



the SCREE

Mountaineering Club of Alaska

August 2006
Volume 49 Number 8

Doubt is not a pleasant condition,
but certainty is an absurd one
Voltaire

**Neacolas Traverse
Seeing is Relieving
A Visit to Colorado**

Monthly Meeting
Wednesday, August 16th @ 7:30 PM
Program: Barry Weiss with slides
of his trip to Eastern Greenland

The Mountaineering Club of Alaska

"To maintain, promote and perpetuate the association of persons who are interested in promoting, sponsoring, improving, stimulating and contributing to the exercise of skill and safety in the Art and Science of Mountaineering"

Join us for our club meetings the 3rd Wednesday of the month at the First United Methodist Church, 9th and G Streets next to the Philips Building (you may use marked parking after hours)

Contact information is provided on the back page or visit us on the web at www.mcak.org

Cover photo: Dylan Taylor above the Gorilla Finger, Neacolas Traverse.

Article Submission: Articles and photos are best submitted on the web at MCAK.org. We prefer articles that are under 1,000 words. To get on the cover a photo should convey the feeling of mountaineering and show human endeavor.

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Hiking and Climbing Schedule

August 1 Tuesday 5:30 pm - Penguin Peak Class D 4,200 feet of elevation gain, 5 miles round trip. Contact leader at least 24 hours before trip. Steve Gruhn 868-9118 (w) 344-1219 (h) steven.gruhn@hartcrowser.com

August 3, 6 pm Thursday - Ptarmigan Tarn, Class B 1,700 feet of elevation gain, 6 miles round trip. Contact leader at least 24 hours before trip. Steve Gruhn 868-9118 (w) 344-1219 (h) steven.gruhn@hartcrowser.com

August 4 – 8 Rosie's Roost and Han's hut Maintenance trip, Glacier Travel, Gain ~6,000 feet, 40 miles RT. Leader Greg Bragiel, unknownhiker@ak.net

August 5, Saturday Bench Peak (5575) Class D 5,000 feet of elevation gain, 22 miles Contact Steven Gruhn at least 24 hours in advance 868-9118(w) 344-1219(h) steven.gruhn@hartcrowser.com

August 9 - Blacktail Rocks This is a Class C hike to Blacktail Rocks in Eagle River. To sign up, contact trip leader Amy Murphy at 338-3979 or e-mail: hayduchesslives@yahoo.com.

August 11 – 13 Annual couple's trip to Upper Snowhawk Hut, Barbeque and Climb. Class B/D depending on Saturday's hike, Gain 2100 feet, 12+ miles Leader Greg Bragiel, unknownhiker@ak.net

August 22 - Eklutna Peak This is a Class C hike to Eklutna Peak in the Peters Creek area. To sign up, contact trip leader Amy Murphy at 338-3979 or e-mail: hayduchesslives@yahoo.com.

August 26 End of month traverse Circumnavigation of the Twins. Class C. 13 miles. Walk around East and West Twin Peaks, above Eklutna Lake. Elevation gain 4000'. Mostly sheep trails with some exposure. Leader: Willy Hersman, mcak@gci.net

The First Ski Traverse of the Neacola Mountains

Story and photos by Joe Stock



Andrew Wexler above the Neacola Glacier

Go downtown and have a pint at Simon and Seafort's grill to watch the sunset. As you dip into your Amber, look across Cook Inlet. You'll see a big glaciated mountain called Mount Spurr with a tiny pompom of steam venting from the summit. Stretching left from Mount Spurr are the Neacola Mountains, a ragged and lonely range of ice and granite, a range that most Alaskans have never heard of.

