

# the SCREE

## Mountaineering Club of Alaska

March 2012

Volume 55 Number 3



*"Always be able to look back  
and say, 'At least I didn't lead  
no humdrum life.'"*

--Forrest Gump

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MCA Snow Travel Class

Peak of the Month: Peak 6290

### Monthly Meeting:

Wednesday, March 21 at 6:30 p.m.

### Program:

Winter climbing in the desert  
by Ralph Tingey.

# The Mountaineering Club of Alaska

[www.mtnclubak.org](http://www.mtnclubak.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 third Wednesday of the month at the BP Energy Center, 900 East Benson Boulevard, Anchorage, Alaska  
[www.akpeac.org/conference/BPEC\\_map\\_06-04-03.pdf](http://www.akpeac.org/conference/BPEC_map_06-04-03.pdf)

## March Program

**March 21 (6:30 p.m.): Winter climbing in the desert by Ralph Tingey.**

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**Cover Photo: Dano Michaud precariously navigating the crux of the descent along the North Fork of the Snow River. Photo by Harold Faust.**

## Article Submission

Text and photography submissions for the Scree can be sent as attachments to [mcascree@gmail.com](mailto:mcascree@gmail.com). Articles should be submitted by the 25<sup>th</sup> of the month to appear in the Scree. Do not submit material in the body of the email. We prefer articles that are under 1,000 words. If you have a blog, website, video or photo links, send us the link. Cover photo selections are based on portraits of human endeavor in the outdoors. Please submit captions with photos.

## Hiking and Climbing Schedule

Monday, March 19: Tit Mountain (2,831). This after-work hike starts at 6:00 p.m. To sign up, contact Steve Gruhn at 344-1219 or [scgruhn@gmail.com](mailto:scgruhn@gmail.com) at least 24 hours in advance of trip.

The following trips are being led by Greg Bragiel. For more information, contact Greg at [unknownhiker@alaska.net](mailto:unknownhiker@alaska.net).

March 24- April 1: Lane to Dnigi Huts tour.

April 15-22: Eklutna Traverse (mandatory training session on April 7).

Don't forget to check the Meetup site and the Facebook page for last minute trips and activities. Or, schedule one that you want to organize.

## On-line? – click me



For best viewing of the Scree on a monitor using Adobe Reader, click on 'View' and 'Full Screen.'

## **Backcountry.com Special MCA Discounts**

Backcountry.com renewed our club discount for another year. They also have an overstock special on two warm jackets that may be of interest to you. These are more for city than outdoor use but nice for cold winters in AK. Please email [jmikaelian@backcountry.com](mailto:jmikaelian@backcountry.com) directly for this deal. Good while supplies last, not same inventory as on BC.com but links below give you an idea of the style. Shipping charges to AK will be additional:  
<http://www.backcountry.com/the-north-face-stone-sentinel-insulated-down-jacket-mens> - Black color - ONLY \$172.  
<http://www.backcountry.com/the-north-face-greenland-down-jacket-womens> - Black color - ONLY \$142

Below are the full details of the MCA BC.com discount

[backcountry.com](http://backcountry.com) – Jeff Mikaelian, Group Sales Coordinator for Backcountry.com, has generously offered a discount to MCA members depending on the merchandise selected. Details below:

I have generated a discount code for the MCA. The MCA discount code is 527-1-AHTDR. To use the code:

1. Add the item(s) that you would like to purchase to your cart
2. Proceed to the final checkout page
3. Click on Redemption Code:
4. Enter this Code: 527-1-AHTDR

To check the final price or see if an item is eligible, put the code first, and then you can add and subtract items as you wish. All of the eligible items in your cart will be discounted. Please know that due to agreements that we have with our vendors that not all brands can be discounted. The best deals will be on BC's own Stoic brand. Also please know that if an item is already on sale you will receive which ever discounted price is better.

The codes do not work on Ski, Snowboard, Kayak and Bike Categories. One or more members may get together and combine their request for restricted items and email the request to me as a Group. Group Orders over \$1000. Ideally, a quantity of one item or from one or two Brands will get the best deal.

Best,  
Jeff Mikaelian, Group Sales  
[jmikaelian@backcountry.com](mailto:jmikaelian@backcountry.com) ; 800 409-4502 EXT 4200





Stu Grenier with Pirate Cove in the distance.  
Photo by John McCormick.

## A Paddle Climber's Quest for Collapsible Snowshoes

By Stu Grenier

You have to love your rituals. They kind of give a bit of uniformity in a hectic and confused world. One of my favorite rituals is going out into Prince William Sound (PWS) for some paddle climbing in late May and early June. I try to do a week or so every year if I can. And every year I have the same issues: Shoving all that junk into the hull of those fiberglass kayaks. Most certainly some are better than others in regard to storage

space, but certain items are always a pain in the butt to stow. Snowshoes have got to take the cake.

Shoving snowshoes in kayaks may be one of those uniquely Alaskan experiences, but that doesn't really make a difference when it is a task that has confronted me more than I like to admit. My favorite style of snowshoes for everyday stuff are the MSRs with the tails that come off, but even with the tails off they are a fairly big item to be shoving into a kayak and I am not really interested in strapping them under bungs on deck anymore. It quickly gets old having to

pull them off to access the hatches and watching the salt water go after the metal fittings. I really don't want to look at snowshoes when I am paddling, thank you. So that leaves the other option of chucking them in the cockpit. Keep them right under the knee to keep just the right flex in the "worst joint in the human body" as my knee doctor calls the knee joint. This gets old, too. You don't want the claw sides touching fiberglass with all that fun wave action and you do not want the claw side up since you have your legs on top of them. To add to the complexity when I use the single kayak, I rig for rolling on occasion, which means float bags to prevent gear from moving in the compartments and lashings or float bags for the deep reaches of the cockpit. Float bags are oddly shaped balloon-like items that keep your kayak from sinking if your hatches or hull leaks and keeps stuff from rolling around inside the kayak if you do hit some big wave action or do Eskimo rolls.

