

**"Climbing is, above all, a  
matter of integrity."**

**— Gaston Rebuffat**

# **the SCREE**

## **Mountaineering Club of Alaska**

**September 2019**

**Volume 62, Number 9**



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**SEPTEMBER MEETING: Wednesday, September 4, at 6:30 p.m. at the BP Energy Center. We will be revealing the winners and the pictures for the calendar. The winners will be speaking about their pictures during the meeting.**



**"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

Glenn Wilson on the south ridge of Peak 8950 above the Yentna Glacier.

Photo by Joe Stock

## SEPTEMBER MEETING

Wednesday, September 4, at 6:30 p.m. at the BP Energy Center at 1014 Energy Court in Anchorage.

<https://www.google.com/maps/place/BP+Energy+Center/@61.1900534,-149.8658586,17z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m5!3m4!1s0x56c897b71cddb81d:0x5058f26b0a2567f1!8m2!3d61.1900534!4d-149.8636699>

We will be revealing the winners and the pictures for the calendar. The winners will be speaking about their pictures during the meeting.

**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.

## Hiking and Climbing Schedule

**September 13 – 15: Ice Fest.** Learn modern ice-climbing techniques, rope-management skills and socialize with other local climbers in a weekend. All abilities welcome. Must be at least 18 years old. Some equipment available.

Cost: \$95. (MCA membership also required).

Registration is only available online and is open from August 10 through September 9.

Visit [www.mtnclubak.org](http://www.mtnclubak.org) and the Training web-page to register, or for more information e-mail: [mcaicefest@gmail.com](mailto:mcaicefest@gmail.com).

Contact: Jayme Mack, 907-382-0212

## Calendar Photo Contest

We are launching an online contest for MCA members to select photos for the 2020 MCA Calendar (horizontal format). There are four photo categories: 1. scenery/landscape, 2. climbing (rock and ice), 3. hiking/mountaineering/slogging, and 4. skiing. Each person is allowed four photo submissions total. Voting will be held from August 21 to 28. To participate in the contest, login to your MCA account via the website (<http://www.mtnclubak.org>), click on the Membership page, and then scroll to the bottom to see the contest submission links (there is one link for each category). Guidelines are detailed in the contest websites. The winning photographers will be asked to briefly share about their selected photo(s) at our September 4 General Meeting. If you have questions, please email [info@mtnclubak.org](mailto:info@mtnclubak.org).

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

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## Announcements

### Hut Needs and Notes

If you are headed to one of the MCA huts, please consult the Hut Inventory and Needs on the website (<http://www.mtnclubak.org/index.cfm/Huts/Hut-Inventory-and-Needs>) or Greg Bragiel, MCA Huts Chairman, at either [huts@mtclubak.org](mailto:huts@mtclubak.org) or (907) 350-5146 to see what needs to be taken to the huts or repaired. All huts have tools and materials so that anyone can make basic repairs. Hutmeisters are needed for each hut: If you have a favorite hut and would like to take the lead on checking on the hut and organizing maintenance, the MCA would greatly appreciate your help!

### Mentorship Program

Interested in furthering your skills? The MCA has a volunteer-driven Mentorship Program that connects beginner and intermediate folks seeking technical experience in specific mountaineering disciplines with mentors who help you gain and work on new skills.

If you would like to become a mentee or mentor, please email [mentorship@mtclubak.org](mailto:mentorship@mtclubak.org).

### Trip

**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 Cali-

fornia 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.

### Gear Retrieval

On August 3, 2019, Michael Meyers and I found Richard Baranow's long-lost bag of gear in the boulders behind Blissful Lake just below the Northeast Ridge of Baleful Peak. After seeing the pictures online, Richard posted the following story:

*Wendy Sanem and I lost that stuff sack back in, I believe, 1997 while finishing up the last of the peaks back up in there...Baleful, Siwash, Fissile, Mountaineer's, Palmer, Troublesome, Hunters, and Devil's Club...a black bear, more than likely, had absconded with it while we were off over towards the east for a few days. Thanks, Billy, for finding that old stash! Without the keys for our bike lock, we had to hike all the way back to the parking lot...and then call for a ride from my brother to get back home!*

If you are heading into Blissful Lake via helicopter and would like to help in retrieving the gear, please contact me at 907.229.3626 for details on where it can be found. It has been placed in an old plastic bucket and underneath the large boulders just southeast of Blissful Lake and can quickly be retrieved during drop-off.

