

the SCREE

Mountaineering Club of Alaska

May 2012

Volume 55 Number 5



*"Do not try to conquer others—conquer yourself
and you will have conquered the world."*

—Meher Baba (quote courtesy of Erik Johnson)

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Peak of the Month: Bush

Monthly Meeting:

Wednesday, May 16 at 6:30 p.m.

Program:

Laron Thomas will present on his first ascent
up the West Face of Mount Silverthrone,
13,220 feet, in the Alaska Range.



The Mountaineering Club of Alaska

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

May Program

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Cover Photo: Erik Johnson on the summit of Mount Alice, viewing north-northwest. Photo by David Apperson.

Article Submission

Text and photography submissions for the Scree can be sent as attachments to mcascree@gmail.com. Articles should be submitted by the 25th 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

August 6th to August 11th, 2012:
Lake Clark National Park/Twin Lakes. Setup base camp at upper Twin Lake and go on day hikes exploring the area. We'll also visit Richard Proenneke's cabin, author of *One Man's Wilderness* and film "Alone in the Wilderness." To sign up, contact Don Hansen at donjoehansen@msn.com or phone 243-7184.

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.

Library

The Club has a library that has been in storage for about five years. It consists of about 600 books related to climbing and mountaineering, magazines dating back to the 1960s, and club "memorabilia." The board has been looking for a secure place where members can access these materials. We have been talking to local libraries, outdoor organizations in the Anchorage area, and the museum. At this point we have not found a home, although we may have found an archive

for the memorabilia. If you know of a place where the books can be housed, please have them contact one of the board members. Ideally it would be relatively secure, but easily accessible to club members. In discussions with the libraries and others that have collected magazines over the years, it is clear that storing hard copies of magazines is no longer practical. None of the places we have contacted will even consider taking magazines. They can be searched and recovered online if anyone is looking for the historical information. Most libraries are set up to help people find this sort of information digitally. If anyone wants these magazines, they should contact Vicky Lytle at Victoria.lytle@gmail.com or 891-0413. The magazines we have include *Climbing* (~ 1970-2000), *Rock & Ice* (~ 1985-2001), *Summit* (~1961-1996), *Mountain* (~1973-1985), *Off Belay* (~1972-76), and *High* (~1995-1999). Any left after June 1 will be put in the recycling bin.

Climbing Notes

On April 11, 2012, Galen Flint, Ross Noffsinger, Carrie Wang, and I climbed Bunting Peak then Roost Peak in Chugach State Park. Roost was my final peak of the 120 in the park. Thank you to the numerous wonderful climbing partners over the years that made this possible.

Wayne L. Todd

On-line? – click me



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



John McCormick hiking up the south ridge with Eaglek Bay below and Knight Island on the horizon. Photos by Stu Grenier.

Peak 2484 Eaglek Bay Paddle Climb

By Stu Grenier

The most conspicuous peak accessible from Eaglek Bay in Prince William Sound, Peak 2484, can be seen in the Alaska Atlas and miles before you enter Eaglek Bay from the south. Other peaks around the bay are higher, but there is something about how this one stands alone and its classic shape that, as the record shows, makes it an early target for many seagoing mountain folks that happen to pass by these waters. Dave Sczawinski, owner and operator of

Pristine Oysters, an oyster farm in the area, told me how he watched Chuck Pratt ski up the north ridge to the summit in 1992 and then ski down. Mr. FA (first ascent), Tim Kelley himself, also could not resist it (see the November 2004 *Scree*) and neither could the writers of all things in Prince William Sound, Jim and Nancy Lethcoe. In their [Cruising Guide to Prince William Sound](#) (page 111), they described the trip to

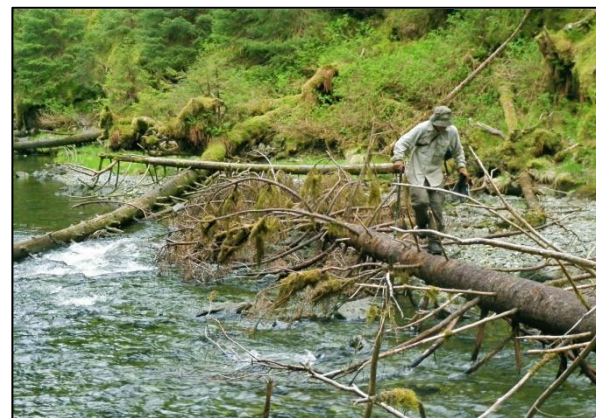
the summit as "a relatively easy walk" and say the peak is unnamed. The truth is John McCormick and I decided soon after seeing the mountain on this trip that we wanted it and all the rest of the above information came to us after it was agreed that Peak 2484 was going to be our dance partner for this paddle climb. In short, for me to have passed it up would have made it harder to concentrate on the other peaks in the area on future trips. We were hooked regardless if it was a virgin or not.

