

# the SCREE

## Mountaineering Club of Alaska

June 2015

Volume 58 Number 6



### *Contents*

**"Blue Collar Beatdown" on Mount Dickey**

**"Agua Sin Gas" on Lucifer**

**Easter on the Eagle Glacier: Pipit, Longspur, and Yudi Peaks**

**Denali Doubts 2013**

**Mount Gordon Lyon Offers Great Hike Close to Home**

**"The Two Towers" on The Dragon's Spine**

**Canyon Hiking: Loreto, Baja California**

**Peak of the Month: Mantok II**

Monthly meeting: 6:30 p.m., Tuesday, June 16. **CHANGED VENUE and FORMAT.**

**Meet at the Glen Alps parking lot for a brief meeting, then hike Flattop Mountain. Carpooling highly encouraged.**

*"In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks."*

**- John Muir**

# 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 Tuesday, June 16, at the Glen Alps parking lot.

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

For the MCA Membership Application and Liability Waiver, visit

<http://www.mtnclubak.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=members.form>.

## Contents

"Blue Collar Beatdown" on Mount Dickey

"Agua Sin Gas" on Lucifer

Easter on the Eagle Glacier: Pipit, Longspur, and Yudi Peaks

Denali Doubts 2013

Mount Gordon Lyon Offers Great Hike Close to Home

"The Two Towers" on The Dragon's Spine

Canyon Hiking: Loreto, Baja California

Peak of the Month: Mantok II

## Cover Photo

Dave Hart at the base of Longspur Peak.

Photo by Ben Still.

---

**Article Submission:** Text and photography submissions for *the Scree* can be sent as attachments to [mcascree@gmail.com](mailto:mcascree@gmail.com). Articles should be submitted by the 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.

---

**Monthly Meeting: Tuesday, June 16, at 6:30 p.m.** Monthly meeting: **CHANGED VENUE and FORMAT.** Meet at the Glen Alps parking lot for a brief meeting, then hike Flattop Mountain. Carpooling highly encouraged.

---

## Hiking and Climbing Schedule

**June 6-7:** Alpine Rock Climbing, Eagle River Valley. Reconnaissance trip to explore some unclimbed rock walls on Mount Yukla. Camp at or near Heritage Falls Campground. Sign up as partners with a competent trad leader, or just come for a camping trip. Bring your own gear. Technical climb or Class B camping trip. Leader: Cory Hinds; email [chinds100@gmail.com](mailto:chinds100@gmail.com).

**June 20:** Flattop Mountain sleepout. No leader.

**September 25-27:** MCA Ice Festival at the Matanuska Glacier. Contact Jayme Mack at [jaymelynnemack@gmail.com](mailto:jaymelynnemack@gmail.com) for details.

**September 27-29:** Glacier Creek mountain climb. Come join the fun of wading the icy Matanuska River and exploring the wilds of Glacier Creek after the ice festival. Typically this is a hiking trip with some possible scrambling. Destination may be a first ascent. Class D. Leader: Cory Hinds; email [chinds100@gmail.com](mailto:chinds100@gmail.com).

---

## On the Web

UKClimbing.com reported that in early April Pete Graham and Ben Silvestre climbed the east face of Peak 9450 in the Fish Creek Glacier and Wild Goose Glacier drainages of the Revelation Mountains. The two named their 1,200-meter route "Hoar of Babylon" and graded it as VI W16 M6 A0. More details are available at <http://www.ukclimbing.com/news/item.php?id=69681>.

Online? Click me!



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

# “Blue Collar Beatdown” on Mount Dickey

By John Frieh



*Route of "Blue Collar Beatdown" on Mount Dickey. Route followed skyline to the summit.  
Photo by John Frieh*

As the winter of 2014/2015 unfolded it seemed to me climbing conditions during the following traditional spring climbing season in Alaska would be lean at best. It was the warmest winter ever on record for the state of Alaska; add to that one of the lower snowfall accumulation totals the state has seen in recent years. For these reasons I started looking for weather windows as soon as March rolled around. Having successfully climbing Mount Huntington twice in the month of March (2011 and 2014), I knew if I could identify a viable weather window I could likely find something to climb.

After much deliberation over where a dominant low-pressure system would settle in the gulf and what that would mean for weather in the central range, I finally committed and grabbed a last-minute ticket to Fairbanks. I landed early in the morning of the 19th and Jason Stuckey, Chad Diesinger, and I immediately departed for Talkeetna. We rolled into town just as the Roadhouse opened, where we each pounded the traditional half standard, a Rudy and a Razy before heading to Talkeetna Air Taxi. After some bag shuffling we departed for the Ruth Glacier.

As always, Paul Roderick of Talkeetna Air Taxi was gracious enough to “fly slowly” on our way in and, after some

observations from the air, ruled out a few possibilities and made a decision to look at the northeast face of Mount Dickey. After establishing camp we skied over and glassed the northeast face. Though what we found wasn’t exactly confidence inspiring, it was enough to merit a “let’s go see tomorrow” plan for the following morning.

The following morning we departed camp at approximately 4:45 a.m. and made the short ski over to Dickey. We cached the skis near the face and started hiking. To be honest I can’t recall when we reached the face, but I want to say around 7 a.m. or so. We climbed two full pitches of snice (snow ice) that took sticks great, but was a little limited on protection

options. Given how thin these pitches were in places, it would be my opinion that possible repeaters of this route should plan on an early spring ascent.

These two pitches put us on the snow ramp that slashed the face. We immediately started blocking it out; simul-climbing



*Chad Diesinger (upper climber) and John Frieh (lower climber)  
following one of the early ice pitches.*

*Photo by Jason Stuckey*





*Chad Diesinger continuing the trench Jason Stuckey started out of the snow cave.*

*Photo by John Frie*

when the terrain allowed for it. We encountered bottomless sugar to mixed climbing and everything in between. I had the final block of the day that started at dusk and ended well past dark.

