

# the SCREE

## Mountaineering Club of Alaska

March 2014

Volume 57 Number 3



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Peak of the Month: Peak W-19

Monthly meeting: 6:30 p.m., Tuesday, March 18

Program: Deb Ajango of SafetyEd will give a presentation on cold-weather injuries.



# 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 6:30 p.m. on March 18 at the BP Energy Center, 1014 Energy Court, Anchorage, Alaska.

<http://www.alaskageology.org/graphics/meetingmap.gif>

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## Cover Photo

Steve Gruhn hiking up the south ridge of Peak 3835.

Photo by Ben Still.

Please note: Starting in 2014, MCA meetings are held on the third Tuesday of the month.

**Article Submission:** Text and photography submissions for the *Scree* can be sent as attachments to [mcascre@gmail.com](mailto:mcascre@gmail.com). Articles should be submitted by the 24<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. Do not submit photos embedded in the text file. Send the photo files separately. 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 oriented photo for consideration for the cover. Please submit captions with photos.

## Monthly Meeting: Tuesday, March 18, at 6:30 p.m.

Program: Deb Ajango of SafetyEd will give a presentation on cold-weather injuries.

**Helpful Tip:** Stu Grenier brought to our attention a website with an informative illustrated guide on ice safety. Click on the following link: <http://www.artofmanliness.com/2014/02/07/how-to-survive-falling-through-the-ice-an-illustrated-guide/>.

## Hiking and Climbing Schedule

- ⇒ **March 1-2 MCA Snow Travel Class.** Come learn how to travel in the mountains during the winter. Students will learn: crampon techniques, self arrest with a mountaineering axe, belaying, and how to build snow anchors. The class is \$50 for current members. To sign up, contact the training coordinator at [jaymelynnemack@gmail.com](mailto:jaymelynnemack@gmail.com). Class size is limited, so don't delay signing up.
- ⇒ **Flattop Flyer Touring Ski:** Join us for an evening ski from Flattop (Glen Alps) Parking Lot to Service High School. This is a fast, fun, but challenging, ski. There are some steep narrow sections, flat stretches, and sharp corners in the dark. Must be an intermediate skier and be able to snowplow with the best of them! Total one-way distance is about 8+ miles and requires a four-wheel drive carpool. Limited to six participants. Participants with four-wheel drive vehicles will have preference if we are short vehicles. Hosted by Travis Taylor; 382-4823, [alaskantrav@hotmail.com](mailto:alaskantrav@hotmail.com).  
**Date:** First Wednesday of every month. March 5<sup>th</sup> and April 2<sup>nd</sup>.  
**Timing:** 5:45 p.m. meet at Service High parking lot to carpool, 6:00 p.m. start vehicle shuttle – carpool with four-wheel drive vehicles begins, 6:15 p.m. start skiing at Glen Alps, 8:30 p.m. finish at Service High (alternate is Hilltop), 9:00 p.m. complete carpool.  
**Things to bring:** Headlamp, warm clothes, water bottle, snacks, waxless skis/poles – three-pin touring skis with metal edges work best. Randonee skis work, too, but it will be a bit slower and you will have trouble on the flats. No skinny skis!
- ⇒ **March 15, Tit Mountain.** Contact Steve Gruhn at [scgruhn@gmail.com](mailto:scgruhn@gmail.com) or 344-1219 by March 13 to sign up.
- ⇒ **April 5, Rainbow Peak.** Contact Steve Gruhn at [scgruhn@gmail.com](mailto:scgruhn@gmail.com) or 344-1219 by April 3 to sign up.
- ⇒ **April 5-13, Eklutna Traverse/ Bomber Traverse/ K'esugi Ridge Traverse.** We will do one of these classic ski-mountaineering traverses. Order of preference as listed. Sign up at the March MCA meeting or email Greg Bragiel at [unknownhiker@alaska.net](mailto:unknownhiker@alaska.net). Mandatory trip preparation day March 29.
- ⇒ **July 5-13 Summer Mountaineering Instructional Trip.** Glacier Travel, Technical. Lots of elevation gain and loss. About 31 miles distance. Trip leaders: Greg Bragiel and Tom Choate. Learn the basics of mountaineering, including: food preparation, navigation, route finding, snow travel, knots, ice climbing, glacier travel, crevasse rescue, bouldering, rock climbing, leadership, and much more. Participants will share expenses. \$50 deposit required to sign up. Sign up at the March MCA meeting.

Online? Click me!



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

## Peak 3940 and Peak 3835 near Cooper Landing

*Text and photos by Ben Still*

The past couple weeks of rain and warm temperatures left much to be desired, especially when it came to winter fun. Everything was a sheet of ice up to 3,000 to 4,000 feet. All the frozen waterfalls had melted away and were reforming and most of the rivers were open. The high pressure looked like it would last for at least another week with cooling temperatures and sunny weather. Having watched the weather closely and monitored the many webcams throughout the state, I realized Cooper Landing had no snow at all up to maybe 3,000 feet. Great conditions for peakbagging, but all of the usual suspects I climb with were either busy or not very interested in the obscure peaks I wanted to bushwhack – or I mean hike. I thought I better try the master of obscure peaks, Steve Gruhn; he quickly agreed to come along and even said several of those peaks were high on his list to climb. My priority of late has been

