

the SCREE

Mountaineering Club of Alaska

April 2016

Volume 59 Number 4



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Monthly meeting: 6:30 p.m., Tuesday, April 19. Sarah Zerkel will present stories and pictures from Aconcagua. From humble beginnings as a Chugach scrambler to climbing the highest peak in the Western Hemisphere, come learn how climbing in Alaska helped to prepare for this South American adventure!



*"The soul should always stay ajar, ready to
welcome the ecstatic experience."*

- Emily Dickinson

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, April 19, BP Energy Center, 1014 Energy Court, Anchorage, Alaska.

<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>.

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Cover Photo

Drew Seitz at The Throne.

Photo by Pedro Binfa

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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Hiking and Climbing Schedule

April 3-10: Eklutna Traverse ski mountaineering (31 miles) OR Bomber Traverse five huts ski tour (35 miles). Glacier Travel. We will go wherever the snow is. Trip leader Greg Bragiel. Participants must have attended the trip training March 26-27.

June 11: Pioneer to Eklutna Traverse. This traverse takes advantage of trails to access great ridgeline hiking and scrambling with zero bushwhacking. It's approximately 20 miles with 12,000 feet of elevation gain. Participants should be fit and prepared for a full day in the mountains. We shouldn't need any technical climbing gear, but everyone should have plenty of water - up on the ridge there won't be opportunities for re-supply - and lots of snacks. Participants should also prepare for a wide variety of weather, as temperatures on the ridgeline can vary dramatically from the valley floor. Trip leader is Katie Strong (kgstrong@gmail.com).

June 18: Flattop Mountain sleepout. No leader.

Online? Click me!



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

The Mountaineering Club of Alaska thanks Derek Jacobs for his efforts and assistance in delivering supplies to the Bomber Hut recently: Coleman stove, metal/mesh lantern globe, and Coleman fuel.

Thank you, Derek!

Greg Bragiel, MCA Huts Chairman



Supplies delivered to the Bomber Hut.

Photo by Derek Jacobs

Transport and four-legged assistant.

Photo by Derek Jacobs



UAA is offering a beginning rock climbing class in May and a crevasse rescue class in June this summer. There are still many openings.

Beginning Rock Climbing: Tuesdays and Thursdays, June 7 to 21 (6 p.m.—9 p.m.), all day Saturday, June 11, and all day Saturday and Sunday June 18—19. Cost: \$450ish.

Crevasse Rescue: Tuesdays and Thursdays, May 17 to 31 (6 p.m.—9 p.m.), all day Saturday, May 21, and all day Saturday and Sunday May 28—29. Cost: \$400

These courses are designed and planned for working individuals and are being offered in the evenings and on weekends to meet working schedules. It is easy and free to become a UAA student.

If there are questions or anyone needs help registering, they can contact the Health, Physical Education, & Recreation Department at 786-4083.

Trivia Time

Answers on page 20.

1. What is the northernmost peak in the Chugach Mountains that is at least 10,000 feet high?

- | | | | |
|-------------------|------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|
| A. Peak 11608 | G. Finland Peak | M. Mount Sergeant Robinson | R. Torksey Peak |
| B. Awesome Peak | H. Henson Peak | N. Sovereign Mountain | S. Ulu Point |
| C. Bellister Peak | I. Icing Peak | O. Mount Sulzer | T. Whitey |
| D. Blank Peak | J. Lapland Peak | P. Sweden Peak | U. Wolverine Peak |
| E. Peak C-6 | K. Mount Miller | Q. Tanada Peak | |
| F. Peak C-11 | L. Mount Sanford | | |

2. What is the westernmost peak in the Chugach Mountains that is at least 10,000 feet high?

- | | | |
|---------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| A. Awesome Peak | F. Globemaster Peak | K. Mount Sergeant Robinson |
| B. Bashful Peak | G. Mount Goode | L. Sovereign Mountain |
| C. Confederacy Peak | H. Mount Grace | M. Truuli Peak |
| D. Mount Gannett | I. Ice Cream Cone Mountain | |
| E. Mount Gilbert | J. Mount Muir | |

A Lofty Success

Text and photos by Sam Zmolek



Looking back from the top of Sawmill Peak.

Awaking alone in a cramped bivy tent, I was miles from any other human beings or even trails, on bare tundra that had only just begun to green up in the slow Aleutian springtime. There was a moment of internal disbelief as I came to my senses, and realizations slowly flowed into consciousness. I was not just a body trapped in human-sized enchilada, however; I was a man on a mission.

I unzipped the bivy and exposed my face to the cold morning air, a misty slipstream blowing through the solid gray of low cloud cover. “Damn it, I don’t need this again,” I thought to myself as I retreated back into my yellow cocoon and zipped it closed. I wasn’t ready to think about what these current conditions meant to my mission yet, so I savored a little more warmth in my sleeping bag, and daydreamed about the enchanting experiences of the previous evening.

The day before had started uneventfully, with the expected eight hours in the office. The lovely weather had been taunting me, however, and at lunch I hatched a scheme to throw a light overnight pack together and cross some unconquered objectives off my list, including the distant Lofty Mountain. This rugged peak looms over the surrounding mountains around the northeast end of Unalaska Island, and is the highest mountain for miles, cresting at 2281 feet above the Bering Sea and Pacific

Ocean. Beyond the peak is a long ridgeline that protrudes into the sea for another three miles and terminates at Erskine Point, where the long mountain spine of Unalaska plunges beneath the waves of Unalga Pass, to resurface as other Aleutian islands beyond.



Ridgeline near Erskine Point.

My goal had been to summit Lofty Mountain, and to hike out to Erskine Point if at all possible. By early evening, I was driving to the end of the road in Morris Cove in the warm, clear June air. Basking in the sunshine and freedom, I followed wild horse trails up the valley to the southeast. After a mile I started look-

ing for routes to climb out the north side of the valley, a surprisingly steep glacially-carved wall that is foreboding in spots, and averages 1000 feet in elevation.

I hopped out of the valley easily enough, despite some struggles through salmonberry bushes and ferns that had already grown tall enough to be a hindrance. I had worked up a mighty sweat already, however, and I was suddenly aware that water might actually become a big problem on this route given the high line and lack of any remaining snowpack after a really weak winter. At that moment, I stumbled upon a stagnant alpine pond and decided to stop and drink like a camel and top off my water supply, even though it wasn't the usual high quality Unalaskan drinking water.

After that recharge, I continued on my route enjoying the broad, sparsely vegetated ridge and gradual elevation gains while I wandered southeast, then northeast and began approaching the jagged teeth of 1855-foot Sawmill Peak. As the evening waned and the peak grew closer, I could see a very thin cloud was forming then dissipating repeatedly on the very top. I wasn't sure what to make of it, but it added an enticing aura of mystery as the colors were being continually enriched by the deepening sunset.

