

*"The miracle is to walk on the green earth, dwelling deeply in the present moment and feeling truly alive."*

- Thich Nhat Hanh

# the SCREE

## Mountaineering Club of Alaska

August 2016

Volume 59 Number 8



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Neacola Mountains Expedition

Skiing Makushin Volcano via Overland Route

Korohusk Peak and Mount Kiliak Traverse

Exploring the Sheep River Glacier

Peak of the Month: Als Mountain

Monthly meeting: **New Venue**. Meet at the Upper Huffman Trailhead for a 1.5-hour hike on the Hillside Trails. Expect good company, berry picking, mountain views, and conversation about Alaska and mountains.



# 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, August 16, at the Upper Huffman Trailhead at 9000 Sultana Drive.

Anchorage, Alaska

<http://oalaska.org/locations/upper-huffman-trailhead/>.

For the MCA Membership Application and Liability Waiver, visit

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

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## Cover Photo

Mike Miller scrambling on Korohusk Peak.  
Photo by Wayne Todd

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**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.

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**Monthly Meeting: New Venue.** Meet at the Upper Huffman Trailhead for a 1.5-hour hike on the Hillside Trails. Expect good company, berry picking, mountain views, and conversation about Alaska and mountains.

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## Hiking and Climbing Schedule

**September 23-25:** MCA Ice Fest, Matanuska Glacier. Email [mcaicefest@gmail.com](mailto:mcaicefest@gmail.com) for details.

**December 23:** Flattop Mountain sleepout. No leader.

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## Choate's Chuckle

- Tom Choate

You don't need a full set of silverware when you go backpacking:  
somewhere along the trail there will be a fork.

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July MCA picnic  
Photo by Cory Hinds



Online? Click me!



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

## Wilderness First Responder Class

This course provides the knowledge, skills and abilities to administer emergency medical care in a non-urban wilderness environment. It covers basic anatomy and physiology, assessment and treatment of injuries, appropriate short-term to multi-day patient care and evacuation considerations. The course includes certification in adult and child CPR and AED.

The course includes practical sessions where you will develop and apply the hands-on assessment and treatment skills necessary to effectively respond to illness or injury in a remote field setting.

For information on the course or course material please contact Deb Ajango at [debajango@att.net](mailto:debajango@att.net).

### Course Schedule:

September 12 (6-10). First night of class, Monday night. Meet 6 p.m. to 10 p.m.	October 3 (6-10)
September 14 (6-10)	October 5 (6-10)
Sept 19 (6-10)	October 8 (8 a.m. to 6 p.m.)
September 21 (6-10)	No class week of October 10
Sept 26 (6-10)	October 17 (6-10)
September 28 (6-10)	October 19 (6-10)
	October 22 (8 a.m. to 6 p.m.)
	October 24 (6-10)
	October 26 (6-10) final exam and graduation

Register Here: <https://register.asapconnected.com/ClassDetail.aspx?pk=637587>

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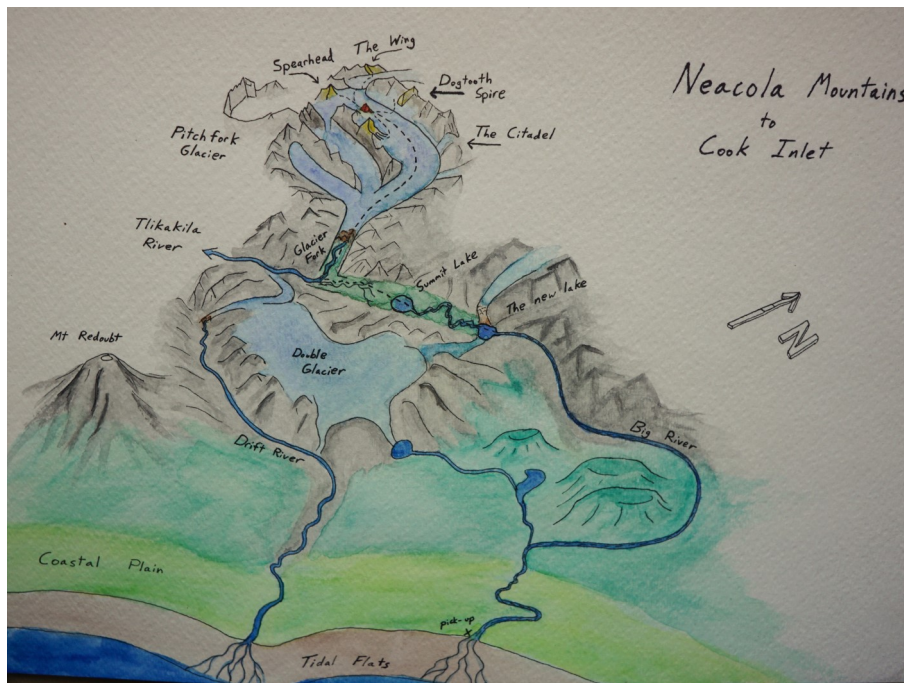
## Climbing Notes

Lee Helzer reported that during a July 7 to 10 traverse of the Kenai Mountains from the Devils Pass Trailhead to Hope, Paul LaFrance, Rob Whitney, and he climbed Peak 4295 southwest of Resurrection Pass; Peak 4246 in the Afanasa Creek, Juneau Lake, and Swan Lake drainages; Peak 4450 in the Abernathy Creek and Swan Lake drainages; Peak 4283 in the Swan Lake drainage; Peak 4350 south of Dragon's Den Pass; Peak 4308 northeast of Dragon's Den Pass; Peak 4515 southwest of American Pass; Peak 4450 in the American Creek, Hungry Creek, and West Fork of the Chickaloon River drainages; Peak 4350 in the Hungry Creek, East Fork of the Chickaloon River, and West Fork of the Chickaloon River drainages; Peak 3950 in the Hungry Creek and East Fork of the Chickaloon River drainages; Peak 4156 in the Big Indian Creek, Hungry Creek, and East Fork of the Chickaloon River drainages; Peak 4150 in the Hungry Creek and Moose Creek drainages; Peak 4330 in the Big Indian Creek and White Creek drainages; Peak 3820 in the Big Indian Creek and Cannonball Creek drainages; Peak 4140 in the Big Indian Creek and Cannonball Creek drainages; Peak 4355 in the Big Indian Creek and Cannonball Creek drainages; Wolf Peak (4450 in the Big Indian Creek and Wolf Creek drainages); Peak 4580 in the Big Indian Creek and Gold Creek drainages; Peak 4318 in the Big Indian Creek drainage; Peak 4250 in the Big Indian Creek and Gold Creek drainages; Peak 4550 in the Bedrock Creek and Big Indian Creek drainages; Peak 4045 (1233 meters) in the Bedrock Creek and Big Indian Creek drainages; Peak 3955 (1205 meters) in the Cripple Creek and Little Indian Creek drainages; Peak 3966 (1209 meters) in the Cripple Creek, Johnson Creek, and Little Indian Creek drainages; and Hope Point (3705) in the Johnson Creek and Porcupine Creek drainages.

