

89

MOUNTAINEERING CLUB OF ALASKA

SCREE

Editor  
Gwynneth Wilson  
1215 - 8th Avenue  
Anchorage, Alaska  
BR 4-7833

Secretary  
Helga Bading  
c/o Jonas Bros.  
700 - 5th Avenue  
BR 7-7822

Vol. 2, No. 12

September 1960

MEETING, MONDAY, OCTOBER 3

The Mountaineering Club of Alaska will meet on Monday, October 3 at 8 p.m. in the Willow Park Recreation Hall. This is the Annual Meeting and there will be election of officers: a president, vice-president and secretary-treasurer; also one member of the Board of Directors. In order to vote dues must be paid for the 1960/61 year. Dues (\$5 per person, \$7.50 per couple and \$2.50 for juniors) may be sent to Helga Bading - address above - or brought to the meeting.

Howard Schuck has provided a first-rate program. The officers of the U.S. Army group who traveled by foot across Raven, Eagle and Eklutna Glaciers last September and then by weasel across Eklutna Lake and up by foot over Eklutna and Eagle Glaciers to Eagle River in March will speak to the MCA. The talks will be illustrated with official movies and slides. The Editor detects an ulterior motive on the part of H. Schuck and suggests that all members attend to find out how each would feel about traveling by foot over any of the glaciers. The MCA provides no weasels.

CLIMBING SCHEDULE

October 1-2: Paul Crews (BR 4-4731) will lead a group of Explorer Scouts up Pioneer Peak. He would welcome help but this is FOR MEN ONLY!

October 16: Gwynneth Wilson (BR 4-7833) will conduct a group for a moderate distance along the Johnson's Pass Trail. This will be in the nature of an exploratory trip to see what the condition of the trail is and to estimate just what sorts of trips could be made on it and in the future. We'll leave at 6 a.m. from 1215 8th Ave. and drive 65 miles to the Trail. Expect to be back before dinner.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 3 MEETING

Alaska Rescue Group: Have you thought of joining the Rescue Group? You don't need to have experience in extracting bodies from crevasses ... in fact we can use people of all talents, as long as they are sincerely willing to help. No membership fees! For example we need "callers" and the only requirement is the availability of a phone and your willingness to stick to the phone for a couple of hours in cases of emergency. Housewives to the front! The Rescue Group has use for volunteers of all occupations and ages. If you want to join, contact Helga at BR 77822 or Janie Swanson at BR 78942.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 3 - ANNUAL MEETING

Reminder: The November meeting will be devoted - programwise - to the showing of slides from any of the numerous trips this past season which members would like to show. If you have slides from a trip or several trips which you'd like to display telephone Howard Schuck at 114-SK 32115 (Duffy) or 114-SK 29448 after 5 p.m.

MOUNT SPURR - 11,070' - Another "First" for MCA

September 2 - 6

by Helga Bading

Standing at the edge of Cook Inlet two years ago I got my first glimpse of Mount Spurr. I was thunderstruck. "It's a Phantom", I thought and wished very much to have a chance to climb it. Since then I have gotten to know the Phantom as a landmark of our city. On winter evenings it stands pitchblack against a fiery western sky. Who can be a climber at heart and not wish to make friends with it? On Labor Day weekend six of us did. We are now looking back on a memorable experience not only because of its unforgettable highlights, but also its many frustrations: waterless camps and gloomy retreats, hairy hairpin ridges and hair-raising traverses, and miles of most miserable moraine.

Friday at 4:30 p.m. under a cloudy sky Bob Bailey, Chuck Metzger and I arrived by floatplane, piloted by Art Antonsen, two miles east of Chakachamna Lake. We were eager to reach the 2800 ft. plateau above us. I had been promised there was no bush, but promptly we got hung up in alderbrush, so thoroughly that the second plane load flying over us (Erik Barnes, Gregg Erickson and Burt Puchtler) vainly searched for a sign of their companions.

-2-

Once out of the devilsclub we climbed up a creekbed, though at spots the clay and scree were so hard we had to chop steps! As darkness fell, despite lack of water, we made camp. Our three partners reached camp long after dark, guided by Bob's shouts and flashlight signals. But they had carried no water. One of the two Indefatigables, Gregg, went back (about 1 hour round trip) to fill the canteens. But he was plenty scared in the steep creekbed, for we had seen many a beartrack on our way up.

Saturday morning: No rain, but lots of clouds. Burt, with his camera, sneaked up on a large black bear and presently we saw both of them sprinting across the berrypatch .... in different directions.

Looking towards our mountain we had two choices. One ridge was steep, but close. The other gradual but - oh - so far away. We chose the steep one. Soon the battle with the "Most Miserable Moraine" began. It's not really a moraine, rather glacier ice covered with scree with lots of narrow ridges and deep canyons. After many Ups and Downs (mostly Downs, sliding backwards) we reached the ridge and painfully wound our way upwards, stepping into Burt's huge footprints in the scree. But the higher we went the steeper and more rotten became our route. Soon a rope was necessary and it occurred to us that what we were climbing wasn't even rock. It was lava, at its worst. And what if we couldn't make it, laden as we were with heavy packs. It was not too late to turn. Quickly we made a "One-Eighty", headed down and towards the RIGHT ridge.