So to find some form of "collapsible snowshoe" I googled it and found one almost humorous

design that looked like something you could tie a string on and fly as a kite if you had a good wind. Clearly it would have lasted about a hundred yards. In short, I found nothing on line with regard to this quest. I really did not want to go to sea again with the bulky store-bought snowshoes, so I decided to try to make something that might do the trick.

I remember reading once a while back that during World War II, the one requirement to joining the Alaska Scouts, the local reconnaissance group made up mostly of Natives was that you had to know how to make a pair of snowshoes from scratch. As a kid I toyed with this and found the hard part is to keep the crossbar or bars that go under the ball of your foot attached to the long sticks that go front and back. You need the crossbars to be able to hold your weight and to be able to stay attached



John McCormick crosses a snow bridge. Photo by Stu Grenier.

to the long front and back sticks. After that fun experience I decided to avoid the problem completely by just having two crossbars attached to some kind of set-up that could allow for the long sticks to be attached in the field, thus shifting the problem of staying together to just attaching the long stick to whatever set-up I came up with. I kind of got an idea of how to do it, but not totally, when I went to that jack-of-all-things-welding, our good friend Dean Carmen. Dean has a garage full of aluminum junk, which he sometimes turns into some pretty cool pieces of art. He also welds the fittings on my stainless steel cook kits after they break. After talking about the design we decided to split some aluminum pipes lengthwise and weld them together with smaller-diameter pipes and just try that as a very compact, but indestructible, basic snowshoe frame that I could supplement with sticks or tree branches in the field to suit whatever length I thought conditions warranted. I used the old standard Vermont Tubbs style of binding. To attach the stick to the frame I decided to use hose clamps.

Our prototypes made it into the field when John McCormick, Alexander (Sasha) Zlatkovski, and I went on a paddle climb in Port Wells (see June 2011 *Scree*). We set up camp in Pirate Cove and John and I decided to snowshoe up the valley while Sasha went kayaking. We proceeded up this interesting and picturesque valley along the creek without snowshoes for about a mile, finding snowless places and firm-enough snow to move without snowshoes. We had to cross a few small creeks on snow bridges and the main creek as an open water crossing. The valley was bathed in that beautiful sunlight that folks who stick it out through the winter here feel we are owed after our limited-daylight winters. After working through some beaver dams, the temperature started to rise and the post-holing started as the snow lost any ability to hold our weight. It was time for the snowshoes.

John, having his store-bought ones, was ready to go in a flash while I, on the other hand, had to shop around for some sticks or bushes of the right diameters and lengths. I settled on some dead alders and some other sticks I found under a spruce tree. I cut them to length and then



**Stu displays his improvised snowshoe.  
Photo by John McCormick.**

hose-clamped them on. I tied the front tips together, but did not do the back ends. We continued snowshoeing up the valley.

The first thing I began to notice was Dean and I should have flattened the top of the pipe that was under my foot. The curvature of the pipe was not comfortable. Also, the weight of the sticks and frame was considerably heavier than

what I was used to and the awkward shape of the sticks made me concentrate more on walking than other snowshoes. After we climbed a scenic knoll in the center of Pirate Valley, it was clear that there were other problems. The whole attachment setup was not stable. Things were coming loose. I sat down and started tweaking everything and then realized that by not tying off the back ends I had destabilized the entire set up. I redid the tying and tied the back ends off this time and found the system to be stable.

John and I continued upvalley and found the snow really deep. Near creeks you could see it was yards deep and now extremely soft. We had to do some side-hilling when the creek cut into the back side of the knoll. The curvature of the pipes under my foot and binding proved to be a serious shortcoming again when side-hilling and caused my ankles to twist in the binding. Without snowshoes under these conditions, one would have to wait until after midnight for the snow to firm up in cooler temperatures to be able to make it out. Sitting around during numerous breaks we enjoyed the many waterfalls and vista of this seemingly untraveled valley. We toyed with the idea of trying to take a ridge, but with my equipment issues and the vast amount of snow I already felt my plate was pretty full with just being up this gorgeous valley.

Following our tracks for the most part, we returned to the top of the knoll and enjoyed the view looking down the valley at Pirate Cove and across Port Wells to Esther Island. When it came time to take the snowshoes off, I found myself relieved. It was an eye-opening experience to have to hunt through the woods to make functional gear without which I could not continue. It added greatly to the trip for me, but I can see that the time needed to get this kind of design of snowshoes functional would probably create stress on trips when other folks have store-bought gear. I still have yet to flatten the round pipes that proved to be the main design flaw. I suspect there are other ways this design could be improved.





The crew skis north up Pinochle trail into the Talkeetna Mountains. Photos by Wayne Todd.

## Mount Monarch Loop (Part 1)

By Wayne L. Todd

Five humans, (Becky King, Tony Perelli, Tim Griffin, Wendy Loya, and I) and Innoko the dog, pack into Tim's car, leaving the shuttle car at the Bonnie Lake pull-off. We approach the Pinochle Creek trailhead, on this brilliant blue sky day, for the start of our three-day loop of Mount Monarch. Despite a forecast for temperatures in the 20s and 30s, the car thermometer reads 5 °F. A mental check of my clothing and equipment seems inadequate, especially the rain pants. The car jacket I'm wearing suddenly has new purpose.

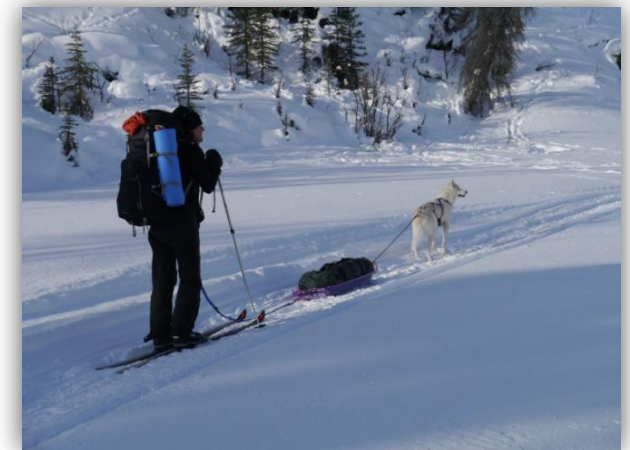
We park amongst the snowmachine trailers and follow 'machine tracks into the Talkeetna Mountains. As we ascend to Hicks Creek Pass, Innoko is offered up to pull my sled (the only one), so I comply. The sled is a reasonable 15 pounds (with brownies). As the angle surpasses the gripping ability of waxless skis, some of us walk up and some skin up.