During the same trip Helzer also climbed Peak 4202 in the West Fork of the Chickaloon River drainage; Peak 3965 north of American Pass; Peak 4350 in the Hungry Creek, East Fork of the Chickaloon River, and West Fork of the Chickaloon River drainages; Peak 4250 in the East Fork of the Chickaloon River drainage; Peak 4150 in the Big Indian Creek drainage; Peak 4250 in the Big Indian Creek drainage; and Peak 4167 (1270 meters) in the Big Indian Creek and Little Indian Creek drainages, for a total of 31 peaks in less than 70 hours. We look forward to a detailed trip report in *the Scree*.

# Neacola Mountains Expedition, May to June 2016

Text by Craig Muderlak, Drew Thayer, and David Fay



Map by Drew Thayer

## Supported by:

The Copp-Dash Inspire Award (American Alpine Club)  
The Shipton/Tilman Award (Gore-Tex)

## Activities:

First ascents and attempts on four peaks off the Pitchfork and Neacola Glaciers, followed by a human-powered return to Cook Inlet, Neacola Mountains of the Aleutian Range

## Summary:

In the second week of May we flew into the North Fork of the Pitchfork Glacier in the Neacola Mountains of the Aleutian Range in southwestern Alaska. We established a base camp and explored climbing routes on neighboring peaks, including two attempts on the northwest ridge of Citadel Peak, two new rock routes and an additional attempted route on Dog Tooth on Peak 7235, a new route up an unclimbed 7250-foot mountain that we called "Spearhead" adjacent to Peak 8908 at the head of the North Fork of the Pitchfork [Ed. note: Peak 8908 has been called *Tarpon Peak* on [bivouac.com](http://bivouac.com)], and a new route to the summit of a 5700-foot rock spire we called "The Wing" on the west side of the Neacola Glacier across from Triangle Peak. After this climbing activity we made a human-powered return to Cook Inlet via ski, foot, and packraft over six days.

## Climbing History:

The group of mountains referred to as the Neacola Mountains is a remote subrange of the Aleutian Range, tucked behind Redoubt Volcano on the west side of Cook Inlet. Several clusters of steep peaks, both gray granite and a very compact and dark meta-basalt, rise from a confluence of broad glaciers. The Pitchfork Glacier's climbing history began in 1965 when two couples – Joe and Joan Firey and George and Frances Whitmore – explored the range and climbed several peaks, including the impressive Citadel Peak [Ed. note: See the April 2016 Scree]. The entire Neacola region has seen 13 climbing parties, with five of these focusing on the prominent Mount Neacola. The Pitchfork Glacier has been visited by eight parties, half of which focused on skiing. Of note to our expedition were the 2011 ascent of the east ridge of Dog Tooth [Ed. note: See pages 122 and 123 of the 2012 American Alpine Journal] and an attempt in 2015 by two British climbers on the northwest ridge of Citadel Peak [Ed. note: See the April 2016 Scree]. Many peaks on the Pitchfork and Neacola Glaciers remained unclimbed; this was a large part of our motivation to visit this remote mountain range.

## Our Objective:

We originally aimed our expedition at the unclimbed walls and spires clustered around the west face of Triangle Peak off the Neacola Glacier. However, on our flight in we realized how much snow remained draped over the massif, which in the unseasonal warmth of the 2016 season would be melting and avalanching.



We opted to land at the head of the Pitchfork Glacier and take stock of options, as the beautiful Citadel Peak was in our minds as a secondary objective, and we were all enticed by a photo of the granite on Dog Tooth as well.

#### First Ascents:

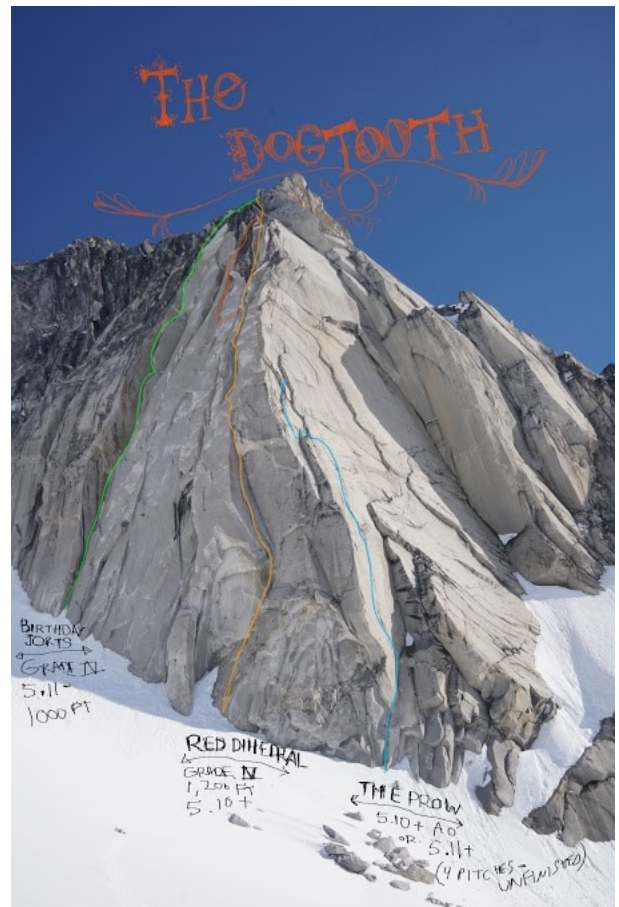
From our base camp on the Pitchfork Glacier we had three weeks to explore the region. With much favorable weather, we were able to make the following attempts and ascents:

- Citadel Peak:** We made two attempts on the northwest aspect of this mountain. The first terminated early when we retreated due to warm conditions: no ice and dangerously wet snow. After a cold spell we attempted the peak via a narrow notch to the west of the northwest ridge that looked like it might hold ice. Climbing at night when the snow was firmest, we ascended snow to the base of the notch, and then climbed steep alpine ice with a few vertical steps to a corniced ridge atop a buttress on the west face of the peak. Facing deteriorating snow conditions and a prominent headwall remaining above, we retreated. We called our route "The Sliver" (90° AI4 M3 3,000 feet); this route offered fun and relatively safe climbing to a position high on the mountain from which a team could launch an assault on the final headwall.