Our original plan/hope was to be off the face before the sunset and then rely on my knowledge of the descent from my 2012 ascent to descend in the darkness or, worst case, enjoy a sit, brew, and exercise session on the summit plateau. Unfortunately we were not and after getting shut down by complex route finding in the dark we resigned to digging a pseudo-snow-cave into the side of a snow fin and sitting down to wait for dawn. When we finally sat down and

settled in it was around midnight so we "enjoyed" four long hours of the Alaska night. Ironically (at least to me I suppose), that night was the last night of winter and the following morning was the first day of spring. As none of us had brought any bivy gear, the Reactor saw plenty of use that night. No one slept out of fear for their fingers and toes. Also as we were not on the summit by this point, in my opinion this does not count as a winter ascent.

As soon as it was light, we blasted out of the cave and promptly restarted our efforts to get off the face. After two failed attempts we finally found a way off the face. It was much later in the day than any of us had hoped. We slogged

over and tagged the summit around 5 p.m. or so.

We reached 747 Pass around 8 or so and sat down for a final brew session as the last of the daylight faded away. Coffee, Perpetuem, and what little we had left to eat was consumed before we began what would end up taking another eight hours to finally reach our tent on March 22nd at 4 a.m. All told we were awake for 48 hours and more or less on the move for all of it minus the four-hour "sit and suffer" session.

"Blue Collar Beatdown" is my second new route on Mount Dickey and my ninth "first" in Alaska since my first trip in 2009. Many thanks to all the great partners who have climbed with me on these over the years.



*Jason Stuckey enjoying a brief respite.*

*Photo by John Frie*

## **“Agua Sin Gas” on Lucifer**

Text and photo by John Friehe



*North face of Lucifer.*

I made my first trip to the Stikine Icecap (or Coast Mountains, if you prefer) in 2009 and made the first ascent of the west ridge of Burkett Needle. What I saw on that first trip was nothing short of amazing; I was blown away to find out much of it was unclimbed. As a result I have returned every year since (except 2010) to climb something; the north face of Lucifer (7872) was my fifth new route in this part of Alaska (my tenth in the state). In 2014 while approaching the West Witch's Tit [*Ed. note: See the August 2014 Scree*], I spotted on the other side of the Witches Cauldron a very attractive looking face. I took a few photos and made a mental note to keep it in mind when conditions and a weather window coincided; I didn't expect it would be the following year.

On Thursday, May 14th, with high pressure providing most of southeastern Alaska blue skies, Doug Shepherd and I flew to Petersburg and helicoptered in later in the day. The high pressure was almost too good and temperatures were in the high 60s on the glacier. To keep things safe we opted for a 2 a.m. departure from camp on the 15th. We managed most of the face before sunrise, but we found the face slow going with numerous crevasses and sloppy snow in the unusual heat. We

were hoping for a direct line up the headwall to the summit, but given the temps and conditions opted for a safer, less-direct line off the face climber's left of the summit.

We managed the ~4,000-foot face in about 12 hours; though we encountered some vertical snow/snice in places, we found the majority of the terrain to be moderate – all in all a good day out. We managed to snag a pickup the same day and were back in Petersburg later in the day on the 15th.

The best part: I managed to fail to pack the stove, which we did not discover until after we had been dropped off. This likely would have ended the trip right then and there, if it not for the warm temps that resulted in some shallow pools on the glacier from which we were able to get water. Still: no coffee in my book is more or less an epic.

Given my f--- up we opted to name the route "Agua sin gas" which in Spanish means "water without gas." Though usually this is reserved for still water (i.e., not sparkling water), it happened to also hold true for our situation.

“Agua sin gas” III WI4 steep snow



# Easter on the Eagle Glacier: Pipit, Longspur, and Yudi Peaks

By Dave Hart

Photos by Ben Still

April 2014

With a sunny Easter weekend in the forecast for April 19 and 20, 2014, Ben Still and I made last-minute plans to head up to the Eagle Glacier and climb a handful of Western Chugach peaks including Pipit Peak (6150 feet), Longspur Peak (5401 feet), Yudi Peak (6540 feet) and Sparrow Peak (6635 feet). Alpine Air had some clients already lined up for drop-off, but said they would try to fit us in late Saturday morning. We arrived at

their Girdwood hangar at 8:00 a.m. We were the early bird that got the worm and bumped up to first in the queue. A 15-minute flight in their Robinson R44 helicopter dropped us at a flat spot on the Eagle Glacier at 5800 feet, ½ mile northeast of Yudi Peak overlooking the Pipit Glacier. The views were vast from our new home. By 9:30 a.m., we had camp set up and began our 1100-foot ski descent down the Pipit Glacier to access our first objective, Longspur Peak, which was interestingly 400 feet lower than our landing site.

Roped up and skirting huge crevasses just below camp, we found a passable saddle at 5650 feet, allowing access to the head of the Pipit Glacier. We were surprised to see our chopper return with a pair of skiers and drop them at our camp to start their Eklutna Traverse. We made a few fun ski turns below the saddle then headed southeast down the southern edge of the Pipit Glacier to below the north face of Pipit Peak. We continued our approach to Longspur Peak while scouting for a safe route to the summit. We opted for what looked to be the mellow northeast ridge, where we dropped our skis at 4500 feet. We booted up the surprisingly narrow ridge, eventually dropping off left and traversing around to the south ridge while post-holing to our waists. Unstable cornices, steep rock, and big exposure on the south ridge barred access

Scree—May 2015



*Dave Hart (left) and Ben Still at camp at pass near Yudi Peak.*

just below the summit. We returned to the northeast ridge for a second try and scrambled up the final exposed couple pitches knowing we had no other option. We stood atop the tiny summit by 1:00 p.m., admiring the views as always. The three known previous ascents of Longspur had been by either the south ridge or the southeast face. We retreated to our skis and enjoyed a fun 500-foot powder descent before putting our skins back on

for our next peak.

