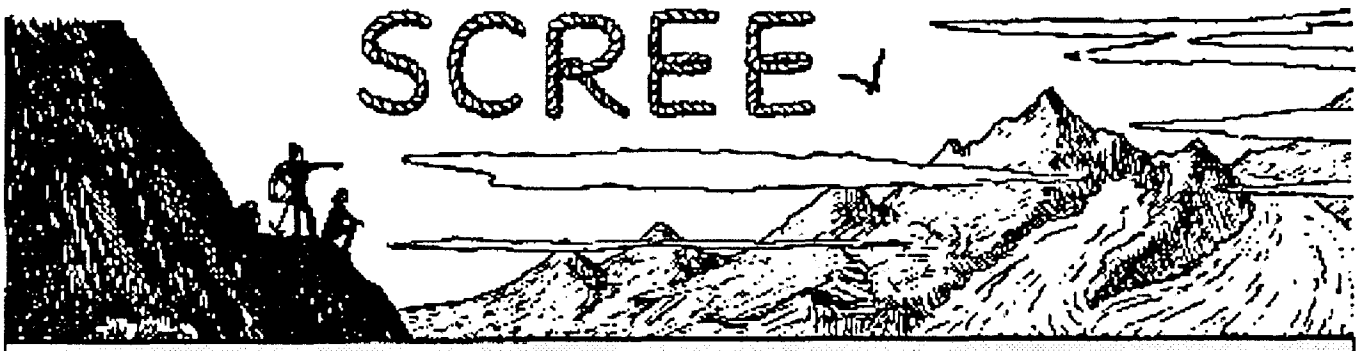

JULY1995 *A Publication of the Mountaineering Club of Alaska, Inc.* Volume 38 Issue 07
Box 102037, Anchorage, Alaska 99510

JULY MEETING

Wednesday
July 19th, 7:30P.M.
Pioneer Schoolhouse, 3rd & Eagle Streets
Downtown Anchorage

Picnic: This month we will have our summer picnic. The club will have burgers and dogs and drinks. Please bring additional items, such as potato salad, beans, chips, watermelon, etc.

Film: No slide show this month. James promised a film.

HIKING AND CLIMBING SCHEDULE

Jul 15 Matanuska Peak
Chugach. Class D. 6000 foot elevation gain. Much of the route is on the Matanuska Peak Trail (not over Lazy Mountain). Long day.
Leader: Diane Sallee 746-5286

22 Denali State Park Anniversary
Byers Lake Campground, Mile 147 Parks Hwy. 10:00 A.M. Byers Lake loop 5-mile hike. Class A. 12:00 picnic and live music. 1:00 P.M. rededication ceremony. A 3-day hike of Kseugi Ridge, is possible, if people are interested.
Contact: Mat-Su Parks Office, 745-3975 or Diane Sallee 746-5286

BRING YOUR CARD

Your MCA card shows you signed the waiver. If you can't find it, or don't have one, remove the back page of Scree and fill out the waiver for the trip leader. Thanks.

Aug 25-28 Hut Construction
Contact Mike Miller: 243-6521

TRIP REPORTS

Deborah

by Mike Miller

Doug Geeting set Dave Lucey and I down on the Yanert Glacier about 1:00 p.m. on April 28, miles from where we wanted to be. The week-long storm had just cleared and low clouds still hung in the valleys. About an hour later the clouds cleared and we could see the top of our objective: the West Face of Mt. Deborah.

Deborah is one of the group of mountains (others include Hayes, Hess, McGinnis, etc.) that makeup the eastern extension of the Alaska Range. The mountain was first climbed by Fred Becky and group in 1954 via the Southwest ridge (AAJ 1955, p. 39). Vern Tejas and party made the first ascent of the West Face in 1981 (AAJ 1982, p. 137). Only ten ascents of the mountain, by various routes, had been made as of 1993.

Early the next morning we left our camp at 6,000 feet to carry a load up the first icefall. Dave led up frozen melt-water and we continued up the left-hand margin of the icefall against the rock, to the top of the icefall at about 7,500 feet. We descended at 10:00 a.m. for our camp. The second trip up through the icefall was now in the sun and we quickly climbed the fixed line as the ice was melted and rocks were bombarding us regularly.

We headed up the second icefall intent on making the high camp this night. After climbing about 500 feet, we were stopped by an overhung wall of the icefall, 15 feet high. We explored right into the icefall and left onto seracs without success. After a 15 hour day, we dropped down 300 feet and set camp.

