

### Advice from a Pika

- ♦ Be alert
  - ♦ Voice your opinion
  - ♦ Appreciate the small things in life
  - ♦ Save for the future
  - ♦ Sometimes we have to squeak by
  - ♦ Spend time in the mountains
  - ♦ Catch a few winks!
- Your True Nature

# the SCREE

## Mountaineering Club of Alaska

July 2019

Volume 62, Number 7



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Peak of the Month: Peak 8150, Revelation Mountains

**JULY MEETING: Thursday, July 11. Potluck at the Eagle River Nature Center.**

Join the MCA for an after-work potluck gathering. There's some excellent climbing, hiking, and running before the potluck if you want to leave work early to enjoy it. We will meet on the back deck of the Nature Center. No grilling allowed, but bring a dish to share.



***"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

Mat Brunton, Travis Baldwin, and Sam Inouye ascending "The Notch" on Organ Mountain. The east-northeast aspect is perhaps the most striking feature in the area (a walled-in couloir skiing experience with one wall being glacier ice).

Photo by Brian Harder

## JULY MEETING Eagle River Potluck

Thursday, July 11, at 6:30 p.m. at the Eagle River Nature Center.

<https://www.ernc.org/find-us>

Join the MCA for an after-work potluck gathering. There's some excellent climbing, hiking, and running before the potluck if you want to leave work early to enjoy it. We will meet on the back deck of the Nature Center. No grilling allowed, but bring a dish to share.

**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.

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## Hiking and Climbing Schedule

**August 24— September 26:** Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) Section Hiking (Ashland, Oregon, southbound to near Quincy, California) Trip Leader: Shaun E. Sexton. Sign-up Details: Send Notification of Interest and statement of qualifications to [SeSexton@gci.net](mailto:SeSexton@gci.net).

Physical Demands: Non-technical; 484 statute miles; total elevation gain = 85,000 feet. Class 1 Hiking.

**Potential Hazards:** slips, trips and falls; attack by wildlife; insect bites; lightning; fire; cold injury and illness; dehydration; heat stress; plant toxicity; gastroenteritis; musculoskeletal and stress injuries; altitude illness; sunburn; urinary tract infections; blisters; and other.

**Requisite Skills** (physical and/or technical) for Safe Participation on Trip: Experience hiking with 25-pound backpack for a week or more. Fitness to average 15 miles per day with daily average ascents and descents of approximately 2,600 feet. Responsible management of personal health issues, including, but not limited to diabetes, allergies, seizures, and heart disease. Tolerant. Tolerable.

**Trip Description Examples:** Section hike southbound up to 484 miles of the PCT in northern California beginning near the border with Oregon (Ashland, Oregon). One rest day per week, on average, in resupply towns near the PCT which may include the California communities of Buck's Lake, Quincy, Belden, Chester, Old Station, Burney, Mount Shasta, Dunsmuir, Castella, Etna, and Seiad Valley. Party members who wish to participate in only a portion of this undertaking may join or depart at any of these or other safe locations of their choice. Options for public and or private transportation are left to decision of the individual.

The ideal party member will be: a fully experienced long-distance hiker with adequate knowledge of equipment, shelter, and food; fully competent at self-management of personal health and welfare; comfortably fit; and have no disruptive schedule or budget constraints. Trail closures by fire or other natural or man-made phenomena are typical and must be expected. Delays are anticipated. Seniors are encouraged to participate.

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

Online? Click me!



## Announcements

### Mountaineering News Report

On May 23 Petersburg-based radio station KFSK reported that Simon Richardson and Mark Robson had climbed five peaks in the Stikine Icecap area of the Coast Mountains in early May. The ascended peaks included Peak 5720 in the North Baird Glacier drainage, Peak 7180 (a.k.a. Hyder Peak) in the Glory Lake and Salt Chuck drainages, and Peak 5919 in the North Baird Glacier and Glory Lake drainages. We look forward to reading a full trip report in a future issue of *the Scree*.

For more information visit <https://www.kfsk.org/2019/05/23/mountaineers-claim-first-ascent-of-five-southeast-alaska-peaks/>.

Steve Gruhn

### Picnic Leftovers

There was a cutting board left at the club's picnic at McHugh Creek on June 22. Contact me at [mattnedom@gmail.com](mailto:mattnedom@gmail.com) and I'll return it to you. I will bring it to the June meeting, or maybe I should say "the next" meeting if I don't get it back to you sooner.

Matt Nedom

### Mint Hut Caretaker

We are looking for people to help at the Mint Hut this summer. Consider volunteering as a caretaker if you are traveling to the hut. We need to get a reliable count of visitors numbers each night, and to report back on any issues. This is easy to do, and should take very little time if you are already heading to the Mint. Contact Vicky Lytle at [Victoria.lytle@gmail.com](mailto:Victoria.lytle@gmail.com), or Jonathon Rupp Strong at [jonathan.rupp@gmail.com](mailto:jonathan.rupp@gmail.com) to volunteer or for more information.

### Proposed Geographic Names

The Alaska Historical Commission has requested comments from the MCA on a proposal to make official the name Gorgon Spire for a 7150-foot peak in the Matthes Glacier and Vaughan Lewis Glacier drainages of the Coast Mountains. The peak was climbed in 1969 by members of the Juneau Icefield Research Program, whose ascent was documented with the proposed name in the 1970 issues of both the *Alpine Journal* and the *American Alpine Journal*. The peak was climbed again in 2018 by the proponent and other JIRP members.

The AHC has also requested comments from the MCA on a proposal to name Peak 2674 in the Salanie Creek and American River drainages on Kodiak Island as Taquka'aq Mountain.

Please provide comments to Steve Gruhn at [geographicnames@mtclubak.org](mailto:geographicnames@mtclubak.org) by June 23 so that he can compile and submit them to the AHC on behalf of the MCA.

*Scree*—July 2019

### Roger Robinson's retirement from Denali National Park

Hello all,

Hopefully many of you can join us on July 18 for the festivities. I believe that Roger will be sharing a terrific slide show of his own that will span the years.

