

**"Spring is a time to find out where you are, who you are, and move toward where you are going."**

— Penelope Trunk

# the SCREE

## Mountaineering Club of Alaska

April 2018

Volume 61 Number 4



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Monthly meeting: Tuesday, April 17, at 6:30 p.m. at the BP Energy Center. Richard Baranow will present "Early explorations in the Chugach 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."**

This issue brought to you by: **Editor—Dave Hart assisted by Dawn Munroe**

## Cover Photo

Carrie Wang topping out on Indianhouse Mountain.

Photo by Wayne Todd

## APRIL MEETING

Monthly meeting: Tuesday, April 17, at 6:30 p.m., at the BP Energy Center, 1014 Energy Court, in Anchorage.

Richard Baranow will present: "Early explorations in the Chugach Mountains."

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

**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. Send high resolution file photos separately, including captions for each photo. 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 don't forget to submit photo captions.

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## Announcements

For those of you not on the MCA Facebook page, it is a very active page the MCA uses to post about upcoming speakers, trip reports and other benefits for club members--you may want to forward to friends and encourage them to join as well!

The MCA Treasurer encourages all members to pay their 2018 dues as quickly as possible. And thanks to those that already have.

[Backcountry.com](#) 15% purchases will only be given to members (working on details now).

Working on more discounts that will be for club members as well. Lets not forget the AMH discounts, speakers through the year and of course the amazing huts. Small price to pay for a great club!

## Hiking and Climbing Schedule

**July 13-21** MCA Summer Mountaineering Instructional Trip. Training/ learning goals: Trip organization, leadership, meal planning, navigation, route-finding, Snow travel, running belay, snow anchors, knots, 10 essentials, Terminology, Glacier travel, Ice Climbing, Belaying, Crevasse rescue, Wilderness medicine, Bouldering, Rock climbing, Rappelling and more while travelling the Bomber Traverse. Leader: Greg Bragiel [huts@mtnclubak.org](mailto:huts@mtnclubak.org) 350-5146 Deadline to sign on for this trip April 17.

For the MCA Membership Application and Liability Waiver, visit  
<http://www.mtnclubak.org/index.cfm?useaction=members.form>.

## Choate's Chuckle - Tom Choate

**Q:** Male ice climbers like the same thing on their girlfriends that they like on their crampons. What is it?

Answer: *on page 10.*

Online? Click me!



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

## Avalanche Safety and Gear Reminder

By Cory Hinds

Standard Avalanche gear includes beacon, probe, and shovel. I recommend adding an inclinometer to the required gear. Measuring slope angles allows us to select safe travel routes through the mountains even when avalanche danger is a concern. In this case, we can still move on slopes below 25 degrees, as long as our slopes don't connect to steeper slopes above. The Avalanche danger may be extreme, but our slopes are not steep enough to slide. Measuring angles can also help locate a safe spot for our basecamp. In this case, we measure angle to the top of the nearby slopes and select sites where this "alpha" angle is 10 degrees or less. If the measured angle is higher than 10 degrees, we move the camp farther

away from the slope. Historical evidence (and mathematics) shows that these locations are outside the Avalanche runout zone. Adding an inclinometer to our kit allows us to make safer decisions.

### *Editor's Note:*

*MCA'er Tim Kelley has among his many talents started creating Apps. One of his latest creations is AvyPal, which measures slope angles, much like an inclinometer. At \$1.99 it might make a good addition to your backcountry.*

## MCA Winter Instructional Class Recognition

The MCA recognizes Tom Smayda and George Ferry for their contributions during the MCA Winter Mountaineering Instructional Trip Mar. 12-18, 2018 35 hours of classroom and field instruction included: Navigation, Stream Crossing, Trip planning, Leave No trace, knots, rope/cord, Snow travel, snow anchors, running belay, rope handling, communication, terminology, staying warm, nutrition/hydration, Glacier travel, Belaying, Avalanche recognition/evaluation and companion rescue, Route finding, Crevasse rescue, Snow shelters, Gear Essentials, Wilderness Medicine, Unexpected camping trip, Shelters, Fires and Signaling.