Thanks,  
- Billy Finley



Photos by Bill Finley

### Choate's Chuckle - Tom Choate

**Q:** Why did the climber bring a security guard with him?

*Answer: on page 12.*

# Scrambles above the North Baird Glacier, Coast Mountains

Text and photos by Simon Richardson, except where noted



*Mark Robson sledge hauling on the North Baird Glacier.*

Mark Robson and I live in Scotland (United Kingdom) and have made several trips to the Coast Mountains of British Columbia. Over the years, we have become fascinated by the remote and pristine nature of the range and were keen to visit the Stikine Icefield. Unlike most teams that visit the area and focus on Devils Thumb and its surrounding peaks, our objective was Oasis Peak (7925 feet) that lay 25 kilometers to the northwest at the head of the North Baird Glacier. This little-visited spire had only been summited once. Together with Devils Thumb and its satellite Burkett Needle, it is considered to be one of the most spectacular mountains in Southeast Alaska.

Our plan was to attempt Oasis Peak via a new route from the north. That had been attempted a couple of times in the 1970s, but our tactic was to visit in the spring (early May) hoping to find more stable snow, ice, and mixed climbing conditions than those encountered by the previous teams in mid-summer. We flew onto the North Baird Glacier from Petersburg by helicopter on 30 April. As far as we could tell, we were the first documented climbing ex-



*Mark Robson on Point 5800 looking across to Oasis Peak on the right.*

pedition to visit the glacier for over 40 years.

As soon as we arrived, it was clear that any technical climbing was out of the question. The mountains were heavily snowed up, draped with enormous cornices and unstable snow mushrooms. But more significantly, it was not freezing at night and there were (literally) hundreds of avalanches. After a week with low clouds, fog, and rain, we reluctantly abandoned plans for Oasis Peak and moved our camp down the glacier to where we could access the intriguing North Arm of the North Baird Glacier.

Finally, on 9 May, the weather improved enough for us to climb through the icefall guarding entry to the North Arm. We were probably the first mountaineers ever to visit this part of the icecap and were surrounded by over a dozen unclimbed peaks. The big prize, however, was Peak 7180 (also known as Hyder Peak), which lay eight kilometers away near the head of a tributary to the adjacent Dawes Glacier. That massive and isolated mountain, with a steep, rocky summit triangle, lay on the western edge of the range. We made the five-kilometer-long and 1,200-meter ascent the following day during a brief 24-hour weather window via a combination of post-holing through deep snow, skiing where possible, and then mixed climbing on the summit triangle. The view from the precarious and massively corniced summit looking east to all the major peaks in the range was breathtaking. During the trip we were also successful in making first ascents of Point 5910, Peak 5720, Point 5800, and the shapely Peak 5919 before flying out on 12 May.

Overall, we only had three days when it was not raining and the visibility was good enough to climb. Snow conditions remained soft throughout, avalanches took place constantly, and we experienced considerable cornice difficulties. Despite all of these challenges, it was an extremely rewarding expedition. The climbing was rarely technical, but picking safe lines and negotiating the beautiful corniced summit ridges made it very exacting. We had one huge cornice collapse, but fortunately we both stayed upright on the solid side of the fracture line! And above all, when the rain stopped and the fog lifted, we were treated to some of the most beautiful and pristine mountain landscapes either of us had ever seen.

Alaskan climbers are notoriously modest about publicizing their achievements, but Steve Gruhn quickly contacted us to say that there were no records of previous ascents of any of the peaks we climbed. Our own research suggested that Peak 7180 was one of the highest unclimbed peaks (with over 3000 feet of prominence) in Southeast Alaska.





Mark Robson on the summit Point 5910.



Mark Robson climbing Peak 5919.

