

# the SCREE

## Mountaineering Club of Alaska

July 2013

Volume 56 Number 7



Monthly meeting:

6:00 p.m., Wednesday, July 17

*Annual Picnic at Abbott Loop Community Park*

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*Mount Tobert, Mount Spurr Attempt, and Peak 6150*

*Finding Serenity at Lost Lake*

*Twin Peaks Trail to Pepper Peak Ridge*

*Peak of the Month: Mount Galen*

"You never climb the same mountain twice, not even in memory. Memory rebuilds the mountain, changes the weather, retells the jokes, remakes all the moves."

*-Lito Tejada-Flores*





# 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 meeting at 6:00 p.m. on July 17 at the Abbott Loop Community Park, 8101 Elmore Road, Anchorage, Alaska.

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## Cover Photo

Zac Davies attempts Mount Spurr with Cook Inlet in the background.  
Photo by Wayne Todd.

## 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 each month to appear in the next issue of 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 at least one vertically orientated photo for consideration for the cover. Please submit captions with photos.

## Monthly Meeting: Wednesday, July 17, at 6:00 p.m.

The July monthly meeting will not be at the BP Energy Center. ***The annual MCA summer potluck picnic will be Wednesday, July 18, from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. at Abbott Loop Community Park at 8101 Elmore Road.*** The park is on the east side of Elmore Road between Lore Road and 84th Avenue. Here's a link to the park page: <http://anchorageparkfoundation.org/directory/abbott/>.

It's a potluck! Bring something to share based on the first letter of your last name:

A-H: salad  
I-R: side dish  
S-Z: dessert

Hot dogs, hamburgers, veggie burgers, fixings, and drinks will be provided by the MCA. We reserved the picnic shelter in case of bad weather. No alcohol is allowed at the MCA picnic. Be green and bring your own utensils, cup, and plate. We have to pack out what we bring in.

Dave Hart reported that on May 21 Greg Encelewski, Ben Still, and he climbed Peak 11350 and Peak 11425 in the Bear Glacier drainage of the Saint Elias Mountains. Dave also reported that on May 22 the team climbed Klutlan Peak (12150) in the Bear Glacier and Nesham Glacier drainages and on May 23 they climbed Peak 11875 in the Bear Glacier drainage. We look forward to reading a full report in an upcoming issue of the *Scree*.

## Hiking and Climbing Schedule

- ⇒ ***July 6-15, MCA Summer Mountaineering/Instructional Trip.*** If you are an experienced backpacker and wish to learn basic mountaineering skills, this is the trip for you. Learn: snow travel, glacier travel, ice climbing, navigation, route finding, rock climbing, leadership, and more while hiking the Bomber Traverse in the Talkeetna Mountains.
- ⇒ ***August 5-11, Lake Clark National Park, Twin Lakes.*** Set up base camp at Upper Twin Lake and go on day hikes, exploring the area and visiting the former cabin of Richard Proenneke, author of *One Man's Wilderness* and film "Alone in the Wilderness." To sign up, contact Don Hansen at [donjoehansen@msn.com](mailto:donjoehansen@msn.com).

Online? Click me!



***Check the Meetup site and Facebook for last minute trips and activities. Or, schedule one that you want to organize.***

## Mount Torbert, Mount Spurr Attempt, and Peak 6150

*Text and photos by Wayne L. Todd, with Zac Davies, Matt Green, and Carrie Wang*

*April 11-22, 2013*



*Panoramic view from our scenic camp.*

As we make our way through serac debris, we listen intently for any sounds from above. We hear none. With two picket placements, Carrie Wang leads over a snow bridge above a large crevasse. On safer terrain, and in the sun, we take a break.

Two days earlier Carrie, Matt Green, Zac Davies, and I were landed on the Capps Glacier by Doug Brewer of Alaska West Air via the classic Beaver. At 3,500 feet, we camp a mile below Sweetgrass Production's skiers. Yesterday, as we skinned our way to high camp at 7,800 feet, we were impressed by where and what these folks skied. On the flight in, we saw many ski tracks, both from heli-skiers and fixed-wing skiers, and a few groups of skiers themselves. This was not going to be quite the wilderness experience we'd thought.

Climbing routes were planned pre-trip by topographic maps. Areas of concern on the map were less hazardous in reality until our high camp. A 4,000-foot face is now devoid of ice except for the bottom 1,000 feet, which allowed an easy skirt of the debris field. From high camp our intended route looked good insofar as slope angle and being mostly crevasse free, but the steep thousands of feet below Jack and Jill Points still have much ice clinging to the upper slopes. As we'd entered the area earlier this morning, a small serac avalanche changed our course slightly.

