

the SCREE

Mountaineering Club of Alaska

April 2010

Volume 53 Number 4



Life is either a great adventure or nothing.
~Helen Keller

Monthly Meeting
Wed. April 22 @ 6:30 PM
Program: Presentation by Jim Saylor, The First Person to
Climb All Peaks In Chugach State Park, Details Inside.

**Dangerous Passage
POM - Bench Peak**

The Mountaineering Club of Alaska

www.mcak.org

"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 BP Energy Center, 900 E. Benson Blvd., Anchorage, AK

www.akpeac.org/conference/BPEC_map_06-04-03.pdf

Cover Photo: Stu Grenier and John McCormick on the summit of Peak 1936 (Set Netter Peak)

Article Submission: Text/video/photography submissions for the Scree can be sent as attachments to mcascree@gmail.com. Do not submit material in the body of the email. We prefer articles that are under 1,000 words. If you have a blog or website, send us the link. Cover photo selection is based on portraits of human endeavor in the outdoors.

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Hiking and Climbing Schedule

April 24 - May 02 MOUNTAINEERING - Scandinavian Peaks
Scandinavian Peaks Class- Glacier and Some 4th or 5th class.
Elevation Gain- Plenty Hazards- Crevasses, Avalanche, Rockfall, Weather. Air transport fees apply.
Greg Bragiel – 569-3008

July 16 – July 30 Arctic National Wildlife Refuge
Class B/C. The trip may include elevation gains over 2,000 feet on day hikes. The destination will be drop off And pickup at an airstrip on the Sheenjek River on the south side of the Brooks Range in ANWR . Set up food cache at the airstrip from there do 2 one week trips along the Sheenjek and tributaries.(climbers are welcome if you include a reliable partner) Leader: Don Hansen, donjoehansen@msn.com.

Monthly MCA Meeting Presentation

Get stoked for the 2010 mountaineering season by attending the Mountaineering Club of Alaska April Meeting. Jim Sayler, one of Alaska's most prolific mountaineers and the first person to climb all peaks in Chugach State Park will present spectacular slides and colorful accounts from over 30 years of adventure. The show will focus on the big peaks in and around Chugach State Park, from Anchorage to Lake George. Discover how to access remote regions in and around the park. Learn the best time of year to attempt difficult peaks and how conditions affect routes. The meeting will be held Wednesday, April 21, 6:30pm at the BP Energy Center located at 1014 Energy Court. Admission is free and open to everyone.

Dangerous Passage 1936

by Stu Grenier

I couldn't resist the opportunity to use this eye-catching title because upon first impression it sounds like a hell of a good historic account of a depression era adventure. In truth the 1936 refers to the elevation of the "peak" we climbed and the Dangerous Passage refers to name of the passage next to which Peak 1936 is located. I guess when you are writing an account of a peak that is low enough to be confused with Tom Choate's birth year you need a sense of humor since there wasn't much dangerous about the climb, or should I say hike, as long as you didn't get messed up with cliffs hidden behind walls of evergreen trees or go for a slide down a slippery grassy or snowy slope to one of the aforementioned cliffs. The passage called Dangerous Passage is probably so named for the many rocks that can be a problem for faster moving deep-draft boats, but of less concern to kayaks.



Sunset on Prince William Sound

Eryn Boone had caught the ferry back to Whittier on June 3, 2009, after spending five days in the Elrington Island area with us, leaving John McCormick and me to brave the paddle back to Whittier from Chenega Bay without female company or a single kayak in which to go poke around alone. I'll save a write up of what we did on Elrington Island for a later date.

On our way north we finally got lucky enough to find a whale using bubbles to catch its dinner right next to shore. Some folks call this bubble net feeding. We had good luck watching the humpback feeding and took some memorable shots. As we sat dead in

the water the whale also stopped perpendicular to us some 50 feet away. Though its eyes were underwater you could feel in the air that we were being observed. I



suspect it was using some inaudible sonar to size us up. Being this close to a leviathan, the air seemed exceedingly heavy. I don't remember how long we observed each other like this, but it was uncomfortably long for me. After observing each other the animal returned to its feeding and we went on our way down the coast to find that it was not finished with us. It matched our direction and approximate pace and surfaced nearby, making a loud elephant-like trumpeting sound that scared the bejesus out of me. This happened more than once. It was all I could do to not drop my paddle to protect my ears. Not unlike a dog, it followed us down the coast for a while and then got out ahead and disappeared. We were kind of taken aback by the whole thing to realize we were not the only curious beings out there. This experience made me wonder if this animal had had contact with humans before in Hawaii. It certainly was not very inhibited by our presence.

We also got to sneak up real close, using the balloon-like silence for which kayaks are known, to a black bear feeding in the grass along the beach. Only when I got too cold just floating behind the noisily masticating bruin that I had to close a pit zip, did it stop and give us direct eye contact, and then made quick work vanishing in the pucker brush.