In early April, Doug Brewer of Alaska Air West in Nikiski loaded Andrew Wexler, Dylan Taylor and me into his Beaver and flew us over the Cook Inlet oilrigs, to Lake Chakachamna below Mount Spurr. For six days, we skied through whiteout, icefalls and snorkel-deep powder to a

food cache in the center of the Neacola Mountains. We base-camped near the cache for ten days while exploring the granite walls, skiing more blower powder and fighting storms and crippling negative





temperatures. When avalanche conditions stabilized, we got first descents of The Gorilla Finger, a 2,600 vertical foot couloir, and Immortal Technique, a 3,000 vertical foot couloir. One day we racked up 10,000 vertical feet of skiing. From the cache, another five days of touring took us through more glaciers, past countless untouched couloirs and down to the lowlands of alder-hell—bushes so thick we often crawled on grizzly trails, dragging our skis behind. On our last night, we slept in the open on a gravel bar by the Tlikakila River. We armed ourselves with ice axes, rocks, and clubs to ward off hungry bears—fresh tracks 12 inches across surrounded our bags. We survived the night and touched Lake Clark—our self-designated end of the traverse—the next morning.

Doug landed his Beaver on a gravel bar and flew us back to Kenai, twenty-two days after leaving the north end of the Neacolas.

Our Neacola traverse was about 100 miles and 20,000 vertical feet. We skied 57,000 total vertical feet. We found the Neacola Mountains to be a heavily glaciated version of the North Cascades with granite peaks rising to 9,000 feet. These low elevation Neacola glaciers are melting fast, like all glaciers around the world. Along our tour, we compared ten GPS elevations to 1958 USGS maps and found an average elevation drop of 70 feet.



Seeing is Relieving

By Wayne L. Todd

As you look across Turnagain Arm to Hope, a ridgeline rises to the West for eight miles before tapering back into Turnagain Arm. I've been interested in traversing this ridge for decades. In 1999 I completed about half the ridge in a moderate day by descending directly to the Gull Rock trail. Logically then, completing the traverse would require two moderate days.

One late Friday in May, the clear skies lure us out of the Porcupine campground and up the Hope Point trail (HPT). We veer off trail and cross Porcupine Creek where the HPT deviates from the creek, gaining the ridge South of Hope Point. Though there is no trail, the brush is minimal allowing steady upward progress. After a bit, a long, slender protrusion can be seen on the ridge above. Due to its deceptive size, the green fiberglass tower takes longer to reach than anticipated. A ladder and discarded electrical connectors indicates this is still an active transporter.

Our route continues up to peak 3,950, south and slightly higher than Hope Point. The register I left in 1999 has about a dozen entries, numerous mentioning Cedar Point further down the ridge.

Motion below on a snowfield to the South reveals three caribou. Further up the ridge we spy two nearby goats who saunter around the next corner. Oddly, they disappear from sight for the duration of our hike along the ridge. An exclamation of "sheep" turns out to be a caribou and calf. Already the animal sightings have made this trip worthwhile.

The 3D image I left in a film container on 3,850 is soaked and there are no visible entries. We camp on the ridge just after point 3,150 with views of Little Indian Creek Valley, the Chickaloon Flats, our ridgeline, Turnagain Arm, and the Chugach front range.

By 8:30am the next day we're en route and drop to a pass of fir trees planted in snow. Below Cedar Point two eagles soar on the breeze. We welcome the breeze for temperature and insect moderation.

On Cedar Point we find no register but leave a Ziploc register. We acknowledge that the easy trip exit is now behind us. On the pass before Extra, a pond sits at a confluence of many game trails but we see no animals.

Carrie Wang contemplates the Transporter



By noon we're on 2,750, the summit before benchmark Extra. Weather is excellent and I no longer have apprehension about completing the traverse: life is good. I briefly think of activities to do this night back in Anchorage. We agree (luckily, so there is no blame later) to descend Northwest off Extra toward Burnt Island, as from our vantage point that way looks to be the easiest, most direct and least brushy (also happens to be the most distant from Gull Rock). With a winter trail, a possible trail from Gull Rock 2 and a known trail from Gull Rock, how bad can it be?

By 1pm we've descended to the sea cliffs above Turnagain Arm after modest bushwhacking and log hopping. I recall commenting about zones of various brush thickness and deadfall from the spruce bark beetle. We begin our horizontal traverse to the trail at Gull Rock some five miles distant. The trip thus far has been pleasant and has proceeded as expected.