As I scrambled across the summit, I was utterly transfixed by the unfolding scene, and was unable to look away. I mean, I live in a place where I get treated to gorgeous views regularly, but I had never seen anything quite like that view. The setting sun was partially obscured by a thin, flowing veil of mist that was constantly in flux with the wind over the crags. I could not stop taking pictures, just hoping they would do the scene some justice. It felt like a crazy psychedelic experience, and I stayed immobile for some time trying to take it all in, not even stopping to layer up even after I began shivering uncontrollably in the cold mist. It could've been five minutes or a couple hours, I

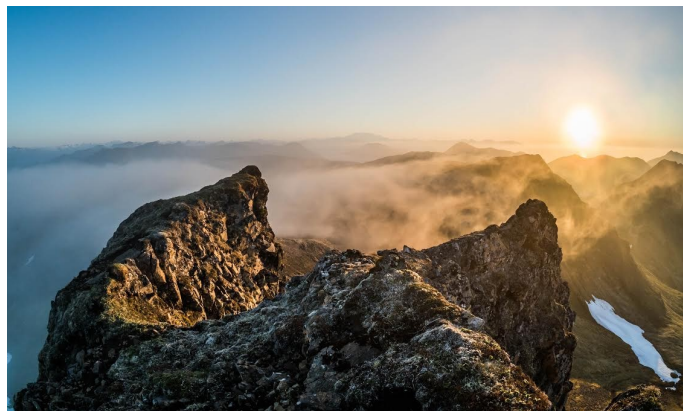
have no idea how long I was up there, but finally I descended the summit to the northeast as the sun set. Chilled to the bone, I was happy to find a suitable campsite below the saddle, crawling into my sleeping bag around midnight.



Scramble up Sawmill Peak.

and resolved that I was going to do something that day, whether it was the summit, or Erskine Point, or maybe just a stroll somewhere else. The weather gods were going to give me something.

When I finally emerged from the bivy, I wasn't sure what I was going to get. It was windy and damp, but only the top 500 feet



View from the top of Sawmill Peak.

of the peaks appeared to be buried in the clouds, and the thick morning fog seemed to be burning off. I got my pack together and headed toward Lofty, staying below the summits of Pegleg Peak and The Lion's Mane, skirting them on traverses on the southeast to avoid unnecessary elevation gains. When I turned a corner and Lofty came into view, my heart sank a little. The wind was howling and all I could see

were some terrifying cliffs and a few narrow couloirs on the face, all disappearing into the white. I had planned to use one of those couloirs, but I knew they could be dicey, and I was not going to commit to an unknown route that I couldn't even see. Rather than linger in despair, I noted that the cloud ceiling would at least let me traverse around to the east face, and attain the ridge out to Erskine Point, and decided to just walk as far that way as I could.

It proved to be a good decision, and before long I was past Lofty

Mountain, and heading to one of the extreme tips of Unalaska Island. In fact, my luck began to change as I traversed the mountain, where I found the one flowing water source of the entire hike. I drank greedily from the steep cascade that seemed to be issuing from the very summit of the peak above. Before long I had climbed up to the ridge and was on my way to Erskine Point. This ridgeline was a very pleasant yet strenuous walk, 1200 feet above the sea with more ups and downs, and much more hand work than I anticipated. As I went all the way out to the end of the ridge, the weather began perking up, and I stopped for lunch in full sun, watching the massive tidal currents ripping below me at Unalga Pass, where the Bering Sea and the North Pacific have their daily interactions between the islands.

Buoyed by the improving weather, I reached the end of the ridge and turned around to head back toward Lofty. I was becoming exhausted, but as I got closer to the mountain, a funny thing happened and I could not keep myself from going for it. Approaching from the northeast, I had a view of the east face, which I had determined was the least demanding and safest of the potential routes. In fact, compared to the other routes, the east face was downright inviting. I still had to deal with clouds on the summit, but I noticed that the clouds were just billowing up from the other side of the summit, and were not going to be any permanent hindrance to navigation.

So I just did it. Lugging my exhausted body up that final 700-foot face to the summit ended up being downright anticlimactic, but at the same time I can't remember a peak I have been so happy to finally conquer. The clouds kept me from getting any dramatic panoramas, but I saw enough to be actually terrified at the top. The summit was a very narrow ridge on crumbling rock that did not exude much confidence underfoot. I had just enough in the tank to snap a few pictures, and then get off the perch before I got vertigo. I didn't see any signs of previous ascents, but there isn't much place to even leave a cairn.

I walked back to camp smiling about the whole endeavor. It took three tries over two years to finally cower over a crumbly ledge for a few minutes. Lionel Terray's "conquistadors of the useless" comes to mind when I think of the whole endeavor, but I also can't help but remember all the experiences along the way that led to those few brief moments on top. In the end, it's the adventures themselves that leave the mark in the heart of man, not the abstraction of a point on the map; and these adventures definitely left worthwhile marks.



Summit of Lofty Mountain, with the tame east face on the left.



Actual tiptop of Lofty Mountain.



Sam Zmolek on the summit perch of Lofty Mountain.

Traversing the Harding Icefield from the McCarty Glacier to Pothole Lake

Text and photos by Timm Nawrocki



Andrew McNown standing on a lookout at a saddle below Peak 5365 above Northwestern Fiord.

On March 12 of this year, Andrew McNown, Charlotte Crowder, and I drove to Nikiski to catch a flight onto the Harding Icefield with Doug Brewer of Alaska West Air. Doug is extremely knowledgeable on the terrain of Kenai Fjords National Park and the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, in addition to the Tor-drillo, Neacola, and Chigmit Mountains across the inlet. He helped us identify a good landing site to start our journey. Doug flew us onto the Harding Icefield near the top of the McCarty Glacier in Kenai Fjords National Park. It was interesting to note that Skilak Lake, Tustumena Lake, and the Tustumena Glacier terminus lake were not frozen this year. From our landing site, we traveled east toward the Northwestern Glacier and set up camp. Originally we had planned on climbing Truuli Peak, but the views of the ocean on the flight in lured us for more.

We had no need to move camp on the second day, freeing the entire day for exploration. We toured to two lookout points (unnamed) above Northwestern Fiord. The views of ice and rock tumbling abruptly over 4,000 feet into the ocean were amazing. On a future trip across the Harding Icefield, I would plan to stay along the coast for the entire journey because it is so magnificent. Also, I would devote more days to tours from a camp to enable thorough exploration of the coastal mountains.

