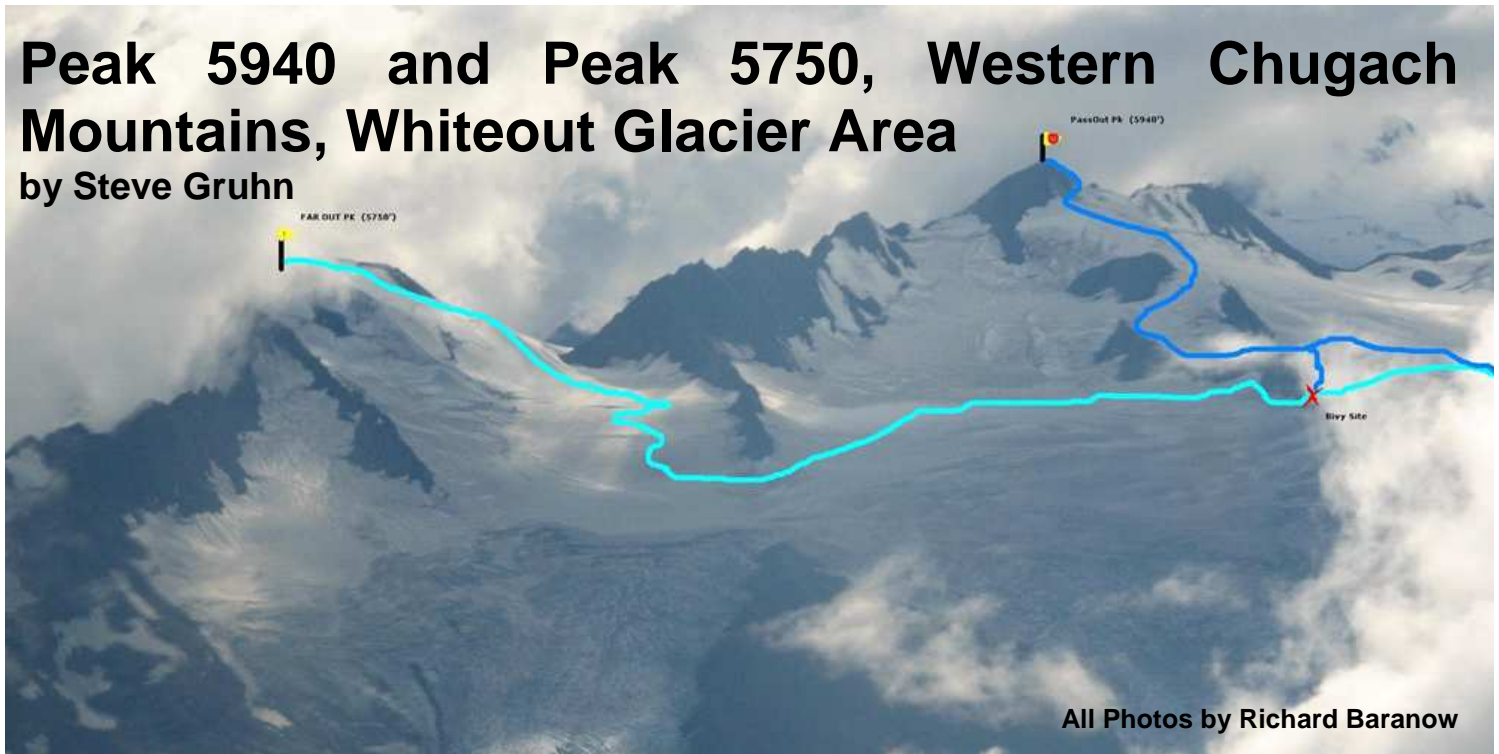
We skied up the trail, enjoying the scenery, solitude, powder snow and friendly camaraderie. Rick mentioned he would like to try skiing up the 4 Mile Trail instead of taking the usual trail that pretty much parallels Peters Creek. None of us had skied up into the 4 Mile Trail valley before so we agreed it would be interesting to go check it out. Rick said the trail was just a little steep at the beginning, sort of where the old homestead is located, but after that it was a gradual ascent into the valley. We followed ski tracks for a short while and then got to make "first tracks" through powder, following the trail as it meandered through the trees and up into a valley.

The sun came out and since we weren't in a hurry, we decided to make a campfire during our lunch break. We gathered up grass, twigs and dead branches and built a nice fire and enjoyed the warmth it shared with us. This is a scenic, secluded little valley and the big meadow where we ate lunch would make a great camp site. The mountain slopes all around us would provide great opportunities for fun skiing once we get more snow. Tom Dolan, a master planner of challenging ski traverses, seemed to be considering some sort of future traverse skiing up this valley, climbing over a pass and dropping down on the other side on to the Peters Creek trail.

After lunch we put out the fire and skied back to the cars. We had a fun and fast trip back out as it's mostly downhill and we had a packed trail to follow. It was another great day sharing adventure and friendship in the mountains.