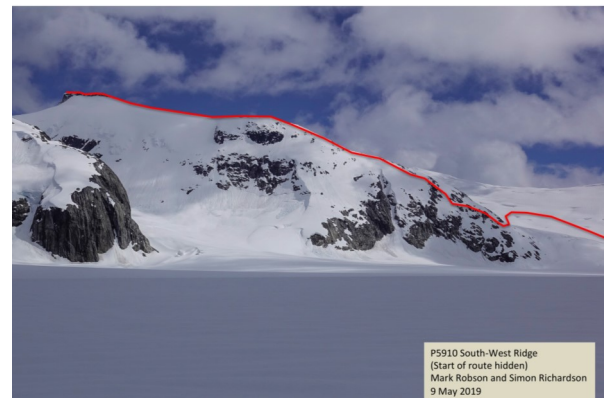


Simon Richardson on the summit ridge of Peak 7180.

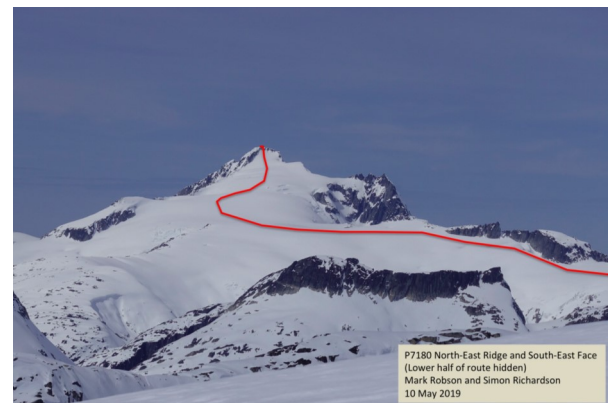
Photo by Mark Robson



P5919 East Ridge  
Mark Robson and Simon Richardson  
12 May 2019



P5910 South-West Ridge  
(Start of route hidden)  
Mark Robson and Simon Richardson  
9 May 2019

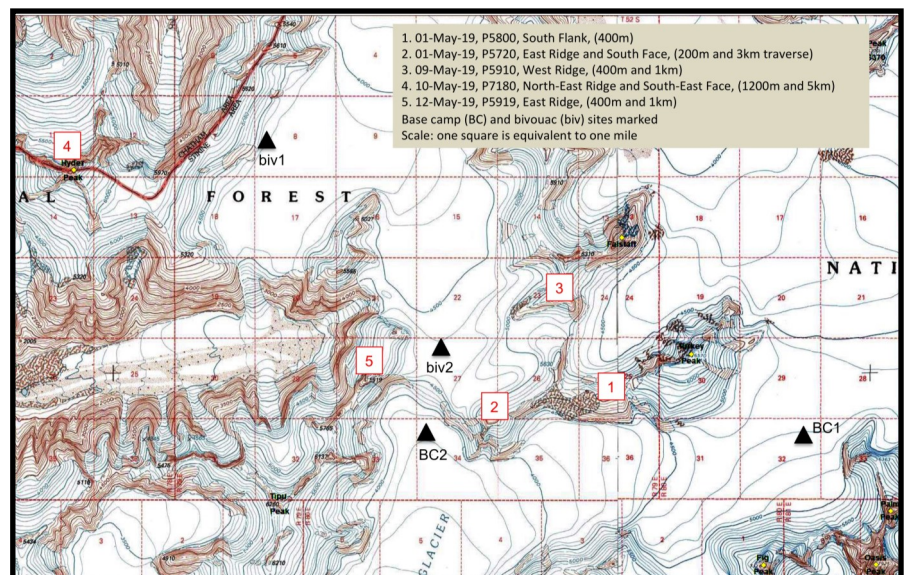


P7180 North-East Ridge and South-East Face  
(Lower half of route hidden)  
Mark Robson and Simon Richardson  
10 May 2019



P5800 East Flank  
Mark Robson and Simon Richardson  
1 May 2019

P5720 East Ridge and South Face  
Mark Robson and Simon Richardson  
1 May 2019





## Peak 5309 (Boulder Creek and Ship Creek), West Ridge, Kenai Mountains

Text by Steve Gruhn; photos by Wayne Todd



*Above: Peak 5050 (far left), Peak 3510 (left of center), and Nativity (4904 feet; center) from the 2600-foot knob.*

*Below: View to the north from the summit of Peak 5309, showing Kenai Lake in the distance.*