As we worked our way northwest to Whittier we left behind what was this year's snowier southern part of the sound. The peaks seemed to become gentler and less avalanche prone. We were looking for a suitable climb to put the word climb in our paddle climb. Peak 1936 appeared to us at

the north end of Dangerous Passage. The passage is created where the west side of Chenega Island almost touches the mainland. Heading north through the passage, you cannot help but stare at Peak 1936. It is dead center for much of the passage. By the time we got to the passage's north end we were seduced by the peak's rocky, but snow- and tree-free, summit and gentle lines, which appeared on the map on its northern Granite Bay side. The other faces we could see were deceptively steep, covered with evergreens, and upon closer inspection with field glasses, were found to be full of cliffs and waterfalls. A needlessly challenging route for my taste when we could find a not-so-challenging backdoor up at the end of Granite Bay. At least according to the map, that is how it looked. A good deal longer, but probably easier.

Peak 1936 (Set Netter Peak) is on the right



Being a bit overconfident, John and I had almost started in the early evening for this little runt, but the weather looked like it would hold, so we started the first thing the next morning. Route finding in the forest was not a problem going up, with a few cliffs and

waterfalls to skirt. We hit a few snowfields to help go around some steeper sections and had the usual posthole hell that is so common at that elevation in early June. My XTRATUFs gobbled up the snow through the tops and I had to stop and empty the ice slush out to keep from freezing. After taking the ridge above timberline it was a rather pleasant stroll to the summit with a good number of firmer snowfields to cross and clouds that were letting the sun almost peek through for a little bit of dancing light here and there on the exposed granite rocks. The humidity, temperature, and style of clouds brought back memories of days long past spent high in the Japanese Alps. There was a long large cornice running along the southeast side of the ridge. It added a nice touch to the long gentle walk to the summit.



John McCormick on the Summit

At the summit John fiddled with his GPS that he was in the habit of wearing on his hat. He came up with a bunch of numbers about our average speed and distance traveled. They made us feel really old and out of shape. Then he said, "This can't be right," and we

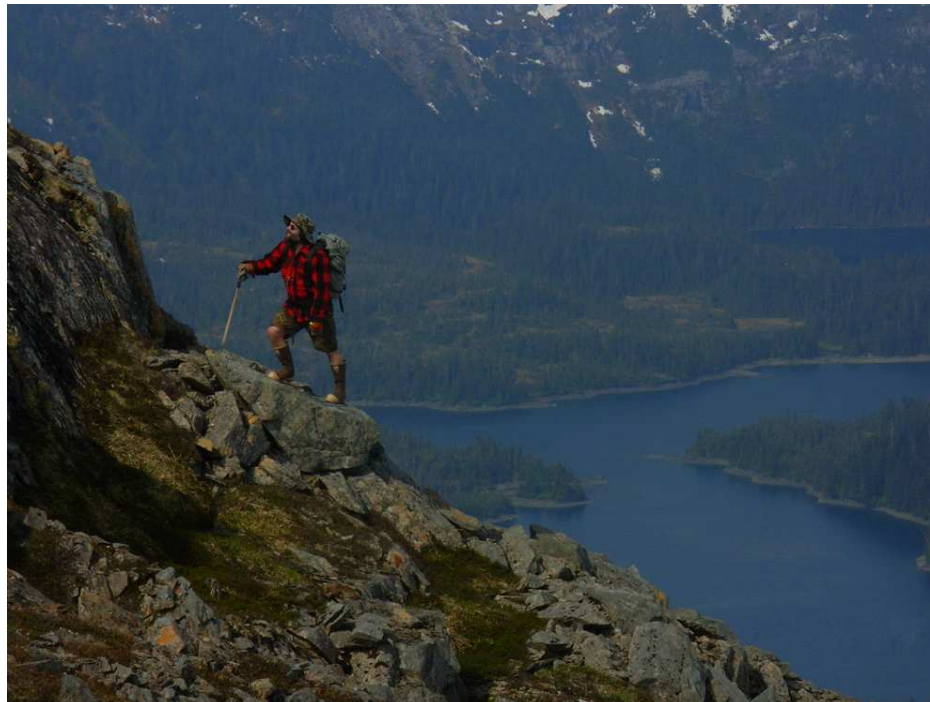
laughed. He spent the remainder of his time on the summit sleeping on the dry tundra while I did the register thing. There were three points about 50 yards apart that were all about the same height and located in such a way as to make a rough circle so we chose the southern one and left a register in a cairn I constructed there. There was no sign of people ever having been there.

Summit Ridge to the North



By the time we left the summit, the weather was starting to clear. The once misty views became clear and I could see small skiffs moving along the coast tending set nets. The better weather and light got us to shoot more photos on the way down, including me hamming it up with a "posed" one.