Route of "The Sliver" on Citadel Peak.  
Photo and artwork by Craig Muderlak

- Dog Tooth:** This spire on the east side of Peak 7235 is made of excellent, featured granite, and during warm-weather windows we established two rock climbs to the top of the face and attempted a third. Our first climb followed crack systems left of the south prow, aiming for a prominent red corner high on the face. The climbing went free until we encountered a corner stacked with loose blocks; there we made a pendulum to the left and ascended crack systems to the top, completing the 1,200-foot route at 5.10+ A0. On a later descent, we rappelled into the pitch we avoided and cleaned the dangerous blocks, then climbed this and the red corner above, completing an all-free route "Red Dihedral" (IV 5.10+ 1,200 feet), a reference to the salient feature of the route and the similarity to the pristine granite of the Incredible Hulk in California. We also attempted to climb the south prow, ascending four pitches of tenuous and engaging climbing up "The Prow" (5.10+ C1 or 5.11c, incomplete). Finally, we climbed the large, continuous right-facing corner system on the left side of Dog Tooth's southwest wall, completing "Birthday Jorts" (IV 5.11a 1,000 feet) free and on-sight up excellent, sustained cracks.



Routes of "Birthday Jorts," "Red Dihedral," and "The Prow" (left to right) on Dog Tooth.  
Photo and artwork by Craig Muderlak

- **Spearhead Peak:** An unclimbed, triangular-shaped peak to the right of Peak 8908 at the head of the North Fork of the Pitchfork Glacier caught our eye from camp. One night we climbed it via a fast route to avoid warm snow conditions. We ascended snow to the west-northwest col of the peak, then followed snow couloirs around the northwest aspect to a mixed step near the summit, completing “Shred Mode” (70° M4 2,000 feet) and naming the peak “Spearhead.”



Route of “Shred Mode” on Spearhead Peak.  
Photo and artwork by Craig Muderlak

- **The Wing:** Our time almost up, we descended from the Pitchfork–Neacola col to the Neacola Glacier to investigate the Triangle Peak massif. Snow was rapidly melting and we witnessed several large wet avalanches and rockfall – this complex terrain would likely need to be climbed in colder conditions, or much later in the summer on dry rock. We opted to climb an attractive spire across the glacier, a 5700-foot sub-peak north and slightly east of Peak 6310 that we called “The Wing.” [Ed. note: Joe Firey called Peak 6310 Neacola Peak after the Whitmores, his wife, and he made the first recorded ascent on June 25, 1965. That 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.] We climbed, again at night, via snow slopes on its northeast and north sides to its west col,

from which we climbed 100 feet of fun, steep 5.7 rock to the summit.

#### Human-Powered Return to the Sea:

After 21 days on the Pitchfork Glacier, we began our return to Cook Inlet. This part of the expedition proved to be very arduous and fraught with uncertainty. We descended the Pitchfork Glacier with 100-pound loads on skis and reached the terminal moraine the second day, which we crossed by shuttling loads. The next day we descended the Glacier Fork of the Tlikakila River on packrafts; this eight-mile river was flowing strong with Class II and III whitewater and we ran all but one rapid. Camped at the confluence of the Glacier Fork and the main stem of the Tlikakila River, we were faced with a major decision between two routes to return to Cook Inlet. The success of our expedition depended upon us making the right choice; however, we didn’t have much information to work with. Our first option was to move our gear upstream, cross Lake Clark Pass overland, and traverse the headwaters that feed the Big River. This route presented a unique navigation challenge: during the 1950s when the USGS topographic maps were drawn, the entire east side of the pass was submerged beneath a large glacial lake. Today that glacier has receded over a mile, completely changing the landscape and the hydrology. Summit Lake, now much smaller, drained east toward the Big River instead of west toward the Tlikakila, and the terrain that used to be buried beneath hundreds of feet of ice was now a swift river that descended to a second, new lake. That river dropped steeply through complex rapids, and the forest on either side was young and thick with slide alder. That geographical transformation rendered the topo maps obsolete, so we had almost no information other than what we saw from the plane and that locals guessed there would be large rapids and “heinous bushwhacking.”



Craig Muderlak ascends alpine ice on an attempt on “The Sliver” on Citadel Peak.  
Photo by Drew Thayer



Our second option was to ascend a 4650-foot pass from the Tlikakila River onto the icy plateau of the Double Glacier, from which we could possibly descend a finger of glacier to the headwaters of the Drift River. Parts of this route had been traveled in winter conditions by a party on skis [Ed. note: See the February 1974 Scree and page 139 of the 1974 AAJ], but we didn't know if it would go in early summer. The decision was tough, as each option presented uncertain and formidable challenges: carry 300 pounds of gear over a high mountain pass and cross an unknown terminal moraine to a river of unknown difficulty, or cross through the newly exposed terrain that has never been traversed and could include dangerous rapids and impassible bushwhacking? Neither would be easy.



*Drew Thayer with a heavy load on the way out.  
Photo by Craig Muderlak*

After much deliberation, we decided to take our chances with pioneering a passage to the Big River. As this route would not require snow travel, we burned our hand-made wooden skis on the gravel bar to reduce our loads. In this moment we crossed our Rubicon; we were now committed to finding a way to the Big River with very little information. We hauled our rafts upstream and then shuttled loads over Lake Clark Pass to Summit Lake. This terrain had been regularly crossed by recreational boating parties that ran the Tlikakila River; however, once we paddled out of the east side of Summit Lake, we were entering unknown territory.

