

SCREE

monthly publication of
MOUNTAINEERING CLUB OF ALASKA
Box 2037, Anchorage, Alaska 99501
Editor: Vin Hoeman, 2500 Glenwood

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APRIL MEETING: Ben Crawford Memorial Park, 3rd & Eagle, Monday 14 April at 8:00 pm
Plans for the program are still in progress.

TRIP SCHEDULE:

5-6 April OPEN WEEKEND - Pick a peak, gather a group.

12 April WINNER CREEK Valley ski tour - From Alyeska's Winner Creek Ski Trail ski up this drainage possibly to Berry Pass, elevation 1950 between it and the Twentymile River drainage. Eventually it is hoped that this trek may be extended to "Bagg Pass" 2730 which divides the Western Chugach from the rest of the range and forms a glacier-free route to Lake George. No circuit of our Western Chugach by this route has been done. Ldr. J. LETHCOE 272-4401

19-20 April GRAVEL CREEK, Northwestern Chugach. If Matanuska River ice still permits crossings, a first ascent of a 7000-foot peak in the Amulet Peak area will be attempted. Intermediate and experienced climbers only with full winter gear. Leader BILL BABCOCK, office phone

26 April SUICIDE PEAKS - The northern peak, 5065, is the main goal, but we will also climb the southern one, 5005, if time permits. KAREN COURTRIGHT 272-3803.

3 May BIRDSEYE RIDGE 3505 - This easy ridge separates Bird and Indian Creeks and it is two miles to the summit with the register in the big cairn. A longer hike to 3855 and 4650 summits has several times been suggested, but the 500-foot drop is not known to have been crossed, easy though it appears. LEADER NEEDED.

11 May EAST TWIN PEAK 5873 - By east ridge after ascending good trail from Lake Eklutna (see 30 Hikes). Southern exposure should offer the first snow-free rock of the summer season and the top needs a good cairn and register.

Leader: TOM MEACHAM 688-2671.

Distribution of this issue of SCREE to all members of the MCA and to the Alaska State Library.

MCAers Storm Byron Peak

17 March 1969

Bob Spurr

Under clear windless skies in cool temperatures, Jim and Nancy Lethcoe, Tom and Coral Loy, Chuck McLaughlin, Larry Swanson, Peter Vlasveld and I made the 2nd annual MCA winter ascent of Byron Peak via its central north ridge. After giving showshoer Larry a 15 minute headstart from the Portage Lake parking lot, the rest of us followed on skis at 7 AM. Three miles later we abandoned both skis and snowshoes below the lower icefall, ascended roped through its center by walking up the bottom(?) of a shallow snow-carpeted crevasse, and climbed over a six-foot ice wall to junction with last year's route. The upper glacier was drenched with wind-hewn snow, and we followed the crest of a snow dune before climbing to the saddle of the northeast shoulder. A recent ice avalanche off the upper icefall had strewn sizable chunks some 200 yards down glacier. After stepping lightly across a snowbridged 'shrun, we ascended the shoulder to the onset of the short north ridge. This ridge, under many more tons of snow than were encountered on our '67 and '68 climbs and consequently steeper and sharper, provided 600 vertical feet of enjoyable belayed climbing on consolidated snow in windless conditions. After gaining the subsidiary NE point, we contoured through the deepest snow of the day before ascending the final 500 vertical feet to the summit. All three ropes were on top by 2:30. Prince William Sound and the foreground peaks of Carpathian and Isthmus were resplendent before a sea of Chugach and Kenai mountains. The descent was uneventful although a two-foot-wide crevasse had opened across our route in the lower icefall. After skiing and snowshoeing lower Byron Glacier and the Portage Lake flats, we arrived back at the cars about 6:30 PM.

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Mountaineering and the Snow Machine - A Dissenting View

Tom Meacham

"Snowmobiles epitomize everything that is wrong with the affluent part of American society: more money and more free time than people know how to spend intelligently; a mania for machines, speed, and noise; a distaste for physical exertion; indifference to the destruction of natural beauty; and the total incomprehension of even the possibility that other human beings enjoy silence and solitude."

from a letter to Life Magazine, 21 Feb. 1969

Few Alaskans would argue the fact that the snow machine is here to stay, as a vehicle for work and recreation. But its merits, when compared to more traditional forms of winter sport, are the subject of this discussion, particularly where mountaineering and motor mushing collide. Does the gas-powered sled have any place in our sport, a sport which has seen prodigious feats of mental and physical stamina performed by the human machine at the peak of skill and conditioning? Do the sound, speed, and smell of motor mushing have an integral role in our sport, a sport which is renowned for its solitude, its kinship with the outdoors, its confrontation with the elemental forces of nature? With few exceptions, I believe the answer to these questions is no.