Peak 5940 and Peak 5750, Western Chugach Mountains, Whiteout Glacier Area

by Steve Gruhn



All Photos by Richard Baranow

Saturday, September 5, Richard Baranow, his two dogs, and I departed from his house near the Eagle River Nature Center for a planned three-day trip to climb a couple peaks in the Whiteout Glacier area east of Chugach State Park that we thought might be unclimbed. Six days later we emerged from the mountains, tired, sore, hungry, and satisfied.

We unexpectedly met Dave Hart, Ross Noffsinger, and David Stchyrba at Echo Bend. They were heading in to attempt Mount West Kiliak and Nantina Point over the Labor Day weekend. We hiked with them for a couple miles until they turned off the trail shortly before Icicle Creek to try their hand at some bushwhacking. Richard and I continued on past Yakedeyak Creek and turned up into the Twin Falls drainage. In short order we were covered in fireweed seeds that stuck to every exposed surface.

I had great difficulty breathing in such conditions. Eventually, though, we slogged upward into the alpine country. We detoured around a sow black bear and cub and took a much-needed rest break along the creek before tackling the scree slopes to the ridge overlooking Blue-Eyed Lake and descending the other side, where we spent the night on the north side of the lake.

The next morning we traveled down the valley following a sheep trail that headed up into the upper Thunder Creek drainage. We waded Thunder Creek and headed up the opposite slope to the toe of an unnamed pocket glacier. From that point we sidehilled northeast across a boulder-strewn slope to another unnamed pocket glacier immediately south of the Thunder Glacier. This glacier eventually brought us up to Blackout Pass. The glaciers in this area have receded greatly from the positions depicted on the USGS maps. We would find this to be true of most of the glaciers we observed during our trip.

We roped up and weaved around the many open crevasses. At one point, we diverted to the rock on the north side of the glacier to avoid a crevasse that split the entire width of the glacier. The rock was smooth, downward sloping, and covered with smaller rocks. Richard's dogs whimpered a bit at the prospect of traveling over this rock, but with a little prompting and assistance they reached the safety of the snow on the upper side of the crevasse. I imitated Richard's dogs. In getting his dogs from the rock back onto the snow, Richard had dropped a trekking pole down under the edge of the glacier. He drove a picket into the snow and I belayed him down to retrieve the pole. It required every bit of the 50-meter rope. In consideration of the difficulty in getting past this tricky spot, we thought it would be prudent to take an alternative route on the return trip.



Whiteout Glacier

Above this crevasse the glacier moderated in slope and the going was relatively easy. The glacier here split into two drainages – the Thunder Creek drainage to the north (our route) and the Emerald Creek drainage to the south

and west. We made quick time to Blackout Pass overlooking the Whiteout Glacier. Here we dropped our packs and hiked southeast to the eastern of two 5800-foot points overlooking the Whiteout Glacier. Retracing our steps, we donned our packs, re-roped, and set out across the Whiteout Glacier to Whiteout Pass, where we set up our second camp.

The next morning we left the dogs tied up next to our tent and set out down the Whiteout Glacier, weaving around numerous open crevasses to reach the rock north of Insignificant Peak. We climbed up a small ridge and scrambled down the east side parallel to the Whiteout Glacier. The tributary glaciers flowing into the Whiteout Glacier have receded substantially from the locations shown on the USGS map.

We took a stab at crossing the tributary glacier opposite Bounty Peak, but partway across decided to retreat and head south along the west side of the ice. After about a mile we found ourselves on the ice again with a crevasse field to our east – the direction we wanted to travel.

Richard led us through the maze of crevasses. Periodically we marked our route by scraping our crampons in dirty areas or by making miniature cairns. By the afternoon we had made it across the crevasse field to the icefall in the center of the glacier. But we were now above the firm line and we were concerned about the snow thinly obscuring crevasses. Zigzagging up the icefall, we made our way to the relatively flat terrain above. We worked our way toward a rocky ridge island north of Peak 5940 in an attempt to approach the peak from the northeast. The steep northeast face, however, was bisected by a bergschrund that ran the entire width of the cirque northeast of Peak 5940. We sat at the southern tip of the rocky island and contemplated aborting the trip; things didn't look very favorable without snow bridges. A snow slope to the west could bring us to the skyline. The route from there, though, didn't look good. The hour was growing late and we were miles from camp. The potential of an unplanned bivy was beginning to materialize.

So, up the snow slope we went. Near the top we spied a possible route that would require a bit of ice climbing. We found a bergschrund with the bottom partially filled with snow and used that as a belay station. We tied our two ropes together and Richard led out, placing a couple ice screws. In the bergschrund below I had quite a bit of difficulty communicating with Richard. Dripping water and periodic rockfall drowned any sounds that made it through the snow and ice. Eventually, though, I followed, retrieving some of the gear and leaving some for the return trip. The ice climb was about a pitch and a half and Richard protected the top portion with a nut. A half-pitch exposed rock scramble led above. We slung a horn for protection. And soon we were on the summit of Peak 5940. Finding no evidence of a previous ascent, we built

a cairn and left a register. Richard chose the name "Pass Out Peak" because his partner was about to pass out from the exhaustion of the trip thus far. Within five minutes, we were descending. It was about 9 p.m. and the fall light was quickly fading.