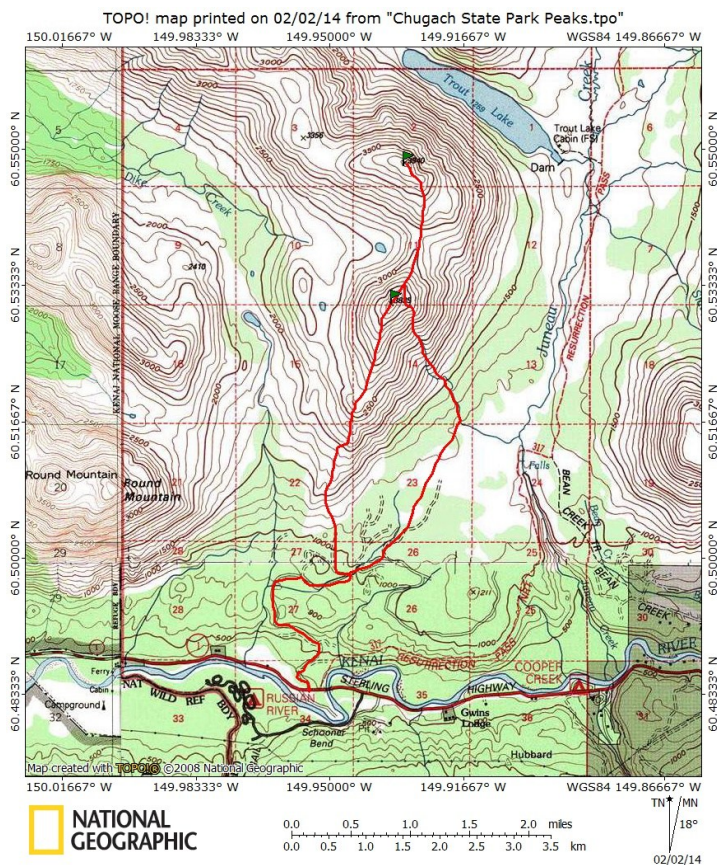
peaks with at least 2,000 feet of prominence, so Peak 3940 fit the bill nicely with 2,661 feet of prominence and Peak 3835 would be the extra bonus peak on the way there.

I picked up Steve at his house at 6:30 a.m. on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014, to start the two-hour drive south to Cooper Landing. We parked at the Resurrection Pass Trailhead at 8:45 a.m. and walked west on the Sterling Highway for 100 feet and turned north up a gated Forest Service road which was partially covered in a sheet of ice. The road made for quick travel and we eventually made a left turn at about 900 feet elevation, following a game/trapper trail through the brushy terrain. This trail eventually started heading too far west so we ventured out into the field of alders. Overall we were able to link together open grassy areas, except for a couple 100-yard-thick alder patches where our pace slowed to a crawl. Once we gained the south



*Looking back at Peak 3835 with the Skilak Glacier off in the distance.*





ridge of Peak 3835 at about 1,500 feet we were able to mostly find open terrain between alders and eventually broke out into the beautiful open alpine around 2,400 feet.

We followed the ridge crest, which was nearly void of snow until about 3,400 feet, taking in the awesome scenery and amazed at how warm and comfortable we were in early February. The last few hundred feet were icy hard packed snow with a quarter inch of new snow on top, which gave just enough traction to hike up without crampons. We were soon on the summit of Peak 3835 with awesome views of the surrounding mountains, the Skilak Glacier, and the large lake at its terminus, which has been exposed by the glacier's retreat in recent years.

From there we continued northward along the ridge dropping down 900 vertical feet of steep icy scree to the saddle between the peaks. Time was getting a little short, so Steve left his backpack here and we continued up scree and snow toward Peak 3940. Nearing the top of the peak, ice-covered Trout Lake

became visible with an interesting web of cracking patterns in the ice. The snow stayed just soft enough for us to make the top of Peak 3940 without crampons. The summit offered up awesome views of the surrounding Kenai Mountains and the big volcanoes to the west.

We stayed briefly on the summit, as it was already 2:30 p.m., and turned around looking to make up time on the way back. We climbed most of the way back up Peak 3835 and traversed out to the east face of the peak looking to miss the alders we encountered on the way up. We dropped straight down to the valley floor following a steep tundra slope into a snow-filled gully, which brought us to a series of open frozen swamps, which we were able to easily hike along. We did not hit the Forest Service road as quickly as we thought we would and eventually realized we had been paralleling it for quite some time. We followed a branch of the road back to the main Forest Service road just as the sun was setting at 5:30 p.m. As I was adjusting my gaiters, I heard a vehicle. Steve caught up with me, and sure enough, a truck was driving down the main road. We hitched a ride in the pickup bed back to my car. Steve and I wondered what he was doing up the gated road just as he was curious what we were doing up there. We briefly exchanged stories; he had been contracted to clear some beetle-killed spruce trees for forest-fire management.

An awesome day of bushwhacking and hiking up two fun peaks on a warm, sunny February day. And we didn't note any evidence of a prior ascent of either peak.



Steve Gruhn on the summit of Peak 3835 with Peak 3940 beyond.



## Skagway's Peak 5889

*Text and photos by William Wacker*

In early June I started to get itchy to get into the mountains again. I had been back at home in Haines for a few weeks, following a windy and expensive ski trip on the north side of Mount Logan, when I decided to take a look at peak objectives in the Skagway area. On June 7th I called up local pilot Drake Olson to get a ride to Skagway and scout some of the peaks along the way. As we flew along the mountain spines dividing the east side of Lynn Canal and the Juneau Icefield, I looked at objectives I could solo. As we neared Skagway we circled Peak 5889. I had seen this peak many times from the ocean and from the air it still looked like a nice peak to bag. Using the Dewey Lake Trail to Devils Punch Bowl, the approach would be roughly 7 miles one way. From the air the climbing looked to be mostly snow slogging with a moderate ridge section of rock connecting to the north side of the summit.

I started out at sea level from the Skagway airport late, around 1 p.m., heading up the Dewey Lake Trail towards Devils Punch Bowl. Hiking up the trail, I fielded questions from



*Will Wacker taking a selfie.*

tourists and summer locals such as: "Where are you going?", "Doesn't the trail end up there?", and "Don't you have to heli to get up onto the glacier?" I didn't have any good answers especially to the metaphorical one on where I was going. That's usually why one ends up in the mountains, in some futile search to find out where it is exactly you're going.

As I crested the saddle separating Devils Punch Bowl from Kasi-daya Creek, I reached the end of the trail, dropped down a few hundred feet, and began traversing around the base of Point 5200. Avoiding the slabs and scree, I moved through tangled tunnels of spruce and hemlock with tufts of mountain goat fur combed into the branches. The bushwhacking was almost enjoyable as I connected onto the various goat trails along the way.