Like everything in Alaska, you want to line the weather up with a location and schedule so you can have things nice. If you go for it without the weather, you may end up with something nasty and you will find folks won't want to come out again next season or ever again. Some of my gear was given to me by MCA-ers who were finished with the sound on account of its charming weather. John McCormick pointed out on this trip that he estimates that 99 percent of people do not like being wet and cold and that is

enough to keep them away. I took comfort from this thought, worrying that maybe the reason we rarely get new folks on these paddle climbs is because I have a tendency of declaring certain areas clothing optional on hot afternoons or to tell bear stories and then to complain when folks start following me around too much because I carry a gun. It is a mystery, isn't it?

So, about lining up a base camp and good enough weather. We had nine days of food, and if things did not go right with the weather, we were prepared to forget the mountains and just paddle around and fish or explore valleys and beaches. Late May and early June is usually the best weather in the sound so we were hopeful, and not by accident, out there then.

On the evening of June 6, we pulled into Eaglek Bay, and after surprising Dave at the oyster farm with two women and getting the local information on Peak 2484, we made for a beach near the mountain since we had good weather. Alexander (Sasha) Zlatkovski wanted to be where he could see miles of water so we stayed out of the little bays. When we got up the next morning, things were not going our way. Summits in thick clouds, and by 10 a.m. hard rain. John and I decided to stay low, and so we joined Sasha, the paddle-only guy, on a trip to the biggest waterfall in Prince



John McCormick crossing a creek after the tide came in and forced us into the brush to get back to the kayak.



Suzzie working the oysters in years past.

William Sound
– Cascade
Falls in Eaglek
Bay.

It was worth it. In the spring it is at its peak size. As we cut through the mist at the foot of the falls, I thought of Dave's now deceased wife Suzzie. The first two times I met her on kayak runs between Whittier and Valdez she had really

encouraged me to paddle the extra few miles to the falls. She even offered to motor us there in a skiff. It was one of her favorite places. This was my first time there. I found myself really enjoying the vertigo effect from watching the rushing water as well as the supremely cool fresh air blowing off the falls and the mist they created. Waterfall mist purportedly contains negative ions, which are associated with states of euphoria. The roar was like that of an avalanche, except constant. As we caught glimpses of seals and river otters in the firth, I decided then to dedicate this climb, if there was a climb, to Suzzie. In years past she had allowed me to spend a few days helping out at the oyster farm letting me eat all the raw oysters I could. When she realized what a pig I was the deal was not renewed. She was always a lot of fun. The thought of her, if not a hint of her presence, was common while I was around Eaglek Bay. Yet another touch to the mystical aspects of this area.

In general there is something about hanging with

folks who live in the middle of nowhere in Alaska all year around, when you are just seeing the sights by muscle power. It could have to do with folks who live by bush time rather than city time. It makes relations in the Big Town seem empty in comparison. The necessity of shelter, human companionship, and varied eats or local information seems to make peoples' humanity shine compared to urban life in the belly of the beast where we are all comparatively hand fed.

Due to weather Eaglek Bay was a bust for climbing, so we moved the circus to Unakwik Inlet. Here we set up shop at a convenient spot for watching humpback whales and sea lions and then decided to take a shot at Peak 2484 from Mueller Cove since the weather started to cooperate. John and I left the double at the back of Mueller Cove and topped out on the saddle on the ridge that separates Unakwik Inlet from Eaglek Bay. We then dropped down to the tidal lagoon (Schoppe Lagoon) which looks like a lake on the map at the back of Schoppe Bay and walked across it at low tide. From there we headed for the same south ridge we had hoped to climb earlier from Eaglek Bay. While going through muskeg open areas we got to see John's first Alaskan deer. They saw us and we saw them and they were gone in a blur. It would have been impossible to get a shot off if we were hunting. I guess you have to see them before they see you to have any chance.

