

**"Strength does not come from winning. Your struggles develop your strengths. When you go through hardships and decide not to surrender, that is strength."  
— Arnold Schwarzenegger**

# the SCREE

## Mountaineering Club of Alaska

**September 2018**

**Volume 61 Number 9**



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**South Baleful Peak Traverse**

**Peak of the Month: Stingray Peak**

**Monthly meeting: September: Wednesday, September 5, at 6:30 p.m. at the BP Energy Center. Billy Finley will give a presentation on ski mountaineering in the Alaska Range, Chugach Mountains, and Talkeetna Mountains.**

**October meeting: Wednesday, October 3, at 6:30 p.m. at the BP Energy Center at 1014 Energy Court in Anchorage. We will have elections and voting for 2019 MCA Calendar photos. Bill Long will present "Decade of Antarctic Exploration," including first ascents as well as geographic and scientific discoveries in Antarctica.**

# 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—Steve Gruhn assisted by Dawn Munroe*

## Cover Photo

Wayne Todd (left) and Steve Gruhn ascending the southeast ridge of Peak 4613 in the Kenai Mountains. North Resurrection Peak dominates the background at right.

Photo by Carrie Wang

## SEPTEMBER MEETING

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

## Hiking and Climbing Schedule

### MCA Ice-Climbing Festival September 21-23 at the Matanuska Glacier

Learn how to ice climb or improve upon your ice climbing techniques. This is a two-day instructional ice-climbing weekend. All abilities welcome. Must be 18 years old. Some equipment is available to borrow. Mandatory meeting Tuesday, September 18th, location and time to be announced. Registration is available online beginning September 1 at <http://www.mtnclubak.org>. Registration will close September 14 and late registration is not available. Cost: \$85 (does not include: rentals, gas, or food) plus MCA membership. For more information contact: MCA Ice Fest Coordinator Jayme Mack, [mcaicefest@gmail.com](mailto:mcaicefest@gmail.com) or (907)-382-0212.

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## Climbing Notes

Wayne Todd emailed that Doug Munoz, Stuart Parks, and he climbed Peak 5950 and Peak 6153, both in the East Fork of the Chandalar River drainage, and Peak 7426 in the East Fork of the Chandalar River and Hulahula River drainages in the Philip Smith Mountains. We look forward to including a detailed trip report in an upcoming issue of *the Scree*.

**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 11th 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.

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

## Choate's Chuckle - Tom Choate

Climbers who don't think a fall would be life-threatening don't understand the gravity of the situation.

Online? Click me!



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



# Mount Ascension (5710 feet), Peak 4613, and Peak 4144, Kenai Mountains

Text by Steve Gruhn; photos by Wayne Todd

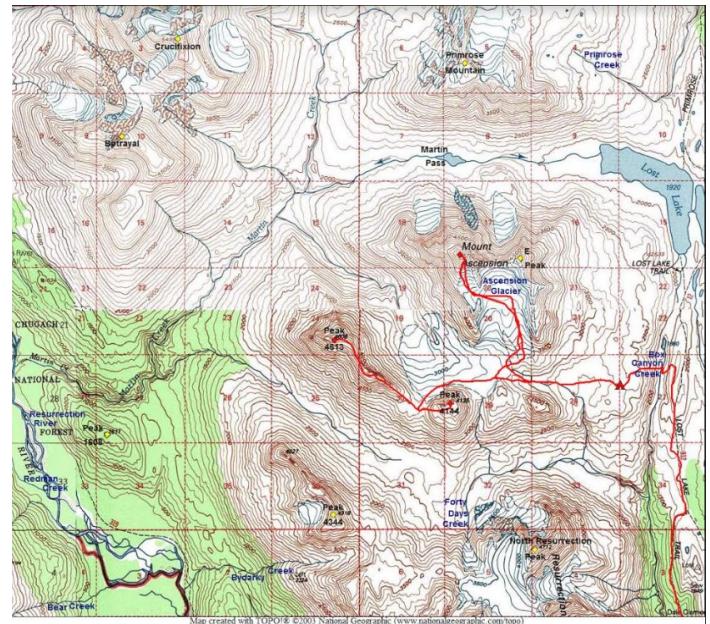


*Composite photo showing, from left, Peak 4144, Peak 4613, and Mount Ascension.*

While sailing across the Gulf of Alaska in 1792, Alexander Baranov encountered a storm and entered a bay for refuge. The storm abated on Easter Sunday, so Baranov named the harbor *Voskresenskaya Gavan* (Resurrection Sunday Harbor). That name later morphed into Resurrection Bay. In 1869, the name Cape Resurrection was applied to a point on the southeastern edge of Resurrection Bay. By 1904 the stream at the head of the bay was called the Resurrection River. In 1930 the U.S. Coast & Geodetic Survey named the peninsula east of Baranov's refuge the Resurrection Peninsula. In June 1967 the MCA's Geographic Names Committee petitioned the State Geographic Names Board and the U.S. Board on Geographic Names to name the summits north of the Resurrection River the Resurrection Peaks; the name became official in the second quarter of 1969.

In June 1967 the MCA's Geographic Names Committee proposed to name the 5710-foot peak north of the Resurrection Peaks and south of Martin Pass as Pointed Peak, but that name was rejected by the State Geographic Board in October of that year. Ten days after Vin Hoeman and his wife Grace made the first recorded ascent of the peak on October 6, 1968 (see the November 1968 *Scree*), he proposed the name Mount Ascension to commemorate the ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven. The name followed the Messianic theme of geographic names in the area – specifically Resurrection Bay, the Resurrection River, and the pending proposal of the Resurrection Peaks — and was officially adopted by the U.S. Board on Geographic Names on February 4, 1969.

Hoeman proposed additional names in line with the Messianic theme for other features in the vicinity, including Betrayal (5075 feet), Conception (4850 feet), Crucifixion (5495), Forty Days Creek (flowing westerly from north and east of the Resurrection Peaks to Box Canyon Creek), and Nativity (4904 feet), but those proposed names were never officially adopted. Other unofficial Messianic-themed names in the area include the Ascension Glacier, North Resurrection Peak, and South Resurrection Peak.



Mount Ascension is the third-most prominent peak in the Kenai Mountains and was featured in the May 2016 *Scree* as the Peak of the Month. Upon researching Mount Ascension, I became interested in climbing it, as well as a couple unnamed peaks to the south and southwest. After a false start in August 2016, I was anxious to make another attempt.

On the hot afternoon of Friday, July 20, Wayne Todd, Carrie Wang, and I met Martin Bril (from Kasilof) at the southern trailhead of the Lost Lake Trail. We biked up the trail (OK, they biked up the trail and I pushed my bike up the trail) to the high point of the trail at 677 meters (2221 feet) where we stashed our bikes.

Wayne led us down the steep, grassy slope to the west, across Box Canyon Creek, and up the steep, vegetated slope on the other side. At the top of the slope we emerged onto a bench pockmarked with small ponds, streams, and snowfields. We found a decent and scenic campsite at about 2600 feet on a small ridge above a snow-rimmed pond to the north. After dinner we turned in early so that we could get an early start before the snow would begin to soften



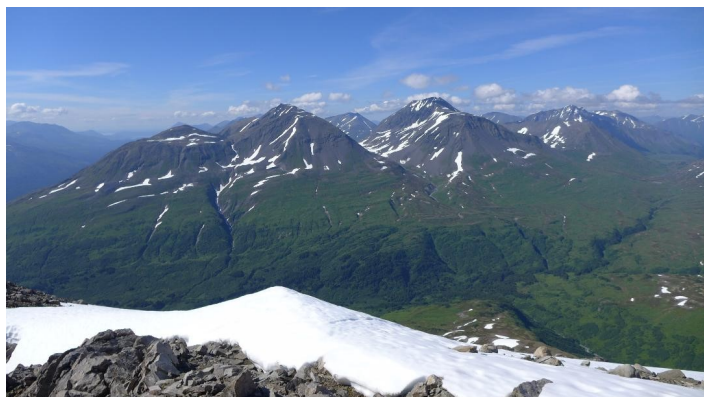


*Mount Ascension from the saddle between Peak 4144 and Peak 4613.*

under the sunny skies forecast for the weekend.

Martin and I left camp at about 7:30 a.m. on the 21st and headed west, toward the toe of the Ascension Glacier. Wayne and Carrie had previously climbed Mount Ascension and weren't interested in climbing it again. The Ascension Glacier has two main distributaries. After seeing the crevasses on the western one, we opted to ascend the eastern distributary. We roped up and ascended the glacier, generally staying toward the eastern side of the glacier to avoid crevasses. After the glacier became more level at about 4100 feet, we turned sharply to the west and crossed the glacier to the bottom of a snowfield. That snowfield had been marked on the USGS maps as a glacier, but after decades of warming, no ice remained. At the bottom of the snowfield, we unroped. Martin ascended the gravel on the east side of the snowfield and I ascended the snowfield until the sun began to turn the snow to slush, at which point I ascended the gravel on the west side of the snowfield. A short hike from the top of the snowfield led to the summit cairn. We found a register, signed it, and replaced it.

