



AUGUST 1997

A Publication of the Mountaineering Club of Alaska

Volume 40 Issue 08

Box 102037, Anchorage, Alaska 99510

AUGUST MEETING

Wednesday

August 21, 7:30 pm

Pioneer Schoolhouse, 3rd & Eagle Streets

Downtown Anchorage

Slide Show: Harry Johnson and the "White Route of Africa" will be the show this month.

HIKING AND CLIMBING SCHEDULE

Aug 28-Sept 1 Kesugi Ridge

Class C. 25-mile hike through Denali State Park.

Leader: Curvin Metzler 333-8766 (Voice mail)

Sep 6-7 Thunderbird Peak

Class C. No technical gear or skills needed, but must be in shape. Eighteen miles R.T. from Eklutna Lake parking. Elevation gain over 5500 feet. Fall colors, blueberries, maybe some rain. Elev. 6575.

Leader: Willy Hersman 265-6405(w)

TECHNICAL ICE CLIMBING SCHOOL

place: Matanuska Glacier

date: September 27 - 28

fees: \$12.50 equipment replacement fee
\$12.50 access to glacier and camping

meeting: Thursday, September 25, Pioneer Schoolhouse 7:00 PM. This meeting is mandatory, so plan to attend.

coordinator: Nick Parker

The ice climbing school is for all levels of experience from beginner to leader. We will present the techniques necessary to become at least a competent second on steep ice. We will not emphasize glacier travel techniques.

PRE-REGISTRATION WILL BE REQUIRED.

Sign-ups are at the August and September meetings for MCA members only. Potential instructors need to call the school coordinator, Nick Parker, at 272-1811.

An equipment check will be done at the organization meeting on the 25th. Students are required to bring their boots, and crampons for inspection. Club equipment will be handed out. (The club has limited supplies of crampons, ice axes and helmets.) Fees will be collected. Questions will be answered. **ALL STUDENTS MUST ATTEND.** AMH, on Spenard Rd. also rents boots, crampons and ice tools for people signed up for the school. Some equipment is sometimes available from instructors, but you should not count on it. Club crampons are not designed for serious ice-climbing; you should consider other options. For this school all attendees must have helmet, crampons, climbing harness, ice axe, and climbing boots.

The school will begin at 9:00 am on Saturday, September 27th, at Matanuska Glacier at the parking lot closest to the glacier. Plan on leaving Anchorage no later than 6:30 am or go up Friday night (no extra charge in the campground). Please leave your dogs, cats, horses, llamas, and other four-legged things at home.

Course Goals

- Learn a useful and safe technique for climbing ice in the alpine and waterfall environment.
- Learn to use modern tools and equipment in order to insure maximum safety and speed while climbing.
- Learn and practice all of the basic state of the art rope management techniques; including a fundamental knowledge of knots useful for alpine climbing.
- Learn and practice basic climbing techniques, with emphasis on skills most useful for winter (and ice) climbing.
- Belaying the leader, through mechanical devices and non-assisted or traditional technique.
- Building save anchor systems regardless of the terrain or conditions.
- Route-finding to rapidly and safely achieve the goal without having unnecessary objective hazards.
- Achieve a climbing and fitness level to assure basic competency in alpine winter climbing.

Equipment for Ice and Winter Alpine Climbing

Technical gear:

Ice axe - your basic tool, most useful in the 55 cm to 60 cm range as the primary tool. Modern ice tools have curved or re-curved picks with serrated teeth for maximum holding power in most ice conditions. Taller climbers or those who primarily are snow-climbers will prefer a 70 cm axe. The

second tool will be in the 45 cm to 55 cm range, specialized for steep water ice-climbing. A great variety are available, so try to use as many styles as possible to find the tool that best suits your style.

Crampons - rigid 12-point are the best choice for ice climbing. The new one-buckle system is far superior to the neoprene straps for attachment. Footfangs are an obvious choice also.

Helmet - a must for the beginning to experienced ice-climber; ice hurts.

