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MOUNTAINEERING CLUB OF ALASKA  
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"CARIBOU YEAR"

FEBRUARY 26th

SYDNEY LAURENCE

We expect a good audience for Tuesday night, February 26th at 8 p.m. in Sydney Laurence for THE CARIBOU YEAR, one hour color film on the life of the Caribou, presented by Dr. William O. Pruitt, Jr. of Fairbanks. As you know, tickets are \$1 and the Club stands to gain financially if we spur attendance at this event, which is a few days after the FUR RENDEZVOUS, and is co-sponsored by the Alaska Conservation Society and the M.C.A. If any members need more tickets for advance sales, they can telephone Scott Hamilton at Broadway 7-8975 (L St. Apts.). News releases, posters, radio announcements, and other media are not as effective as word-of-mouth and advance sales, - so get to it!

S.D.H., Jr.

The Executive Board of the Mountaineering Club of Alaska met on February 1st to congratulate John Dillman on assuming the Presidency following the resignation of Ed Fisher and to pick Dave Duncan to serve as Vice-President.

MEETING NIGHT

Since there has been a mix-up regarding the use of Willow Park Recreation Hall on the 4th Tuesday of the month, will you please indicate your choice of MCA meeting night by checking either the 3rd Monday or the 2nd Tuesday (the only available days) on the enclosed card and dropping it in a mail box.

THE ASCENT OF O'MALLEY PEAK

by Ted Shohl

On January 26 an MCA party led by Rod Wilson set out for O'Malley Peak. Because of the unusually warm weather during the preceding weeks the pre-climb briefing at Dave DeVoe's house left a wide choice of equipment open from Korean boots to bathing suits! The party consisted of Rod Wilson, Dave and Don DeVoe, Don's friend Steve, Kim Degenhardt, Dale Hagen, Walt Coin and Ted Shohl. The group convened at the bottom of Clark's road at 6:45. The morning was very foggy, with road visibility at times under 50 yards, so that the auto approach was not without interest. In spite of an icy road surface, the two noble Land Rovers had no trouble in climbing to the Clark's turnoff. The leader decided against taking the cars farther up the powerline valley, very wisely as it later developed.

At 7:15 packs were shouldered and we set out, crossed the powerline valley and climbed a gentle gully to a ridge overlooking the Cook Inlet just at sunrise. The fog had been left below shortly after starting and the view was all that could be asked. The snow was scanty with a glazed and breakable crust which held most of the time but occasionally gave that old trapdoor effect. Walt developed equipment difficulties and elected to return to base. After a short break for pictures and candy, the march up the broad northern approach to the peak continued. This was a gentle rise of about two miles, and the going was good. We reached the snowslope leading to the ridge at about 10:30. The slope was hard and well packed, with a slant (my estimate) of about 35°. Four pairs of crampons were distributed among the seven climbers - a neat trick. After a short lesson for us novices by Rod on what to do after a fall until the St. Bernard comes, we started up. A rope was not required owing to the smoothness of the out-run and level bottom of the slope. No major problems developed and we reached the ridge about 11:30. From here a long, gradually rising traverse along the ridge in blazing sun and rapidly softening snow led to the summit. I was glad to get there, as it began to recede at an increasing rate during the last half hour, but I finally caught up with it.

The weather was perfect except for low ground fog, and any number of suicide peaks were visible. After a leisurely lunch we all signed the guest book and started down. The main feature of the descent was a long sitting glissade down a snowfield on the west side of the peak. This seemed to save a lot of walking, which appealed to me. On the return hike we found a jeep which had attempted to continue beyond our parking place. It was hopelessly snowbound and its fossil remains should be of interest to future archaeologists..

Since every ascent must have some identifying feature, it should be noted that this was the first successful winter climb of O'Malley Peak.

THE SNOWS OF RABBIT CREEK

by Bill Davis with an assist by Ruth Schmidt

On Saturday, January 26, an intrepid group of cross-country skiers attacked the snows of Rabbit Creek. Consisting of Bill-Nancy Davis, Tom-Harriet Klester, Ruth Schmidt, Bill Morris, Marge Prescott, Marguerite St. Palley, the group was led by the internationally famous downhill and cross-country ski mentor, Paul Crews, Sr. After rendezvousing at several places in Anchorage and along the Seward highway, we headed for the hills. In spite of fears that the Davis' VW might not make it back out, we pushed the cars as far up Rabbit Creek as the road was open.