Around 8 p.m. I emerged out of a stunted forest into a spectacular boulder-strewn environment, carpeted with lush fields of heather and moss. A bit weary, I decided to lay my pack down for the night. I had made my mind up before I left that I didn't want to do the entire 14-mile round trip in one push. As the sun set, I lay on a bed of moss looking down on the cruise ships leaving Skagway, 4,000 feet below. I couldn't help but feel a bit superior as I ate a can of sardines, watching mountain goats roam through the green-terraced mountainsides and imagining the thousands of people floating by below looking at the back of someone else's head in a buffet line.

The next day I got out of camp around 5 a.m., carrying a satellite phone, stove, mountaineering axe, 30 meters of rope, and rappel anchor. I began by avoiding the edge of the Dog Sled Glacier, dropping down a few hundred feet to the edge of a sizable escarpment of small cliffs, loose boulders, and scree. My heart sank a bit as I couldn't see an obvious way through all of it. After a bit of wandering, I found a weak point and delicately de-

sended 800 feet to a newly formed lake at the terminus of the glacier. Here I was finally at the base of the mountain proper, with 2,800 feet to get to the summit.

I began ascending the wide-open snow slopes, hoping the conditions would be solid enough to take a direct line up the 35- to 45-degree slopes. I soon found out that the snow was mostly punchy, and for reasons of efficiency, I was forced into a zigzag approach to and from rock spines. After about 1,800 feet of moderate climbing, I found myself on a steep, semi-exposed section of rock and snow, separating me from the north ridge. It would have been a no-brainer if the snow was in better shape, but instead I was forced onto a steeper section of rock.

As I climbed onto the ridge and gazed up at the piles of loose





*The Sawtooth Range in the distance with Point 5741 on the north ridge of Peak 5889 in the foreground.*

rock, those old, familiar feelings of fear, doubt, and loneliness began to take hold. They are emotions you learn to cope with especially when you find yourself in the mountains alone. What looked like a walk-up from the air became an unprotected balancing act of terror. As I climbed up the stacked boulders on the ridge, I began cursing myself for underestimating my objective and risking so much for this crumbling piece of crap. About 50 feet from the summit, I climbed over a small 20-foot section of steep rock that I would later rappel on the descent. Standing on the summit, I left an old, oxidized, oval carabiner on the highest point around noon and wasted no time in beginning the descent as the mountain continued to heat up.

While down-climbing the ridge a loose block dislodged underneath my weight, sending a rockslide off the east wall. By now I was verbally cursing myself. Continuing the down-climb, my hearing became hypersensitive to the sounds of the mountain: the cracking and prying of sun-melted ice, the shards of rock spitting down cliffs, the rushing of water beneath the snow. In

my mind there was a feeling something could go terrible wrong at any moment if I weren't focused. A feeling of all-consuming awareness took over. By the time I reached my overnight gear, I swore this was the last time I would climb a rotten mountain especially alone.

By 10 p.m., after downing several pints of IPA at the Red Onion Saloon in Skagway, I found myself spinning dramatized versions of the past two days to any wide-eyed spectator who would listen. Surprisingly, people seemed legitimately interested in what I was saying or maybe I just had a good buzz going. I was scraped up and dirty, with pine needles in my socks and a rip down the crack of my pants, but I began feeling I wasn't as big a loser as I had made myself out to be on the mountain. For better or for worse, life is just richer when you're hanging your ass out.



# A Wilderness Adventure and a Scramble up Tupik Mountain

*Text and photos by Andrew Fabian*

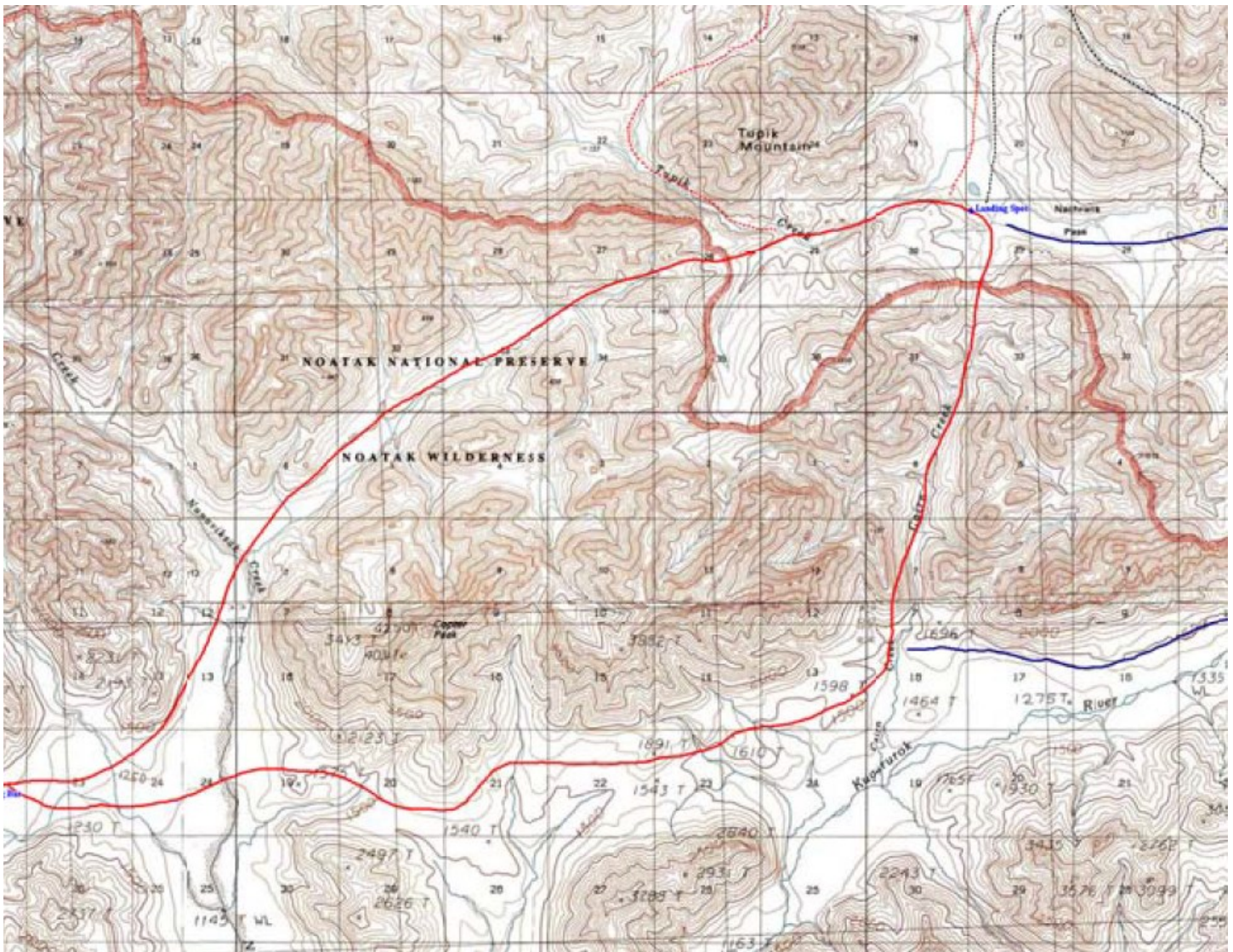
In August of 2013 I had the privilege of joining the Magdanz family for one of their wilderness adventures in backcountry Alaska. While the Magdanz family had lived for years in Kotzebue, I had grown up in the Lower 48 and lived most recently in Seattle, so I was quite excited to get a taste of what Alaska had to offer. While I had always enjoyed nature and the backcountry, I had a feeling Alaska would be a little more intense. Also, being heavily involved in the Seattle mountaineering scene it was an interesting transition to go from a place where enjoying the wilderness is a hobby to where it is a way of life.