The locals were not wrong: we soon encountered complex and committing Class IV and V whitewater that we could not run in our laden packrafts. We were able to line our boats down the banks of some sections, but eventually we were forced to portage through the thick alder forest. These portages were extremely slow as we had to shuttle loads through dense foliage, and we spent two days covering less than two miles. On the fourth night, after over an hour of tortuously slow bushwhacking, we encountered a small clearing at the edge of the river that was probably the only flat spot for a mile and we made a cramped camp there amongst thick mosquitoes. The next morning we awoke to the demoralizing task of returning through the alder forest to retrieve our second loads. Once we got moving on the river, intense rapids soon forced us back into the forest, further dampening morale. Constant sign of the presence of moose and grizzly bears added to the stress.

At that point we wondered if we would make it to the coast in our remaining time; our food supplies were dwindling and the going was very slow. We didn't know if we could take many more days of this brutal travel – physically or emotionally. On the evening of the fifth day, we emerged from the forest to another long section of continuous whitewater – however, this section looked like it just might go. Craig bushwhacked a quarter mile down the bank to scout the rapids, and came back hopeful: it was technical and had some dangerous obstacles, but it could go. After assessing the hazards we inflated our rafts once more and entered sustained Class III whitewater. To our great relief the river soon calmed down and we ran it all the way to the “East Summit Lake,” which does not appear on older



*Craig Muderlak climbs Pitch 2 of “Red Dihedral” on Dog Tooth while David Fay belays.  
Photo by Drew Thayer*

maps. This was a major milestone, as we had now crossed the unknown terrain between the lakes, and we celebrated with a driftwood fire on the shore of a lake studded with floating icebergs.

We were overjoyed and relieved the next morning when we descended into the North Fork of the Big River and found it runnable. After scouting and running some big Class III rapids, we entered fast-moving “boogie water” and let the river carry us some 35 miles out of the mountains. Moving effortlessly through miles and miles of that expansive terrain felt divine after so much hard effort between the lakes. We made camp on a sandbar on the coastal plain, where the river spread out into slow braided channels and we noticed sea gulls and harbor seals, signs of the nearby ocean. The next day we floated out on the ebbing tide to Cook Inlet, and the pilot picked us up by float plane at the land’s edge.

#### **Logistics:**

We flew in with Alaska West Air out of Nikiski. The pilot, Doug Brewer, was exceptional and possessed intimate knowledge of the terrain; he was also flexible and easy to work with. The Neacola Mountains offered many options for climbing on both snow-covered peaks and granite spires. Since 2016 had a warm spring, we encountered wet snow and very little ice, and were happy to have a full complement of rock gear. Parties wishing to climb spring-style ascents via ice and mixed rock and ice might need to come earlier.

#### **Support:**

We were grateful to the Copp-Dash Inspire Award from the American Alpine Club as well as the Shipman-Tilman Award from Gore-Tex for their generous sponsorships of our expedition. In addition we would like to thank our gear sponsors including Hyperlite Mountain Gear, Feathered Friends, NRS, Alpaca Rafts, Rab Equipment, SatModo, Bluewater Ropes, Backpacker’s Pantry, and Werner Paddles.



*Drew Thayer following on Pitch 2 of  
"Red Dihedral" on Dog Tooth.  
Photo by Craig Muderlak*

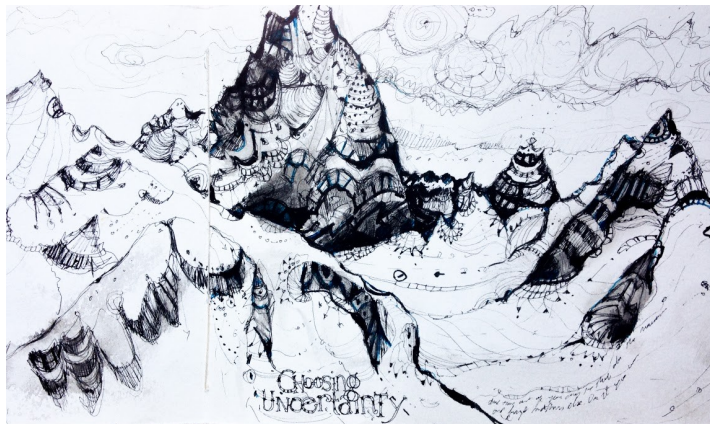
*Drew Thayer working up a perfect splitter on  
"Red Dihedral" on Dog Tooth.  
Photo by Craig Muderlak*