A New Story



For those who were almost invited

Moving horizontally we encounter a bed of branched large fallen spruce upwards of four layers deep garnished with a fine mix of freshly budded Devils Club intertwined with mature 'Rusty Menziesia'. This is followed with an occasional ravine that requires climbing up and around. For dessert we have an occasional pocket of mosquitoes.

The activity of either forcing through the brush or climbing onto and then along a downed tree is fun for perhaps 100 yards, or less. We forge on, hour after hour, thinking a trail will soon be encountered. An occasional bush plane flying just overhead adds to the frustration. The forward progress is difficult enough that we entertain ideas of accessing the

coastline below the cliffs. Fortunately, between the high tide and sustained cliffs this idea is not pursued. A saving grace from the madness are the streams that created the ravines. At every couple of these we hydrate and take a sanity break. "The trail must soon be upon us." Very slowly the Chugach comes into view as we struggle along.

The downed spruce, whilst our demise, also lends to more efficient progress. We down climb them into gullies and up climb them to exit, or sometimes cross on them above gullies. Our record of tree linking is eleven. The tree walks aren't effortless though, with climbing on top of them, negotiating the upside branches and then jumping or climbing off. Heavily branched trees are usually passed by. To pass under the downed trees, while on the foliated ground, requires kicking or twisting the down branches out of the way, and sometimes crawling on all fours. A squirrel could make it to The Trail in 2-3 hours, assuming he wasn't eaten by a predator.



Even with eye protection, Carrie receives an eyelid cut from a branch. Not to be outdone, I hit my head on a stiff branch causing bleeding onto my face. Night dawns and we accept that we "probably won't be out today". Around 9:30pm I cell call a friend to let him know we will be overdue but are having a

“grand time”. (That call leads to some work for Cory, thanks again). Creeping by a jetted piece of land and then an island makes us falsely think that we are farther than we really are. At 11:30pm we give up for the day at a lovely heather mound atop the sea cliffs with the pounding waves to lull our dulled senses. Gull Rock is truly in sight about one mile distant. Unfortunately, we are out of water, quite parched, but know better than to search that late in our exhausted state for water. Carrie has begun to get dizzy and tingly. I’m not surprised to see my legs rather swollen above the boot line from log, branch, and brush bashing.

With traffic visible across the arm and commercial jets descending to Anchorage, it is a cruel irony that we are still many hours from home.

We are back at it at 7am (easy for an early start when you don’t have water) and soon encounter a large quenching stream. In this section of land we see old flagging but with all the downed timber, the old trail is rendered useless. Rarely, on this north side, do we get a short break from the jungle where trees are still standing and the under story is minimal. Carrie thinks she smells a pancake breakfast wafting from Gull Rock. I fantasize about what treaded mechanical vehicle could travel over this mess.

A small ravine crossing that I squirrel over and Carrie ground pounds gets us to Gull Rock. Another ½ hour of mere grade 2 bushwhacking, partly below 500’ vertical cliffs (rock climbers potential?), and we intersect the Gull Rock Highway. We don’t walk out to Gull Rock Point. It is noon on the third day, 48 hours after beginning our journey. Kissing the trail seems appropriate. I wonder what the first hikers think of theses bedraggled folks sitting on the edge of the trail, “Maybe really out of shape”, perhaps.

Traveling at a pace above three plus hours per mile with such little effort seems strange, but we soon adjust to the ten times speed. Life is quickly almost normal again and after encountering some friends on the trail, life is good once again. (Devils Club thorns and bruising prolongs the pleasant memories of the trip).

Wayne ‘Never Again’ Todd (again)



Colorado's Windom Peak and Chicago Basin

By Amy Murphy



Chicago Basin

My family recently held their annual reunion near Durango, Colorado, which provided a perfect opportunity for me to take (another) vacation and go backpacking in the incredibly beautiful Rocky Mountains. I also hoped to climb one of the 54 peaks over 14,000' high Colorado boasts about. I invited Ron Ramsey to go with me and he found a perfect location outside of Durango for us to explore for seven days: Chicago Basin, in the San Juan National Forest's Weminuche Wilderness. This basin provides access to three of the tall "14ers:" Windom, Sunlight and Eolus Peaks.