After the muskeg open areas gave way to large evergreens with thick brush underneath, the mountain got steeper as we skirted the really steep areas for the less steep ramps. In one area John, with better boots, chose to use his ice axe to work up a steep open area. I, with Xtratufs and their comparably limited side-hilling ability, chose to stay in the thickets to minimize exposure. I like minimizing exposure. It is who I am. As expected the trees and brush gave way to the open ridge with snow fields and occasional melted out areas. The vastness of the view south toward the heart of the sound, especially toward Knight Island, with a

Japanese-watercolor-like blue hue that seemed mind bogglingly intense, gave the climb almost an air of ecstasy when combined with the expectation of the new summit.

The ridge narrowed the higher we got, and just before one of the false summits, dropped off into oblivion to the east, climber's right. To the west, cornice or mega snow, which at times also was too steep to see down. Right before the steep wet moss slopes climber's right started to offer the potential of a death slip, a cairn caught my eye. The realization that somebody had put some time into this ridge made me speculate whom it might have been. The placement would suggest somebody who did not want to deal with exposure, probably their own personal summit. I had also noticed farther down, footholds cut into moss and gravel on a steep unavoidable section of the route. Did Suzzie once say she came up here from time to time or was it the Alaska Pacific University kids or Leo Americus, an old peakbagging friend whom Dave tells me frequents these parts, who knows? I was hoping for a summit register to help answer some questions. Choosing to use the ice axe and brave the cornice I took my Xtratufs up a short, steep snow face, rather than deal with a possible death



Peak 2484 rises behind Sasha Zlatkovski as he paddles across Eaglek Bay in Prince William Sound.

slide to the east. Either way, the warm breath of exposure was on the back of my neck, but less so in the snow. John was now back up with me after spending time on the west face. All things went well and, as we topped the last false summit, a good-sized cairn appeared on the true summit with a 10-foot-high, view-blocking cornice off to the west. The summit cairn was covered with lichens, so undoubtedly had been there for years. [Ed. note: Paul May reported building this cairn in May 2001.] I dug down and moved a few rocks, but found no register. John and I left a register dedicating the climb to Suzzie with date and route info and the letters MCA.

John suggested we do a traverse and take the north ridge down to where it forked back to the east, but as usual, I wouldn't have it. I wanted the known. As I descended I lost my feet with the Xtratufs no less than four times landing on my butt and sometimes self arresting with the ice axe. The Xtratufs do have their limitations, and the higher you go above certain elevations in certain seasons, the more dangerous they become. John's method of wearing his rubber kayak shoes for the approach and leaving then at the bottom of the climb to change out to Vibram-soled hiking boots gives him the edge on side-hilling and kicking steps. I am still toying with using crampons with the Xtratufs, but crampon bites will ruin the boots, which now run about \$70 for a new pair. When post-holing crampon bites are likely to happen, so you end up in the situation of taking the crampons on and off again and again as conditions change. Plus hauling them around in the kayaks is a drag. John's method is certainly safer.

We got back to Schoppe Lagoon and found the tide had come in, so we had to walk around the edge of the lagoon to pick up John's kayak shoes and to get to the saddle that leads to Mueller Cove. This was a pleasant accident that resulted in more bear sightings and discovering some very beautiful deep forest. We crossed the main creek, John on a log and me wading, we made it

back to the kayak by 10 p.m. We met Sasha, who was watching whales in his kayak after spending the day again at Cascade Falls. The adventure continued, but that was it for inland and up on this trip.

In the previously mentioned Scree article, Tim suggested the name Schoppe Peak for Peak 2484. Due to the fact that there is already a Schoppe Bay and it is a family name rather than a descriptive name and of multiple pronunciations, I am suggesting Pristine Peak for this mountain. Pristine Oysters is the name of the oyster farm which has been within sight of the mountain for over 20 years and, though the peak seems to be a popular climb as mountains go in the area, it is still more fitting than other suggestions. It is a suitable name for a beautiful peak and for me a permanent salute to a woman that lived and loved this place with all her heart.

We are planning another Prince William Sound paddle climb in late May or early June. There may be kayak space for a like-minded

person or experienced paddle climber with the right schedule for the trip and training. Let me know sooner, rather than later, if you are interested.



Stu Grenier cleaning oysters and eating them in years past.



John McCormick and Stu Grenier on the summit with Unakwik Inlet behind them.