*Top Left: Members of MCA Winter instructional trip near Caribou Creek training: River crossing*



*Bottom Left: Resurrection Pass area training: Snowpit testing.*

MCA members attending the Winter Instructional Trip: Kadin Feldis, Alexandra Janczewska, Alyxander Christenson, Isaac Woods

Instructors: Tom Smayda, George Ferry, Greg Bragiel

Walk Worthy and teach others.

Greg Bragiel- Lead instructor



*Top Right: north of Caribou Creek training: Bivi camp.*



*Bottom Right: Resurrection Pass area training: V-Shaped conveyor shoveling, Avalanche Companion Rescue*

# Indianhouse Mountain (4350 feet) Traverse, Front Range, Western Chugach Mountains

Text and photos by Wayne Todd

July 17, 2016



*Carrie Wang traversing the east side of Indianhouse Mountain.*

Sweat pours off my forehead and stings my eyes. Motivation for my traverse of Indianhouse Mountain is already waning and Carrie Wang and I have not even ascended the easy half of elevation gain. Hiking partners would be shocked at our slow, plodding pace (crampons, axe, and helmet are not justifications of load).

This social trail off of the old road/powerline is substantially steep though, a third more than Bird Ridge. A trip would have injurious consequences.

As we planned a traverse, we left the car at the intended endpoint, Falls Creek, and gained the experience of a couple miles of overgrown trail to the steep trail cutoff. There is a much closer, but more hazardous pull-off.

At the plateau, referred to as Indian by some, we already realize one liter each of precious, cool, refreshing, life-replenishing water will not be sufficient for the day. Carrie mentions feeling off, perhaps from the heat (Alaska heat, mid-70s-plus). The black flies bite hard if allowed a few too many seconds on bare skin. I spy the low cut in the ridge into Falls Creek Valley, thinking this traverse could wait until another day. Starting at 11 a.m. did not help the situation.

We ascend slightly farther to gain a rest stop in a slight breeze, which is a bit smoke-inundated from the McHugh Creek fire. Just after, at 2900 feet, we veer right off the sub-ridge onto a sheep trail to lessen the side-hilling and shrubbery patches. The traverse is on, as neither of us called "uncle."



*North Suicide Peak from a notch.*

The trail fades in and out and over a few ripples, very gradually gaining elevation as we approach the east ridge. There is still much steep rock lying above. We ascend the last major gully before the lower-angle protrusion beyond. We continue up right in the gully, following a natural up-and-right depression, which bisects numerous gullies, including one larger one. This route is marked with small cairns. At an open-face gully just before the ridge that borders the cliffs to the north, we ascend directly up, making a couple 5th-class moves. Back to the ridge, a short, low-class hike to the top and we're greeted all around with full, but smoke-hazed vistas. All slope aspects look very dry.

After a poke around the numerous seemingly dismembered cairns, we begin scouting a descent off the west side. I know this is a mountain that should be climbed with snow, but think surely it's not as steep as I remem-

ber (don't climb this side in summer unless ...). Our first descent section is a gully that requires a few all-extremity moves. A fall on this face would probably lead to serious injury or death.



*Carrie Wang scouting the west face of Indianhouse Mountain.*

We slowly work down, back, and forth across a 100-yard fall-line swath, guiding off the right ridge, with numerous fifth-class moves between small, vegetated benches, with occasional 10- to 20-foot climbs to gain a better bench. The gravel-covered, downward-facing rock is especially treacherous. A resting goat lazily keeps eyes on us from below, realizing at our slow pace we are no threat. Our rockfall, on the other hand... When we get within 50 yards, he slumbers around the corner to the left onto even steeper terrain. So much for following any game trail.