From the summit I noted that the lake at Martin Pass north of Mount Ascension, indicated on the USGS map as having two outlets, only drained to the east, toward Lost Lake. It no longer drained to Martin Creek. I also took a look to the south and southwest to scope out clues to aid in our ascents of the other two peaks.



*View northwest across Martin Creek from Peak 4613 of Betrayal (left), Crucifixion (center), and Peak 4450 (right).*



*Carrie Wang (right) and Steve Gruhn make their way up Peak 4613 as Peak 4144 (left) and North Resurrection Peak dominate the background.*

We were headed back down before 11:30. Upon reaching the top of the snowfield, I realized I had left my sunglasses at the summit. About face. Upward I marched to the summit a second time. Martin hiked down the scree on the east side of the snowfield and waited for me to join him. I returned by plunge-stepping and boot-skiing down the snowfield. After a lunch break we roped up and retraced our steps to the toe of the eastern distributary of the Ascension Glacier.

We unroped and made our way toward the toe of the western distributary of the Ascension Glacier, crossing an unnamed tributary of Martin Creek north of Peak 4144 (1263 meters). Shortly after we crossed the stream, we encountered Wayne's and Carrie's tracks. We followed them to the saddle west of Peak 4144.

Wayne and Carrie had left camp an hour after us and hiked to the saddle, climbed Peak 4144, left a pill-bottle register under a summit rock, hung out on the summit watching our progress on Mount Ascension, and returned to the saddle to wait for us. They had found no sign of any previous ascent, but they had encountered a coyote along the way.

After a brief rest and hydration break, the four of us set out to



*A herd of mountain goats encountered on the southeast ridge of Peak 4613 during the ascent of that peak.*



ascend the southeast ridge of Peak 4613 (1406 meters). The route was pretty straightforward until we reached an exposed gen-darme around 4400 feet. From Mount Ascension that spot had appeared to be the only difficulty along the ridge.

Martin had been in the lead, but stymied by this obstacle, had turned around. Once that decision had been made, he was bound for home. Wayne and I poked around on the south slopes a few dozen feet below the ridge crest and found that by crossing some steep snow patches we were both able to regain the ridge separately without a terrible amount of effort. Our whippets were certainly handy, though.

Carrie followed us and brought the news of Martin's departure. The remaining three of us hiked up to the summit and admired the clusters of pixie-eyed primroses we encountered en route. We found no evidence of prior ascents on the summit. We gazed across Martin Creek at the prominent peaks named by Hoeman – Betrayal and Crucifixion.

After a brief respite and some photo snapping, we were began to retrace our steps to the saddle. At the saddle I rested a bit and quizzed Wayne and Carrie about their route on Peak 4144. It was quite sunny and one of the hottest days of the year. As a result, I was quite dehydrated and sweating profusely. I wanted to rest up before deciding whether to attempt Peak 4144. Wayne and Carrie began the trek back to camp while I rested, fueled, and hydrated for another half hour.

Feeling better, I decided to try Peak 4144. It was a pretty straightforward ascent up the western slopes to the lower-angled slopes on the southwestern aspect. The middle of the three summits was the highest. I didn't linger when I reached the summit. I didn't locate the register that Wayne later told me that he had left. I immediately retraced my steps, finding a cairn that Wayne and Carrie had placed to mark the west-facing gully to descend. In the middle of the steepest part of that gully, with my weight on my whippet, the whippet strap broke. What lousy timing! Fortunately, I was able to grip the shaft and descended without further difficulty.

Back at the saddle, I rehydrated and then promptly had a bout of the dry heaves; they are not recommended. I recovered and set out following Wayne's and Carrie's tracks to camp. The terrain on the bench southeast of Mount Ascension is pockmarked with many similar-looking kettle ponds, knolls, and ridges so it took me an extra hour to find camp. By 10:30, when I arrived at camp, Wayne and Carrie had already bedded down for the evening. I fired up the stove, rehydrated a freeze-dried meal, ate a few spoonfuls, and then decided I wanted rest more than food.

Up late the next morning, I slowly got moving and packed my gear as fog rolled up from the valley below. Wayne and Carrie set out

before I did. I met them at the bikes in the fog about an hour after they had arrived. We set out biking down the trail in the fog. I'm by no means an expert cyclist and I quickly found out what it's like to do an endo. Fortunately, I was wearing a helmet, but I still hurt my chest. Endos are also not recommended.

After an ordeal of pushing, riding, and crashing, I met Wayne and Carrie in the parking lot, where we loaded up and headed for breakfast in Seward at The Smoke Shack (recommended), a fine end to a very satisfying, albeit taxing, weekend.



*Carrie Wang biking up the Lost lake Trail.*



*Above: Steve Gruhn walking his bike up the Lost Lake Trail.*

*Below: Steve Gruhn (top), Martin Bril (middle), and Carrie Wang descending to Box Canyon Creek en route to camp.*





# Peaks 3450, 4450, and 4032, Chugach Mountains

Text by Wayne L. Todd, with Carrie Wang

June 2018



*Carrie backdropped by the deep Chugach on Peak 4032.*

*Photo by Wayne Todd*

*Trail on map + new area = trip – river crossingx2.*

Three easy peaks neighbor Lion Head to the east, with the caveat of being separated by a river, the Matanuska River.

Surely a trail marked on the USGS maps must still exist. Utilizing Google Earth perhaps confirms this.

As we ground-truth around Milepost 110 where the obvious trail should be, instead there are fresh dirt roads with "No Trespassing" signs.

Carrie advises checking at the nearby Grand View RV Park. We meet Dwight who is not only the park owner, but also the other landowner. He gives us permission and directions to the trail, but with concerns about us getting hurt. He had not heard of packrafts.

The trail, mostly used by moose these days, is still in good shape. It was a Meekin trail, which he used for hunting said moose decades ago. At the very swollen Matanuska River, we scout and find a good put-in location. Slightly downriver the river tapers to a minor canyon with towers that remind me of some inner-Earth movie scene. A moose cow and young calf walk up the river bed on the far side. We don't witness any parental moose abuse of her trying to cross the main channel.

We're dressed for just crossing, not rafting, so I'm grateful I don't get flipped when the abrupt eddy line grabs my boat. After walking a lesser braid, finding a suitable hanging tree (sounds like a western), and reconfiguring for hiking, we briefly search for the trail on this side (at almost three hours for the

prep, crossing and de-prep gives us a D in math and is an inefficient red flag).

We ascend steep rock, talus, and pebble sand, somewhere in the vicinity of where the trail is or was. Odd vehicle-size earth piles indicate tailing piles, but they are just from odd erosion. The pebble sand is worse than ascending scree. If you "stop," you continuously slide down – an incentive not to stop and avoid it wherever possible.

The "steeps" abruptly about a plateau around 3000 feet. We are expecting alpine, but to our chagrin it's knee-high brush with pockets of alders. A moose and calf ... Peak 3450 is just to our right, so we carry

packs up in case we descend an alternate direction. The top of 3450 is alpine with feng-shui-dappled boulders and trees. The



*Carrie Wang climbing talus above the South Fork of the Matanuska River.*

*Photo by Wayne Todd*



*Wayne Todd stretching on Feng Shui boulder.*

*Photo by Carrie Wang*



views are good, but not stunning, partly due to the other peaks blocking the good stuff.

We try shortcutting off to our destination of a campsite below Peak 4450, but we find a cliff, a serious one of hundreds of feet which leads us back to our up route. Numerous moose trails back on the plateau lead here and there, so we sporadically use them. At very-full Rock Glacier Creek, we soon find a reasonable crossing. A bit higher at a lake oasis, we declare campsite. Oddly, we have not seen any wildlife (excluding moose) or birds; the mosquitoes are even mostly non-existent.

An evening stroll west reveals more small lakes, making ours less oasis-y. We note Peak 4032 also has a serious steep east side. Genuine alpine flowers punctuate the waning light.

During the night I hear ptarmigan and numerous songbirds. Now that's more like it, except for the sleep interruption. A low-cloud morning delays our departure slightly, but as per the forecast the day quickly segues to mostly sunny, except when it's mostly cloudy.

Well on our way to 4450 and in luxurious alpine, Carrie "notifies" a black bear by our camp. Using my 30x camera, I confirm and wonder, "Where is our tent?" At this distance we can do nothing, so continue upward; slightly higher our tent comes into view.



Map of ghoulish Peak 4450.

On the ghoulish face (see topo map) of 4450 we are rewarded with stunning views of alpine lakes visually blending/leading to the expansive Matanuska Glacier dwarfed/towered by the big ice and snow peaks of the Chugach (Mount Marcus Baker, Mount Sergeant Robinson ... tapering to Mount Wickersham and the "A"

peaks). This would be an amazing campsite.