The next morning we picked up our cache and headed up again. I led the overhang and we finally established above the second icefall. We set high camp at 10,000 feet after another 15 hour day.

The next day was easy: drop 2,000 feet, collect the cache, return to camp, climb 250 feet up a snow ramp, cross the bergschrund, climb 300 feet of ice and set a fixed line. By 2:00 p.m. we were basking in the hot sun. By 6:00 we were fed and watered. By 7:00, in bed. And by 12:00, still wide awake! Thoughts preyed on our minds about tomorrow's climb: worries, doubts, fears, plans. We set the alarm for 3:30 a.m.

At 4:00 we woke without hearing the alarm, dressed, ate and were out by 6:00 am. We easily sidestepped across the bergschrund and climbed the 60° fixed line. We alternated leads: one person would lead on belay, set an anchor and tie-off the rope. The second would use an ascender on the fixed line for self-belay and one ice-tool to climb to the anchor. He would then lead the next 300 feet on belay. In the couple of snow pitches through the rock band we were able to use slings and pins for pro. The rest of the face was 60° - 70° ice, front pointing. The weather was beautiful as the sun hit the face at noon and we were climbing in only our shirts. We could look down on our camp and could see Gary Bocarde, Chris Natenstadt, and Tom Church who carried their cache up to our campsite this day.

We continued up, generally left-traversing the upper face to arrive beneath the huge gargoyles of rime-ice rising above our heads 60-100 feet. Suddenly clouds came in over the summit from the east and snow started to fall. We couldn't see the 300 foot rope-length the last two pitches to the summit. Now, on the summit, with the wind rising, we untangled the 7 mm rope to rappel. After 14 hours of climbing the ten 300-foot pitches to the top, we started descending at 9:00 p.m. Just under the base of the gargoyles, I saw an old, white fixed line frozen into the ice. I pulled about ten feet out, cut it off and stuck it in my coat. I suspect it is from either the first ascent or the second (by Brian Okonek, 1975).

We continued to rap. The wind picked up. The snow fell harder and wouldn't stick to the ice, so it continuously slid down the face in great spindrift flows. Landmarks of rocks and ice we barely recognized to help guide us down to the only place we could cross the bergschrund. Traversing rappels from the ice screws into the windy, snowy and now, darkening night increased the tension we felt. Our gear iced up from all the snow and the wind. Goggles were useless. We had to find the way down as the same way we came up, but all our anchor stations and dinner-plates were covered by all the new snow flowing constantly down the face.

Finally, we found a rock with a crack that I had pounded a pin into on the way up - we were saved! Now we knew we just had to go straight down about five more raps. The wind picked up to about 60

mph and finally we had to dig out headlamps to see in the dark. We used slings on some rocks to rap from. We had to find the "keystone" rock that marked our way across the bergschrund. We couldn't see it from above, especially since visibility was limited to about 50 feet. I threw the ropes down, and for the first time, I had no trouble pulling up slack to fit them into my tuber - the wind was blowing so hard straight up the face that it carried the ropes up. Without looking a gift-horse in the mouth, I rapped down and found the "keystone." Dave rapped the last time into the bergschrund and fell across it to the ramp below. I did the same across the bergschrund; as my right leg hit nothing, I pushed off with my left and launched myself over and onto the ramp below. We were safely off the face! It was now about 2:00 am and the sun was starting to rise. We stumbled down to camp to find we had a visitor! A piece of ice about three times larger than our tent fell off the ice wall above camp and slid to within 30 feet of our tent. A couple other two-foot diameter pieces were laying up against our tent! Nothing we could do but get some rest, and get out of there ASAP.

We slept until late in the day and met Gary and party coming up to be our neighbors. As the storm died off, we were up early to get out. The lower icefall had changed dramatically and rappelling was difficult. With relief you can't imagine, we arrived on the lower glacier. Now all we had to do was wait for the plane.

Five days later, after another storm, that plane arrived.

Mt. Blackburn's North Ridge

by Dave Hart

"Hey, Paul! Could you do me a big favor and toss me a knife out here in the latrine?"