We retraced our tracks one mile back up the Pipit Glacier to the base of the north ridge of Pipit Peak. We skied up to the saddle at 5500 feet on the north ridge and swapped to crampons. The next 1/3 mile up the north ridge was super-fun hiking and steep snow climbing with at times big exposure off either side of the



*Dave Hart skiing back up glacier toward Pipit Peak with Longspur Peak on the right.*

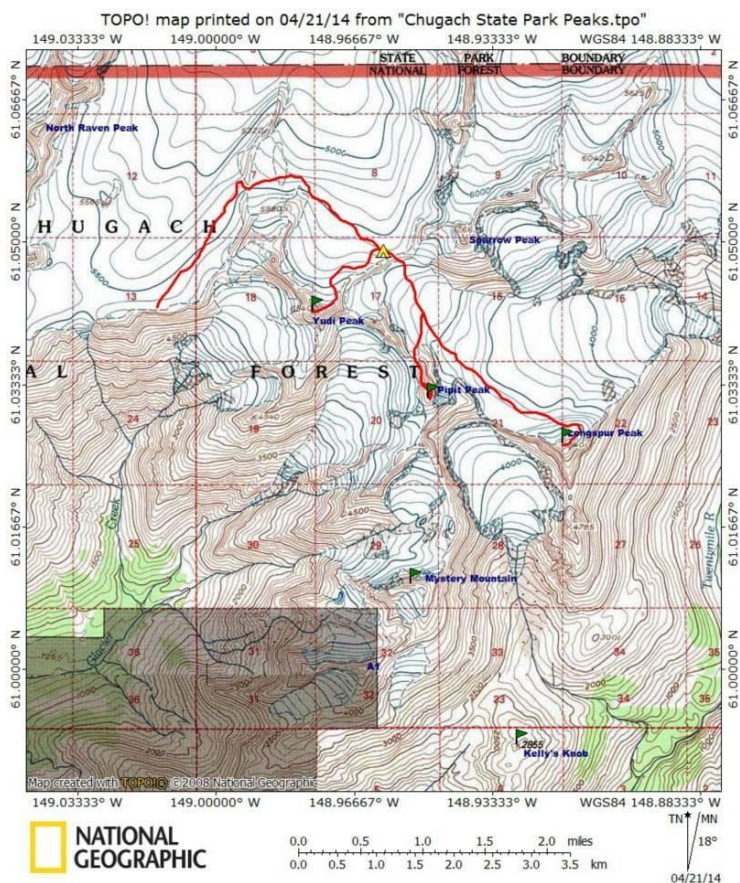


*Dave Hart cresting the summit ridge of Longspur Peak.*

ridge. We ended up on top by 4 p.m. to beautiful views of the Chugach Mountains, Prince William Sound, and Turnagain Arm. Careful down-climbing brought us back to our skis, where we again enjoyed a brief powder descent to the Pipit Glacier. A final hour grind back up to our camp below Yudi Peak got us there for a well-earned dinner. We went to bed Saturday night happy with our day spent in a beautiful spot.

Sunday morning brought clouds fast approaching from Prince William Sound to the east. Yudi Peak was only 700 feet above camp. How hard could it be to run up that before breakfast, then decide how we were going to get home that night before the storm trapped us? Deep snow, steep skinning, a couple pitches of belayed ski traversing and avoiding avalanche slopes ended up taking two hours from camp to reach the summit of Yudi Peak. From the summit at 10 a.m. we phoned Alpine Air, visible 6400 feet below us in Girdwood, to check their flight availability if we chose to meet them at Alaska Pacific University's Thomas Training Center two miles away. They said they could get us later in the afternoon. It would be a race between us, the helicopter, and the incoming storm that was very quickly approaching.

We descended and had camp packed up by noon. We briefly considered trying to get up Sparrow Peak, less than a mile from camp, but opted to not push our luck with the approaching storm. We skied a traversing descent northwest down the Eagle Glacier, intending to sneak across the north ridge of Yudi Peak at the 5500-foot level. Amidst building clouds we found a surprisingly steep down-climb, allowing access off the broad north ridge of Yudi Peak to the mellow glacier below. From here it was an easy one-mile ski upglacier to APU's Thomas Training Center at 5650 feet, overlooking Girdwood. We arrived by 3 p.m. in wind, clouds, and increasing snow. Our exit was uncertain, but we called Alpine Air to confirm our flight. By 5 p.m., our shiny red chopper appeared from below, saving us from another night in the tent. We made it safely home for Easter dinner after a whirlwind 33-hour tour on the Eagle Glacier.





## Denali Doubts 2013

By Tom Choate

It was a dream, long held, rarely resurrected.

Every decade renewed, finalized in 2003,

Dredged up by storms, while on the great mountain.

But it is a dream full of doubts:

Could I reach the top, yet again after 50 years?

Would my body hold together when I approach 79?

My left foot has failed after but a few hours for many  
years.

What other handicaps of circulation, of breathing, of  
bones or muscle

Will appear to further shackle me?

How much can my companions take before they  
abandon me in frustration?

Yet this great mountain, perhaps the biggest of all,

Has gripped my soul for over a half century.

Wild and untouched, even now frequented on one  
route,

Only for two months, before resuming its wildness.

It is always there, flaunting its mysteries, eternally  
alluring.

Head and shoulders above all other mountains I have  
known.

It will be weeks of daily struggles and daily rewards.

Yes, I will commit again, for it is burnt into my soul.



