the SCREE

Mountaineering Club of Alaska

August 2014

Volume 57 Number 8

Contents

Monthly meeting: 6:30 p.m., Tuesday, August 19

Program: Joyce and Barry Weiss will present on their multi-day adventure in Chile's Torres del Paine National Park.

The mountains will always be there; the trick is to make sure you are, too.

-Hervey Voge

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 meeting at 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday, August 19, 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 in the mist approaching the summit of Peak 4373 in the Kenai Mountains. Photo by Ben Still.

Article Submission: Text and photography submissions for the *Scree* can be sent as attachments to mcascree@gmail.com. Articles should be submitted by the 24th 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.

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Climbing Notes

Wayne Todd reported that on July 16 he climbed Far Out Peak (5750) and Pass Out Peak (5940) to become the first person to climb every peak in the Western Chugach Mountains. Congratulations, Wayne! Carrie Wang was his partner on both Far Out Peak and Pass Out Peak.

Luc Mehl reported that over the Independence Day weekend, Paul Forward, Sarah Heck, Shasta Hood, and he climbed Peak 5502 in the East Fork of Indian Creek and Puntilla Lake drainages of the Alaska Range. They called it Squaw Peak due to the name of the bench mark on the summit.

Ben Still reported that on July 2 he climbed Randolph Peak on Admiralty Island with Mike Miller and that a GPS reading indicated the summit elevation was 4271 feet.

Gerry Roach reported that during a 1988 unsuccessful attempt to climb the east ridge of Mount Sanford, Phil Trimble, a third partner, and he climbed Peak 9950 in the Betseli Glacier and West Glacier drainages of the Wrangell Mountains. Trimble called it Henson Peak in honor of the arctic explorer Matthew Henson.

We look forward to reading detailed accounts of each of these climbs in an upcoming issue of the *Scree*.

Geographic Names

The Alaska Historical Commission has requested comment on the proposed names "Helen Gwin Peak" and "Old Buzzard Ridge" for a 3,600-foot point on the northwest ridge of Helen Rhode Mountain (3947) in the Cooper Creek and Russian River drainages of the Kenai Mountains, and the northwest ridge of Helen Rhode Mountain, respectively. Helen Oleta Griffin Gwin (1914-2007) and her husband Patrick H. Gwin (1906-1986) settled in Cooper Landing in 1946 and lived there until their deaths. They operated Gwin's Lodge together from 1950 to their divorce in 1959, when Helen took over the operations. "Old Buzzard" was reportedly Helen's nickname for Patrick. Contact Steve Gruhn at geographicnames@mtnclubak.org with comments by September 12.

Hiking and Climbing Schedule

⇒ ***Trip Leader Training.*** Wednesday, August 6, 6 p.m. at Kaladi Brothers' meeting room, West 6th Avenue near the Performing Arts Center. Come learn about being a trip leader. Please email Vicky Lytle at victoria.lytle@gmail.com to let her know you are coming.

Online? Click me!

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

Crabtree Mountain and Peak 4373 (Kenai Mountains; Thurman Creek)

By Steve Gruhn

Early on the morning of June 14, Ben Still met me at my house. Together we had climbed a couple peaks west of the Resurrection Trail on February 1 (see the March *Scree*) and were interested in exploring some of the peaks and ridges we had seen from our highest summit. He planned to meet up with his wife in Cooper Landing after our peakbagging sojourn and I had to return to Anchorage, so we caravanned to the Cooper Landing Trailhead of the Resurrection Trail. A favorable forecast seemed somewhat in error as we drove through rain south of Summit Lake Pass. Intermittent rainfall would follow us throughout the day.

We arrived at the trailhead around 6:30 and were quickly off, hiking up the rain-slickened trail. We took the Trout Lake cutoff and quickly reached the Trout Lake Cabin. There the trail ended somewhat abruptly and game trails meandered through the brush to the northwest. We followed them, heading roughly for some rising terrain and the southeastern aspect of Crabtree Mountain (3295), the first of our two objectives.

Steve Gruhn above Trout Lake. Photo by Ben Still.

Crabtree Mountain was first climbed by Larry Swanson on August 23, 1971 (see the October 1971 *Scree*). I'm not sure how the peak obtained its name, but I learned of it from Willy Hersman's "Index of Peaks in *Scree*" (available to MCA members by clicking "Download MCA Scree" at http://www.mtnclubak.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=membersscree.scree).

After meandering around in the brush for a short while, we found ourselves at the base of a brush-free, 1,300-foot, southeast-facing gully that led toward the summit plateau. Ben made quick work of this gully; I made slow work of it. We met on the summit, a small nipple on the broad plateau. Amazingly, we found the register that Larry Swanson had left. Many other people had signed it in the interim, including Toby Schwoerer on the same day in February that we had climbed Peak 3940 to the southwest of Trout Lake. This register is housed in a glass jar and is in need of archival and replacement, but we didn't have any materials with us, so we signed it and buried the register in the summit cairn.

Our next objective was a prominent peak some 4-1/2 miles to the northwest. We descended north to a broad, 2450-foot saddle and continued northward, but veered off the ridge and headed to the saddle west of Point 3468. Once on the ridge overlooking the headwaters of the West Fork of the Chickaloon River, we began our long walk to the west and northwest, keeping Thurman Creek on our left – over a 3350-foot point, over Point 3572, and skirting a couple of 3450-foot points on their west sides. The tundra-and-rock-covered ridge provided easy hiking. Terrain and clouds obscured our objective and we wondered if we'd have a view when we reached the summit. We continued up

Peak 4373 at left on the distant skyline. Photo by Ben Still.

of Crabtree Mountain. We were able to connect several meadows (surrounded by alders) to find our way down to Juneau Creek a short distance below the outlet of Juneau Lake. Already wet from the intermittent rain and the soaked brush, we waded knee-deep Juneau Creek and bushwhacked eastward to the Resurrection Trail, where we began our long trudge south to the cars, arriving around 10 p.m.