Dropping back to alpine brush zone en route to 4032, we work the moose trails well and mostly avoid any serious brush. On the flanks of 4032, we spy a cow moose with young calf (are we being followed?) that fortunately move away from our intended direction. After passing hundreds of alpine flowers, we find the views from 4032 good, but a bit lacking compared to those

from 4450. There's definitely a new view of Lion Head. Arcing back to camp, we avoid the chasm and most brush, again utilizing moose trails. And we find the tent undisturbed.

A slightly different exit direction from camp still places us crossing Rock Glacier Creek within visible sight of our ingress. Just across we definitely find the old map trail, which is great for travel and feeling historical, but the trail splits and then dwindles around a small wetland and we lose it. The distances are so small it doesn't really matter, but I was hoping to take it all the way to the river.

This crossing, now that we have experience and the upriver advantage, takes us only 1-½ hours (the serious boaters would still be dismayed).

We enjoy a fine dinner at the Grand View RV Park (for sale as of our trip) and pass along a grateful "Thank you."



Above: Peak 3450 and camp, with a bear somewhere.

Right: Descending to the Matanuska River.

Below: Back across the Matanuska River; tower in background.

Photos by Wayne Todd





# Mount Huxley (12216 feet), Saint Elias Mountains, Second Ascent (New Route)

Text by Ben Iwrey; photo by Andrew Peter, Saint Elias Alpine Guides

Scott Peters, Ben Iwrey, Andrew Peter – *Super-Hux*

3-4 June 2018

## Dramatis Personae

Wayne Marrs - Co-owner, Saint Elias Alpine Guides  
Scott Peters - Lead Guide  
Andrew Peter - Guide  
Ben Iwrey - Client

## Location

Columbus Glacier, Saint Elias Mountains, Wrangell-Saint Elias National Park



Route of “Super-Hux” on Mount Huxley.

Photo by Andrew Peter

It was immediately clear we’d be contending with more unknowns than usual, even by the standards of our beloved Switzerland-plus-sized heaven-on-earth. *Can an Otter land on skis there? Will Paul Claus be willing to land us? What about those seracs and that traverse? Will the beta have held up all these years? Are we good enough?* The three of us gathered in Wayne Marrs' office to pore over what little beta he had, which was still a treatise compared to what we could find online. It didn’t take much chin-stroking to formulate Plans B, C, D, and E in case the weather or landing conditions wouldn’t get us there – beautiful and worthy objectives all. Heck, some were at least as enticing as Plan A (Mount Natazhat).

## **June 1**

Paul and Jay Claus landed with two Super Cubs with tundra wheels. We were not willing to drag sleds through sand in mountaineering boots for two days before hitting the route proper – that is the wrong species of suffering. Discussion began, and in a moment of silence, Jay casually asked, “Have you guys thought about Huxley?” Andrew Peter had mentioned it in an email

months earlier, and it hadn’t come to anything. But there it was: a virtually untouched, named, technical peak in heaven’s most spectacular neighborhood. My adult alter-ego voiced his concern that the switch to the Twin Otter at Ultima Thule Outfitters and the additional flight miles would force me to miss a mortgage payment. Paul assured my (ban)alter-ego it wouldn’t, and hotter heads prevailed. Plan Q: *execute!*

Scott Peters, appropriately, took the copilot’s seat, and his comm chatter with Paul told me the spire off the Otter’s nose was something special. We were within a few miles when I got my first look. *No WAY we can do that.* I managed to keep the adult alter-ego in check that time. We landed around 8800 feet on a fork of the Columbus Glacier, enticingly and butt-clenching-ly close to the western flank of Mount Saint Elias. Paul took off down-glacier, and after digging our landing-zone cache, loading up sleds, and strapping on skis, we began skinning up 10-degree snow. We crested a bump to see a clear line of wolverine tracks crossing our path on a level patch. Thus was born Wolverine Camp.

## June 2

We woke to iffy weather: intermittent visibility and snow, but light wind. We threw on skins and skied southeast to check out Paul and Jay's beta. After discussion, we decided to climb the face near camp instead of the back side.

## June 3

We woke early and began packing for the summit push. Scott led off at 5:40 a.m., I followed in the middle, and Andrew picked up the tail end. Scott's and my bivouac experience on University Peak in 2017 had convinced us to bring a sleeping bag for each climber. We packed a single Z-Rest, two liters of water each, enough snacks to last two days, and no stove. Thirty minutes of slogging through shin-high snow brought us to the face proper. This entailed approximately 2,000 feet of sustained 45- to 60-degree snow and ice up to AI2+. Proper calf-resting spots were vanishingly rare, and the exposure was spectacular. While clearing ice for a screw placement, Scott let loose a dinner plate that crashed into my knee; it wasn't until two days later that I realized it had been cut pretty badly, and I later developed an infection that took weeks to clear up. We continued in what appeared to be deteriorating weather, though the wind was negligible.

We reached an overhanging rock shelter in virtual ping-pong-ball conditions, and we treated this as the go/no-go point. Andrew and I were wary about the weather and noted that we hadn't yet

seen the summit pyramid that day; Scott said he wasn't ready to throw in the towel, and Andrew and I – perhaps dreading the prospect of re-ascending that face – agreed to continue. It wasn't 20 minutes later that the cloud cover parted to reveal the "Middle Finger" rock spire (my term) and Mount Huxley's summit. Andrew to Scott: "Do you ever get tired of being right?" Scott: "It's a burden sometimes." We began the lengthy traverse under the summit pyramid's hanging glacier, intent on gaining the west ridge, rather than taking on the nasty-looking mixed climb up the east ridge. The ridge itself involved some interesting route-finding challenges and an AI3+ corniced step that forced Scott to ascend pack-free before giving us a belay and hauling. A short snow traverse led us to the tiny, fragile, corniced summit; we managed to squeeze all three of us on top without a collapse. We left the summit around 9:00 p.m., reaching the col from which we first accessed the ridge around 11:00. We settled in for a pretty comfortable bivouac: light snow, 15 to 20 degrees Fahrenheit, and still no wind.

## June 4

As with most bivies, we didn't sleep super well, but we were comfortable and tired enough to stay in our bags until 7:30 a.m. We began the traverse-in-reverse under bright skies, finally reaching the face around 1:00 p.m. Five rappels took us to terrain we could comfortably down-climb, and we returned to Wolverine Camp at 5:45 p.m.

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## WHAT IS CLIMBING ?

by Tom Choate    November 11, 2015

Climbing is not a sport, although good climbers train athletically.

Climbing is not a business, the return on investment is joy.

Climbing is not an art, even if many climbers take great photos.

Climbing is not a craft, even though climbers design good gear.

Perhaps climbing is an emotion, because so many are passionate.

But I think climbing is a disease, because once you are infected, it is INCURABLE. Sometimes it is even deadly!



# "Time-Dilation Traverse" in the Arrigetch Peaks

Text by Mick Davis



*Panoramic view southwest from The Citadel. A: Thunder Ridge; B: Sodden Peak (a.k.a. Moria); C: Marshall Peak; D: Shot Tower; E: Battleship; F: Arthur Emmons Peak; G: The Pyramid; H: Locomotive Peak; I: Independence Pass; J: Wichmann Tower; K: The Badile; L: The Maidens; M: Xanadu Peak; N: Escape Col; O: Ariel Peak; P: Caliban Peak; Q: The Albatross; R: The Parabola; S: Elephant's Tooth*

*Photo by Mick Davis*

## **Summary:**

Our two-member team spent two days hiking from Takahula Lake into the Arrigetch Peaks via the Aiyagomahala Valley. We set up a tent camp on the valley floor and gained the ridge forming the north side of the valley. Over the course of three days we traversed from the east side of Slot Tower to the summit of the West Maiden, climbing the East Ridge of Slot Tower (III, 5.6, 4 pitches.), the South Face of The Citadel (III, 5.9, 4 pitches), the East Ridge of East Maiden Peak (5.8, III, 4 pitches) and the East Ridge of West Maiden (III, 5.5, 4 pitches). We spent two days at base camp waiting out a storm and then climbed Thunder Ridge (IV, 5.6) to within three pitches of the summit before snow flurries wetted the rock enough to stop our progress. We rested and waited on unsettled weather, but ran out of time for additional climbs before hiking the 18 hours back to Takahula Lake in time to meet our floatplane. We have dubbed the four-peak traverse from Slot Tower to West Maiden the "Time-Dilation Traverse" (IV, 5.9). Everything in the Arrigetch Peaks was bigger than it looked and took longer than we expected. Time seemed to rush past and leave us behind as we moved through climbs or approaches and then appeared to wallow around us while we sat stationary and soaked in bivy sacks or dry and restless in the tent. When coupled with 24 hours of daylight and zero contact with others, the effect was that time lost all meaning. The days ran together and we lost track of them. There were no nights. Our motion was governed by the weather, which varied by the minute and the meter, and at times felt determined according to dice thrown by the devil.