The natural bisecting bench that I like to use for winter ascents is discontinuous. We briefly consider descending far left, but the terrain between our green mini-benches and the snow looks too steep, too sloped, and too smooth. The water-flowing sound coupled with the sparkly sun reflections from the snow-fields below taunt us. A climb back up all this and a retreat down and out our water-free ascent would seriously suck.

We have slight route opinion differences, but typically agree as better options present. We were headed up to the north ridge on a promising bench when another "reasonable" descent option presents. The hundreds of feet slowly tick down, but there is always some unknown slope and an ever-present rollover with probable cliff lurking below. We get close enough to the bottom that I'm thinking it might be worth some stupid 10- to 20-foot moves. I see a reasonable down-climb section, but Carrie spies a better sloped bench to the left. A few butt-slide moves and we're off the steeps! Hell, yeah. Then we proceed

to almost slip a couple times on the small, rock-covered, lower-angle rock. That was an unpleasant hour and a half. We fill and treat water-depleted bottles, looking back up at a really ugly, steep, brown mass of convoluted rock matter, with little, green, broken, spider-web wisps.

The alpine zone here is a gorgeous mix of endless green cover with Zen-spaced boulders fed down the middle by a clear, bouncy stream, and wildflowers, too. We traverse up to the main trail due to a possible large brown animal lower on the stream trail (it was a rock). At the main stream intersection, we stop for a water-gulping, foot-soaking, and black-fly-killing break. I killed, or at least stunned, 50. They are so contrary to the lovely, sunny, wildflower-banked, soothing stream. We hike out fast, stopping only once to drink more water.

We are disappointed to see a steady stream of 10-mile-per-hour vehicles dragging along toward Anchorage (caused by gawkers of the firefighting helicopters dropping their baskets into the inlet for water and powering back up the mountain-side. I gawked safely as a passenger). We bump into Jim Sellers, though, and have a nice chat.

Eight hours, 6 miles, about 4,600 feet of elevation gain. West side highly not recommended in summer; sufficient scrambling exists on the east side.



*The Zen boulder area (east branch upper Falls Creek).*



*Wayne Todd and Carrie Wang on top with the Suicide Peaks in the background.*

## West Kiliak (7450 feet), Western Chugach Mountains

Text and photos by Marcin Ksok

July 2017



*Greg Encelewski on the summit of West Kiliak.*

I must have achieved near perfection in one of a mountaineer's most important skills – a short memory for suffering – because I did not remember having such a hard time accessing the Icicle Creek drainage. A few years had passed since my last trip up there, but how did I conceive the idea that it wouldn't pose much of a challenge? There was an honest mistake of turning up too early before reaching Icicle Creek and bushwhacking a bit, trying to follow the trails moose built to deceive such travelers as Greg Encelewski and me. But I clearly remembered that once one started gaining the slopes and benches above the creek, the going wasn't terrible. Surely a short memory. We fought the brush, the alders, the misleading sheep trails. Eventually, victorious, we parked under The Boulder, rewarded with a gem of a campsite.

Scree, scree everywhere. Up the scree we went into an impressive amphitheater formed by the north walls of Mount Yukla (7535 feet) and the south walls of Mount Kiliak. The east and west peaks of Kiliak were split by a convenient gully, which we took up to a small saddle. The snow was good, but strewn with rocks of various sizes, putting me on edge for most of it.

From the saddle we followed Vicky Lytle's directions from her *Scree* article [Ed. note: see the October 2010 *Scree*]. We took a

bench on the north side of the peak and passed some snow runnels; one of them rock-avalanched three minutes after our passage. On the edge again.

Shortly we reached the ridgeline and come to a scrambly section, which put us into another gully emptying over a cliff. Cautiously Greg headed up the variable snow, which turned quite icy; honestly we weren't prepared for these conditions, lacking ropes and protection. Yet we overcame this and another snow slope to reach the ridgeline again.

Easy terrain led to the summit where clouds opened a bit and provided windows into the surroundings. We took some time, it was quite pleasant up there and we were not excited about the way back down. Not having concrete description of the alternate way of descent, we retraced our steps, got separated, which offered Greg the opportunity to bypass the initial north bench in favor of ridge direct. Although steeper, it might be a safer option. The large gully offered uneventful passage again.