This request is for any photos that you all may have of Pam and/or Roger doing their National Park Service duties. I will collect your submissions and have them showing between events. I will also put them all in one place to give to the Robinsons so that they have them for their memories.

Please email photos to me and I will put them together.

Enjoy your summer and thank you in advance.

Cheers

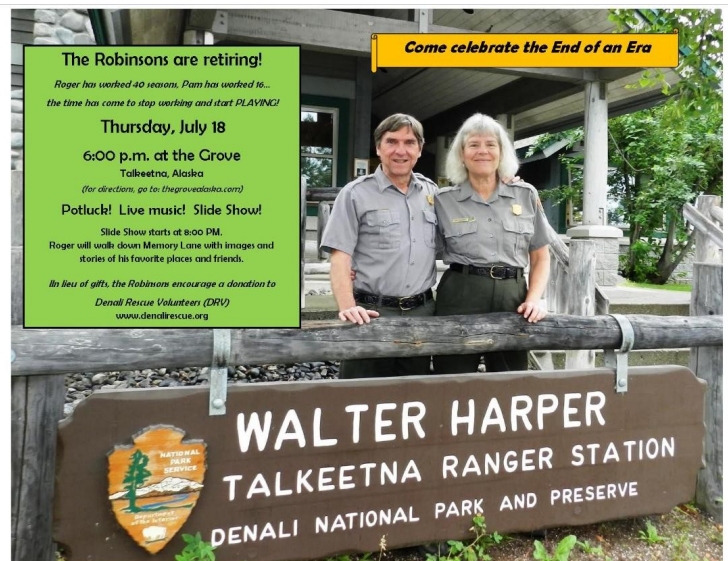
Joe Reichert

Mountaineering Ranger

Denali National Park and Preserve

907-733-9101

[joe\\_reichert@nps.gov](mailto:joe_reichert@nps.gov)



### Choate's Chuckle - Tom Choate

**Q:** The solo climber had ascended several pitches when he was disappointed to find he was no longer alone.

**Why?**

**Answer:** on page 15.

## Peak 4550, Talkeetna Mountains

Text and photo by Dan Glatz

March 10, 2019



*Coleman Ahrens on the summit ridge of Peak 4550.*

Peak 4550 caught my interest as my partner, Coleman Ahrens, and I were driving north along the Glenn Highway looking for something new to climb. We pulled into the parking area adjacent to the Kings River and set off on a snowmachine trail that eventually led us to an old unused road that deposited us on top of a plateau at around 1000 feet. Once on the plateau, our objective came into view and we set off cross country through forests and frozen swamps in knee-deep snow toward a spine that ran north toward the summit ridge between the West Fork of Young Creek and Granite Creek.

The travel was slow at times, but eventually we found ourselves above timberline, cruising snow-free slopes and sheep trails to the summit. The views from the summit were surprisingly impressive due to the close proximity to both Granite Peak and Lava Mountain, as well as an unobstructed view south toward the Central Chugach Mountains.

While Peak 4550 may not be at the top of anyone's agenda, it is definitely a worthwhile half-day hike for anyone looking to escape the more popular trails that are closer to town.



# "Ruth Gorge Grinder" on Mount Dickey (9545 feet), Alaska Range

Text by Alan Rousseau

On April 3, Jackson Marvell and I started up the east face of Mount Dickey in hopes of repeating "Blood from the Stone" (Easton – Steck, 2002 [Ed. note: see pages 14 through 19 of the 2003 American Alpine Journal]). By about 4 p.m. that day, we realized the route lacked ice in a critical portion. After settling into our chopped bivy, we decided the next morning we would traverse right and try a new line up some iced corners we had spotted. We hoped the corner system would provide access to an ice line just left of "The Wine Bottle" (Bonapace – Orgler, 1988 [Ed. note: see pages 74 through 82 of the 1989 AAJ]).

The climbing of day two was dreamy, steep continuous cracks, and squeaky névé. The difficulty sustained in the M6 AI6 range for the majority of the day. The passage was mostly as we had imagined, with just a short pendulum swing into the ice system we had hoped to reach. After the pendulum we found some excellent steep névé. Over the course of the next six rope lengths, four of which were AI5 to AI6+, we gained the next snow patch and chopped our second bivy.

After a rough night with four inches of snow and a constant onslaught of spin-drift blasts, we were pleased to once again find ourselves greeted by the rising sun. This time high on the east face. We still had about 2,000 vertical feet of terrain to gain in order to hit the summit of Dickey. We started up the next section of ice tube, which turned out to be about 350 meters of ice climbing. This was never easier than AI5 and contained some sections of full-on sustained overhanging ice climbing. The ice was mind-bendingly steep and consistent. Upon topping out above the headwall, it was a relief to be able to kick in a flat platform for the feet, and finally un-weight our front points.

Above the headwall we still had severely consequential terrain wallowing through steep, rotten snow and hard-to-protect shale bands. It took us about four hours to weave up through the upper 800 ver-

tical feet of Mount Dickey. We topped out on the peak in beautiful calm weather, with un-observed views of the range. We wasted little time on top, as it was already 5 p.m. After stuffing as much gear as we could into our backpacks, we started rallying down the west face, through 747 Pass and hit our camp at 8:30 p.m., as twilight was changing to darkness.

We were incredibly relieved to arrive back in our camp unscathed, having completed a new route on the east face, "Ruth Gorge Grinder" (5,000 feet, M7, AI6+, April 3-5, 2019). Climbing any route on the east face of Mount Dickey had been a goal of mine for nearly a decade. To have finally climbed the feature by a new route, with such sustained quality climbing, was an experience I will not soon forget.

