

the SCREE

Mountaineering Club of Alaska

FEBRUARY 2024

Volume 67, Number 2



"I will not follow where
the path may lead, but I
will go where there is
no path, and I will leave
a trail."

— Muriel Strode

February Meeting

Wednesday, February 7, 2024

6:00-8:00 p.m. at the BP Energy Center

Presenters: Kathy Still and Az Sellers

Topic: The 120 Chugach State Park Peaks

Contents:

Mint Hut Renovation 2024

Aaka (3980 feet) and Mount Osborn (4714 feet), Kigluaik Mountains

Peak 5676 and Point 5620, Talkeetna Mountains

West Galbraith Peak (4580 ± 20 feet), Endicott Mountains, Brooks Range

Iodine Peak (5110 feet) and Tellurium (5341 feet) Traverse, Elementary Mountains,
Talkeetna Mountains

First Ascent of "The Trench Connection," Main Tower (6910 feet), Mendenhall Towers

Redoubt Volcano (10197 feet), Chigmit Mountains, Aleutian Range

Bleak Peak (5430 feet), Western Chugach Mountains

Mount Sanford (16237 feet), Wrangell Mountains

Peak of the Month: Peak 4970, Mertie Mountains

"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."

Cover Photo

Meg Inokuma breaking trail below the upper ridge of Redoubt Volcano. Photo by Wayne Todd.

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Contribute to the Scree!

Have something to share with the Alaska mountaineering community? Trip reports for all levels of mountaineering—from Flattop Mountain to Denali, from Kichatna Spire to Bodenburg Butte—are welcome and requested. We also welcome letters to the editor, notes, essays, poetry, photos, and the occasional creative writing piece. Contributions can be emailed as attachments to mcascree@gmail.com. Material should be submitted by the 11th of each month to appear in the following month's issue. We prefer text in MicroSoft Word format. Photos should include captions and photographer credits and should not be embedded in the text. While we're not sticklers on word count, submissions that are more than six pages per author will be split into multiple issues.

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For the MCA Membership Application and Liability Waiver, visit <https://www.mtnclubak.org/membership>



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



Announcements

Scheduled Trips:

Serenity Falls Cabin Sleepover

February 3-4, 2024

This trip will involve traveling 10-13 miles across/around Eklutna Lake to the Serenity Falls Hut located between Eklutna Lake and the Eklutna Glacier. Depending on conditions, there will be ice climbing opportunities within 1 mile of the hut. The hut is reserved for Saturday night— we will have a group departing from the Eklutna Lake Trailhead at 7 a.m. on Saturday and will depart the cabin at 3 p.m. Sunday. Anyone interested who is unable to make this departure time is welcome to travel on their own to and from the cabin. The waterfall ice climbs near Serenity Falls are rated WI4 and higher, so this trip is not recommended for beginner ice climbers. There will be opportunities to climb with more experienced climbers if you are not comfortable leading ice. For interested beginner ice climbers, the MCA is hosting an instructional beginner ice course the same day at Eklutna Canyon. Other fun festivities will take place at the cabin and anyone not interested in ice climbing is welcome to join. There are 13 bunks available and additional floor space or winter camping, if preferred. For more information or to sign up, contact G Platte at guerinplatte@gmail.com or Andrew Holman at andrew.s.holman@gmail.com.

Moderate Ice Climbing in Eklutna Canyon or at the Beer Climbs south of the Knik River

Saturday, February 3, 2024

The goal of this trip is to give beginning ice climbers a chance to top-rope on moderate ice (WI2 - WI3). Details are still being determined, please contact Gerrit Verbeek (gerrit.r.verbeek@gmail.com, 907-795-8288) if you are interested in attending as a beginner or as a more experienced climber capable of helping to set up top ropes.

Eklutna Traverse

April 15-21, 2024

Ski traverse. Glacier-travel experience required. Eight participants maximum. ~ 30 miles, ~ 9000 feet elevation gain. Trip leader: Greg Bragiel, Unknownhiker@alaska.net. Note that there is currently a waiting list for this trip.



Serenity Falls Cabin:
61.29324, -148.97569.



Eklutna Canyon:
61.4482, -149.33965



Eklutna Traverse
(actual location is between the Eagle Glacier and the Whiteout Glacier): 61.14025, -148.94786

Request for Gear Donations

In July 2024 Scouts BSA Troop 210 from Anchorage will be conducting a mountaineering instructional course along the Bomber Traverse in collaboration with volunteers from the MCA. All participants will be members of the MCA. In an attempt to defray the costs for the eight participating Scouts I'm in search of used, but still serviceable gear. Specifically we're in need of ice axes, crampons, pickets, harnesses, helmets, and various carabiners. If you'd like to donate old gear and clean out your closet while helping to support getting eight teenagers excited about moving safely in the mountains, please call, text or email me.

Thanks,

Bill Posanka

907-306-8939

williamposanka@yahoo.com

Mint Hut Renovation 2024

Planning is well underway for an addition to the Mint Hut next summer. We will need volunteers to help with many tasks both in town and on site. The plan is to fly materials to the site on July 19, 2024. We anticipate up to 10 days for construction, depending on weather.

On site we will need:

Skilled carpenters; and

Workers for a variety of tasks from framing to metal siding to insulation to carrying rocks for ballast

In town we will need:

A painting party: Painters (no skill needed) to paint plywood and dimensional lumber so we don't need to paint on site other than some touch-up;

Help loading trucks/trailers for delivery of materials to the Gold Mint Trailhead;

Securing the special use permit for use of the Gold Mint Trailhead;

Setting up the landing zone (LZ) at the Gold Mint Trailhead the day before we fly in materials;

Organizing the materials at the LZ at the Gold Mint trailhead the day before we fly in materials;

Breaking down the LZ after the last helicopter load; and

Setting up the LZ to receive the tools/materials that will be flown out.

If you are unable to contribute as noted above, the MCA would appreciate any cash or material contributions that individuals or companies would be willing to make. Do you know someone or a community-minded business that might be interested in helping? For example, the expense of one window fabricated out of state, shipped to Alaska, crated to fly into the hut, delivered to Hatcher Pass and flown to the hut costs approximately \$650.00.

Items to consider donating funds or materials for would include: doors, stainless-steel countertop (like are in the new Bomber and the Holden Huts), building vents to keep condensation down, materials for volunteer-built tables (2 required), materials for an additional ladder to the loft, Tyvek building wrap and Ice/Water Shield for the roof, 5-gallon pot(s) for melting snow, and a climbing hangboard to provide an indoor activity on stormy days. One big item that would be a great assistance are contributions to cover the cost of the roof on the addition and new siding for the entire hut. Volunteers could sign up to pre-fabricate one or both tables. Dimensions can be provided. All of these items are within our current budget, but we are always open for donations to offset MCA funding that could be used for future hut maintenance.

We are also looking for a dry place (no heat needed) for countertop/vents/windows and various other miscellaneous materials and supplies, roughly the size of a single car garage. Additionally, we need a place to crate the windows and doors, and a location to hold the painting party.

If you can't commit to working on site for 10 days, we can rotate people in and out as we've done on other projects. On site everyone will be expected to sleep in their own tent and for the most part provide their own food, if they are not staying the majority of the time. The MCA may be able to fly your tent/food/cooking gear in, but you'll need to hike it out.

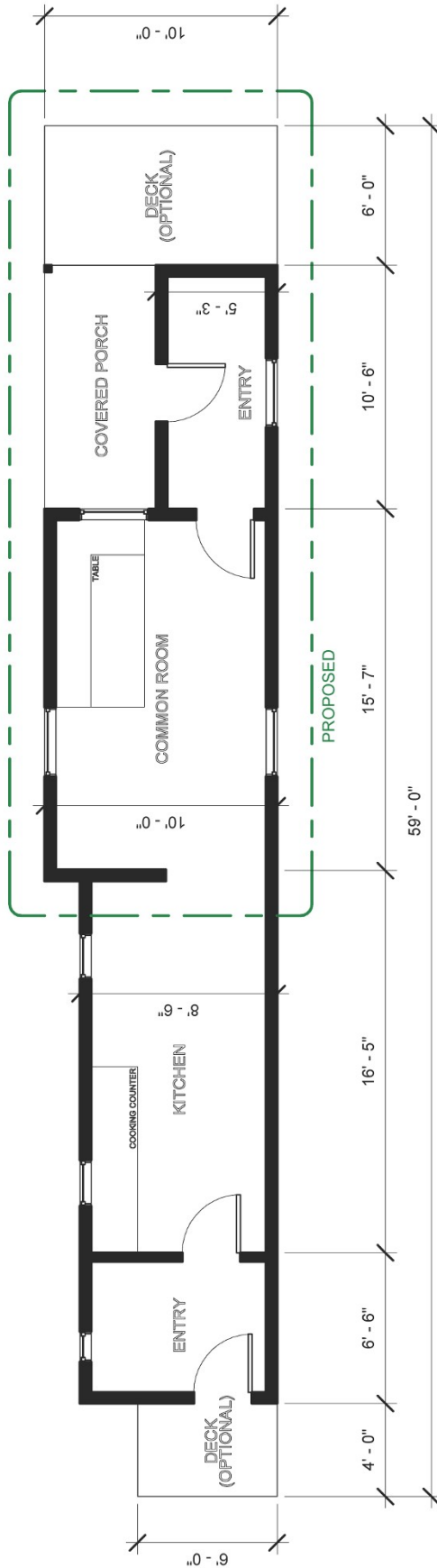
If you are interested in working on site or at the LZ, please contact Stan Olsen at (907) 231-3581 after mid-February. If you are interested in the painting party, contact Dave Staeheli at (805) 407-7299 after mid-February.