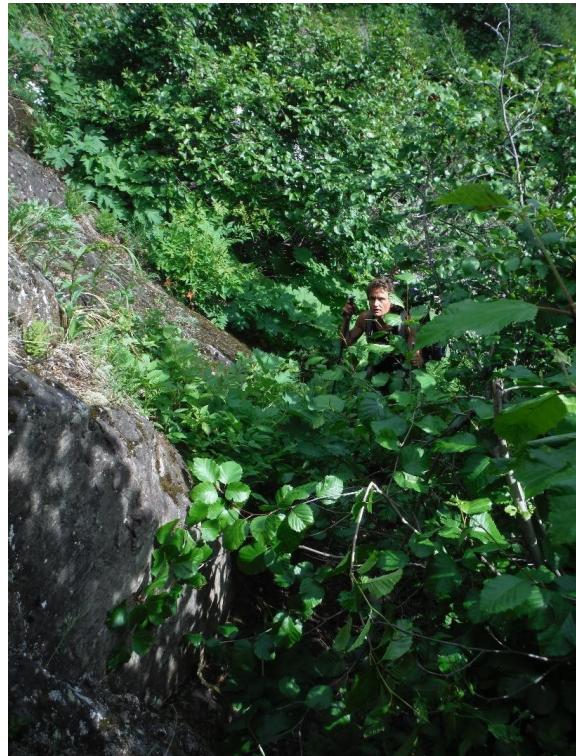
On our return down the scree, we realized its enormous nature, and at camp we congratulated ourselves on a speedy, eight-hour summit. The magnitude of how far we still were from the parking lot also sunk in. The way of the weekend warrior neces-

sitated long hours in the boots. We still felt good, not like spring chickens, but not bad.

The way down would surely be easier, at least until we get lost, cliffted out, retreated, bushwhacked again, found a random rope, took that down, got blocked by cliffs and the creek, went up, traversed loose slopes, and eventually ended up on the Eagle River Trail. Then I felt more like a fall chicken, dirty, missing feathers, and ready for the axe. The trudge to the parking lot added a finishing touch to the adventure. It's a good, easy trail, but oh so long.



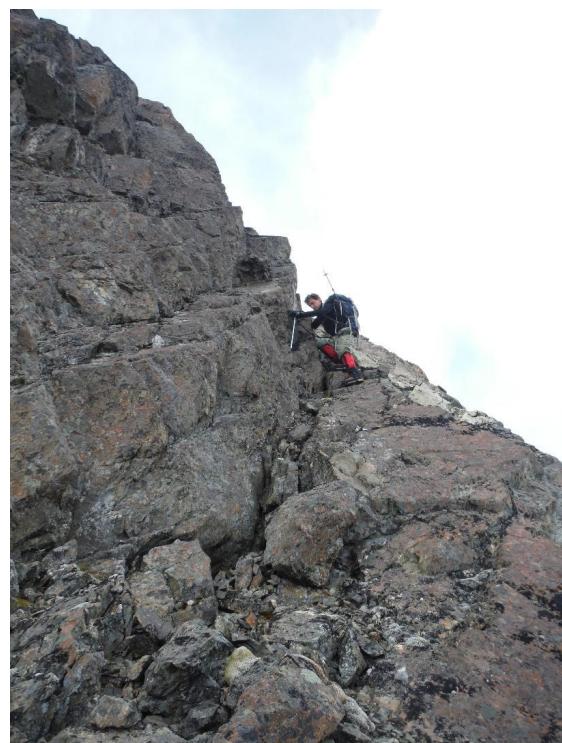
*Greg Encelewski at boulder camp.*



*Greg Encelewski bushwacking.*



*Greg Encelewski on the scrambly section.*



*Greg Encelewski on the scrambly section.*

## Eagle Lake Ski Marks a Spring Rebirth, Western Chugach Mountains

Text by Frank E. Baker



*Frank Baker is dwarfed by mountains above Eagle Lake.*

*Photo by Pete Panarese*

On the bluebird morning of March 1, 2018, there was no wind and the sun was warm on our faces as Pete Panarese and I skied into South Fork Valley, headed for Eagle Lake. It was my first major outdoor trip in more than a year after knee surgery, and in every fiber of my being it felt like a physical and spiritual rebirth.