It was May 15 and Paul Barry and I were hunkered down at 13,300 feet, deep in the Wrangell mountains. Two days prior we had briefly stood on the 16,390-foot summit of Mt. Blackburn before racing an encroaching lenticular cloud back to our high camp where we were now waiting out this storm. Unfortunately, I had eaten some contaminated food after returning from the summit. My guts were in turmoil, and my current messy predicament necessitated the immediate use of a knife! Oh, how I relish these memories of expedition climbing.

On a clear day in the Copper River Valley, Mount Blackburn towers above everything. My first view of it came several years ago while mountain biking and hiking in McCarthy for an entire sunny week. Ever since then I have wanted to climb to the top and experience this same view, but from the summit.

Paul Barry, Mikki Hand, Randy Kinney and myself all met up in Chitna, the starting point for our climb, on Saturday morning, May 6. Paul Claus of Ultima Thule Outfitters, was to fly us to 7,000 feet on the Nabesna Glacier that morning, but the weather was not cooperating. Just as we were resigning ourselves to indefinitely camping out on the airstrip waiting for this storm system to clear, Paul arrives in his bright orange Beaver.

"Would you all prefer to wait out this storm back at the lodge?" he asked. Let's think: freeze dried food and camping on the Chitna airstrip (Where the Hell is Chitna, anyway?) or Eleanor's incredible home cooked meals at the Claus' beautiful lodge DEEP in the heart of the Wrangell/St. Elias National Park. Hmm... It took us all of two seconds to begin loading his Beaver with our two weeks of gear.

It was three days later before the weather cleared enough to fly us into the mountain. During that time we relaxed, hiked, took saunas, jumped on the trampoline, slept, read, wrote and ate incredible food - all of which contributed to our successful climb. To Paul's credit, he twice tried to fly us to the mountain during those three days. It's very reassuring to have a safe and competent pilot trying so hard to get you where you want to go. He was equally diligent in retrieving us from the mountain.

I went in with our first load of gear in his super cub at 6:00 AM on May 9. As we were preparing to land, Paul asked if I wanted him to fly a cache of our gear up to our next camp at 9,700 feet. There was a huge plateau up there and it would only take a few minutes, he said. What a deal! We landed at 7,300 feet and left the essential gear there. After reloading the cub with about 80 pounds of food, fuel and clothes, we took off for the plateau. In less than five minutes, we were back at 7,300 feet. "That was the easiest carry you'll ever make!" Paul said with a big grin on his face.

Two and a half hours later, Paul was back with Mikki, Randy, Paul B. and the rest of our gear in his Cesna 185. Our climb had begun.

Maybe there's no validity to this statement, but from my past experience with Wrangell Mountain weather patterns, both good and bad, they seem to

come in four to five day cycles. Coincidentally, there was a group of three Girdwood climbers camped at our landing spot who had been stormed in there for the last five days. If this theory held true, we might have enough time to get to the summit before the next storm system came through.

The route from base camp is straightforward and relatively safe until one must pass below several small active seracs at 9,000 feet. As we were loading our packs to single carry up to 9,700', we saw one of these ice cliffs calve off and send a powder blast across our intended route. I could have thought of better omens with which to begin our climb! We left our 7,300-foot base camp at noon and, moving steadily, we reached our super cub cached gear by 4:00 PM.

The next morning we set off with half our gear hoping to carry to our 11,300-foot camp on the north ridge. We skied to the 10,000-foot col and began working our way up the ridge. We encountered steeper snow and ice than anticipated, with sections reaching up to 50°. Unfortunately, we had only one second axe between the four of us. We all would have felt more secure with our favorite short ice tools. The two most sustained sections were each one full pitch long: the first just above the col and the second just below our 11,300-foot camp. Each was a mixture of ice and snow which we protected with running belays using snow pickets and ice screws. The most technical section was a 10-foot vertical cornice encountered halfway through the day. Paul later remodeled this obstacle during our descent by shoveling a two foot wide staircase down through the snow face. Mountain climbing engineers apparently do have their utility.

After six hours of climbing, the four of us cached 28 man-days of food, fuel and gear and started our descent. A combination of rappelling and down climbing got us to camp by 9:00 PM. That evening, Mikki and Randy contemplated remaining in camp while Paul and I made a quick dash for the summit. They felt the route was a bit more difficult than they had expected. They didn't feel up to the challenge, especially with the more difficult section yet to be seen. We decided to sleep on it, and not rush any decisions that night.

The next morning, both Mikki and Randy still felt they would be happier waiting for Paul and I as we tried a quick alpine ascent from here. If things went well, we would return in only three days.