John McCormick and Sasha Zlatkovski enjoying a fire on a wet day.



David Apperson sitting on the col 95% of the way up the mountain. Photos by Erik Johnson unless otherwise noted.

Probably Shouldn't Have Done It, But...

Mount Alice, 5318 feet, Kenai Mountains

By Erik Johnson

Since first visiting Seward, Alaska, in 2008 I have, like so many others, looked long and hard at the summit of Mount Alice. I met my buddy David Apperson in 2009 when out for a run on Lost Lake Trail. While running through the mud on the winter trail in early summer, we both laughed as we flew down the trail. I thought, "This is a person I could get to do some of the adventures that have been stirring my thoughts with me."

Anyway, David and I did the Crow Pass Crossing race, skied in winter, raced Mount Marathon, and developed a respectable amount of trust, so that at the beginning of summer 2011 we mapped out all our available time off for that summer for bagging some of the local peaks. Mount Alice was the prize. We had four weekends from late July through August when we could attempt Mount Alice, but we had other climbs and races we could do as backups.

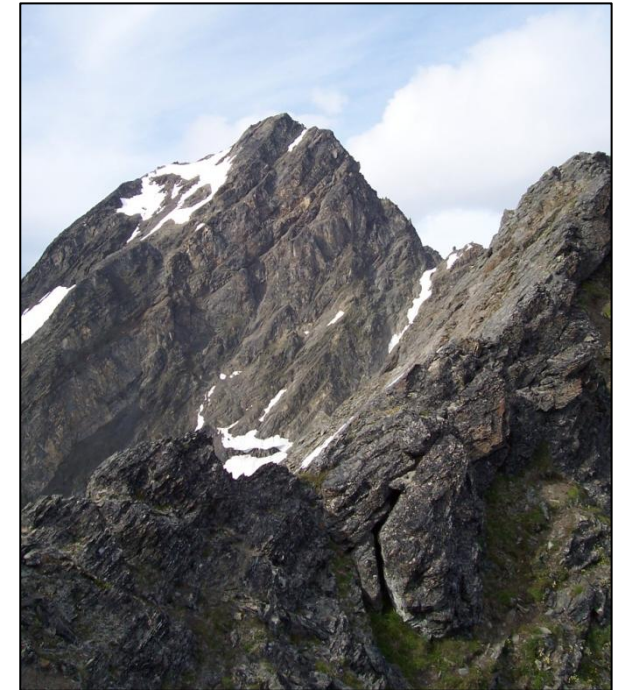
Backups were necessary as we wanted a clear day without wind.

Both of us had considered going up to Palmer for the Matanuska Peak Challenge mountain adventure race, but when we saw Seward was anticipating near perfect conditions, David decided to drive down from Anchorage. So on Saturday July 30th, 2011, at 7 a.m. we met and drove to the trailhead on Nash Road. We had food, water, cell phones, cameras, light mountain-running shoes, and small backpacks.

We made short work of climbing into the bowl of the main face in a little over an hour. We departed from the traditional hiker's trail at timberline and crossed over to the bowl in bright, warm sunlight. I remember saying to David, "Hell, we will be on top before lunchtime!" I had never attempted to climb Mount Alice beyond the Godwin Glacier overlook ridge to the far south spine, but David had attempted to climb straight up the face with someone else several years earlier, but it proved too exposed. I was discovering from the stories he was telling me

about Mount Alice attempts that this was going to prove a challenging day. From the friend of ours who got lost and spent the night in a rain cloud not sure where he was going to the countless people who aborted the trip due to crumbling rock on the south spine, not to mention two fatalities and injuries.

As we stood in the bowl, I pointed to the western ridge and suggested climbing that side. It looked reasonable enough. Once on top of the west ridge, I started getting a real taste for the crumbly vertical drops on both sides we were skirting most of the day. It was manageable and we both had the energy to climb energetically around boulders and soon I was glad I had done some core and upper body conditioning because my arms and balance were fully engaged. For an hour we traveled shirtless in sun that would leave me



On the south ridge viewing back at Mount Alice. Photo by David Apperson.