Days three through five were budgeted to travel north across the bulk of the icefield. We stayed east of a band of north-south oriented nunataks. This route provided a very broad travel corridor and allowed for some great views across the broad expanse of ice farther to the east. Much of the fourth

day was a whiteout because of snow and low clouds, but we had intermittent views of nunataks to aid navigation. On our fifth day, we arrived at the head of the Skilak Glacier on the north end of the icefield. Setting up camp that evening, we dug a kitchen deep into the snow and built a massive wind wall



Early dusk over the Harding Icefield.

around it to prevent air flowing down the glacier from disturbing our renowned chefs.

Because of the good weather we experienced, we reached the north end of the icefield without having to use our weather day, so we had additional time to do another day tour. We summited the northernmost nunatak at the head of the Skilak Glacier, Peak 4930. From the top, we were able to look down the Skilak Glacier and south back across the icefield. The first

six days of our journey had gone smoothly: we had plenty of time to rest, cook, hang out, and explore (all things that I highly value while camping).

Perhaps the only downside was that my dog, Loki, found very few interesting scents to investigate up on the icefield. That and I ran out of bacon for him halfway through the trip.

The seventh day began a stretch of a few less casual days for us. Our planned route followed the Skilak Glacier all the way to the terminus, with the Iceberg Lake route as an alternate should the glacier prove impassable. I will describe our route down, but want to stress that it requires some very slow double-carries through dense alder and some difficult route-finding. If any future groups follow this route, they should plan extra time (a day and a half to two days) to get past the last mile of glacial ice and across the terminus lake.

We descended the Skilak Glacier, gradually slowing down as crevasses became increasingly frequent and route-finding became more difficult. Approximately one mile from the glacier terminus, we were unable to continue making progress north down the glacier. Just past a large ravine on the western slope adjacent to the glacier, we hauled our gear up onto a series of rocky benches. We spent much of the next morning scouting potential routes that would get us down to the terminus lake. Eventually, we identified an outcrop with a spur that extended north beyond the glacier terminus as the best route down. We spent the day double-carrying gear to the outcrop. That night, we began a thrash through alder down from the outcrop, but ended up bivying amidst the alders.

A foot and a half of snow fell during the night, followed by brief rain. I scouted ahead and saw a mountain goat on one of the rocky benches below us. We were able to follow its tracks down the series of cliffs and benches to the frozen lake surface. It rained all morning, soaking us and any gear that wasn't wet from the previous night. Skiing across the lake was made difficult by the high density of the snow. By the time we reached the north end of the lake, we were two days behind schedule. Instead of continuing on as planned, we contacted Doug and asked him about the potential of flying out from a nearby lake. Once again, Doug's expertise on the Kenai Peninsula was hugely helpful. He identified Pothole Lake, three miles north of us and part of our original route, as an ideal and legal pickup site (legal landing sites are limited in the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge). The next day, one day behind our anticipated trip end date, we skied to Pothole Lake, and Doug flew us to back to Nikiski. Although we had plenty of food to continue out along our original route, it was nice to end the trip at a high point and skip the remaining tedious portion.



Doug Brewer of Alaska West Air dropped us off in his DeHavilland Beaver. Thanks, Doug!



Charlotte Crowder passing a nunatak on the fourth day.



Charlotte Crowder (right) and Andrew McNown weaving between crevasses on the lower Skilak Glacier.

Citadel

Text by Matt Helliker



Matt Helliker and Jon Bracey reconnoiter the Citadel, with the Northwest Ridge on the right and the North Ridge on the left.

Photo by Posing Productions 2015. Used with permission.

On the 2nd of May, Matt Helliker and Jon Bracey set off to attempt the unclimbed Northwest Ridge of the Citadel in the Neacola Mountains. Unfortunately, a few days before their arrival, there was heavy snow across the range, which meant the ridge was buried under powder, making the climbing slow going. After one huge day of 700 meters of climbing hard mixed, free, and aid on very good rock, the two climbers bivouacked. They woke the following day to snow showers, but continued up to the base of a large tower leading to a snow crust. After following good cracks to this point the rock "blanked" out. After much time looking off the ridge to the left and to the right, only steepness and featureless granite could be seen in the conditions, smooth, steep granite without a crack or seam in sight to climb, aid, or protect with. So the climbers descended. After the attempt, Matt made it clear that they chose to not place bolts on their climbs, "For sure, you could drill, bolt and bat hook your way up the tower, but that's not our style; maybe we missed something or maybe in drier summer conditions with rock shoes it's possible, but again for sure protection would be

an issue without bolts!"

After a day of recovery in base camp, Matt and Jon set off again, but this time to attempt the unclimbed North Ridge. After a steep glacier approach, they joined the base of the ridge and quickly climbed up snowy ramp lines, open faces and a few mixed steps to reach a large tower, this was aided in the cold and windy conditions, which led them to a "typical Alaskan" corniced ridge that, once worked out, led them to the summit snow slopes and to the summit, making what was thought to be the second ascent of the peak. [Ed. note: On July 3, 1965, the wife-and-husband team of Joan and Joe Firey climbed the east face of the south ridge to the summit to make the first ascent of the peak. This ascent had been previously unreported, but was documented in correspondence archived in the Grace and John Vincent Hoeman Collection at the University of Alaska Anchorage/Alaska Pacific University Consortium Library.]



*Matt Helliker climbing mixed terrain on Day 1 of the attempt of the Northwest Ridge.
Photo by Jon Bracey*



*Matt Helliker (right) and Jon Bracey on the summit of the Citadel after the first ascent of the North Ridge.
Photo by Matt Helliker*

Sneak Peek for the May Issue



*Eric Rook on the summit finish of Pistriakoff Peak.
Photo by Sam Zmolek*

Little Switzerland Climbs

Text by Pedro Binfa



Summit of Middle Troll.

Photo by Pachi Ibarra



Talkeetna Air Taxi's turbine otter on the Pika Glacier.

Photo by Pachi Ibarra

July 21st

It had been a long season of work and fun in the mountains of Alaska and it was almost the end of the season for me. It's always good to go on a personal trip with friends, which is how our story begins. My friend Pachi Ibarra had just finished guiding in Denali, Drew Seitz had just finished a course/expedition with National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) in the Chu-

gach Mountains that included a deep fall into a big crevasse, and I had also just finished a NOLS expedition in the Clearwater Mountains and Susitna areas. We met in Palmer and quickly prepared food, gear, and logistics to head out. Our good friend Rob Kutchin gave us a ride with some adventure because of the summer fires of 2015. After arriving in Talkeetna, we worked through the access and flight logistics associated with entering Denali National Park and in a few hours we were in the air, looking around and trying to capture photos of all of the mountains calling our attention. After a little detour to Denali base camp, our pilot made a quick turn and we finally arrived at what would be our base camp for the next few days.