The first 2-1/2 miles were over a packed trail, but there was plenty of soft snow along the sides to slow our descent to the first bridge. From the bridge we followed a broken trail set by a mountain climber we met who was returning from a failed attempt on 1948-meter (6391-foot) Cantata Peak, which loomed over Eagle Lake. He mentioned that heavy winds a day earlier thwarted his effort.

The trail the climber had set stayed mostly to the right, or west, of the established summer trail that had a lot of hills. We felt fortunate to have a set track, because in some areas the snow was about 16 to 18 inches deep.

Even though the ambient temperature was about 10 degrees Fahrenheit, the rising sun was definitely overpowering the cold.

Entering a shaded area, it seemed like the temperature dropped five degrees!

About 3-1/2 miles into our trip, we stopped on a knoll for a snack break and spotted five moose bedded down on the left, or east side of the valley. They also seemed to be enjoying the warm sunshine. On the other side of us in the distance, we heard a ptarmigan's distinctive squawk. Before getting underway, I remembered to apply some sunblock to my face.

The climber's trail meandered around the valley quite a bit, but our progress was steady and we reached the lake about 1 p.m. We soon found a nice lunch spot with a great view of 2106-meter (6909-foot) Eagle Peak, which although many thousands of feet lower, somewhat resembles K2 in northern Pakistan, at 28251 feet.

Pete mentioned climbing Eagle Peak twice from the Eagle River Valley side several years ago, and I noted my single summit with the late Dave Gahm in July 2005, via the gully from Flute Canyon. Viewed from the Eagle and Symphony Lakes area, Eagle Peak was quite an impressive natural feature.

Aside from the climber's trail leading up toward the old shelter, there were no other tracks on the lake, human or animal. With no wind, the silence was palpable.

About 2 p.m., we packed up and began our six-mile return trip, which expectedly, was much easier because it was mostly downhill. On the return we often lingered to take in the beautiful landscape. The frequent rests were also quite welcome!

I removed skis and opted to hike up the big hill after the bridge, while Pete remained in his waxless skis. We reached the top about the same time, so I don't think hiking provided any advantage.

Weary, but really thankful for such a special day, we arrived back at the car about 6 p.m., making it a nine-hour outing.

After a year of knee rehabilitation, injections and physical therapy for lower back issues, I felt like I had returned to myself and the land that I love. For me, the long recovery period revealed a truth found in a Joni Mitchell song lyric:

"Don't it always seem to go

*"That you don't know what you got 'til it's gone ..."*

*Frank E. Baker is an MCA member and freelance writer who lives in Eagle River.*



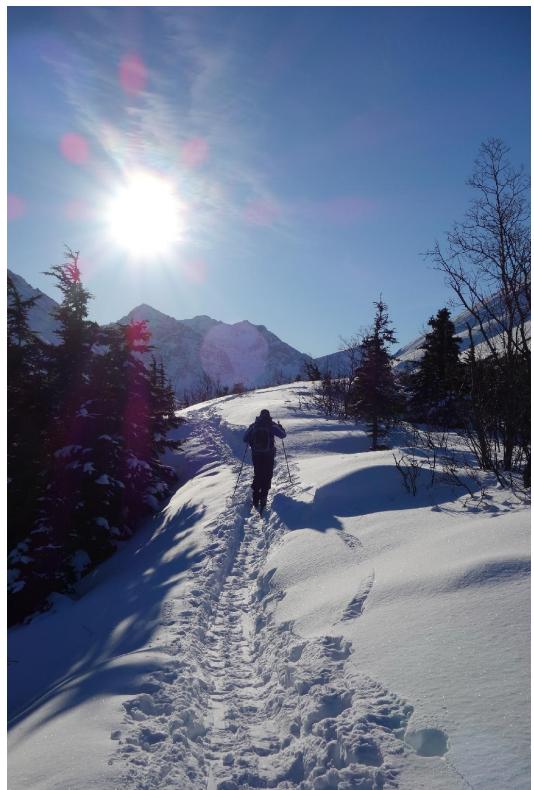
*Pete Panarese enjoys lunch at Eagle Lake, with 2106-meter (6909-foot) Eagle Peak in the background.*