The view down the west ridge of Mount Alice.

thoroughly sunburned to the place where the west ridge runs into the west face. The face's slope angle was between 60 and 70 percent and at one point I was heading laterally toward the north ridge, but I was the first to call out that I wanted to back up and seek a less exposed route. So David and I changed leads and he looked up and saw a long seam of rock that extended 40 feet up. The right side of the seam was 1.5 feet lifted from the left side but there was an even deeper cut right at the intersection that was very suitable for handholds. David and I took a long 45 minutes checking each handhold and proceeded up what someone with a fear of heights might have nightmares about. The exposure was extreme. I had a kind of spastic pop song by the tUnE-yArDs, "Gangsta," in my head that, due to my nervousness, started bubbling out of my lips as the singing helped me

release the excess stress energy. After that hair-raising section we weren't far from the western col area that is about 95 percent of the way to the top. We sat there a little rattled by what we had accomplished. I was the first to regain my composure and started talking about getting up the last 5 percent of the climb. But David did a smart thing, he considered if he would be all right turning around and not summiting. I was more interested in continuing on to stand on top of Mount Alice the most prominent peak I stared at for the last several years, every time I was in town. I guess I sort of repressed just how

totally exposed and not careful I had just been 20 minutes earlier. But David agreed that this was a chance of a lifetime with perfect weather making the summit from a direction that to our knowledge hadn't been attempted. We climbed up rounding the summit from the intermediary col area to the left (north) side and it took another hour because the rock was rotten crumbly crap...but we made it to the top. It seemed like we could see forever. We did the cursory picture taking, flexing of muscles, and war whoops and cries. This is where we were first aware of the Godwin Glacier in full view.

We sat there for the better part of an hour relaxed and happy, until David reminded me that the climb down wasn't going to be now less dangerous. I was forgetful of the fear I had been experiencing for the last couple hours. I guess I just need a break to enjoy the fun of the top of the world. Soon after I remembered the difficult path ahead of us and we started feeling the presence of Mount Alice like a Zeus of some ancient mythic god that had called on us to meet the challenge

of my life to that point or die trying. David and I both suddenly got a bit of anger in our hearts that we had been called up here by this god that would have us be lost to our loved ones and cheat our destinies or future experiences. We were focused with determination not to perish and planned a traverse descent of the summit instead of backtracking. We knew the sheer glacier-carved rock route that we had just climbed was not a safe way to return. We decided to head toward the southern ridge and hoped to descend into the bowl along the long snow patch that forms where the Matterhorn-like peak meets the south ridge. It took us an endless amount of arm-straining, painstakingly-slow descending to get down. The southern ridge is made of crumbling rock and there were tufts of goat fur everywhere and constant rocks becoming dislodged from our feet and hands. There were huge drops beneath our feet and gendarmes the size of motor homes blocking our route and forcing us into exposure. I couldn't help thinking the rocks could dislodge due to my touching them, fall, and crush me like the coyote in roadrunner cartoons.

Once at the snow couloir, we continued our cautious and sober descent until we reached a 40-foot bergschrund in the glacial ice that, without climbing gear, was too slick to climb down into and up the other side. I was glad I was with someone who was a very fit mountain runner at that point, because we had to climb back up hundreds of feet to the ridge in the slick snow. David and I were the top Seward finishers at Mount Marathon that year, and I was also the Mayor's Marathon winner in 2010, so while we were tired and disappointed about having to backtrack, we powered on and began a much longer, seemingly-endless trek down to the Godwin Glacier overlook in scorching sun that was toasting my torso. We held the southern ridge for three quarters of a mile until we arrived at the radio transmitter for the helicopter on the Godwin Glacier overlook.

I won't say that the rest of the time on the mountain was uneventful. We drank from mountain streams, marveled at goat tracks and fur collections, and we even ran down a bit of the hikers' trail to the car. But something had changed in my mind, having stood in the realm of the gods and returned in one piece; I had some extremely elevated mental activity, the symptoms were expressed by laughing in a rattled way after just about every few sentences. We agreed that we would never encourage anyone to attempt what we had done; thinking if a person would listen to reason they probably weren't stupid enough to do the climb. We returned to David's car almost 12 hours later, basically 7:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. We drove back to my apartment and, although I rarely drink beer, I had two beers, hoping to relax and settle down. I ate some dinner and I crashed out, while David went out to a bar and ended up sharing the story of the day with anyone who was around. When I woke up throughout the night at various times I shudder to think of the particularly exposed section in flashbacks. In the morning I was reentering the routine of my life and decided I would plan a run.