Boots - double plastic or leather (if you can get them). Plastic boots are the warmest and as stiff as the best leather without breaking down. Alveolite foam inner boots are the best liner yet made, in terms of warmth vs. weight

- Neoprene socks or booties which are loose fitting are also helpful.
- Neoprene or cloth/insulated overboots are necessary for altitude and all but spring conditions in Alaska. A margin of warmth must be maintained for safety.

Harness - must be adjustable with wide leg loops, that will open up to put on over all your various clothing systems. Most modern styles have this capability.

Ice Screws/Spectres - you should employ a variety of types and lengths to accommodate varying ice conditions. Pound-in and screw-in types of various lengths should be carried on the climbing rack.

Ratchet wrench - is very helpful, especially for leading steep ice with older screws.

Carabiners - you must have three large locking type and several regular carabiners. As you increase your proficiency and the difficulty of the routes you lead, you will require increasing amounts of hardware to protect your leads.

Slings - you will need to carry several of varying lengths, plus you should have a quick-draw for each ice screw you carry on the rack. You will also need several two-meter lengths of 6 mm to 8 mm perlon for prussik slings and other specialized uses for which tubular webbing is not suitable.

Special mechanical devices - jumars, figure-8, and other gizmos will be used and discussed to establish their relevancy to ice and winter climbing.

Clothing Systems for the Winter Alpine Environment:

The clothing system should layer well and be adaptable to a variety of uses and temperatures. Strive to use the minimum amount necessary to reduce both weight and bulk. The use of pile and (gor-tex-et-all) should yield a warm and light suit able to keep you warm in anything short of a



blizzard. An expedition parka and/or suit would be the final layer.

Socks - light wool or poly liner, heavy wool or pile outer. Or a neoprene sock, especially built for climbing. Capilene, wool or blends all are used.

Legs - poly or capilene long-johns in various thicknesses. Salopettes or pile bibs. Mountain pants or a mountain suit. Bibs - or a one-piece suit are the best choice because they eliminate the waist hassle.

Torso - Bib pile or insulated suits are the best choice. Poly or capilene t-neck tops. Pile or wool sweater. Down vest. Mountain anorak or parka.

Hats and mitts must be warm and wind proof. A balaclava or face mask should be carried. Waterproof shells for the mitts are necessary.

Gaiters

Everything in the clothing system should have long zips or full side zips, so they can be easily removed or put on.



TRIP REPORTS

Licking the Cone

Willy Hersman



It always seems to be there. From somewhere in the Talkeetnas or somewhere in the local Chugach, you've probably seen it before. The first time you see this majestic peak on the horizon, you are likely to ask anyone nearby, "What is that over there? Does it have a name?"

Always seems like I am joking around when I tell someone, "Oh, that's Ice Cream Cone." It never sounds right. Sometimes I think locals were pulling Dave Johnston's leg 30 years ago when it was first climbed. Something they made up on the spot, just because they were asked. Like it or not, the name is ingrained now; no matter that the Board of Names rejected it. And the name does not detract from the fact that, after you've seen it enough, you just have to go climb it.

Phil Fortner and I had laid plans for Ice Cream Cone Mt. (8765) several times without actually setting foot near it. The plans were put off for various reasons, but finally this June, along with Chris Brown, it looked like we would at least step up to the plate. On the evening of the solstice Mike Meekin took the three of us to a Cub strip on Friday Creek at about 3500 feet, where we spent a night next to the creek. We would attempt this climb from the south side. All previous successful ascents of the Cone that I know about have been from the north. I think there have been three. There has been one attempt along the west ridge, and one attempt to do a winter ascent. The south face has a prominent gully, which looked pretty reasonable from photos. We had a fair assortment of hardware in case the gully didn't go.

The next day we hiked to the pass at 5300 feet, making a rocky camp from which to do the climb. The gully looked good, the peak, well, not as striking as from the north. Except for a dribble down the gully, there's no ice cream on the south side. And the cone material is all 100% Chugach crud. We started on the gully in the morning, and found that the snow was too sloppy. As it steepened there were occasional point avalanches swooshing in from side gullies, emptying into a bobsled run in the center. It looked less and less inviting as the sun hit. More and more rocks fell into our path. We sat and watched a while, but realized it was too dangerous to climb into the narrow hallway above. For the last 1500 feet or so we scrambled on the face, finally reaching the summit ridge. And the rope finally came out.