On August 7<sup>th</sup> I flew into Kotzebue and after a night of packing and divvying up weight, we headed to the airport to meet Eric, our pilot, to fly us out to the northern Brooks Range. Our party was six, so we flew out in two trips on a little four seater. We had great views along the way, but I was most surprised when

the pilot started lining us up to land, but I still couldn't find the landing strip. Luckily he knew what he was doing and we landed on what ended up being a flat field that wasn't too muddy, a landing strip that I'm pretty sure only about two pilots know about.

Our plan was to circumnavigate Copter Peak in six days, and in the process cross the watershed divide a couple of times.

Being on the first flight out, three of us got to wait around for a couple hours for the second group to fly out. During that time I took a few practice shots with the bear gun and we learned that though the bugs were probably not going to be that bad it was probably going to rain a bunch. We chose August because even though it does rain more, there are way fewer mosquitoes and that's pretty much exactly what we got, lots of rain and not that many mosquitoes (despite all of the mosquito horror stories I had heard about Alaska ...).







*Reid (left) and Grant Magdanz on Tupik Mountain overlooking the northern flats.*

When the second group landed, we set out on our trek. The terrain was beautiful and in most cases not too difficult to travel across with the exception of some very dense bushwhacking through willows near rivers, some wet river crossings, and some muddy sections. We generally walked on the slightly elevated ground on the sides of valleys to keep out of the flooded basins.

A few highlights:

- The thousands of caribou paths that we often used as trails. Caused by the migration of hundreds of thousands of caribou, there were countless paths that covered the hills and made for some nice trails to walk on.
- Six grizzly bear sightings, including a mother and two cubs.

- The beautiful landscape and the isolation.
- It almost never got dark. I know this is normal in Alaska, but being from the Lower 48, this was exciting for me.

Reid, Grant, and I, the three youngest, enjoyed a few adventures scrambling up some of the smaller mountains along the way. A couple days in, we came up next to the base of Tupik Mountain. Now Tupik Mountain had a couple of draws: it was one of only two mountains in the area with a name, it was one of the highest, and it would provide us a view of the northern flats all the way out to the Arctic Ocean (assuming it was clear). The parents decided to take

a long lunch by Tupik Creek and the three of us took off up the south ridge of the mountain.

It was about 1,600 feet vertical up to the summit at about 3904 feet. Most of it was scrambling up scree and a little bit of enjoyable ridgeline walking. As we neared the top, clouds rolled



*A moment of sun.*





*Left: Sidehilling on caribou trails.*

*Below: Reid Magdanz (left) and Andrew Fabian walking the ridgeline on Tupik Mountain.*

in and we were worried we were going to miss out on our view. No summit photos because just the last 100 feet or so was clouded in. So we ran along some ridgelines to the north side of the mountain and got a cloudy view of the northern slope and looking back at what we had hiked so far. No sign of any human traces up there, but there were definitely some caribou trails. The best part of the climb may have been the way down, though, I do have to say that the northern Brooks Range has some of the finest scree skiing I've ever done. It felt like you were plunge stepping in snow most of the way down. Running down like kids on a playground, I think we made it down in about 15 minutes.



The trip finished off with another couple enjoyable days of hiking. I think the last day might have been the only day the entire trip it didn't rain a majority of the time. Overall it was a very enjoyable and relaxing six days spent in the wilderness.

Waiting at the runway, our pilot was right on time, and with an extra loop around Copter Peak so we could see our hiking route, we flew back down to Kotzebue. There I got to spend another few days learning about Alaska Bush culture.



## Revealing The Angel

By Graham Zimmerman



*Graham Zimmerman climbing gorgeous granite on the East Buttress of The Angel. Photo by Scott Bennett.*

Southwest of Denali, deep in the hinterlands of the Alaska Range, rises a valley of giant granite walls. They are known as the Revelation Mountains and have a reputation for beautiful hard climbing and terrible weather. In June of 2013 Scott Bennett and I visited these mountains in search of new rock routes on beautiful peaks.

We arrived in Talkeetna just as a legendary high-pressure spell was coming to a sharp close. The clouds were closed in and we spent five days waiting in town until we were able to fly into the range. Lucky for us, many successful teams were flying out after sending the West Buttress of Denali and we had a constant stream of friends both old and new arriving in town. It also gave us plenty of time to dial in our logistics.

Due to it being the latter part of the season, we were not able to land a fixed-wing airplane on the Revelation Glacier, forcing us to hire Talkeetna Air Taxi's R44 helicopter to insert us into the range. Unfortunately the payload of the R44 is far lower than their airplanes, so instead of the usual heavy load of food and kit we had to pare down to the absolute bare minimum. Our gear was the lightest we could imagine affording, our food was only the most calorie dense.