Paul and I left our 9,700-foot camp I at noon on May 11. By 2:30 PM we were digging out our campsite at 11,300 feet. Only two and a half hours to travel the same ground that had taken six hours the day before. A broken trail, a known route, and Paul using Mikki's ice axe helped speed up our progress.

From our camp II, we could look over the edge of the ridge and see our last camp 1,600 feet below. We could even hear Mikki and Randy as they yelled greetings to us.

Later that afternoon, we saw what appeared to be two Anchorage friends of ours, Brad Gessner and Kurt Bauer, as they made their way up from base camp to camp I. We were surprised when they continued past our first camp and began climbing the north ridge. Anticipating their weary state, Paul and I had a tent platform and hot drinks awaiting their 10:30 PM arrival. They had gained over 10,000 feet that day, the last 4,000 feet of which were by foot.

May 12 dawned again beautifully clear and sunny. We could see 16,237-foot Mt. Sanford rising 40 miles to the north. To its left was the distinctively flat volcanic dome of 14,000-foot Mt. Wrangell. We saw what appeared to be steam plumes near its summit, but this could have just as easily been a small cloud.

Brad and Kurt were going to take a much needed rest day while Paul and I hoped to make high camp on the gentle slopes above 13,000 feet by early afternoon. We left by 10:00 AM and made quick progress up the hard packed slopes. Occasional crevasse bridges reminded us that we were still on an active glacial ridge. The route was more sustained than the day before, so we used our four pickets and four ice screws as running belay anchors for much of the day. The crux was a seventy degree, although it seemed even steeper, eighty foot ice pitch. This would have been an enjoyable lead in Eklutna Canyon with two ice tools, but here at almost 13,000 feet our heavy packs, awkward mountain axes and hollow ice conditions greatly taxed our strength, endurance and nerves. Although less steep, the final thirty feet involved hollow and brittle ice climbing protected by a tied off Russian titanium ice screw. It was not the most confidence instilling piece of protection I'd ever placed.

The final few hundred feet of 45°-50° snow slopes above the ice pitch seemed almost trivial, although the consequences of a fall here would have proven equally as dire as lower.

We reached the welcome gentle slopes above 13,000 feet and began searching for a suitable spot for our camp III. The slopes were so hammered by wind that we had to continue up to 13,300 feet before finding a huge crevasse bridge with soft enough snow in which to dig our final camp. It was 5:00 PM and we

were both physically and mentally taxed, but nothing that a good night's rest wouldn't cure. This was our fourth consecutive good weather day since landing six thousand feet lower. We went to sleep that night wondering how many more we could expect.

Paul and I each favor an early departure on summit day. The discomfort of cold mornings is soon forgotten after setting out from high camp. But more importantly, an early start might make the difference between summitting or not.

Luck did not seem to be with us on this day. We woke at 4:00 AM on May 13 only to find that our sunny calm skies had been invaded by 40-50 mph winds and the accompanying spindrift. The ground blizzard afforded us minimal visibility. With only 11 bamboo marker wands remaining, we certainly weren't going to reach the summit today! We were thankful we had spent the previous afternoon building bombproof snow walls, even though the weather had looked so very promising.

"Hurry up and wait" was the slogan that came to mind. Fortunately, we only had to wait about four hours before the wind lessened in intensity. Our digital wind speed gauge showed the speed to be 20-25 mph. More importantly, the visibility had substantially improved. The sky was blue again, although the ridge above still showed obvious snow plumes. We decided we'd try for the summit fast and light, both in agreement that at the first indication of worsening visibility we'd rush back to camp.

We left high camp about 10:00 AM. To protect ourselves from the wind, we were each wearing all our clothes except our down parkas, and no flesh was exposed. Although the ambient temperature was above zero, the -40° F wind chill greatly increased the risk of frostbite.

Progress was slow but steady. The wind was incessant, yet never worsened. Cresting a rise at 15,000 feet we were met by a very disappointing sight: the summit was only one mile distant, yet hidden by an obvious lenticular cloud only 1,000 feet above us. It seemed very unlikely of us topping out this morning, but we decided to see how high we could get. It might be our only good day before running out of our four days of food and fuel back at high camp.