Heading up "Pass Out Peak"

Richard cleaned the route and we quickly retreated down the glacier. We discussed whether to head back to camp at Whiteout Pass or whether to bivy on the rocky ridge island north of the summit. Richard finally convinced me that spending the night sitting on a cold rock was better than either spending the night sitting on the ice closer to camp or spending eternity at the bottom of a crevasse.



Steve enjoys a night on the rock.

We found a relatively level location out of the wind on the west side of the north part of the rocky ridge island. Richard was able to find a trickle of water nearby. We snacked on some munchies, put on every bit of clothing we had, emptied our packs, and put our legs inside to conserve body heat. It seemed like it was going to be a fun night out in the Chugach! The situation even brightened up a bit when Richard pulled out a couple of handwarmers to share. All we needed now was a bowl of popcorn and a movie! Then raindrops started to drizzle on us, dampening our spirits. It ended up being a long night...good thing Richard doesn't snore!

At first light we were up and walking back and forth to generate some much needed heat and to limber our stiff joints. My mind was pretty numb at this point, so I was susceptible to Richard's idea of attempting the other planned peak instead of just heading back to camp.

We dropped to the east side of the rocky ridge island and headed northeast down the glacier to about 4500 feet where we rounded a corner and headed south up another glacier. Our route took us within view of immense crevasses and seracs to the east – directly between our desired peak and us. We continued up the glacier, turning southeast and ascending Point 5620. We descended to the east and stopped for water at a small melt pond east of Point 5620 and west of the 5650-foot point to the east.

From the pond, our route took us in something of an S shape as we headed to Peak 5750 to the north. I swapped the lead with Richard and kicked steps up the steep snow to the broad summit. We had thought that this summit might be unclimbed, but I discovered a cairn and a broken alder branch that had been set in the cairn. I'd be interested in hearing the details about the previous trip, probably some hunter or explorer from the Lake George area. We left a register in the cairn and Richard selected the name "Far Out Peak" because the peak was at the far eastern edge of the Western Chugach Mountains; so far out from his back door!

We boot-skied down the steep snow and roped up, with Richard once again in the lead. We trudged to the southwest, bypassing Point 5620 and soon rejoined our ascent route. By noon we were back at our bivy site where we stopped for me to do a bit of foot doctoring. Duct tape in place, we trudged on, descending the icefall and weaving through multiple crevasse fields. By 6 p.m. we had reached the side of the Whiteout Glacier and begun our scramble up the rocky slopes to the west. I had to stop again for more foot doctoring – the insides of my heels had been rubbed raw.



Crevasse Field on the Return to the Whiteout Glacier

We roped up and got back on the ice around 8 p.m., but had difficulty retracing our route through the crevasse

fields from the day before. Richard navigated and I staggered behind him, thoroughly spent. We weaved through the crevasse field as the sun set and dusk darkened. Twice I punched through to inky blackness below, but avoided dropping into the abyss. Exhausted, I also collapsed twice on level terrain. I was an accident waiting to happen. We had to continue on, however...the glacier here was very inhospitable.

As the last light left the sky, Richard led us through the last of the nasty crevasses. While there were still cracks between us and Whiteout Pass, they were much more easily navigated with the limited visibility afforded by our headlamps. We reached the rock a little east of Whiteout Pass around 11:30 p.m. It took me a half hour to stagger up the 200 feet to camp. Richard's dogs were glad to see him. I finally entered the tent, only to immediately "Pass Out" on my sleeping bag, with my boots still on! Because we hadn't had much of a dinner the night before, there was luckily extra food remaining. Richard prepared the meal. After he roused me, I inhaled my portion, pausing only to doze off in mid-bite a couple of times. Freeze-dried lasagna never tasted so good!

That night, the wind picked up and a mix of rain and snow fell. Fog surrounded us in the morning. Not wanting to navigate around crevasses in a whiteout, we spent the morning doctoring feet, telling stories, and resting. Eventually, the weather cleared in the early afternoon. We decided to make a break for it. Right before heading out, we discovered that Nene had lost her collar somewhere during her ramblings... we looked in vain for it. Next time you're at Whiteout Pass, keep your eyes open for a dark green collar.

Eventually, though, we were on the move. We crossed the East Branch of the Eklutna Glacier to a pass due east of Mount Beelzebub. The descent to the toe of the glacier was relatively easy. Here we unroped and changed into running shoes. Richard and I split up. He selected a direct route that dropped steeply to the valley floor. My feet aching, I selected a more gently sloping route to the west. I made good time and stopped for a bit to call out to him when I noticed he was several hundred yards behind me. Thinking I was well ahead of him, I slowed my pace. The next thing I knew, I saw Richard ahead of me and to the west. He had quickly crossed my path and found the continuation of the same sheep trail we had traveled three days earlier.