So I texted David to see if he wanted in on a traverse of Lost Lake - 16 miles. I had no illusions about running it quickly and we just ran a comfortable pace, recounting the climb and watching our feet so we didn't trip. I can remember thinking how remarkably stable and lacking in peril the Lost Lake Trail seemed, as if I expected to still be balancing the razor's edge of Mount Alice. Mount Alice still looms large as I make my daily way, living in Seward.



View of the north ridge of Mount Alice.



Erik and his wife Maria at their home in Seward, with Mount Alice in the background. Photo by Stu Grenier.



Southwest aspect of Mount Alice with the red line marking the route from left to right.

Note:

My friends, after I got nerve enough to give a short speech at the ice climbing festival after decades of joking about, the heavy emotion I've been feeling in the last couple of years got out for all to see. Several people liked the message and asked me to put it in print. So it appears below. I mentioned my poetic concept of a seventh sense to some of you and since there was interest, it will appear in installments over the next few months.

Thanks, Tom Choate.

A Message from an Old Mountain Goat

You young climbers are the future of our sport. The mountains need to hear from you, and you can open up to them. Remember that all of us can help the mountains to hear from us (naturally we can, since we are mountain-ears!!)

Seriously, the mountains may seem solid and cold, but for many of us they are alive in some deep and slowly changing way. We have learned to search for hidden treasures inside mountains; and made amazing discoveries over years of intimate contact.

So don't merely climb mountains (we used to say "conquer them"), nor try to know them while you remain stuck in a human viewpoint. If you speed to the summit and back, focusing only on local problems and the conversations of your companions, you will miss most of what the mountains can teach us: the greater truths that lie within.

Quiet down, search around, open your senses, and discover new feelings. Put your ear to the

rock and listen for the slow vibrations of the universe. Caress the rock, and let the texture of the eternal sculpture work its way into your soul.

Sincerely,

Tom Choate
September 1, 2011

The Ice Climb

By Tom Choate 9 / 04

White shards of ice splatter my face as I bury my ice tool too deep in the vertical wall of the glacier. A slight tremor in my calves betrays my fear. My stomach muscles tighten even more as I scan the slightly overhanging, sun-rotted face above, searching for the way through that seems least likely to fracture and send me plunging down to disaster.

Willing power into my tired biceps again, I pull up slowly onto the two ice tools, listening to the telltale squeaks from the ice on the left, little squeals indicating moving joints within the ice. Movement meaning spreading cracks, a warning of impending failure. I begin moving my left leg slowly, trying to keep the strain equal on my two arms and remaining leg. Just as the crampon comes out of the ice I feel movement in my left ice tool. Something is failing, and my breath stops.

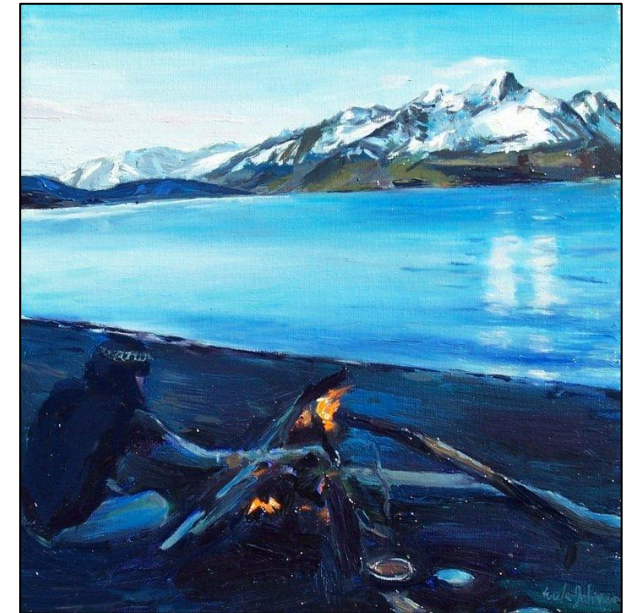
"Don't pull out," I plead to everything holding me, as I kick the left crampon in a foot higher, trying not to jerk on the ice tools. As I bring up my right foot, the squealing from the ice increases and the left tool pops loose. I twist to the right, putting all my weight on the remaining right tool, which instantly starts squealing.

Raindrops from the melting ice above splatter my goggles, obscuring the ice surface as I make a desperate swing with the left tool at the ice

overhang above. The white splatter on my face is reassuring, even restoring hopefulness; but in an instant the ice on the right shatters into a hundred pieces and I am twisting left with all my weight.