We made it back in time for a late lunch, siesta, and then attempted to paddle north with the evening tide, but the wind was up and we were tired so we landed on a rocky beach at the mouth of Granite Bay for the night. A set netter was watching our progress and the next morning we pulled up to his skiff and talked with him. His name was Lyle and



time to brave the sound on a loose-knit paddle climb in May or June when I run a note on the MCA or KCK (Knik Canoers, and Kayakers) ListServ. After this trip I really look forward to going again.

The Posed Hero

The Reality

he was born in Cordova and had fished this area for decades. We talked for a while and concluded that Peak 1936 had no name. Lyle said he had no time to climb because the openers were every 12 hours now. I suggest the name Set Netter Peak for Peak 1936. From the foot of Peak 1936 north, the passage is full of set nets.

We spent 10 days between Chenega Bay and Whittier. The weather and company made this an agreeable trip. I wonder what experienced, easy-going kayaker will have



Peak of the Month: Bench Peak

by Steve Gruhn

Mountain Range: Kenai Mountains

Borough: Kenai Peninsula Borough

Drainages: Bench Creek and Divide Creek

Latitude/Longitude: 60° 38' 57" North, 149° 8' 4" West

Elevation: 5575 feet

Prominence: 4515 feet from Peak 5760 in the Bartlett Glacier, Spencer Glacier, and Trail Glacier drainages

Adjacent Peaks: Peak 4650 in the Bench Creek and Divide Creek drainages, Peak 4550 in the Gleason Creek drainage, Peak 5030 in the Henry Creek and Ohio Creek drainages, and Peak 4450 in the Divide Creek and Placer River drainages

Distinctness: 1525 feet from either Peak 4650 or Peak 4550

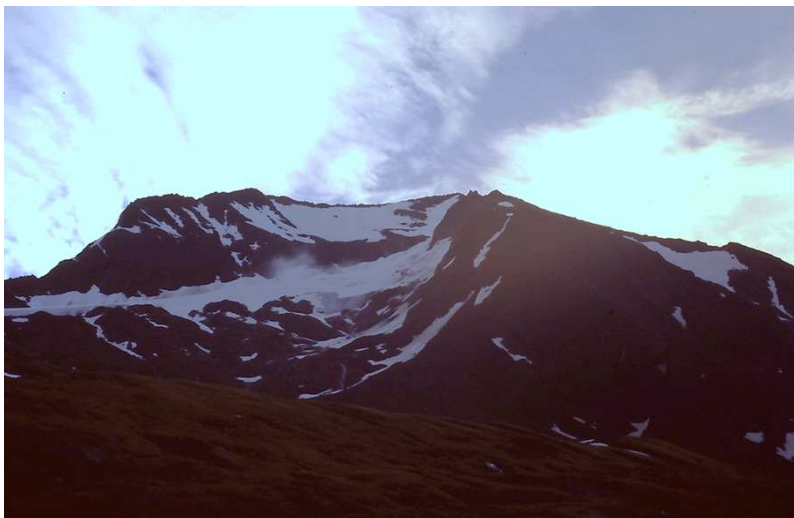
USGS Map: Seward (C-6)

First Recorded Ascent: July 20, 1969, by Thomas "Harry" Bludworth and Winfred "Dub" Bludworth, Jr.

Route of First Recorded Ascent: Southeast ridge

Access Point: Upper Trail Lake or Johnson Pass Trailhead at Mile 64 of the Seward Highway

Southwest Face of Bench Peak, 1969



Photos on this Page by Dub Bludworth

The highest peak on the Kenai Peninsula west of the Alaska Railroad and north of the Trail Creek-Kenai River drainage, Bench Peak is the eighth-most prominent peak in the Kenai Mountains. The nearest higher peak is more than 7 miles away. In clear weather this relief enables tremendous views from the summit.

Harry Bludworth in the Valley South of Bench Peak, 1969



Camp, 1969



After having made an unsuccessful attempt to climb Bench Peak with Fred Cady in June 1969, the Bludworth brothers departed Dub's home in Moose Pass on July 19, 1969, via a boat piloted by Dub's boss, who ferried them to the Johnson Lake Trail (now known as the Johnson Pass Trail) at the north end of Upper Trail Lake. They hiked up the trail to Ohio Creek. Their June attempt had been slowed by high water in

Ohio Creek. In July, however, the Bludworths found that the water level had dropped, making for easy wading. Once across the creek, they bushwhacked around the west end of a ridge and headed 2 miles up the valley north of Ohio Creek to a suitable campsite.