Huts Committee

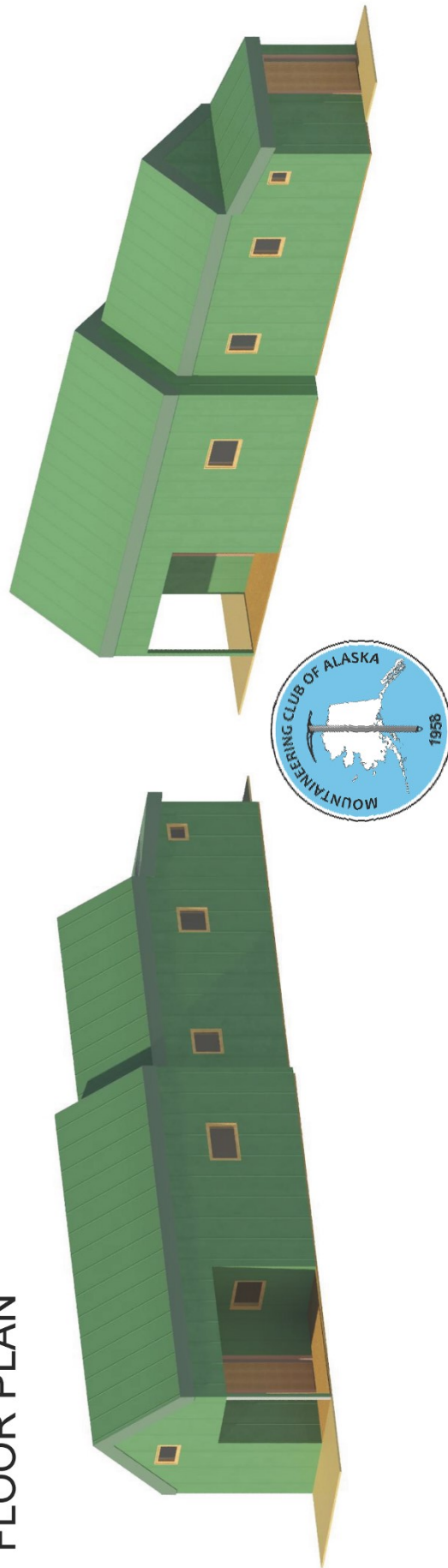


Mint Hut:
61.85677,
-149.07977

16 FOOT EXPANSION W/ ARCTIC ENTRY



FLOOR PLAN



Aaka (3980 feet) and Mount Osborn (4714 feet), Kigluaik Mountains

Text and photos by Dave Hart
July 2022



Aaka:
64.98267,
-165.14007

I set a goal to explore new parts of Alaska in 2022. Unfortunately, that summer was exceptionally rainy, so some objectives fell off the radar. Still, Renee Ernster and I squeezed in a fun peakbagging road trip to Chicken over the July 4 holiday, as we waited for a good weather forecast for the Kigluaik Mountains outside of Nome. Our primary goal was a four-day backpacking ascent of Mount Osborn (4714 feet), with a side trip to Aaka (3980 feet) along the way. Aaka has 2200 feet of prominence. Osborn is an even more prominent (4369 feet) and isolated mountain. From Osborn one has to travel 282 miles to reach a higher peak.

A weather window opened in mid-July, so Renee and I reached out to Dan Glatz and Theresa Pipek for a last-minute mileage flight to Nome on July 8.

The four of us arrived at Nome in the early afternoon, shuttled to town, and rented our expensive pickup truck for the one-hour drive to the trailhead at 500 feet. Interest-



Dan Glatz, Theresa Pipek, and Renee Ernster head up the south ridge of Aaka.

ly, there was another pickup truck at the trailhead. We spent 1.5 hours leisurely hiking 2.7 miles up the Grand Central River

that first night to make our Aaka ascent easier the second day. There was a decent all-terrain vehicle trail through the brush up to our camp. By 9 p.m., we were basking in full sunshine at our tundra camp.

On Day 2 we broke camp at 9:30 a.m. and hiked another two miles up-valley to Gold Run, and left our backpacks for the scramble up the Class 2 south ridge of Aaka. There was still a bit of summer snow around, and the ridge was quite blocky and slow traveling.

We made the summit by 2 p.m., with nice views especially toward Mount Osborn. There were no cairns or other markings on the summit. But being so close to the Nome-Taylor Highway (also known variously as the Beam Road and the Kougarok Road), and the significant historic mining activity in the valley below would suggest others had certainly been here before. But Steve Gruhn's Alaska mountain database had no "reported" ascents of Aaka.

We opted to descend the rocky northwest ridge to some snowfields on the west side of the peak, rather than reverse our unpleasant ascent route. Loops are always more interesting anyway. We made it back to our packs by 4:15 p.m., curious how the next bushwhack section would be up to our Osborn camp.

Renee Ernster scrambling just below the summit of Mount Osborn.



Dan and Theresa opted to stay lower in the valley in wet, grassy meadows while Renee and I linked clearings higher on the hillside. The lower route was better, and we followed this on the way out. The four of us rejoined at the head of the valley after wading across the North Fork of the Grand Central River. We wandered among some of the destroyed mining structures in the area, mostly flattened cabins, but included a still-intact wooden aqueduct water pipe – the remnants of the Wild Goose Pipeline. At one point 100 years ago, the Wild Goose Pipeline delivered water from the Grand Central River drainage to the Nome River drainage to aid several mining operations there.

By 8 p.m., we found a nice lake at 880 feet to camp by with nice views down the valley toward Aaka, and of Osborn towering above us.

Camp was lovely, even with the healthy mosquito population. Renee and I brought a small tent, though Dan and Theresa opted to bivy out. They are tougher than us.

We were fast asleep by 9:30 p.m. after a big day climbing Aaka and getting here. Plus, we had to get up early the next day.

We didn't know how hard the Osborn summit pinnacle was, so we brought two skinny climbing ropes, harnesses, and a few slings with us. In retrospect, had we asked Wayne Todd who climbed this peak decades ago in 1996 (see the May 2007 *Scree*), we could have left this burden at home. Oh, well.

We woke at 6 a.m. on our third day, wanting to give plenty of time for the 4000 feet of scrambly ascent up Osborn's southeast ridge. The route certainly looked intimidating from below.

We left camp at 7 a.m. with high-overcast skies. As we started gaining the lower ridge, we saw a big black animal several hundred yards up-valley from us. We did buy one can of bear spray in town, so out it came. The jury is still out, but we think it was a lone musk ox, rather than a grizzly. I'm not sure which would be worse. We each went about our own business.

The ridge was a fun Class 2 scramble most of the way. The exception was at 3700 feet where a 200-foot-vertical section of loose and unpleasant talus and boulders slowed our progress. As we continued to the final summit ridge, it was not entirely clear which of the several pinnacles was the summit. Dan ran ahead and scoped out several options, before we finally settled on the correct summit at 11:15 a.m. Because we had the ropes, Dan led out and we fixed a line up the exposed Class 3 summit ridge. It wasn't hard, but a bit loose and certainly exposed.

The four of us rejoined on the summit at 11:30 a.m. and enjoyed a fabulous, sunny rest for 30 minutes. The Kigluaik Mountains are very rugged and spectacular, and would offer some challenging, messy, scrambling routes, possibly better in the spring with a solid kick-step snowpack up the talus and gullies.

We had been following occasional footsteps along the route. It turned out Shane Ohms was a day in front of us with Brayden

Banksy and his friend Erik, both local Nome hikers. We ultimately missed each other, as they descended past us while we were on Aaka. They drove the pickup we saw at the trailhead.

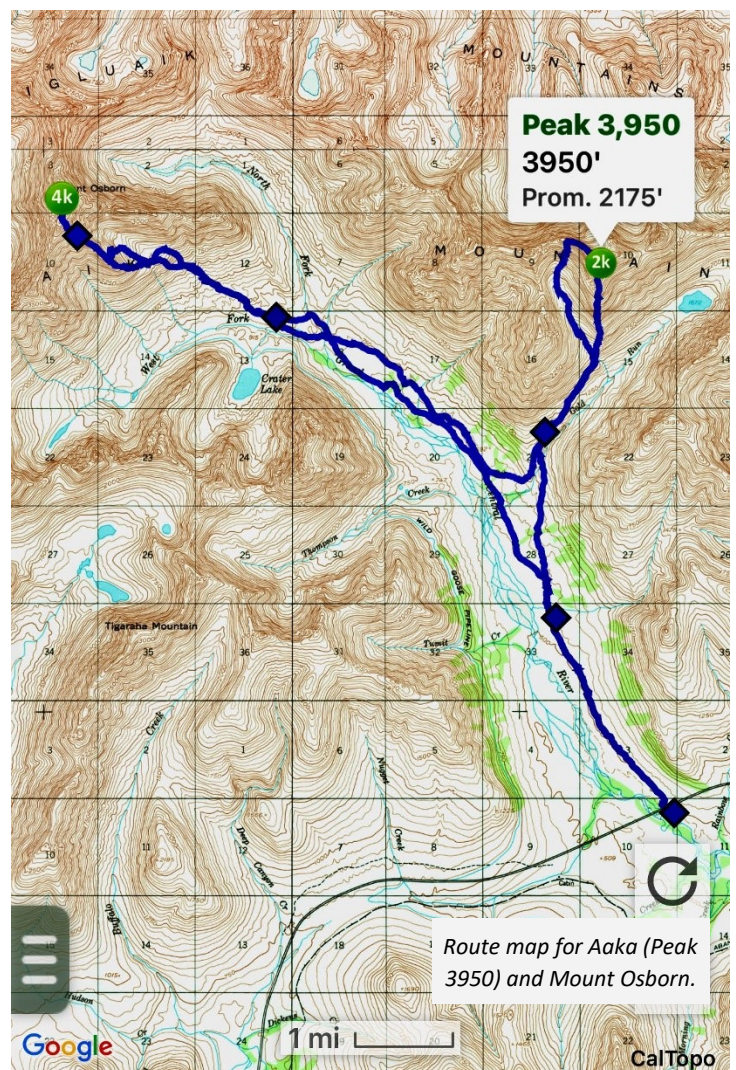
The day was so spectacular, we opted for a 30-minute nap on the descent 500 feet below the summit, soaking up the sunshine before the long drop back to camp. We linked a few snowfield glissades and scree-field plunges, which made the descent nice.