There is a small pop as my left tool comes out, and I am weightless as I launch outward into space. There is no scream, my voice frozen in fear, and time is suspended. A slow motion video begins, as long streams of white and blue ice flow by, moving upward. All the shattered pieces of ice alongside me seem suspended and still as we fall together.

Suddenly great pain erupts from my ribs and hips as the rope comes up tight. In the shock there is suspended motion, no breathing, no time. A dark wave blinds my eyes, closes my ears, and blunts the pain. In the isolated brain a light of realization shines: Thank God the last ice screw held. Thank God my belayer did his job. Swinging in space, I begin to breathe again.



Enjoying a campfire with a view of Mount Alice.
Original painting by Erik Johnson.



Northeast aspect of Gunsight Mountain from the Glenn Highway. Photos by Frank Baker.

Sighting in on Gunsight Mountain on Saint Patrick's Day

By Frank Baker

While Travis Taylor and a group of MCA-ers were skiing the Skookum Glacier this past Saint Patrick's Day, I aimed for 6,441-foot Gunsight Mountain in the Talkeetna Mountains.

In winter I generally approach the 6,441-foot mountain from the more gradual east side, accessing snowmachine trails from about Mile 120 on the Glenn Highway. On this snowshoe trip, the snowmachine trails reached about three-fourths of the way up the mountain. With all the trails so high, I was quite positive avalanche danger was low. In fact, I've summited the mountain five times during winter and never seen an avalanche on the more gradual, eastern side.

I followed one of the main snowmachine trails for about half a mile before strapping into snowshoes. Three snowmachines came into view and quickly ascended to about halfway up

the mountain. I could tell immediately that these were powerful machines that with skillful drivers would have no difficulty going higher if they wanted. They stopped on a gradual plateau and sat for awhile, apparently admiring

On this beautiful, sunny day with the temperature in the 20s, I would be out for about seven hours, and their jaunt lasted less than an hour.

They were the last machines

I saw that day, despite the fact the mountain was crisscrossed by numerous snowmachine trails. On really packed trails, I didn't need snowshoes at all, but after breaking through unexpectedly several times, I put them back on and kept them on.

the sweeping view. Then in just minutes, they were tracking their way back down the mountain, waving as they droned past me.

When I finally reached the 5,000-foot level, the snowmachine trails ended abruptly at a broad plateau where someone had apparently camped. The site offered great views to the south toward the Matanuska Glacier as well as to the east toward the Nelchina Basin. From this point, however, I would be on my own, working my way over to the mountain's east ridge without the aid of a snowmachine trail.

At about 6,000 feet, more than three hours into the hike, I ditched my snowshoes and put crampons on my boots. Sitting down, I realized I was upon a very old, faded snowmachine trail—only 400 feet from the summit! I had seen snowmachine tracks up this high before, marveling at the power of today's machines and the ability of their drivers.

I know better than to be a big fan of high marking, however, in view of the lives lost to avalanches in Alaska and Lower 48 states. But as I mentioned, I'd never seen an avalanche on the gradual east

side of Gunsight Mountain. Judging from the traditional, more gradual route selected by most of the snowmachiners, I concluded they were savvy to the safest approach.

A few minutes after I ditched the snowshoes, I regretted it, as I began sinking to my knees in soft snow. Windblown, rocky areas were a welcome relief as I slowly made my way up the last few hundred feet to the summit. I stopped at least six feet back from the top because it was now a huge snow cornice hanging out over an incredibly steep, 2,000-foot drop into Glacial Fan Creek's canyon. I sat down in the snow and quickly wolfed down part of a sandwich, drank some water, snapped a few photos, and prepared to descend. Weather was closing in all around and it was telling me to get off the mountain.

After again post-holing up to my knees, it was a relief to get my snowshoes back on for the rest of the descent. In about an hour I was back to where the new snowmachine tracks ended, and in another hour I made it to the main snowmachine trail where I could walk without the aid of snowshoes. The top of Gunsight Mountain was now obscured by thin, wispy clouds.

I reached my truck at 6 p.m., tired, but not exhausted. For me, it had been a good way to celebrate Saint Patrick's Day. I didn't think I was sporting any holiday color, but as I took my snowshoes off for the last time, I noticed part of the webbing was green.



Gunsight Mountain's east ridge.