A surprising thing happened. The higher we climbed, the less defined the lenticular cloud appeared. It seemed to be dissipating before our eyes. We hurried as quickly as our oxygen starved lungs allowed. We reached the final summit ridge at 16,000 feet and it seemed we were approaching the lower limit of the lenticular cloud overhead. Below us, visibility remained clear, yet windy. Above, the roaring wind and bleak gray sky provided a surprising contrast. We were tip-toeing a fine line, and were prepared to retreat at a moment's notice. But, we thought, we just might make it.

Fifteen minutes later, we were wandering across the flat summit plateau together, searching for the true summit. Every high point gave view to another seemingly higher spot somewhere else - sometimes where we had just come from. After a few minutes, we decided we had finally found the true summit after three and a half hours of hiking. To the south we could see the storm intensifying and moving our way. A couple summit photos later we were literally jogging back across the plateau on our retreat. In less than an hour and a half we were relaxing back in high camp, having descended out of the encroaching lenticular cloud. Our 3,000' summit day's gentle four mile long ridge provided considerably easier terrain than the prior two days' climbing.

Brad and Kurt arrived at high camp from below shortly after we did. They, too, were surprised to find such a difficult crux on this unassuming route. Fortunately, they were a bit more prepared and each had a second ice climbing tool.

The five day cycle of good weather seemed to be coming to a close. The snow and wind picked up that night and kept all four of us in camp, with myself suffering food poisoning, the entire next day.

Two day's later, May 15, the weather improved and Brad and Kurt went for the summit about 7:30 AM. Paul and I had only a bit of food left, so we decided to descend shortly thereafter. We had no idea that waiting to descend with Brad and Kurt would have added another week to our trip, as it did them while enduring two additional storms.

Paul and I rappelled the ice pitch and used running belays while down climbing the steeper slopes. Far below, we could see Mikki and Randy cutting countless impressive "S" turns on the slopes above our 9,700-foot camp. Occasionally, their hooting and hollering would drift up to us during our descent.

At 2:00 PM we rejoined Mikki and Randy at camp I; by 4:00 PM we were all packed and skiing towards base camp. A new storm was brewing, and the upper mountain was hidden in the thickening clouds. We raced the increasing wind and snow down to base camp. I didn't envy Brad and Kurt's position. It turned out they did not summit this day

because of the storm, and ended up spending an entire week at high camp before they could finally summit and return to base camp, where they remained in yet another storm for an additional several days. Hearing their tale didn't surprise me, as Brad had once spent eight days waiting to be picked up from Mt. Bona's base camp with only two days of food. A "good weather magnet" he is not.

We reached base camp by dinner time that evening. Thirty-six hours later, and right on schedule at 7:00 AM, Paul Claus and his Beaver appeared out of the mist. He came to a stop twenty feet from our snow walls and hopped out onto the glacier.

"Come on guys. Let's go!" he said, already beginning to load our gear into his plane. That's what I call service.

Mount Foraker's Sultana Ridge

by Dave Hart

Thwop, thwop, thwop, thwop. The familiar deep bass chopping sound of two National Guard Chinook helicopters could be heard in the distance. From our 11,300-foot camp IV on Mount Foraker's northeast ridge, we had an unobstructed view of almost thirty miles up and down the Kahiltna Glacier. It wasn't long before we spotted the two helicopters well below us as they made their way up the Kahiltna Glacier. Above, a four engine C-130 airplane was circling, apparently coordinating whatever training mission was about to commence.

Initially we didn't pay much attention to all of this activity as it is not uncommon during the summer climbing season on Denali. However, as the Chinooks neared Foraker, they began gaining altitude as quickly as their twin rotors could lift them. Soon they flew over our camp and, not finding what they were after, continued south along the ridge towards Foraker's summit, four miles in the distance.

During the past several evenings, we had kept tabs via CB radio on a four person Utah team attempting the first ski descent of the Sultana Ridge. We knew they were in high camp, just out of sight about two and a half miles further along the ridge, and might even have been able to make a summit attempt by now. The recent unsettled weather, the fact they were attempting to ski from the summit, and finally the presence of the rescue helicopters had us concerned that something might have gone wrong. Our fears were confirmed when we tried to reach them by CB. The response, presumably from either the C-130 or one of the Chinooks was, "The climbers you are trying to contact are presently involved in an aerial hoist evacuation."