*Tom "Old Mountain Goat" Choate, 78, on his way to base camp in 2013 after becoming the oldest person to climb Mount McKinley, which sits behind him.*

*Photo by Bruce Kittredge.*

## Trivia

## Mountain Goat Geography Quiz

By Tom Choate

Answers on page 19.

1. Which is the second highest peak in the Chugach Mountains?
  - A. Mount Valhalla
  - B. Mount Thor
  - C. Mount Marcus Baker
  - D. Mount Witherspoon
  - E. Mount Gilbert Lewis
2. In Chugach State Park, which of these is highest?
  - A. Calliope Mountain
  - B. Bounty Peak
  - C. The Mitre
  - D. Rook Mountain;
  - E. Eagle Peak;
  - F. Peeking Mountain



## Mount Gordon Lyon Offers Great Hike Close to Home

Text and photos by Frank E. Baker



*Frank Baker on the summit of 4134-foot Mount Gordon Lyon.*

I noticed quite a few ski tracks carved into the slopes as I climbed the last few feet to the top of Mount Gordon Lyon, 4,134 feet, overlooking Eagle River. It was warm, about 45 degrees, and no wind. This relatively easy hike April 26th over mostly snow-free terrain was just what the doctor ordered for someone already nostalgic for winter, but eager for spring and summer.

It was about 2 p.m. as I hiked up the traditional way – from the Alpenglow (Arctic Valley) Ski area. This meant I only needed to ascend about 2,000 feet over three miles to reach the top of Gordon Lyon. The main trail goes east to a broad saddle between Rendezvous Peak and Gordon Lyon. From the saddle you turn left, or north, and follow a trail up the ridge all the way to Gordon Lyon's summit.

I took a more direct route, angling to my left, or northwest, just beneath the Site Summit road, but eventually connected with

the trail coming up from the saddle. I met four skiers who were taking advantage of the nice day and winter's residual snow that lingered on the shadier, northwestern slopes.

My real objective for the day was Highland Mountain, which at 3,606 feet, is about 530 feet lower than Gordon Lyon and lies to its north. From my home above Eagle River Road, I look directly at Highland Mountain – but have yet to climb it. From the north side it would be a bushwhack with no trail that I know of, and from Gordon Lyon one has to descend about 900 feet along a ridge and then climb back up another 400 feet to reach Highland's summit.

From the top of Gordon Lyon I could see two people and a dog below. They had done just that – only the couple had skis and were working their way back up toward me. Glancing to the south, I spotted a large eagle soaring at an elevation about 500 feet higher than I was, and gaining altitude. The eagle was

being lifted by what little wind there was to make his gradual climb, and it appeared effortless.

Pouring some hot coffee from my thermos and biting into some cheese and crackers, I cell phoned my wife Becky to ask if she could spot me atop Gordon Lyon from our house. But she said: “Sorry, I’m inside Carrs grocery.” It made me smile – that I could talk from the top of a mountain to a person in the deli section of the store. “Get me something good,” I urged. “See you later this afternoon.”

The two skiers and dog were getting closer as they moved up the ridge, and I felt like hanging around long enough to greet them. But even with the nice view – Anchorage and shimmering Cook Inlet to the west, South Fork and Ship Creek Valleys to the south, and far off in the distance to the north, Denali and Mount Foraker looming on the horizon like white giants – I was beginning to get bored and felt like heading back. It was easy to skirt around patches of soft snow as I angled back toward the Alpenglöw (Arctic Valley) Ski Area where my car was parked.

Hiking guidebooks list Mount Gordon Lyon as easy to moderate, and I would agree with that rating. There is a steep, but very short, section right near the top where one needs to

take extra care with footing. But other than that, the entire climb is on a gradual incline.

A somewhat longer, but quite rewarding, hike is to begin from the South Fork trailhead, ascend the first pass to the right to the ridge, follow the ridge north toward the Alpenglöw (Arctic Valley) Ski Area; skirt right around Rendezvous Peak on an established trail to the saddle I referred to earlier, then head up Mount Gordon Lyon.

Mount Gordon Lyon was named in 1964 by Mrs. Gordon Lyon to commemorate her husband, Gordon Miller Lyon (1906-1964), who had been an engineer who worked on military construction projects throughout Alaska for much of his professional career.

On these short trips I’m reminded of how fortunate we are to have such great destinations so close to home. On past hikes we’ve joked about ordering pizza from mountaintops, but on this day I could have done just that – with Becky merrily rolling her cart down the aisles at Carrs. I’d have to hike home, of course, to enjoy it!

Frank E. Baker is a freelance writer who lives in Eagle River. To contact Frank, email [frankedwardbaker@gmail.com](mailto:frankedwardbaker@gmail.com).



*Looking into the South Fork valley from the 4134-foot summit of Mount Gordon Lyon.*



## First Ascent: “The Two Towers” (Alaska Grade IV 5.10 2,000 feet)

### The Dragon's Spine, Little Switzerland, Alaska Range

Text and photos by Zach Clanton

*“Make choices based on your values, your analysis, your intuition and your dreams. The story of the [climb] is one of the distance between our ideals and what we are willing to sacrifice to live up to them.”*

*~ Michael Kennedy*



*The Dragon's Spine skyline from Little Switzerland base camp/airstrip.*

It all started with this first photograph. The midnight view from basecamp on our first night in Alaska's Little Switzerland. In 2012, James Gustafson and I dreamt of this skyline before seriously considering it and before we had ticked off the guidebook classics in the area. The second photo was taken in 2014 atop Saruman's Tower, halfway through The Dragon's Spine Traverse.

Three years and three ski-plane expeditions later, we are still dreaming of this captivating ridgeline. First attempts were plagued with vicious 10-day storms, dead ends, a leader fall, crevasse scares and more. In July of 2014, all of our work began to pay off.