## **Report:**

In the center of the primarily volcanic Brooks Range of Alaska lies a remote pocket of granite peaks and spires that have been

glacier-carved into otherworldly topographies to create an alpine climber's dream. Aptly named *Arrigetch*, meaning fingers of the outstretched hand in the language of the Inupiat, the peaks lie well north of the Arctic Circle and deep within the Alaskan Bush. The area is now encompassed by Gates of the Arctic National Park, a vast trail-free wilderness the size of Switzerland, and has only seen roughly 50 expeditions since climbers first visited the area in the early 1960s.

Our two-member team spent two days hiking from Takahula Lake into the Arrigetch Peaks via the Aiyagomahala Valley. The main ridge forming the north side of Aiyagomahala Valley contains nine major peaks and many smaller gendarmes. We hoped to explore the unclimbed east ridge of Slot Tower and then continue east to west along the main ridge climbing the major peaks for whatever distance weather, food, water sources, and energy would permit.

Four hours and 3,000 feet of talus brought us from base camp on Aiyagomahala Creek to the main ridgetop near the east edge of Slot Tower. We climbed the East Ridge (5.6R III) in four pitches. The first pitch of the East Ridge negotiated 200 feet of 5<sup>th</sup>-class gendarmes along the ridge to reach the higher-angle slabs. The second pitch angled left across slabs and overlaps and under a small roof before turning up the left edge of the ridge to eventually meet the left side of the major roof formed by a large fang. The fang was the most obvious feature on the ridge and was easily visible from the valley floor. Pitch 3 skirted left of the fang and through a notch above it, to the base of a gully. Pitch 4 exited the gully on the left and climbed easy terrain to an exposed 5.6 move over a large boulder and onto the summit.

Weather rolled in just as we summited, so we quickly downclimbed about 150 feet of 4<sup>th</sup>- and 5<sup>th</sup>-class terrain heading

westward to the Slot Chimney exit. A single 200-foot rappel down the chimney in a heavy rain provided a quick escape onto to wet 4<sup>th</sup>-class terrain and careful down-climbing brought us to the saddle between Slot Tower and The Citadel, where we hunkered down to wait out the rain.

Soaking wet in our bivy sacks, but still warm after eight hours of nearly continuous rain, we felt a sudden temperature drop and the rain abruptly turned to snow. Then shivering in near-zero visibility, we decided it was time to descend, just as the snow turned to graupel. After descending roughly 1,000 feet, we broke through the mist, the rain slowed, and visibility improved. We dried out and watched the weather settle before eventually heading back up toward the ridge. The most logical route from our current position was to ascend talus and 3<sup>rd</sup>-class slabs to the looming south face of The Citadel and climb the previously established South Face route (III, 5.9, 4 pitches). On The Citadel's summit we realized that descending would put us in the shade of the ridge, while a bivy on the summit would enjoy sunshine for several more hours, so we elected to catch up on sleep missed during the storm bivy.

While descending the 4<sup>th</sup>-class west ridge of Citadel the next morning, we spotted a tiny patch of snow on the north side of the main ridge, which we used, in its entirety, to make tea and fill bottles before heading west along the ridge toward The Maidens. Finding water was a challenge on the ridge traverse. Aside from the small snow patch and the rainstorm, we found no water sources. The main ridge crest was riddled with small spires and gendarmes, many were dirty and loose, but a few looked solid and interesting. The time required for us to negotiate those many features would burn most of our expected weather window and leave little time for climbing The Maidens, so we dropped off the ridge and traversed the talus, at times descending beneath slabs wet from the storm.

We eventually regained the main ridge crest on a flat grassy area several hundred feet east of East Maiden. We simul-climbed exposed gendarmes to the base of the East Ridge, which we then climbed direct in two full pitches and a short finishing pitch. The first pitch was a runout 5.7 slab up



*The east ridge of Slot Tower and the southwest face of The Citadel.*

*Photo by Mick Davis*

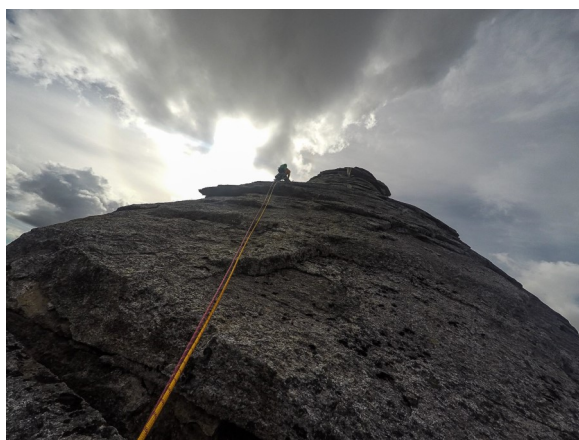
to a large ledge.

Pitch 2 moved right on the ledge and up a 20-foot left-facing corner (5.8) to a large roof, which we passed on the right with the assistance of a massive flake jutting out past the corner from the slab on the right. Mike Taormina placed a piton to protect a leftward traverse above the roof on a lichen-covered slab before turning up the 5.6 slab and finishing the pitch just below the summit. A short 5<sup>th</sup>-class pitch led to the summit. That East Ridge route (III, 5.8, 3 pitches) likely met the South Face to

East Ridge route (5.8) established by Peter, Michael, and Carl Lehner in 1976 [*Ed. note: see pages 165 and 166 of the 1977 American Alpine Journal*], but we were uncertain about the amount of overlap. Our East Ridge route, direct from the main ridge crest, might have been new terrain. The Arrigetch climbing report put out by Gates of the Arctic National Park (2003) lists the first ascent of East Maiden as the “*East Ridge, likely 4<sup>th</sup> class,*” but that appeared to be inaccurate. The actual trip report from the expedition responsible for the first ascent describes climbing the 4<sup>th</sup>-class *West Ridge* of East Maiden (see Michael Westmacott's “*Arrigetch,*” published on pages 109 through 116 of the 1967 *Alpine Journal*).

We descended the 4<sup>th</sup>-class West Ridge of the East Maiden to the saddle between East Maiden and West Maiden and then summited West Maiden via its low-5<sup>th</sup>-class East Ridge. We rappelled and down-climbed the East Ridge and then settled down for a high bivy with another gorgeous view, for which The Camel in particular lived up to its name.

Low on food and water with a large storm forecast to arrive the next day, we returned to base camp in the morning by descend-



*Mick Davis leading the first pitch of the east ridge of East Maiden Peak, a runout 5.7 slab.*

*Photo by Mike Taormina*

ing the gully leading from the saddle between The Maidens for roughly 600 feet and then cutting east across talus and tundra and down to the creek. We have dubbed this four-peak traverse from Slot Tower to West Maiden the “*Time-Dilation Traverse*” (IV, 5.9). Everything in the Arrigetch Peaks was bigger than it looked and took longer than we anticipated. When coupled with 24 hours of daylight and zero contact with others, the effect was that time lost all meaning. The days ran togeth-



er and we lost track of them. There were no nights. Our motion was governed by the weather, which varied by the minute and the meter, and at times felt determined according to dice thrown by the devil.

After almost two days in the tent, the weather cleared enough to warrant an attempt at climbing. We packed up and headed up-valley to investigate Battleship, the cirque below Wichmann Tower, and the remaining peaks on the west end of the main ridge. Arriving about midnight, we found Battleship, the Wichmann cirque headwall, and the talus and slab approaches to Disneyland and The Badile all still wet. We made tea and watched the clouds envelop Wichmann Tower before returning to camp in a light rain.

The next afternoon the weather cleared and we headed for Thunder Ridge (IV, 5.6).

We crossed the creek and climbed 1000 feet of tundra and talus to the ridge, which gradually transitioned from 3<sup>rd</sup>- to 4<sup>th</sup>- to low-5<sup>th</sup>-class before sharpening into a beautiful 5.6 knife-edge.

Just as we reached classic 5.6 slab-with-cracks climbing, snow began to blow in from up-valley. The wind kept the rock dry and we climbed on, reaching a high point within one or two pitches of the summit ridge complex before the clouds enveloped us, visibility dropped, and humidity rose. At that point the rock wetted, the lichen swelled, and the slab became treacherous. We began rappelling down the west side of the ridge. We had difficulties finding rappel anchors among the compact slabs and overlaps on the west side of the ridge and placed two pitons to continue our descent. Seven 200-foot rappels brought us to wet, 4<sup>th</sup>-class, grassy ledges and slabs, which we carefully down-climbed for another 500 feet to the floor of the cirque below Moria [Ed. note: *This is the same peak that Michael and Sally Westmacott called Sodden Peak following their two unsuccessful attempts in 1964 (see page 318 of the 1965 AAJ).*] We arrived back at camp as the weather began to clear just enough for us to dry out and use the day to recover from 20 hours of continuous motion.

We woke to an unsettled forecast, so we decided to rest and enjoy the scenery on our last day in the valley before beginning the bushwhack back toward Takahula Lake the following day, vowing to return the entire way.