We gradually leave the views behind of the northern Chugach Mountains and further enter the glistening snow-covered Talkeetna Mountains. It feels great to be outdoors and there is a sense of an impending wonderful trip. Moose dot the hillside as we ski. The wide trail lends to parallel conversation with friends. The day is calm and seemingly warm in the sun, if you move at a brisk pace. A few dozen snowmachiners pass by, heading out – most slowing down by us. A few stop their machines and just watch us as if we're a rare-animal sighting.

Various ski techniques are employed descending to Hicks Creek, along with various wipeouts. Our shadows stretch out ahead as the day progresses down Divide Creek (and the temperature drops). Folks take turns skjoring with Innoko.

We lose the sun on Caribou Creek and start looking for a suitable flat spot for tents and adequate wood for the Beast. We under-stomp the tent platform with skis and realize after setting up the Kifaru that it won't hold weight unless we sleep on skis. We seriously re-stomp down thru the crust to the sugar snow and reset camp. Stove A (Simmerlite) starts out working OK, but then trails off to not working at all. Stove B (Dragonfly) starts off not working, builds to a crescendo, and then drops to an andante. This is frustrating and problematic, as we have much snow to melt for five thirsty people and one hard pulling dog. Mild tinkering and later field stripping of stove A leads to a labeling of 'dead stove' (fuel line?). Interchanging of A's bottle with B's body builds a hot-rocket snow-melter. By now the Beast is pinging hot and able to assist with snow melt.

The sky darkens, more and more stars alight, and then we are treated to banding and dancing



Wendy Loya skjors with Innoko on Divide Creek.



**Wendy, Tim, Innoko, Becky and Tony enjoy the sun, backdropped by Mount Monarch on the left, Mount Chitna on the right, and Crown Peak in the center.**

green northern lights for as long as we wish to stand outside in the -10 °F. A bonfire warms folks, as does arm swinging, foot dancing, booty wearing, and pad standing. The serious warmth, though, is in the Kifaru with the few-pound branch-burning stove. But be warned, any synthetic clothing that contacts the Beast or stovepipe instantly vaporizes (as would skin).

After full meals and hot drink rounds, we nestle in our sleeping bags for a chilly night (30 degrees colder than expected). The northern lights continue to dance.

## 2/19/2012

The peaks alight with morning sun as we tend to our bodies and gear. Eventually the glorious sunshine reaches us before we ski northwest out from camp up Caribou Creek. We pass a few traps next to the trail, one with a partial eaten animal (Lynx?). The valley bottom narrows to a short canyon (now Chitna Creek) so we weave back and forth, still on a snowmachine trail. Feather and skidded-foot tracks tell the story of a bird that abruptly landed for small prey, or at least to drink some water.

An urgent 'Moose!' yell from around a corner warns of a large, trotting, agitated animal heading my way. I quickly flank a wall, continue the 'Moose!' warning and watch her trot by heading for two others. Everyone escapes harm. Next we encounter the agitated two-year-old calf. After herding it around numerous corners, we finally slip by in a wide section. We see upward of 50 moose in these two valleys.

Oddly, while in front checking out the route on a non-snowmachined corner, I encounter another moose standing at the base of a gentle ice

flow. My cohorts are taking a break out of sight. Yelling, branch snapping, and pole waving do not move him along. I now know prolific licking and 360 degree turns is an ominous warning. From our 15-yard distance he suddenly moves forward as I press against a small alder clump, yell "Moose!" repeatedly, and at 6 feet with his head down and making growling noises, I put my pole forward to his nose and have a sick feeling I'm about to be stomped. He backs up a bit as I try to sidestep up near vertical snow. Human reinforcements arrive, but two of us on point have similarly poor results so we retreat back around the corner and climb up the hill we were trying to avoid.

The snowmachine trail heads steeply upslope so we begin traversing gradually up and left in the main valley. Moose are prolific and we encounter other bad-attitude animals, but on broad slopes we give them distance. Today we have little direct sun as ridges blocked the sun earlier and now the skies have segued to high overcast.

At a break spot, a GPS and map check alerts us to 'something's not right.' A bit later, further route checking and group consensus is that we've traveled 2 miles too far up Chitna Creek. We about-face for a fun and fairly quick ski to the northwest-trending valley of Chitna Pass.

Despite the hour, the consensus is to push on for Boulder Creek today. Ideally, we should be out by 3 p.m. tomorrow for an obligation.

We skin up, with some clever rigging of one set of non-fitting skins. Fortunately, the experienced group all brought skins. Innoko again takes my sled. I'm tethered to the back of the sled and comfortably pace with him on the steeper and softer sections. However, on the flatter sections where he wants to catch up, I have to nearly jog to keep up. Whenever he stops, a slight push on the sled encourages him to pull again. He never complains, but loves to be petted.

To be continued.



**Our ski trail up Chitna Creek (we should have been traversing out of this valley).**





Harold Faust ascends the north side of Snow River Pass. Photo by Dano Michaud.

## Should be Simple Enough, Just Get Going while the Getting is Good

By Dano Michaud

Looking at the internet's 10-day forecast, the weather page was showing yellow balls and cold temperatures for the next three days. So the call went out to Harold Faust, "Do you want to get out (stupid question) and do some exploring?"

Circular-traverse is what I call this form of travel, the trip starts at one point and travel in a direction that circles around a large land mass, returning back to the start. On this trip we didn't come completely around. Harold's wife dropped

us off at the Ptarmigan Creek Trailhead and our truck was 8 miles south and in another parking area, at Milepost 13 of the Seward Highway.

So the plan was simple enough, go up the Ptarmigan Creek Trail, crossing Ptarmigan Lake, proceed up and over Snow River Pass into the Paradise Valley, and then out the North Fork of the Snow River and finally wrapping it up at our parked truck some 26 miles on the other end.