The weather looks great, has been, and is forecasted to continue (thanks, Tim). After the break, Zac (Denali guide in training) leads along a lesser debris field, over some crevasses small enough to skin over, and onto the Mount Torbert plateau. Here the slope angle is quite modest (probably a good thing,

as the terrain is foot-high sastrugi lumps). More and more peaks come into view as we ascend, many to the north of the Tordrillo Mountains.

We easily skin to the top of Mount Torbert, though a strong tailwind has us bundled up. Mounts Foraker, Hunter, and Denali are visible to the northeast, Cook Inlet and the Chugach Range to the east, Mount Spurr (next objective and then...) close-by to the south and the Revelation Mountains to the west. After high-fives and yahoos, Matt and I want to linger for pictures, but our rope partners want off. A twister rope mess almost ensues.

I am impressed how quickly Matt and Zac work out roped skiing, especially on the sastrugi. I gather our wands on the descent and am glad we didn't need them as they were too few to be of great assistance. Back on crampons for the debris field, we see only one more small serac avalanche. (I estimate those rock faces will be ice-free in five years, creating a possibly safer route.) Carrie pops a leg into a crevasse as we walk along our skinned-up path. A strong sun dog concerns our weather future.

A strong north wind flaps our tents during the night and hurries us back over the pass to the Capps Glacier in the morning. With the right slope angle, good snow, and sled brakes well engaged, for the first time I make nice S-turns with a sled in tow. After only a few hours of skiing we're back at our cache/base camp. The upper camp has been replaced by a smaller group.

Hissing on the tent and subsequent tent snow avalanches at night makes me wonder if our trip is essentially over. But by noon the storm has passed, so we skin up the adjacent ridge for great north-facing runs (albeit getting tracked by all the visitors). The kickers built above large crevasses and cornices will make for an exciting movie. Just before bedtime, a Super Cub lands and we meet Jake the pilot and Holly from the upper camp inviting us to a dinner.



*Mixing with the other team.*

In the morning, sleds in tow again, we skin west for Mount Spurr. Having analyzed the standard route, a steep 1,500-foot

fin with no exit options, we instead skin to a passed southern valley. This valley looked to have good access to the northeast ridge of Mount Chichantna, plus there seemed to be a skin track in place! Glaciers in this area, even of moderate angle, are quite broken up and seem to be quickly receding, making route-finding difficult.

Rows of large snow-dappled seracs border the route to and around our new camp at 4,500 feet. An expansive, broken snow-covered glacier rolls next, then steep-spired rock ridges. Evening light makes this even more stunning.

A quasi-5 a.m. wake-up finds us skinning up the existing track (hey, there's 4 inches of fresh snow on top) before the sun crests our ascent ridge. Clouds soon form over the distant peaks to the north, which is quite a noticeable difference from all our bluebird days. As we weave over, around, and by many crevasses, the clouds intensify and squeeze, but we continue.

A note on guy behavior: The skin track transitions to a very short boot track. To avoid de-skiing, Matt skins above the existing track, but aborts when traversing skis no longer have enough purchase on the hard-pack snow. Zac skins above Matt's track, but also aborts. I skin above Zac's track, but of course skid down also. Carrie follows the original skin track and de-skis for the short section (we all do this the following day).

Visibility is compromised, a wind is about, and it's trying to snow. We top out on the ridge for limited under-cloud views to the east before turning about. We stop



*On Peak 6150.*





*Skinning up the Capps Glacier.*

for a while hoping for a weather change, but it's a negative. We have an amazing, fun (especially for the lead skier) 3,000-foot run back to camp alongside 'our' skin track. The weather somewhat clears in the afternoon, but high winds and lenticulars confirm our decision.

A real 5 a.m. wake-up has us re-skinning at 7 a.m. Glances behind and around reveal only blue sky as we ascend. From the ridge, Cook Inlet glows orange from sun reflection. To the south, Spurr puffs sporadic smoke and we now fully view the crux (a one-pitch, 60-degree snow-to-blue-ice-to-cornice face). We transition to crampons and alternate leads and teams for the picket-running belays. It's hot, especially when leading. We make steady, but slow, progress, along the mile toward the crux.

Halfway there, we run a timeline and acknowledge a bivy would be in the cards. With no stove, one pad, one pair of ice tools for four, and four pairs of not-so-warm boots, we call a halt. We sit in the blazing sun for a long, relaxed chat before turning about. The long crevasse-accented run back to camp

is even more fun in good light. Another glacier-and-snow alpenglow evening awaits at camp.