I would like to think that I am self-sufficient, but it's our relationships that define us. And my relationship with this range is more than any one trip. So now, after three years of

imposing our imagination on the unknown, we have turned our vision into something real and tangible. There is now a line drawn on the single, sweeping and serrated massif of rock. One hell of an adventure and a 2,000-foot new route we dubbed “The Two Towers” (going along with first ascensionist National Park Service Ranger Roger Robinson's Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit themed names) done in 36 hours as a cap on 63 days spent on glaciers in the Alaska Range that summer. We climbed 20 pitches, rigged countless rappels, and spent the night shivering on a two-ton teetering block, clipped to a nest of Camalots. We became committed and exposed like never before, but it's still part of a larger dream. One that I fear is larger than I could have ever imagined. The only knowledge of this route gathered prior to our attempt was that of ski tours around the base and a brief fly-by, so naturally, the only way to find scale was to put our bodies where our minds were. So

much progress has been made here, but James and I aren't finished yet. We are only halfway done with our intended route and I am certain the best is yet to come.

In 2012, The Dragon's Spine silhouette was such a powerful image to behold as we cooked dinner every night; we decided to have a closer look on our last day. This was our first attempt on the mountain, and it was on the impressive diamond shaped wall of the second tower. We had no idea what to expect and after running into dead ends left and right, a tension traverse to a new crack system ended in gear failure and James taking a 40-foot leader fall. Thoroughly beat up and bloodied, we ended that first expedition feeling very lucky to be alive. Oddly enough, we were also filled with a strong desire to see more of what the mountain could offer us.

The next year, thanks to the American Alpine Club's Mountain Fellowship Grant, we flew in under blue skies and took a few days to "warm up" on The Royal Tower as well as some local airstrip crags. We then moved our camp down to the foot of The Dragon's Spine just as it began to rain. The next 10 days went by very slowly as the classic Alaskan storm of fury hammered our floorless tent, causing it to rain within the shelter as we took turns holding onto the single pole that supported it. Ten days is an extremely long time to sit in a tent, especially if you've left all of your reading material at base camp. But somehow we managed to collect our consolation prize by putting up a new four-pitch route of amazing quality during our one six-hour sunshine sucker hole. We called the area the Red Dragon Wall and the climb "Green Couch" (5.10a).

Fast-forward to July 2014 and we were back at Dragon Camp. This time we loaded up our sleds with 70 pounds of beefy tents, hearty meals,



*James Gustafson atop Saruman's Tower, the second tower and our high point.*

bottles of bourbon, and thick books. We even left a cache with more food at the airstrip four miles away. We were ready to wait out anything the Alaska Range could dish out. This time, the weather was less than horrific and during halfway weather days, we managed to do some reconnaissance climbing on the first tower, get some fun skiing/snowboarding in, and add a new direct-start variation to "Green Couch."



*The Dragon's Spine skyline from Little Switzerland base camp/airstrip.*





*James Gustafson atop the first tower with the second tower in view.*

While sitting in our tent at Dragon Camp with mixed weather reports coming in through our satellite text messenger, it was very difficult to know the right moment to begin such a large endeavor. We reasoned that there absolutely had to be three days of clear skies forecasted to even think about making a real attempt. Getting caught in a storm high on the route was unthinkable. But after a week or so, we realized that was simply not going to happen and that we had to take advantage of a 48-hour window that was coming our way. With nerves on high alert, we made our last supper and fell asleep thanks to our whiskey-fueled inside sweater.

Dawn broke with a fresh coat of snow laid across the entire massif, but the skies were as beautiful as we had ever seen them, so the decision was obvious. It was go time. We quickly simul-climbed the first tower that took us four hours the first time and only one and a half the second. One side of the ridge was dry as a bone, while the shady aspect remained wet from that dusting of snow that was diminishing rapidly with the rising sun. Before we knew it, we were making the first rappel off the first tower and down to the base of the largest stretch of steep rock along the route. It was as if we were launching off into space. This was truly the beginning of the unknown and it put great big smiles on our faces.

Tricky steps of 5.10 splitters and stem boxes broke up moderate climbing. Our heavy packs made everything a little bit harder, but we could not imagine going any lighter. We had decided to bring pitons instead of sleeping bags and were convinced that a small blue tarp was a much better idea than a bulky tent. Pitch after pitch flew by as we made haste into the sky. Sometimes we found ourselves in a dead end, succumbing to the frustration of stunted progress. Then we'd collectively put our thoughts together and remember that we were on our own. No guidebooks or online descriptions would help us there. Instead of putting our heads down, like so many of us do in an effort to read another's interpretation of a mountain, this was an entirely heads-up operation. Nothing but our own imaginations and intuitions could lead us upward. It was beautiful.

As we approached 12 hours of climbing, the midnight sun was quickly on its way behind the mountains. We had just passed an excellent bivy site, but we needed to keep going. With an impending storm, there was zero time to waste. After struggling relentlessly on a short section of thuggy off-width moves in an utterly exhausted state, I followed James' lead up to a two-ton block that was wedged in between the walls of a chimney. Every time we moved an inch, the rock would shift, giving us the feeling that it was about to tumble out of place

and fall into the 2,000 feet of air below us. Sure enough, we decided that this was the best place we were going to find to have a rest so we settled in on our single foam mattress and got wrapped up in our tarp. Just in case our bed decided to go missing in the night, we clipped ourselves to an elaborate anchor overhead. I was borderline delirious, definitely dehydrated and didn't even have the energy to feed myself. After James' insistence on stuffing our faces with gummy bears and almonds, I snapped back to life and could focus my mind again.