We reached camp at 4 p.m. in time for a big dinner then bed.

Our fourth and final day would be long, as we had to descend all the way to the truck, drive to Nome and catch our evening flight back to Anchorage. We were on the trail by 7:45 a.m., and reached the truck 3.5 hours later, where Theresa and Renee braved the cold Grand Central River for a well-earned bath. River crossings, bugs, swamps, bushwhacking, talus, and scree made the trip challenging, but rewarding, for this classic Alaska peakbagging adventure. I'm glad we made it up two peaks on this trip, but a longer trip would be even nicer.

Our stats were 30 miles and 8000 feet of elevation over our four days. This trip had been on my wish list for a long time. I'm glad it came together for the four of us.

Additional photos from this trip are on Page 19.

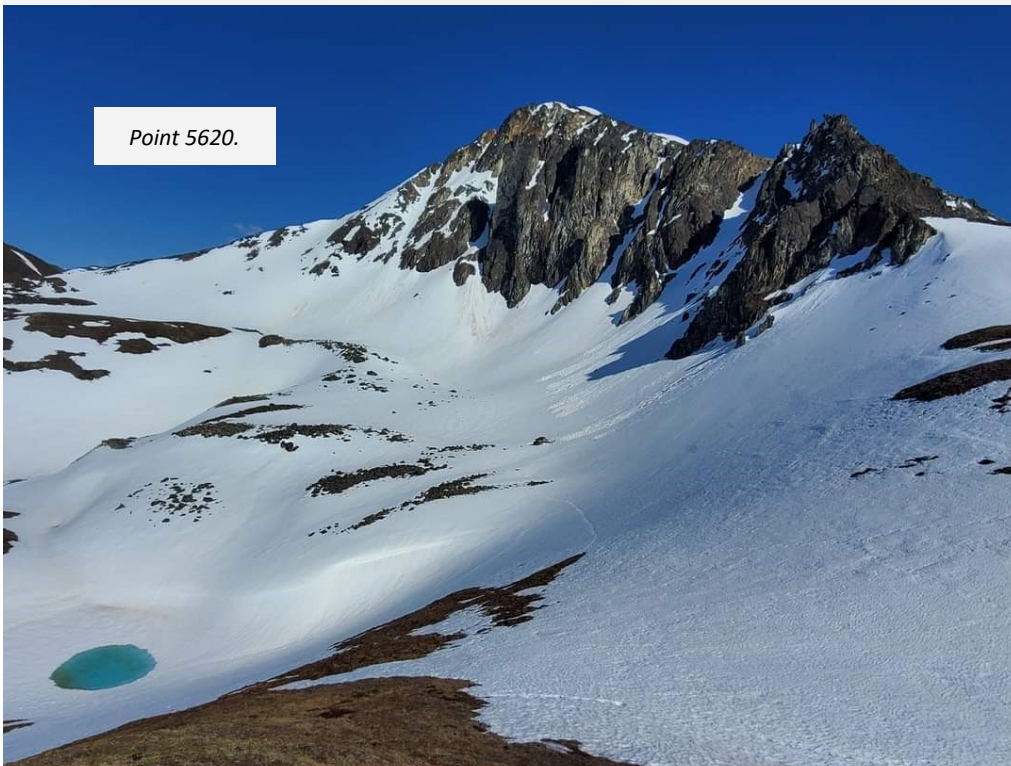


Peak 5676 and Point 5620, Talkeetna Mountains

Text and photos by Kaleb Notte



Peak 5676:
63.33023,
-148.45939



This part of the Talkeetna Mountains is up Edmonds Creek, just off the Denali Highway. This is Ahtna Land, but there is an easement that leads into the valley with a zero-bushwhack approach. You can obtain a pass online to access the land.

I approached the valley and set up camp below Peak 5069. Though these peaks can easily be a day trip, the long drive and overnighing allow extra time to bag multiple peaks.



I ascended the col between Point 5620 and Peak 5676 via Class 2 hiking, dealing with some isothermal snow in the valley. The snow on the north ridge became bulletproof to gain the summit, but aluminum crampons did the job. Views of the Alaska Range and Hayes Range are abundant.

From Peak 5676 to Point 5620, I traversed the ridge going at more Class 2 hiking. Plenty of peaks in this zone and lots of views.

West Galbraith Peak (4580 ± 20 feet), Endicott Mountains, Brooks Range

Text and photos by Slow-Plodding Human Porter (SPHP)



West Galbraith
Peak: 68.43894,
-149.53607

Part 1 of Day 32 of Lupe's Second Summer of 2022 Dingo Vacation to Canada and Alaska!

August 30, 2022, 9:58 a.m., 42°F, Galbraith Lake Campground, north side of the Brooks Range –

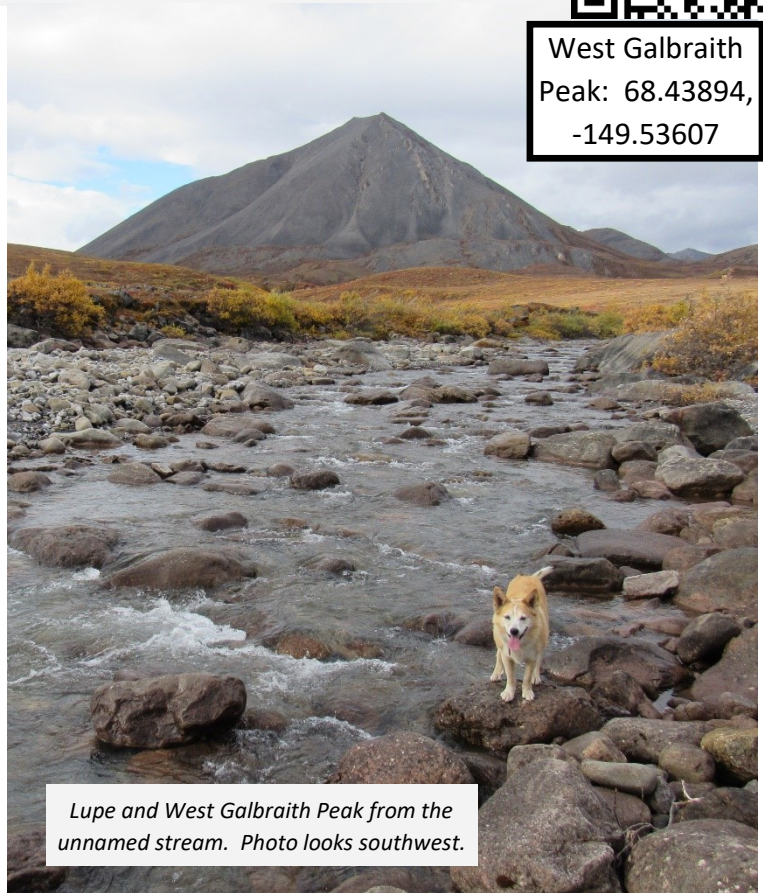
About ready, Loopster! Shall we?

We shall, SPHP!

Happily, the fog that had rolled in late yesterday evening was gone, and the mountains were below the clouds. Full of enthusiasm, Lupe left the campsite trotting southwest through the tall, yellow bushes, heading straight for the nearest mountain, the one SPHP had finally decided to call West Galbraith Peak (4580 ± 20 feet). After crossing the campground access road, the Carolina Dog raced away across the tundra, exploring and sniffing far ahead of SPHP. Lupe soon made it to a big stream flowing down out of the mountains on its way to Galbraith Lake.

Following the stream's rocky exposed streambed proved more trouble than it was worth. Returning to the bank overlooking the stream, Lupe discovered a trail running along the upper edge, which made life easy.

Climbing steadily along the lip of the widening floodplain, Lupe was far from the stream by the time it curved south-southwest. Several glaciers were now visible at the far upper end of the valley in the vicinity of Mount Kiev (7775 feet), which was high enough to be lost in the clouds. That whole region looked mighty enticing, but much more rugged than anything SPHP was prepared for today.



Lupe and West Galbraith Peak from the unnamed stream. Photo looks southwest.

The edge of the high ground Lupe was following swept around in a wide arc to a broad bench of tundra below West Galbraith Peak's northeast slopes. Continuing south for more than 0.5 mile, this bench eventually shriveled away. A steep east ridge coming down off West Galbraith Peak was directly ahead. Before Lupe got that far, she was having to traverse rock slides. Looking west up the mountain, a long stretch of brown tundra extended hundreds of feet higher.

You know, Loop, might be easiest to simply head up right here. The tundra's steep, but perfectly doable, and the rocky region above it doesn't look bad, either. Want to try it?

Fine with me, SPHP, but what does the topographic map say?

Don't have any maps of this area, Loopster. West Galbraith Peak is just one of those spur-of-the-moment "Bet we can climb that one!" peaks.

Turning west, Lupe started up the tundra. The Carolina Dog had plenty of time to study the intricacies of the tundra, or admire the terrific views, during SPHP's frequent breaks to gasp for air.

Lupe waiting for SPHP partway up the tundra slope. Photo looks west.



Tundra became scarce. Lupe kept climbing, angling west-southwest on stable, irregularly-shaped scree. By the time the American Dingo intercepted the east ridge, much of West Galbraith Peak's long summit ridge was in sight. A highpoint way over at the south-southwest end looked like it might be the true summit. Getting to it appeared potentially problematic.

Scrambling west-northwest, Lupe continued higher. Scree all the way! Steep, but the ascent wasn't bad at all. Only one big outcropping of bedrock that was easily avoided. Soon Lupe was closing in on the mountain's north-northeast highpoint.