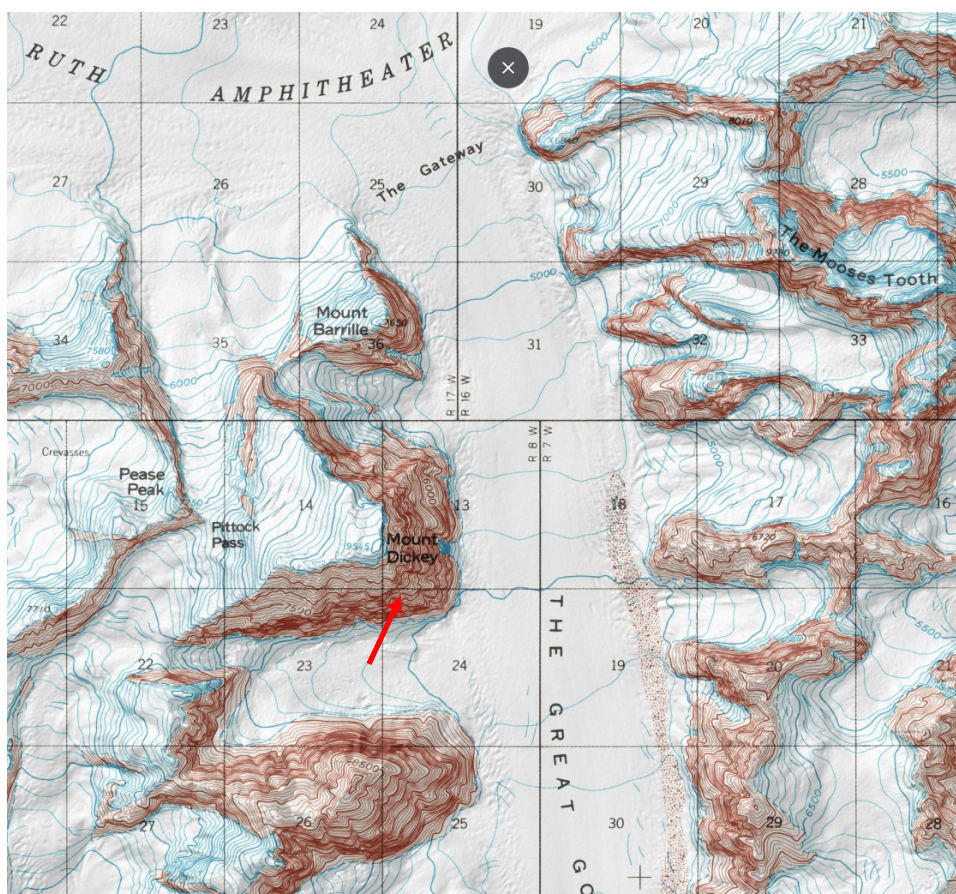


Photo courtesy of:

<https://www.topozone.com/alaska/matanuska-susitna-ak/summit/mount-dickey/>



# Organ Mountain (6980 feet) and Flute Peak (6634 feet), Western Chugach Mountains

Text by Mat Brunton



*Travis Baldwin, Brian Harder, and Sam Inouye traversing a steep snowfield from the east ridge onto the east face a few hundred feet below the summit of Organ Mountain.*

*Photo by Mat Brunton*

On April 5, 2017, Mat Brunton, Brian Harder, Sam Inouye, and Travis Baldwin completed the first known ski descent of Organ Mountain in the Eagle River area of the Western Chugach Mountains. From the South Fork of the Eagle River, it was about 24 miles and about 8000 feet that also included an ascent of Organ's east couloir with a descent down its west couloir (prominent features on the north ridge) and a descent of Flute Peak's west couloir (ascended via Flute's north couloir and a scree traverse).

We climbed it, but skied off the back side due to extremely variable melt-freeze conditions. The back side, a very steep, west-facing couloir, was several hundred feet of slide-for-life without a clean run-out. We dubbed the line "Organ Donor" as a fall, even in better conditions, would be serious.

Despite Organ alone being a huge day, with plenty of food and daylight remaining, Mat talked the boys into rallying up Flute Peak for a descent of its wonderful west couloir back to the Flute Glacier.

*Scree—July 2019*



*Mat Brunton entering "The Notch" on Organ Mountain.*

*Photo by Brian Harder*



## Gear:

- Pieps DSP Pro avalanche beacon
- Black Diamond Deploy shovel
- Black Diamond QuickDraw Tour probe
- Black Diamond Snow Saw Pro
- Voile Objective skis
- Dynafit Superlite 2.0 bindings
- Dynafit ski crampons
- Dynafit PDG boots
- Black Diamond mohair mix skins
- Petzl Irvis Hybrid crampons
- Smartwool ski socks
- Outdoor Research Voodoo pants
- Patagonia Alpine Houdini pants
- Patagonia Capilene boxers
- Patagonia Duckbill hat
- Tech T-shirt
- Black Diamond BDV hoody
- Black Diamond Hot Forge Hybrid hoody
- Black Diamond Helio gloves
- Black Diamond Cirque 35 pack
- Black Diamond Traverse ski poles
- Black Diamond pitons
- Black Diamond Oz alpine draws
- J Snare v-thread tool
- Petzl Sum'Tec hammer ice tool
- Petzl Altitude harness
- Petzl Laser Speed Light ice screw
- Petzl RAD glacier kit (with 30-meter RAD line, two ropes between the group of four)
- Petzl Reactik headlamp
- Julbo photochromatic sunglasses
- Camp Speed helmet
- 20 feet of 6-millimeter cordelette
- Repair kit: Leatherman, bailing wire, Voile straps, Black Diamond binding buddy, extra batteries, pole basket, etc.



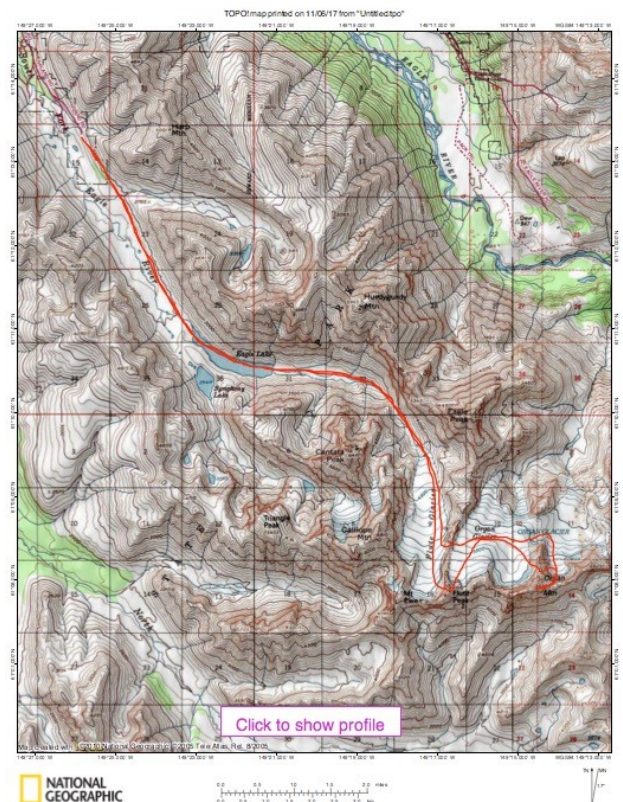
*Mat Brunton breaking trail to Flute Peak's north couloir.  
Photo by Brian Harder*