*Right: Mike Taormina leading the second pitch of the east ridge of East Maiden Peak, a 5.8 corner to a massive flake under a roof.*

*Photo by Mick Davis*

*Below: The Camel from the East Maiden Peak-West Maiden saddle.*

*Photo by Mike Taormina*



*Left: Mike Taormina negotiating a wet Thunder Ridge as the lichen begins to rehydrate.*

*Photo by Mick Davis*

*Right: Mick Davis contemplating an unsettled forecast and short time remaining in the Arrigetch Peaks.*

*Photo by Mike Taormina*



# Day-Hiking Mount Fairweather (15325 feet), Fairweather Range

Text by Greg Slayden



*Greg Slayden and Steven Song descending the west ridge of Mount Fairweather at sunset.*

*Photo by Eric Gilbertson*



Mount Fairweather (15325 feet) is well-known as perhaps the worst-named peak on earth – its altitude and maritime location mean it is regularly pummeled by long-lasting storms. But it is also a very alluring goal for peakbaggers as the 27<sup>th</sup>-most prominent peak on earth (2<sup>nd</sup> in Alaska), the British Columbia high point, and the apex of Glacier Bay National Park.

The standard route on the peak starts by flying to about 9600 feet on the Grand Plateau Glacier. Some might consider this “cheating” and prefer a sea-to-summit expedition, but for most mortals this option provides the right amount of challenge. From the landing zone, the summit route via the southwest valley and west ridge only gains about 5700 feet over 5.3 miles – for many strong climbers, those numbers suggest a tough but doable day hike. However, in addition to the frequent storms, other obstacles often include acclimatization; bottomless, deep snow; and huge crevasses that can entirely block the route in the southwest valley.

I turned back on Fairweather twice – in 2008 due to bad weather and deep snow, and in 2014 due to uncrossable crevasses. For my third try, my goal was to make sure that I had strong and experienced partners, that the route was in shape, and then monitor the weather and only leave home in Seattle and head for the mountain if it looked good. In 2018, things started to fall into place – I got a strong team together with super-climbers Eric Gilbertson and Steven Song, and our glacier pilot (Drake Olson from Haines) told us that prior expeditions this season had summited with no route issues – a good contrast from the 2013-2015 seasons when no one made it.

In mid-June we started looking at the weather, mainly by consulting with Drake, and when the window looked good we got a last-minute flight to Juneau and then a short hop to Haines. We arrived on the evening of June 19<sup>th</sup> and were very excited when Drake flew us out toward the peak on the morning of the 20<sup>th</sup> – the weather was stellar. Actually, it was too stellar – when we arrived above the Grand Plateau Glacier, it was freakishly warm, and the snow was too soft, and Drake would not risk a landing in the mush when he might not be able to take off. This may have been another global-warming first – unable to get to Fairweather due to the weather being too fair!

So we hung out in Haines for a couple of days in a rare heat wave, waiting for cooler temperatures – not part of our plan, but we had no choice. There was a good freeze on the night of the 21<sup>st</sup>, and Drake was able to fly Eric to the landing zone on the morning of the 22<sup>nd</sup> – it was a perfect bluebird day above a marine layer. Eric set up a tent and basecamp while Drake went back and fetched Steven and me, and once together at camp, we decided to take advantage of the weather and get going as soon as possible. By 10:30 a.m., the three of us were skiing up toward the southwest valley, going fast and light.

The snow surface was hard and icy. We gained a gentle 1700 vertical feet over 2.5 miles, and then the slope got steeper, so we cached our skis and just headed up on crampons. Steve did a great job of routefinding up through a serac-fall zone, past the usual high camp basin at 12300 feet, and then up the headwall to the west ridge col. The route was indeed in great shape, with the snow bridges over the big slots strong and trivial to cross.



We took a rest at the col at 3:20 p.m., and then started heading up the broad west ridge. There was one relatively steep ice step, but otherwise it was easy cramponing up a surface of ice crystals and pockets of powder snow, with no crevasse danger.

The only real issue I had was feeling the altitude – hiking from 10000 to 15000 feet after spending months at sea level immediately prior is generally not recommended. Eric and Steven (whose combined ages were close to mine alone) raced ahead, breaking trail and placing wands, while I plodded on, sucking wind. The weather was holding, and I really wanted this peak, and my partners were kind enough to wait on top for over an hour. I reached the summit at 7:50 p.m., exhausted, and the three of us had a brief celebration. The marine layer blocked the famous ocean views, and some high cirrus was slightly concerning, so we headed down after I had been there 15 minutes.

We all cruised downhill very quickly – gravity was a great cure for my altitude fatigue. We were a bit dehydrated, hungry, and tired, but just wanted to get back to camp quickly. Eric melted some snow in his stove during a break at the col, and at our ski cache it took us a while to get our gear swapped and ski across a field of frozen snowballs. But the final two miles were a blast as we schussed across the low-angle icy glacier in the increasing darkness. We got to camp just before midnight, not needing our headlamps. Our “day hike” of Fairweather had taken 13 hours, 20 minutes.

Very tired, we made some dinner and retreated into the tent, where we slept for the hour or two of solstice darkness. In the morning we woke up to another incredible bluebird day, called up Drake on the satellite phone, and two plane trips later we were back at the airport. We may have set a record by climbing Fairweather in just over 24 hours, Haines to Haines. And the stars were definitely aligned for us as we were able to arrange a quick flight from Haines to Juneau, and once in Juneau quickly board a flight to Seattle. I was dropped off at my home at 8 p.m., less than 24 hours after standing on top of Fairweather.

We were very lucky to pull off this quick ascent – especially Eric and Steven, because I had paid some dues on two previous expeditions. I know climbers who needed four or more multi-day expeditions to get this coveted peak, and one buddy who spent eight days at basecamp trapped by blizzards before escaping, without ever heading uphill. But our luck was partly due to planning and flexibility – this is a trip where it really pays to wait for good conditions and weather before even thinking about heading there. Capable and fit partners with the same philosophy are essential, too, as is an experienced glacier pilot like Drake. When everything goes right, it is indeed possible to “day hike” Fairweather.



*Base camp on the north side of Mount Fairweather.  
Photo by Eric Gilbertson*



*Greg Slayden and Steven Song skinning up to the west col.  
Photo by Eric Gilbertson*



*The team, left to right: Steve Song, Greg Slayden, and Eric Gilbertson  
on the summit of Mount Fairweather.  
Photo by Steven Song*

# Mount Soggy (7190 feet), Western Chugach Mountains

Text and photos by Shane Ohms

June 1<sup>st</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2018



*Sophie Tidler and Shane Ohms on the summit of Mount Soggy on a perfect day.*

For the past few years, I've predicted and anticipated Mount Soggy being the most fantastic of the Chugach climbs; a wondrous mile-long snowy ridgeline culminating atop a 7000-foot perch. Although it is an impressive 7190 feet high, making it the tenth-highest peak in Chugach State Park, it is remarkable that it still manages to be dwarfed by virtually all of its closest mountain neighbors. No other mountain, in my mind, could be as iconic as Mount Soggy.

The main challenges associated with Mount Soggy are the Twinsicle Glacier and the necessity for stable snow conditions. For this reason, May to early June is considered the ideal time for climbing Soggy and I concluded that the most ideal time of day to be traveling on the glacier and the mile-long snow ridge would be during the cold temperatures presented in the morning. Planning to land ourselves at the toe of the Twinsicle Glacier at 5 a.m. was the aim of our trip planning. The only feasible way of doing so (within the constraints of the weekend) was to hit the trail after work on a Friday, travel lightly, bivouac at the 3300-foot rock camp, and then upon Saturday morning, climb Mount Soggy, and return to the car.

It was under this agenda that John Perrin, Ryan Senko, Sophia

Tidler, and I set off from the Eagle River Nature Center trailhead at 8:10 p.m. on a Friday after work on the 1<sup>st</sup> of June. The trail miles went by with ease and only once did we (my fault) lose the trail. Along the way we ran into the two Eagle River llamas (Cerveza and Raul) and surprised one wolverine. I cached some beers in Icicle Creek to be enjoyed on the return trip.