I don't think either of us slept that night. Although that "night" was only several hours long and the month was July, it was quite the chilly one and sharing our body heat was absolutely necessary without a sleeping bag. While tending to the constant tasks of keeping my leg from going numb and trying to maintain my cocoon status within the blue tarp, every time I seemed to nod off, I would awaken in a sudden fit of paranoia. I would blast my head through our measly shelter and scan the horizon for even the smallest cloud that would signal the onslaught of Alaskan fury. The prospect of going down the way we came up was a horrifying and expensive proposition to say the least. And as they say, "the only way down is up." The problem was, we had no idea what lay ahead and the only line of descent was probably another 2,000 feet of climbing away. When the new day revealed a thin film of clouds and a vibrant sundog, we knew it was time to start thinking about Plan B.

Two pitches later, we were on the summit of Saruman's Tower in a slightly dazed and lethargic state. This was no time to let our guard down, as the ridgeline ahead was that of a knife's edge. Again, we ran into a dead

end. I walked up to the edge of a ledge with overwhelming exposure and decided I wanted nothing to do with it, searching out options in all other directions. After wasting time exploring off of the ridge proper and dealing with ice-choked cracks, I finally admitted to being stumped. James then walked up to the same stance I had rejected and decided he would hammer in two pitons for a lower-out maneuver over the abyss. I plugged in a backup cam and slowly traversed out over a 400-foot overhang on top of a 2,000-foot cliff onto a rock the size of a coffee table. It was still my block and the next two pitches went by smoothly with the kind of exhilaration that only comes with fun and easy climbing in an exposed and beautiful position. And then it happened again. We were stopped dead in our tracks.

It was along this ridge that I found, as Alvah Simon says, "my line, my edge, where a man meets his moment, where the fear passes through him and he still stands, open to every consequence of living and dying." The belay I brought James to was another one of those coffee-table rocks, but this one had only one way forward. The path ahead was obstructed by the impassable arrowhead of a blank gendarme, massive overhanging walls on either side. Twenty-six hours into our first ascent, we had gone past the point of no return and it was obvious that our weather window would close before the next



*James Gustafson on the third pitch of the second tower, with the airstrip in the background.*



dawn. Rappelling was now mandatory. We crawled up to either end of that ledge on our bellies to see if we could spot a line of descent, but there was nothing to see. So we tied our ropes together, threw them over the edge of the unknown and fully committed ourselves to a terribly uncertain free-hanging rappel. I was sick to my stomach with fear and anxiety so needless to say, I was a bit relieved that it was the end of my block. James would go first. With one last look of nervousness, he began to slide silently down the ropes. After 10 feet, he disappeared over the edge.

There was not a breath of wind in the air, not a single whisper of the raven nor distant hum of bush planes. The silence was like nothing else I had experienced before. I kept waiting to hear something, anything from James, desperately hoping that he would find another anchor before coming to the end of our

70-meter ropes. And then I finally heard it in the distance, “OFF RAPPEL! IT’S ONE HUUUGE ONE!” he screamed. A small amount of confidence returned to me, so I clipped in. The exposure was dizzying as I uncontrollably spun in circles, granite walls soaring in all directions toward the dark-blue sky. I tried to stay focused on my Prusik as the overhang seemed to push me farther and farther away from the rocks I had been so fond of clinging to. My feet touched solid ground just as I came to the knots in the end of the ropes. Moments later, rockfall chopped over 10 meters off one of them, adding to the omnipresent feeling that the success of this climb would not be because of any guidebooks or online descriptions, but the ever-evolving and adaptive mind of the present.

To view a video of the climb, visit <http://youtu.be/IYPM1k9qiDM>.



*James Gustafson on Cracks of Doom, the crux pitch of “The Two Towers.”*

## Canyon Hiking: Loreto, Baja California

Text and photos by Wayne L. Todd

With Becky, Deane, and Carrie Wang, Dillan Walsh, and others

December 2014—January 2015



*Alongside a refreshing waterfall, Becky, Deane, and Carrie Wang start up the crux section in Emerald City Canyon.*

In addition to the expected water activities offered off the coast of Baja California, we find fun and adventurous activities inland as well.

After online searching and judicious use of Deane Wang's smartphone Gaia app, we drive just 15 miles from Loreto for the start of Tabor Canyon.

Lizards, dragonflies, and many water bugs, in numerous pools, soak up the sun along our hike. As warned, a mild rock scramble soon turns some around (Class IV). Just beyond, after a knee-deep water crossing, the crux 30-foot boulder chimney turns more and slows most. At our visit, trusting a small jammed log across the opening is required to ascend. We don't use the very sketchy rope (perhaps bring your own 50-foot rope). A short, open log climb waits around the corner, but from there on, it's "easy" boulder hiking. Numerous beautiful pools (most look suitable for jumping or at least soaking), flowers, insects, birds, and canyon vistas draw us onward. Only a few shallow water crossings are required. Our initial group size of 10 dwindles to 4 by the time we reach the falls, the standard stop.

That was such fun, that after a week of ocean activities, we find

ourselves near Ligui Canyon. With a wimpy rental car, we have a couple-mile foot approach up an arroyo. These are easy walking and offer mild scenic wonder, but soon we're at the canyon proper, the real candy. This starts off wet, with a short rope climb out of a pool (this rope is stout and is bolted at the top) and continues wet most of the way. Wading through clear water (warm enough even in shorts!) with steep canyon curves, striations and blue sky above is fun and gorgeous. This canyon reminds me of canyoneering in the Grand Canyon. Occasional wide spots offer dry breaks with plant oases. Along the way we see tarantulas, a 6-inch stick bug, water "moss" that turns out to be larvae, and vivid colored insects. The tenacity of nature is dramatically displayed by trees with roots mostly exposed along the canyon walls.