We probably have enough time to make a third attempt on Spurr, but many reasons rationalize a return to base camp. Descending from our stunning camp the next morning, without sled brakes on, Carrie and I have a synchronized rope cluster, both crashing shy of crevasses (one glacier glasses casualty). The remainder of the return ski is quite uneventful. After re-establishing camp, a ski tour to the pass between the Capps and Triumvirate Glaciers reveals more mountain-and-glacier splendor, and another abandoned camp. We divert to the upper camp, arriving as Jason, Martha, and Holly return from their ski day. We are quite impressed with the steepness of their climb and ski runs (and two of them on telemark skis). The visit segues to an amazing real-food curry dinner by Martha. With poofy parkas still on and purple light on the horizon, we double-pole downglacier two miles to our camp (arriving quite warmed up).

A fun looking climb/ski peak we'd seen from the stunning camp is our next day's objective (Peak 6150, northeast from camp). A later start is planned to allow southerly slopes to soften. Still frozen in the a.m., we are soon cramponing up snice-hard to knee-deep snow, with a fun, steep crevasse crossing (always have your pickets). This is the hottest day yet and we actually seek shade. From the summit ridge, views open to the east and south. We guess as to Anchor-age's location. We stop at the base of the 15-foot summit spire. Our timing is good and we have a mixed run of powder, corn snow, and other, but still leave nice tracks. In camp, a call to Alaska West Air requests a one-day early pickup. :{

Another relaxed day segues from a planned afternoon south-facing to a north-facing ski. As we head north we see three dots heading up Peak 6150. (Sadly, we learn later their oddly slow descent is due to a blown-out knee). Good runs, and cornice jumping by Zac, are had, though the slopes are looking like Turnagain Pass from all the tracks.



*All on ski hill.*

A morning call to Alaska West Air gleans that Doug is already en route, so we hastily break camp. Soon we're airborne and looking back at our playground (already Mount Spurr is taunting), then the platforms, then automobiles and reality.

The next day the weather is storming and foul and continues for three days. Sometimes an early exodus pays off.



*Mushroomed seracs.*



## Finding Serenity at Lost Lake

*Text and Photos by Frank Baker*

"It's so peaceful here," I told my son-in-law Nate Hanes as we rested on a snowy knoll overlooking Lost Lake, on the Kenai Peninsula. "It's going to be hard to leave."

On April 26th we'd made the seven-mile hike to the lake on the Primrose Trail over hard-packed snowmachine tracks. But on this crystal-clear, bluebird afternoon, there were no riders

On the same day I listened to an interview with a pioneer Alaskan via the University of Alaska (Fairbanks) Oral History Program. She complained about how snowmachines have dramatically changed Lost Lake in winter, noting that on narrow parts of the trail it's become dangerous for people snowshoeing or skiing when machines are screaming along at 50 miles per hour and faster.



*Lenticular clouds over Lost Lake.*

to be seen. In fact, we didn't see a soul the entire day.

I didn't realize how precious the serenity was. A day after the hike, I viewed a YouTube video of Lost Lake snowmachining, and it was an unbelievable beehive of activity. The high-pitched whining of machines filled the air, and there was hardly a stretch of snow that wasn't covered by tracks.

As I've mentioned in previous columns, I'm not one to complain about snowmachines, since I often use their trails to access backcountry areas. I pick and choose my times to avoid conflicts, and apparently I'd made the right call on April 26.

We packed our cross-country skis on our backs, but didn't opt to ski around the lake very long before heading down. The



*Lost Lake on the Kenai Peninsula, as seen looking west toward Martin Pass. At left are the twin peaks of 5710-foot Mount Ascension.*

packed, often icy trail was much too fast for skis, so we walked most of the way.

On the hike down the trail we stopped by an old cabin that once belonged to Alaska mining engineer Charles Hubbard, who came into the area in the early 1900s and worked several gold claims. My family knew Charles Hubbard and his wife Orabelle back in the 1940s and 1950s, and we often visited his home at Mile 17 off the Seward Highway. Charles Hubbard died in 1969 at age 100 as one of Alaska's most noted miners — in the early 1900s he even actually rubbed elbows with Wyatt Earp in Nome.

### **Breath of Life Run**

Every August there is a run/walk on the Lost Lake Trail to raise funds for cystic fibrosis. Signup for the event began in April and this year the field was filled within hours. For more information on the event, visit [www.lostlakerun.org](http://www.lostlakerun.org).