So to get the most of the day, we started early. As aforementioned, Harold's wife dropped us off at the Ptarmigan Creek Trailhead.

This is a beautiful backcountry trail that is highly recommended pretty much all year. But the natural obstacles keep the masses down, so it is uncommon to run into someone.

We don our snowshoes, packs with skis (yes, I said both), and the sled we used to pull our more bulky gear. The trail was not as bad as last year when Harold and I did this same trail and made 30+ deadfall crossings in just 3.5 miles to the lake. We were fortunate to have only six trees to climb under, over, or go around, and it still took us three hours to get to the lake.

The lake was a breath of fresh air. We knew the flat, smooth surface was going to provide us with some sweet traveling. This we wanted for making up lost time spent on the trail. We scooted along, making great progress crossing this three-mile lake, the snow cover was minimal and provided us a real sweet glide. And as always, it was fun to hear the lake grunt and groan, pop, and crack as we moved along.

At the end of the lake is where the main trail ended and few travelers ever visit. We were

glad that this section was not deep in snow cover because after crossing the lake this area was thick with alders and small, but continuous, creek crossings. We made it through that mess and then busted out and onto a real nice dry creekbed. For the next 2.5 miles we enjoyed the nice traveling that Mother Nature had provided us. Skiing along and enjoying this remote backcountry canyon, we rounded a bend in the creek which came to an abrupt end some 300 meters in front of us. It was then we knew that it was time to go south and leave the luxurious travel conditions of this dry creek bed.

We climbed the river bank and then proceeded up and into a field of cottonwood and spruce-chocked forest. By this time both of us were hitting a wall, and with daylight knocking at our heels, it was determined that a nice camp location was in store. What was most desirable was an area close to water and where we could build a fire safely. As we traveled, the spruce trees thinned out and the hemlocks took over and then it wasn't long and our camp location presented itself. We immediately began the task of setting up camp and getting some hot liquids and grub going. We split the tasks with Harold working on the fire and me on the tent and kitchen.



Harold Faust crawling under some deadfall on the Ptarmigan Creek trail. Photo by Dano Michaud.



**Dano Michaud touring through Paradise Valley.  
Photo by Harold Faust.**

The next morning before traveling, we filled our guts with grub and put on dry clothes. The fire the night before was very nice in this lowland travel. We disposed of our carbon print and we were now ready to tackle the alders and all they had to offer. My gosh, was I clueless, this valley (Snow River Pass) is not large in width nor length, but difficulty was made up for in all the alders and ....more alders. We picked the side we thought would do us best and headed that direction trying to get some elevation so as to get out of the alders and to get some kind of visual bearing on the lay of the land.

Now we both knew when we did this gig that the travel conditions were unknown due to the current snowfall and unexplored terrain, so we decide to bring both snowshoes and skis. To some this might seem very burdensome, but we were willing to take the chance. This country has had early glacier passing (couple thousand years ago) and it is very common to get into a spot that from a distance appeared to be casual traveling, but instead deep gorges or ravines will be the common obstacles. In these types of areas snowshoes are without a doubt the only way to go. As for the skis, they were to be used

on the long, flat areas where they would prove very beneficial. One problem, busting through alders pulling a sled, carrying a pack with skis can be, well to say the least, a real pain in the bum. But hey, this is a good day if travel in this fashion keeps us from our jobs.

Our alder bashing came to an end around 2 o'clock for we were getting closer to the head of the pass and the glorious hemlock forest was coming into view. As we got closer we came across some high mountain lakes and ponds which were a nice twist in the travel. Past travels have proved that hemlock forests like these usually have some nice cuts, breaks, ravines and small creekbeds that, if you catch them just right, can provide great traveling routes down to our desired destinations.

And it did just that, and by 4:00 p.m. we were at the bottom and into Paradise Valley. Unfortunately for us, the clouds would periodically bust open and then huddle back together, blocking out what we already knew was out there, the magnificent unclimbed peaks that guard this valley. Even if we weren't there to climb them, viewing them even for a short time is surely worth the pains endured. Paradise Valley was well named, this gem is a sacred land by any man with a heart for the backcountry, and access difficulties kept it so.

The valley opened up and we traveled on a large area that was a possible swamp or grassland that was thick in snow and we traveled for two more hours, stopping at a wolverine cache that was a burrowed hole in the snow. The dinner bell was the fresh fur from the victim that is the balance of life and death in this fragile existence. Moving on along a snow-choked creek, Camp 2 came into view and within minutes set-up was in full progress, Harold on the building of the kitchen and fire detail and I on the tent. Our travels have never included the use of fire as most of our overnight explorations involve

elevations where the only heat source we gets is provide by the food we consume and the clothing that insulates us. This was an exception and it was very comforting to have the fire, must be some kind of primeval instinct, or maybe it's just cool to roast Pop-Tarts in that fashion.

Throughout the night a light snowfall was heard hitting our tent and it continued until we broke camp. We fired up our stove for fresh cups of joe and breakfast, which consisted of two packs of instant oatmeal that were doctored up with a assortments of nuts, dried berries and fruits, coconut flakes, M&Ms, a slab of butter, and dried goat's milk (only type that has fat in it). With guts full and packs ready, we headed out on our final leg of the trip. The travel was most enjoyable. As we skied a light snow fell and the valley opened up to its grandeur with old growth tree-covered moraines, cottonwood growth, and then spruce-covered hills and large boulder fields left behind from ancient glacial retreats, numerous ponds, lakes, and the Hearth Glacier terminating at the valley floor.