This would be a dangerous canyon during rainfall, but our weather and forecast looks good. We learn later it rarely rains here and amazingly the flowing water is from the very infrequent hurricanes (every year or so). There was a serious hurricane the year previous which has slightly changed the canyon routes from the descriptions.

From fellow canyon hikers, we hear about an elusive Loreto



Canyon hiking book. After numerous town trips, we find a copy at Gecko Curios, which also has a very nice collection of art from around Mexico.

We are down to four adventurers by our outing to Rainbow Canyon. After another short arroyo approach we are bouldering and hiking by waterfalls, colorful butterflies, a small snake, and miniature sand traps (belonging to ant lions). Mostly-de-rooted fig trees offer shade and photo opportunities along the way. The travel is less refined in this canyon, which leads to mini-bushwhacks and scrambles (most avoided on the exodus with better route selection). As the canyon narrows, brushes up, and steepens approaching the red arched walls, I am told, "Enough!" We discover a building-size under-boulder passage on the exit.

With just one more day to play, Emerald City Canyon is our next day's outing. Except for one and a half short sections, this is the easiest walking of these canyons and would be suitable for children as the travel is mostly over small rocks (if you can get them up the cruxes). More colorful flowers and insects dot the passage, along with two horses, and a few water crossings (wadings). The crux move is a 30-foot traversing rock scramble adjacent to a sunlit cascading waterfall above a shimmering green pool (another Class IV). After a bit of hiking, a 15-foot half crux of rock steps, alongside the creek, leads to more gentle hiking. A jammed log 10 feet overhead spanning this section attests to the force and water level of the hurricane. It's hard to imagine that epic torrent compared to this calm, blue-sky day with the gentle stream. We hike on, searching for a geographic fault or where the canyon looks to drop off, but realize it probably does not and as we're weaving, this route could go for a long way.

For lunch, we backtrack to a natural pool suited for jumping in. The water is refreshing and only a tad cool. After convincing everyone to join in, someone spies a large centipede looking creature with rather larger pincers ambling along the pool bottom. Everyone's quickly out of the water, there is no more talk of swimming and the exodus wading sections are completed expeditiously. This insect instilled more concern than the tarantula sightings.

Numerous other canyon hikes listed in the book are left unvisited, but we're already thinking Loreto might be a place to visit again.



*Carrie Wang hiking up Tabor Canyon.*

Note: Gecko Curios in Loreto sells the hiking book, [Hiking Loreto](#) by DeeDee and Dave Kelly and Ed Nugent. The canyon names and hike names were given by the expats who wrote the book. Some locals may have different names for the canyons and the hikes.



*One of numerous beautiful canyon pools along the Ligu Canyon hike.*



## Peak of the Month: Mantok II

Text by Steve Gruhn

Photos by Chris Wright

**Mountain Range:** Alaska Range; Mantoks

**Borough:** Denali Borough

**Drainages:** Northeast Fork of the Yentna Glacier and Swift Fork of the Kuskokwim River

**Latitude/Longitude:** 62° 55' 49" North, 151° 40' 33" West

**Elevation:** 9650 feet (± 50 feet)

**Prominence:** 900 feet from The Fin (13350)

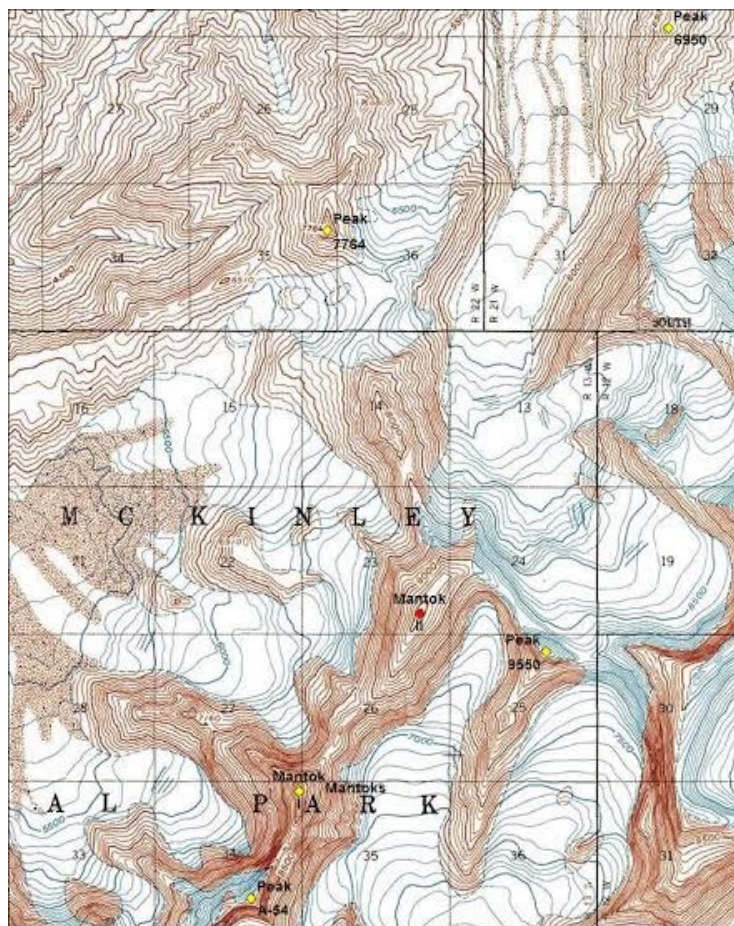
**Adjacent Peaks:** Peak 9550 in the Northeast Fork of the Yentna Glacier and Herron Glacier drainages, Mantok I (9350), and Peak 7764 in the Herron Glacier and Swift Fork of the Kuskokwim River drainages

**Distinctness:** 900 feet from Peak 9550

**USGS Maps:** 1:63,360: Talkeetna (D-4);  
1:25,000: Talkeetna D-4 NE

**First Recorded Ascent:** April 19, 2010, by Joseph McBrayer and Christopher Wright

**Route of First Recorded Ascent:** "Ladies' Couloir" on the southeast face to the southwest ridge



In his unpublished 1960s manuscript on Alaska's mountains, Vin Hoeman identified over 150 peaks in the Alaska Range as worthy mountaineering objectives, including Mantok II, which he referred to as Peak A-55. During a 2007 visit to the Northeast Fork of the Yentna Glacier, Peter Doucette, Ben Gilmore, and Freddie Wilkinson found a group of peaks so inspiring and manly that they took to calling them the Mantoks. The three climbed a 9350-foot peak on the west side of the Northeast Fork and unofficially named it Mantok I.