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After parking the cars, pointing them downhill so they would at least be facing home, and fiddling around while everybody got organized, the group struck out up the road. It seemed best to continue along the road to gain access to the upper part of the valley. Although very icy in places, requiring a creeping pace, the route was straightforward and pleasant.

It's true, too, that we were in no particular hurry. The weather was most favorable and the views intriguing since there was a layer of fog over the Inlet and along the shoreline. The peaks across the Inlet were visible and Paul took time to point them all out to the uninitiated. All of these things conspired to make the up-valley portion of the trip leisurely and enjoyable.

At one point Paul went ahead of the group to reconnoiter the route. Those of us chugging along behind were amazed how quickly he outdistanced us once he took it in his mind to zoom ahead; but before long he returned into view and waved us on along the road.

Just before lunchtime, our glorious leader revealed his secret plan. On the return portion of the adventure we would leave the road, swing along the south-facing ridge (to have the benefit of the sun) and then plunge back down into the valley when the time seemed appropriate. Nobody seemed to object to his ideas. We located a cleared place for lunch and after much animated conversation, stove cursing, and general food exchanging, we were ready for the return portion of the trip.

It began just as Paul had planned. Then, as we pushed along the side of the hill, the harder climbed higher and higher while the softer just angled along, viewing snow bunnies and ptarmigan in their white (snow white) coats. Naturally we met some bushes and on a couple of steep, icy slopes some slips (out of control) occurred. A short practise session with ski poles as brakes took place! FINALLY Paul had to stop the lower group until the higher ups came down. Then, just as planned, we dropped into the valley and back onto the road. Whooah, sort of, with benefit of some alders.

Then, of course, we were back on familiar territory. So down the road we came, over the same old icy patches - now somewhat wetter because of the warm temperatures - slipping and sliding and generally having a whee of a time. It had been a good day and a good trip. And when we got back to the cars, the apprehension some folks had experienced earlier in the day proved unnecessary (they were afraid they might be stolen) --but the skis were still on the racks right where we had left them!

PORTAGE LAKE

February 3

by Dale Hagen

It was too icy at Alyeska for my Head Standard skis, which seemed a little too dull to give enough edge control. So for Sunday, instead of skiing, I tried to find someone to go with me down to Portage and make the trip over to Whittier. Portage Lake was frozen, and it was possible to drive into the parking lot, and it was not raining. In spite of these favorable conditions, I was unable to find anyone to go along. I went alone, because I wanted to go.

The ice on Portage Lake was variable in thickness. I found one place where it was only three inches thick, but in most places I tested it, it was more than six inches thick. At the near zero temperature of that Sunday morning, the ice was freezing more and it was cracking occasionally from internal stresses. It was somewhat disconcerting to be walking across the ice and to have it crack under foot with a sharp noise followed by a deep rumbling like distant thunder. It took approximately forty-five minutes to hike across the lake on crampons.

The face of Portage Glacier is high and formidable when seen from close up. As the glacier presses outward, it is continually breaking up the lake ice in front of it. For two hundred feet the lake ice is piled up chaotically, and in the cold still morning air, this continual breaking up produced a snap, crackle, and pop like a huge bowl of Rice Krispies.

I think it would have been possible to climb directly up the glacier face had there been two people. It would have taken some ice screws and some direct rope tension, but from the rubble pile, where a large ice cave had collapsed, to the top side of the glacier, it was only ten or fifteen feet. But I couldn't make it alone.

In the summer I have climbed the rock along side the glacier and that way gotten on top of the ice. I decided to try it that way again. It is necessary to climb up and then traverse across to get on the glacier. Well the rock, although it is solid, is rounded off, and it lies in a way which offers very few hand or foot holds. In the summer it is possible to stick on the rock by friction, but with winter snow and ice this is no longer possible. I climbed higher and higher, moving very carefully and with difficulty, looking for a place to traverse. After a couple hours and up about four hundred feet and well above the glacier, I finally had to admit to myself that I could not go higher, could not get across, could not go back down, and had taken too many chances in the meantime.

I located a fragmented quartz vein on a ledge above me and I worked an ice piton into it using my ice axe. This was the only piton I had, the rest of my hardware were ice screws, and since I had to get down as far as I could in one rappel, I had to tie one end of my rope. I clipped on and slipped down all of the hundred fifty feet of length. At the end of the rope was a steep but solid patch of snow. There were other snow patches below that one, and I was able to safely crampon down to the ice on Portage Lake.

I walked backward to get a perspective on this recent scene. My hundred fifty feet of Gold Line looked somewhat irrational just dangling alone across the rocks. But never mind, I'll recover it.