Within ten minutes the skies were once again silent as the rescue was complete. Being the closest, and only, climbers in the area, we wanted to know if there was anything we could do to assist any remaining climbers. We were able to contact the NPS Ranger stationed at 14,000 feet on Denali's West Buttress, and offered our assistance. Fortunately, it was not needed. The skier's 2,000-foot fall while descending the summit slopes resulted in only minor injuries: a possible broken ankle and ribs. The remaining three climbers were unhurt and would begin their descent from high camp the following day.

It's easy to become complacent about the dangers involved with mountaineering. I think observing a rescue like this sobers one up. It is not difficult to get injured if your luck, skill or patience runs thin. Each of our team, Paul Barry, Jacques Boutet, Ron Rickman and myself was reminded of that important fact on that beautiful sunny afternoon. Sunday, June 11, our ninth day on the route, had certainly turned out to be more exciting than we had expected.

We chose to climb 17,400-foot Mt. Foraker's often overlooked Sultana Ridge because, although it is long and involves a lot of ups and downs, it is relatively safe from the avalanches that tend to scour the standard southeast ridge route. Also, the approach is minimal compared to the twenty-five mile approach required for the northern routes. And finally, the views along the route are phenomenal. This seven mile ridge route is graded an Alaska Grade III, mostly due to high altitude, crevasses, route finding and length, as opposed to any real technical difficulties. During the two weeks we were on the mountain we logged about 27,000 feet of vertical elevation gain. For comparison, even though Denali is 3,000 feet taller, a typical West Buttress expedition will gain approximately 23,000 feet.

I tend to do a lot of research before I set out to climb a big peak. Reading past accounts and looking at photos and maps is helpful, but the best information seems to come from talking with people who have actually been there. This proved true for Foraker, too. "It's the wind! I still hate the wind!" Willy stated, seven years after his, Todd and Gordon's ascent. "Crevasses. We all popped in several times. They can't be avoided." were Shawn's words of wisdom after his attempt last year. Armed with this, we prepared ourselves for both evils as best we could.

We left Anchorage Friday afternoon, June 2. After registering with the Talkeetna Ranger Station (see accompanying editorial article this issue), our pilot flew us to the 7,300-foot level of the southeast fork of the Kahiltna Glacier. As this was the same crowded base camp used by hundreds of Denali climbers each summer, we were eager to travel to the base of Foraker that evening in search of a more remote base camp site. We loaded up our sleds with twenty-three days of food, fuel and gear and skied three miles to the 6,800-foot base of our route below Mt. Crosson (12,800). It was after midnight before we settled into our tents, but it was a good feeling to know that we could begin climbing the following morning.

Our first two days on the route were sunny and offered great views of Denali and Hunter across the Kahiltna valley. During those two days we double carried our now twenty-one days of food, fuel and gear and moved up to our first camp at 10,000 feet. After the first 100 yards of glacier travel required to reach Crosson's lower scree slopes, we enjoyed the freedom of two days of unroped scrambling.

A storm pinned us at 10,000 feet for a day before allowing us to double carry and move up to our bomber second camp at 11,300 feet on day four. This day, and all that followed, had us treating every footstep as suspect; the crevasses seemed to be lurking everywhere. Here, too, a storm kept us tent bound for two days. Snow, wind, drift in, dig out. It was getting much too familiar. With plenty of supplies, though, we were prepared to last out any and all storms. The waiting game had begun.

We woke on our seventh morning to sunny and calm skies. Both Denali and Hunter were out in all their glory across the valley. This was one reasaon why we chose the Sultana ridge.

We had left Anchorage a week earlier, yet had made only about one mile of progress up the ridge. With six more miles of ice and snow separating us from Foraker's summit, we were feeling the need to take full advantage of this clear weather. We decided to make another double carry in a single day. During the morning, we carried half our gear up Mt. Crosson and down 1,000 feet to the col between Crosson and Pk. 12472. That afternoon, we returned to our 11,300-foot camp to only load up our remaining gear and repeat the morning's climb. The weather cooperated and it was midnight before we dove into our tents. Fifteen hours of windy climbing had us thankful for a relatively sheltered camp III situated at 11,750 feet behind a small serac. Another selling point of the Sultana ridge is that it offers Mt. Crosson as a consolation prize, of sorts, even if we didn't make Foraker's summit.