We followed this sheep trail to Blue-Eyed Lake and ascended the ridge overlooking the Twin Falls Creek drainage, but lost our battle with daylight near the big boulder at 3400 feet. Not wanting to descend the brush via headlamp, we opted to camp. After dinner, it wasn't long before the trickle of the stream nearby ushered us into slumber.

The next morning we descended to the valley floor, and cruised the eight miles down the Crow Pass trail to

Richard's house, several pounds lighter, having covered an estimated 52 miles with about 18,000 feet of elevation gain. We were tired, hungry, sore, and satisfied! Another fun-filled adventure in the Chugach Mountains!

I was quite surprised by the lack of wildlife we saw on this trip. I counted about a dozen mountain goats, two dozen sheep, a moose, a few ptarmigan, a couple ducks, and a couple spruce grouse. I had expected to see substantially more wildlife, having covered such distances through the heart of Chugach State Park and the wilderness areas to the east.



Kaupo and Richard



Mt Susitna: a new MCA Tradition?

by Stuart Grenier



The gentle mountain across the way got to calling again, so I set my sights on sharing a February attempt with as many folks as I could. I let Roger Clifford set the date since he was coming back from Iraq and said he was game to go. I ran the usual ads on the MCA listserv and made it a formal club trip in the Scree. At the height of it, there were 18 who wanted to go. When it became clear that we would not have the ice road to get us within reasonable ski distance, folks began to drop out. I figured that cold injuries would be our biggest problem, so I shook the list on the cold weather gear and lost a few on that point, too. When it was time to toe the line we had one of the strongest teams I've ever assembled for any trip and the mountain is only 4396 feet. The eight

members were Dolly Lefever and Mark Miraglia, Stan Olsen and Sally Balchin, President Wayne Todd, Sam Pepper, the Scree Editor John Recktenwald, and me. Roger couldn't make it after all, but his choice for dates proved perfect.

When Dan Byrnes and I went up in March of 2007, we had the ice road, which is built when the power lines need to be serviced – on average once every four years. That year we were able to get out of our car within 11 miles of Mount Susitna's true summit. No such luck in 2009. We were looking at about a 30-mile ski in from the Point Mackenzie General Store. Thinking that there might be some like-minded folks to ski in with, I found

that that folks were all planning on using their own snowmachines or pay local hauler Mike Mason to snowmachine them in. Four of us went in with Mike on Thursday to start breaking the trail up to be followed by a second wave of four to come in Friday.

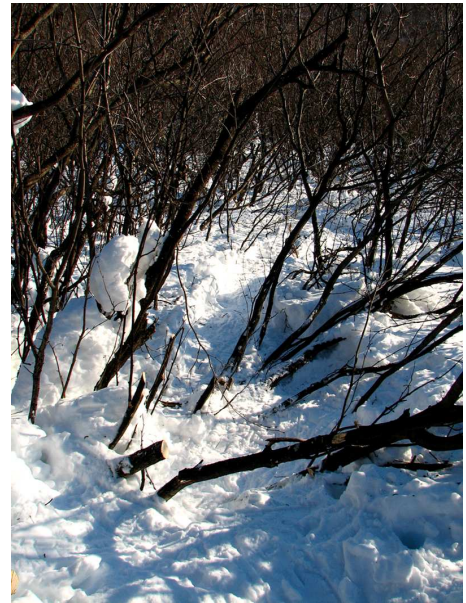
The first wave was made up of Wayne Todd, Sam Pepper, John Recktenwald, and me. As we snowmachined in, it was clear the mountain was experiencing some very high winds. Spindrifts were shooting off the ridges like crazy. It was fun to watch the mountain as the machines slowly closed the distance. Ear protection and warm clothing were a must on the machines. Mike Mason had recruited his neighbors Kenny and Susan Hightower, and Esty to help get us all in together. With a bright, sunny day the scenic stops on the way were quite impressive. It would have been a rather long straight slog on skis for the most part.

Our first stop at Alexander Creek was Collin's place, which he says isn't a lodge but it looked like a lodge to me. It is called Dinglishna Lodge. We checked out a cabin that we could rent on our way out and then decided to go eat at the Hightower's place in the shadow of Dinglishna Hill. This was really working out great. We got to rub elbows with the locals and everybody knew about the MCA and the Scree and of course one of Alexander Creek's most famous part-time residents, none other than Hoeman Award winner Tim Kelley. While taking in all the local bear stories and Tim Kelley stories, we were enjoying their eats and beer. Boy, I didn't know people could get that hungry just riding snowmachines. The Hightower's hospitality was so great we almost forgot about the mountain, but then somebody remembered why we came. We left some bucks, jumped on the machines and headed up Alexander Creek with old MCA-er Billy Hightower now driving for us.

Where Pierce Creek met Alexander Creek was where we said goodbye to our machine friends and cached our skis and extra chow for the trip out. The snow was deep and folks with bigger snowshoes were way happier than folks with smaller ones. President Wayne, being light and fit found his way to the front of the pack and gave us bigger guys a nice set of first tracks to follow up Pierce Creek. We worked our way up the creek pulling sleds, past the private property, and then up on the south side crest when the drainage started to canyon out on us. Here we camped as the wind whipped through the trees.