At 6:30 a.m. on Friday, July 19, Wayne Todd and I met at the Huffman Road Carra and drove to Cooper Landing. We'd planned to attempt Peak 5309 in the Boulder Creek and Ship Creek drainages south of Kenai Lake. But we didn't know exactly where to start our hike. The 1950 Seward (B-8) quadrangle depicted a trail east of Porcupine Creek, but neither of us were sure how to access that trail – or whether it still remained nearly 70 years after the map was published. Google Earth imagery from April 2011 didn't help us much because of the snow cover. We settled on the Rainbow Lake Trail because we at least knew where it was. We turned left onto Snug Harbor Road and drove to the Rainbow Lake Trailhead at an elevation of approximately 1300 feet, arriving at about 9 a.m.

The hike down to Rainbow Lake went quite quickly. We passed a woman walking a dog and then we were alone for the rest of the day. We hiked to the end of the maintained trail and then found a series of small side trails to follow southward. After these eventually terminated at the shore of Rainbow Lake, we followed the shoreline toward the southeastern edge of the lake.

Once there, we dove into the brush and began making our way uphill over fallen logs. Then Wayne spied some survey flagging. We followed the survey flagging to a trail (likely a snowmachine route) and turned right. Wayne had been in this area with Martin Bril and Dan Glatz on November 2, when they had climbed Nativity (4904 feet). On that trip they had followed a snowmachine trail.

But in the mid-summer high ferns and tall brush, we had trouble following the route. Often we could only feel an unseen hard-packed route under our shoes. Other times we connected objects of litter (and there were way too many such objects) that we hoped were on the correct route. Flies and mosquitoes swarmed us, seemingly excited about the fresh meat that was venturing into their domain. We followed the snowmachine route for about a mile and a half, but it seemed like a lot longer due to the difficulty of keeping on the route.

Eventually, we reached a point at about 1800 feet overlooking an unnamed stream where Wayne said that he had left the snowmachine route in November. In November he had crossed the stream and headed south. Our objective on this trip was to the east, so from this point on, we would both be hiking on new ground.

We departed the trail to our left and ascended steeply through brush and krummholz to a knob at about 2600 feet. There we stopped for a bite to eat and to view the scenic Cooper Lake. But the bugs soon got us moving again. From the knob we tried contouring to the east, but thick alders forced us to change our plans. We spied some fireweed patches below us and separately made our ways to them and crossed the unnamed creek. We continued upstream, first on the south side of it and later on the north side of it, trying to connect patches of fireweed, but in reality connecting patches of willows studded with fireweed. We reached



brushline at about 2400 feet and left the bugs behind. From there we hiked up a waterfall and proceeded eastward through a pass. On the southeast side of the pass was a gorgeous, unmapped lake that drained into Boulder Creek. Fields of fireweed speckled the landscape.

We followed the north shoreline of the lake and discovered that there was quite a bit of swampy ground near the shore. We came to Boulder Creek, waded across it at about 2600 feet, and then began gradually gaining elevation. A steep ridge came down from the northeast and we wanted to round that without ascending it. An unmapped incised chasm south of us left only a relatively narrow swath to select our route.

Once above the chasm, there was a short stretch of the stream that seemed crossable. Above that a waterfall loomed. We crossed to the south side of the stream and headed uphill. The vegetation gradually petered out and soon we were in a field of talus. We followed this talus eastward for nearly a mile and uphill for nearly 2,000 feet. The talus slope gradually narrowed to a ridge with snow on the north side.

Upon encountering a patch of steep, exposed snow, Wayne, in the lead, doubled back to the north and west, finding snow that was at a gentler angle and much less exposed. The day had been gloriously sunny, but as we neared the summit, fog swirled around us and we heard thunder in the distance to the west.

Wayne waited for me on the summit, but once I got there, we didn't tarry. We wanted to get off the 26th-most prominent peak in the Kenai Mountains to avoid a possible lightning strike.

Although we hadn't observed any evidence of a prior ascent on the summit, I did come across some trash (apparently a part from a snowmachine) at about 4200 feet on the descent.

We retraced our steps to Boulder Creek and then traveled on the south side of the unmapped lake to the pass. Concerned about losing daylight, we minimized our breaks, and tried to keep a steady pace. We traveled on the south side of the unnamed stream until just before the stream made a dogleg to the north.