Day 1

We woke with big smiles on our faces and felt blessed to be there on a perfect day to climb. Our first objective was the route "Lost Marsupial" on The Throne, a good route to get familiar with the area. The climbing was great and scenic, and we enjoyed our time climbing and switching leads. One of the great things about the area is that it offers the opportunity to choose your own adventure. A few hours later we were at the summit ridge, which still had snow and several large cornices. We carefully chose our route mostly walking on rock, and

avoiding the snow as much as possible. Drew decided to stop along the way while Pachi and I kept walking and climbed to the summit.

On our way back from the summit, we looked toward the place where Drew had stopped, and we realized that a large section of the cornice was no longer there! We were glad we were not there ourselves, and carefully made our way to where Drew was waiting. We talked about what had just happened, were happy that everyone was all right, and started our rappel descent. The descent went smoothly and a few hours later we were all safe at camp enjoying dinner and some cold beers to celebrate the successful summit.

Day 2

One of the advantages of Alaska is the near 24 hours of daylight during the summer, so we had a later start. Drew decided to stay at camp while Pachi and I went to climb the South Face of the Middle Troll, another good adventure to enjoy and get to know the area. From camp, we saw a rope team getting on the route, so we decided to wait for them to climb higher. After waiting for about 30 minutes, we still saw them moving, but not actually climbing. Finally we decided to leave and met them at the bergschrund of the glacier. They were looking for a backpack that they had dropped from up high while climbing. After wandering a little around the area, we located the backpack inside the crevasse, and with a short rappel they were able to recover it. After that, they decided to just return to camp. For Pachi and I, the story was the opposite and we started climbing, switching leads on what was another great classic of the area. The higher we climbed, the better the quality of the rock and the climbing. The last two pitches of the route were prime and the view from the summit was an amazing gift. We took the time to enjoy the view and take pictures, and then we again



*Drew Seitz climbing the skyline of the Trolls.
Photo by Pedro Binfa*

started our descent - it's not over until you are back at camp.

There is where things got spicy: after a few rappels, we got distracted pulling the rope and a section got stuck inside the crack. After about an hour and a half of trying to free it, we decided to cut the rope. We were left with two sections of rope and were able to rappel with the 40-meter section without many problems. The more complicated part was crossing the bergschrund, but after some problem solving we were able to make it again safely back to camp.

Day 3

This was a vacation trip, after all, so we spent most of the day resting and preparing for our next challenge: to attempt the

skyline of the three Trolls.

Day 4

We woke up early in the morning to take advantage of the colder conditions to walk on firmer snow, and we quickly progressed to the ridge of the South Troll. From there, we climbed on easy to moderate terrain for a little while until we found the

first challenging section. Pachi took the lead and climbed a steep crack, which led us to a nice ledge. From there, we discussed our options and decided to climb a nice crack with some loose blocks along the route. That was one of the cruxes of the route with a few 5.10+ moves before reaching another easy section. We all met at our anchor and climbed to the first summit of our line. Then we rappelled down to a col and climbed on moderate terrain to the summit of South Troll. From here it took us two full-length rappels to get to the

col between South and Middle Trolls. Here, we were more or less in known terrain, so we decided to traverse (which was a little exposed and not well-protected) and link the last two pitches of the normal route of Middle Troll. From the summit of



*From left to right: Pachi Ibarra, Drew Seitz, and Pedro Binfa on the summit of the South Troll.
Photo by Pedro Binfa*

our second peak, we started to see some clouds gathering in the valley, so we quickly took a few pictures before moving down to the north shoulder of Middle Troll to continue rappelling. There we found some established rappel stations, but also a lot of soft, melting snow. I began the first rappel and moved away along a ledge, but while Drew was rappelling he triggered a small point-release avalanche. Luckily I wasn't caught because of my positioning on the ledge. We all descended and moved to what was supposed to be our final peak, traversing on moderate terrain to the ridge that led us to one more tricky pitch to the summit. We all celebrated on the summit, though its small size made for an awkward celebration. From there, we discussed continuing on to one more minor summit to the north. Again we rappelled down into a gully and I took the lead, climbing through easy terrain and a wide crack to reach the high point. I decided to down-climb back to my friends and together we decided to descend due to changing weather conditions and an approaching storm. We set up multiple rappels and down-climbed some sections, all new terrain to us, and in a few hours we were on snow again. We roped up and were able to make it safely through some crevassed terrain just before the rain arrived. We were all excited about the climb and also tired from the day, and cooked dinner and retired for the night.

Days 5 and 6

We spent most of the next day in the tent, with stormy conditions, and called our friends at Talkeetna Air Taxi to see if there was any chance to leave the mountains that day. Unfortunately there was not, but we made it out the next day during a short weather window.

Little Switzerland is an amazing playground – easy access and world-class climbing. There are a few classic routes and also many areas to keep exploring and climbing new peaks. We couldn't find any previous trip reports of the complete skyline of the three Trolls, but we are not certain that this is the first time the route has been done. I highly recommend visiting for access to challenging climbing that remains moderate enough to enjoy.

Pachi Ibarra at the summit of the North Troll.

Photo by Pedro Binfa



Pachi Ibarra leading one of the hard pitches of the traverse.

Photo by Pedro Binfa



Approach to the skyline traverse of the Trolls.

Photo by Pachi Ibarra



Ridge of The Throne and the cornice with our track at the place where it broke, the tracks more to the right were from a previous group of climbers.

Photo by Pedro Binfa



Triangle Peak (7,250 feet) – Delta Range

New Route on the West Face

Text and photos by Jason Shorey and Bryan Sehmel, unless otherwise indicated

A perfect warm weather spring weekend in the Delta Range, a Fairbanks mountaineer's dream. Something we look forward to all winter, and for some, all summer. A typical mad dash into the Deltas opens up access to many famed peaks that have been climbed over the years. This particular weekend's trip in April 2015 was focused on the west face of Triangle Peak (7,250 feet), located about seven miles up the Castner Glacier.

The inspiration for the trip came from a wonderful picture on Mountain Project that Galen Vansant took a few years back (2013). Not knowing what to expect on this climb, I turned to my climbing partner, Bryan Sehmel, who was always up for my stupid adventures into the unknown.

Taking off Friday evening after work we headed down the Richardson Highway and were able to start skiing by 8 p.m. We skied up the creek and onto the Castner Glacier, making it about 3.5 miles upglacier before midnight. Then, just as we had stopped to pitch the tent, I noticed a dark shadow barreling toward us, fast enough that I nearly got into a defensive stance. Thankfully these were my friends Andrew Cyr and John Harley who were climbing Black Cap that same weekend. They asked if they could put up camp next to us and we gladly welcomed them into our makeshift camp.