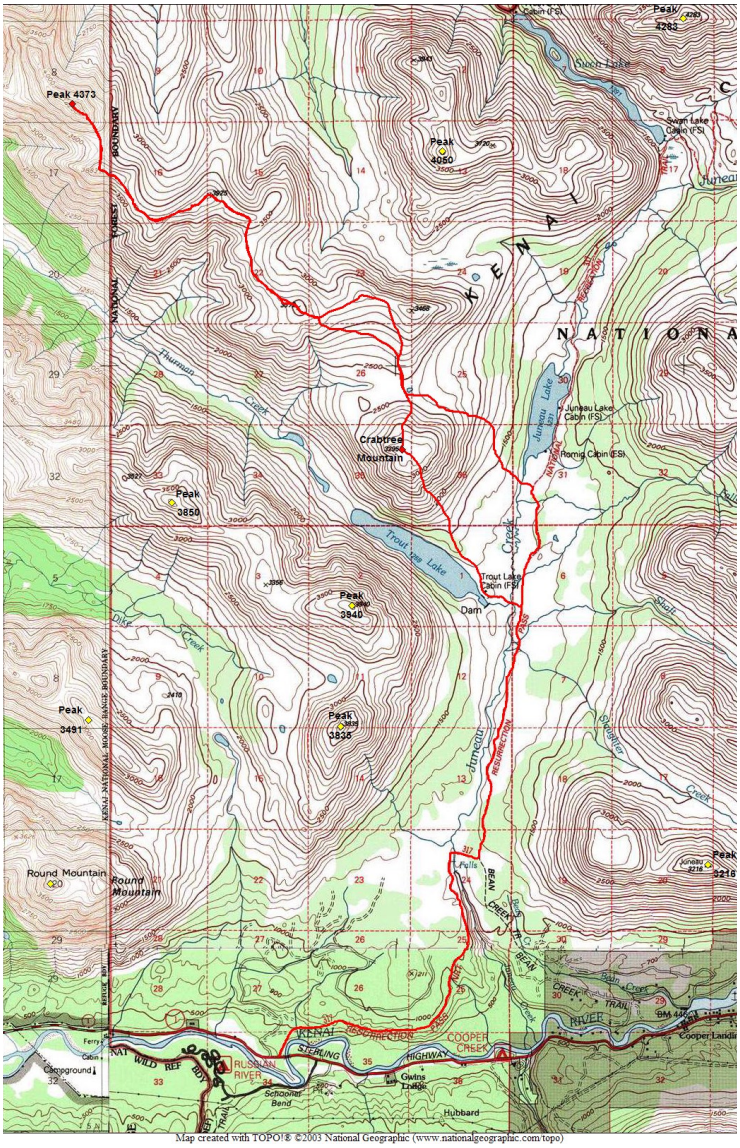
I've done over a dozen hikes west of the Resurrection Trail and they've become somewhat infectious. Every time I sit on the summit of a peak, I scan the horizon for interesting peaks and start planning my next trip. From the summit of Peak 4373, I could see an intriguing peak to the east. I don't think the area west of the Resurrection Trail is done with me just yet.

Point 3925, over a 3950-foot point, a 3850-foot point, a 3750-foot point, and up a 3800-foot point, and descended to a saddle just above 3,600 feet where we rested while watching a band of three curious caribou. Ahead of us the terrain made a distinct change and the rocky slope rose into the clouds.

We ascended the wet lichen-covered rocks and made our way to the highest of the three summits. We found no evidence of a previous ascent. Fortunately, we had a break in the clouds that afforded a bit of a view to the north.

The summit elevation isn't specified on either the Kenai (C-1) 1:63,360 USGS map or the Kenai (C-1) SE 1:25,000 USGS map. The 1:25,000 map indicates that the summit is between 1320 and 1340 meters (between 4331 and 4396 feet) and the 1:63,360 USGS map indicates the summit is between 4350 and 4400 feet. Thus, the summit elevation is somewhere between 4350 and 4396 feet. Using the midpoint of that range and lacking a better name, I call it Peak 4373.

After a brief summit rest, we retraced our steps down the ridge. At Point 3572 I veered off to the south side of the ridge to cut the corner to the saddle north of Crabtree Mountain. Ben continued along the ridge, but even with the extra distance he hiked, I still didn't get much of a rest before he met up with me. At the saddle I had the bright idea to follow what I thought was a horse trail toward the east. The supposed horse trail turned out to be a moose trail that made a beeline to the nearest marsh, mud hole, willow thicket, and alder patch. Eventually having had his fill of my bright ideas, Ben steered us southeastward across the northwestern slopes



Eshamy Peak

Text and photo by Ben Still

Looking down on Eshamy Lagoon from the summit of Eshamy Peak.

My alarm sounded at 6 a.m. on June 29th, 2014; time to get out of the tent and make some coffee and eat a quick breakfast. I am camped at the head of Eshamy Lagoon in Prince William Sound with family and friends; I have a solo trip up Eshamy Peak planned for the morning while the rest of the crew sleeps in and fishes for trout on Eshamy Lake. The previous day I visited Eshamy Lake on my way up Saddle Peak (3005). After a cup of coffee and a cinnamon roll, I blow up my packraft and begin the one-mile paddle to the base of Eshamy Peak, leaving the beach at 7 a.m.

Upon arrival at the south side of the peak, I dive into the brush, finding a beautiful old-growth spruce/hemlock forest thick with blueberry bushes, with the occasional patch of my favorite plant, devil's club. At about 800 feet in elevation, I break out into a beautiful meadow. The forest continues for 300 vertical feet above, but a hidden cliff band blocks my progress. I can't see the cliffs very easily from the meadow and crash through some thick devil's club before realizing I am blocked by a 20-foot cliff. I descend back into the meadow and try again, this time finding the high-use bear trail with lots of bear scat. This game trail leads me right to the weakness in the cliff and into the alpine above.

Once above timberline, the going is easy and I admire the amazing views of all the bays, inlets, and mountains. Beautiful alpine wildflowers blanket the slopes above. The final couple hundred feet is steep heather and fairly slick, but easily negotiated. I find myself on a 2978-foot-high summit with amazing views of the Sargent Icefield in one direction and Prince William Sound in the other. After 15 minutes basking in the sun, I retrace my steps back down the mountain, taking extra care finding the bear trail and make it back down to my packraft by 10 a.m. I arrive back just in time for second breakfast!

Twentymile Transect: Peak 4360, Whitecrown, Hover Peak, Peak 4575, and Peak 4290

Text and photos by Wayne L. Todd with Carrie Wang

Carrie Wang skinning up to high camp north of Peak 4575. Hover Peak provides the backdrop with the southwest ridge of Whitecrown on the sky-line to the left of the summit.

[*Ed. note: See the July* Scree *for the first part of this article.*]

The Climbs:

Direct sun highlights our route minutes after leaving camp. Efficiency drives our constant-incline, but weaving, route to the south base of Whitecrown. The middle ridge route (southeast ridgelet) still looks good up close, so we skin up steepening snow (farther than the mountaineer in me suggests). We leave skis where the slope tops out on a bench and shortly after don crampons. It's already very warm and the trailbreaking thereafter intensifies the heat. The route varies from knee-deep snow to snice on 20- to 50-degree slopes.

A snow bunting flies over. Pika tracks dot the snow at 5,000 feet (amazing, spring is coming early). The predominant massive snow mounds around the pass, dropping below us, become more seductive as shadows accentuate their height. The airspace is oddly void today and the contrasting quiet is spooky.