The mountaineering purist would argue that any mechanical overland conveyance which is used in the conquest of a peak is improper and unethical. While this statement may be extended to ridiculous length, it is generally accepted in Alaska that many peaks require a fly-in by bush pilot. An overland conquest of such a peak by human motive power is especially significant, and more "pure" (and presumably more self-satisfying) than flying in. The Alaskan perspective is significant, however, since in Colorado or Wyoming anything less than a cross-country hike would be treason. The key in these cases is accessibility, based on the end-of-the-road concept, with the normal automobile.

Since the airplane is a seemingly accepted means of mountain conquest in this state, does it follow that the snow machine is also? I do not think so and feel that even the airplane has been, and will continue to be, misused by persons whose desire

to reach the summit overrides their appreciation of the basic values of mountaineering and their respect for the mountains they conquer. With the easy availability of snow machines, this fact may become even more characteristic of motor mushers.

A 13,000-foot peak which is climbed for the first time by landing at the 12,000 foot level and hiking to the top before lunch makes a travesty of the annals of first ascents. Similarly, a first ascent in which a valley approach with 6000 feet of elevation gain is made with a snow machine, followed by a short sprint on foot to the summit, is a rejection of the fundamental ethics and spirit of mountaineering.

However, the use of a snowmobile to ferry supplies to a base camp (in lieu of air transportation perhaps) in preparation for long days or weeks of actual climbing would be viewed by most as a fairly legitimate use of the gas sled. Even so, the purist might well argue that the airplane is more satisfactory than the snow machine from an aesthetic viewpoint, since it hops over the virgin wilderness before alighting, instead of racketing and thrashing through it. It seems clear though, that the amount of elevation gained, and the manner in which it is done is essential to any evaluation of the propriety of snow machines or other artificial conveyances; if this elevation gain is an integral and essential element of the climb, rather than merely the means of access before the true mountaineering begins, then the only ethical means of locomotion should be by shank's mare.

The preceding statements have been directed mainly at the achievement of first ascents by mechanical means. Does the snow machine have a place in the conquest of peaks already climbed several times by more strenuous and "pure" methods? I believe the answer here again is generally no, unless one wishes to reject the mountaineer's virtue of empathy with nature, in the mistaken belief that the end justifies any means. O'Malley Peak or Vista Peak is a strenuous but satisfying combination of ski-touring and climbing, a trip lasting from dawn to dusk on a short winter day. Would the quality of wilderness contact be as great if the touring portion were replaced by snowmobiling? I believe it would be lessened to a great degree, if it were present at all. MCAers' contacts with motor mushers on the South Fork of Campbell Creek, at Snowbird Mine, and in other popular locations have graphically illustrated the difference in depth and quality of communion with nature; it is frightening to visualize the snowmobilers' obvious disregard for the serenity, fragility, and beauty of the out-of-doors becoming an accepted part of the MCA philosophy.

The question of snow machines is only a part of the larger crisis faced by the remaining wild and remote areas in North America. Galloping technology is clubbing recalcitrant wilderness into submission, for sport and profit on all sides. The nearly unlimited ability of dune buggies, jeeps, trail bikes, and snowmobiles to transform unspoiled territory into a reasonable facsimile of Spenard Road at 5pm is evident. And it can be done on a budget, in your spare time.

The national forests have long been an outlet for this desire to overwhelm nature with speed, internal combustion, and a minimum of sweat and finesse. Recently, several national parks have encouraged snowmobile use, as a means of relieving the press of summer crowds. Alaska is the last really significant area in our country where the confrontation between Yankee ingenuity and the forest primeval has not already been decided in favor of the Yanks. Should the MCA by word and deed, (or by tacit acceptance), add its weight to the forces now pressing for a quick conquest of nature? Or should we orient our underlying goals toward the preservation of significant areas of our state from exploitation for quick gain or cheap thrills, in the hope that a rational land-use policy may be evolved before all reason for such a policy disappears? Though the weight of MCA opinion is small, and other outdoor groups are more properly suited for political combat, it behooves the membership of the Mountaineering Club of Alaska, individually and as a club, to define for itself the basic philosophy for which the club stands. The vital questions concerning conservation or exploitation of public lands are being asked now. If they are answered in favor of the exploiters, there will be no need to ask them again.

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Reluctant Rebuttal

Vin Hoeman

The truck ~~could be passed~~; I asked for this criticism and now must answer. However, let's speak of facts, one of which is that American wilderness that all who read this love is fast disappearing, and another fact being that the various off-road mechanical conveyances are hastening the demise. It is a mistake though, to reject all use of all such tools for this reason. We conservationists should watch for destructive practices everywhere in our travels and see what we can do to stop them, but we should not condemn a tool which is only that, or try to categorize and characterize the diverse users of the tool.