Andrew asked, "What are you guys climbing?" My response: "We are going to try the west face of Triangle." Andrew looked at me incredulously and commented, "I thought that face was unclimbable." I glanced over to Bryan who had just looked up with an expression of, "Oh s--t, what am I getting myself into?" I responded with a laugh and said, "I guess we'll find out." Based upon our photo of Triangle Peak, our only piece of beta, we could only assume that the belief was that one could not gain the face because of the icefall at the base of the peak.

Knowing that we needed to still ski about four miles to the base of the west face, we decided to get up early (4 a.m.) and hopefully get on the face and climb the brunt of it before the sun came around and warmed up a beautiful, yet terrifying, 100-foot cornice that hung off the summit block. Bryan and I followed the perfectly-crafted skin tracks before us, graciously left by the Alaska Alpine Club's spring trip led by Nicholas Janssen



*West face of Triangle Peak
Photo by Galen Vansant*

up Black Cap and White Princess. Those tracks made for good time up the remainder of the Castner until we branched off to approach via the Broken Glacier.



West face of Triangle Peak.



Jason Shorey gaining the west face proper.



Jason Shorey traversing below the rock/ice step.

Without any prior beta about this climb and Andrew's comments a few hours earlier, the Broken Glacier was not confidence inspiring. But, we managed to skin up the glacier without any problem, negotiating many ups and downs and wide "S" turns to avoid what appeared to be deep valleys and ominous fissures in the glacier. Dropping our skis off at the base of the 2,600-foot wall we transitioned to our crampons and ice tools. Peering at the face before climbing, we were able to find a direct line from the glacier to the summit.

The initial step through the icefall turned out to be steep snow

atop glacial ice, but with no evidence of cracks. This brought us to about a 200-foot debris cone of snow resulting from the couloir's incessant sloughing through a pinched area between a rock wall to the north and an icefall to the south. About one pitch up the cone I broke through the snow and dangled about three feet down into a crevasse. Stopping myself from going any deeper, I was able to slither back out of it downhill. My attempts to step over it succeeded only into scraping more snow into the chasm and widening it. If I had one chance in my life to perform the quintessential snow/ice climbing dyno from the movie *Vertical Limit*, it was then. To my surprise, and a laughing belayer, it worked and I was able to safely cross the crack.

Bryan took over the lead here and kicked steps up the 60-degree snow. But, after forgetting almost all of his food in the tent, he was powering down until I shared a saving-grace Clif Bar. That's all he needed and was good to go from then on. About half way up the wall a fork in the road gave us the option



Jason Shorey following up the alpine ice section of the climb.



Jason Shorey approaching the summit ridge.

of a right ice/rock step or a left ice/rock step. Choosing the left option would get us out of the kill zone from the looming summit cornice and allow us to stop worrying about it for a bit. So, we chose that line. Bryan led through the ice pitch as we gained the upper headwall.

We originally had intentions of taking a direct line up the headwall and around the summit cornice. But, from this close proximity to the summit bomb now shining in the late-April afternoon sun, it became obvious that a more lefterly route was less suicidal. After wallowing in some unconsolidated snow, we were finally able to pull off a Legolas-like move to get through a tricky 70-degree snow section to a little ridge leading up and over a much more manageable cornice to gain the northern ridge and an incredible view of the west face of White Princess. With great glee we bounced up the “standard route” through one final short rocky step and onto the summit. We then descended back down the ridge to a less-steep version of the direct line we took on the ascent.

Back at our skis, we unroped and enjoyed the “high-performance” skiing offered by our Silvretta bindings and

mountaineering boot combination. We descended the Broken and Castner Glaciers and returned to our camp that we had abandoned 14 hours earlier. Falling asleep quite early, with a spoon still in my mouth, another beautiful weekend in the Deltas came to a close.

After a little research from some helpful Alaska Alpine Club members, Bryan and I realized that our climb of the west face of Triangle Peak was the first known ascent of that face. (Although, I will note that the ethos of some early Fairbanksan climbers was to not report or record their ascents.) In total, our line was a 2,600-foot direct route of the west face of Triangle Peak, up to 70-degree snow, one pitch of moderate alpine ice, and a little cornice and crevasse hopping to top it off.



Bryan Sehmel (left) and Jason Shorey



Summit ridge

Tough Access to Hunter Creek Waterfalls

Text and Photo by Frank Baker

With this warm tail end to winter, I should have expected the creek would have a lot of open water. Bordering each side were thick ice slabs, or ledges. Some of the ledges were nearly four feet above the creek and often slanted downward toward the water, making traction difficult. My Kahtoola microspikes wouldn't fit over the feet of my Neos waders, so traction was sketchy as I slowly made my way upstream.

The ledges would often pinch off against the steep sides of the creek, forcing a crossing. The stream was fast, but no more than

knee high in most places—so that part wasn't too difficult.

Located at the end of Knik River Road (Mile 9.6), Hunter Creek is a haven for ice climbers. On normal winters with cold temperatures and snow, the stream freezes sufficiently to allow relatively easy access by skis or snowshoes to the frozen waterfalls, which begin about two miles upstream.

I had no real reason on March 5 to head into the area, except that I love canyons and I wanted to venture somewhere differ-

ent.

The last time I tromped in there was in January 1997, and it became a battle. The stream forks about two miles in and on that trip I took the East Fork. With snow, open water, and small frozen waterfalls of glare ice, I needed four types of equipment: snowshoes, waders, crampons, and an ice axe. Unfortunately, I had only snowshoes with cleats. I pushed about ¼ mile beyond the fork. Cold and soaking wet, and with a couple of expletives deleted, I turned around.

I was told later that had I gone about half a mile farther in the East Fork's narrow canyon, the terrain would have opened up and it would have been easy going for a couple of miles on the approach to the Hunter Creek Glacier.

On my recent trip the Neos waders (that fit over hiking boots) were perfect, but again, had they been attached to microspikes, I would have been golden. It was not difficult to see why there was no one else in the area, as I painstakingly worked my way around each bend, crossing the stream no less than eight times. The stream bottom's smooth, slippery rocks offered yet another challenge, but in such situations I become irrationally stubborn.

"I refuse to get wet!" I said out loud. Perhaps just saying the words helped, because I didn't fall once.

Around one bend I spooked three ducks – they appeared to be American wigeons, but I don't know duck species very well. "Either early arrivals, or with this recent mild winter, over-winterers," I thought to myself.

A while later I saw a small, dark bird perched on a black rock in the middle of the stream. Drawing nearer, I saw it was a water ouzel, or dipper. They are quite amazing birds. I've read that they have some kind of suction cups on their feet that allow them to walk underwater, even in a swift stream. It would be great if I could equip my waders with a facsimile of dipper's feet!