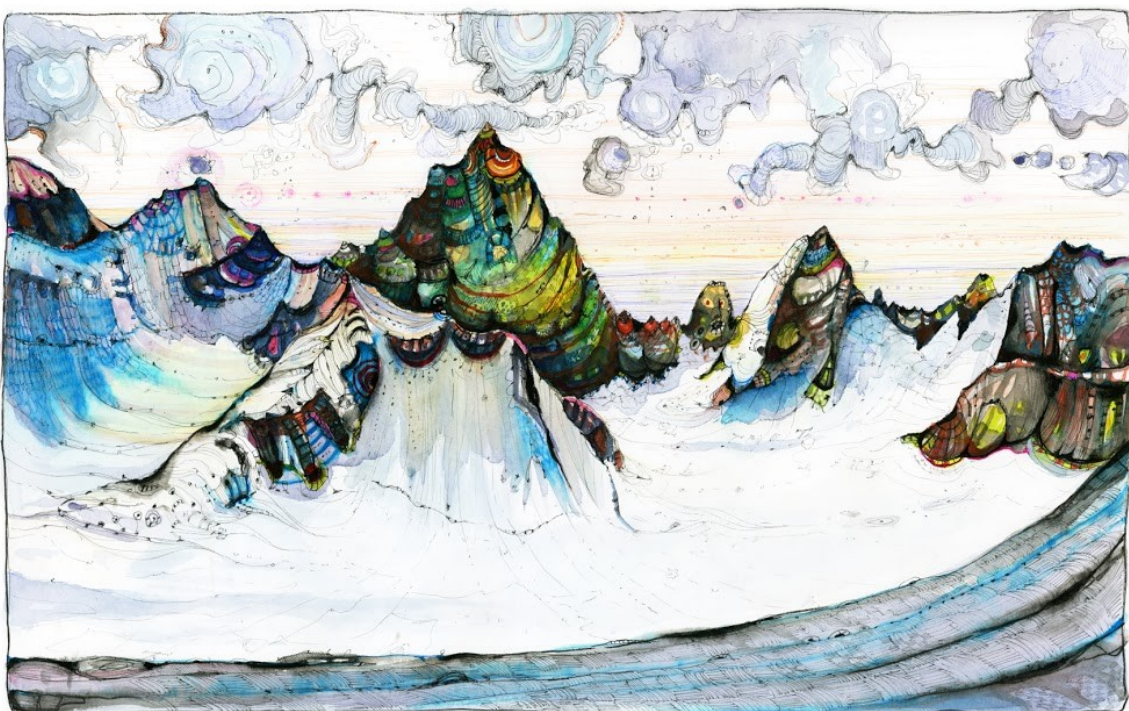


*The  
Neacola  
Bells*



Artwork by  
Craig Muderlak  
freelance artist:  
[www.muderlakart.com](http://www.muderlakart.com)

*Neacola script*



*Spearhead*



## Skiing Makushin Volcano via Overland Route

Text and photos by Timm Nawrocki



*Looking down at the Nateekin River flowing out to the ocean.*

Sam Zmolek has written a series of articles on explorations on Unalaska Island, and Erin McKittrick wrote of exploring Pakushin Volcano in the March 2016 *Scree*. Between the two of them, they set an urge in me to go explore Unalaska for myself. I decided to attempt a solo ascent of Makushin Volcano and tour around the northern lobe of Unalaska Island in early June. Sam provided me with invaluable firsthand knowledge of both Makushin Volcano and the terrain on the island itself. Based on his advice, I formed a plan of striking out from Unalaska along the Nateekin River. Sam also helped me greatly logistically, so I wanted to express my thanks!

The logistics of getting to Unalaska Island were fairly simple, as PenAir operated a direct flight from Anchorage to Unalaska (tickets were purchased through Alaska Airlines). With Alaska Airlines frequent flier miles, the round trip cost only the taxes charged. Once in Unalaska, I purchased a land-use permit from Ounalashka Corporation, which had an office located a mile from the airport. Permits were very reasonably priced. Observing how Ounalashka Corporation managed the land around town filled me with respect; the unfortunate all-terrain vehicle scars near town on Adak Island were absent there. There were large grocery stores in town for any last-minute needs, though I brought most of my food in my checked bag. I split my route over 10 days, which allowed enough time for exploratory side trips and weather days in case waiting were necessary to summit Makushin.



*There are several hot springs on the south side of Makushin Volcano at about the 3000-foot elevation.*

I took a taxi to the end of Captains Bay Road. From there, I hiked over a ridge into the Nateekin River drainage. Staying high, I traversed to the west, hitting the valley bottom once it was mostly devoid of brush. Because of low, dense clouds, I wandered lost for most of my third day, trying to make it over a ridge and down to the southern base of Makushin. Finally, I had to cheat and GPS my way there. My first three days had been rainy and windy with low clouds that hindered navigation above 1500 feet.



On the morning of my fourth day, the weather cleared and I was able to ski to the summit without using any of my weather days. I had brought with me a pair of Åsnes Combat Nato skis mounted with 7tm telemark bindings. The 7tms were modified to fit my leather mountaineering boots. Most telemark bindings with a tour mode can be modified to fit mountaineering boots provided the boots are leather with a slight flex at the toe and have a front and rear bail. The downhill capability would have to be classified as survival skiing, but for summer, when the skis were mainly an ascent/descent tool, this setup was perfect as it allowed one to ski and hike in a single pair of boots. The summit of Makushin was a 5,500-foot climb from my base camp, but with the skis it was quick and easy. Additionally, the skis helped greatly with changing snow conditions from isothermal slop toward the base to wind-blasted ice at the summit. The south side of the volcano was a steady, but relatively mellow, and direct climb to the top.

I then continued south toward Makushin Bay and then walked the coastline to the end of Portage Bay. Makushin and Portage Bays were beautiful with sea cliffs and mountains meeting the ocean. Anyone who takes their dog should be prepared for many fights with foxes. Red foxes are quite numerous along the coast. From the end of Portage Bay, simply head north to loop back to the end of Captains Bay Road.



*Sea cliffs along Portage Bay.*



*View of Okmok Caldera on Umnak Island from the top of Makushin Volcano.*



*Descending Makushin Volcano toward the knob at 4700 feet and the summit of Pakushin Volcano.*







# Korohusk Peak and Mount Kiliak Traverse

Text by Nathan Hebda



*From left to right: Mike Miller, Max Neale, Nathan Hebda, Cory Hinds, and Wayne Todd at the bivy rock near Icicle Creek.*

*Photo by Wayne Todd*

At 6:00 on a Saturday morning we departed from the Eagle River Nature Center. I was in the company of Cory Hinds, Max Neale, Mike Miller, and Wayne Todd. It was my first time meeting the latter two and I had never had the opportunity of climbing with any of them. The forecast called for strengthening wind throughout the day with a significant chance of rain. It was June 18th, a few days before solstice, and we would need all the light we could get.

We followed a small offshoot up from the main trail not very long after Echo Bend. It soon disappeared and bushwhacking ensued until we found our way up the primary route and above timberline in the Dishwater Creek drainage. We continued up a prominent and steep gully on Korohusk Peak's southwest slope. A firm snowpack made for quick travel, leading up to some rock scrambling and then a ridgeline walk. By 12:00 we were sign-



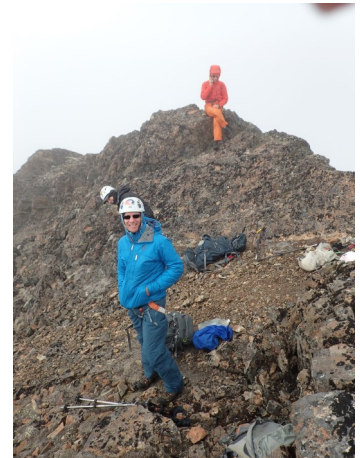
*In the Dishwater Creek drainage.*

*Photo by Wayne Todd*

ing into the summit register. Conditions were fair, but showed potential for worsening. A moderate wind blew and the clouds were still high overhead. We continued west along the ridgeline, soon stopping to tie into two separate rope teams. Having never simul-climbed before (and in fact having never taken part in a technical ascent), I clipped in between Max and Cory. Exposure was severe in some parts, but not sustained, and soon we were scrambling off-rope to a col below Mount Kiliak's northwest ridge.