The next morning we followed the drainage up, keeping it on our right until we came to a small, but deep, 100-yard-wide drainage that ran into Pierce Creek. From here we went around the little drainage until we could cross without dropping into it and then headed straight up the mountain. A thick wall of alders drove us off to the right, but with the President at the helm, we managed to hit a series of small fields that greatly reduced our alder issues. Many of the alders that did find their way in front

of us fell prey to the hand saws and loppers we brought for this very special occasion: putting in a climbing route to the true summit. This was my fourth time up this route and I showed no mercy. I was having such a good time wasting alders with my 24-inch bow saw that I hardly noticed when the fast-moving second wave of Stan, Sally, Dolly, and Mark showed up and passed by. My right arm was pretty tired when I rolled into high camp on the knoll, but with everyone's help we had no problem gathering firewood and getting a nice fire going that was good for grilling the usual steaks and roasting marshmallows after dark.



Clearing this trail made a lot of sense to me. What makes Mount Susitna tough other than its hard-to-get-to location is the wall of alders that looks like a massive alder tsunami about to wash over you as you approach it. In [Shem Pete's Alaska](#) he mentions that the Pierce Creek route is how the Natives climbed this peak and after trying other routes I found Shem to be right on the money. The alder situation up Pierce Creek and directness of the east ridge to the true summit makes this route the best foot route to the true summit, though there is at least one other trail that targets the north summit. With the work that this team did, taking advantage of the natural game trail that runs along the south rim of the Pierce Creek drainage and then a few breaks in the alders to the high camp bench, things will be much easier for future summit seekers as long as they can find and hold the trail through the worst of the alders once the trail leaves Pierce Creek. With the prominence of this peak that can be seen from Anchorage and much of the Valley and its status in Dena'ina Culture as a sacred place where one can get "power," I think it should be on a lot of peoples' to-do list. This was my fifth summit on this peak and I still intend on going back. I guess you never have too much "power." I suspect if this mountain were in Japan, China, or India there would be a temple or shrine on the summit with the usual pilgrims coming and going.



After a windy night some folks got up long before sunrise on summit day. We were all glad to see the wind had finally died down. Dolly had said the day before if the wind did not die down she wouldn't attempt the summit. This was coming from somebody who had summited Mount Everest and the highest mountain on every continent. With the good weather and the second wave breaking trail, we had no problem cutting across the bench to Granite Creek, crossing the creek before the east face became steep, and then taking a prominent little ridge that after some alder work brought us to a long snow cornice that was a perfect ramp out of the alders to the base of the east ridge.



From there most of us, one by one, switched over to crampons from snowshoes as the snow firmed up and the ridge got steeper. We held the ridge all the way to the summit, which was a first for me. On my other trips on this route I went climber's left to go around the steep section, but the snow conditions this time made holding the ridge an option and, by then in last place, I had all those nice steps kicked in for me.



On the summit we were snapping photos of the impressive scenery and watching the repeater station about half a mile south on the ridge. Some of us saw a person moving around over there. Mark had been to the station many times for his job, but nobody seemed interested in heading over to say hello or check out the reputed kitchen. The views west to the Tordrillo Mountains and north to the rest of the Alaska Range were perfectly clear. The wind was light. I thought about trying to dig up the big orange register, but things looked so iced over I knew it would have taken forever. Maybe next time up it won't be so icy. By this point in the trip we had found that, though analog cell phones had worked fine from the summit in the past, the new digital technology let us down badly. Both ACS and AT&T were useless. Even from base camp they almost never worked. It was one of the few disappointments of the trip. Some of the folks living in Alexander Creek area have the same opinion about the switch to digital.

As people started to head down, Wayne stayed on the summit. By the time we were all halfway down the ridge I again was bringing up the rear. I took a lot of pleasure in seeing so many brightly dressed climbers on such a scenic ridge with the Big Su off in the distance seemingly running right into the base of the ridge. With the relief of having everyone summit, the mountain's usual good feel was all the better. I found myself lingering with all the senses turned to max. It seemed strange to me that everyone was in what seemed to me to be a hurry to get back to base camp. Before dark started to fall I pulled into base camp and spent the night working on how to cook quesadillas over a fire without burning them. It was fun listening to everyone around the fire and watching the firelight on their faces.



The next morning I enjoyed the fire some more and then the second wave left pretty early, intent on getting to their machines and then back out to the Point Mackenzie General Store from where we all had started. The first wave left with our sleds nipping at our heels on the steep slope. I stopped to leave some marker tape to help folks find the trail in key areas. We picked up our cached gear and skis and skied to the Hightower's home. There we shared some chow and digital pictures of the trip and then continued on to Collin's place when it was clear the Hightower's were out of beer. At Collin's we found a nice warm cabin waiting for us and a massive amount of beer and good eats. With a satellite television on the back wall and a host eager to hear and tell stories, it seemed to be a perfect evening. The next morning it was back on the machines to the general store.