Phil led along the narrow ridge, looping horns, climbing over and around small towers, skirting cornices. The climbing was not difficult, but the exposure was unmistakable. Even more unmistakable were the gathering thunderheads. We reached the top, but could not stay to stare at all the places where we had sat looking at the Cone so many years. It's no place to watch lightning. Once off the summit ridge we took our time going down, one rappel needed to get back to the gully. The slush kept us from going very fast to camp, but finally we reached our tents, happy to sleep in the next day.



Aniakchak Crater

Don Hansen



We left Anchorage for King Salmon, AK on Saturday, June 28th under clear but smoky skies to connect within our air charter to Aniakchak Crater (caldera). The three women: Linda White, Pam Bell, and Kerry McCaig in our group of five got to King Salmon first and left on the first charter aircraft for Aniakchak before Fred Kampfer and I arrived in King Salmon. By the time Fred and I got to Aniakchak under clear skies without smoke, Pam and Kerry had chosen a good camp site in the cove adjacent to the one that we were dropped at Surprise Lake nestle in the northeast corner of the crater. The lake is well named, because it's azure reflection suddenly appears when the aircraft passes through "the Gates" a very narrow pass or gap in the crater wall. It turns to the right, and suddenly the lake appears along the northwest wall of the caldera. Vent Mountain looms in about the center of the crater while the precipitous Black Nose mountain guards "the Gates," and Aniakchak Mountain ascends above the rest of the crater rim. Fred, Linda and I setup our camp at the cove we were dropped off at. Thus the group was split into two with Pam and Kerry, good friends wishing to have their space and having a more ambitious plan of hikes and climbs than Fred, Linda, and I. The coves on the southwest side of the lake are the best places to camp in the crater with some protection from the notorious winds that are known to blow down all tents that get in the way. The south side of the lake with its lava formed coves is very beautiful with its tundra slopes covered in wild flowers especially the rhododendron who's flowers covered the slopes along the lake in rose and green. Purple lupine, yellow and white flowers competed for space on the dryer flat slopes in back of the coves along the lake, while fields of lupine colonized the dry gullies that drained into the lake. The lake is a photographer's paradise on the rare sunny Saturday afternoon.

Linda, Fred and I went for a short walk from the lake toward Vent Mountain but soon turned around in the oven heat of the afternoon after going up and down over what appeared to be endless gullies between us and the mountain. We figured we'd climb it on a cooler day. We got our wish, Sunday morning was cool and windy with clouds boiling over the southeast rim of the crater and starting to descend to the crater floor. An ominous warning of high winds and storms were out on the Gulf of Alaska. Thus all five of us decided not to do

the mountain but hike along the shore. First we headed towards "the Gates" but the clouds and winds were also coming through the pass, so we went in the other direction and explored the west end of the lake and the warm springs that flow into it. Pam and Kerry extended their hike to follow the creek that drains into the lake to its origin. It turned out to be an old extinct glacier covered in ash.

Monday started out with overcast and light showers, but cleared about noon so Linda, Fred, and I decided to go for a hike across the crater southwesterly of Vent Mountain while Pam and Kerry decided to stay near camp and climb up the two small cones near the lake. As we hiked the weather became clearer and the route we took was much easier than the route we were on Saturday. As we started passing Vent Mountain we got "summit fever" and decided we better climb it while the weather was good after all it was just a "walk up". As I lead the way up we carefully crossed a steep snow slope (without ice axes or walking sticks since we really did not plan to climb the mountain on this hike) and started to climb up the rock and ash slope to the summit. As the slope got deeper the rock and ash got looser and began to crumble under feet and hand holds. I had to back off a few times and traverse to the right where the rock seemed a little more stable and to avoid knocking any more rocks down in Fred's direction. The 3 of us made the summit with a little more effort than expected. The summit turned out to be to my surprise. It was a 300-foot, deep crater with steep walls. The views from the rim of Vent Mountain were spectacular as a band of clouds encircled the Aniakchak caldera rim with clear skies above.