Peak of the Month: Bush

By Steve Gruhn

Mountain Range: Mertie Mountains

Borough: Unorganized Borough

Drainage: Thurston Creek

Latitude/Longitude: 64° 51' 38" North, 141° 11' 23" West

Elevation: 2572 feet

Prominence: 722 feet from Peak 2740 in the Sinnott Creek and Thurston Creek drainages

Adjacent Peaks: Peak 2550 in the Boulder Creek and Thurston Creek drainages and Calico Bluff (1894)

Distinctness: 522 feet from Peak 2550

USGS Map: Eagle (D-1)

First Recorded Ascent: 1909 by G. Clyde Baldwin and International Boundary Commission party

Route of First Recorded Ascent: South ridge

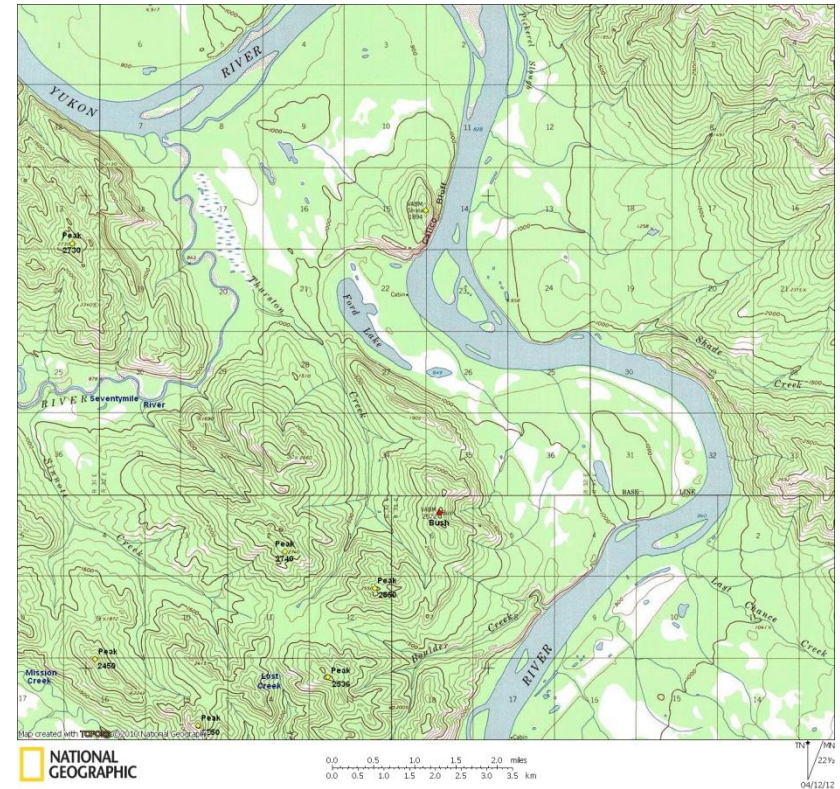
Access Point: Mouth of Boulder Creek

In 1906 the United States and Canada set out on a multi-year effort to mark the boundary between Alaska and the Yukon Territory. In the spring of 1909 two parties comprised of U.S. and Canadian surveyors set out to continue the work. The southerly party surveyed the boundary in the vicinity of the White River and the northerly party surveyed the boundary north of the Yukon River. The Chief of Party for the United States for the northerly party was G. Clyde Baldwin. The northerly party based its operations out of Eagle and started out by establishing triangulation stations atop promontories on the south side of the Yukon River. Two such triangulation stations occupied by Baldwin and his crew were Calico Bluff (which they named Strata) and Bush.

To reach Bush, the crew floated down the Yukon River from Eagle to the mouth of Boulder Creek. They then ascended Boulder Creek to the base of a hill on its northwest bank and then ascended the south ridge of the peak. To mark the triangulation station, they drilled a hole in a rock on the summit, which they named Bush.

The work that season would last 120 days. By the end of the season, the northerly party had surveyed and cleared 40 miles of the boundary north of the Yukon River.

The information for this article was obtained from the International Boundary Commission's *"Joint Report upon the Survey and Demarcation of the International Boundary between the United States and Canada along the 141st Meridian from the Arctic Ocean to Mount St. Elias."*



View to the east from Gunsight Mountain. Photo by Frank Baker.



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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. Articles should be submitted by the 25th of the month to appear in the next month's Scree.

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