We crossed the stream and headed north up a salmonberry-filled swath for perhaps a hundred feet. We spun our wheels as the clocked ticked down to sunset, finding potential routes through the vegetation, and then losing them in thick brush, all the while swatting bugs and calling out to alert any bears in the area of our presence. After perhaps an hour of stumbling around in the brush and battling flies, we came across the snowmachine route. By then the sun was nearing the horizon.

We followed the snowmachine route down and to the west. At one point Wayne noticed a small side trail to our right that we

had taken on our ascent. Had he not pointed it out, I would have kept following the main route, perhaps leading to the Russian Lake Trail. I'm sure glad Wayne was paying attention.

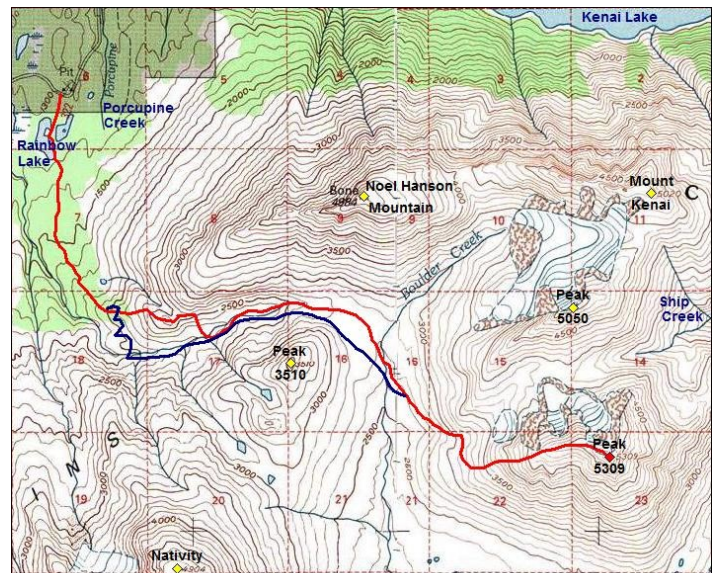
Dusk overcame us perhaps a half mile from Rainbow Lake. Our pace slowed and we had more frequent instances of losing our route. But we continually headed downhill and to the north, so we were making progress – even if it was slow progress. Shortly before midnight we could see Rainbow Lake and we opted to head for the shoreline and off the trail. We trudged along the shore and then on the myriad trails around the lake, finally arriving at the car just after midnight.

We had been on the go for about 15 hours and my eyelids were heavy enough that on the drive back to Anchorage I had to stop at Granite Creek to take a nap.

We found the scenery in the alpine area to be gorgeous and recommend this area to other mountaineers. There are several prominent peaks in the area without records of ascents. However, both Wayne and I feel that mid-July might not be the best time of year to access the alpine country via the route we traveled.



*Steve Gruhn wading the unnamed stream on the return.*



*Route of ascent shown in red; route of descent shown in blue where it departed from the route of ascent.*