On April 8, 2010, Paul Roderick of Talkeetna Air Taxi flew Joey McBrayer and Chris Wright from Talkeetna to the Northeast Fork of the Yentna Glacier, just outside the Wilderness Boundary of Denali National Park. After some aborted climbing attempts and a few days of inclement weather, McBrayer and Wright skied up the western fork of the Northeast Fork of the Yentna Glacier and established a camp at the toe of the icefall south of Mantok II. Early the next morning they set off on an attempt up a mixed couloir on the southwest side of the

face. After about a thousand feet of climbing, a group of lenticular clouds rolled in from the east; retreat ensued. The following day they returned to their base camp to enjoy some more reading, navel contemplation, and aborted climbing attempts. On the tenth day of their expedition, McBrayer and Wright returned to the base of Mantok II to re-establish their camp. The following morning they left their tent at 6:30 and opted to forgo their earlier line to attempt a wide-open couloir that snaked up the southeast face to the southwest ridge. In the couloir they found 50- to 60-degree snow and névé with the occasional 70- to 80-degree ice step. The final pitch below the ridge was the most challenging with a few mixed moves and 30 feet of 80-degree rimed snow. After cresting the ridge they roped up and ascended the 50- to 60-degree broad, crevassed ridge for the remaining 700 feet of elevation to the summit. From their camp 2,700 feet below the summit, the climb had taken them three hours. The descent via the same route took another three hours. They named the 2,700-foot





*Joey McBrayer gets moving above the bergschrund in the "Ladies' Couloir" on the southeast face of Mantok II.*

route "Ladies' Couloir" and graded it III AI3+. Upon reaching their tent, they packed up their camp and skied back to their base camp in a hurried attempt to get a flight out before a snowstorm set in. The storm, however, won the race, and Roderick wasn't able to reach them until the following day, April 20, when he flew them back to Talkeetna.

I don't know of a second ascent of Mantok II.

The information in this article came from the Grace and John Vincent Hoeman papers, which are archived at the University of Alaska Anchorage/Alaska Pacific University Consortium Library; from Wilkinson's article titled "The Fin Wall," which appeared on pages 48 through 55 of the 2008 American Alpine Journal; from Wright's article titled "Mantok II," which appeared in the December 2011 *Scree*; from Wright's report titled "Mantok II, first ascent, Ladies' Couloir; Peak 10,020', northwest face to summit ridge," which appeared on page 111 of the 2011 AAJ; from Wright's blog, available at <https://christopherwright.wordpress.com/>; and from my correspondence with Wright.



*Mantok II's southeast face with the line of the "Ladies' Couloir."*

## Answers to Geography Quiz

1. Which is the second highest peak in the Chugach Mountains? B. Mount Thor (12521 feet).
2. In Chugach State Park, which of these is highest? F. Peeking Mountain (6925 feet).

## Mountaineering Club of Alaska

|                |                 |              |                                     |                 |              |
|----------------|-----------------|--------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| President      | Cory Hinds      | 229-6809     | Board member (term expires in 2015) | Rachad Rayess   | 617-309-6566 |
| Vice-President | Galen Flint     | 650-207-0810 | Board member (term expires in 2015) | Joshua Clark    | 887-1888     |
| Secretary      | Max Neale       | 207-712-1355 | Board member (term expires in 2016) | Jayne Mack      | 382-0212     |
| Treasurer      | Aaron Gallagher | 250-9555     | Board member (term expires in 2016) | Carlene Van Tol | 748-5270     |
| Past President | Greg Encelewski | 360-0274     |                                     |                 |              |

Annual membership dues: Single \$20, Family \$25

Dues can be paid at any meeting or mailed to the Treasurer at the MCA address below. If you want a membership card, please fill out a club waiver and mail it with a self-addressed, stamped envelope. If you fail to receive the newsletter or have questions about your membership, contact the Club Membership Committee at [membership@mtnclubak.org](mailto:membership@mtnclubak.org).

*The Scree* is a monthly publication of the Mountaineering Club of Alaska. Articles, notes, and letters submitted for publication in the newsletter should be emailed to [MCAScree@gmail.com](mailto:MCAScree@gmail.com). Articles should be submitted by the 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](mailto:vicepresident@mtnclubak.org).

Missing your MCA membership card? Stop by the monthly meeting to pick one up or send a self-addressed, stamped envelope and we'll mail it to you.

Mailing list/database entry: Aaron Gallagher - [membership@mtnclubak.org](mailto:membership@mtnclubak.org)

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

Huts: Greg Bragiel - 569-3008 or [huts@mtnclubak.org](mailto:huts@mtnclubak.org)

Calendar: Stuart Grenier - 337-5127 or [stugrenier@gmail.com](mailto:stugrenier@gmail.com)

Scree Editor: [MCAScree@gmail.com](mailto:MCAScree@gmail.com) Steve Gruhn (344-1219) assisted by Dawn Talbott ([dawn.talbott@yahoo.com](mailto:dawn.talbott@yahoo.com))

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

Find MCAK listserv at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/MCAK/info>.

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