From there, the climbing quickly became steep and intimidating. After some deliberation between taking the ridge itself or an extremely steep snow slope to its right, Cory and Max started up the rocky ridge with one of the ropes. Mike, Wayne, and I stood below and debated whether we could continue. The climbing appeared sustained and demanding, and weather was a real concern. Finally, Cory encouraged us along and we committed to pressing forward.

The ridge was very narrow with severe consequences to either



*On the summit of Korohusk Peak.*

*Photo by Wayne Todd*





*From left to right: Cory Hinds, Nathan Hebda, and Max Neale continuing east from Korohusk Peak.*

*Photo by Wayne Todd*



*Mike Miller brings up Nathan Hebda and Wayne Todd.*

*Photo by Max Neale*

side. With Mike leading and Wayne behind me, we simul-climbed across using the gear already placed by Cory and Max. They used mostly nuts and smaller cams while also clipping into slings slip-knotted around rock horns. I frequently took out my ice axe for snowy areas and tucked it away for rock. Some sections were very steep with progress requiring linking a number of 5<sup>th</sup>-class moves.

To me, this was an entirely new form of climbing on intimidating terrain and in challenging conditions. Keeping my cool took some work, though I also knew my team was made of expert mountaineers and felt confident overall. The climbing was fun and never very difficult, though the ridge did have a few tricks for us. I fell once after stepping on a loose hold, but managed to stop myself before weighting the rope. We reconvened at the top of a near-vertical pitch from which Cory had provided



*The second rope team travels as Cory Hinds and Max Neale set up a belay.*

*Photo by Wayne Todd*

ed a belay to the second rope team.

From there we were able to traverse un-rope across a snow slope climber's right of the ridge. Visibility had dropped and we were planning our routes with small breaks in the clouds. The terrain became demanding once again and I found myself on a two-person rope team behind Cory. Both the rock and snow became progressively more rotten as we ascended, but we pressed on with urgency. At 6:00 p.m., Cory provided me a final belay and welcomed me to the summit.

There was no view, and almost immediately after stepping on the top, the wind picked up to a very strong and sustained gust. As soon as the whole party was present we continued down Mount Kiliak's southern face, linking a series of steep and narrow benches. The down-climbing was challenging in many parts and in our fatigue and difficult weather we took extra care. Next we followed a gentle slope until being forced to pick a snow gully to descend. We chose the middle road, which was more direct than the shallower option to the left and more safely accessed than over the ridge to the right.



*Cory Hinds and Mike Miller take a break on the North Ridge of Mount Kiliak.*

*Photo by Wayne Todd*

For over one thousand feet, we switched between plungestepping steep and rotten snow and down-climbing tricky rock. Cory and Max put their descent expertise to good use and got an extra break below as the rest of us moved at a more conservative pace. After a few falls on a final steep section of very slick rock, we were at Icicle Creek (and nowhere near the glacier as the GPS track shows).

Travel along the creek was easy at first, but the next few hours would be spent in the brush. We were able to link much of the trail past the bivy rock by looking for cut branches, but even those sections were very overgrown. Dilapidated cairns and



faded tape become more common as we continued, but it was clear that few people had been this way for some time. As midnight came and went, I got pretty tired and took a backseat to the decision-making effort. We gained elevation and rounded a knob to avoid the falls, traversed a while, and then found a scree slope to once again drop down. As 2:00 a.m. loomed, it began to get lighter again and I found a second wind. I led the last section of bushwhacking through intermittent clearings until stumbling in joy onto the main trail.

For the final six miles out, the conversation was at some of its most interesting. Each member shared their last nearly 24-hour experience. Everyone seemed to agree that they hadn't had a day this long for a long time. It was certainly my longest day. At nearly 4:15 Sunday morning, we reached the trailhead.

I headed straight off for home, as I had places to be in the morning. The rest of the team pressed on to Denny's, where I understand their Grand Slam experience was an adventure unto itself. This was a fun and thrilling climb with really amazing company and I am really grateful for the opportunity. We were very fortunate that the weather never fully turned on us, but also maintained good teamwork to maximize our safety and success. This was truly an outing that I will never forget.



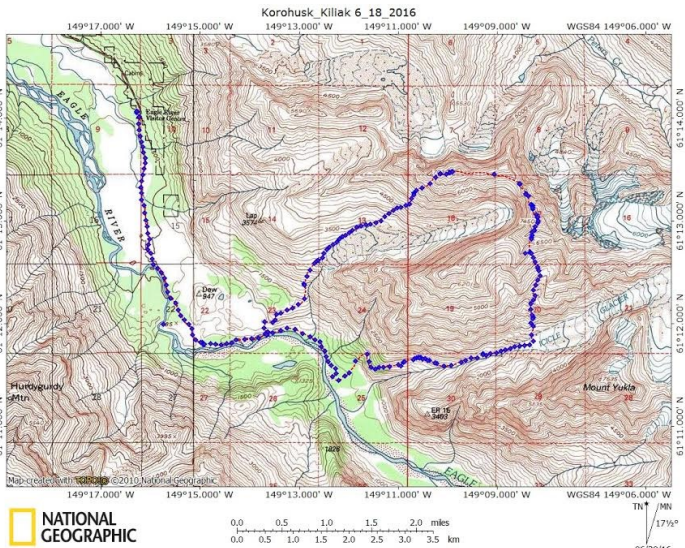
Mike Miller and Nathan Hebda descending the gully.  
 Photo by Wayne Todd



Nathan Hebda and Mike Miller traversing steep rock with the Dishwater Glacier in the background.  
 Photo by Max Neale



Cory Hinds stands above Dishwater Creek.  
 Photo by Max Neale





## Exploring the Sheep River Glacier, July 15-22

Text and photos by Lang Van Dommelen



*The buttress with "Life Insurance Policy?" The climb is on the skyline buttress and ends on a pinnacle in front of the first buttress.*

Fifteen feet from Chris Williams' belay, I looked at the rock he had climbed through, and asked, "How the f--k did you climb that without bringing down the whole pitch on me and Gus?" Chris gave me a blank stare, and then bluntly said, "Levitation." As Gus and I tiptoed across, rocks tumbled, bouncing downward and off the belay ledge 150 feet below us. It became clear that at this point, rappelling wasn't an option and we were committed to climbing higher on an increasingly loose, scary route. A pitch before, I had headed up a corner teeming with loose, tottering blocks waiting to smash Chris and Gus Barber. From the belay, the rock seemed to be better. Chris headed up what would become one of the most dangerous pitches I have climbed. Sitting here writing, I am still amazed that Chris didn't kill Gus and me during his lead.