As was becoming the norm, that evening a storm moved in and kept us once again tent bound for the entire next day, our eighth on the ridge. Towards evening, the weather hinted at clearing and after dinner the clouds had all but disappeared. Again wanting to take advantage of any and all good weather, we loaded up our packs and began ferrying a load up and across Pk. 12472 about 7:00 PM. Stable snow conditions allowed us to traverse the upper southeast slopes of Pk 12472 instead of going up and over the true top. We reminded ourselves to be sure to reevaluate the stability of these slopes if they loaded with any new snow. After three hours and a few small crevasse falls, we cached our gear just above our anticipated fourth camp. We arrived back at our col camp around midnight, happy to have salvaged part of the day.

This evening of traveling was one of the more spectacular hikes I've ever experienced. Our views from high above the Kahiltna Glacier with Denali, Hunter, Foraker and countless smaller surrounding peaks were magical. The late night sun cast long rays across the ridges and peaks, creating sharp contrasts of shadow and light. This, combined with the alpenglow and sunset, was a rare treat for those of us who usually climb by day. Returning to our col camp we were awestruck watching the sun reflect off the lakes and rivers on the tundra well over a mile below us to the northwest.

Unbeknownst to us, this evening found the four Utah skiers beginning their fateful summit bid about 10:00 PM. As we slept, they climbed into Foraker's quickly developing lenticular, enduring 80 mph winds on the summit. As we made breakfast the following morning, our ninth, they began their ski descent. Reportedly, the 2,000-foot tumble occurred about 9:00 AM, the rescue was requested at noon, and completed after we arrived at our fourth camp that afternoon around 4:00 PM. Our excitement and anticipation of possibly being in high camp the next day was overshadowed by the sobriety of observing the rescue first hand. Still, we spent the evening deciding what we needed to take the following day on our single carry over to high camp, two and a half miles distant.

For the first time on the trip we were able to move the day following our arrival at a new camp. It was our tenth day, and we agreed to carry six days of food and eight days of fuel with us to high camp. With any luck, we could be on top tomorrow!

This single carry day included the most exciting terrain of the entire seven mile ridge. Blue skies, huge cornices, seracs, crevasses, steep drops to both sides and incredible views greeted us all day long. We met the remaining three Utah climbers about half way across and sat down to a quick lunch with them. They had quite a tale to tell about the prior day, and they all appeared strong and in good spirits.

We continued along and reached high camp at 12,100 feet by 5:00 PM. The weather was beautiful. It was, in fact, too hot as our crampons balled up most of the afternoon. I've jokingly been called a "good weather magnet" and I was hoping to cash in on that just one more day! Even though the evening's 8:00 PM weather forecast was poor, we went to sleep that night under clear skies, mentally preparing ourselves for the next morning's 5,300-foot summit push.

We woke at 4:30 AM on June 13 to a cloudless, windless and barely freezing morning. It was almost too good to be true. Fear, nerves and excitement are all present while I'm brewing up before a summit day. At least this day it seemed that we would not have to worry about any weather problems thwarting our progress.

Unexpectedly, from the next tent Ron informed us that he was worried about doing further damage to his foot which he bruised stepping through a small crevasse a few days earlier. He reluctantly decided that the 5,300-foot descent from the summit would be more of a risk to his foot that he was willing to take. After all, he and his fiance, Nicole, are getting married this August! It was disappointing for all of us, especially Ron, when Jacques, Paul and I headed for the top at 6:15 AM.

The distance from high camp to summit is less that two miles, though over one mile of altitude must also be gained. The average angle was in the middle 30's the entire way. Not exceedingly steep, but enough to not be able to entirely relax, either. The wind we had cursed for the last ten days had scoured almost all the fresh snow from the summit slopes. The only trace of our passing were the imprints our crampon points left as they bit into the hard packed snow.

We made good time, and reached the summit uneventfully by 11:45 AM. Not a cloud could be seen for over a hundred miles in any direction. It was a perfect summit day - certainly the best weather day in weeks. The twenty minutes we spent wandering around on the flat summit was more time than I had spent on the summits of Denali, Hunter, Bona and Blackburn combined over the past several years. It was a special summit for me, as I had been wanting to climb the three big peaks in the Park for several years, and was fortunate enough to do so on the first attempt of each. And a day like this, to boot. What a joy.

It was hard to leave, but Jacques, who says he is not happy unless he is inches away from hypothermia and dresses accordingly, was beginning to get chilled hands. Even though the ambient air temperature was a comfortable 10°F, the constant 20-25 mph winds created a numbing wind chill of -30°F. We headed down around noon and made great time, arriving back at high camp by 1:45 PM, seven and a half hours after leaving. Ron was waiting for us, offering his congratulations and happy for our success. Definitely a bittersweet success.