Getting to the Revelations involves bumping over the crest of the Alaska Range. When we approached it was clear on the east side of the mountains, but as we neared our intended pass, the storm clouds loomed and the rain began. While our pilot Will was quiet and focused, we sat with eyes wide as rain

started to pelt the front of the cockpit. The tiny machine rocked as the wind picked up over the pass. Ominous dark faces and sprawling dry glacier surrounded us.

Long minutes later we were safely over the pass and we dropped into the Revelations proper; huge walls sprung up around us and we reveled at the hidden gems that were now surrounding us. The glacier below was bare ice with huge boulders cast about. We landed on the flattest spot we could find and unloaded our kit.

As Will flew away we were left with the silence of the walls surrounding us and the clouds blowing about their tops. It would be easy to say that Scott and I were old hands at being in big mountains, but just like the joy found in the first listen to a wonderful new song, we were enchanted and extremely psyched about being in the Revelations.

Within a few days we were comfortable with the daily cycle of rain and clouds in the afternoon and with confidence that we were not under threat from a large weather system, we launched on the East Buttress of The Angel. It is a big route and a gem of the range.

The climbing started easy and we moved quickly up granite slabs and corners. As we gained elevation the wall got steadily steeper and we quickly found ourselves climbing vertical corners and faces generally split by gorgeous cracks. Where there were no cracks, we found holds and unlocked thought-



provoking sequences. The climbing was fun and we moved well up the terrain. As the afternoon wore on, we reached the top of the wall and found ourselves on the ridge line.

Seemingly as soon as we started to consider looking for a place to bivvy, an excellent spot appeared and we were quickly able to clear a great little spot perched over the precipice. As the afternoon clouds started to build, we set up our tent and crawled in for some food and a sleep.

The night passed with rain, but we slept with confidence in the forecast.

Morning dawned in fog; we repacked and headed upward. As we started it cleared, revealing a beautiful day of blue skies, low winds, and amazing views.

The ridge crest offered beautiful easy, mixed climbing. A tower near its end daunted us all morning, but turned out to have a beautiful low-angle wide crack splitting its side, offering enjoyable climbing high on the mountain. A final short ice step led to the summit snowfield and an easy walk to the top.

We looked out upon miles of beautiful mountains with untold amounts of unclimbed lines. The wind was mild and the sun was warm. Thus far it had been a nearly perfect climb.

Our plan had been to descend the South Ridge, but one glance down its barren steep crest made us look the other way. To the north we knew of one hanging serac surrounded by steep walls. We pinned off in that direction.

Eight hours later we were on the ground with significantly less gear, soaked clothing, and nearly a dozen core shots. While we had managed to stay out from under the hanger, we had managed to have quite an adventure getting down. What we had seen as a clean face from the ground had turned out to be a big horror show of crappy ice, loose rock, and running water.

There was one last icefall to reach the central glacier and base camp, and while we wanted this to be trivial it was not, with multiple punches into crevasses and raps off of seracs. When we finally reached our tent at 2 a.m., we were exhausted and soaked.



*Graham Zimmerman seconding on the ridge line above the East Buttress. Photo by Scott Bennett.*





*Left: Scott Bennett in bivy. Photo by Graham Zimmerman.*

*Below: On the top! Summit of The Angel. Photo by Scott Bennett.*

As we curled up, the weather rolled in just as hard as we slept.

We had planned to climb more in the range; we were surrounded by beautiful enticing objectives, but the weather gods had other plans and we experienced some of the stormy conditions for which the Revelations are known. For a week we sat in the tent, it was a blur of podcasts, naps, and nibbling our ever-dwindling rations.

When the weather finally cleared for a few hours, enough to get out, we jumped at the chance. Our flights back to the Lower 48 were imminent and the forecast promised more heavy storms for the next 10 days. The helicopter came in and we got out.

Looking back on our trip, it was certainly a success, but the amount of objectives in the range has left me with a sense of wanting more. This season I plan to return to the range to see if I can't gather a few more experiences from the Revelations. I couldn't be more excited about it.



Huge thanks to The New Zealand Alpine Club, The Mugs Stump Award, Outdoor Research, Rab, Boreal, Julbo, Petzl, Camp, Second Ascent, and Nude Food for their support on this trip.

Also huge thanks to Talkeetna Air Taxi for providing us with a solution for getting into the range this late in the season.



## Round Mountain and Peak 3520 near Fuller Lake, Kenai Mountains

*Text by Steve Gruhn; photos by Ben Still*

I had become interested in Peak 3520 near Fuller Lake in the Mystery Hills and Round Mountain (3901) while researching Peak 3520 for the December 2013 Peak of the Month. Early February brought relatively warm temperatures and a paucity of snow in the western Kenai Mountains. Ben Still and I jumped on these conditions to make a couple of quick ascents west of the Resurrection Trail (see page 3). Ben and I enjoyed our trip so much that three days later, on February 4, he was back at my house at 6 a.m. for some more peakbagging. I drove us to the Fuller Lake Trailhead north of the Sterling Highway west of Cooper Landing.

We started up the Fuller Lake Trail a little before 8 a.m. The trail started free of snow and ice, but once we got into the trees, it became pretty icy. Heading up in the pre-dawn light, we made quick time, though, and didn't need to put on our crampons. After crossing the bridge over Fuller Creek just be-

low the outlet of Lower Fuller Lake, we planned our route up Round Mountain to the east of Lower Fuller Lake. We decided to travel around Lower Fuller Lake and then set off through the leafless brush, toward the northwest ridge, linking clearings to brushline. This worked surprisingly well. With the leaves off the alders, plotting our serpentine route was easy and soon we were on top of Point 3642, braving the strong breeze. We descended to the saddle and continued southeast up the rounded ridge to the summit of Round Mountain. Once on top, we didn't spend much time in the gale, but did peek between the rocks of the cairn to check for any obvious register; there wasn't one.