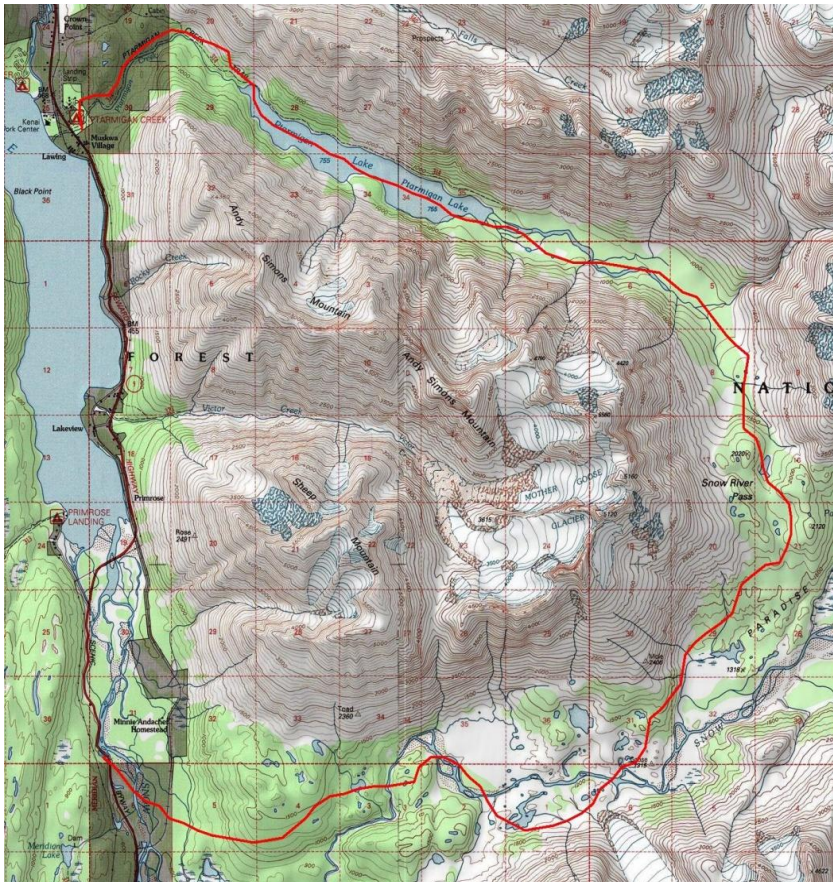
**Dano Michaud ascending the north side of Snow River Pass.  
Photo by Harold Faust.**



We hooked up and proceeded down through the hemlock forest. The going was much more forgiving as the snow level was less and our

As always the crux seems to come at the end of our trips and this one seemed to be no different. As we got out of the forest and made it to the lowland, our trip along the Snow River had one area she wasn't going to give up so easily. The trail crossed a piece of ice that itself was very sketchy. Then the trail – if you could call it that – hugged the rock wall just a few inches above the river that at this point was a good 4 feet deep and very cold. If one was to be careless, the price would be critical. The obstacle of concern was that the trail was so tight we had to do it without packs, but at the very end a short snow-covered icy rock without any handholds had to be mastered. One of those last-minute, what-the-heck-am-I-going-to-do-here thoughts comes to mind. After we both got past the area with our packs, it was then time to go retrieve the sled.

**Unnamed and unclimbed  
peak southeast of  
Snow River Pass.  
Photo by Dano Michaud.**



**Harold Faust squeaking his sled through a narrow gap along the North Fork of the Snow River.  
Photo by Dano Michaud.**







North face of East Kinglet Peak on a cold morning.  
Photos by Mark Smith.

## The North Fork

By Mark Smith

Sitting at the South Fork Eagle River trailhead with a cold beer and chips was a better ending than I had envisioned just shortly before. At least a mile from the end of my four-day trek from Bird, I'd been surprised to find that I was able to get cell phone reception. That would give my son, Carl, a jump on driving up from Anchorage to meet me. I'd arranged for him to be expecting my call sometime after 6:00 p.m. To my dismay, I discovered that he was in Cooper Landing, returning from Mount Marathon. Now I was faced with hours to kill. However, I'd previously spoken with a co-worker who lived near the trailhead and had been invited to stop by and visit. Having hiked all day and then walked a mile on pavement to get to his house, my feet

were getting pretty sore when I discovered they weren't home. It wasn't until the next day that I learned he'd left a cooler of beer on the back porch for me. While walking back to the trailhead for my long wait, I did meet a woman with whom I served on the Chugach State Park advisory board. It was she who later met me at the trailhead with the beer. Thus ended my fifth visit to the North Fork of Ship Creek.

The trip had started with high ambitions for climbing several peaks along the route. Beyond the end of Bird Ridge lies The Beak. From Tom Choate's

account, it sounded like more than I would be willing to tackle, but at least worthy of exploring partway up. By the time I'd groped my way in the fog and drizzle to the south base of The Beak, I'd lost all interest in attempting to climb something that I couldn't even see. Instead I headed down the steep slope leading to the area that I refer to as Bidarka Valley. It's a beautiful area of beaver ponds surrounded on three sides by Bird Ridge Overlook, The Beak, and Bidarka Peak.

Over the years, with encouragement by example from John Recktenwald, I'd been progressively reducing my pack weight. This was the first trip of more than a single night that I'd planned to use a bivy sack. One problem that I'd always wondered about was how to get in and out of the sack in the rain without getting soaked. Fortunately the morning of this trip I'd added several ounces to my load by packing a small mylar sheet. With that stretched over me as a lean-to, I was able to enter and exit my bivy sack while staying dry, and in the morning to cook

under shelter. The best part was not having to sleep in a zipped-up body bag.

The next day I headed up the extension of Bird Ridge north of The Beak. I headed up yet another bird part, The Wing, before descending north into a drainage feeding the North Fork of Ship Creek. This time I had a delightful, clear, evening lying on dry tundra while cooking and reading. Although it was almost late enough to retire, the view of several possible routes up Tail Feather Peak, which rose 2,000 feet from my camp, was too tempting to pass up. After climbing more than halfway up and several failed attempts to find the routes that had looked so promising, a night's rest became more tempting.

Fine weather continued the next morning as I descended the rest of the way into the valley of the North Fork. Since first setting foot there on a trip with my nephew, John, enroute from the South Fork of the Eagle River to Crow Pass, I've thought that it was one of the prize spots in the Park. The valley runs 10 miles east from the confluence with the South Fork of Ship Creek to Grizzly Bear Lake and Moraine Pass. It rises from 2,000 feet to 3,000 feet and, after leaving the woods in the first couple of miles, is mostly



View down the North Fork of Ship Creek from below The Kinglets.