*Photo by Frank Baker*



*Frank Baker pauses to take in the scenery on the return trip from Eagle Lake.*

*Photo by Pete Panarese*

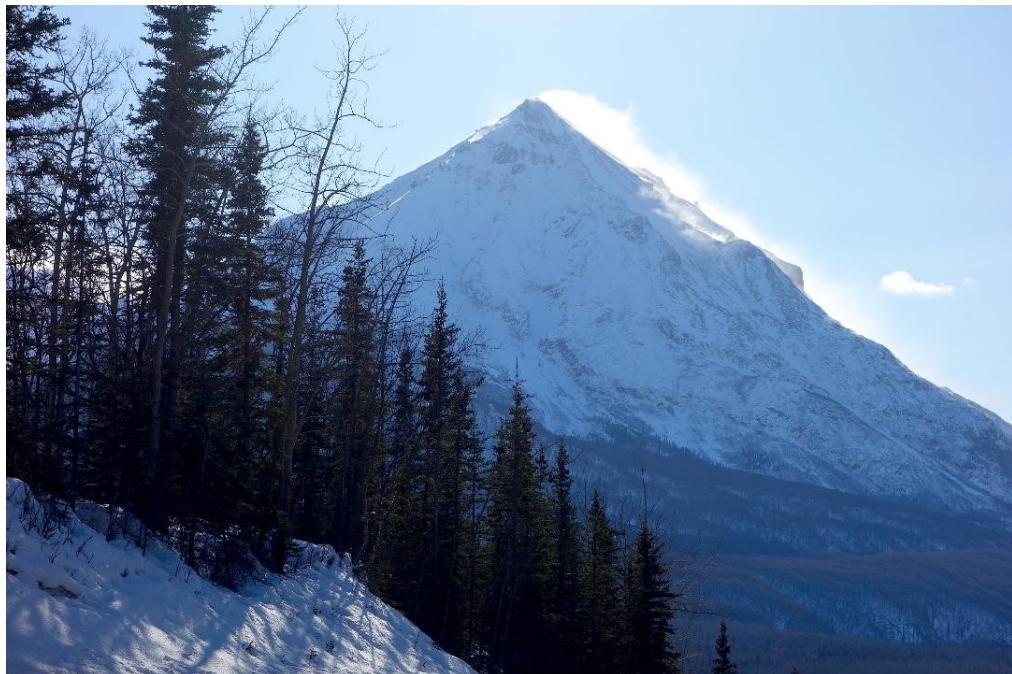


*Pete Panarese begins the first mile on a six-mile ski to Eagle Lake in South Fork Valley.*

*Photo by Frank Baker*

## King of the Matanuska River

Text and photos by Frank E. Baker



*Northeast side of Kings Mountain.*

In March of this year, snow blows from the 5,809-foot summit of Kings Mountain, which lies above the Matanuska River in the eastern Chugach Range. The photo was taken from the Glenn Highway on the mountain's northeast side. A monument to Alaskan Gerard "Ger" McDonnell lies on the mountain's northeast ridge near the summit. On August 1, 2008, McDonnell made mountaineering history by becoming the first Irish person to stand on the 28,251-foot summit of K2. He died during the descent after attempting to rescue three injured climbers above 8000 meters.