We steadily ascend, alternating leads, but not setting any speed records for sure. Breaks are judicious. The further-east peaks beckon and we note numerous fixed-wing aircraft scattered in glacier bowls. Approaching the ridge, I'm hoping the high point is the one connected to our spine and not one bump to the left, as that looks chossy. A gap, with views of other bird-named peaks, opens north and after an additional 10 feet of careful snow-covered rock scrambling, I have 360-degree views! (The airspace a few feet north is unhindered for hundreds of feet below). A careful perch for photos and video (and GPS) ensues and after a similar scramble up the 20-foot-distant westerly gendarme, we're both ready to descend. The northeast ridge looks travelable, but the southwest ridge looks nasty, unless one really enjoys clamoring on and around gendarmes with high exposure. [*Ed. note: With this ascent of Whitecrown, there are now no unclimbed peaks in the Western Chugach Mountains.*]

Descending, we note that a confident skier could ski either the face to the northeast or the glaciated bowl to the southwest of our ridge. A boots-off break, still with only a shirt on, quasi completes our climb. Back on skis, I start the descent on softening snow. A small slough compels me to ski cut most of the slope, producing some decent-sized wet-snow avalanches. The fairly steep ski, now on the avalanche bed surface, involves focused linear skiing. On lower-angle slopes we arc back to camp, maintaining elevation so as to avoid skinning, concluding a rewarding nine-hour outing. A plane circles low overhead and

lands one lake above, though mostly this has been an oddly quiet day.

We break camp with ptarmigan cackling and head east into the sun, Carrie pulling the sled whilst I break trail. As we angle south the tracks from the plane skiers are utilized. This glacier seems benign and with other tracks we opt to dismiss roped travel. Soon we're descending to a bowl just east of Hover Peak. Most gear is ditched from our packs before ascending the snow-mottled southeast ridge of Hover. One continuous band of snice+ compels the use of crampons and axes. Splendid 360-degree views of the Chugach are had from on high, including where we've been and where we're headed. This is the only snow-free summit of our trip.

We get a long glide south in a natural quarter pipe. Skinning farther south with frontal direct sun, we cross numerous heli-skier track clusters. This is another fairly quiet aircraft day. Now knowing the snowpack is quite stable, we travel maximizing efficiency rather than standard safety. With slower pace we ascend to over 4,000 feet before setting camp in shade.

After setup, the very-close-by, still-in-the-sun Peak 4575+/- beckons, so we're soon boot-packing up the few hundred feet of the south ridge. Coupled with gentle evening light, this has the best summit view yet, closer to the rugged easterly peaks and including Carmen and Twentymile Lakes and the Twentymile River drainage. We plot our nearby descent route along with our exodus. (This point is visibly higher than the surveyed Point 4555.) A night of ~10 degrees Fahrenheit awaits. With conditions like this, I'd think more folks would be ski mountaineering.

Carrie Wang ascends the southeast sub-ridge of Whitecrown.

Carrie Wang and Wayne Todd on the summit of Peak 4575 with Twentymile Lake and Carmen Lake in the background at right.

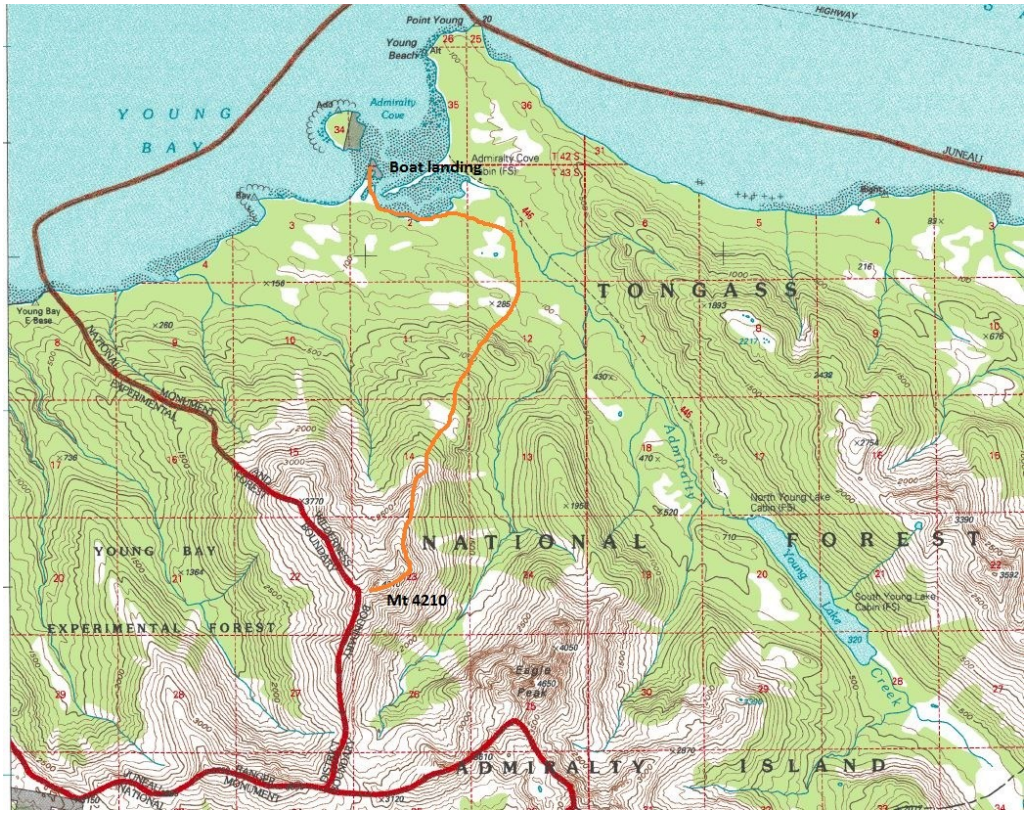
The 400-foot, 45-degree, mixed-condition southerly down-climb, with sled tugging at my pack, seems longer than necessary, but soon we're across another bowl and snacking in the pass southeast of Peak 4290. For the 500-plus-foot climb of that peak (confirmed by GPS), I attach numerous sundries rather than carry a pack, but consequently look like a badly decorated tree. Ascending, we have good views of our previous year's not-so-pleasant route up Kinnikinnick Mountain [*Ed. note: see the July* Scree] and additional descent views (upper section, anyway). After Carrie leaves the top, I hear aircraft and minutes later stare 20 yards into the window of a scouting helicopter. Minutes later, we again hear only ourselves.

Mount 4210 (Admiralty Island; Admiralty Creek)

By Carl Reese

On a Wednesday night last June, Mike Miller called me and asked if I wanted to climb a mountain on Admiralty Island. I dropped my work plans for the following day. I am always looking for people to climb with and Mike is an experienced and solid climber. The previous November we tried to climb this same peak, but ran out of daylight and climbed a smaller and closer peak. The weather forecast was just about perfect and Mike and I knew we weren't going to run out of daylight. As an aside, Mike and I don't just share a birthday; we were born the exact same day and year. We have both been riding the earth for the EXACT number of days.

We set our sights on a mountain called Mount 4210 that is northeast of Eagle Peak on Admiralty Island, not the Eagle Peak in the Chugach Mountains. It's called Mount 4210 because it rises 4,210 feet above sea level and nobody named it otherwise. There is no record of it having been climbed before.