Another half mile upstream on an ice slab covered by a thin layer of frost were old, faded wolf tracks. They were too large to be a coyote's, and there were no human tracks anywhere. So I believe I'm correct in that identification.

I decided to call it a day about a quarter of a mile below the main fork. After a brief lunch I retraced my steps and repeated the stream crossings. Without any kind of traction devices, it was slow going as I carefully made my way across the slippery ice slabs.

Hunter Creek is definitely a winter destination and though I'm not an ice climber myself, it's fun to go back in and watch their activities, at least, during a "normal" winter when they frequent

the area.

Private property abuts Hunter Creek, which is east of the Chugach State Park boundary, so it is advisable to park in the large parking lot on the left just past the bridge. Upstream or downstream from the bridge, remain in the creekbed and do not enter private property on either side.

Postscript: I returned to Hunter Creek March 12, this time wearing Kahtoola microspikes (Size XXL) over the feet of my waders. This setup worked well on the slippery ice, but as the canyon narrowed the stream became deeper and swifter. The ice ledges pinched off about every 50 yards, requiring multiple crossings. That, in addition to rockfall from above, convinced me that spring was not a good time to enter that area. If I did return at that time of year, I'd probably add a hard hat to my equipment list.

Frank E. Baker is a freelance writer who lives in Eagle River.



Looking downstream, ice ledges along Hunter Creek offered good walking, but would pinch off against the banks, requiring multiple stream crossings.

Photo by Frank Baker.

Hidden Peak

Text and photos by Nathan Hebda



Hidden Lake.

I pulled out of Glen Alps on my studded 26-inch mountain bike at 9:30 a.m. on Friday, March 11th. The last two days had been beautiful, as would be the next two days, but this day the wind blew sharp, stinging snow as visibility came and went. My objective was Hidden Peak, a new destination for me, and I was alone. I gave myself a 20 percent chance of reaching the top.

The Powerline Trail was covered in packed snow that was fun to ride, as long as I stayed in the center. At the Hidden Lake Trail I stashed my bike and became instantly glad of my decision to bring snowshoes. They proved very handy following Hidden Creek upstream to the southern slopes of O'Malley Peak. Walking over the tops of thickets sticking out of the snow almost felt like cheating. Strong winds blowing from up-valley caused me some frequent vacillation, but I decided to push on.

I picked a snow-free ridgeline west of O'Malley's summit, packed my snowshoes, and made my way up. Third class scrambling toward the bottom gave way to steep walking toward the top. I was startled by another lone hiker coming down from O'Malley. "Only the crazy ones are out today," he said. "I guess," I replied. I continued along the main ridgeline to the summit of O'Malley, which I reached via a could-be-quicker pace at 2:30.



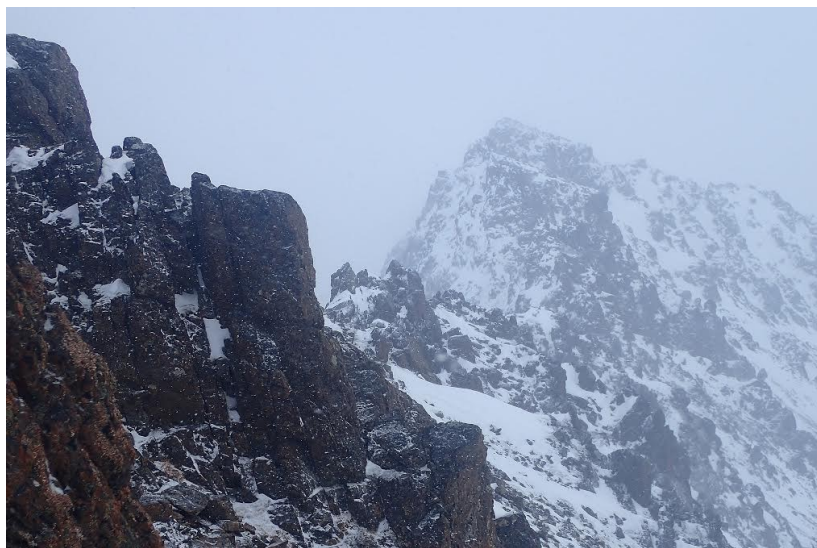
Approaching O'Malley Peak.

Visibility continued to waver as I sought a break from the wind. I knew Hidden Peak involved more careful travel and route finding, and the weather looked only worse in that direction. I imagined reading in the news about somebody getting blown off of the ridge on a day like this and thought to myself, "what an idiot." At the same time it appeared that I could drop back down toward Hidden Lake at almost any point. I took out my ice axe and microspikes and continued.

Travel was quick and easy at first. I traversed along the southern slope just downhill of the ridge and away from the precipitous drop to the north. The snow slopes I crossed were affected by wind, but otherwise showed no signs of instability. A gendarme proved not too difficult to bypass, though the moves became progressively more involved and exposed after that. I longed for ski goggles as the wind and snow battered my eyes.

Feeling pressed for time, I decided to continue side-hilling high instead of dropping down to easier ground, even though the peak appeared more easily obtained from the eastern side. This decision proved to be an error as solid 4th class routes dead-ended twice at false summits. I backtracked slowly and carefully to continue on. Four o'clock rolled around, at which point I pushed my turn-around time further back to 4:30. Finally a very steep section gave way to shallower ground, which easily led to the summit.

There was no view and it was getting late, so I didn't stay long. I dug around for a register, but did not find one. I continued east downhill and did find some easier ground, though I was soon picking my way south down steep rock and along the edges of snow-filled chutes. Hidden Lake proved to be a more serene destination for peanut butter and jelly. I strapped on my snowshoes from there and made it out without having to take out my headlamp.



The homestretch to Hidden Peak.



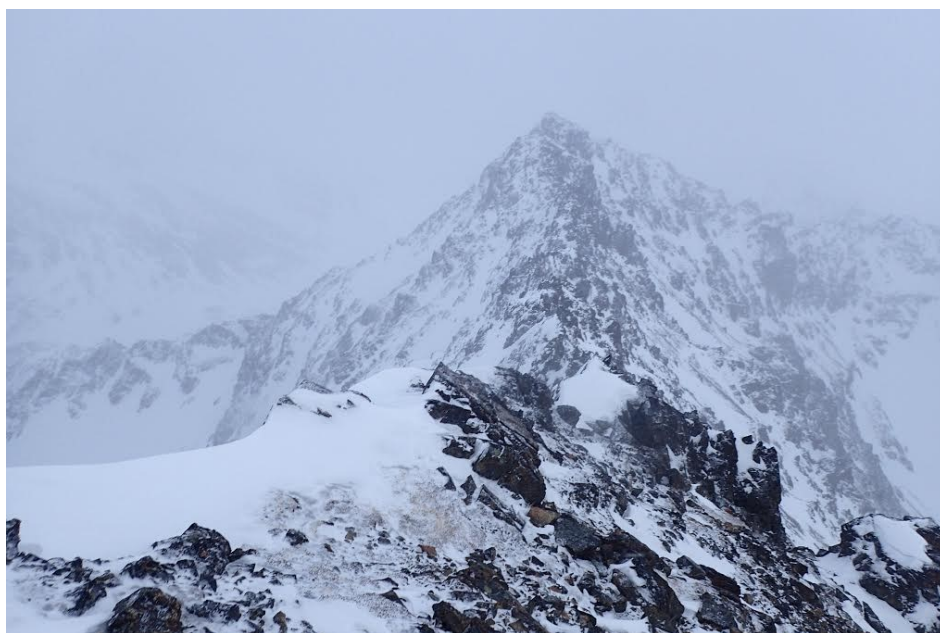
Descending to Hidden Lake.