Story about a March 2006 ascent of Kings Mountain: <http://www.akmountain.com/index.cfm/2006/03/04/King-Mountain>

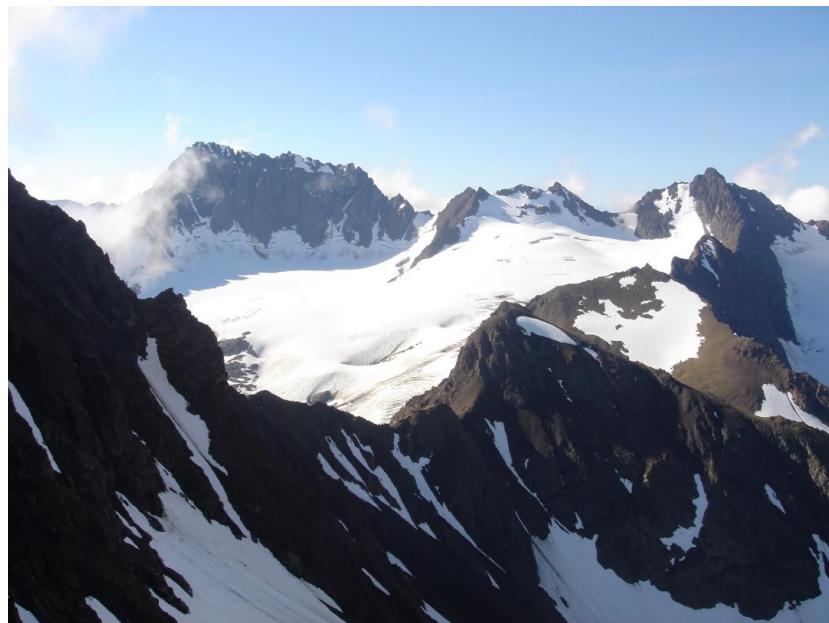
Link to photo of Ger's memorial on Kings Mountain:

<http://www.akmountain.com/index.cfm/2006/03/04/King-Mountain#PhotoSwipe1521763310919>

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## Organ Mountain

Text and photo by Frank E. Baker



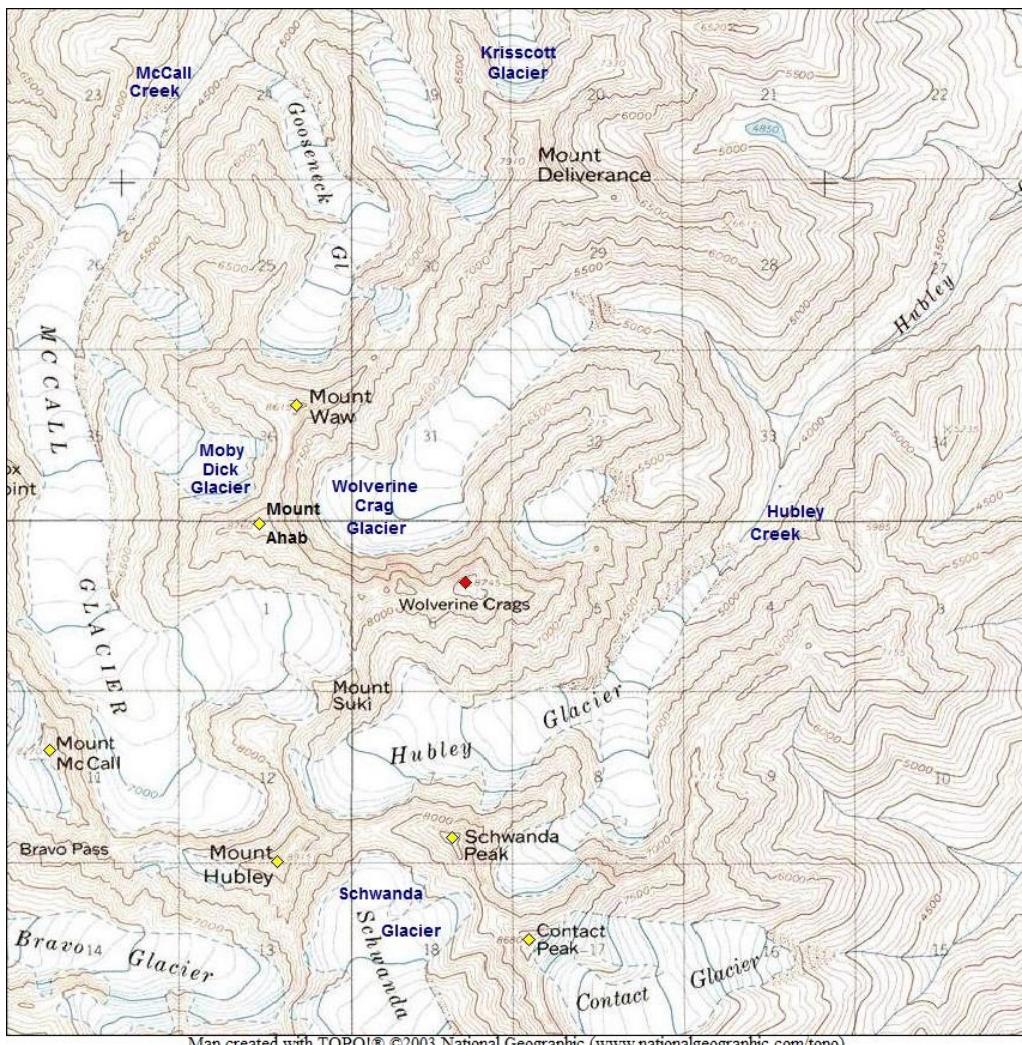
*Looking south across the Organ Glacier to 6,980-foot Organ Mountain in the Western Chugach Mountains, during July 23, 2005, ascent of 6,909-foot Eagle Peak by Frank Baker and Dave Gahm via western gully from Flute Canyon.*