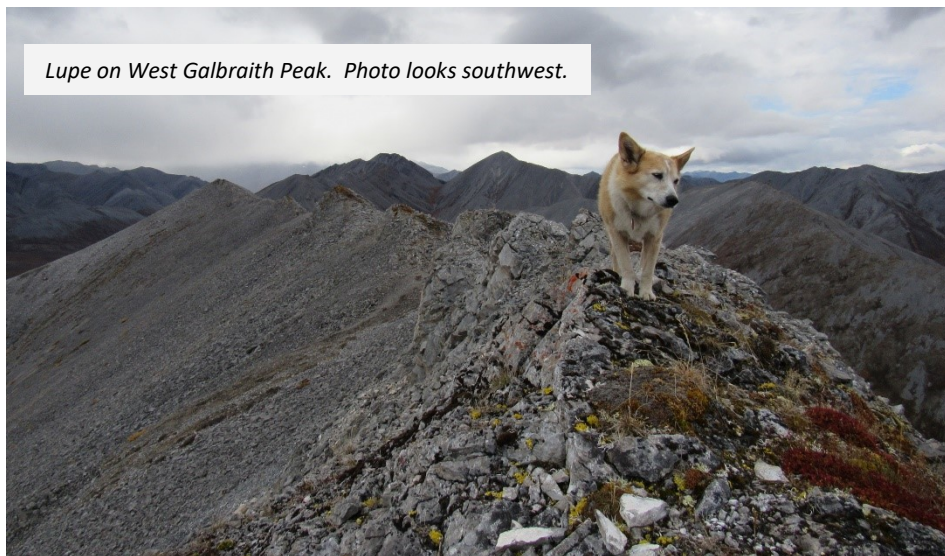
1:37 p.m., 51°F, West Galbraith Peak (4580 ± 20 feet) – Lupe's perch on the north-northeast summit was sufficient for comfort, but certainly not any bigger than it needed to be. Looking south-southwest along the long summit ridge, SPHP was satisfied.

Hard to say for certain, Looper, but I think we're golden!

So, we're already at the true summit of West Galbraith Peak, SPHP?

Believe so, Loop! Might be an illusion, but if that south-southwest highpoint is any higher, it can't be by much. Think I'd actually bet on this being the true summit.

Lupe on West Galbraith Peak. Photo looks southwest.



Well, good enough for Dingo work, then! I'm ready for a break anyway, SPHP! Can we just hang out here?

Why, of course! Right after I shake your paw! Congratulations, Loop, on your successful ascent of another fabulous peak in the Brooks Range!

An eagerly accepted chocolate coconut bar and beef jerky were shared in celebration of the joyous occasion.

The views were incredible! Off to the south, the glaciers in the Mount Kiev region were disappearing among rain showers, making the silvery peaks in that direction even more mysterious.

Lupe atop West Galbraith Peak, with views of Lake Benchmark Mountain (left) and The Molar (5308 feet; center) beyond Galbraith Lake. Peak 7090 is at right. Photo looks east.



Skies were sunnier toward the east. Galbraith Lake and the Atigun River were in sight. Lake Benchmark Mountain (5050 feet) was the highest point north of the river beyond Galbraith Lake. To the southeast, Peak 7090 stood out, although both Peak 7250 and Wellsung Mountain (7580 feet) were more daunting.

To the northwest, a line of silvery peaks hid whatever was beyond it.

Although cloudy, conditions were near perfect – comfortably warm, and no bugs, despite no breeze at all. With beautiful sights in all directions and plenty of time to enjoy them, SPHP began daydreaming about other peaks Lupe could climb in this region someday.

Early enough, SPHP, and we're already here! Why don't we climb another mountain today?

Hmm, you're right, Loop! Should we pick out an objective?

How about that pointy peak off to the southwest, SPHP? It's even higher than this one!

You mean the one on the right side of that pass, Looper?

Yes! I'm almost positive we could climb it, SPHP.

I believe you're right, Loopster. Want to go for it?

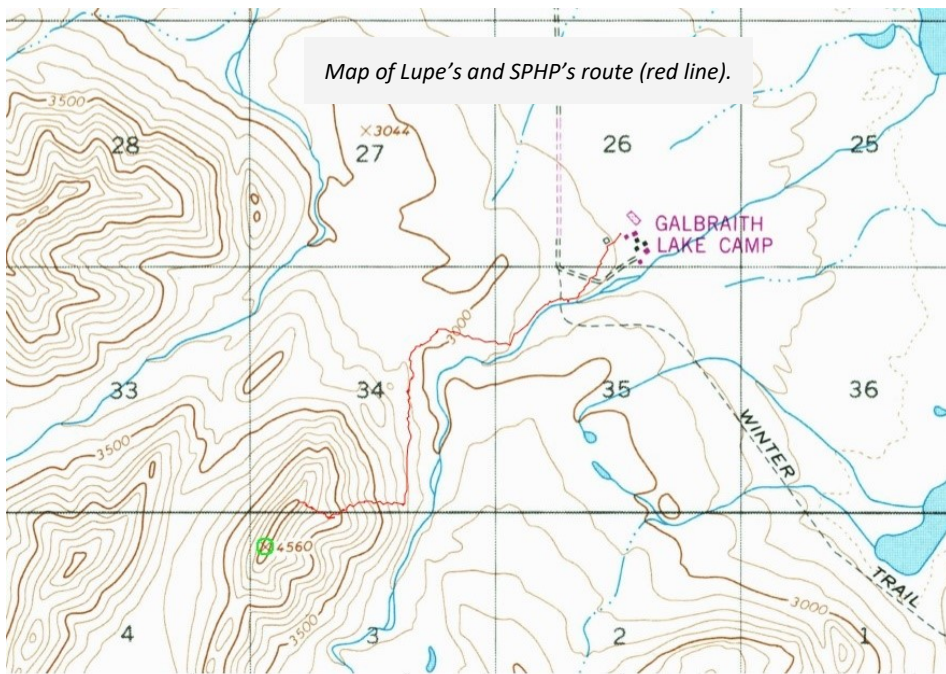
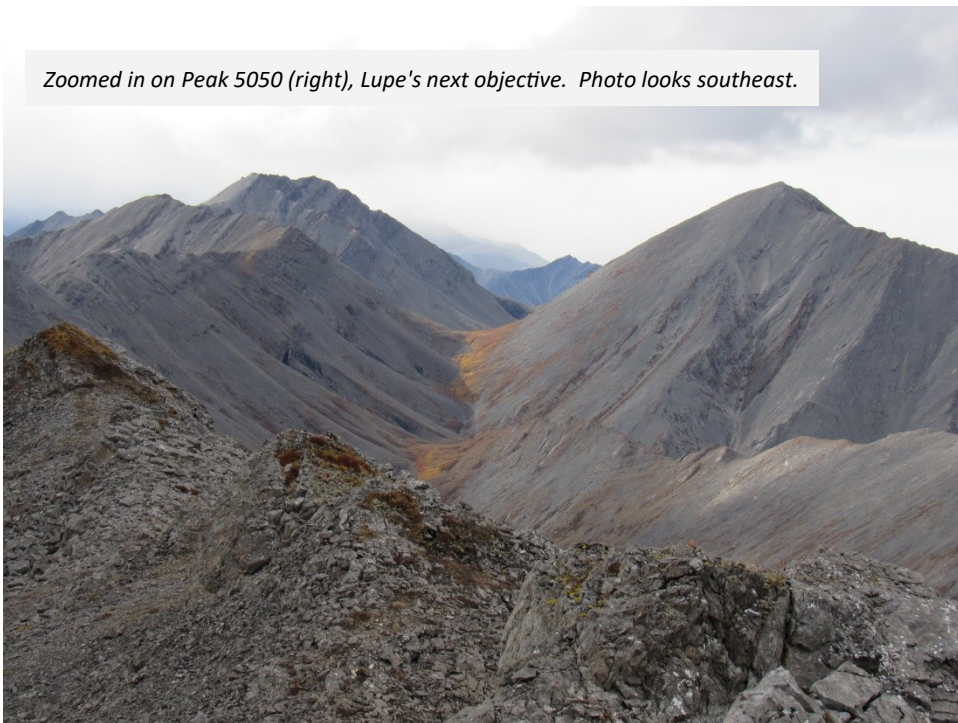
Not until my traditional summit hour is done, SPHP. West Galbraith Peak is an incredible place, too! Let's enjoy our time here. Then we'll go.

Fair enough, Loopster. Sounds like a plan!

Surrounded by splendor on all sides, Lupe relaxed on the soft tundra as her final precious minutes up on West Galbraith Peak ticked away. Meanwhile, SPHP enjoyed the fabulous Brooks Range views, now drawn especially to that magnetic peak off to the southwest.

Revised and condensed from an original post at adventuresoflupe.com.

Zoomed in on Peak 5050 (right), Lupe's next objective. Photo looks southeast.



Iodine Peak (5110 feet) and Tellurium (5341 feet) Traverse, Elementary Mountains, Talkeetna Mountains

Text and photos by Kaleb Notte



Iodine Peak:
63.13639,
-149.34259

[Ed. note: Borrowing on the theme of Antimony Creek's name, Shane Ohms has called the sub-range of peaks west of Honolulu Pass the Elementary Mountains. Iodine Peak and Tellurium are southeast of Hardage Creek.]

The easiest way to access these peaks is by crossing the East Fork of the Chulitna River, which I learned in July is very sporty, so I went out for an easier crossing in May of 2022 to hit these roadside attractions.

With no surprise, there are solid snow bridges to cross the river! It's much better than waist-deep wading on my previous trip climbing Vizzy Peak (6220 feet) [Ed. note: See the August 2021 Scree]. Once crossing the river, the travel is quick, as all the brush is buried in deep snow and a freeze-thaw cycle is holding strong.