A few days earlier, we had rushed from Anchorage after work to meet Dave King of Last Frontier Aviation, which owns the jet-black A Star that was going to put us at the base of a relatively unclimbed area. We were climbing as a team of three. Chris was an obvious partner for this trip. I've spent years climbing with

him. He is solid as a rock, and more committed to the art of climbing than anyone else I know. He takes pride in being compe-

tent at everything from rock to ice to aid. We had been trying to get out to the big mountains for several seasons, but lack of funds, broken vehicles, and timing had always thwarted trips. The less obvious choice of partners was Gus. Gus "Guzzlejugs" Barber was a 19-year-old protégé, with only a handful of trad leads under his belt, but eager for experience. This short slam-and-grab trip was an excellent opportunity to push his limits.

Our first day on the Sheep River Glacier had broken with unstable weather, but anxious to see the goods, we skied up the glacier to the base of Peak 8733. As we skied up the glacier, a route became clear. A 300-foot splitter crack split the lower section of the wall to a ledge. From there a route up the west ridge seemed probable.



*Gus Barber on the first pitch of "Funding Denied."*

We racked Gus up for the first lead: a chimney leading to a hand-and-fist crack that led to fingers high on the pitch. The golden granite was impeccable, the gear perfect, and



the climbing unique and thought provoking. This 150-foot pitch was one of the best 5.9s I've climbed. Whooping with excitement, Chris took the second lead, an intimidating steep crack that, like the first pitch, started wide, narrowing to overhanging, but perfect hands, high on the pitch. This pitch was even better than the first with a moderate rating of 5.10. After this pitch, the route changed. We traversed a ledge leftward to gain the ridge proper. Staying on the ridge proper kept us in 4<sup>th</sup>-class and easy 5<sup>th</sup>-class (5.2 to 5.6) climbing on the ridge, broken by moderate roped pitches of 5.8 with classic exposure as we gained elevation above the glacier. The ridge ended at the peak of the steep face. In rain and hail we decided that we should begin our descent only a few short pitches shy of the summit. We descended our route of ascent, down-climbing and occasionally rappelling through steeper sections. We returned to camp at 2:30 a.m., having established "Funding Denied" 5.10 1,300 feet Grade IV.

Three days later I found myself on a small ledge several pitches above Chris' choss extravaganza on the east side of the south ridge of Peak 8250, about a mile and a half southwest of Peak 8733. After 20 minutes, I managed to build an anchor that I hoped had at least a chance of holding a real fall. I yelled, "Off Belay!" I followed that with, "Probably don't fall!" Chris climbed first, bringing pins to supplement the anchor. The climbing had gotten better for a spooky 5.10 pitch, then instantly became dangerous once more. Then we were at a critical decision point. We could have either continued upward, potentially leading to a walk off. Or to our left, a pinnacle of rock stood 60 feet above us that seemed to promise a relatively safe passage of rappel relatively free of death blocks of choss. Listening to peals of thunder, rappelling seemed the safest option. After three complicated, and somewhat, exciting raps, a traversing exit pitch, and a steep scree scramble back down to our skis, we finally began to joke, "Man, I hope our parents have life insurance policies on us, if we pull more s--t like that ..." Laughing, I said, "There is the route name 'Life Insurance Policy?' with a question mark." We reported this as Grade III 600 feet 5.10x with the hope that it would warn away others.

With poor weather approaching, we knew that time was short to attempt the biggest face in the area. At 1,200 feet, it seemed full of splitters. How wrong we were. Another scree fest followed by another X-rated pitch and massive rockfall too close for comfort; we decided we had enough scare for one trip. Our



*Gus Barber belays Chris Williams on the 5.10 pitch on "Funding Denied."*

approach passed a 250-foot wall about a half mile north of "Life Insurance Policy?" that had several splitters and we decided that a day of cragging would be a nice way to end our trip. Gus was stoked to get another lead, so he headed up a wonderful, steep hands-and-finger crack. As the weather changed and rain started to fall, we rappelled the route, and headed back to camp. Gus named that route "Hypothermic Sending Temps." At 5.11a, it was one of the best cracks I had ever climbed in the Talkeetna Mountains.

After two days of poor weather and zero visibility, we finally got a weather window for a pick-up and headed back to Eagle River for our traditional Pizzaman pies and IPAs.



*Chris Williams and Gus Barber soloing easy terrain about halfway through "Funding Denied."*