Having noted a slight trail on the ridgeline, we decided to follow that down the entire northwest ridge to avoid descending some of the steep snow in the lee of the mountain that we had ascended. The ridgeline route was largely free of snow and we



*Afternoon light on snowy Round Mountain from Lower Fuller Lake.*



made quick time down to the east shore of Fuller Lake. We found the icy trail around Fuller Lake and hopped across rocks a few feet below the outlet to find a rough campsite overlooking the northwest end of the lake. We stopped there for a bit of lunch and then continued along the trail for nearly a mile until we could see a route up the steep slopes to the west. We stopped there for yet another bite to eat. Ben spotted a Dall sheep above us. This was to be the only large animal we saw during both of our trips to this area.

And then we set off southwest up the hill toward the north ridge of Peak 3520. Ben headed up a spur on the southeast side of a gully and I headed up the longer, but less steep, spur on the northwest side of the same gully.

Ben soon reached the ridge crest; I labored on for a while longer while he walked slowly up the easy ridge to the summit. He met me as he was headed back down. He turned around and together we reached the summit of Peak 3520, the highest point in the Mystery Hills. The views of the Skilak Lake area were tremendous, as were the views of the northwestern Kenai Peninsula, the Tordrillo Mountains, the Chigmit Mountains, and the Skilak Glacier. But the breeze and the sun in the western



*Ben Still on the summit of Peak 3520.*

sky prompted us to depart, following the rough trail down the ridge to the spur that Ben had ascended.

En route we saw three white-tailed ptarmigan that were camouflaged quite well against the snow. I always enjoy seeing ptarmigan; they are such pretty birds. We descended to the trail – Ben quickly and I slowly – and then proceeded to retrace our steps to our lunch spot overlooking the northwest end of Fuller Lake. We stopped there for a quick bite and then hiked

the trail around the east side of Fuller Lake and the west side of Lower Fuller Lake. At the Fuller Creek bridge, Ben put on his Kahtoolas to help his footing on the icy trail. Lazy, I decided to keep my crampons in my pack. Ben made quick time down the trail to the trail-head, but had to wait for my arrival a few minutes before the sun dipped below the horizon. We had experienced yet another gorgeous winter day in the Kenai Mountains and our second two-peak winter day without the use of skis, snowshoes, crampons (excepting Ben's Kahtoolas on the trail descent), or headlamps in less than a week. What a privilege it is to live in a place where day trips like these are possible!



*Steve Gruhn ascending Peak 3520 with Mount Spurr in the distance.*



## no "Ski Tracks"

### Ptarmigan Peak Route

Text and photos by Wayne L. Todd

With Cory Hinds, Kakiko Ramos-Leon, and Carrie Wang

February 1, 2014

The crystals align and as I'm emailing Cory about his services for a possible climb of "Ski Tracks," Kakiko emails me inquiring about said climb. Cory is a go, so we're on, with him leading, me following, and Kakiko leading Carrie.

After a yea-nay on protection\* by Cory, we head to Glen Alps by 7 a.m. By headlamp, three skiers and a bicyclist travel east on the Powerline Trail. The 90 percent ice/snow, 10 percent gravel underfoot (and tire), soon has us ditching skis in the brush. Kahtoola micro-spikes are the preferred footwear. I "save" my Kahtoolas for the exodus and, surprisingly, arrive uninjured (carbide-tipped poles mandatory).

Two hours later we're gearing up at the base of the climb. Laron Thomas and Bryan Roerick pass by en-route to "Only Hookers Get the Blues." We hoofed it a little faster when we spotted them thinking they, too, might be headed for "Ski Tracks."

Rope-gun Cory spiders up the rock, placing pro, but then slows (Pitch 1). Hmmm, doesn't look that bad from here. I soon hear, "On belay," and climb rock, utilizing my recently sharpened crampons and ice tools. Oh, I see why the slowing and appreciate the top rope. Leaving the pro for Kakiko, I merely unclip the rope. I lead Pitch 2 (drag the ropes), the easy up-and-right snow section, stopping at a stomped-, and peed-, out belay station from prior climbers. Carrie and I convince Kakiko that was the hardest pitch (P1), easy because we're not leading the rock, haven't been here before, and Cory's already above so can't refute our half-truths. The next 20 feet doesn't look bad.

Pitch 3, up and left, I round the moderate corner section to a short steep chimney, realize half-truths will be dispelled and

still really like the belay. Looking back, Cory thinks he's usually gone farther left around the chimney. Pitch 4 is more snow, so I lead the ropes. Cory scouts left, toward the standard crux pitch, but there's so little ice and snow we go right. Carrie and I make no more route advisements.

Pitch 5 (crux) Cory leads more steep rock, verglas and tufts of dirt and moss. I have fun seconding, not leading this as he does, and trail ropes. We belay up Carrie and Kakiko. Due to daylight concerns, we go independent on gear for the next

pitches. Cory leads Pitch 6 of lesser-angle rock, then a left snow bench to a snow gully.

Raven tracks and poop, then circling birds, then standing birds moving items around by beak, confirm we're in a Ravens Roost.

I lead Pitch 7 of pleasant snow and ice (though half the screws only go in half-way). We swap Pitch 8 of more ice (belayed above from rock). I drag the ropes onto the

snow-covered boulder field under waning light (P9?).

It's fully dark and headlamps after de-rope and such. Efficient snow climbing above soon has us on Ptarmigan Peak's west ridge under a star-filled sky and above a glowing city. Kakiko lets out an exuberant yell.

On the dark minor scramble/snow descent we miss the direct route and trend farther south toward Rabbit Lake before angling west for Ptarmigan Pass. Warm temperatures persist allowing a non-rushed descent.

The mixed condition descent leads to mixed methods: crampons, Kahtoolas and bare boots. Ice-covered Ptarmigan Tarn



Left to right: Carrie Wang, Wayne Todd, Kakiko Ramos-Leon, and Cory Hinds post-climb back at the trailhead (about 11 p.m.).





*Left: Cory Hinds leading Pitch 1.*

*Middle: Kakiko Ramos-Leon (left) and Carrie Wang climbing to the west ridge after the technical difficulties.*

*Bottom: Cory Hinds leading Pitch 8.*



recently drained leaving large angulated ice shelves, and by headlamp it seems other-worldly.

We somehow overshoot the Powerline Trail and spend a few minutes locating it above, not below, us.

We make the parking lot 16 hours after starting, managing to triple Cory's previous times. He considers it good training and heads out early the next day for ice climbing. We rest.