*Travis Baldwin, Brian Harder, and Sam Inouye  
above "The Notch" and hanging glacier, about to gain  
the east ridge of Organ Mountain.  
Photo by Mat Brunton*



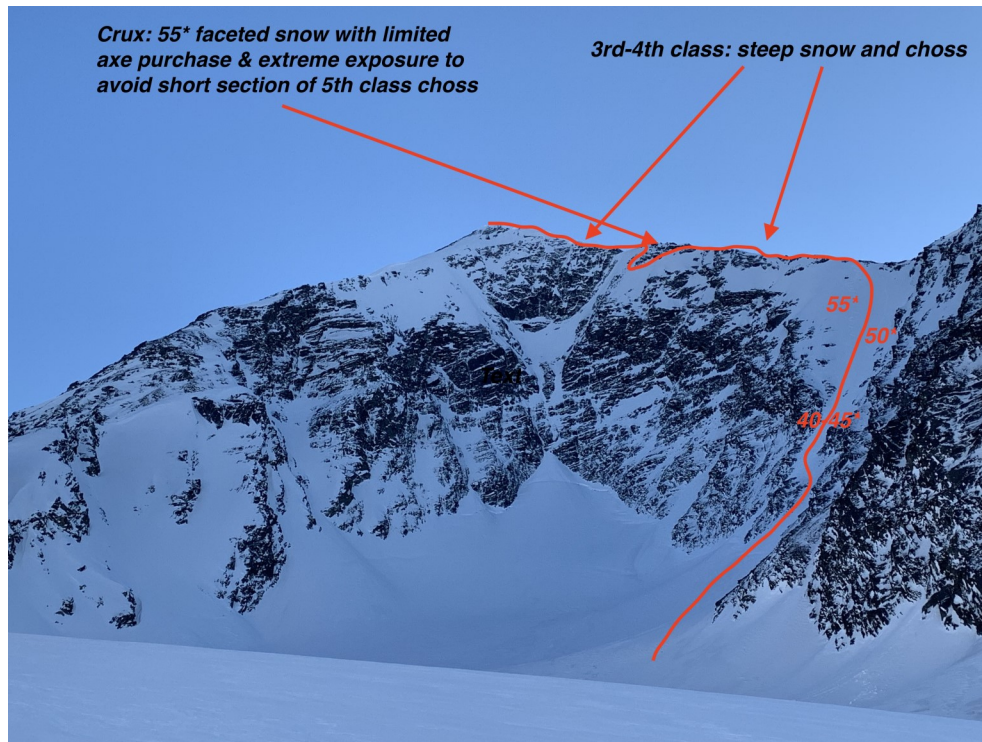
*Mat Brunton ascending Flute Peak's north couloir, which is  
the standard ascent route and provides access to the west  
couloir via a short scree traverse.  
Photo by Brian Harder*





# Mount Billy Mitchell (7217 feet), Central Chugach Mountains

Text and photos by Mat Brunton



*North aspect of Mount Billy Mitchell showing the route Mat Brunton climbed.*

What do you think about big-mountain, or wilderness, solo adventures? Are you one to judge: the recklessness, the insanity, the irresponsibility, the stupidity, the carelessness, ad nauseam? Big-mountain solo adventures are not something I'd encourage. I don't think others that undertake such endeavors would necessarily encourage them either. We'd be disdained for doing so (even more so than for the choice to undertake such endeavors ourselves), and it just doesn't seem right.

That said, those that do undertake such endeavors typically do so more than once. It's a powerful and intense experience. The experience is all yours: the decision-making, the processing, and the emptiness of the wilderness that amplifies the magnitude of inner space. I don't know of anything else that squeezes the third eye in such a way ... even psychedelics don't provide as clear of an experience of inner space and oneness, and yoga and meditation don't provide the same connection with Nature. Maybe you eventually realize that you're not really alone on such adventures ... be it the oneness, the interconnectedness, or the permeability between this dimension and the innumerable others that can be realized.

Maybe there are other layers of value to these experiences that our curated, comfortably numb, modern-industrial, first-world, consumer-capitalist existence disregards? Maybe it's value of a primal, spiritual, even evolutionary nature? After all, it's only in this contemporary blink of humanity's existence that we've lost such a con-

nection to the wilderness that demanded such experiences of us. That is, in the vast majority of our past, such experiences were necessitated by life and Nature for survival – and often as rites of passage. Maybe indigenous cultures developed such rites of passage as they knew such intense solo experiences in the wilderness were an essential and integral part of our being that, while maybe no longer necessitated by life, were necessary for a mature human being to understand.

Regardless of all my perhaps silly prose, I undertake such solo endeavors rather frequently – as much out of necessity as out of desire. Necessity, in the sense that I need to get out. The mountains and the wilderness are my therapy. They're essential to my wellbeing. I feel like those of us that aren't comfortably numb need such an escape, and the mountains and wilderness provide that for us. For those of us that have been blessed to such a degree as to live in a place like Alaska, it's easy to "drop out" and get that solace. Given the often hectic schedules of modern man and the balancing act life requires of us, solo is often the only feasible way to get out. Maybe that's not such a bad thing, especially for those of us that would rather expend our energy in the mountains than on the social effort and constraints necessary to coordinate with partners.