The weather couldn't hold perfect forever. We napped for a few hours that afternoon before waking for dinner and the 8:00 PM forecast. We were not surprised to hear that a storm was going to hit the following day since we could already see high cirrus clouds, a sun dog, and lenticulars building on Denali. We all wanted to get across the avalanche prone slopes of Pk. 12472 before they loaded with snow so we packed up camp and began the long descent at 10:00 PM, just as it began to snow. The storm had arrived early.

Traveling by night was easier than by day. It was cooler and more comfortable, the snow bridges were safely frozen, our crampons didn't ball up with snow, and trail breaking wasn't as difficult.

We reached our fourth camp by 12:30 AM, and finally pulled into our third col camp at 3:00 AM, just as it began getting lighter. We breathed a sigh of relief after safely having traversed the slopes of Pk. 12472 before they could load with snow. Now, we felt, nothing could prevent us from getting back to base camp during the next good spell of weather. Our timing was perfect. As soon as we hopped into the tents at 5:00 AM, the blizzard hit full force. Later we would learn that this was the storm that trapped, and later killed one member of, a Taiwanese Denali expedition at 19,000 feet on the West Buttress.

Our next 24 hours were spent mostly sleeping and recovering from the prior day's summit push and retreat to here. It was a welcome rest.

The snow and wind quit unexpectedly during the early morning of June 15, our thirteenth day on the route. We woke at 4:30 AM, packed our bags and at 7:00 AM began the final 1000-foot climb up and over Mt. Crosson. Our fourth time on top was just as

scenic as the others, with clouds hiding the Kahiltna Glacier 6,000 feet below us. Occasionally we could hear planes below the cloud layer which was hovering around 10,000 feet. It must be flyable below, we thought. We just might be back to town tonight!

Seven hours after breaking camp, we were skiing up the final slopes of Heartbreak Hill. The sun was beating down, the wind was calm and there were two empty planes on the airstrip. We were going home!

We had a wonderful trip with a good group of friends. I think each of us would recommend the Sultana Ridge as a beautiful and relatively safe, though long, route

EDITORIALS

Dave Hart

Talkeetna Registration Process Frustrates Climbers

The 1995 Denali National Park climbing season was the first year during which climbers were singled out and charged a controversial and prejudiced $150 land use fee. I climbed Mount Foraker with three friend several weeks ago. Our last stop before our pilot could fly us to the mountain was the National Park Service Ranger Station in Talkeetna. We registered our team, officially named Civil Disobedience, and paid our $600. After signing my visa charge slip, I was tempted to jokingly ask for my seat assignment and boarding pass, implying that my $150 should entitle me to a "free" ride back to Talkeetna, courtesy of the high altitude Llama rescue helicopter. After their earlier disapproving response to our team name, though, I didn't think they would see the humor in that.

Apparently, it's a National Park Service regulation that all climbing parties must not only name their team upon registration, but must also declare a leader of their team. Some groups want, and at times need, an official leader, but we felt this was unnecessary and unwanted. Of course, this went against the official policy and they disapproved of our choice. "Living up to your team name, I see," was the almost rude comment as we were finally handed our permit legitimizing our leaderless team.

Then it was upstairs to watch the Denali safety video. It seems to me that if climbers are hearing for the first time that there are crevasses on the Kahiltna Glacier, that it will be cold enough to get frostbite, and high enough to risk pulmonary and cerebral edema, that there is little hope in this video having any meaningful effect on the safe outcome of their climb. I see a similarity between this video and an FBI warning sign read by an armed robber as he flees a bank running out to his get away car. It seems a bit late for that deterrent, too.

After the video, Ranger Joe, seemingly just up from the beaches of southern California with his bleach blond hair pulled back into a pony tail, came up to give us his pep talk. "Hey, dudes. What'd ya' think of the video, heh-heh?" He continued to query us as to our experience, equipment and plans for the climb. His second-hand (mis)information and advice on the route was almost dangerous. Fortunately, we had the sense and experience to take his misinformation with a grain of salt. Others might not be so fortunate, and I wish them luck.

I, for one, certainly don't feel I received $150 worth of services this summer. I would even go as far as to say that the quality of service and information was worse this year than the two previous years I've registered for climbs in the park. I can only hope that these bureaucratic frustrations will not spread to other government managed lands in Alaska.