*Zombie-walking the trail miles of Eagle River's Crow Pass Trail.*

At 11 p.m. we began gaining elevation on the backcountry trail that leads up Twin Falls Creek. The trail was nicer than I had





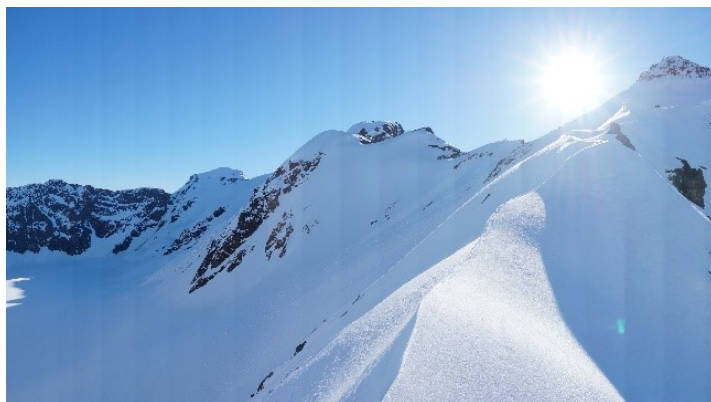
*Ryan Senko and Sophie Tidler bivying at the 3300-foot rock camp.*

anticipated it being; however, it took a bit longer to reach the 3300-foot rock camp than I had budgeted. There was a big time gap between looking at a map and estimating the time required to gain those 2500 feet and the time it actually took for the legs to do it! Nonetheless we arrived at the rock camp at the fine hour of 1:30 a.m. John and I each ate a Mountain House before joining Sophie and Senko in our reflective bivy bags at 2:30 a.m. The wind was not heavy, but it was constant and brought down all the cold from the glaciers and snow above. Little sleep was had that night. There would have been none; however, Senko had purchased a bivy sack (instead of the cheaper bivy tarps the rest of us brought) and he managed a little shut-eye on that frigid night. After shivering for an hour and receiving no sleep, Sophie and I simultaneously raised and seconded the motion to begin climbing in an effort to get some blood flowing. Around 4:30 a.m., we disembarked from the rock camp and made way for the Twinsicle Glacier.



There was much evidence of avalanche activity seen all around the valley and within the Twinsicle Glacier bowl. But the snow was firm and we pressed onward. At the toe of the glacier, John and Senko decided to return to rock camp to sleep some more because they felt they lacked the mental energy needed to stay sharp on Mount Soggy. Sophie and I pressed onward, sticking to

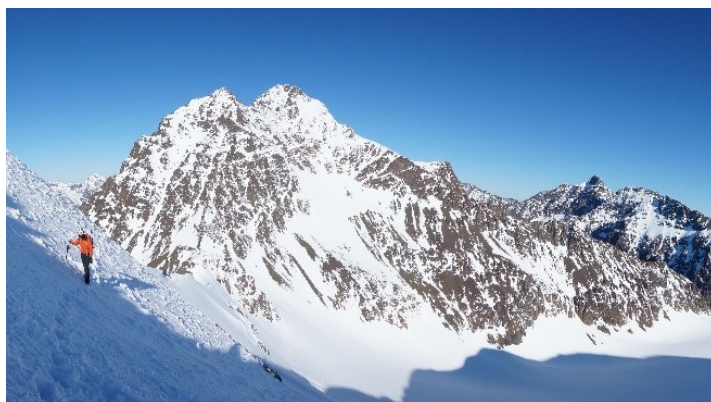
*Looking down the Twinsicle Glacier to the southern peaks already taking on sunlight.*



*The mile-long snowy ridge traverse that leads to Mount Soggy (center of photo).*

the left-hand side of the glacier, and eventually reaching Twinsicle Pass, where we could finally see the mile of snowy ridge traverse that was ahead of us.

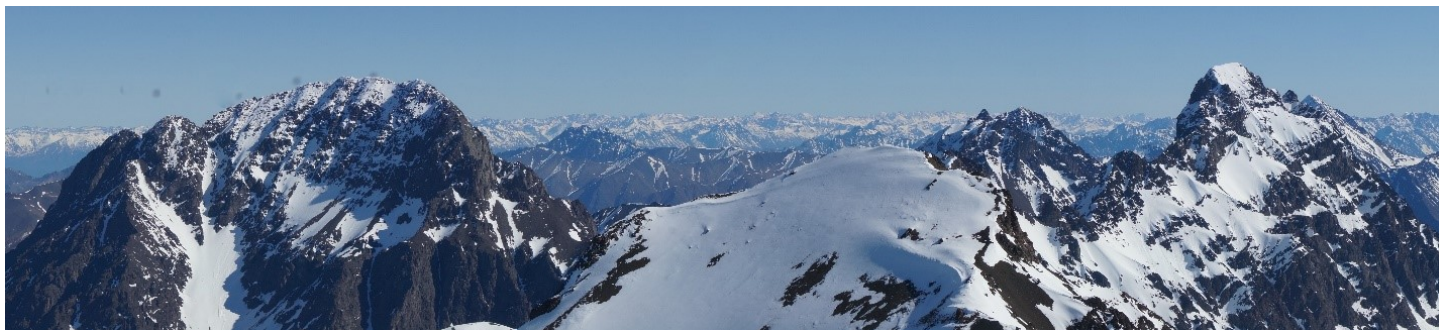
The snow conditions were perfect as we traversed the ridge high above the Icicle Glacier. Our feet rarely sank in more than four inches! Step after intentional step, we slowly made our way for the summit, all the while soaking in the majestic snow-capped views around.



*Sophie Tidler on the Mount Soggy traverse with Mount Yukla, Mount Kiliak, and East Kiliak Peak behind.*

At the summit of Mount Soggy at 9:42 a.m. on a beautiful June 2<sup>nd</sup> bluebird day, we were treated to the most amazing views of the infinite, gnarly, glaciated, and snow-covered Chugach Mountains. Mount Yukla to our west looked like a good challenge for another year. To the north were Mount Rumble and Bellicose Peak. Rumble looked like it had supplied many climbers with good memories. The intimidating Bellicose looked outright impossible. However, it was Mount Beelzebub and Devil's Mistress to our east that presented the most visually stimulating of the views. To our south was the giant expanse of rock that we call Rook Mountain. It is difficult to compare, with fairness, summit views across different seasons. But I believe the views from atop Mount Soggy were equal, if not greater, than the summit views we were given on Bashful Peak toward the





*Above: Left to right: Mount Rumble, Icicle Peak, Benign Peak, and Bellicose Peak*

*Below: Sophie Tidler feasting on prime views of Mount Beelzebub and Devil's Mistress. Rook Mountain is to the right of Sophie.*



end of the previous year's summer. My high expectations of Mount Soggy had been exceeded and I couldn't be more thankful for how perfectly things had come together.

At 10:20 a.m., we began our descent. We would have loved to have spent an additional hour sitting atop Soggy, but we didn't want the snow to soften in the sun and we didn't want to keep John and Senko waiting too long. Reversing our route was quick and easy. Although our traverse tracks were now in the open sun, the snow remained firm and stable. Descending the Twinsicle Glacier was quick, too. Multiple times we practiced self-arrest by sliding out of control on our butts and then rolling over and bringing ourselves to a stop. At 12 p.m., we strolled back into rock camp to find that John and Senko hadn't much luck getting more sleep. Apparently, the wind was stronger than it had been at night and the valley had only recently emerged from the shadows.

At 3:20 p.m., John, Senko, and I were at Icicle Creek. The three of us sprawled out in the sun and John and I enjoyed our beers (Senko does not drink). John and Senko took their boots off to dry their feet, socks, and boots. My boots were more ... soggy, but I opted to keep mine on because I knew hard it was to convince

myself to put back on a pair of wet boots. Sophie, who had stopped on the trail to cool her feet in the Eagle River, then joined us at Icicle Creek. She didn't want her beer, so I had no problem finishing it while we all enjoyed the sun's rays on the gravel bar of Icicle Creek for another half hour. At 4:20 p.m. we hopped back on the trail, only stopping at Echo Bend to drink some water. I think we can all agree that the three miles from Echo Bend to the Eagle River Nature Center are the longest three miles in all of Chugach State Park. And so, I put on my

home-stretch pace to get them over with a little faster. At 6:10 p.m., I was back at the car, quickly joined by my fellow *compadres*.

It had been an unforgettable 22 hours of exploring the Eagle River area. My excitement had carried me well through the trail miles on our return, but as soon as I was seated in the car, the effects of being awake for more than thirty hours took their toll and sleep came upon me instantly. Mount Soggy is certain to remain forever in my memory as one of my most cherished Chugach climbs.



*Sophie Tidler zipping down the Twinsicle Glacier.*



## Trails are for the Weak: Rainbow Peak (3543 feet), Front Range

Text and photos by Dave Evans



*A Dall sheep contemplates the burn area high above Turnagain Arm.*



*A fallen soldier felled and partially consumed by fire.*

### 2016

In 2016, before the fire at the McHugh Creek area along the Seward Highway, I hiked up to Rainbow Peak from the Rainbow Trailhead, and then wandered down its nearly trail-less west rib to the McHugh picnic area, through the area that later burned. On the way up to the peak, I was surprised at the number of families with children out on the rugged trail. On most other ascents, it had just been me, my wife, and an occasional Dall sheep. But that time, there were many kids, some obviously elated to be outdoors in the summer with a bluebird sky above, and others clearly not enthralled with the scrambling and effort required to make progress up the hill.

After branching off of the Old Johnson Trail and climbing higher where the route up Rainbow Peak became fairly steep and rocky, I passed a father shouting to his daughter, perhaps 12 or 13 years old, to “get back on the trail.” She was off to the side of the trail and, judging from the smile on her face, enjoying the challenge of finding foot and finger holds in the rock. In my judgment, she was not at risk of anything other than a scraped shin. She ignored her dad. When he repeated his command, she turned and, with all of the exasperation that only a teenager can muster for her parents, said “Dad, trails are for the weak!”