With all that in mind, I set off for the Thompson Pass to Valdez corridor of the Central Chugach Mountains for the last week of March



2019. It was a crazy ideal window: an extended high-pressure system that was abnormally warm for that time of year. The warmth meant less pressure gradient, extreme offshore flow, and dreaded wind that often rapes the snow in this corridor. However, warmth also preceded the high. Above-freezing temperatures and rain reached up to about 4000 feet (most, even very long, daytrip accessible Chugach peaks are below 8000 feet and approaches typically start from sea level up to about 2500 feet). Combined with the intense sunshine of the high, that destroyed the powder on all but upper-elevation northerly aspects. On the bright side, the solid crust from the melt-freeze cycle made for very efficient and fast alpine travel with low avalanche danger until later in the day on solar aspects. The relatively high water content snow that did remain dry and wintry, combined with a benign temperature gradient, also created low avalanche danger even on the steepest northerly aspects. So, sun and warmth later in the day were about the only worries (besides the slide-for-life snow before the widespread crust softened).

On the second day of a four day ski-peakbagging binge, I went for the biggest peak in the corridor: Mount Billy Mitchell. Information on that peak was extremely limited (basically non-existent). In central Chugach guru Matt Kinney's backcountry skiing guidebook [*Alaska Backcountry Skiing: Valdez & Thompson Pass*], he mentioned that he attempted the summit of the true Billy Mitchell (Peak 7217) a few times, but did not succeed in attaining it. He knew of no other successful ascents. There was no accurate, firsthand information available online or through any other sources. The only history of a prior ascent I've been able to locate at the time of this writing is from the February 2011 *Scree* that stated Alex Christie claimed a successful summit attempt in April 2010 in a 19-hour push starting at 2 a.m. No details were provided, and he did not provide a report.

I'm not much for 2 a.m. starts. About the earliest I can recall waking up for any big mission in Alaska was 4 a.m., and I don't think I've ever left a trailhead earlier than 6 a.m. I left my truck on the Richardson Highway at about 10:15 a.m. in trail runners, as I had to cross the shin-to-knee-deep Tsina River due to the aforementioned warm temps and meltdown. Consulting the map in regard to distance and terrain, I figured it would either be a modest daytrip (at least for my level of fitness and experience) or I'd get shut-down by technical difficulties I couldn't overcome safely without a rope and partner. My predication was accurate. Moving with purpose, but not hurrying, the mission took about 6.5 hours, truck to truck. After all, being based in the Western Chugach with MUCH longer and more heinous approaches required to reach big peaks like Billy Mitchell, I wasn't too worried about time in the relatively "cleanly" accessed central Chugach.

As mentioned, the journey started with an open-water crossing of the Tsina River. Luckily, it was only about shin deep in the morning. Access to the Seal Glacier, which brought me to the base of the north face of the true Billy Mitchell (there's confusion as to which peak is actually Billy Mitchell, as folks have climbed and skied lines off sub-peaks in the area claiming to have climbed and skied "Billy Mitchell"), began by following a relatively clean creek bed to the "Key to Lisa": a narrow and steeply walled slot canyon that was stuffed full of snow and was actually mostly skinnable and skiable at 30-ish degrees. It was a very neat feature.

That zone was the most wind-hammered of the four I climbed and



*Lower opening of the Key to Lisa.*



*Above the Key, one follows low-angle (but in some areas still avalanche-prone) glades to the moraines of the lower Seal Glacier. Following the glacier up and around sub-peaks, one arrives at the base of the true Mount Billy Mitchell's big north face.*

skied during the late-March 2019 window, and the ambiance was reminiscent of the Western Chugach (rockier and drier). The snow was chalky and firm, and didn't require Billy Goat Plates for booting, as did most booting in the other zones (Crudbusters, Worthington Glacier, Port Valdez) I visited in late March 2019. Crampons and an axe were essential, as a fall on the long and steep access couloir/face to the west ridge would be brutal



due to the firm and likely un-arrestable snow and the choke at the base that gave it a degree of exposure.

Topping out on the west ridge at about 6700 feet provided some rest and relaxation before the Billy Mitchell experience became intense again. There did seem to be a skiable line from the summit, but it would be incredibly exposed for the entirety of its very steep approximately 1,400 feet and require a long rappel. If not skiing this uber-extreme line from the summit, there's about 500 feet vertical of scrambling up and down the west ridge. Most of it is 3rd class, perhaps a bit bordering on 4th, with one short 5th-class or extremely exposed and steep snow section.

Blissful low-angle glacier gliding followed by near-perfect late-March corn in the glades had me back at the Key to Lisa in very short order. Later in the day descending the Key to Lisa was another potential crux of that route, as the canyon floor was littered with rock, snow, and ice fall. The walls were big and steep and there was no protection from whatever might fall. On colder, earlier season days with better snow it would be likely no big deal. With hard and icy snow that had not softened at all, debris to maneuver around, and some crater-like openings exposing the creek and its running waterfalls; I had to descend a little slower than I would have liked. While I didn't notice anything falling while I was in it, likely due to having already been exposed to several much warmer days prior, I was glad to have a helmet (which I also put on for the ascent) and wouldn't have minded having some body armor.



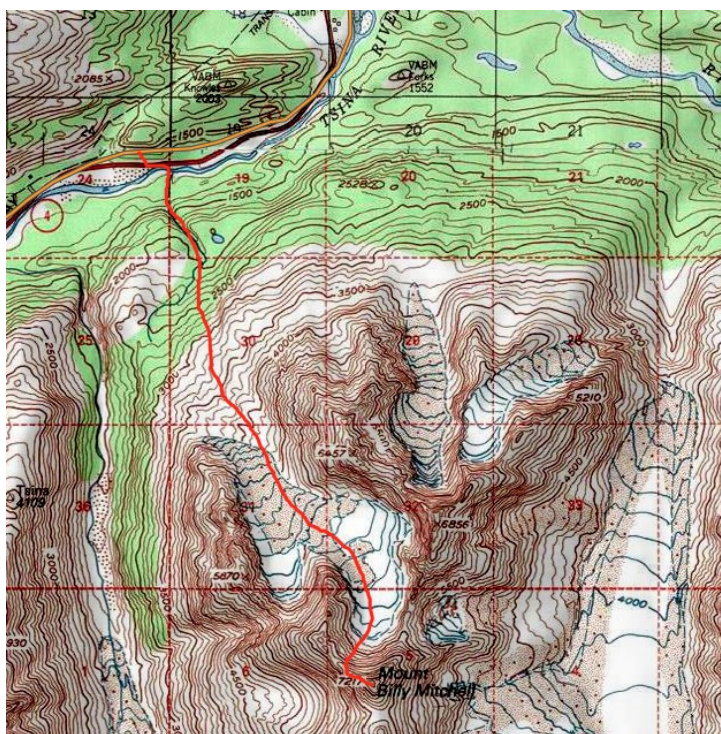
*Returning to the ski drop in for the northeast face/couloir, Mat Brunton opted to descend skier's right of his booter as the snow was better and the turns steeper (55\* vs. 50\*).*