**Bird Creek crossing.**

easy tundra hiking. It seems almost like a small Denali Park, without the highway and without anyone else present. It offers numerous different routes to enter and exit the valley. On that first trip we crossed several ridges from Symphony Tarns before dropping into the North Fork and camping at Grizzly Bear Lake. To exit we clawed our way over the loose scree and boulders of Paradise Pass. The debris on the slope was so unstable that John had to wait at the bottom, completely out of the way until I'd reached the top.

My route on this day took me almost directly north across the valley and toward Concerto Peak. This had also been on my original peak-bagging itinerary but as the weather and my energy levels both deteriorated, it was an easy decision to change objectives. Instead I headed down the north slope into Ewe Valley, lying between Concerto and Triangle Peaks. On this occasion there were numerous sheep and steady rain. I began slogging up the south slopes of Triangle, which was the last peak on my list. After sweating up the 1,600-foot climb on wet rocks in the rain, I was greeted on the broad, west shoulder of Triangle by strong winds and a surprisingly cold temperature. After taking a snack break in the shelter of a boulder and wrapping myself in 2 ounces of mylar, my interests were more focused on a warm night's

rest than hiking the rest of the way up an easy peak in the cold wind and rain.

Camp was in the open along the shore of one of the Symphony Tarns. I struggled to arrange my poles, guy ropes and assorted rocks to adequately secure my lean-to for the night. I found it more challenging to stay dry as the wind blew the rain. I slept fitfully as the tarp flapped. On one or two occasions it blew loose and I had to get up to secure it while attempting to keep my bivy sack and bag dry. Eventually the wind grew stronger and the snapping of the mylar sounded like gun shots. By then I'd lost all hope of sleeping. I'd planned to arise early for a grand exploration up to the Flute Glacier, but when the wind eventually died, sleeping in sounded like a better idea. When I finally did look around, I discovered that snow had fallen overnight, on July 4<sup>th</sup>, down to about 5,000 feet.

Despite the less-than-ideal sleeping accommodations on this trip, it was more comfortable than another of my earlier forays into the North Fork. That solo trip started from Crow Pass. I crossed Steamroller Pass and intended to hike down upper Bird Creek. One view of the upper valley made it clear that the route would entail endless bushwhacking. Instead I turned north to scramble over The Kinglets and into the North Fork. My lightweight gear wasn't quite as refined at this point. I spent the night in an ultralight tent without a sleeping bag, but using my backpack as half a bivy. I couldn't understand why I'd been so cold on a night in June until I awoke and saw new ice covering the entire pond nearby.

That trip took me through Bird Creek Pass for the first time. At times it was unclear on which side of the pass to descend. Eventually I came upon a well defined game trail. It was depressed into the soil and showed moose and bear tracks. There was a good bit of fresh bear scat to further indicate the most popular route. Eventually I came to the spot on the Imus map marked as "ford." Ahead of me lay 75 feet of thigh-deep

class III whitewater with a rope of indeterminate age stretched across at head height.

Twice I've visited the North Fork in the winter. The most recent was with Greg Bragiel when we skied from Arctic Valley to Bird. The first couple of miles after leaving the main Arctic to Indian trail were somewhat tedious. At times the creek offered a good route; at other times we had to ski in the woods through some deadfall. Before long, though, it opened up into tundra and beaver ponds. It was like enjoying the entire Arctic to Indian route without a sign of others. And who would have expected directions in this remote spot? But there in the open tundra, near the entrance to Bird Creek Pass, was an out-of-place skier sign on a lone tree.

There are other routes yet to explore into and out of the North Fork. From Steamroller Pass there's allegedly another pass to the north that drops into Moraine Pass. Then there's the suggestion of a route, a dotted line on Imus's map, from Moraine Pass down Camp Creek to Eagle River. After reading one person's account of endless alders, I thought this might be better attempted in the winter. Then my friend Jeremy told me about his several-day ordeal, including a late-night bivouac on the steep slopes along Camp Creek with a partner who was never in a hurry, even as their trip stretched beyond the point when he's informed his wife that she could report him as overdue. But that's his story to tell.



**Greg Bragiel stands by the skiing man sign near Bird Creek Pass.**



Kris leading a team. Photos by Wayne Todd.



Students testing a bollard anchor.



Above: Chris climbing in the wind gusts.



Above and right: Instructors with their students during Sunday's class.



# MCA Snow Travel Class February 11 and 12, 2012

## Basic Mountaineering School

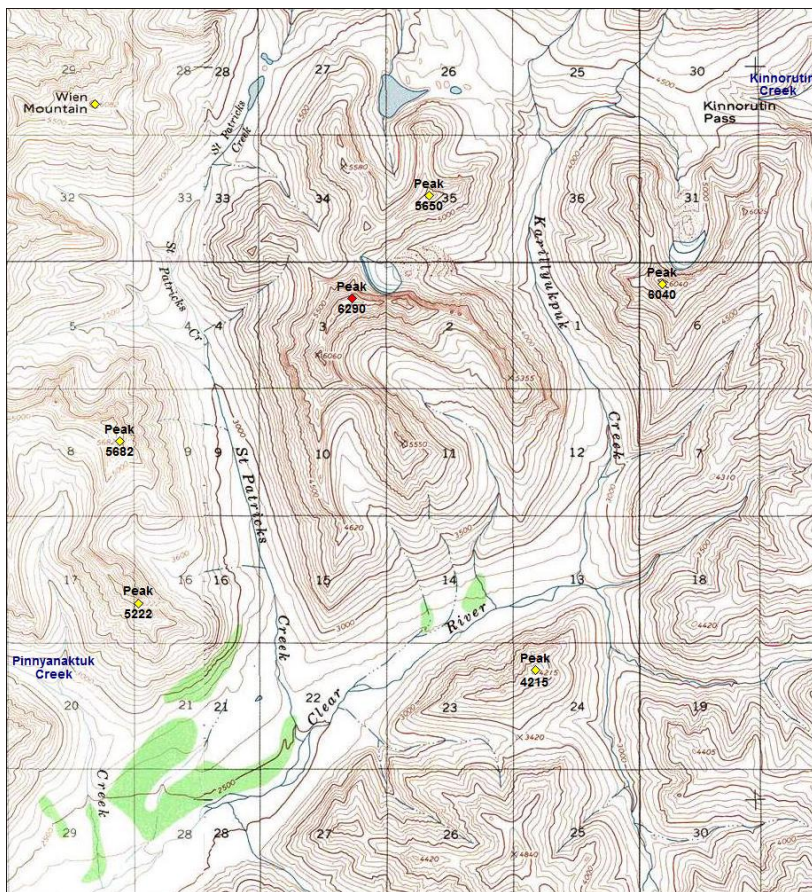
By Wayne Todd

Despite steady winds and prevalent spindrift, students and instructors prevailed for a full Saturday of gloves-on training at stations of anchors, belays, self-arrest, and snow travel.