Admiralty Island is the seventh largest island in the U.S. It's 95 miles long and 35 miles wide and has one town, Angoon. It's separated from Douglas Island, where I live, by Stephens Passage, which is about three miles wide. Most of the island is undeveloped landscape, at least from a human perspective. Angoon is a small Tlingit village that has existed for some 12,000 years. Yet Tlingit have never been the primary residents and they have always known this. The Tlingit word for the island is Kootznoowoo, meaning "Fortress of Bears." There are more bears per square mile on Admiralty Island than anywhere else in the world. Admiralty Island is three miles from Douglas Island across a channel, so black bears can swim between the islands. On Admiralty Island they get killed by brown bears.

Before the Russian missionaries converted them to the Russian Orthodox faith, there was a clan of Tlingit that believed they descended from bears and their souls actually were bears. It's a cool idea. In the 19th century John Muir met Tlingits that claimed to be bears. They believed bears could become trapped in human bodies, humans trapped in bear bodies, and that sometimes each could change to their soul forms.

Tlingit oral tradition maintains that brown bears literally conquered Southeast Alaska thousands of years ago in a grand battle. They say the bears were once white (polar bears) and brown bears arrived. There was a mighty struggle and the brown bears won. Scientists scoffed at the thought and others accused the Tlingit of inventing the story to demonstrate that eventually brown people would prevail over white people. There are no polar bears within a thousand miles and, indeed, Admiralty Island is a temperate rain forest with 300-foot trees. The sea never freezes and the average winter temperature in Angoon is around 30 degrees Fahrenheit.

Yet, another story emerges. Recently biologists found polar bear DNA in the bears of Admiralty Island. About the same time they found this, archeologists found evidence showing Tlingit lived in the area for some 12,000 years. That places the first Tlingit at Admiralty Island at the heels of the Pleistocene ice age when the Fortress of Bears looked like present day Greenland. Suddenly, Tlingit lore makes sense.

We met at the boat ramp in Juneau at 7 a.m. and boated to Admiralty Cove on the north end of the island in Mike's 18-foot aluminum skiff. We started our approach at 8:30. We packed pickets, cams, nuts, ice axes, crampons, and a 60-meter rope. We packed crampons because we thought we might climb a steep snow field on the north face if the ridge became a problem. We made the route up as we went along and, indeed, it seemed quite possible to ascend the mountain via the snowfield on the north face. The potential route follows an unnamed creek that drains into Young Bay upstream into an

Eagle Peak on left, Mount 4210 on the right. Carl Reese took this photo in November 2013 from the summit of an adjacent peak. Miller's and Reese's route to the summit of Mount 4210, the northeast ridge, is on the left of the summit.

amphitheater with steep snowfields just below the summit and climbs the snowfields to the top.

The whole day was warm and almost without wind, pretty rare for the summit of a mountain in Alaska. The forest at lower elevations was old growth spruce and hemlock, one of the largest unlogged tracts of forest in the world. In the 1980s there was a plan afoot to log the whole island to stumps. Wisdom prevailed.

Once we reached the base of the Northeast Ridge, we ascended over 3,000 feet in less than a mile. The space between large trees at lower elevations provided fairly unobstructed walking. We dragged out ice axes right away. Below timberline we hooked them on trees and bushes to secure ourselves from falling, as much of the climb was near 45 degrees. We climbed for about three hours to ascend through the forest to timberline on the Northeast Ridge of Mount 4210. At low elevations a wide ridge steepens and funnels to a singular thin rampart leading to the summit. As we ascended the ridge, we found a spectacular view. The ridgeline itself isn't technical, but has considerable exposure and much of the rock along the higher elevation on the ridge was fractured rock or choss. At times the ridgeline was only a foot or so wide. Due to the fractured nature of the ridge, we roped up near the summit, using a combination of cams and snow pickets driven into the choss. We determined we didn't need a rope for the descent, at least with conditions that day.

Most of the time bears are the least of my concerns in an industrial world rife with cancer, heart disease, obesity, and depression. I have had chain smokers tell me I am nuts to walk in bear country. It was a little exhilarating and a little unnerving, knowing the trails were made by bears that may have never encountered a human before. As Mike and I walked through the forest we called out, "Coming in," or "Coming out," to alert the keepers of the fortress that we were on the way. We saw no bears, but found warm bear feces a few times.

We made the summit around 2:30 p.m. The view was breathtaking, mountains in all directions. We got a grand view of Chatham Strait, Lynn Canal, Stephens Passage, Seymour Canal, and Icy Strait looking out toward, and past, Glacier Bay. Southeast Alaska is a maze of mountainous islands and fjords and we could see a hell of a lot of it from the top of Mount 4210. Mount Fairweather loomed some 120 miles to the northeast. We ate and rested for about a half hour on the summit, taking in the views. We descended Mount 4210 and made it back to the boat by 9 p.m. We headed back to Juneau with the sun setting in the over the Mansfield Peninsula to the west.

The maze of islands and fjords in Southeast Alaska provide the opportunity for adventurers to go places without human influence. The fjords often have fishing boats and hunters or kayaker camps in lower elevations, but the landscape above timberline is not human landscape. As Mike and I entered the harbor at day's end, a fisherman hollered, "Any luck?" Mike responded, "Hell, yeah!" The fisherman assumed we caught king salmon. The notion of going to sea without fishing was foreign to him. We are lucky, indeed.

Three First Ascents in Glacier Bay National Park

Text and photo by Paul Knott

In April and May this year, Kieran Parsons and I were fortunate to make the first ascents of three summits between Mount Abbe and Mount Bertha in Glacier Bay National Park in southeast Alaska. The most exciting of these was Peak 8290, which sports a pyramid of clean granite on its summit.

We had originally planned to attempt the east ridge of Mount Crillon – a challenge put forward by Bradford Washburn in 1941 [*Ed. note: see page 150 of the 1941* American Alpine Journal] – but heavy snowfall, high winds, and unseasonably warm temperatures made the approach to the ridge too avalanche-threatened. Hence, we made a 20-kilometer traverse on the Brady Icefield to the area north of Mount Bertha, where we climbed to a col at 6190 feet and thence a high bowl overlooking the Johns Hopkins Glacier.

On May 6, we made the first ascents of two snow summits on the south side of the bowl: Peak 7507 via its snowy northern arête, and Peak 7274 via its west ridge. The view from these peaks convinced us that the most direct approach to the granite top of Peak 8290, the snowy southeast face, was not viable because its ice cliff was too threatening and the face ran with wet slides each afternoon.

Kieran Parsons on the return along the corniced ridge to Point 6706. The ridge contained numerous hidden steps and some of the cornice collapsed as he and Knott descended.