*The extremely steep and exposed snow section where Mat Brunton was forced to leave the crest of the west ridge of Mount Billy Mitchell.*



*This exposed section is near the top out of the face/couloir of Mount Billy Mitchell. After overcoming this obstacle, it's a relative cruise up the ridge to the summit. As Billy Mitchell is the highest peak for miles and in a unique zone near the confluence of the Tsi-na and Tiekel Rivers/valleys, the summit views are mind blowing.*





# "Royal Ribbons": A Memorial Climb

Text by Wayne Todd

February 26, 2005



*"Royal Ribbons."*

*Photo by Dave Lucey*

Dave Lucey and Mike Miller can see the top of the ice climb from the road. "How easy is that"? Because of the "short" approach, they don't bother with flotation. Seeing the canyonized creek route, Mike opts for an easier-looking overland route. Soon he is on a "nightmare" route, hanging from, and bushwhacking through, alders on very steep terrain. Meanwhile Dave negotiates the standard route of frozen downed trees, and ice-and-snow-covered rocks, all confined by steep walls, above a creek. All the while they are in shouting distance exchanging repeated "is it better where you are?" [It's unknown whether this is to lure the other one into their quagmire or to try and escape their own situation].

They make it intact to the base of "Royal Ribbons." "Seeing it from the road, it's farther than you think."

Why "Royal Ribbons"?

For Mike, this very day was a memorial service for Johnny Soderstrom and this was a dedication climb in lieu of the ceremony. Ceremonies which Mike avoids. Johnny was a friend who had helped Mike build his cabin. Johnny was known to be a "talented, prolific, and well-respected climber." In addition to being an accomplished mountaineer, he was "friendly, kind, and giving." A scholarship fund was established in his name. [The couple that own the residence at the start of the route, also knew Johnny.] Johnny died in an avalanche on Mount Huntington.

For Dave, he knew that Sue Nott had climbed this ice fresh off

the plane upon arrival in Valdez. Sue was an incredible U.S. mountaineer, having climbed all over the world. A year later Sue sadly disappeared along with her partner Karen McNeill climbing the Infinite Spur, on Mount Foraker. Dave knew Karen, who was from Canmore, Alberta, having himself ice climbed out of Canmore several times. He had the chance to meet her and talk about another climb she and Sue had done – the Colton-Leach route on Mount Huntington. He was to do that very route one year later with Kristian Sieling. Numerous scholarship funds were established in Sue's and Karen's names, including the McNeill-Nott Award grant program.

Mike leads the fat first ice pitch. Dave leads the second pitch that includes a rock traverse, which is the crux, especially if you're not expecting rock. Dave carries a Pika and pounds that in (hopefully a Spectre for the sake of avoiding cruelty to animals). They complete the third pitch on more solid ice.

Then there's the "good" or "awesome" free-hanging, overhung, undercut rappel. They have no incidents, but both exit the lower creek route.

\*As told around a campfire with beers in hand. These two really need to be on a podcast/fireside chat for tales of their mountain escapades. Requirements: 1) Beer, 2) ...

I assisted with some focus on this particular story, not being helped by Ernie Borjon, who intermittently inquired as to the specific location of the climb, nor by Cory Hinds, who was hooting encouragement for embellishment.

Mike Miller rappelling from  
"Royal Ribbons."  
Photo by Dave Lucey



*Top photo: Pika on the left, Spectre on the right*  
*Photo by Dave Lucey*  
*Bottom photo: Pika without a specter.*  
*Photo by Wayne Todd*



# Cantata Boots and Boats

Text and photos by Paxson Woelber

20.3-Mile Hike and Packraft Loop around Cantata Peak in Chugach State Park



*Greg Martin, Meghan McClelland, and Ben Sullender packrafting Eagle Lake at sunset.*

The September 2018 heat wave was so intense that Alaskans started referring to it as a new season: Second Summer. High-temperature records across the state were shattered, and re-shattered. Outdoorspeople dug gear back out of closets, frantically calculated leave time from work, and headed to the mountains with plans more fitting for July.

On September 8, Greg Martin, Meghan McClelland, Ben Sullender, and I set out on a 20-mile hike and packraft loop around Cantata Peak. Since their earliest days packrafts have been used as logistical aids, turning remote bodies of water from obstacles to routes. More recently, packrafters have pushed the limits of these ultra-light inflatable boats on big, remote whitewater. But our goal today was a little different: we would use our fleet of Alpaca packrafts to string together a sort of jerry-rigged “lake chain” around Cantata Peak. We’d start with Symphony Lake and Mirror Lake, climb a tall rocky pass between Cantata and Calliope Mountain, float an unnamed new lake forming off the toe of the Flute Glacier, and end by paddling across Eagle Lake. From a logistical standpoint the plan was a little absurd, as it would probably be faster to leave the boats at home and walk around the lakes. And the flatwater wasn’t exactly a technical challenge. But this was a strange season, and it called for a strange adventure.

## And we’re off!

We met at a Carrs parking lot before dawn, our breath misting in the cool air and the black silhouettes of the mountains looming on the horizon. After grabbing coffee and snacks, we drove north out of Anchorage and up the switchbacking roads to the South Fork of the Eagle River Trailhead.