Nathan Hebda on the summit of Hidden Peak.



On the ridgeline between O'Malley Peak and Hidden Peak.



Approaching Hidden Peak.

Trivia Time Answers from page 3

1. What is the northernmost peak in the Chugach Mountains that is at least 10,000 feet high?
M. Mount Sergeant Robinson

1. What is the westernmost peak in the Chugach Mountains that is at least 10,000 feet high?
D. Mount Gannett

Peak of the Month: Slope Peak

Text by Steve Gruhn

Mountain Range: Kodiak Island; Marin Range

Borough: Kodiak Island Borough

Drainage: Sacramento River

Latitude/Longitude: 57° 32' 26" North, 152° 16' 35" West

Elevation: 1612 feet

Prominence: 1054 feet from Peak 1736 in the East Fork of Twin Creek, West Fork of Twin Creek, and Chiniak River drainages

Adjacent Peak: Peak 1736

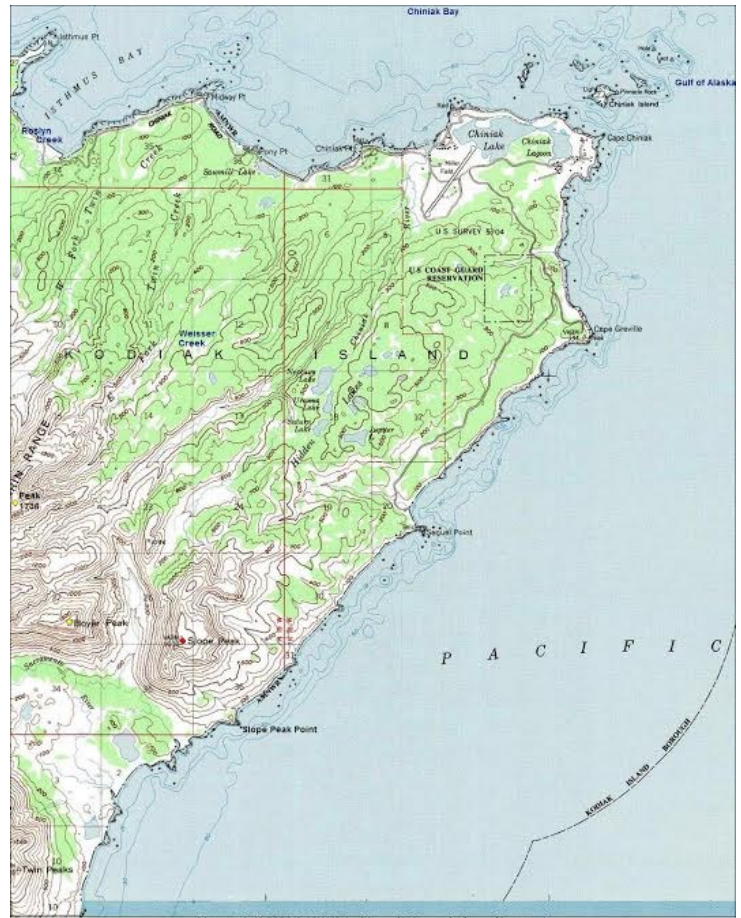
Distinctness: 1054 feet from Peak 1736

USGS Maps: Kodiak (C-1) SW (1:25,000) and Kodiak (C-1) (1:63,360)

First Recorded Ascent: September 1932 by John Bowie, Jr., Walter J. Chovan, Frederick B.T. Siems, and a U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey party

Route of First Recorded Ascent: Southeast slopes

Access Point: Waterfall 200 meters north of Slope Peak Point



During a September 1932 survey of the east coast of Kodiak Island from Narrow Cape to Cape Chiniak, Frederick B.T. Siems, Commander of the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey's steamship Surveyor, led a USC&GS party, including surveyors Walter J. Chovan and John Bowie, Jr., to establish a survey station on the summit of the first high peak southwest of Cape Chiniak. The party started on the north side of a small waterfall 200 meters north of Slope Peak Point and climbed the steep bluff and then headed straight up the steep southeast slope to the summit of the peak. At the summit they established a bench mark in a drill hole in a large boulder, which they then buried in the ground so that the top of the bench mark was at ground level. They calculated the summit elevation as 1612 feet and gave the name Slope Peak.

One of the interesting points about Slope Peak is that the west face is one of the few locations on Kodiak Island where alpine skiing through timber is possible.

The information for this article came from National Geodetic Survey records available at <http://nosimagery.noaa.gov/>

[images/shoreline surveys/descriptive reports/T-4729.PDF](#) and <http://www.geocaching.com/mark/details.aspx?PID=UW1832> and from my correspondence with Skip Theberge and Patrick Saltonstall.



Southwest aspect of Slope Peak from near the mouth of the Sacramento River.

Photo by Patrick Saltonstall

MCA Board Meeting Minutes - Wednesday, March 9, 2016

Attendees: Cory Hinds, Jennifer DuFord, Nathan Hebda, Stephen Austria, Carlene Van Tol

Guests: Steve Gruhn, Josh Clark

1. VP-Programs (Galen Flint)

- a. March: Huts presentation

2. Treasurer's report (Aaron Gallagher)

- a. No major expenses yet. No concerns.

3. Secretary's report (Max Neale)

- a. Based on the member survey, we selected three action items to pursue:
 - i. Huts fundraiser (this fall sometime)
 - 1. Max, Galen, Jennifer, Aaron
 - ii. Welcoming new members
 - 1. Max to generate welcome message
 - 2. Aaron to identify new members
 - 3. Ed Smith to organize an event for new members
 - iii. Provide information on our huts
 - 1. March 15 presentation

4. Training (Nathan):

- a. Level 1 Avalanche course, March 5-7 at Hatcher Pass. Last weekend.
- b. Crevasse Rescue. Completed. Gift certificates and feedback.
- c. Snow climbing, ice climbing – April 9. Schedule and sign-up.
- d. Summer rock climbing course at Hatcher Pass?