**Choate's Chuckle** - Tom Choate

**Answer:** Nice front points.

## Peak of the Month: Wolverine Crags

Text by Steve Gruhn



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

Wolverine Crags is the seventh-highest peak in the Brooks Range and the sixth-highest peak in the Romanzof Mountains.

In May 1957 the McCall Glacier became the site of intense glaciological study as part of the International Geophysical Year (IGY). During the course of the multi-year IGY study, glaciologists ascended numerous peaks in the area and photographed others. Wolverine Crags first caught my attention while I was reviewing the 1960 *American Alpine Journal*. A photo of the peak appeared on Plate 41 between pages 82 and 83 of that issue of the AAJ.

I don't know of any ascents of Wolverine Crags; yours could be the first.

The information for this column came from Robert W. Mason's article titled "The McCall Glacier Station, Brooks Range, Alaska," which appeared on pages 78 through 86 of the 1960 AAJ.

**Mountain Range:** Brooks Range; Romanzof Mountains

**Borough:** North Slope Borough

**Drainages:** Drainages: Hubley Glacier and Wolverine Crag Glacier

**Latitude/Longitude:** 69°17' 58" North, 143°45' 7" West

**Elevation:** 8745 feet

**Adjacent Peaks:** Mount Ahab (8760 feet) and Mount Hubley (8916 feet)

**Prominence:** 595 feet from Mount Ahab

**Distinctness:** 595 feet from Mount Ahab

**USGS Map:** Demarcation Point (B-5)

**First Recorded Ascent:** This peak might be unclimbed.



*The late Austin Post viewing the southwest aspect of Wolverine Crags.*  
Photo by Robert W. Mason and courtesy of the American Alpine Club.

Used with permission.

## Mountaineering Club of Alaska

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

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

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

Paid ads may be submitted to the attention of the Vice-President at the club address and should be in electronic format and pre-paid. Ads can be emailed to [vicepresident@mtnclubak.org](mailto:vicepresident@mtnclubak.org).

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

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

*Carrie Wang descending the west face of Indianhouse Mountain.  
Photo by Wayne Todd*

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