The snow-machine is perhaps less destructive to the land in itself than any other off-road vehicle including the airplane. Properly used, it can open whole new fields for exploration impractical to visit otherwise and without impairing the scene for the next visitor. For mountaineering, however, it is subject to severe limitations, and that is part of the attraction of mountains, their intractability to vehicular ascent. No mountain in Alaska has, to my knowledge, been climbed to its top by snowmobile. The example of a 6000-foot elevation gain in the preceding article must be fictitious, it has yet to be proven possible in Alaska. Similarly, I know of no first ascent of a 13,000-foot mountain by landing at 12,000, but the point is there is no motivation to do these things. The honesty in which one admits to the extent in which machines are used is important. As to the significance of mountaineering accomplishment, most people believe there is none and they may be right. At any rate, one is apt to enjoy the mountains more if he speaks of associations there rather than conquest.

In closing may I say that snow-machiners do much harm if they purposely give offense, but non-machiners also do harm if they purposely take offense where none is given. I grit my teeth as a jet plane goes over, but it helps to fancy the pilot and passengers don't like the noise either. Let us work to do away with noise and fumes, not jets and snowmobiles.

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KIMBALL and the HORN MOUNTAINS

Vin Hoeman

Grace and I met Jerry Kreitner, Dan Osborne, Jim Pray, and Clem Rower of the Alaska Alpine Club at Paxson and drove through Gakona to the Chistochina River Trail but darkness fell soon after we started for Mount Kimball with 2 snowmobiles pulling all but the drivers on skis, plus an eskimo with about 250 pounds provisions. We all wore packs as well. About 15 miles in we camped, the next day making 10 miles to Slate Creek with one machine, abandoning the other broken down. This was 10 miles from the highway, elevation 3700, a gain of 1800 feet from where we left the trucks but the skiers all skied part of that. I might add that all but Clem had walked either in or out on previous attempts on Kimball. In the succeeding days we relayed our gear on skis up the Chistochina Glacier to a highpoint of about 6800 on 11 March, but, as on the best of the 7 previous attempts, heavy snowfalls precluded our reaching the ice cliffs that are the crux because of avalanche danger. We left a cache by the igloo that has miraculously survived since the August attempt and came out, glad not to be dependent on pilots and their craft for our transportation.

The machine we'd had trouble with was left at Gakona for repairs. Grace and I retrieved it the 22nd and the next morning rushed it from Gunsight Mountain Lodge, Grace ski-journing behind as usual, up over the 3750 pass and down Crooked Creek to Albert Creek beyond Table Mountain. We tried to get up this over Belanger Pass, but failed, so we returned to South Creek and rushed across South Lake and the little one beyond it. The machine would not cross this pass either and we left it at about 3675 elevation, crossing to Alfred Creek on skis and webbs, down its easy overflow to the big northern tributary that comes in at 3350 and up this. We too soon left it for the ridge of our Horn Mtns' highpoint thus condemning ourselves to crossing many leaps, but there were interesting clam-like and "oystershell" fossils in the sedimentary rock.

At 3pm we reached the 6418 summit which from the map is the highest of the Horns. Not far down there was sheep sign and 500 feet below the summit Grace found a much-weathered but recognizable piece of tissue paper, possibly airborne but more likely sign that hunters had sought their quarry on these slopes. We built a cairn on a boulder near the top but didn't have material for a proper register. Tentatively we'll call it "Big Horn", the next one (BM 6414) which looks like it "Little Big Horn" and the 5604 third major summit of this group "Little Horn". It was dark and cold by the time we reached the machine and we had trouble with lights on the way out, but we'd once again demonstrated that new one-day ascents are possible by using such aid.

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ODDS and ENDS

Dave Johnston & Sal were married in Montreal on 5 March.

Bill Babcock and Karen Courtright made the first winter ascent of Pioneer Peak, 6398, on 16 March having picked a weekend with good snow conditions. This was the first successful ascent of Pioneer's main peak since 1966.

Vin Hoeman is going to Dhaulagiri, 26,811, (6th highest mountain) with a group led by Boyd Everett, 8 of the 10 members of which have had Alaskan-area expeditionary experience. They hope to do a new route, the Southeast Ridge.

Dub and Harry Bludworth attempted a first winter ascent of Granite Peak, 6729, in the Talkeetnas 8-9 March and got quite high, but were stopped by gendarmes on a SW corner variant of the standard route which hasn't been climbed in summer either.

Grace Hoeman has volunteered to take editorship of SCREE for the two months her husband is likely to be absent.

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