Iodine Peak (left) and
Tellurium (right).

I ascended Iodine Peak via a ramp on the northwest aspect that went at Class 2 directly to the summit. I was only looking to bag this peak before the drive up, but I noticed a long, wide ridge that connected to Tellurium, so I decided to run over to this peak, too.

I dropped down the south ridge of Iodine and connected to the northeast ridge of Tellurium going at Class 2. On this section I was glad to have snowshoes, as I was post-holing pretty badly. Once on the summit, I took the west ridge down back to the Parks Highway, making for a nice Class 2 loop.

**An additional photo from
this trip is on page 14.**



The northwest ramp of Iodine Peak.

First Ascent of "The Trench Connection," IV, AI 3, 85°, 1700 feet, Main Tower (6910 feet), Mendenhall Towers

Text by Seth Classen
March 26-27, 2023



Main Tower:
58.53335,
-134.48714

Climbing the Mendenhall Towers in winter had been a dream of mine ever since the first time I saw them proudly basking in the winter alpine glow on a crystal-clear evening a few years earlier. Not surprisingly, there were other climbers in our small community who shared this goal and were biding their time for ideal conditions. The vision for the new line up the south face of the Main Tower came from local legend Dylan Miller, after climbing the Main Tower via a different route with Keagan Walker and me. During that climb, we realized that conditions for the approach were exceptionally good, and in Southeast Alaska, the approach is often half the battle (or way more).

The traditional approach to the Mendenhall Towers involves a grueling 3.5-mile hike to the glacier, which can take 2 to 3.5 hours, depending on the time of year, amount of snow, and your goodwill with the higher powers that determine the trail conditions. Then you wind your way through roughly 10 miles of glacier terrain, picking your way through a couple of icefalls, one of which can be particularly tricky and time-consuming. These difficulties usually present parties with a decision: either bring camping gear and double the load of gear they have to carry the whole way on their backs or decide they don't need any more time developing characteristics of a beast of burden and exchange their hard-earned money for a glorious ride in a helicopter. However, the winter of February and March of 2023 brought to us rare and perhaps unprecedented conditions offering an attractive alternative. A redeeming cold snap that had been depressingly absent throughout the vast majority of that winter finally froze Mendenhall Lake. After Dylan Miller, Cameron Jardell, Alex Burkhart, and I skied across the ice, we followed the track we had previously pioneered up the toe of the glacier. This allowed us to satisfyingly exempt ourselves from the usual vexatious approach, slightly reminiscent of the Tibetan monk tradition of Kaihōgyō. After gaining the lower glacier and wrapping around the second icefall, we took a shortcut through the third that only required us to boot-pack one short section, thanks to March's fat snowpack. Not long after continuing to make great speed up the rest of the glacier, we were able to see most of the route we wished to climb on the south face of the Main Tower. Sluff and spindrift were falling in slow motion down the cliffs under the hanging bowl that our chosen route climbed through.

The last leg of the approach was a 2000-foot elevation gain from the South Fork of the Mendenhall Glacier to the top of the

"The Trench Connection"
Main Mendenhall Tower
S. F.

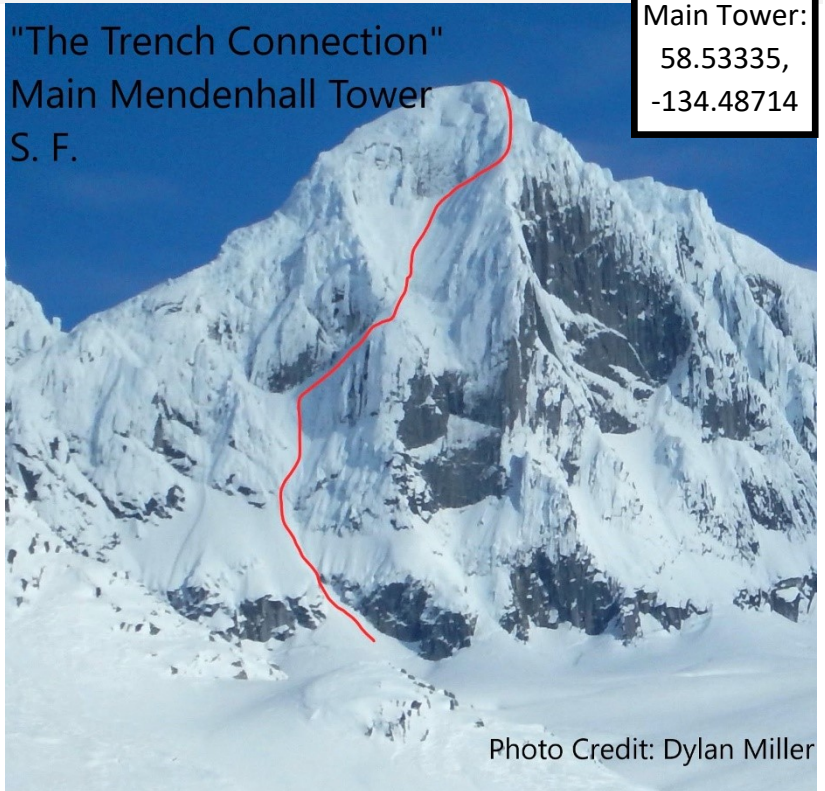


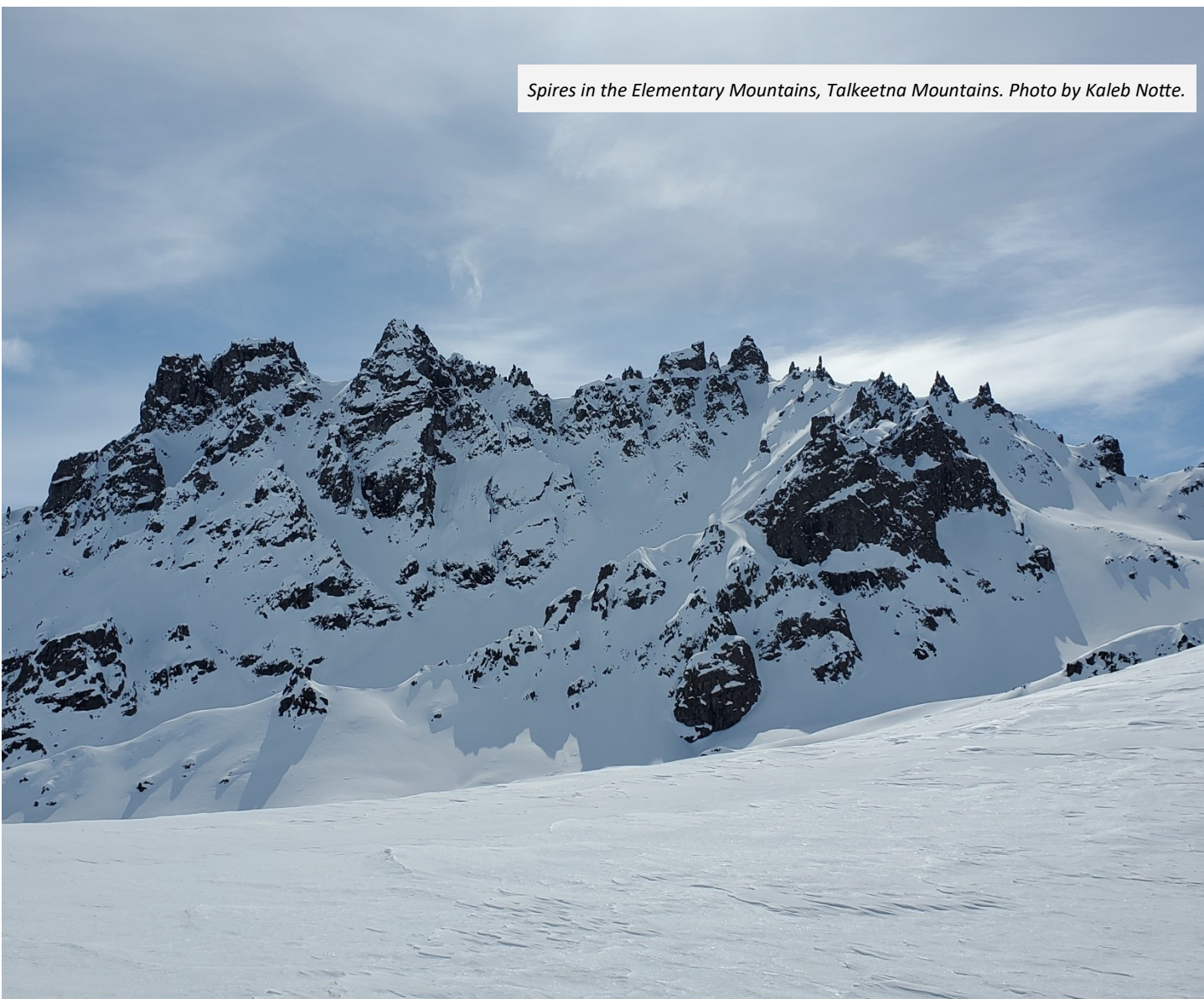
Photo Credit: Dylan Miller

upper apron. During prior visits to the towers, this section had been wind-scoured and icy, but this time we were able to keep our skis on the whole way, thanks to a few inches of new snow. An epic, orange-and-purple-fireball sunset made the slog go easier. We then sat at the base of the route, preparing hot drinks and scrumptious freeze-dried meals for an hour or so. The sun went down, and we committed ourselves to the dark arts of single pushing through the night. After using it successfully on several previous trips, we now fancied leaving the camping gear at home and bringing extra headlamp batteries instead. It was our experience previously that during the winter months, on a calm day, the sun's heat radiation can turn alpine snow into a sloppy, wet nightmare. So, we took a tip from Gollum and started hiding from the oppressive sun on all of our winter alpine climbing missions.