After returning to this mountain as much as I have, I have to say that a winter ascent seems to be the easiest, as long as you have either a team to help break trail or a set trail. The usual summer route I use requires getting the kayaks out of the mouth of the Big Su and back to Anchorage. This is fun for folks with experience on the water, but it is a bit much for most folks. Now that the Alexander Creek area has been infested with invasive northern pike and their salmon tourist industry is struggling, there are some folks over there who hope that a climbing/ ski market will develop in time. From what we saw on this trip, I think winter MCA trips up Mount Susitna probably should become a club tradition. Maybe something that could be done during Fur Rondy, If not every other year, at least every third year. The mountain has a strong draw to it that becomes stronger the more years you spend looking over at it. The problem that Tim Kelley and I have found is that one trip to the summit isn't enough. This is at least my fourth Scree article about climbs on the mountain.

Thanks to all the folks who helped us make this such a wonderful trip. Especially Shem Pete, Tim Kelley, Sam for driving, and the rest of the Alexander Creek and Pierce Creek folks.



Peak of the Month: Mount Tajis

by Steve Gruhn

Mountain Range: Saint Elias Mountains; Takhinsha Mountains, Chedu Ridge
Borough: Haines Borough
Drainages: Dukadee Glacier and Garrison Glacier
Latitude/Longitude: 59° 7' 3" North, 135° 43' 59" West
Elevation: 7451 feet
Prominence: 1601 feet from Mount Dech (7475)
Adjacent Peaks: Peak 6550 near the Dukadee Glacier and the Garrison Glacier, Peak 6850 near the Davidson Glacier and the Dukadee Glacier, and Mount Toggenburger (6841)

Distinctness: 1601 feet from Peak 6550
USGS Map: Skagway (A-2)
First Recorded Ascent: There are no records of an ascent; this peak might be unclimbed.
Access Point: 4000-foot level of the Jajee Glacier

Although I know of no records of an ascent of Mount Tajis, I did find a record of an attempt to scale the peak some 43 years ago. I know of no other attempts to climb Mount Tajis; your attempt could be the first successful one.



Photograph taken by Lawrence E. Nielsen that originally appeared in the December 1966 *Appalachia*

In June 1966 Dr. Lawrence Nielsen led a group of glaciological researchers on an exploration and mountaineering trip in the Takhinsha Mountains. This was the first mountaineering trip into the area.

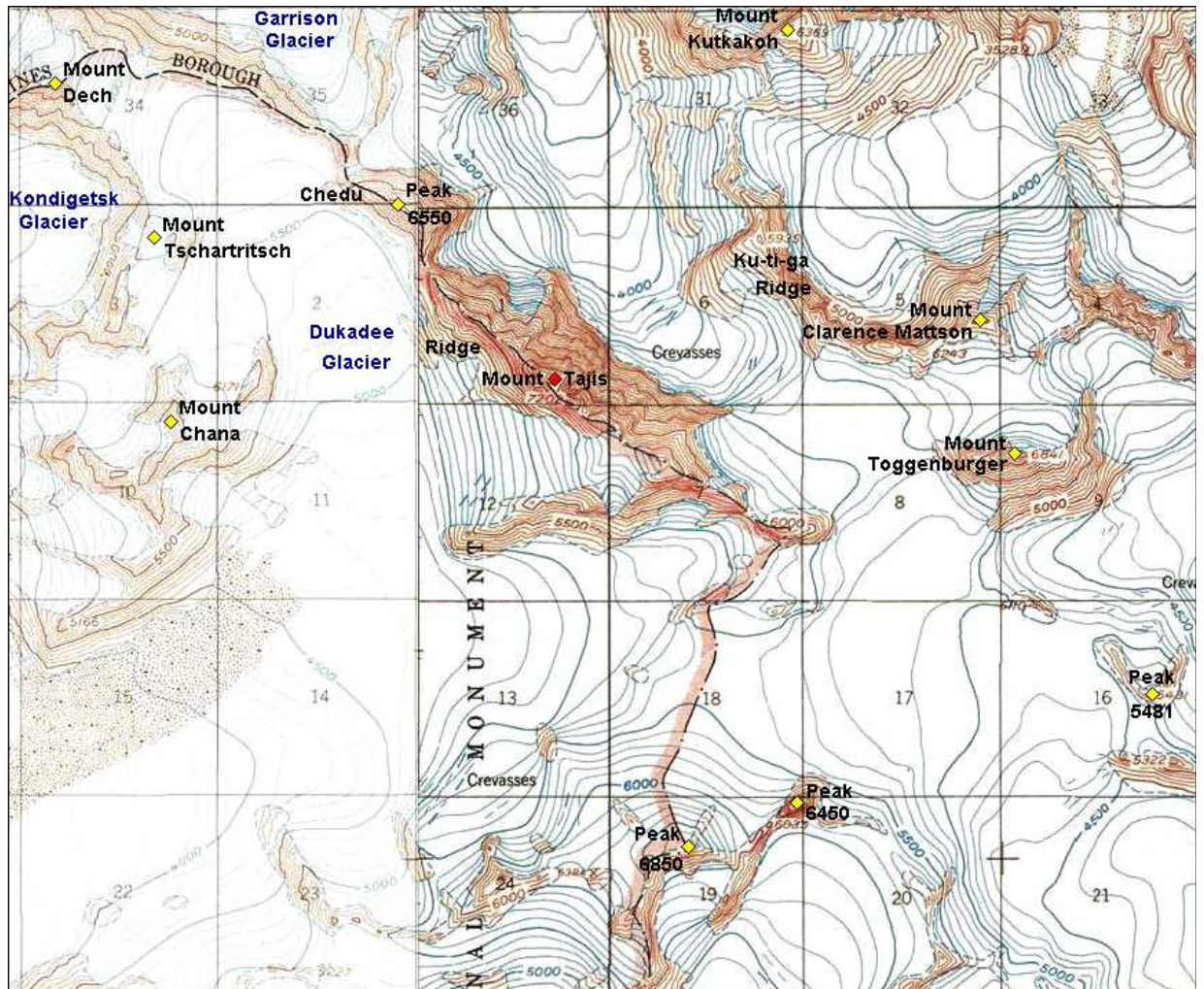
Layton Bennett flew the party from Haines to the 4000-foot level of the Jajee Glacier, a northern tributary of the Casement Glacier. After establishing a base camp, the party consisting of Nielsen, David Chappellear, Bob Rickey, Dave Seidman, and Gil Dewart moved their camp 7 ½ miles to the 4600-foot level of the Dukadee Glacier on June 18, where they had received an air drop of supplies from Bennett.