Only a mile of 'Most Miserable' lay between us and the goal. Two and a half hours and many steps later we reached its edge. By a small lake we flopped to the ground, pooped. It was 5 p.m. Supper (soup) and hot tea revived the fighting spirits. One last effort of the day brought us 300 ft. higher to the top of the ridge which we reached in total darkness. Camp was waterless and very windy, but we had a good headstart for the long slog ahead.

Water from the canteens provided the scanty breakfast. By 7 we had saddled up and climbed upwards under clouds and strong winds. At 11 o'clock, six thirsty climbers reached snowline (about 5000 ft.) and settled for a tea-making session. Thoroughly chilled but well fed we again climbed up, only to find that the ridge now petered out into a series of gendarmes. We decided to traverse around the west side. But there was nothing solid underfoot and a thousand feet of plain air below. The ledge was narrow and dropped off sharply, making the traverse hazardous and slow. It took more than an hour to reach solid glacier and safety.

Once on solid snow we roped up, and with crampons on our feet gained altitude rapidly. At 5 p.m. (10 hours on the road) we felt our strength ebbing. We found the ideal campspot for the two Logans at 7500'. While camp was erected and soup put on, the Indefatigables climbed 300' higher to the ridge above camp. It grew cold in a hurry, only 8 degrees now. Clouds vanished and there - pink in the evening sun - rose the peak above us, immensely beautiful and inviting. Gregg and Burt returned with the news we would have to descend at least 500 ft. to reach the summit plateau. It was steep, but it would "go" they said.

A full moon rose above Cook Inlet. Its shine was reflected in the water, and the lights of Anchorage glittered below, so very very far below. We were "on top", quite literally.

At 2:30 a.m. the alarm went off. (It WAS my idea, but we had all agreed). What with having to melt snow for breakfast and thawing out ourselves it was 5 o'clock before we were roped and cramponed and ready to go. Just as we reached the ridge above camp a warm pink glow slowly descended down the peaks of Spurr and Redoubt to the south. And then the first sun rays struck, and we felt warm and happy and confident. The peak would be ours.

To descend down to the plateau was no easy matter. Bob went ahead, anchored by Erik, and by sheer good fortune (climbers call it experience) found the only possible route, an avalanche chute. At the bottom it was all ice, but we managed to crampon down it facing the slope.

Breaking trail across the high plateau was hard work. Progress appeared painfully slow at that altitude. Beside us to the north we admired an awe-inspiring peak which we promptly christened "Spurr Rowel". It looked forbidding. I decided we'd better leave this one for Paul to climb and turn our thought toward the real Spurr. At 10:30 we reached the foot of the actual summit ridge. Erik belayed both Bob and myself over an icy pitch, then stood up to leave. When we turned we saw him up to his armpits in the crevasse he had been sitting on.

The top of Mount Spurr has interesting crystal formations, apparently caused by sulphur steam escaping from various vents. The largest of these incessantly sends forth lemon-yellow steam and a murderous smell. Bordered by 100 ft. walls of ice crystals we wound our way up to the summit. It was 12 noon, sunny and slightly windy. All tiredness disappeared. But there was little time to linger and enjoy the glorious view and feeling of achievement, for we had only 26 more hours before our appointment with Art and the plane. After 20 minutes of rest and photography we left for the downward journey.

A floatplane came circling overhead, wiggling its wings. None of us knew the plane and we wondered. Meanwhile, clouds had risen from the valley, enveloping our campsite and shrouding the steep wall of the ridge. Religiously we followed our tracks in 100 ft. visibility. At least, we had no chance to get scared of the ascent that lay ahead. It went better than expected. Only 45 minutes of step chopping and panting brought us to the top, and by 3:30 we were back in camp.

Over tea and grape juice (bless Gregg's heart) we decided to break camp as fast as we could and get down to warmer climates. Quickly we climbed and skidded down the glacier, thence across the two "hairy" traverses. Our previous footsteps had frozen and despite weariness nobody slipped. After that there was only pumice and rocky ridges left to negotiate. But also only one more hour of daylight.

While it was snowing and blowing softly, skies behind the Aleutian Range turned red. In front of our eyes lay more beauty than one can hope to soak up on a single day. Darkness found us camped at the edge of 'Most Miserable', with the luxury of a campfire and a whole lake from which to drink. Stars appeared and the mountain we had just made friends with stood serenely in the moonlight. As we watched in wonder, long greenish beams of the aurora borealis rose and danced above the mountain, making it appear like a fire spitting volcano! (Ed. note: which, of course, it is)

Tuesday was sunny and warm, but all the mellowmess of the fall day was anti-climax now. Erik found a reasonable way across the 'Most Miserable' (only 2 hours of it). Only an hour ahead of the airplane schedule, we forded a swift mountain creek and walked toward the lake ..... immeasurably happy despite aching shoulders and feet.