I participated in the event many years ago, and quickly realized that the Lost Lake area is too beautiful to run through. So I returned to the area a couple of years later for a three-day camping trip, which included an ascent of 5710-foot Mount Ascension.

A hike to Lost Lake in summer is a “must do” for Alaskans. If you’ve ever seen the movie *The Sound of Music*, and recall the scene of Julie Andrews singing, “The hills are alive with the sound of music,” in alpine meadows, then you’ll laugh when you find yourself singing that song at Lost Lake. It’s hands down one of the most stunningly gorgeous spots in Alaska.

And in summer, you might feel compelled to exclaim: “serenity now!” in the style of George Costanza’s father in the *Seinfeld* television series.



## Mid-May Hike Feels More Like Winter than Spring

*Text and Photos by Frank Baker*

The Chugach Mountains were a world of snowy whiteness May 19 as I hiked up the Twin Peaks Trail above Eklutna Lake, one of my favorite areas. It was a sparkling clear day and at 11 a.m. the temperature was in the mid-40s, and rising. Snow had melted off the first half mile of the trail and as I moved into

entering some rather steep and rugged terrain inhabited by Dall sheep.

“Maybe she’s looking for a gourmet meal of sheep,” I thought to myself. “She must be rather desperate for food to take on



*The author’s snowshoe tracks on the Pepper Peak ridge overlooking Eklutna Lake.*

snow up higher, hiking was still manageable without snowshoes.

I’d taken along some short, cleated snowshoes anyway, since I’d planned to access the ridge that leads up to Pepper Peak. At about 2-1/2 miles, where the second wooden bench is located, I spotted something moving across the valley toward the Twin Peaks, to the north. I didn’t need binoculars to tell it was a sow grizzly bear and a cub, which looked large enough to be from last year. She and the cub were moving uphill fast,

those challenging slopes.”

I took a short break at the bench, got into my snowshoes and began the ½-mile trudge up to the ridge to a point where I could see Eklutna Lake. To get there my elevation gain from the second bench would be a little less than 1,000 feet.

Looking back to see how far the bears had progressed, I had another surprise. Soaring directly over the pair, between the Twin Peaks, was a paraglider. I know he was low enough to see



*Bears moving across the valley toward the Twin Peaks.*

the bears, and I wondered if he was wondering: “If I crashed and lived through it, would the bears get me?”

Glancing upward toward 5,400-foot Pepper Peak, I saw another paraglider gliding on the updrafts. Earlier, at the first wooden bench along the trail, I’d seen footprints headed directly up the steep slope instead of the roundabout route I generally take. They must have been those of the two paragliders.

Wondering what other excitement awaited me; I continued the slow uphill trudge. Thankfully, the snowshoes were only sinking in a few inches, and even on some of the steeper sections, I had good traction.

A slight wind out of the southwest wind greeted me as I crested the ridge about 3 p.m., ready to sit down in the snow to enjoy the view and a late lunch. A bald eagle soared about 1,000 feet below me, and the occasional cluck and cackle of ptarmigan filled the air, which had now warmed to at least 50 degrees or higher.

Yet, with all the whiteness everywhere, it still felt like winter. Its grasp seemed about two weeks longer than on a typical year.

As soon as I slipped back into my snowshoes and began the downhill trudge, following my own tracks, I spotted two dogs, followed by four people--three young women and a young guy. Moving closer, I noticed that they weren’t wearing snowshoes. A couple of them were in tennis shoes!

“Thanks for breaking trail for us,” one of them chimed.

“I’m surprised the trail held you up,” I responded, noticing that in the wet, sticky snow they were only sinking in a few inches.

“It was great coming up,” came another energetic voice.

We chatted a while and I told them about the bears on the other side of the valley, but to not be concerned -- they were very far off. Moving down the mountain I

was half laughing at myself, fully equipped for a bivouac, carrying a 25-pound pack of gear; while the young folks looked like they were on a Sunday picnic outing.

“On some days in the Chugach,” I thought to myself, “it would be unsafe to travel so light. But on this day the weather will be kind and forgiving, even to the unprepared.”

Traveling a lot lighter, and with quite a few less years under their belt, the four passed me on the descent, thanking me again for the trail breaking. With their youthful vigor and determination, I doubt they would have needed a trail.

On the way down I spotted a red helicopter to the south at a low elevation. It appeared to be hovering and maneuvering in pursuit of something. I learned later that it was the Alaska Department of Fish and Game performing Dall sheep research, perhaps tagging operations.

Returning to my truck after the 5-1/2-hour outing, I thought again about the bears, wondering how they were faring in their search for food in this mid-May world of white. I wondered if, like us, in their own way, they complain among themselves about the weather.