It's fair to say that I had some misgivings when we began the climb. I don't have an enormous amount of winter alpine experience to boast about, but it didn't strike me as a great sign that we began the 1,700-foot climb up the face by forcing our way through chest-deep powder with shovels. All the same, Cameron and I got to work, taking turns shoveling as Dylan and Alex came up behind. *"We'll just keep going until we wear ourselves out, then we'll ski home,"* I thought to myself. Luckily, the snow

improved dramatically as we reached the top of the initial snow cone, and the grade steepened. After scrambling over a short, steep step of ice and névé, we gained another snow slope that led us to a steeper section of 70-degree ice and rime followed by some lower-angle mixed-snow terrain. The next section was a right-trending snow ramp that Dylan had picked out from looking at pictures, and we were relieved to see that it would indeed give us access to the upper hanging bowl. The 75-degree traverse brought us to a comfortable bench with awesome nighttime views of the starry sky and Juneau's city lights. Things were looking good, and we continued up pleasant névé into the hanging bowl with awesome exposure. As we trended up and right, our precious névé turned into more deep powder, and we once again got out the shovel. We dug an expansive trench toward the upper right side of the hanging bowl. I suspect somewhere around this section is where Dylan drew inspiration for the route's apt name.

Completing the trench traverse, we then got eyes on the last big question mark of the route: a steep, rime-covered slab that didn't appear at first glance to be too difficult. Hands-on inspection revealed it to be protection-less and insecure, so we pitched it out. With that pitch taken care of, we cruised to the summit, enjoying more views of stars and a blood-red crescent moon. Dylan and I had already done the same descent a few weeks earlier, so it was easy to repeat, and we got off the mountain without complications. We got back on our skis and shredded the apron down to the glacier. The rest of the egress passed quickly, with gravity now pulling us home. We were back at the visitor's center a little over three hours after clipping into our skis at the top of the apron.



Spires in the Elementary Mountains, Talkeetna Mountains. Photo by Kaleb Notte.

Redoubt Volcano (10197 feet), Chigmit Mountains, Aleutian Range

Text and photos by Wayne L. Todd
May 10-12, 2022



Redoubt Volcano:
60.48512,
-152.7435



Tim Griffin and Meg Inokuma on the summit of Redoubt Volcano with Cook Inlet in the background.

I start videoing as this looks to be another good serac fall display. Seconds later, the powder blast jumps the safety cleft and barrels toward camp. Crap! Tim Griffin rushes out of the pooper for fear of being buried, Meg Inokuma goes for the tent and I leap on my spread out sundries, with back to the mountain. Gray light envelopes us as we get pelted with small ice chunks and snow particles for 35 seconds.

The quiet resumes as does the full sunshine. Everyone is present, and no one is injured.

Meg, Tim, and I flew in two days previously with Doug Brewer of Alaska West Air, the go-to pilot for climbing Redoubt Volcano. This trip has a more promising start as we exit the ski plane to knee-deep snow, unlike the previous attempt, which started with hip-deep wading. We are missing Carrie Wang on this round, as four days previous she slipped on ice and stood up with a trimalleolar fracture.

We also have the advantage of being landed at 4400 feet on the east side of the mountain, as opposed to near sea level in Drift River Valley to the north as on our first attempt. Between the previous attempts, a recent flyover, and the known current standard route, I know the route. Now it's just whether conditions, weather, equipment, accidents, and the human factor allow it.

Knowing I'm the weak link in this team, I volunteer for the middle of the rope, but pull the sled as we skin toward the high camp, which is only 1600 feet above and two miles distant. As the day warms and we gain steeper ground, my skins glob up badly and despite having a skin track, the sled is pulling harder than normal. This is much harder work than it should be, or am

I getting old for this? I frequently scrape the snow off and apply skin wax. No one else's skins are sticking and I get grief from Tim for having old skins. I keep applying more skin wax on subsequent stops until they finally slide as they should. And I'm now trailing both of them with the sled behind so they can make a sled-wide track. We eventually make the short distance to camp, but I question whether I can summit tomorrow, especially if I have more skin issues.

Camp is the same spot we've camped before with a large geological cleft between us and the East Face of Redoubt Volcano,



Wayne Todd on the east side of Redoubt Volcano.

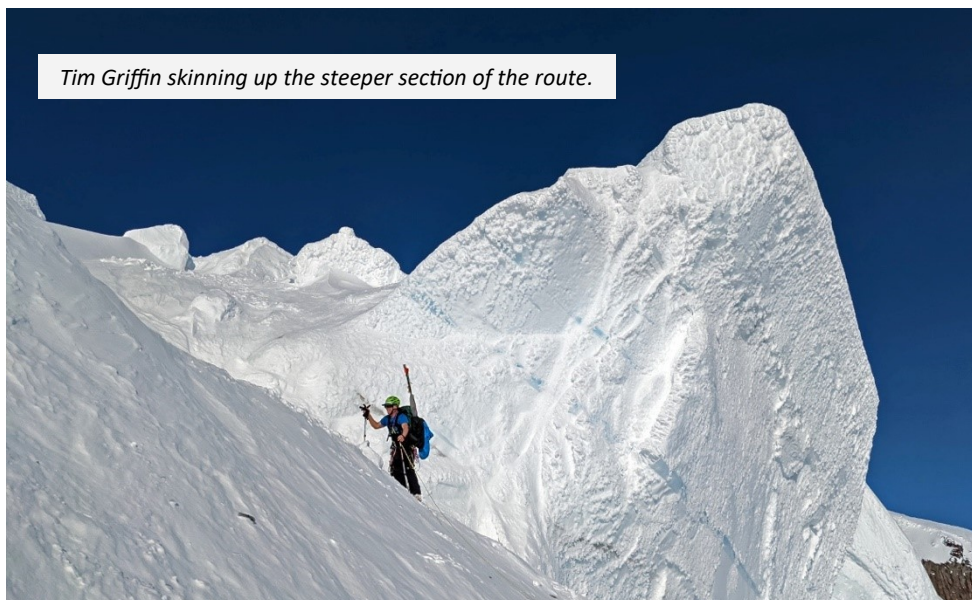
which is a 4000-foot face of hanging seracs. The cleft protects this spot from the occasional serac fall detritus. The views of this face are spectacular from camp, and exciting to witness gravity prevailing over friction as large ice masses tumble down. The opposite views of the snow-dominated Redoubt flank and myriad smaller peaks, gliding out to Cook Inlet, especially around sunset, are also gaze worthy.

We're curious what temperatures will be on this trip as the spot National Weather Service forecasts fairly cold temperatures, whereas mountain forecast models oddly warm temperatures. (If a peak you want to climb is on [mountain-forecast.com](https://www.mountain-forecast.com), you're lucky as their forecasts can be spot on.)

We settle in to our robust three-person tent with extended vestibule as the sun slides lower. It's obvious we aren't having any oddly warm temperatures.

Morning is also dang chilly but an 8 a.m.-ish start negates any real hardship. We skin north with Tim leading, me in the middle, and Meg on the tail. After passing a mildly distant serac face with fresh debris, we arc left and up, which is not intuitive, but is the way. On this steeper section, Tim's skins repeatedly blow off, causing angst and questions of our chances of summit success. After a forced break in which to warm up his skins, Meg leads out in the high serac-fall danger section. I'm very relieved to be moving again but also relieved to share skin issues. (We have no more skin problems on this trip.)

We enter more open terrain with a high, vertical serac buttress to our right, which we traveled below on our first Redoubt trip. That poses no risk to us, but we're still in a serac-fall zone from higher up, but at least in full view. I appreciate Meg's pondering

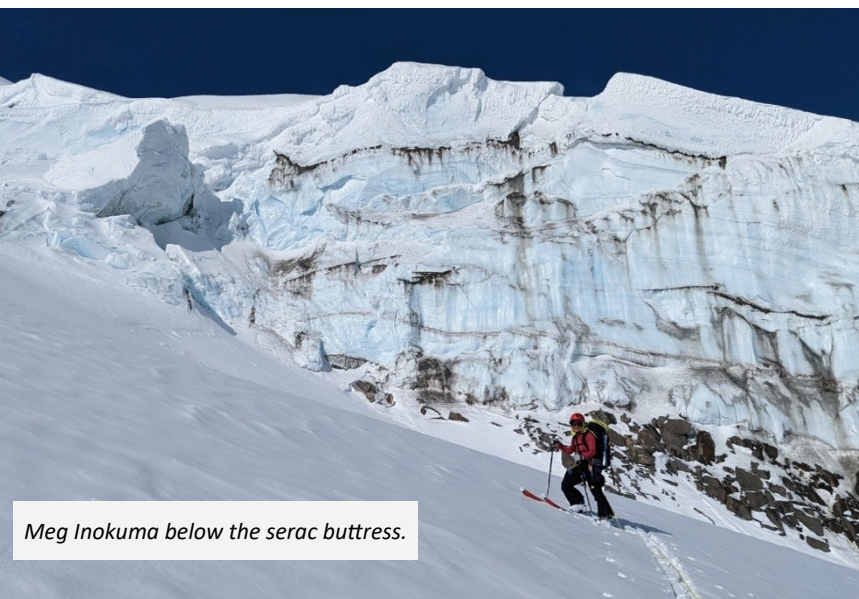


Tim Griffin skinning up the steeper section of the route.

switchbacks for some seconds for pictures, and views of the Drift River Valley, the bulk of Redoubt's east side, to Kalgin Island and beyond.

At a practical looking connector above the serac buttress, we transition to the north ridge over a modest crevasse, with Tim on point again. Regardless of leader, our pace has slowed as we're feeling a bit of altitude. With winds and parallel sun, we layer up, as it's dang chilly. We're now finally above all serac-fall danger, but it's definitely not as scenic, with the views now mostly being at distance. This section is hardpack snow, with mild sastrugi.