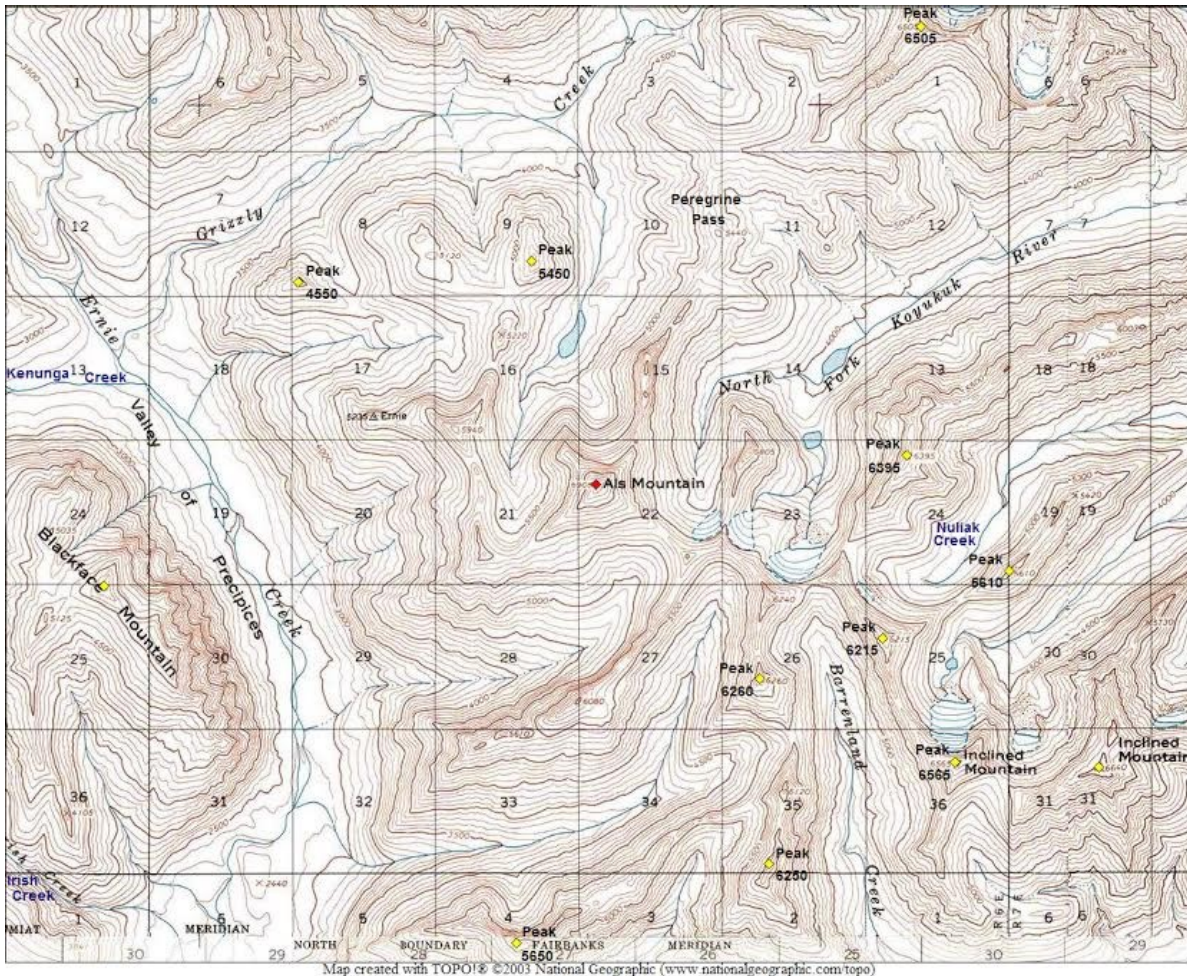


*Base camp, "Funding Denied" climbs the ridge on the center peak.*



# Peak of the Month: Als Mountain

Text by Steve Gruhn



**Mountain Range:** Brooks Range; Endicott Mountains

**Borough:** North Slope Borough

**Adjacent Pass:** Peregrine Pass

**Latitude/Longitude:** 68° 2' 42" North, 150° 43' 44" West

**Elevation:** 6905 feet

**Prominence:** 1655 feet from Cockedhat Mountain (7410)

**Adjacent Peaks:** Peak 6260 in the Barrenland Creek drainage; Peak 6505 northeast of Peregrine Pass, Peak 5450 in the

Grizzly Creek drainage, and Peak 4550 in the Grizzly Creek drainage

**Distinctness:** 1155 feet from Peak 6260

**USGS Map:** Chandler Lake (A-2)

**First Recorded Ascent:** September 1930 by Robert Marshall and Al Retzlaf

**Route of First Recorded Ascent:** Southwest ridge

**Access Point:** Wiseman

Als Mountain is the highest point in the Ernie Creek drainage, an approximately 220-square mile drainage basin that drains to the North Fork of the Koyukuk River in Gates of the Arctic National Park.

On August 28, 1930, Lew Carpenter, Bob Marshall, and Al Retzlaf set out from Wiseman to explore the upper reaches of

the North Fork of the Koyukuk River.

Several days later from a camp near the mouth of Grizzly Creek, Marshall climbed Limestone Mountain (6250), Carpenter went hunting, and Retzlaf tried prospecting before turning to hunting. Retzlaf shot three sheep high on a mountain south of Grizzly Creek. The following day Carpenter left the party and



began his return to Wiseman. Marshall and Retzlaf climbed the southwest ridge to the summit of the peak on which the latter had shot the sheep. They descended to the north, via a hanging valley that drained to the south side of Grizzly Creek. Marshall named the summit Al's Mountain in honor of his friend's sheep hunt. The U.S. Board on Geographic Names' policy of avoiding possessive apostrophes eventually resulted in the official name of Als Mountain.

Later on the trip, Marshall climbed Blackface Mountain (5350). Marshall and Retzlaf returned to Wiseman in late September.

In late June 1996 Tom Choate and Scott Bailey started on a trip with Alok Somani by flying to Chimney Lake. From there they headed north and Choate and Somani climbed Midnight Mountain (6110) and all three climbed Mount Doonerak (7457)

and Hanging Glacier Mountain (6750). Later that month the three were joined by Kris Hutchin and two of Somani's friends – Jeff K. and Tom P. – who flew to a short airstrip below the Gates of the Arctic. The six-person party climbed Boreal Mountain (6654) and Choate made a solo ascent of Gates Peak (6074). In early July, Jeff K., Tom P., and Somani flew out, leaving Bailey, Choate, and Hutchin to continue northward toward Ernie Pass. En route Choate made a solo climb of Als Mountain via the southwest ridge. Upon his descent, the party hiked to Anaktuvuk Pass for their flight home.

The information for this column came from Robert Marshall's Arctic Village; from Marshall's Arctic Wilderness; and from Tom Choate's trip report titled "Gates of the Arctic Ascents 1996," which appeared in the November 1996 *Scree*.



*Denali's north side, taken on May 5, 2016, from about Mile 20 of Denali Park Road, clearly shows Karstens Ridge leading to the south summit — one of the mountain's more challenging routes.*

*Photo by Frank Baker*

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*The Scree* is a monthly publication of the Mountaineering Club of Alaska. Articles, notes, and letters submitted for publication in the newsletter should be emailed to [MCAScree@gmail.com](mailto:MCAScree@gmail.com). Articles should be submitted by the 24th of the month to appear in the next month's *Scree*.

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