The next day was overcast and rain we spent the day near or in camp. The following day was overcast, after raining lightly all night. Linda spotted a fox on the hill above camp and I spent an hour getting close enough to the fox to tape it on my cam-recorder. Brown bear were spotted along the other side of the lake and several caribou were seen on hikes in the crater. That afternoon Linda, Fred, and I hiked over to Half Cone an interesting feature on the northwest corner of the caldera that had unusual lava rock formations and bright red bands of rock along the crater wall. On our hike back to the lake we went past the buried glacier and the small cone near the lake which was the source of the warm springs. Pam and Kerry climbed Vent Mountain that evening. The next day we walked up a cone located just below Birth Day Pass on the opposite side of the caldera from Surprise Lake. Since we had a late start we decided not to climb up to the pass. On the Fourth of July morning skies were clear, sunny and calm as a fog slowly rose from over the azure waters of Surprise Lake. Linda

and I hiked up the hill in back of camp for the view and pictures. Linda, Fred, and I hiked over to the crater lake below the face of Black Nose Mountain and went through "the Gates", while Pam and Kerry climbed up Birthday Pass and the caldera rim and headed toward Aniakchak Mountain. But the weather turned and the clouds dropped before they could make the summit.

Saturday, the 5th of July was spent getting ready to leave camp in case the weather turned bad. We instructed the pilots at Katmai Air to pick us up a day early if the weather was predicted to change for the worst, but it did not happen. I spent the day photography flowers and scenery, Linda and Fred watched birds, Fred is learning how to identify birds and flowers from Linda. Sunday our scheduled pick up day looked bad that early morning with low overcast clouds and drizzle, but began to clear in late morning and the two aircraft arrived about 2:00 PM to pick us up and return to King Salmon and we were back in Anchorage that evening.

It was a fantastic trip with much better weather than I expected and in the company of Linda, Fred, Pam and Kerry, it was enjoyable.

The Three M's, Mud, Melon and Memories

Bill Wakeland



he first "M" is thanks to the horrendous muck and ruts and water that ATV traffic has created near both ends of this 42-mile (map miles) loop. The less said, the better, except to point out that much of the ATV trail does help hikers across the more beautiful areas not yet

defiled.

The melon? Believe it or not, Curvin Metzler carried in a 10-lb. Watermelon for our pleasure the first evening - after the longest, most uphill, day of our hike! If you know Curvin, no further explanation is necessary.

As for memories, only Curvin had done this route before, so it was new country to three of us, Chuck Kennedy, Janet Lund and me. And new travel companions for all four of us. All quite different and independent, but we "fit" well and covered a lot of ground - in more ways than one!

Stan Aarsund drove Janet to the mile 99 trailhead, transporting the rest of us from the exit at

mile 91, where I left my car. He hiked in several miles with us, up the steepest climb, before returning to drive home. By then we were in open tundra and brush, with views on all sides, including the Chugach to the south, and Monarch Peak to the west. Dropping down to Hicks Creek, we continued up toward Hicks Lake, crossing and re-crossing the creek, finding our way through mud holes and generally getting acclimated to more of it.

Camp 1 was on Divide Creek in a little swale with a stream, some mile or two beyond Hick's Lake. A long day, some 11 or 12 miles, rewarded with watermelon! Rather typically, it had been sunny and hot, turning cloudy and cool, with lots of mosquitoes.

Day 2 we were soon on Caribou Creek, heading upstream on the route of the historic Chickaloon-Nelchina trail. Both hot sun and thunder and lightning with rain blessed us. 55 Ways correctly pointed out the trail did not cross Caribou, and in fact showed a route that left the river after a few miles, to re-join it where Chitna Creek joined it. The U.S.G.S. map shows the trail crossing the river, which is wrong.

Well, when we came to where the trail left the river, our prophet, Curvin, declared that route was too long, and we could follow the river and sneak by the three cliffs upstream to save time. So off we went, and did the first two. Over one, and in the river, gingerly wading around the next one. But the third was too much current piled up against the rock face. So we debated the alternate route, and decided to cross the river. So we linked arms and made it ok, but of course had to re-cross a little further upstream. Pulled that off, and of course felt pretty cocky.