I have to think that somewhere in their DNA ancestry, they’ve encountered this kind of aberrant weather before, and perhaps take it in stride.



# Peak of the Month: Mount Galen

By Steve Gruhn

Mountain Range: Alaska Range; Outer Range

Borough: Denali Borough

Drainage: South Fork of Moose Creek

Latitude/Longitude: 63° 28' 2" North, 150° 22' 12" West

Elevation: 5022 feet

Prominence: 1272 feet from either Mount Thorofare (5629) or Peak 5103 in the Boundary Creek drainage

Adjacent Peaks: Peak 4904 in the Boundary Creek drainage, Mount Thorofare, Peak 5103, Peak 4271 in the Stony Creek drainage, and Peak 4078 in the North Fork of Moose Creek and South Fork of Moose Creek drainages

Distinctness: 872 feet from Peak 4904

USGS Map: Mount McKinley (B-1)

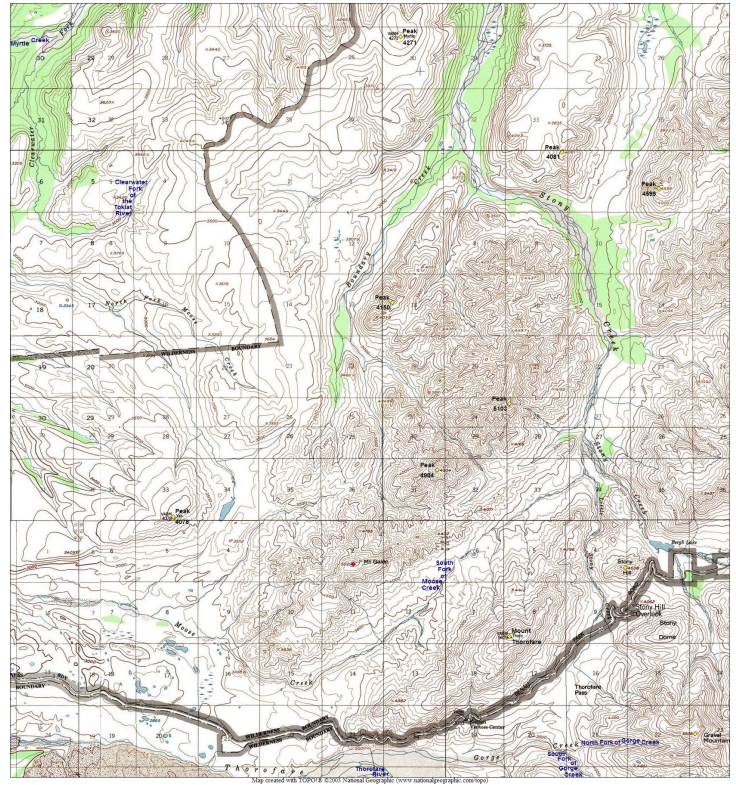
First Recorded Ascent: 1980 by Robert Garneau

Route of First Recorded Ascent: Northwest aspect

Access Point: Denali Park Road

Mount Galen is a rounded peak and popular hike northwest of the Eielson Visitor Center in Denali National Park. It is commonly climbed from the northwest side. The steeper south-eastern aspect is reportedly covered with loose rock.

The USGS named the peak in 1941 for James L. Galen (1872-1939), the former Superintendent of Glacier National Park and the former president and manager of the Mount McKinley



Tourist and Transportation Company that helped to develop the tourist facilities of Mount McKinley (later Denali) National Park.

For a 360-degree view from Mount Galen's southwest ridge, click [http://www.nps.gov/dena/photosmultimedia/upload/Mount-Galen\\_out.swf](http://www.nps.gov/dena/photosmultimedia/upload/Mount-Galen_out.swf).



Photoshopped panorama of Mount Galen's northern aspect. Photo by Leon Ingulsrud.



## 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 below. If you want a membership card, please fill out a club waiver and mail it with a self-addressed, stamped envelope. If you fail to receive the newsletter or have questions about your membership, contact the Club 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: Seth Weingarten – [membership@mtnclubak.org](mailto:membership@mtnclubak.org)

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 Elizabeth Ellis ([elizabeth.anne.russo@gmail.com](mailto:elizabeth.anne.russo@gmail.com))

Web: [www.mtnclubak.org](http://www.mtnclubak.org)

Mailing list service: [MCAK@yahoogroups.com](mailto:MCAK@yahoogroups.com)

Mountaineering Club of Alaska  
Box 243561  
Anchorage, AK 99524-3561