To get to the Needleton trailhead that leads to Chicago Basin, you can hike 20 miles roundtrip from the Purgatory trailhead, or you can ride in on the 125-year-old Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad. We took the train because it was an interesting way to get to the trailhead and allowed more time up in the basin area.

From Needleton we followed the Needle Creek drainage about seven miles up to Chicago Basin, which is surrounded by magnificent granite peaks. Ahhhhhh.....!!! We set up base camp about a mile before the basin as it is a popular area with thousands of visitors every year and we wanted to avoid crowds. We picked a great spot at about 10,000' elevation and were visited by thirsty, inquisitive mountain goats every day. We went on day hikes to higher elevations (close to 13,000'), trying to acclimatize. One day we hiked to the top of Columbine Pass and saw even more incredible and varied scenery with vistas full of mountains, waterfalls, vibrant wildflowers and abandoned mines.

In the Rockies, you quickly learn that afternoon rain and thunderstorms are a daily occurrence and you should be off peak summits by 2:00 and watch the clouds. On our last full day, we set out early in the morning to climb Windom Peak (14,084'). From base camp, we hiked to the end of Chicago Basin and then headed up a steep trail to Twin Lakes.

From Twin Lakes, the trail to both Windom and Sunlight Peaks veers off to the right. We followed the trail up to Windom's ridgeline, hiking over snowfields and scree fields. The last ½ mile or so to the summit rises steeply and is covered with huge, granite boulders requiring some basic climbing techniques to get up and over. It was rather exhilarating! The route up Windom is labeled as moderate "scrambling," but it is different than some of the scrambling encountered here in the Chugach.



Twin Lakes

We sat on the summit for a while, reveling in the scenery and the magnificent peaks visible in all directions. We watched thunderheads and dark clouds build up in nearly every direction, wondering when the rain, thunder and lightning would start again. While descending, we met at least ten or twelve other people still heading for the summit, despite the increasing clouds.

Frequently people climb both Sunlight Peak and Windom Peak on the same day as they are relatively close together. Supposedly, you can do a long ridge walk between the two peaks, but it did not look like it could be done very easily. One guy we met said he had just climbed to Sunlight Peak's true summit. He said most people stop about 10 feet below the summit because the last couple of moves are tricky and he was excited because he enjoyed the challenge of making those moves. Eolus Peak, the third 14er in the area, is more challenging to climb than the other two peaks.

Except for the high altitude, all three of these peaks are rated moderate day hikes from base camp. However, these peaks are still more difficult to climb than the state's high point, Mt. Elbert (14,433'), so we are glad we climbed a less

popular, but more-challenging peak in a remote and scenic area.

When you fly out of Anchorage to go "play" at high altitudes you need to seriously consider how the higher elevations will affect your body and try to allow time to acclimatize. This trip was a test for Ron to see how he would do hiking at high altitudes again because last summer he had the severe misfortune of developing high altitude pulmonary edema (HAPE) when he tried to climb Gannett Peak in Wyoming with Steve Gruhn and me.

Ron was not feeling well and did not do the summit climb with us. Later that night Ron woke me up saying he was having extreme difficulty breathing. I could hear Ron gurgling with every breath he took and we realized he needed medical attention, and more oxygen, as soon as possible. We did not have a cell phone and it was 21 miles to the trailhead so we did not have many (any) options available. Amazingly, Ron found the strength and internal fortitude to hike all the way back to the trailhead under his own power; even arguing with us when we removed stuff from his pack to lighten his load.



Goats (on the right) and Ron Ramsey

It took Ron quite a few months to recuperate from his bout with HAPE. However, after spending five weeks trekking through New Zealand this spring, Ron felt ready to try to go high altitude again so we headed for Colorado. On last year's trip we were on a very tight schedule that did not allow any time at all for acclimatization. We went from sea level to the 10,600' base camp in less than 48 hours. This year Ron and I took things slower and allowed time to acclimatize before attempting to climb the peak. Luckily, this year's trip occurred without incident!