Instead, early on May 7, we set off on the 2-kilometer-long southeast ridge from a camp by the 6190-foot col. We had noted the potential for time-consuming difficulties along this ridge, and beyond Point 6706 we found ourselves tackling a series of knife-edge corniced mushrooms and towers. It took us nearly three hours to negotiate a few hundred meters of ridge. Above, an easier snow arête took us to the base of the granite pyramid. The only way up this was on steep rock, but the granite was superb, providing secure climbing with juggy holds and plentiful protection. We climbed close to the crest, in three pitches up to about 5.7, or New Zealand Grade 15.

From the summit, we could see just how much untapped potential exists for climbing and big walling in this knot of granite peaks. Amazingly, the granite has been virtually untouched since Alan Givler, Dusan Jagersky, Steve Marts, and James Wickwire climbed here in 1977 [*Ed. note: see pages 392 through 396 of the 1978* AAJ]. The west side of Peak 8290 sports a continuous 1,500-foot pillar, and other summits in the Mount Abbe group sport similar monolithic pillars up to 2,500 feet in height.

In the afternoon warmth, we found the difficulties on the approach ridge transformed from mostly snow to mostly rock. Collapsing cornices, sodden snow, and disintegrating rock concentrated our minds and forced us to make two awkward diagonal abseils. Equally, it was hard to ignore the ominous clouds gathering over the ocean south of us. We finally plowed our way to the tent in mist and light snow at 6:30 p.m., fearful that any oncoming storm would load the avalanche-prone slopes we still had to descend.

Fortunately, high pressure held off the worst of the weather, and early the next morning we post-holed down from the col, finding our footprints obliterated by wet slides. Toward the bottom of the slope, we noticed a huge cone of ice blocks extending out over the glacier, and realized that our stashed snowshoes lay just within the cone. This made the 20-kilometer walk back to base camp a distinctly unappealing prospect. Luckily, by the afternoon the weather had cleared and our ski-plane pilot, Paul Swanstrom, was able to pick us up directly. After such a vivid experience, the spring shoots, fragrance, and birdsong back in Haines were simply exquisite.

We are grateful for financial support for this trip from the Mount Everest Foundation and the Canterbury Mountaineering Club.

Peak 4009 is “Flag Mountain”

Text and photo by Frank Baker

In the mid-1980s current MCA member Frank Baker installed a flag at this point, about a mile east of Mount Eklutna (4065). Baker says that he was told by ultra-light pilots flying out of the Birchwood Airport that they often used the flag to gauge wind direction. He returned to the site recently and made repairs to the flag. Eklutna Lake can be seen in the background.

"Scratch and Sniff"

First Ascent of a New Route on Mount Frances

By Clint Helander

This past May, Andres Marin and I made a short, but exhilarating, expedition into the Alaska Range. Our goal was to explore the East Fork of the Kahiltna Glacier for new routes. Despite its immediate proximity from Kahiltna Base Camp in the Southeast Fork of the Kahiltna Glacier, the East Fork receives little traffic. Based off of several photographs Andres had seen from friends who had previously ventured in to the area, we decided to take a look. After much reconnoitering, we found a hidden gem that we had initially overlooked.

Route of "Scratch and Sniff" (right) on Stubbs' Buttress on Mount Frances. Descent route is on the left. Photo by Andres Marin.

Unseasonably warm temperatures in the Alaska Range made climbing on nearly every aspect at lower elevations questionable. Regardless, we skied past the south face of East Kahiltna Peak, where several lines were established by Vince Anderson, Barry Blanchard, Jonny Blitz, and Carl Tobin in 2004 [*Ed. note: see pages 182 through 184 of the 2005* American Alpine Journal]. South-facing routes were more or less out of the question, as every steep mixed line was seemingly bare; only defined by traces of slush avalanches and rockfall. Farther upglacier, we scouted Mount Andrews, which is a prominent subpeak on Denali's South Buttress. "Going Monk," established by Kelly Cordes and Jonny Copp is the "mountain's" only line, but contains well over 4,000 feet of relief [*Ed. note: see pages 194 and 195 of the 2004* AAJ]. Other magnificent lines were just

Andres Marin beginning the first technical pitch. Photo by Clint Helander.

barely threatened by one of several large seracs that adorn the upper wall.

We moved farther upglacier, but the conditions were the same. Feeling slightly disheartened, we skied back to our camp under the East Ridge col of Mount Frances. Temperatures were so warm that it didn't even freeze at night. As we weighed our next move, we looked at the snaking hordes undulating up the well-worn trail of Denali's West Buttress. Suddenly I found myself tracing a line up a rocky buttress on the north side of Mount Frances. Although significantly shorter than any line we were hoping to climb, it seemed like a worthy consolation and a fun day out.

The next morning, we left at the leisurely hour of 11 a.m. and began climbing. A deep wallow in slush over the bergschrund and some simul-climbing up a right-trending snow ledge led to a weakness in the first steep rock band. Andres lead an amazing 65-meter pitch up a steep corner and then up a wide left-facing chimney that required an array of techniques. At one point both feet were against the wall and I found myself almost completely sideways.

Almost every pitch contained some kind of technical 5- to 15-meter crux section of engaging M5-6 climbing. Just as one option closed, another opened. As the sun set, we found ourselves near the top, but the climbing remained stiff enough that we pitched out almost the entire route. After about nine hours, we topped out on the pointed buttress. Several rappels on rock gear led to an easy descent down an adjacent Mini-Moonflower-like ice gully where, after 11 65-meter rappels we crossed the 'schrund.

The next morning we skied back to Kahiltna Base Camp and concluded that conditions were not ideal for further pursuits. Regardless, we both left with a feeling of joy and accomplishment. While we were unable to attempt any of the intimidating and challenging 4,000-foot climbs we had planned on, we discovered that big things come in small packages. Our new route "*Scratch and Sniff*" on Stubbs' Buttress (named in honor of Talkeetna's world-famous cat mayor) contained 12 pitches of incredible climbing on a previously untouched feature, less than two hours from Kahiltna Base Camp.

Andres and I have been friends for the better part of a decade. We first met in 2005 while working on Mount Rainier. In the wake of the Liberty Ridge tragedy (where we both lost our good friend Eitan Green), we felt truly satisfied to share a wonderful day on a steep face together, relishing the exquisite climbing almost as much as the reaffirmed friendship.

Clint Helander (left) and Andres Marin below "Scratch and Sniff" on Mount Frances. Photo by Andres Marin.

"No Rest for the Wicked" on West Witch's Tit's West Ridge

By John Frieh

John Frieh cruising up one of the few easy or moderate sections of "No Rest for the Wicked" on the west ridge of the West Witch's Tit on the Devils Thumb massif. Photo by Jess Roskelley.

Nearly five years ago, in July 2009, I made my first-ever climbing trip to the Stikine Icecap in southeast Alaska (my second time ever climbing in Alaska) where Dave Burdick and I made the first ascent of the West Ridge of Burkett Needle. The climbing was outstanding and certainly some of the best alpine rock I had ever touched. I can still remember standing on top of the Needle, looking out across the Stikine Icecap and seeing easily a dozen other equally beautiful lines I wanted to climb. I have managed to return nearly every year since then to attempt one; unfortunately every time I climb one of them I see a few more I want to climb. Perhaps one of these years I'll finally get caught up.