\*Cory recommends 10 runners, 4 pitons (knife blades, baby angles), 6 screws, 4 nuts (medium to large), 2 small-to-medium cams, and 2 larger cams (1-inch to 2-inch), and 2 60-meter ropes.

For a video of this climb, see Kakiko's film at <http://kakikoredgrana.blogspot.com/2014/02/ski-tracks-ptarmigan-peak-ask-wayne.html>.





# "Beauty and the Beast" 7a+ A3 650 meters on The Gargoyle and Second Ascent of the "Tooth Traverse" in the Ruth Gorge

Text and photos by Alex Blümel and Gerry Fiegl

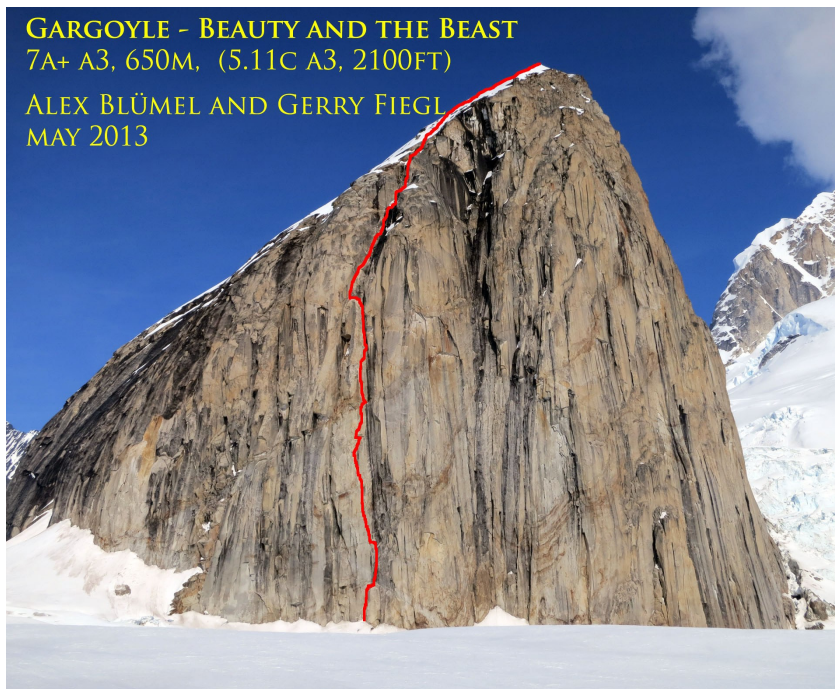
We left Talkeetna just after the last big storm on the 19<sup>th</sup> of May. When we two Austrians arrived at the Ruth Gorge it was wintertime.

However, things turned out to change immediately, as an extraordinary weather window lasting more than a month with only a short interruption was about to establish itself. So weather-wise everything was brilliant, but the mountains started to shake of their winter jacket. Being in there alone the first week was quite a tough time as they had to gather all information about the conditions and several attempts were forced down by icefall and avalanches. "Winter is definitely over in here!" was the clue after being chased away a few times. But the rock was far from dry. "Sitting in the middle of an alpine paradise in perfect weather and long days, but poor and dangerous conditions can make a hard time as well!" the two agreed.

Having investigated the area in detail, they found out that Austrian alpinists played a big role in the history of Ruth Gorge climbing. Especially Andi Orgler needs to be mentioned as he left big routes, like the "Wine Bottle" on Mount Dickey and "The Pearl" on Mount Bradley, on almost every important summit in the gorge. Probably almost forgotten over in Europe and Austria as well, this should get some special recognition at this point. Besides learning that most of the logical lines were already climbed, Gerry and Alex spotted a big system of cracks, corners, and dihedrals on "The Gargoyle" which was supposed to be unclimbed. After being driven off so often on May 28<sup>th</sup>, the two gathered motivation and gear again and forged a new line up "The Gargoyle" with one bivy sitting in the middle of the wall and one on the summit to give the snow time to freeze for the descent. Two days later they came back to free three remaining pitches. After that only one aid pitch graded A3 for loose and choss rock, overhanging snow, and water combined with very poor protection remained on the topo. "Definitely a tough, psycho fight against these 30 meters in conditions like that and hardly any more pleasure if dry!" the two Austrians agreed. The name was easy to find as "The Beast" was just explained and "The Beauty" was found lower down on the route in form of a trad pitch consisting of finger cracks, roofs,

**GARGOYLE - BEAUTY AND THE BEAST**  
7A+ A3, 650M, (5.11C A3, 2100FT)

ALEX BLÜMEL AND GERRY FIEGL  
MAY 2013



New route "Beauty and the Beast" on "The Gargoyle."

flakes, etc., all on perfectly solid rock. For the record the two needed one bolt on the aid pitch and left a few pitons *in situ*.

After two weeks of high pressure, the amazing weather window was interrupted by a few bad days. Tent time and time for some socializing with the neighbors Freddie Wilkinson, Renan Ozturk, and Alex Honnold. The first two turned out to be quite regular visitors for a few years now. "It's still too early for rock climbing in this season," Alex and Gerry were sure and



Gerry Fiegl climbing the middle part of the route.





so they thought about a ridge as the season for couloirs and ice was long over.

Sitting in the tent with the American climbers the two Austrians got more and more psyched on trying the "Tooth Traverse," which was only completed last year after a few attempts by Freddie and Renan. High pressure returned and Gerry and Alex set off on June 6<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 p.m. toward the Sugar Tooth and reached this summit around lunchtime the next day. After a nap they headed on to Eye Tooth following "Talkeetna Standard" up the south ridge. A 24-hour climbing day later, they were happy to establish their first bivy already below the summit of Eye Tooth. From there the next day took them in 12 hours to the Bear's Tooth to have another bivy night. The third day was a long one again. Rappelling the "Russian Route" from Bear's Tooth and climbing the "Swamp Donkey" up The Mooses Tooth took them about 14 hours, but the day was not over. A long descent down the West Ridge, at times tricky with cornices, in the dim light was waiting. Happily realizing the "Tooth Traverse" as the second party just one year after the first ascent, the two reached their base camp 83 hours after setting off on June 10<sup>th</sup> at 9 o'clock in the morning. "Special thanks to Renan and Freddie for the inspiration and good beta!"