With the air temperature at 21 degrees Fahrenheit, at 7:00 a.m. on June 21, the party left their air drop camp to attempt Mount Tajis. On firm snow they climbed up the steep tributary of the Dukadee Glacier on the south side of Mount Tajis and reached the southeast ridge at the 6950-foot

saddle between two 7350-foot points. They climbed the northwestern point and saw that their objective was separated from them by a deep gully and long, difficult rock leads. They then retreated and climbed the southeastern 7350-foot point and made a roped glissade back to their air drop camp, with each person taking a turn at stepping into a crevasse in the sun-softened snow of the afternoon. The party packed up and left their air drop camp at 11:00 p.m. that night and returned to their base camp at 3:30 a.m. the next morning.

Nielsen and Chappellear subsequently named several geographic features using words from the local Tlingit language, including Mount Tajis (which is the Tlingit word for a stone axe), Chedu (comb) Ridge, Dukadee (rock slide) Glacier, Mount Dech (two), Jajee (snowshoes) Glacier, Mount Kutkakoh (wilderness or lonely place), Kondigetsk (fog) Glacier, Mount Tscharritsch (main chief of Chilkot Indians about 1880), Ku-ti-ga (totem pole) Ridge, and Mount Chana (evening), among others.

Nielsen and Chappellear published the account of their trip on pages 273 to 287 of the December 1966 *Appalachia*, the journal of the Appalachian Mountain Club.



Map created with TOPO!® ©2003 National Geographic (www.nationalgeographic.com/topo)

Adze

For Sale

Salomon Super Mountain Expert Boot, Size US 11, EU 45. Too small for me. 1 season of use, great condition. Paid ~\$300 at AMH, a couple years ago; make me an offer. "Salomon boots -- the classic mountaineering companion. Thanks to their crampon compatibility, full foot wrapping rand and high tech climbing chassis. 200g Thinsulate(R) insulation designed for high activity levels traps warm air. Heavy-duty lugged Contagrip(TM) outsole packs some serious bite for rugged peaks. Gusseted tongue Suede and synthetic uppers Height: 6, Weight: 4 lb. 6 oz. pr."

Dave Hart, davidhart@pxd.com – 244-17225

For Sale

Outdoor Research Brooks Ranger Overboots size XXL never used \$100

Marc, 907-350-8222, marc.hoffmeister@us.army.mil

For Sale

Mountain Hardwear Cypress Green Nitrous Hooded Jacket (Mens Medium). Brand New, never worn jacket, didn't fit and I can't return it. Retail at \$240, asking

\$100. Awesome jacket. My loss, your gain. "Lightweight and warm, with 800-fill goose down for chilly belays. Compresses to fit in your pack. Constructed out of our EcoSensor Ripstop, virgin and recycled polyester fibers, blended to create a lightweight, downproof fabric.

Weighs in at 14 oz.

Marc, 907-350-8222, marc.hoffmeister@us.army.mil

For Sale

Women's Arc'teryx Alpha SV Bib Pant size 4/6. Worn only 3-4 times, in new condition, just didn't quite fit.

These are an awesome pair of bibs. Retail over \$400.