One of the lines that caught my eye was the West Ridge of the West Witch's Tit. John Scurlock, a Pacific-Northwest-based pilot photographer, had a few photos of it on his excellent website that made it look like a series of easy granite ramps and Dieter Klose, or as we know him, the Icecap manager, reported that it was unclimbed.

In August 2013 I flew to Devils Thumb with a group from Portland intent on attempting that line; unfortunately a lean winter followed by a hot summer resulted in impassable glaciers so the team opted for the *50 Classic*, East Ridge of Devils Thumb. A nagging injury from earlier in the season forced me to sit that one out and delivered me my first Stikine shutout. I vowed to return.

I did this year and on May 28th Jess Roskelley and I flew from Seattle to Petersburg. We grabbed lunch with Dieter and some white gas and then flew to the Devils Thumb massif's single landing zone southeast of Devils Thumb in the early afternoon. We scouted part of the approach before turning in early. The following morning (May 29th) we departed camp around 3:30 a.m. and began the long traverse around the Devils Thumb massif to reach our proposed route on the West Witch's Tit.

After eight-plus hours of traversing multiple glaciers and ridges, some that required climbing and rappelling, we finally reached the West Ridge, which we were "pleasantly surprised" to find was anything but easy granite ramps. We took a brew stop and debated our options; if it had been any later in the day I doubt we would have tried, considering how difficult the terrain that

Jess Roskelley leading the crux pitch, a 15-inch, off-width crack rated at M7. Photo by John Frieh.

lay ahead appeared. In the end Jess said, "Why not?" and we launched just before noon.

Almost immediately we were faced with stout mixed climbing. I kept thinking, "That had to be the crux!" only to be faced with another hard pitch. Roughly halfway up the route Jess led arguably one of the hardest pitches, if not the hardest pitch, I've ever seen in the mountains. Fifteen inches wide, give or take; perfectly smooth and would have been unclimbable if not for the ice in the back of the chimney. Exiting out required lying back a giant flake with our feet above our heads to attempt to get sticks into sugar snow. Stout! As the pitch took nearly two hours to lead, my sense was to bail, considering how late in the day it was at this point, but we couldn't let such a proud pitch go to waste. More hard climbing followed; all told I recall three or four solid M6 pitches and one solid M7 were below us by the time we reached the summit. Near the top we crossed over Bill Belcourt and Randy Rackliff's rappel line from their original first ascent of the West Witch's Tit in May 1995 [*Ed. note: see* Rock and Ice *69.*].

We summited around 11:30 p.m., making the fifth overall ascent of the West Witch's Tit. We discussed our options; though we were told a rap line existed down the south face that would make our hike back to camp shorter, we were very worried about locating the first rappel station in the dark and then rapping into new terrain. In the end we opted to rap the Belcourt/Rackliff line as we knew where it started and had some good beta from Randy and Bill about where it would deposit us. It turned out to be the right decision as their excellent line took us down very steep terrain on a single 70-meter rope. As an aside, their unrepeated line on the southwest face looks amazing and is prime for a first free ascent.

We hit the glacier sometime around 5 a.m.; at this point it all gets foggy for me as, all told, we were awake and on the go for 36 hours on a measly 3,000 calories each. We likely would have laid down for a brief shiver nap, but with the weather window rapidly closing, we death-marched our way back to camp where Wally of Temsco Air promptly snatched us up.

"No Rest for the Wicked" is my fourth first ascent on the Stikine Icecap in the five years I have been climbing there and one of, if not the, hardest routes I have ever climbed anywhere in Alaska. I am proud of our effort.

Thanks to Wally of Temsco Air for the superior service; Dieter Klose for continuing to tolerate my flagrant behavior in the Stikine; and of course, Jess Roskelley for being a great partner. Thanks also to Randy Rackliff and Bill Belcourt for the great beta and encouragement, as well as John Scurlock; I lost count of how many first ascents his pictures have provided me. Finally, a big thanks to the great people of Mountain Gear and the Alta Group/Petzl for supporting local climbers like us. Until next year!

Peak of the Month: Peak 7776

By Steve Gruhn

Mountain Range: Coast Mountains

Borough: Petersburg Borough

Drainages: South Sawyer Glacier

Latitude/Longitude: 57° 37' 1" North, 132° 39' 43" West

Elevation: 7776 feet

Prominence: 1226 feet from Tracy Peak (8095)

Adjacent Peaks: Peak 7360 in the Dawes Glacier and South Sawyer Glacier drainages and Peak 7152 in the South Sawyer Glacier drainage