That put a big grin on my face as I forged ahead, fought the scree near the top, and then ambled down the west rib toward McHugh. The going was relatively easy and the scenery spectacular. After pausing to watch a bore tide work its way up Turnagain Arm, I turned a rocky corner and surprised two huge Dall sheep with curl-and-a-quarter horns. Later I also startled a raptor that appeared to have been intent on capturing some-

thing. That turned out to be a ptarmigan, which I didn’t see and nearly stepped on before it flushed.

There was no “tree line” on the west rib, but there was a daunting “alder line.” Since there was no way to bypass the alders and they offered no clear weakness to exploit, I “Tarzan-ed” and rappelled down them, using them as lifelines to prevent catastrophe in the steeper areas and swinging from them to avoid obstacles below me. During that bushwhack, the girl’s words to her dad came to me and made me smile again. It wouldn’t be the last time that day.

Alder-bashing eventually gave way to a more pleasant hemlock forest, where the route-finding and bushwhacking was easier due to game trails that had been cut back and flagged, here and there, by some Good Samaritan. The “Class V” bushwhacking started again when I reached the spruce zone, or what remained of the forest after the bark beetles had killed all of the mature trees. It was as if two giants had been playing “pick-up sticks” with thousands of massive



*Near the McHugh Creek picnic area, looking toward the Turnagain Arm Trail (Old Johnson Trail).*

spruce trees, one of them lost, and in a huff scattered the trees across my path to the McHugh picnic area.

The branches made it difficult to go over, under, or on top of the spruce trees, and often several trees were intertwined, creating an impenetrable barrier and forcing me to find a different path. Deep ravines scoring the ridge transverse to my direction of travel complicated matters, and sometimes the best route was to walk on a downed spruce spanning a ravine, 10 feet or more above a snake's nest of devil's club, or over a pit filled with the punji sticks of other dead spruce. During this several-hour effort, thinking "trails are for the weak" never failed to re-energize me and bring a smile and a laugh.

After I reached McHugh, I still had to hike back to my car at the Rainbow Trailhead, but I was out of water, and it was a hot day. I approached a young couple who had just finished a walk on the Old Johnson Trail and asked if they had any water they could spare. They gave me a long head-to-toe once-over and then I realized that I probably looked like I'd just come from a war zone, with some torn clothing and scrapes on my face. But they let me have the remainder of their water, and their kindness also brought a smile to my face every time I took a sip.

## 2017

In 2017, the bushwhack up from McHugh into the burn area was relatively easy, because many branches of the beetle-killed spruce trees had been consumed by the fire, or entire trees had been partially or fully consumed. In addition, many of the devil's club plants had burned up or, if their stalks remained, the spines had been burned, so they were easy to walk through. Nonetheless, the going was not easy by any means, and "trails are for the weak" came to mind again, with the same effects on me as in the past. I put a few waypoints into my GPS on the way up, thinking that they might help on the way back.

I found the burn area to be surprisingly green. Vast areas were covered by a dense, almost neon green moss, and in some areas the moss had an orange tint. In both cases, the moss appeared to prefer areas where the original vegetative mat had been completely consumed by the fire. The moss clung weakly to the damp underlying silty material (presumably ash), and it was easy, with a misstep on sloping ground, to accidentally shear off large patches of moss.

The bright-green moss was also deeply churned wherever moose and sheep had stepped. I saw several dozen sheep, including a contingent of large rams. No moose presented themselves, but a glossy black bear did give me a brief stare before ambling away, and a downy woodpecker announced its presence several times as it dug into a blackened trunk. Two eagles

glided over, but didn't linger.

There were also large numbers of what appeared to be foot-tall spruce trees, densely packed into smaller areas around and between the moss, duking it out in a survival-of-the-fittest battle for prominence. In some areas of the burn area, dandelions were well-established, as were other invasive plants. In a few wet locations within the burn area, the vegetation appeared to be untouched, and higher up the ridge, there were a few islands of green hemlocks in a sea of otherwise blackened trunks. I saw nothing that shouted "fire retardant was dumped here" or "seawater was poured here."

The fire did not reach the alder line, so that obstacle remained unaffected. I turned back down to McHugh after a half-hearted attempt to penetrate the alders; they yielded much easier to downhill traffic.

Back at the parking lot, I realized I had lost my car key somewhere up on the ridge. Fortunately, a couple visiting Anchorage from Nome gave me a ride and insisted on taking me directly to my home. Their kindness brought a smile to my face as I wrote this.

## 2017 Epilogue

The following weekend, I revisited the area to try to find my car key in the trail-less chaos of the burn. I hoped I'd lost the keys at one of my GPS waypoints, and my GPS promised me plus or minus 10-foot accuracy. Perfect! But that balloon was popped at the second waypoint, when the GPS said my waypoint was located about 30 feet off of a ridge in the middle of the air. After that, I figured finding the key would be impossible. But unlike the previous waypoints, the fourth was not on a rocky ridge with a great view, and I remembered the area. Vegetation narrowed down the waypoint location to one spot, and after double-checking my GPS, I looked down and there, not six inches to the right of my foot, was my key! That generated a big "yahoo!" and another big smile.



*Example of the green moss growing on top of the ash.*



# South Baleful Peak (7950 feet) Traverse; Western Chugach Mountains

Text by Cory Hinds; photos by Max Neale



On June 2, 2018, with perfect weather, Max Neale and I climbed the southwest ridge to the south summit of Baleful Peak from the Red Spot Glacier, then descended the east gully and returned to our camp at Tulchina Falls in the East Fork of the Eklutna River drainage. Our original intent was to cross the ridge between Benevolent Peak and the southwest ridge of Baleful, drop into the valley between Bashful Peak and Baleful, then climb the north ridge of Baleful to the north (true) summit. By the time we realized our navigational error, it was too late to adjust and we finished the southwest ridge, which turned out to be plenty of adventure and mileage for one day.

We started moving at about 6 a.m., reached the south summit at about 4 p.m., and stumbled back to camp at about 3 a.m. Max's GPS watch logged 22 miles and 9,000 vertical feet of climbing. Here are some notes of possible interest from the day:

- The climb up into the Red Spot Glacier basin from the East Fork was not too bad. We found a reasonable trail with some flagging here and there and a few pieces of fixed webbing/rope, probably from hunters.
- After topping out on the flagged route up into the basin, we dropped down at least several hundred feet following perceived weaknesses in the alders. Allow two to three hours to get from Tulchina Falls camp to open hiking higher in the basin.
- We found tedious post-holing in wet snow and some "snow swamp" in the basin until we gained elevation. We selected a chute (the wrong one for our original objective, as it turned out) next to the melted back Red Spot Glacier, putting on crampons when the angle steepened and the snow hardened.



- The last 30 to 40 feet before the ridge was notably steeper and required some real climbing. We had two tools each and we were glad to have them. We climbed on the left side of this "step" up a thin strip of continuous snow that had some ice underneath and typical loose rock. As we got closer to the ridge, the ice disappeared and we wallowed upward in steep snow, feeling uncomfortable with the steep exposure. It felt great to finally reach the ridge at about 6000 feet and rest in the warm sun.
- The rock on the southwest ridge was horribly fractured and friable; so much so, it was really not worth attempting to place protection – there was no competent rock to hold anything! The best approach was to weave the rope back and forth and sling an occasional block. We brought one 60-meter rope, 8-millimeter, which we felt was a good choice (due to several rappels on the descent). We removed crampons for the next 1,000 feet or so of ridge, replacing them as we reached sections where there was more snow. We encountered some low-5<sup>th</sup>-class climbing, maybe up to 5.6 or so, with some stemming. The suggested approach when climbing that type of rock is: "push, don't pull."



- When we finally got a profile view of the north ridge it looked like there were some sections of steep rock in the last 1,000 feet.
- For the last 500 feet or so, the ridge was steep and covered with rime, so we traversed under the ridgcrest on the south side, struggling a bit in the deep snow.
- Views from the summit were spectacular – from tidewater in Prince William Sound to the upper Eklutna and Whiteout Glaciers of the Eklutna Traverse. We were looking from the “rocky” Chugach into the “icy” Chugach. It was blue sky and no wind. The north summit was obviously higher and the ridge separating the summits looked “involved.”
- We down-climbed about 300 feet toward the notch between the summits, then did two 30-meter rappels to access the east gully. We slung a block for the first, then equalized a couple pitons for the second. Once in the gully, it was an easy plunge-step descent for a few thousand feet. Paul Andrews sent me a photo of that east gully several weeks earlier that showed continuous snow from the top to the pocket glacier. Without that photo showing that the gully was continuous, we would likely not have tried that descent. Later in the season, sections would be melted out and would require rappels through waterfalls. We replenished our water from one such waterfall in the gully. The gully steepened at the bottom, and had a significant “trough” where the loose snow slid down. We crossed the trough once or twice, then used it to cross the bergschrund at the bottom.
- Once on the pocket glacier, with the angle easing off, we happily post-holed downhill unroped and all was well until Max disappeared. Crevasse fall! I quickly approached the lip and called down, “Are you OK?” Clear response: “Yes, but send me an end of the rope right away.” I padded the lip and lowered a loop. Max clipped in, accessed his second tool from his pack and quickly



climbed out. He described the situation as extremely lucky, as the soft snow from the lip had “packed” around his torso as he fell, wedging his upper body between the hard ice, while his legs dangled in the air! The crevasse continued down another 20 to 30 feet. If the snow had been dry, he might have fallen farther and become wedged or corked, most likely with an injury. It was also lucky that the guy who didn’t fall

in the crevasse had the rope! That was a wake-up call, and we immediately roped up and continued down more carefully.