At 8:00 the next morning, they began their climb in a wind-driven rain. They found loose rock typical of the Kenai Mountains. Once on the southeast ridge, they had easy ridge running for 1.5 miles despite the fierce wind. On the summit they took 30 minutes in the sleet to build a cairn and leave a register. They returned to camp at 4:00 p.m. That same day Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin became the first people to set foot on the moon. The Apollo 11 crew and the Bludworth brothers had both set foot where no one had gone before.

The next day the Bludworths returned by hiking south along the trail and following the railroad tracks back to Dub's house in Moose Pass.

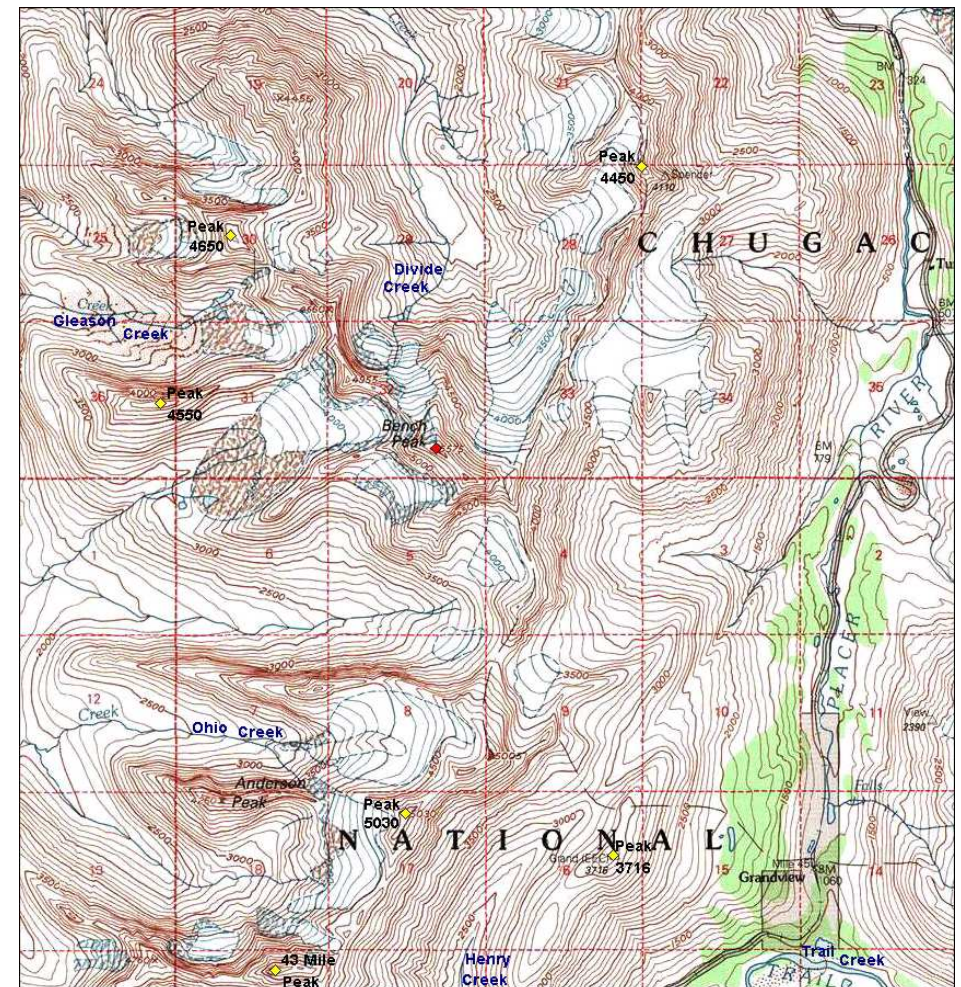
The first published mention of the name Bench Peak was in Harry Bludworth's trip report in the August 1969 *Scree*. The USGS officially adopted the name in 1971.

Crew from 2007 Ascent, Ross Noffsinger Photo



Jim Pommert's trip report in the July 1986 *Scree* documented a May climb of the south ridge.

On July 7, 2007, Wayne Todd, Ross Noffsinger, Carrie Wang, David Stchyrba, and I biked south from the Johnson Pass Trailhead at Mile 64 of the Seward Highway to the stream flowing through the valley the Bludworth brothers had ascended. We hiked up the same valley, but instead of following the valley to its head, we ascended the basin southwest of Bench Peak to a couloir slightly southeast of the summit. My trip report appeared in the November 2007 *Scree*.



Map created with TOPO!® ©2003 National Geographic (www.nationalgeographic.com/topo)

Mountaineering Club of Alaska

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

Dues can be paid at any meeting or mailed to the Treasurer at the MCA address at right. 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, notes and letters submitted for publication in the newsletter should be e-mailed to the Scree Editor. Articles can be submitted anytime.

Paid ads may be submitted to the attention of the Vice-President at the club address and should be in electronic format and pre-paid.

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

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