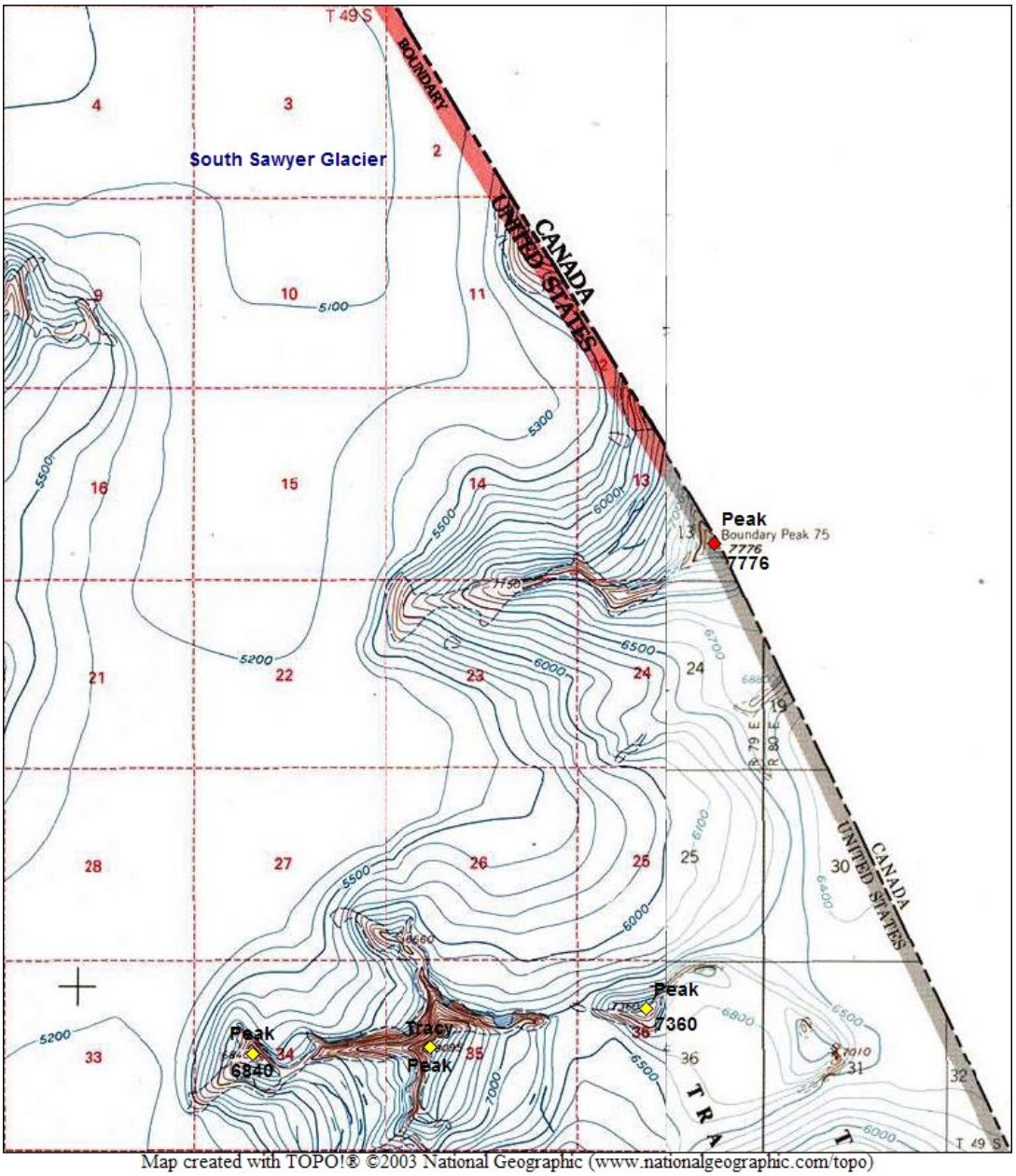
Distinctness: 1226 feet from Peak 7360

USGS Map: Sumdum (C-2)

First Recorded Ascent: July 6, 1980, by Geoff Faraghan, John Hoiberg, Nathan Hoover, Betty Tamm, Paul Tamm, Chris Wilson, Leslie Wilson, and Jason Winnett

Route of First Recorded Ascent: Glacier on the southwestern aspect

Access Point: Chutine Lake



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

Peak 7776 was designated as Boundary Peak 75 by the Alaska Boundary Tribunal in 1903, but was not visited during the survey of the Alaska-British Columbia boundary.

On June 27, 1980, Ken Loken flew Geoff Faraghan, Jay Hoiberg, Nathan Hoover, Betty Tamm and her husband Paul Tamm, Chris Wilson and his father Les Wilson, and Jason Winnett in a Cessna floatplane from Juneau to the Canadian customs at Telegraph Creek, British Columbia, and continued on to Chutine Lake, where they established a base camp at a lagoon on the southwest end of the lake. For five days the party worked on establishing a route to the Stikine Icecap while waiting for the weather to clear for an air drop. After the weather cleared, Loken made an air drop at the edge of the icecap at 6600 feet.

After the air drop was completed, the party left base camp and reached the air drop 24 hours later. After collecting supplies, the party set out on skis for a 40-mile clockwise loop east of the Alaska-British Columbia boundary. Much of the time was spent in swirling glacial fog, so they navigated by compass. While completing their circuit, they made some stops to make the first

1980 first ascent party's camp on the Stikine Icecap. Photo courtesy of Nathan Hoover.

recorded ascents of a few peaks, including Peak 7776 and Peak 7442 (also known as Boundary Peak 76).

On Sunday, July 6, the party was greeted by fog when they arose at 5:45 a.m., and left with daypacks for the ascent of Peak 7776. In the fog they skied about three miles across the flat of the Stikine Icecap, up a shoulder, and to a notch, where they had a lunch break and left their skis. They proceeded across the border into Alaska. The soft, wet snow made for slow progress as they ascended the glacier on the southwestern aspect of the peak. The bergschrund proved challenging to cross, so the party split into three groups to attempt three different routes. All three groups headed up on the rocks of the southwest ridge once they had crossed the bergschrund. Nathan Hoover described the rock route as Class 2 and 3. About an hour after reaching the rocks, they were on top, Les and Chris Wilson arriving first and Jay Hoiberg and Nathan Hoover arriving second. Paul and Betty Tamm arrived last to find a special birthday surprise for Paul – a Rainier Ale. He returned the surprise by sharing the ale that he had brought. They built a cairn on the summit and left a register.

The fog had rolled in while they were on the summit, obscuring the terrain below. On the descent the soft snow caused them to sink above their knees with each step until they reached their skis. A great roped ski run led them down to their camp and a birthday dinner for Paul.

After some additional climbing, the party returned to their base camp and, after further climbing, Loken flew them from Chutine Lake to Juneau on July 21.

I don't know of a second ascent of Peak 7776.

The information for this article came from Paul Tamm's report titled "'Chutine Peak,' Owens Peak, and Other Peaks of the Stikine Region," which appeared on pages 196 through 198 of the 1981 *American Alpine Journal*; from Paul Tamm's article titled "Return to Chutine," which appeared on pages 36 and 38 through 41 of the 1981 *Canadian Alpine Journal*; and from my correspondence with Nathan Hoover and Betty Tamm.