"sets the standard for serious expeditions. These chest-height bib take advantage of ultralight Gore-Tex XCR material to keep you totally dry no matter how wet it gets. Three-quarter length side zips stop just short of your waist, so they won't interfere with a harness or hipbelt, and a through-the-crotch WaterTight zip is a godsend when nature calls. Keprotec instep patches that won't get eaten by ski edges or crampons"

Marc, 907-350-8222, marc.hoffmeister@us.army.mil

Parting Shot



Randy Howell being Randy Howell

Mountaineering Club of Alaska

2010 PROPOSED BUDGET

*Last Updated 11/22/09

		Proposed for 2010	Change 10 vs 09	Approved for 2009	Current for 2009*
REVENUE					
Membership Dues	<i>received during calendar year</i>	\$7,000.00	3%	\$6,800.00	\$7,205.00
Scree subscriptions		\$200.00	-33%	\$300.00	\$130.00
Training	<i>ice climbing, crevasse rescue, other</i>	\$5,800.00	-11%	\$6,500.00	\$7,790.00
Photo Calendar		\$3,000.00	0%	\$3,000.00	\$0.00
MCA Products: T-Shirts, Patches, Etc.		\$0.00	-100%	\$500.00	\$580.00
Donations		\$0.00	0%	\$0.00	\$0.00
Other--Interest on Accounts		\$200.00	0%	\$200.00	\$198.14
Other-MCA Products for 50th Anniversary		\$0.00	0%	\$0.00	\$0.00
Other		\$0.00	0%	\$0.00	\$20.00
TOTAL REVENUE		\$16,200.00		\$17,300.00	\$15,923.14

EXPENSE					
Training	<i>campsite, access fees, instructors, trip leaders</i>	\$5,300.00	10%	\$4,800.00	\$3,066.07
Scree	<i>postage, mailing, printing</i>	\$2,300.00	0%	\$2,300.00	\$1,630.63
General Meeting	<i>rent, refreshments, entertainment</i>	\$2,200.00	10%	\$2,000.00	\$1,646.72
Administrative	<i>supplies, forms, PO box, bank fees, phone, web site</i>	\$1,000.00	100%	\$500.00	\$534.92
Hut Construction & Maint.	<i>materials, supplies, hut equipment, lease fees*</i>	\$2,500.00	-50%	\$5,000.00	\$9,963.71
Insurance		\$3,000.00	NEW	\$0.00	\$0.00
Club Equipment	<i>climbing gear, misc equipment</i>	\$500.00	-29%	\$700.00	\$0.00
Library	<i>new books, periodicals, Scree binding</i>	\$100.00	-80%	\$500.00	\$0.00
Other:	<i>miscellaneous expenses</i>	\$0.00	0%	\$0.00	\$0.00
Photo Calendar		\$2,600.00	0%	\$2,600.00	\$0.00
MCA Products: T-Shirts, Patches, Etc.		\$0.00	0%	\$0.00	\$0.00
Other-MCA 50th Anniversary Party, Products		\$0.00	0%	\$0.00	\$0.00
Other - Awards		\$800.00	167%	\$300.00	\$200.00
TOTAL EXPENSE		\$20,300.00		\$18,700.00	\$17,042.05

DUE TO (FROM) RESERVE (To Balance)	(4,100.00)	(1,400.00)	(1,118.91)
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CASH BALANCE - All Accounts

Beginning Balance - January 1, 2009	\$22,260.96
Increase (decrease) during 2009	(\$1,118.91)
Current Balance for 2009	\$21,142.05
Checking - Credit Union 1	\$3,702.26
Money Market - Credit Union 1 (.92%)	\$14,633.19
Savings - Credit Union 1 (.8%)	\$1,624.88
18-month CD - in trust for hut lease - Northrim Bank (3.54%)	\$1,133.72
Petty Cash	\$48.00
TOTAL ALL ACCOUNTS - for 2009	\$21,142.05
Ending Balance - November 22, 2009	Not Finished

The 2009-2010 MCA Board reviewed budgets from 2005-2009 and the following projections of revenue and expenses were unanimously approved to present to the membership. Please review as we will vote on the proposed budget at the January 20, 2010 General Membership Meeting.

Mountaineering Club of Alaska

President Wayne Todd 522-6354
Vice-President Ross Noffsinger 336-2233
Secretary Brian Aho 223-4758
Treasurer Tim Silvers 250-3374

Board member Jayme Dixon 382-0212
Board member Travis Taylor 382-4823
Board member Mark Kimerer 360-5935
Board member Mark Smith 868-3155
Board member Tony Lutes 242-3559

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

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 Treasurer. The Post Office will not forward the newsletter.

The 'Scree' is a monthly publication of the Mountaineering Club of Alaska. Articles, notes and letters submitted for publication in the newsletter should be submitted on the web at www.mcak.org or e-mailed to the Scree Editor. Articles should be received by the monthly club meeting (third Wednesday of the month) to be 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.

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

Mailing list/database entry: Yukiko Hayano and Randy Plant - 243-1438
Hiking and Climbing Committee: Jayme Dixon - 382-0212, Richard Baranow - 694-1500
Huts: Greg Bragiel - 569-3008
Calendar: Stuart Grenier - 337-5127
Scree Editor: John Recktenwald - 346-2589
Web: www.mcak.org (change your address here)
Mailing list service: MCAK@yahoogroups.com

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