The snow-covered, but jumbled, caldera slowly gets more distant below us as the ridge narrows. When the terrain dictates very short switchbacks, we decide to ditch skis rather than use ski crampons. With real crampons, we walk up quickly flattening terrain, albeit slowly, as the snow softens and deepens (i.e., post-holing). And now, with little wind and more perpendicular sunlight, it's warm – really warm.



Meg Inokuma below the serac buttress.

Soon we're basking on the summit, Tim is down to a T-shirt, and we take turns getting belayed to the west to peek out over the presumably corniced top. Yahoo, finally on top after three attempts, with near endless "dang, there's a lot of peaks out there" views, and with spectacular weather, albeit disturbingly warm.

Alas, we must descend, but we have skis not far down. We quickly layer up there, as it's northerly and the sun is abandoning us to the west side. The caldera is now emitting a bit of smoke, which we can smell. As per usual, we de-rope for the descent, skiing fairly close to the up-track. Numerous crashes occur amongst the variable and solidifying snow, but even with a belay over the crevasse, we're back in camp in under two hours. We're

psyched, but tuckered, so we're "bagged in" early. Despite close quiet neighbors, I don't really sleep this night.

Another gorgeous morning greets us on the flanks of Redoubt Volcano. We are in no hurry to vacate camp, as we just have the

easy two-mile ski down to the landing area. Temperatures are warm enough and coupled with no wind, I've spread my clothing and gear out so as to make packing easy. I make a comment about how pleasant it is to do so, and within a minute, we hear another serac boom from high on the east face.

After the powder blast we take stock of our camp, and I extricate my still-recording phone from my pocket. Most importantly, everyone is fine, and the tent is still intact, but where is Meg's helmet? It's not around or below camp. No longer feeling so relaxed, we quickly pack up and make wide arcing ski turns down to the landing, looking for a helmet along the way. It is not found.

Having satellite-messaged Doug via the InReach, we have a couple hours to truly relax again in an area that is likely safe from serac fall or avalanche danger. He flies his Bush Hawk aircraft, which is a sweet plane, if you're just a group of three, to pick us up. Less than an hour later, we are flatlanders again in Nikiski.

Addendum:

Redoubt Volcano is a fairly high-risk peak to climb. Our route is the current standard route and probably the least hazardous possible. Most of the risk is from serac fall, but there are also massive crevasses and avalanche-capable terrain.

I shared our GPS track with a group that climbed Redoubt a week later. They reported serac debris over their ascent track.

With a strong team and no oppressive trail breaking, it is possible, and becoming more common for teams to summit in a day from the landing area.

If a climbing group still wants to camp, the area below the mildly distant serac fall, which is about a quarter mile north of our camp, is probably the least hazardous. Other than that area, climbers are exposed to serac fall from the edge of the landing zone plateau at 4600 feet until gaining the north ridge at around 8600 feet.

If you want a roughly similar trip, but with much less objective hazard, consider climbing Iliamna Volcano (10016 feet) instead.



Top: Camp below the east face of Redoubt Volcano.

Middle: The powder blast, as seen from camp.

Bottom: Tim Griffin, Meg Inokuma, and the remains of camp after the powder blast.

Bleak Peak (5430 feet), Western Chugach Mountains

Text and photo by Greg Higgins
August 23, 2023



Bleak Peak:
61.39823,
-148.93244



Looking south from the summit of Bleak Peak toward Bold Peak and the Eklutna Glacier.

I cycled out of the Eklutna Lake Parking Lot around 8:20 a.m. after a restless night's sleep. This was the only day given a forecast of sun for a while. I had explored this trip as a possibility several years ago on a hike up to Bold Ridge Overlook. That is the trip where a bear took two large bites from my bike seat making the homeward journey one where I mostly stood up on the pedals. There was a light mist on the lake and the only person I saw was an early-morning kayaker paddling along the shore near Yuditnu Creek. He was as surprised to see me as I was to see him. The cycling to the trailhead where I stashed my bike took 45 minutes. I broke this trip into stages and made guesses on my travel time for each stage. Stage One was the cycling to which I allotted one hour. Stage Two was the hike to the trail ridge above Sdaylent Creek, which I figured should take about two hours. I was feeling particularly good on this section after a good breakfast and made the 2,000 feet in an hour and 45 minutes.

Stage Three was crossing the creek and getting to an overlook point on the ridge south of Bold Creek. I reached a point just below 4000 feet in under an hour, which was my timeline. In Stage Four I then traversed east along the slopes leading to the upper drainage of Bold Creek. My estimate on this stage was off. I had planned an hour to reach deeply into the valley between Bright and Bleak peaks. After an hour I was well short and sitting at 4200 feet on the slope south of Bleak Peak. My stages were only done to get me to a point where I could de-

side on the summit. I liked my location so elected to go directly up the south ridge to the summit from my rest point. Less than an hour took me over the top, which is listed at 5430 feet and farther along the ridge to a higher point. I did not realize that I had actually traversed the summit until I looked at my Gaia map, which showed me at a point it listed at 5519. The summit massif is an elongated flat and rounded ridge running north to south. From my high point everything started downward. I reached it around 3:20.

From the top, which I left at 3:50, I took an east ridge route down. That ridge connects with Bright Peak's north ridge. I swung into the valley between the two summits and made my way back to my summit start point. Before leaving the top, I put on an extra pair of socks and my knee braces for the long trip back. My knees actually did quite well and the tighter boots helped relieve hot spots on the traverses going back. My timing was pretty good, as well. I got back to my bike at 8:45 with just enough light to cycle back to the car. Rain began to fall as I drove home. I could see this front coming while I was climbing and I was glad I chose today to go. Gaia listed the trip at 22 miles with half of that cycling. My total elevation gain, up and down, was around 5,300 feet.

The headwater country for Bold Peak is rather stark with rocky areas creating a debris-filled appearance. Both the drainages between Bleak and Bright Peak and the one leading south toward Hunter Creek Pass have this foreboding aspect. The water

in the creeks up here is absent and starts well down the valley, percolating out of the rocks. It reminded me of the lands of Mordor in a Tolkien novel. Perhaps Bright Peak should have been named Barren Peak? On Bright Peak's western slopes, I saw a large number of sheep that were clearly apprehensive about seeing me in the valley. The lone moose I ran into was on the return just after I left Bold Ridge Overlook. She was happy to give me the trail and went off into the brush. Leading up to that ridge was a ton of bear scat. The only berries visible in the scat were red and looked mostly dried out. There was no bear sign in upper Bold Creek. An enterprising bear would have found some fantastic areas of mountain blueberry on the southwest-facing

slopes. This species seems to be the only one that did well this year. I used them to supplement my scanty provisions.

The views from the summit were quite nice, especially in the changing weather and coming storm. Pioneer Peak from here looks like it has a triple summit. Bold Peak dominates to the south with Bashful Peak peering out from the ridge to its left. There were also excellent views of the Eklutna Glacier's West Branch, with Peril Peak and Mount Beelzebub dominating the skyline across from Bellicose Peak.

Additional photos from the Kigluaik Mountains trip report, page 6

Right: Dan Glatz, Theresa Pipek, and Renee Ernster viewing up the Grand Central River to Mount Osborn, above Renee at right.



Left: Renee Ernster and Dan Glatz on the summit of Mount Osborn.

Mount Sanford (16237 feet), Wrangell Mountains: A Reckoning

Text by Curt Pollock; photos by Brant Woodruff

March 20-30, 2021



Mount Sanford:

62.2134,
-144.12884



Curt Pollock heading back to camp at 7200 feet. Crevasse fall was at top of icefall at climber's right.

After three days holed up in the cramped tent at 7200 feet, we decided the climb was over. The forecast called for a two-day weather window followed by a week of “unsettled” conditions – code for more sub-zero temperatures, high winds, incessant avalanches rolling off the valley walls, and enough snow to bury the tent. I wanted to head down immediately, but my intrepid partner, Brant Woodruff, did not. He suggested we ski to 9000 feet, dig in, explore the upper mountain, retrieve our cache deposited days before, and then begin our retreat to the highway just ahead of the next storm. I reluctantly agreed. It *was* a beautiful mountain and we *had* invested piles of time, money, and energy into the project. Plus, my brand-new electric socks were in that cache.

It was the last worrisome crevasse at the top of the rollover before easy skiing to 9000 feet. The second trip through the icefall had been more stressful than the first, as the storm had significantly altered the snowpack. I was to the far side of the yawning crack when the snow bridge gave way. My plunge was swift, quiet, surreal. Hanging in space, my disbelief and shock quickly gave way to panic, as I estimated the distance to the surface and the leg-breaking trip to the bottom, should my partner screw up. Panic soon gave way to anger, as I considered how hastily I had probed the fragile snow bridge. I remembered assuring my wife I would return in one piece. “I’m

not dying in this @\$% crevasse,” I yelled, while at the same time trying to remember how much life insurance I had arranged for my dear wife should I perish in this damned hole. With amusement I realized I was still holding my probe in one hand and my ski pole in the other.

I was too wrapped up in my own predicament to think much about Brant or what he must be dealing with on the surface. I could only focus on going up and getting out. Stupidly, I had decided to skip donning my chest harness. I always kept Brant waiting, a reality that irritated me. No matter how hard I tried, I was always the last one to get ready. So, skipping the chest harness that morning was an easy decision. I now regretted it, as the pack pulled me over backward. After clipping my avalanche probe and ski pole to a carabiner on my harness, I wrangled my skis and ski crampons until they, too, were dangling from a carabiner clipped to the rope. Finally, after clipping pack to rope and wiggling free of that encumbrance, I began my ascent.

I made my way up the rope as far as I could, still eight to nine feet from the glacier’s surface. Ascending the rope was extremely difficult, requiring herculean strength, likely made possible only by my fear of dying, adrenaline, and a steady routine of weight training before the trip. The rope had bitten deeply into the lip of the crevasse, rendering continued travel under

Curt Pollock heading down and out the Sheep Glacier.