*Above: Alex Blümel getting started on "Beauty and the Beast" following a crack system.*



*Right: Gerry Fiegl (top) and Alex Blümel at a semi-comfortable bivy in the middle of the wall.*



# Peak of the Month: Peak W-19

By Steve Gruhn

Mountain Range: Wrangell Mountains

Borough: Unorganized Borough

Adjacent Pass: Chisana Pass

Latitude/Longitude: 61° 53' 45" North, 142° 44' 23" West

Elevation: 10004 feet

Prominence: 1654 feet from Presidents Chair (10372)

Adjacent Peaks: Peak 9250 in the Nabesna Glacier drainage, Peak 9805 in the Chisana Glacier drainage, Presidents Chair, and Peak 9700 near Chisana Pass

Distinctness: 1354 feet from Peak 9250

USGS Map: McCarthy (D-5)

First Recorded Ascent: April 23, 1993, by Harold O. Hunt and Danny Kost

Route of First Recorded Ascent: South face to southeast ridge

Access Point: 7600-Foot level of an unnamed glacier in the Nabesna Glacier drainage

In his unpublished manuscript on Alaska's mountains, Vin Hoeman identified prominent Alaska peaks that he thought were worthy of climbing. Because the number of such prominent peaks was large, he cataloged them by mountain range and incorporated the first letter of that range into his naming scheme. Thus, his name for the 19<sup>th</sup> unnamed Wrangell Moun-

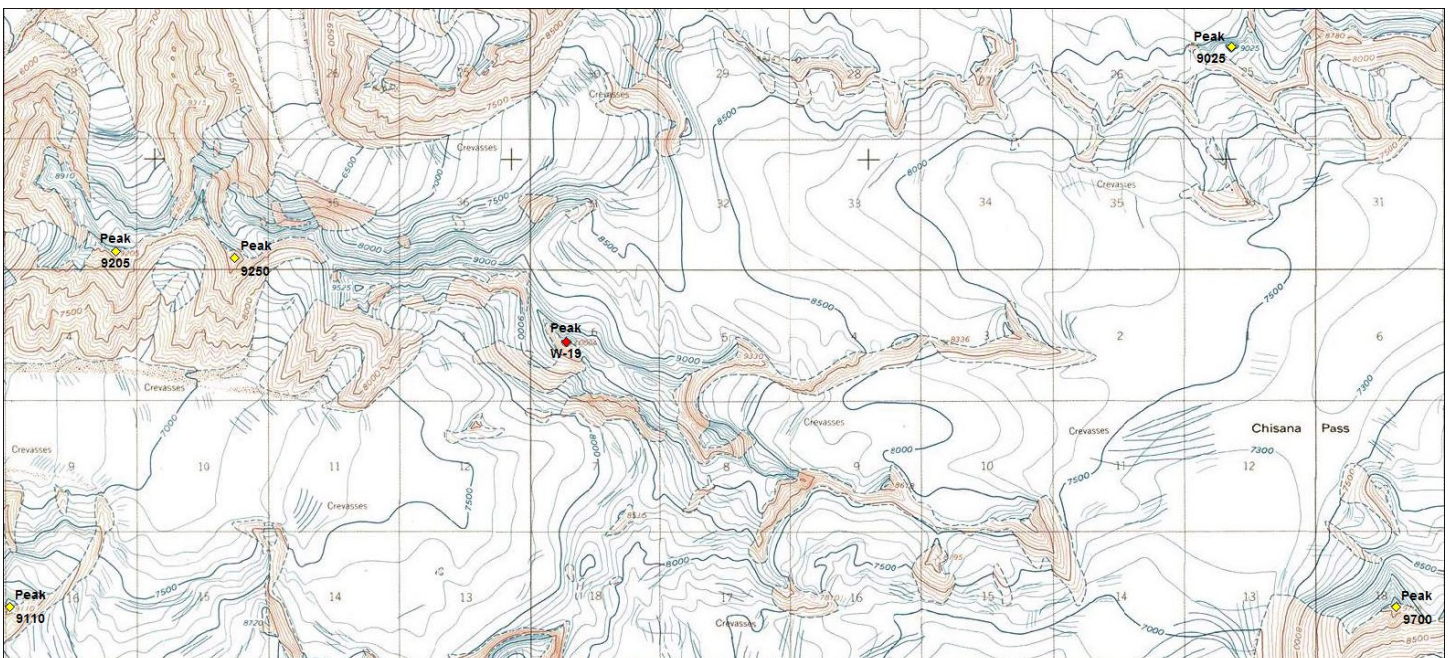
tains peak in his manuscript was Peak W-19. In his manuscript, Hoeman wrote that Peak W-19 was "most easily approached from the north but several possibilities exist." Hoeman's unpublished manuscript is part of the Grace and John Vincent Hoeman Collection, which is available in the Archives and Special Collections section of the University of Alaska Anchorage/Alaska Pacific University Consortium Library.

By my count, Peak W-19 is the 375<sup>th</sup>-highest peak in Alaska and the 47<sup>th</sup>-highest peak in the Wrangell Mountains.

On April 21, 1993, Gary Green of McCarthy Air flew Harry Hunt and Danny Kost in a Cessna 185 to the 7600-foot level of the unnamed glacier west of Peak W-19. On snowshoes the next day, they climbed Presidents Chair. On April 23<sup>rd</sup>, the two ascended a tributary glacier on the south face of Peak W-19 that led to the southeast ridge of the peak, which they followed to the summit. They descended via their ascent route. Danny described the climb of Peak W-19 as straightforward and fairly easy.

I don't know of a second ascent of Peak W-19.

The information in this article was obtained from Danny's report titled "President's Chair and P 10,004, Wrangell Mountains," which appeared on page 124 of the 1994 *American Alpine Journal*, from H. Adams Carter's summary on page 274 of the 1994 *Alpine Journal*, from my correspondence with both Harry and Danny, and from Harry's slides that depicted their route.





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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](mailto:MCAScree@gmail.com). Articles should be submitted by the 24<sup>th</sup> of the month to appear in the next month's *Scree*.

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