*Greg Martin, Ben Sullender, and Meghan McClelland on the South Fork Trail, with Cantata Peak in the background.*



The South Fork Trail feels more like a highway for the first few miles, and usually I just put my head down and power through it. But that time it was hard not to appreciate the backlit fall foliage, which filled the valley with glittering reds, greens, oranges, and golds.

Past the bridge, the trail chokes down to singletrack width as it winds over old glacial moraines and past small stands of pioneering birch trees. With every step the temperature climbed and the day became brighter and brighter.

### Show up and blow up

At the edge of Symphony Lake, we dropped our packs for the first “blow-up” of the trip.

It was almost a shame to shatter the perfect mirrored surface of Symphony Lake with our paddles, but we had lakes to float and passes to climb.

At the far end of Symphony Lake, we deflated our boats and headed upvalley on light game trails.

Just before Mirror Lake, we side-hilled around a line of cliffs draped in waterfalls.

Above the waterfalls we reached the blue-green edge of Mirror Lake, nestled between Cantata Peak and the toe of a rock glacier below Calliope. By then the sun was as overhead as a September sun could be, and Greg, Ben, and Meghan stripped down to their “birthday drysuits” for the paddle across the lake. I took a few photos, peeled off my hiking gear and joined them. I don’t know whether we made the first float on Mirror Lake, but I bet we can claim the first naked crossing.



### Into the high country

We pulled out at the far end of the lake next to the toe of the rock glacier and deflated our boats. Looming above us was the biggest unknown of the trip: a wall of craggy cliffs that pinched together right at the pass between Cantata and Calliope. For days I’d been

studying the maps and looking at trip reports to see whether this pass would go. I hadn’t found any write-ups, but the slope angle shading layer on CalTopo suggested that there was a narrow bench on the northwest corner of the pass that we could follow. It looked bad, though, and the rest of the group was understandably reluctant. I started to feel a little defensive, and insisted – and told myself – that I wouldn’t push it if it got sketchy. Everyone agreed to give it a shot, and we headed upward.

We picked our way over loose moraines and past the terminus of a rock glacier clinging to the northwest face of Calliope. As we approached the pass, the scree became steep and unstable. We fanned out, moving back and forth looking for productive footing. One step forward, one step forward, one step backward ... it was slow progress, but progress nonetheless.

Greg reached the chokepoint first, and to my relief he called down that it would work. What I had been thinking of as a “bench” was really more of a steep, dusty gully, but we were able to climb it one-by-one without trouble.



*Greg Martin, Meghan McClelland, and Ben Sullender taking a break in the 5280-foot pass between Cantata Peak and Calliope Mountain.*

Just after 4 p.m., we reached the 5280-foot pass between Cantata and Calliope and dropped our packs. That pass was higher than many Western Chugach Front Range summits, and making it there with our paddling gear felt like an accomplishment in and of itself.

Beyond the pass we dropped into a deep, U-shaped valley between Cantata and the north ridge of Calliope. Recent glaciation there had littered the valley floor with loose, haphazard piles of scree.

As we reached the mouth of the valley, the western faces of Eagle Peak came into view, lit up with warm early-evening light.

Meghan decided to take a break by the creek between Eagle and Cantata, while Ben, Greg, and I scrambled up glacier-polished bedrock to the toe of the Flute Glacier. Of all the lakes on this trip, that is the one I was looking forward to paddling the most. That



lake didn't have an established name. In fact, it has only existed for about a decade and a half due to the rapid recession of the Flute Glacier.

The amphitheater of craggy peaks around us glowed with sunlight, and above us the sky was a pale, almost-tropical blue. We were at the toe of an alpine glacier, in Alaska, in September, still wearing shorts. All across Alaska, people were enjoying the beautiful weather. But the conditions that day could also be seen in a darker light, as an especially alarming data point in the longer-term story of climate change in Alaska. In recent years, Alaska has warmed at a far faster rate than the global average. Alaska has experienced record-setting tundra fires, vanishing glaciers, eroding coastlines, and ecological disruption on a wide scale. Floating a lake so new that it hadn't even made it onto the maps yet was exciting, but also alarming.

From the glacial lake we scrambled back down the middle of the valley, past the cascades below Eagle Peak.

### Eagle Lake and homeward

By early evening we reached the flat floor of the valley above Eagle Lake. That was one of my favorite places in Chugach State Park. The gravel bars made for breezy walking between the towering walls of Eagle, Cantata, and Hurdygurdy Mountain.

Just above Eagle Lake we decided to give the creek a shot. We inflated our boats and headed down the shallow waterway, half paddling and half butt-sliding over sandbars.

Eventually we gave up and dragged our boats the last couple hundred feet to the edge of Eagle Lake.

Eagle Lake at sunset was sublime, but by then we were eager to make it home.

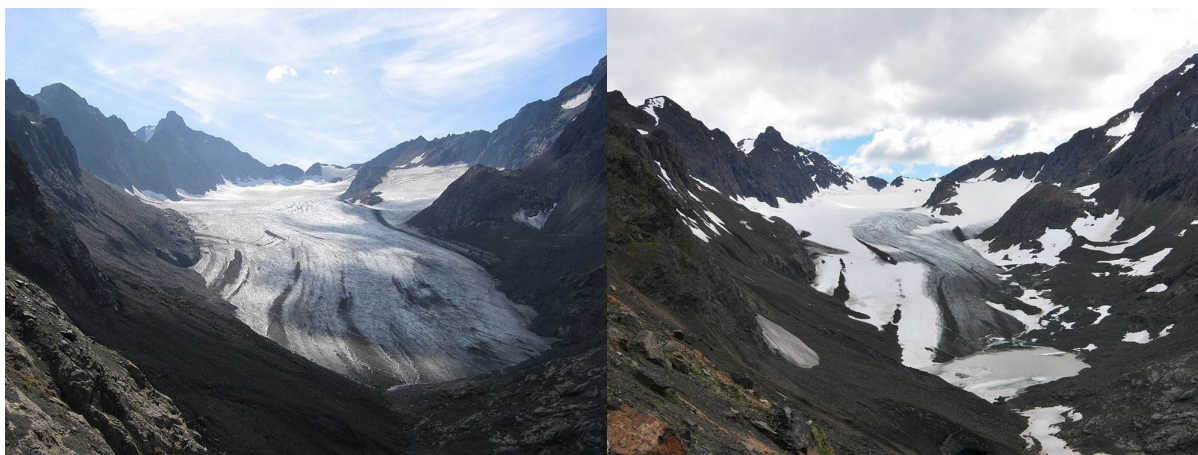
As soon as the sun dipped behind the mountains, the impending winter reasserted itself, and temperatures quickly dipped. We packed our boats for the last time that day with cold, wet fingers,

pulled on fleece jackets, and fished headlamps from the bottoms of our packs.