For more information about Colorado's 14ers, check out this Website: www.14ers.org.

Climbing Notes

On June 2, 2006, Paul Andrews and Wayne Todd climbed Peak 7530 in the Wrangells. No cairn was found. MCAR C-7 T3S R10E S21.

On July 10, 2006, Wayne Todd and Carrie Wang summited Baleful Peak. This was Wayne's 21st 'Chugach 7,000 footer', thus completing the local high peaks. They also climbed Siwash on July 11.

MCA Board Meeting Minutes

MCA Board Meeting Minutes July 5th, 2006

Hiking and Climbing – Committee is to classify each potential leader's qualification and submit it. Discussion about a jar at the members meeting to give suggestions for possible trips. The board members will also bring 3 trip ideas to the next meeting. We will vote on trips and compile a list.

Huts Committee – we still are looking for a Chairperson for the Huts Committee. Motion to authorize that the committee go over budget by 10% in order to buy supplies to paint the Mint and Bomber Huts. All in favor.

Picnic – the July member meeting is a picnic at Valley of the Moon Park. Organization of the picnic was discussed.

Amy Murphy – will possibly be ready to take orders for t-shirts at the August meeting

New Business

-- Discussion to have the club pay for Avalanche training for the Training Committee chairperson and possibly new leaders as an incentive. This issue will be tabled until the October budget meeting.

--The board is trying to find new ways to get leaders to volunteer. One idea was an incentive program to give recognition to active leaders. Motion to put the leaders names in the Scree and announce them at meetings when they achieve a Bronze (30 trips), Silver(50 trips) or Gold (100 trips) leader level. All in favor. The count starts August 1 and will be announced at the August meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:05.

General Membership Meeting Minutes

July 19, 2006, 7:30 pm

This month's general meeting was held at Valley of the Moon Park for the MCA's annual picnic. Thanks to all for bringing potluck dishes and thanks to all who helped set up and clean up!

Adze

For Sale

Koflach Degre Mountaineering Boots. Purchased in 2005. Used a few times and in excellent condition. Size EU 9.5, US 10 \$200
Mark 360-5935

MCA Trip Classifications

The classifications below do not take into account individual trip hazards such as river crossings, scree slopes, snow fields, bears, etc. Trip leaders are required to inform the trip participants of any such hazards either verbally, on the sign-up sheet, or in the trip description. Leader approval is required for participation on all trips. **NON-TECHNICAL:** Following are a few standards used to classify nontechnical trips. The classification is made in terms of hiking distance and altitude gain. Many trips are not on established trails.

CLASS A: Easy hikes with a maximum distance of 8 miles for day trips or 4 miles per day for overnight trips. Altitude gain up to 1200 feet.

CLASS B: Trips involving a maximum distance of up to 12 miles for a day trip or 6 miles per day for an overnight trip. Altitude gain of 1200 to 2500 feet.

CLASS C: Trips up to 15 miles for a day hike or 8 miles per day for an overnight trip. Altitude gain up to 3500 feet. Scree, steep grass or other rough terrain problems may be encountered.

CLASS D: Hikes and climbs with an altitude gain of over 3500 feet or a distance of greater than 15 miles for a day-hike or greater than 8 miles a day for an overnight trip. Peaks in this classification may require minimal climbing skills.

CLASS E: Hazardous climbing conditions or stream-crossing conditions may be encountered. A basic mountaineering course may be required.

TECHNICAL: Technical trips are open to all qualified climbers. However, the registration on any particular trip must be restricted to a safe and manageable number of climbers. Registration is made directly with the leader, who determines the qualifications needed for the trip.

GLACIER TRAVEL: Trips requiring roped travel over glaciers. Knowledge of crevasse rescue, and ice axe and crampon skills are required. Basic understanding of ice and snow anchors also required.