We needed that feeling, to get through the miles of wet brush that waited us soon after re-joining the trail and crossing Chitna Creek. Climbing out of Chitna Creek valley on the ATV trail, we soon spotted the foot trail (once horse trail), that follows the creek upstream. No more ATV mudholes until we descended to Boulder Creek late the next day. Hallelujah!

The trail was much further up the hill from the creek than shown on the U.S.G.S. map, both going up the main creek, and also up the westerly fork that leads to the pass. After climbing some more, as the wet, scratchy brush thinned (we were still in shorts), and the trail sort of faded out, we camped for the night in the most level spot we could find, where the late sun broke out and cheered things up. We were at 4500 feet, only a few hundred feet below the pass, a couple of miles further. Quite a day it had been! River crossings, thunder and lightning, rain, and route



finding.

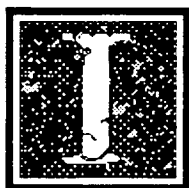
A full moon that night, and not a cloud in the sky next morning, the "payoff" day for the trip. We watched sheep, marmots and a beautiful, gray wolf - hunting and catching small game. And we sat around more, glassing the jagged, snow-clad peaks and waterfalls. The trail was now easily followed, all the way down from the pass along a ridge to the gravel flats, willows and alders of Boulder Creek, where we soon camped.

Another day's travel, often in wet brush or water - it rained off and on - brought us to a camp spot up the little valley we MCAers used to descend to get to the Simpson cabin on Memorial Day hikes from the Purinton Creek trailhead. Boy, how that area has changed! Couldn't see the cabin, or even find the old route. ATVs have chewed up the whole area around the base of Anthracite Point, from where the trail climbs up to high ground. The entire wooded area seems much wetter than I remember. I do recall some survey work years ago. Perhaps the old trails are now in trespass. Oh yes, another very noticeable change - our entire route below timberline is now laced with beetle killed spruce.

A few hours on day five brought us out to the old trailhead at Purinton Creek, near mile 89. The "new" trail continues easterly on a ridge a half mile or so to the north - with some hills and meanders to finally connect to a new section line trail down to the new parking lot near mile 91. The "old" trailhead is private and due to be closed. We dropped our packs there, and Janet and I hiked up the highway to my car in the mile 91 lot. We were soon having a little pig-out at King Mt. Lodge. A most interesting hike in an historic area, with a crew of fascinating people! I'm getting so old I enjoy the people as much as nature!

Falls Creek Climbs

by Kirk Towner



It wasn't hard to convince fellow club member Ted Embs to head up Falls Creek for a weekend of climbing - he'd seen the area before. Shawn O'Donnell took some convincing - something about not getting his traditional rib feast on the Fourth of July. In the end a five-sun forecast, assurance of great quantities of food, and the promise of three new peaks did the job. So the three of us, along with Shawn's dog Cody, set out to climb Indianhouse Mt. (4350), South Suicide Peak

(5005), and North Suicide Peak (5065).

From the trailhead on the Seward Highway, a good path brought us steadily uphill for a half-mile or so to a fork at a large rock. Trail-guide Ted assured us that the left route more or less follows the creek, a bit brushy at times, until it opens up a mile and a half later. Some time later we exited the trail as it started to climb to point 3920, NW of Indianhouse, selecting an excellent campsite next to the creek at about 2800, beside a large bouldering rock.

After taking a break, we hiked up to the ridge leading to Point 3920, rejoining the trail to the top of the knob. A young ram had the same idea of climbing Indianhouse, so we watched him stroll along the exposed NW ridge leading to the top. "See," I told the others, "a piece of cake." We picked out a route that looked possible as a non-technical scramble along the ridgetop; this was to be Cody's first summit. We had to drop low around the first gendarme, then continued along the crest to about the halfway point. Two little gullies separated us from easy travel. I scrambled across the first to scout out the final difficulties. Without a rope there were two options: bad, and worse - climbable, but with an unhealthy drop should anything go wrong. Shawn wisely vetoed both routes.