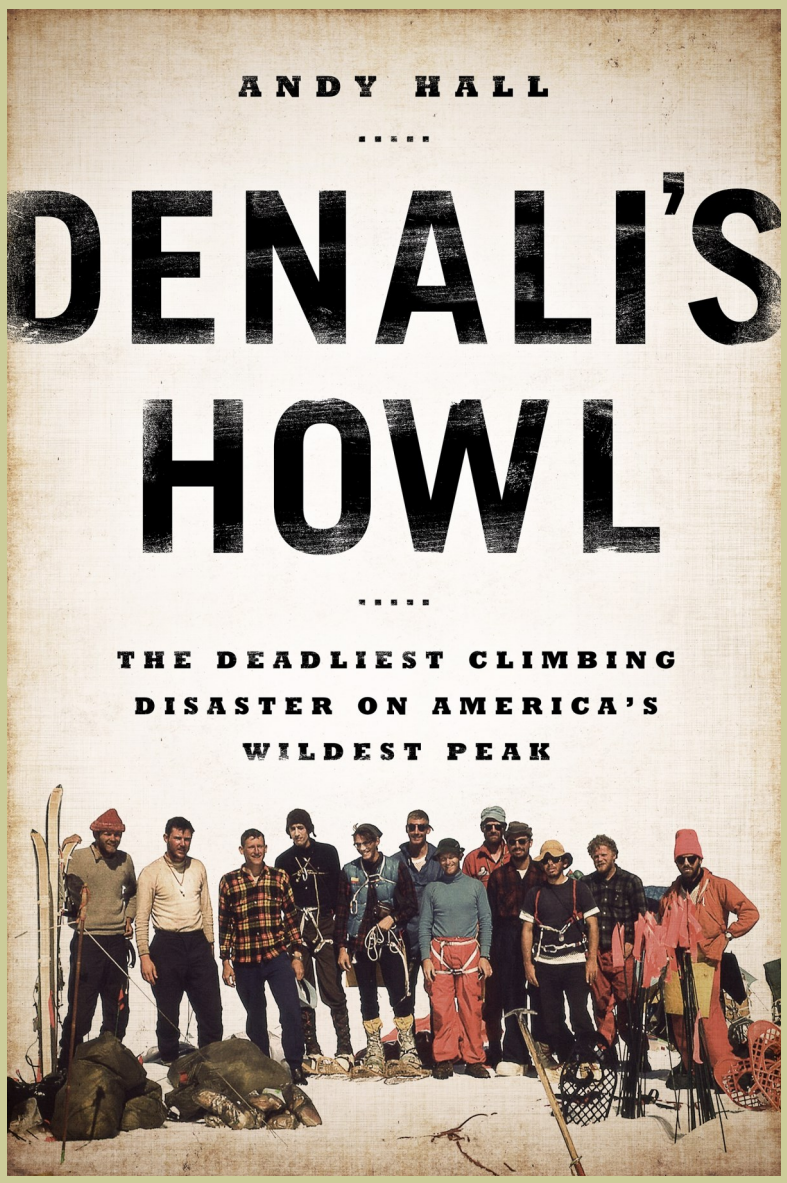
Book Review

By Frank E. Baker

Denali's Howl: The Deadliest Climbing Disaster on America's Wildest Peak

Author: Andy Hall

Denali's Howl is the dramatic account of one of the most deadly climbing disasters of all time. In 1967, 12 young men attempted to climb Mount McKinley – known to the locals as Denali – via the Muldrow Glacier and perilous Harper Ridge on the mountain's northern side. Only five survived.



Andy Hall, son of George Hall, the Mount McKinley National Park superintendent at the time of the incident, spent years investigating the tragedy. [*Ed. note: For his role in keeping Mount McKinley open to climbers in the aftermath of the Wilcox tragedy, the MCA bestowed George Hall with an honorary lifetime membership.*] With tenacity and relentless research, Andy Hall tracked down survivors, lost documents, and recordings of radio communications. In Denali's Howl, Hall chronicles in meticulous detail the full story of an expedition facing extremely difficult weather conditions, or what some have called "The Perfect Storm."

At an elevation of nearly 20,000 feet, these young men endured an "arctic super blizzard," with howling winds of up to 300 miles an hour and wind chill that would freeze flesh solid in minutes – all without the high-tech gear and equipment climbers use today.

Hall writes: "Two weather systems had been developing as Wilcox and his companions worked their way toward the summit: one from the northeast and one to the southwest. Rain clouds mustered over the Beaufort Sea, a stretch of ice-bound ocean that spans 1,200 unbroken miles between Alaska's North Slope and the North Pole … at the same time an equally uncommon system developed over the Aleutian Islands southwest of Denali. These massive weather systems separated by a thousand miles were on a collision course headed straight toward Joe Wilcox."

The expedition team consisted of Steve Taylor, Joe Wilcox, Howard Snyder, Dennis Luchterhand, Mark McLaughlin, Paul Schlichter, Jerry Clark, Jerry Lewis, Anshel Schiff, Hank Janes, John Russell, and Walt Taylor.

Expedition leader Joe Wilcox and three other climbers reached the summit on July 15, 1967. Three days later, five other members of the expedition made it to the top, led by Jerry Clark, an experienced 31-year-old mountaineer. But later, seven of the team perished near the summit. They were: Jerry Clark, Dennis Luchterhand,

John Russell, Walter Taylor, Clark Janes, Steve Taylor, and Mark McLaughlin.

This gripping story of death and survival also describes the efforts by many to save them – Hall's father among them. But Hall writes that nothing the National Park Service, U.S. Air Force, or any other rescue group could have done would have saved the stricken climbers in the raging storm. He contends that the expedition made the "staggering mistake" of not bringing a full complement of snow shovels and snow saws up the mountain – the only tools with which they could have efficiently constructed igloos and snow caves to protect them in the highly exposed area near Denali Pass.

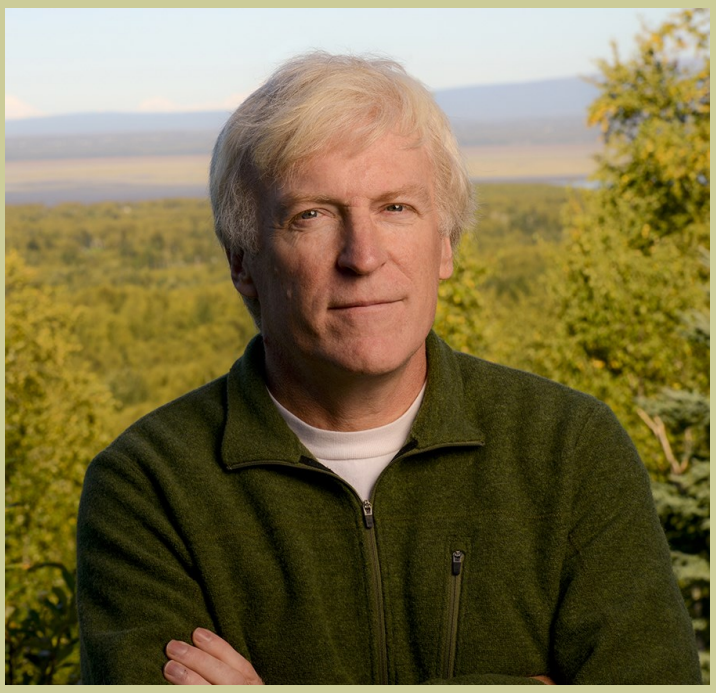
Another mistake, he writes, is that team members possessed an insufficient number of required "wands," the thin four-foot poles – like tomato stakes – that mark the line of ascent as a safeguard against losing the return route in whiteout conditions.

Denali's Howl also explores the interpersonal dynamics of team members and how some of the team members' discordance could have contributed to the expedition's desperate situation.

With detailed maps and colorful illustrations, this epic page-turner is a must read for anyone interested in mountaineering, adventure, and the history of Denali climbing.

Denali's Howl: The Deadliest Climbing Disaster on America's Wildest Peak, by Andy Hall; Dutton Press, 2014, 227 pages, is available at Amazon.com and local book stores.

Other books about the ill-fated Wilcox expedition: White Winds, by Joe Wilcox; In the Hall of the Mountain King, by Howard Snyder; and Forever on the Mountain, by James M. Tabor.



Andy Hall

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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 24th 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.

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Huts: Greg Bragiel - 569-3008 or huts@mtnclubak.org
Calendar: Stuart Grenier - 337-5127 or stugrenier@gmail.com
***Scree* Editor: MCAScree@gmail.com Steve Gruhn (344-1219) assisted by Elizabeth Ellis (elizabeth.anne.russo@gmail.com)**
Web: www.mtnclubak.org

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