Sunday was a good-visibility, gusty day for roped climbs south of the skiers' gully on Little O'Malley Peak utilizing newly acquired techniques. Thanks to Dean Carman, Tom Dolan, Randy Howell, Ryan Jones, Rob Litsenberger, Dave Lynch, Tim Silvers, and Wayne Todd for instructing.

Congratulations to all the students on your persistent and successful completion of this class. I encourage you to continue learning and wish you safe and adventuresome travels in the mountains.





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

## Peak of the Month: Peak 6290

By Steve Gruhn

Mountain Range: Brooks Range; Endicott Mountains

Borough: Unorganized Borough

Drainages: Karillyukpak Creek and Saint Patricks Creek

Latitude/Longitude: 67° 53' 24" North, 150° 27' 27" West

Elevation: 6290 feet

Prominence: 2040 feet from Amawk Mountain (6671)

Adjacent Peak: Peak 5650 in the Amawk Creek and Karillyukpak Creek drainages

Distinctness: 1240 feet from Peak 5650

USGS Map: Wiseman (D-1)

First Recorded Ascent: Mid-August 1966 by J. David Scheyer and Samuel A. Wright, Jr.

Route of First Recorded Ascent: Unknown

Access Point: Chimney Lake

On August 10, 1966, Sam Wright and Dave Scheyer chartered a float plane from Bettles to Chimney Lake. Heading over the mountains and up the Hammond River, they set out to investigate a place near Kinnorutin Creek where Bob Marshall had planted some white spruce seeds in 1939. Finding no evidence that the seeds had sprouted, they climbed Apoon Mountain on August 13, 1966. Then they continued through Kinnorutin Pass, down Saint Patricks Creek, up a tributary, through the pass between Midnight Mountain and Mount Doonerak, to Bombardment Creek. From a camp near Bombardment Creek, they planned to attempt the south face of Mount Doonerak, but heavy rains prevented them from reaching the summit.

Returning to Saint Patricks Creek, Scheyer and Wright climbed Peak 6290 as something of a consolation prize. They then headed up Saint Patricks Creek, down Amawk Creek, and up the North Fork of the Koyukuk River to Barrenland Creek, where Marshall had also planted white spruce seeds in 1939. They found Marshall's stakes that marked his plot, but found no evidence that the spruce seeds had sprouted. From there, they headed up Ernie Creek, through Ernie Pass, and down the Anaktuvuk River to Anaktuvuk Pass, arriving on August 23.

After flying to Chimney Lake, Gus and Emily Benner, Charles Hildebolt, and Geoff Radford made a technical climb of the north ridge of Peak 6290 on August 23, 1973. The climb consisted of lots of 4<sup>th</sup> class climbing with 4-1/2 pitches of 5.1 to 5.2 climbing. They exited to the west, made one long rappel, and descended a gully.

Gus Benner's report entitled "Doonerak and Other Peaks, Brooks Range" appeared on page 140 of the 1974 *American Alpine Journal* and featured a brief account of the 1973 technical climb of the north ridge of Peak 6290. Additional information for this article was obtained from Sam Wright's 1988 book, *Koviashuvik: Making a Home in the Brooks Range*, from records in the Grace and John Vincent Hoeman Collection housed at the UAA Consortium Library, and from my correspondence with Gus Benner.



## Additional trip report photos.

### North Fork of Ship Creek photos.



Looking west from Grizzly Bear Lake.  
Photo by Mark Smith.



Ray Nabinger hands skis to John Pekar while Tom Dolan looks on. This is the “bridge” at the North Fork of the Ship Creek crossing spot.  
Photo by Amy Murphy.

Near the top of Bird Creek Pass, looking east toward Moraine Pass.  
Photo by Amy Murphy.



### More Snow River photos.



Interesting formations along the North Fork of the Snow River. Photo by Dano Michaud.



Wolverine Cache.  
Photo by Dano Michaud.

## Proposed Geographic Names

The MCA's Geographic Names Committee recently received a letter from the Alaska Historical Commission requesting comments on a proposal to name an 8,084-foot peak in the Schwan Glacier and Rude River drainages of the Chugach Mountains northeast of Cordova “Mount Chosin Few” in honor of the soldiers and marines who fought in the Battle of the Chosin Reservoir in the mountains of North Korea in November and December 1950. This peak is one of the most prominent unnamed peaks in the United States. It is also known as De Long Peak on bivouac.com (<http://bivouac.com/MtnPg.asp?MtnId=7783>).

There is also a proposal before the USGS' Board on Geographic Names to change the name of Negrohead Creek in the Dugan Hills west of Minto to Lochenyatt Creek. “Lochenyatt” reportedly means “grass tussocks” in the Lower Tanana Gwich'in language.

Contact Steve Gruhn at [geographicnames@mtclubak.org](mailto:geographicnames@mtclubak.org) to submit written comments regarding either of these proposals. Comments on the first proposal must be submitted to the Alaska Historical Commission before March 9. Comments on the proposed name change should be submitted to the USGS Board on Geographic Names as soon as possible.



## MCA Board Meeting Minutes February 1, 2012

**Note:** Tasks to be completed in **bold**.

Members Present: Tim Silvers (President), Galen Flint (Vice President), Randy Plant (Treasurer), Mark Smith (Secretary), Greg Encelewski (Director), Jim Sellers (Director)

1. Beckey Presentation – Voted on and all approved investigating whether Fred Beckey would be interested in giving a presentation, the appropriate venue, and reimbursement of expenses. **Galen** to take the lead.