5. Huts

- a. New Hut report from Cory: First, I am excited to say that we made it to the new hut site on skis last week. We found a really cool, safe route from the Bomber Hut over to the new valley. Confirmed the route we saw from the air. Attached is a photo of skiers approaching the notch into the new valley. Views are stunning. Many options for new adventures (climbs, ski tours). I have submitted the confirmed coordinates of the hut site to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to be included in the file for our development plan.



Cory Hinds, Dave Staeheli, Diana Evans, and Jack Bent head for the saddle south of Mount Besh (at left).
Photo by Dave Evans

Second, DNR recently announced that we need to do this as a new lease application. This is somewhat of a bummer, because they had told me earlier that they could do an administrative change. The new lease application will mean a public comment period. At the end of the comment period, assuming no major opposition, they can give us an Early Authorization to construct. This has the potential to delay our plans for construction this summer. We'll hope for the best. All indications are that the new hut will eventually be approved. I will keep in close contact with DNR to be sure that approvals are lining up before we purchase hut materials.

Third, given the DNR decision that we need a new lease application, rather than administratively switch from Dnigi, I am rethinking the removal of the Dnigi Hut. Dave Staeheli has analyzed the elevations and it appears that keeping the Dnigi Hut at its current location would help as an interim stop to connect a tour from the new hut back to the Mint Hut. In other words, it would make the traverse more doable for our members when carrying heavy packs/deep snow/long days. I am discussing this with DNR and will report back. My recommendation at present is to keep the Dnigi Hut and maintain it as a key link in the new loop connecting the new hut and the Mint Hut.

Fourth, Michael Thompson generated a complete set of dimensioned drawings for the hut. Using these drawings, we received a proposal for using Structurally Insulated Panels (SIPs). Stan Olsen provided, yesterday, a cost estimate for the remaining parts and pieces (windows, door, roofing, siding, transport, miscellaneous materials). It appears that we cannot afford the SIPs. Stan estimated construction using conventional stick frame and insulation, and it appears to be within our budget. So pending our final review of numbers early next week, it appears we will go with conventional stick-frame construction, which is fine.

Summary: project is proceeding, location confirmed, will be on budget, possible delay from permitting, may end up keeping the Dnigi Hut after all.

6. Hiking and Climbing

- a. Ed Smith is doing a good job getting trips posted. Board should continue to help rounding up trips.
- b. Trip leader training? Stephen to help Ed.

7. Mentoring

- a. Very successful program, building the younger generation of climbers/leaders.
- b. Need volunteer to contact Rachad Rayess and get an update on the program. Nathan to help.
- c. Social event with Mentors and Mentees? No decision.

8. Library

- a. Policy decision on books owned by Vin Hoeman. Should the “core” books in the Vin Hoeman Library be retained or treated the same as any other book and sorted and discarded by our librarian?
 - i. Decision:
 - 1. All books to be discarded from the MCA Library will be stamped with a “Discard” stamp across all existing “MCA Vin Hoeman Library” stamps, and any library cards will be removed from the back of the book.
 - 2. No special consideration will be given to retaining in the MCA Library any book with Vin Hoeman’s or Grace Hoeman’s name written in it indicating its original ownership, if the book otherwise qualifies to be discarded from the MCA Library.
 - 3. The Librarian is requested to generate a list of books proposed to be removed from the MCA Library and post it on ListServe two weeks prior to a general meeting.
 - 4. The listed books will be brought to the next general meeting for members to look through and select any books they might want to take, without charge.
 - 5. The remaining books on the list not taken at the meeting will be sold to Title Wave Books for cash or credit.
 - 6. The MCA Board and the Librarian will adopt a policy for handling any cash or credit that MCA might obtain from book sales to Title Wave Books.
 - 7. When in doubt about a book, the Librarian should ask Steve Gruhn.

9. Action Items

- a. Cory:
 - i. Run board and general meetings
 - ii. Organize the design/budget/construction of new hut
 - iii. Ask members to lead trips and be mentors.
- b. Galen:
 - i. Organize Huts presentation and run the March 15 general meeting
 - ii. Arrange and announce upcoming programs, summer outings
 - iii. Ask members to lead trips and be mentors.

c. Aaron:

- i. Work with Max, Galen, and Jennifer on Huts Fundraiser in the fall
- ii. Assist with organization of another summer rock climbing course?
- iii. Ask members to lead trips and be mentors.

d. Max:

- i. Arrange a meeting place.
- ii. Type up greeting for new members
- iii. Organize meeting with Galen, Jennifer, and Aaron on Huts Fundraiser
- iv. Ask members to lead trips and be mentors.

e. Carlene: Resigning from the Board due to heavy work load. Will still be involved in the MCA, but needs to step aside for a while. Board to look for a new member.

f. Nathan:

- i. Work with Rachad on continued organization for mentor program
- ii. Organize signup for snow-climbing training
- iii. Research stove options for new hut
- iv. Ask members to lead trips and be mentors.

g. Stephen:

- i. Liaison with Ed Smith. Communicate Board agenda and actions.
- ii. Help organize trip leader training.
- iii. Ask members to lead trips and be mentors.

h. Jennifer:

- i. Planning for summer picnic event?
- ii. Work with Max, Galen, Aaron on Huts Fundraiser in the fall
- iii. Focus on Parks Advisory?
- iv. Ask members to lead trips and be mentors.

i. Jayme Mack:

- i. Help identify other training we can offer the MCA, taught by professionals.
- ii. Focus on Ice Festival
- iii. Ask members to lead trips and be mentors.

j. Ed Smith:

- i. Continue to get trips posted in the Scree and on website
- ii. Organize an event for new members
- iii. Ask members to lead trips and be mentors.

10. Next Board meeting: Wednesday, April 13

11. Next General meeting: Tuesday, April 19

Mountaineering Club of Alaska

President	Cory Hinds	229-6809
Vice-President	Galen Flint	650-207-0810
Secretary	Max Neale	207-712-1355
Treasurer	Aaron Gallagher	250-9555

Board member (term expires in 2016)	Jayne Mack	382-0212
Board member (term expires in 2016)	Vacant	
Board member (term expires in 2017)	Nathan Hebda	310-3255
Board member (term expires in 2017)	Stephen Austria	402-540-7037
Board member (term expires in 2016)	Jennifer DuFord	227-6995

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.

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.

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

Hiking and Climbing Committee: Ed Smith - 854-5702 or hcc@mtnclubak.org

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 Dawn Talbott (dawn.talbott@yahoo.com)

Web: www.mtnclubak.org

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

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