FIFTH CLASS: Trips which involve fifth class climbing. A Basic Mountaineering course or equivalent is required. Knowledge of belay and rappel techniques and placing anchors is required. Climbing difficulty varies widely with each trip.

TRIP PARTICIPANTS have the obligation to acquaint themselves with the nature of the trip and to verify that it is within their capability and experience. Anyone wishing to participate in any trip above CLASS A must have completed one or more trips of the next lower classification, or the equivalent.

Approved: MCA Board, February 15, 2000

General Rules for MCA Sanctioned Trips

1. Proper equipment is available from the trip leader.
2. No dogs. (Among the reasons are bear problems.)
3. The trip leader can require special equipment and refuse participation to any person that is ill-prepared (e.g. inappropriate clothing/gear).
4. The leader's suggestions are to be followed. Do not go off alone, return or rush ahead without his (her) permission, and don't ford a stream before the leader assesses the situation. Remember, this is a club trip and the leader must know where all participants are. Anyone separating from the group without the leader's approval is no longer considered a participant the MCA Sanctioned trip.
5. The trip leader has the authority to split the group (fast and slow), dependent upon current conditions. However, he/she must appoint a qualified co-leader to lead the second group using the guidelines specified in the current Trip Leader Responsibilities.
6. Trip participants who, in the leader's opinion, put themselves or other members of the group in danger by disregarding the leader's suggestions, shall be subject to sanction by the club. Sanctions may include, but are not limited to, reprimand at general meeting, exclusion from future trips, termination of annual membership, or lifetime exclusion from the club.
7. You must sign up on a trip roster (club meetings) or contact the leader, and you must have signed the club waiver to be on a club trip.
8. If you find you cannot participate after signing up on the roster, please let the leader know, both for transportation and gear-planning and so someone else can go. If you are the leader, help find a replacement.
9. Total number of people on club trips:
Minimum: 4 (for safety reasons)
Maximum: Leader option, depends upon the trail and campsite conditions, but generally limited to 12 in trail-less areas or State/ National Parks
10. Firearms are not encouraged, and please let the leader know if you want to carry one - it will be leader's option. Aerosol bear repellent is preferred.

Approved: MCA Board, February 15, 2000

Mountaineering Club of Alaska

President	Steve Gruhn	344-1219
Vice-President	Sean Bolender	333-0213
Secretary	Julie Perilla	222-6939
Treasurer	Debbie Arens	688-4606

Board member	Eric Teela	240-9693
Board member	Annette Iverson	222-0581
Board member	Randy Howell	346-4608
Board member	Rebecca Bisette	375-0959
Board member	Steve Parry	248-8710

Annual membership dues: Single \$15, Family \$20

Dues can be paid at any meeting or mailed to the Treasurer at the MCA address below. If you want a membership card, Please fill out a club waiver and mail it with a self-addressed stamped envelope. If you fail to receive the newsletter or have questions about your membership, contact the club treasurer. The Post Office will not forward the newsletter.

The 'Scree' is a monthly publication of the Mountaineering Club of Alaska. Articles and notes submitted for publication and other communication related to the newsletter should be submitted on the web at www.mcak.org or mailed to Scree Editor Box 102037 Anchorage Alaska 99510. Articles should be received by August 16th (the club meeting) to be in the September Issue.

Paid Ads may be submitted to the attention of the Vice-President at the club address and should be 'camera ready' and pre-paid.

Missing your MCA membership card? Stop by our monthly meeting to pick it up or send a self-addressed stamped envelope and we'll mail it to you.

Mailing list/database entry: Greg Bragiel - 569-3008

Hiking and Climbing Committee: Randy Howell – 346-4608, Greg Bragiel – 569-3008

Huts: Vacant, Your name could be here

Calendar: Stuart Grenier 337-5127

Scree Editor: John Recktenwald 346-2589

Web: www.mcak.org (change your address here)

Mailing list service: MCAK@yahoogroups.com

Mountaineering Club of Alaska
Box 102037
Anchorage AK 99510