2. Proxy Voting – Nothing in the bylaws or statute prohibits proxy voting. Jim suggested, and others agreed, that it should be used infrequently and for specific issues. Email voting was agreed to be acceptable in limited cases, primarily due to urgency. Any one member's objection to resolving an issue by email would be sufficient to prevent it from being voted by email. A log of results should be maintained.

3. Deletion of Members from Listserve – Board voted unanimously to delete members from the listserve who do not renew their membership after a reasonable time. Deletion will occur in March.

4. Urine in Latrines – Mark expressed a concern that dumping fecal-contaminated urine, in particular at the Mint Hut, might subject the club to liability. Although the diverter solution appears to be problematic in winter, we should inquire as to the success with it at the Snowbird Hut, at least in the summer.

5. Director and Officer Handbook Updates – Suggestion was made to archive annual budget summaries on the website and to maintain the budget detail with transactions on Google Docs.

6. Insurance – Jim reported that we will need new bids before we can purchase Directors-and-Officers insurance. **Jim** will request the price for the look-back protection, which provides coverage for incidents that occurred before the start of the policy. The purpose of D&O insurance is to protect individuals acting in their capacity as directors or officers from liability. Whether they are protected would rely on the "prudent man rule," i.e., they would not be covered for acts of negligence. It does not protect the club's assets in the event of a suit against the club. That would be

covered by a general liability policy. Due to the limited assets held by the club, such a suit would not likely be pursued and does not seem worth insuring against. As our bylaws indicate that trip leaders are considered temporary officers, they appear to be covered by the policy. Wording may need to be changed to include instructors as temporary officers. **Jim** is to confirm that temporary officers would be covered by a D&O policy.

7. Ad - \$200 ad approved last year and paid in January, 2012, for Kelsey Gray's book.

8. Chugach State Park – **Mark** is trying to secure a blanket permit for 2012 that would cover any activities where a permit is required.

9. Discounts – **Tim** will contact Backcountry.com about renewing our discount code.

10. Benefit Sharing – Nothing has been scheduled regarding meeting with other clubs. Jim expects to hear something in the spring.

Next meeting March 7.

---Mark Smith, secretary

## MCA General Meeting Minutes February 15, 2012

Parks Advisory: The Matanuska-Susitna Borough is arranging a land swap for Government Peak property that would enable a future downhill ski area.

Trips: Greg Bragiel has trips scheduled for the Resurrection Trail, the Talkeetna Mountains (Lane to Dnigi Huts), and Eklutna Traverse. He is also looking for trainers for a women's outdoor skills program at Victory Bible Camp on Saturday, March 10.

Training: Outdoor session of Introduction to Ice Climbing was held Saturday, February 4, rained out Sunday. Eight to 10 students participated, led by Andy Rembert with the help of other instructors. Snow Travel outdoor sessions were conducted the weekend of February 11-12. Wayne Todd led, with help from other instructors. Eighteen students participated. Upcoming sessions scheduled for nutrition, winter camping, and crevasse rescue.

Geographic Names: "Mount Chosin Few" has been proposed for peak near Cordova.

General: Members who do not renew will be removed from the Listserve beginning in March. MCA's discount with Backcountry.com has been renewed through January 2013. Part of the proceeds from the Alaska Ice Fest will be used to establish the Ice Access Coalition. One target could be preserving access to Hunter Creek.

Slide Show Presentation by Harry Hunt: Climbing Quest for Adventure, Exploring Alaska Backcountry for Ice Climbs.

---Mark Smith, secretary

## Nuggets in the Scree

Jeff Babcock wrote to say that he has a new book ([Should I Not Return](#)) that details the events of the 1967 Mountaineering Club of Alaska Summer McKinley Expedition's ascent of Mount McKinley with his brother Bill, Chet Hackney, John Ireton, and Gayle Nienhueser. Jeff and Bill gave the August 2008 presentation to the MCA which covered their ascent and their actions in the face of an epic storm. On that expedition the members of the MCA Expedition were involved in the response to the infamous Wilcox tragedy that resulted in the deaths of seven climbers. See [www.shouldinotreturn.com](http://www.shouldinotreturn.com) for additional information. The Wilcox tragedy played a prominent role in the MCA's history. Partly as a result of actions taken in response to the Wilcox tragedy, the MCA bestowed honorary membership on George Hall, who was then the Superintendent of Mount McKinley National Park. And Ray Genet, Vin Hoeman, and two members of the Seattle Mountain Rescue Council made an August 27, 1967, ascent of Mount McKinley while searching for the bodies of the members of the Wilcox Expedition. That ascent was the latest summer ascent of Mount McKinley recorded.

# Mountaineering Club of Alaska

President	Tim Silvers	250-3374	Board member	Greg Encelewski	360-0274
Vice-President	Galen Flint	650-207-0810	Board member	Brian Aho	360-4671
Secretary	Mark Smith	868-3155	Board member	Vicky Lytle	351-8246
Treasurer	Randy Plant	243-1438	Board member	John Recktenwald	346-2589
			Board member	Jim Sellers	360-2560

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 Membership Committee at [membership@mtnclubak.org](mailto:membership@mtnclubak.org).

The 'Scree' is a monthly publication of the Mountaineering Club of Alaska. Articles, notes and letters submitted for publication in the newsletter should be emailed to [MCAScree@gmail.com](mailto:MCAScree@gmail.com). Articles should be submitted by the 25<sup>th</sup> of the month to appear in the next month's Scree.

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. Ads can be emailed to [vicepresident@mtnclubak.org](mailto:vicepresident@mtnclubak.org).

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.

Mailing list/database entry: Yukiko Hayano and Randy Plant - 243-1438

Hiking and Climbing Committee: Vicky Lytle - [hcc@mtnclubak.org](mailto:hcc@mtnclubak.org)

Huts: Greg Bragiel - 569-3008

Calendar: Stuart Grenier - 337-5127

Scree Editor: [MCAScree@gmail.com](mailto:MCAScree@gmail.com) Steve Gruhn (344-1219) assisted by Amy Murphy (338-3979)

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