I suspect my reluctance had to do with pride. The crevasse fall was the big event I wish had never happened. Though we had trained for the hazard, I never really thought it would happen to us. I never thought it would happen to me. I thought I was smart enough, competent enough, and experienced enough to steer us clear of such hazards. Besides, Mount Sanford was only a Grade 2, and by Alaska standards, an easy objective. If I've learned anything at all, it is that my hubris was dangerous, my underestimation of Sanford foolish, and my will to survive remains fiercely intact. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I've relearned just how precious, fleeting, and fragile life is. Fortunately, I chose a capable partner – one who took his responsibility seriously and delivered when it counted. I quite literally owe Brant my life. So, take note, fellow adventurers: enter wild places with humility and make sure you are prepared, for the mountains don't care one wit whether you live or die.

Summary: There were just two of us and we skied in from the Chistochina River Bridge on the Tok Cutoff, down the Chistochina River, up the Copper River, then the long slog up Boulder Creek to Sheep Creek. We took Sheep Creek to the Sheep Glacier and went up from there. We made it to around 9000 feet before turning around. Weather hammered us and we bailed.

my own power impossible. I wondered if my life would end there – close, but not close enough. Brant's voice interrupted my resurging panic, and the shovel he lowered rekindled hope. I nervously excavated a trench on top of the loaded rope, reducing friction just enough to enable hauling. A few minutes later my head poked up out of the hole and I clawed my way onto the glacier's surface. I hugged Brant, did a little jig, and thanked him for saving my life.

Seven weeks had passed since I promised Richard Dennis, owner of Red Eagle Lodge, an account of our failed climb – one he might publish in the local rag. At 60, I'd like to think my word means something, that keeping a promise, no matter how small, is important. But I had not delivered and that fact bothered me.

Starting/ending point: Chistochina River Bridge, Tok Cutoff

High point: Around 9000 feet

Miles traveled round-trip: Around 70



Boulder Creek camp.

Peak of the Month: Peak 4970

Text by Steve Gruhn



Mountain Range: Mertie Mountains

Borough: Unorganized Borough

Drainages: Teddys Fork of American Creek and Oregon Creek

Latitude/Longitude: 64° 36' 54" North, 141° 32' 32" West

Elevation: 4970 feet

Adjacent Peaks: Peak 4810 in the Champion Creek and Mission Creek drainages; Peak 4410 in the Dome Creek, King Solomon Creek, and Little Champion Creek drainages; and Peak 3860 in the Cripple Creek and Wolf Creek drainages

Distinctness: 710 feet from Peak 4810

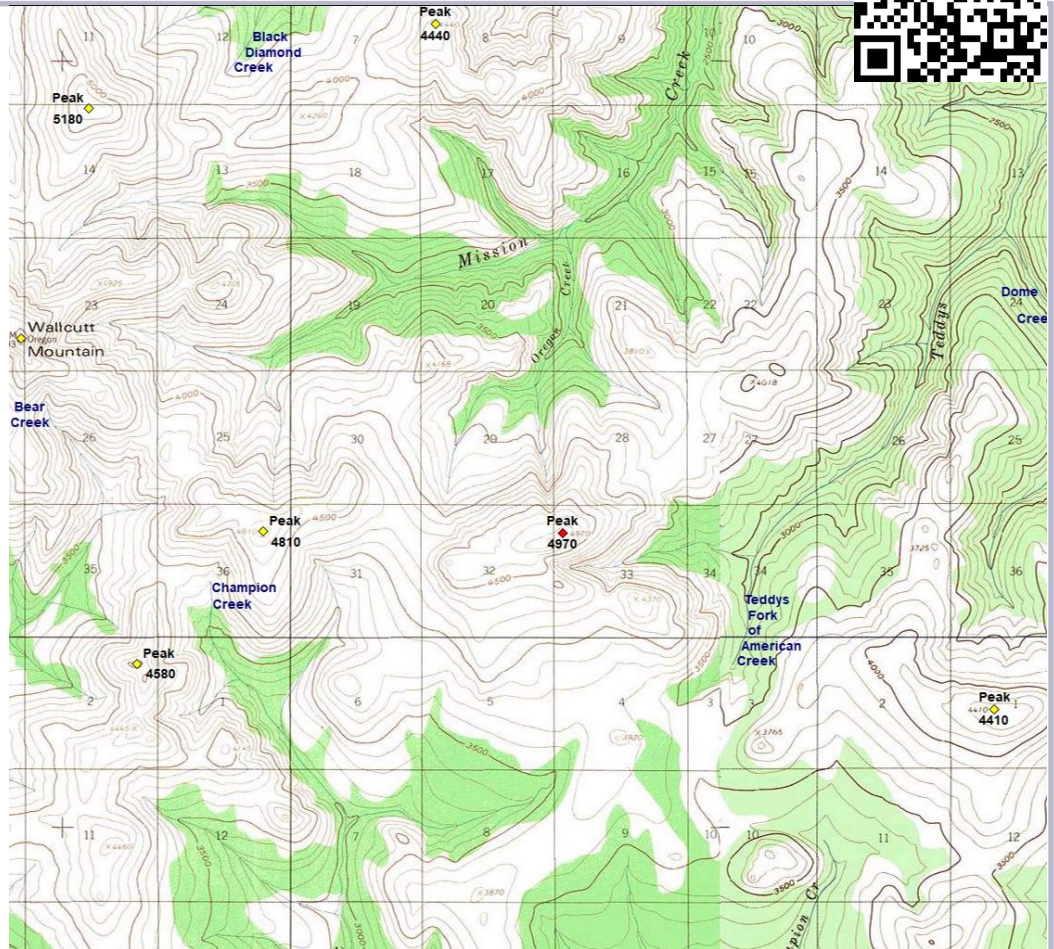
Prominence: 710 feet from Wallcut Mountain (5593 feet)

USGS Maps: 1:63,360: *Eagle (C-2)*, 1:25,000: *Eagle C-2 SE*

First Recorded Ascent: October 5, 1900, by Charles Stewart Farnsworth, Frank Lee, James Wickersham, and two packers

Route of First Recorded Ascent: Northeast ridge

Access Point: Eagle



On June 6, 1900, the U.S. Senate unanimously confirmed President William McKinley's appointment of James Wickersham as district judge for Alaska. On July 2 the Wickersham family began their journey northward, sailing from Tacoma. They arrived at Wickersham's post in Eagle on July 15.

In the fall Fort Egbert established a hunting camp near the head of Mission Creek, about 16 miles southwest of Eagle, and employed Frank Lee and Charley Webb as hunters to supply the post with caribou meat for the upcoming winter. Captain Charles Farnsworth of Fort Egbert invited Wickersham to join him on a hunting trip. On October 5, 1900, Farnsworth, Lee, Wickersham, and two packers set out with a pack train of five mules and five horses from Eagle. They crossed American Creek and then followed the divide between American Creek and Wolf Creek, a tributary of Mission Creek, over Peak 3815. They continued along the divide between American Creek and Mission Creek and ascended the northeast ridge of Peak 4970, descended its west ridge, and then dropped into the Mission Creek drainage, where they found the hunting camp in a small copse of timber near the head of a gulch on the south side of Mission Creek. Wickersham returned to Eagle on October 11, having harvested four caribou and 36 ptarmigan.

While it's possible that Farnsworth, Lee, Webb, or other soldiers from Fort Egbert previously traveled the same route from Eagle over Peak 4970 to the hunting camp, there is no known record of their having done so.

The information for this column came from Wickersham's 1900 diary titled "Daily Reminder" and from his 1938 book, Old Yukon: Tales, Trails, and Trials.

General Membership Meeting Minutes

January 10, 2024, 6:00-8:00 p.m. at the B.P. Energy Center, Anchorage, AK

- The meeting was opened by Vice-President Rebecca Marks.
- The 2024 Proposed Budget was presented and new Treasurer Dominick Curtiss introduced by President Peter Taylor
- The budget items were explained and discussed with the general membership audience in attendance.
- In particular, the topic of the need for insurance for the liability of the MCA Board members was discussed. This item was left in the budget, but tabled for further discussion.
- Funding for the huts including plans for expansion of the Mint Hut were also discussed in more detail. The idea of using windows of a type made for recreational vehicles instead of glass panes was raised for discussion with the Huts Committee.
- After no more questions were asked, Peter called for a motion to accept the budget. Dominick Curtiss seconded the motion. Members voted unanimously to accept the 2024 budget as proposed in *the Scree*.
- Next, Rebecca introduced our guest speaker, certified backcountry ski guide Joe Stock. Joe presented, with a beautiful slide show, an instructional overview of avalanche avoidance.
- Questions from the audience were answered and personal experiences were shared. His book on the subject, 300 pages, is available for purchase at local outdoor gear shops and bookstores. If out of stock, it also may be ordered at local bookstores.
- The meeting adjourned and then tables and chairs were reset to original order. The room was left by the 8 p.m. closing time.

Submitted by Matt Nedom.



Looking across the Matanuska Glacier to Amulet Peak, 8290 feet, in the Central Chugach Mountains. The first ascent was in 1968 by Vin Hoeman, Grace Hoeman, and William Babcock via the south ridge. Photo by Frank E. Baker from Lion Head.

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Annual membership dues: Basic ("Dirtbag") \$20, Single \$30, Family \$40

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

The Scree is a monthly publication of the Mountaineering Club of Alaska. Articles, notes, and letters submitted for publication in the newsletter should be emailed to MCAScree@gmail.com. Material should be submitted by the 11th of the month to appear in the next month's *Scree*. Captions should accompany all submitted photos.

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

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: Annie Shane—membership@mtnclubak.org
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Renee Ernster low down on the south ridge of Mount Osborn. Photo by Dave Hart.

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