We tromped back to the parking lot in the dark, tired, but not so tired that we couldn't admire the immense splash of stars overhead.



*Greg Martin paddling an Alpaca Gnarwhal on the newly-formed lake below the Flute Glacier. It's likely that this was the first time this lake had been floated, but it's nearly impossible to know for sure.*



*What a difference a decade makes. The Flute Glacier, as seen from the mouth of the cirque below the south face of Eagle Peak. The photo on the left was taken during Paxson Woelber's first ascent of Eagle Peak with Dylan Watts, in 2004. The photo on the right was from mid-July, 2016.*



## Peak of the Month: Peak 8150

Text by Steve Gruhn

**Mountain Range:** Alaska Range; Revelation Mountains

**Borough:** Unorganized Borough

**Drainages:** Revelation Glacier and South Fork of the Swift River

**Latitude/Longitude:** 61° 40' 3" North, 154° 9' 53" West

**Elevation:** 8150 (±50) feet

**Adjacent Peaks:** Golgotha (8940) and Sentry Peak (7294)

**Distinctness:** 700 feet from Golgotha

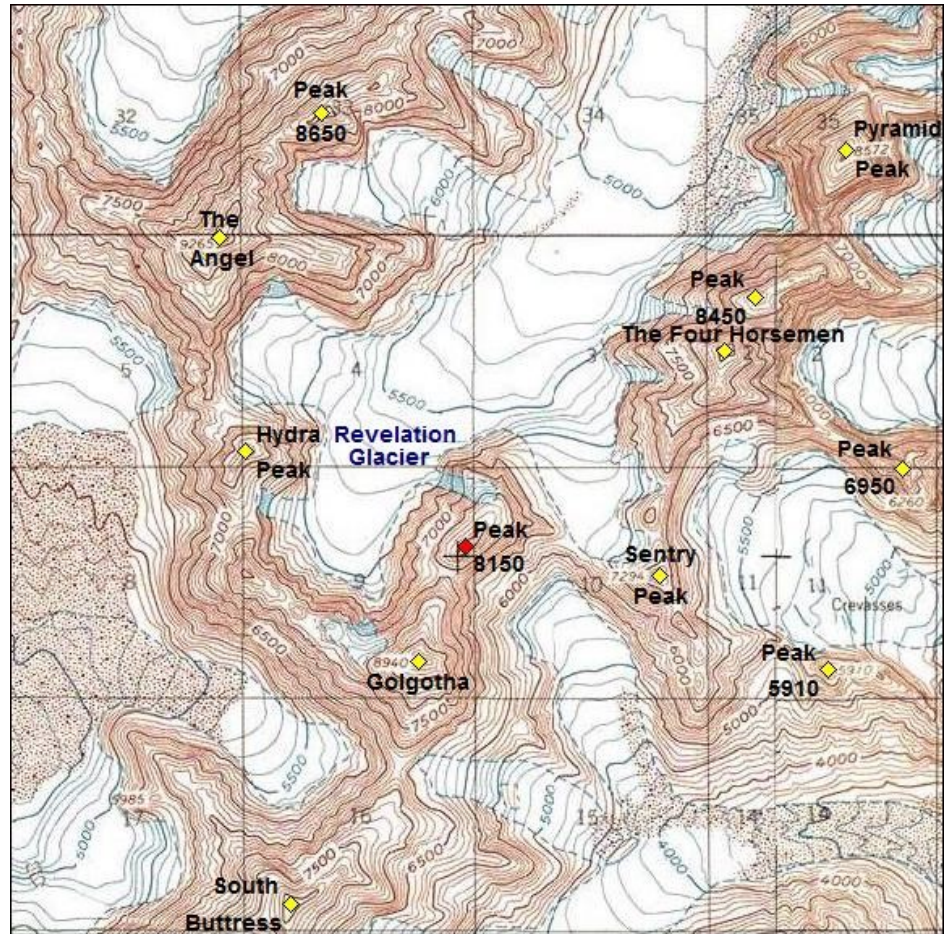
**Prominence:** 700 feet from Golgotha

**USGS Map:** Lime Hills (C-4)

**First Recorded Ascent:** Spring 1985 by Greg Collins, Dan Heilig, and Mal Miller

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

**Access Point:** Revelation Glacier



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

In late April 1985 Greg Collins, Dan Heilig, Mal Miller, and Thomas Walter were flown to the head of the southernmost fork of the Revelation Glacier. After setting up a base camp at about 5600 feet, the windy and stormy weather prevented climbing about two-thirds of the time.

During the periods of favorable weather, the entire team climbed The Four Horsemen (8650) and Collins and Walter climbed The Angel (9265).

One afternoon, Collins, Heilig, and Miller climbed Peak 8150 northeast of Golgotha via the northeast ridge that involved

moderate mixed climbing.

Collins and Walter later climbed Hydra Peak (7850). The entire party was picked up from the Revelation Glacier in late May.

I don't know of a second ascent of Peak 8150.

The information for this column came from Walter's report titled "Four Horsemen, the Angel and Other Peaks, Revelation Mountains, 1985," which appeared on page 119 of the 1988 *American Alpine Journal*, and from my correspondence with Collins.

**Choate's Chuckle** - Tom Choate

**A:** He found a friend in a crack.



## Mountaineering Club of Alaska

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*Greg Martin, Ben Sullender, and Meghan McClelland inflating Alpaca packrafts at the edge of Symphony Lake.*

*Photo by Paxson Woelber*

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