Not willing to call it quits on the ridge, we spotted a series of grassy ledges connecting below our gully. It looked like Cody would even be able to follow, but we'd have to backtrack and drop several hundred feet. Ted heard the Call of the Crazy Creek Chair back at camp, so Shawn, Cody and I continued. Plan B worked well, and Cody's loyalty more than made up for inexperience. Along the way, we could see that the couloir leading to the prominent notch on the west face looked like another fine route, certainly a popular one according to the summit register. After a break up top to soak up the view, we descended through dry gullies on the west face and rejoined Ted at camp.

The next morning we found the sky just cloudy enough to cool off the sun - perfect weather for climbing. We headed NW out of camp to join the south ridge of South Suicide, following sheep trails to the top. Although someone had constructed a sizable wall at the summit, we were unable to find a register. An hour's nap on the mossy ledge overlooking Rabbit Lake motivated us to continue across Windy Gap to North Suicide. Today it was just Cool Breezy Gap. We climbed to within 200 feet of the summit until we found one exposed corner that Cody was unwilling to cross. I distracted the loyal beast with a few rounds of rock-fetch while Shawn tagged the top, then continued



to the summit with Ted upon Shawn's return. Lazy day-trip climbing has its rewards - we returned to find Shawn nearly asleep with his boots off; however, a few poorly-aimed snowballs kept him from getting too comfortable.

On the return to camp we didn't want to lose any elevation from Windy Gap, so I led out on a sidehill shortcut to the southeast ridge of South Suicide. In good dry conditions it was a fun scramble around gullies and scree slides, though not necessarily the best way to go. We crossed over and dropped down to the tarn at the head of Falls Creek - a truly beautiful site backed up against the rocky wall of Point 3920. We stayed long enough to give up any hope of tiring Cody with fetch, then walked back to camp and yet another feast. Shawn had risked death by climbing both Suicides in a cotton shirt (and we all know cotton kills), so he left it spread out on a rock to dry overnight.

Our final morning we awoke to sun, a large climbable boulder, and Shawn's shirt full of holes from a hungry local resident. Depression set in, as this was no ordinary shirt but a true favorite, not available in Alaska. Ted and I left Shawn to mourn and explored our rock: only one simple way up or down, with plenty of possibilities. Shawn finally joined us, and after a bit of looking selected a finger crack on the west side. Undaunted by his recent loss or the fact that he was climbing in sandals, he topped out and announced the first known ascent of "Ground Squirrel Blues," tentatively rated somewhere between 5.4 and 5.14b (those hours at the gym are paying off). Guided by his route information I repeated the line and confirmed his rating. Bring shoes if you camp here.

We were reluctant to leave, but with our food nearly gone - we each swore at the start that we had enough to feed everyone for the whole weekend! - there was nothing left to do but pack up, hike out, and agree on a restaurant in town.

ADZE

Roomate Needed
Downtown apartment. \$400 plus
util..
Matt 278-3648

Topo Sheets
Southcentral area, Chugach,
Talkeetna, Kenai Mountains.
Some climbing routes annotated.
Free to anyone who needs them.
Willy 265-6405



REMINDER

The First Annual Mountaineering Club of Alaska
1998 Photo Calendar

We need your photos by the August meeting:

- * Any current (1997) club member is eligible to enter.
- * Photos should be hiking- or climbing-related. You may enter one photo in each of two categories: People and Places & Things.
- * You may submit any size print (5 x 7 recommended), but it must be received by the August meeting.

Either drop it off at a meeting or mail it to: MCA / PO
Box 102037 / Anchorage AK 99510-2037

- * All entries remain the property of the photographer. The Club is authorized to publish the photo for use in the calendar only.
- * Attach a note card to the back with the following information:

Your name, address, and telephone
Category and title of the photograph
Any interesting details about the photo that might be published in the calendar
(was it a club trip, local area, club member, when and where was it taken, etc.)

We need your calendar order by the September meeting: The calendars will be available around December, please let us know if you want a calendar by the September meeting so we will know how many to print. You are encouraged to enter a photo and pre-pay, the prices will be:
\$20 Normal price for non-members
\$18 Normal price for members
\$16 Rock-bottom super-discount price for members who submit a photo in the contest and pre-pay by the September meeting

THANKS

To Noble Mechanical for donating sheet metal to protect the Scandinavian Hut stove area from possible flare-up.