- As we reached the rock at the bottom of the pocket glacier we could see the valley floor maybe 500 feet below, but we could not see the slope below us connect with that floor. That was a bit concerning, and it turned out to be a difficult and unwelcome problem for the final exit from that hanging valley. We post-holed down a reasonable-looking gully only to find that it ended a couple hundred feet above the valley floor in what appeared to be an ice waterfall. Having no ice screws and not knowing if our rope would reach the bottom, we didn’t like that descent option, so we turned around and ascended the slope and moved to skier’s right. Descending again on polished rock, we again found ourselves at a steep drop with no clear descent option (no anchor and unknown drop distance). This was not going well. Ascending the slope a second time, we moved even farther skier’s right and saw what looked like some possible steps that could be down-climbed to a subtle rock knob where we might sling our rope and rappel. We executed that sequence carefully and were very happy to be off the technical terrain.



- It was now about 7 p.m., and we had a long way to go back to camp. Thank goodness for Max’s endurance, because the next couple hours, and a million post-holes later, put us at the approximately 5450-foot pass, looking down onto the upper East Fork. The weather continued to be perfect with the late evening sun becoming golden on Bounty Peak and others.



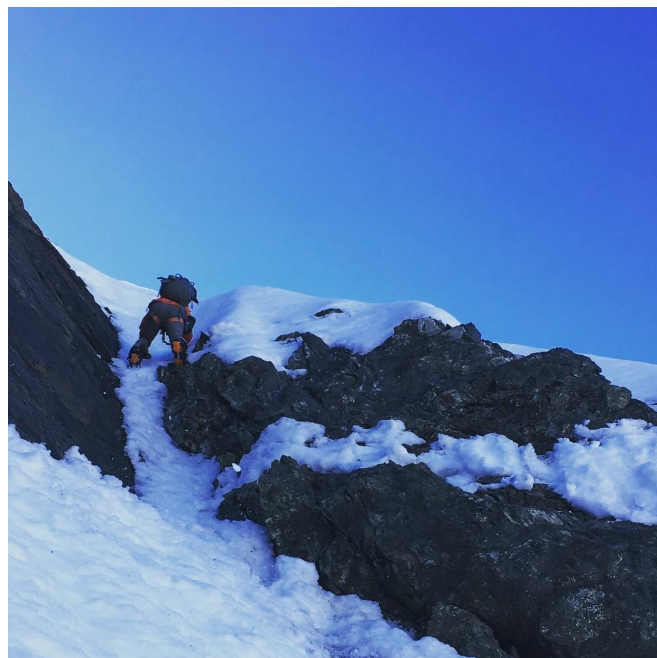
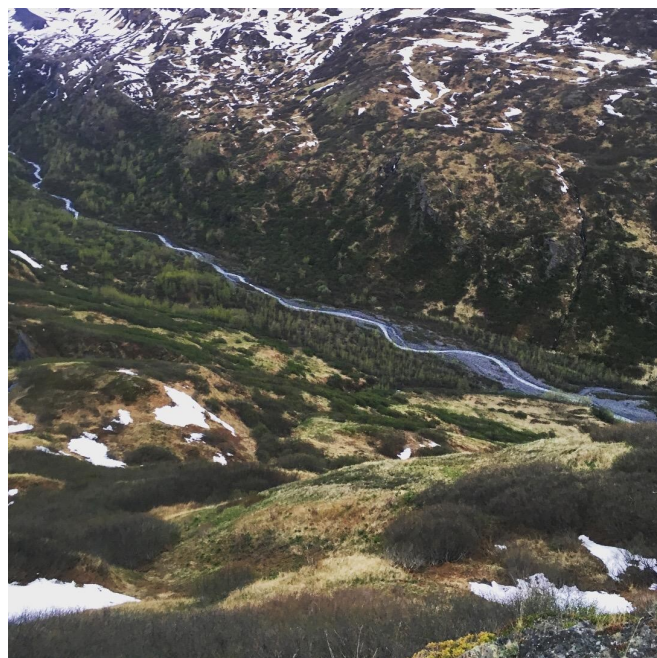
- We opted to exit on skier's left of Baleful Creek, choosing moderate slopes over direct lines of travel. Taking our time and looking around carefully, we were able to reach the valley bottom without significant bushwhacking. However, at one point Max turned around and asked me, "How many tools are on my backpack?" The answer, unfortunately, was one less than at the start. It was an easy decision: we'd simply head back up, retracing our steps and find the tool, right? Oh, heck no. That tool was a goner; we were not going back up anything to look for it. That was the second Petzl/Charlet Quark that was lost in that valley by my partners on East Fork adventures. The first was on our crossing of the raging East Fork of the Eklutna River after coming down off the MOWLI with Matt Hickey [Ed. note: see the November 2013 Scree]. There is now a pair of Quarks, probably within a mile up in the East Fork! When I told Matt about this story, he sent me a funny poem about bears dancing with tools lost:

*There's a bear out there with two tools from fools  
lost 'cuz their follies...  
He climbs he rhymes while dancing  
among the MOWLI!*

- On our exit down into the East Fork, we met a family of healthy-looking goats, then started running into black bears. One poked his head up around a small knoll, confirmed our species, and then ran off. Next, we jumped a small bear in the valley bottom, then a little farther his much-larger mom, which ran up the hill. Then another one went crashing through the woods as we marched along. "He was booking!" Max said. Finally, in a large clearing, around midnight, we saw a very large brownie. Her coat was glimmering in the dim light. She took off quickly as soon as she became aware of us, then paused to assess the situation. Max and I made plenty of noise to let her know that running away from us was the right decision! She agreed and bolted across the meadow at top speed, making us acutely aware that we were only equipped with two feeble legs.
- When we reached the valley bottom, my right knee was starting to get pretty tender. I figured the flat ground would be good for it, which it was, but of course the ground wasn't really flat, so I was dealing with some pain from there on out. Using a walking stick helped a bit. It was in that condition, stumbling around in the Alaskan summer twilight, that I learned to my great amazement, that Max is part bloodhound. He says that he has developed this skill, but I think it comes from deep hereditary bloodlines. He was picking up

game trails in the growing twilight with only the slightest scuff of ground or pattern of growth; it was really quite amazing. Just as one trail petered out, he'd pick up another. We bypassed the 2190-foot knob all the way down at river level with no problems.

- After what seemed (and actually was) hours and hours, we stumbled back into camp and ate "dinner" at 3 a.m. as the daylight started to come back. We took a nap, enjoyed a leisurely exit via bikes, and concluded appropriately with beers at the trailhead while lounging on the lakeside beach, followed by burgers at the Eagle River Alehouse. Super trip with a super partner.





## Peak of the Month: Stingray Peak

Text by Steve Gruhn

**Mountain Range:** Brooks Range; Schwatka Mountains

**Borough:** Northwest Arctic Borough

**Drainage:** Kavachurak Creek

**Latitude/Longitude:** 67° 44' 56" North, 156° 50' 42" West

**Elevation:** 5499 feet

**Adjacent Peak:** Peak 5371 in the Noatak River drainage

**Distinctness:** 1149 feet from Peak 5371

**Prominence:** 3092 feet from Peak 5511 in the Kavachurak Creek and Tunukuchiak Creek drainages

**USGS Maps:** 1:63,360: Ambler River (C-2), 1:25,000: Ambler River C-2 NW

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



Stingray Peak is the fourth-highest peak in both the Noatak National Preserve and the Noatak Wilderness, the 11th-most prominent peak in the Schwatka Mountains, the 16th-most prominent peak in the Northwest Arctic Borough, the 67th-most prominent peak in the Brooks Range, and the 425th-most prominent peak in Alaska. In the Brooks Range – and in all of northwestern Alaska – there is no higher peak west of Stingray Peak.

The name of the peak was given on bivouac.com (<https://bivouac.com//MtnPg.asp?MtnId=26023>) as part of a theme of naming peaks in the region after types of saltwater fish.

I do not know of any attempts to climb Stingray Peak; yours could be the first.



## Mountaineering Club of Alaska

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Annual membership dues: Single \$20, Family \$30

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 11th 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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*Carrie Wang hiking below the north aspect of Peak 4144 in the Kenai Mountains.*

*Photo by Wayne Todd*

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