# Peakbagging in the Upper Western Lobe of the Yentna Glacier, Central Alaska Range

Text by Glenn Wilson; photos by Joe Stock

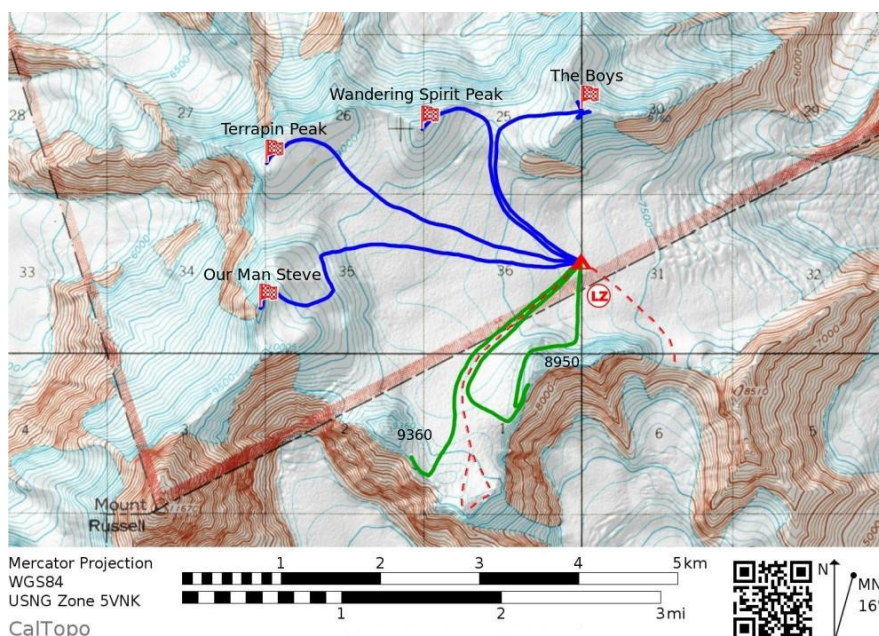
Even the best plans can fall through at the last minute – weather, flights, permits, etc. – and we've grown accustomed to changing everything when that happens. Joe Stock calls it "Expecting the Unexpected" and some of our most memorable climbing trips in recent years have started that way. So when Joe called two weeks before we were to leave and said that a long-anticipated expedition wasn't going to happen for reasons beyond our control, my first thought was "Adventure!" When he called, he'd already been consulting with Steve Gruhn, and together they came up with an alternative plan that would have us setting up a base camp and climbing peaks in a rarely-visited corner of the central Alaska Range in Denali National Park. To add a sense of wilderness exploration to the trip, most peaks in the area are unnamed with no known records of first ascents.

The members of our team were Joe Stock (AMGA/IFMGA Mountain Guide, [stockalpine.com](http://stockalpine.com)), Elliot Gaddy (Guide, [elliottgaddy.com](http://elliottgaddy.com)), James Kesterson, Paul Muscat, Matthew Sanborn, and me. In various combinations, our history of alpine mountaineering together goes back as far as 22 years. We've found that we share similar interests and that we enjoy each other's company even when the weather gets bad.

We assembled in Anchorage on June 2<sup>nd</sup> and drove to Talkeetna the next day where we waited overnight for the weather to clear at our destination. On the 4<sup>th</sup>, Paul Roderick of Talkeetna Air Taxi loaded all of us and our gear into a Turbo Otter and flew us to the upper western lobe of the Yentna Glacier.

At 7700 feet we dug out a large flat area, protected it with snow block walls, and set up our base camp. Our camp was surrounded by several unnamed peaks, which we would attempt to climb. Down the valley and beyond we had a full view of Mount Foraker (16 miles away) and in the opposite direction, just past the head of the valley, was Mount Russell.

By mid-afternoon we were out for a reconnaissance hike. We traveled on snowshoes a mile northwest to a col on the east ridge of a 9250-foot pyramid-shaped peak where we switched to crampons and continued up for our first summit of the trip. We named this Wandering Spirit Peak, and from the top we soaked in terrific views of where we would wander for the next nine days. We returned to camp at around 9:30 p.m. and had supper after a very



full day.

The next morning we headed a mile and a half to the base of a 9350-foot peak that stood west-northwest from camp. We worked our way up to the northeast ridge where Joe, in the lead, found a large, completely hidden crevasse. Clouds were building as we ascended, and we heard thunder in the distance. By the time we were within a few hundred vertical feet of the summit, the sound of thunder was close. We retreated and waited lower down for the weather to clear, but it didn't show any signs of letting up. It was snowing when we headed back to camp.

Up at 2:00 a.m. and out of camp by 3:30 on Day 3, we started out again to attempt the peak from the day before. Conditions hadn't improved and visibility was very limited. We waited at the base of the peak for some time, but again, the weather only seemed to be deteriorating, and we headed back. Our tracks had mostly been covered by snow, so careful navigation down the mile-wide, gently sloping glacier was critical. It would have been too easy to miss camp and end up dealing with the icefall down the valley. My mind played tricks on me as we hiked in nearly whiteout conditions. I had a distinct sense of walking through a narrow, perfectly round, all-white tunnel. Navigation seemed easy – just follow the tunnel. Joe and Elliot knew better, of course, so using GPS and compass, they led us straight back to our camp.

Day 4 was beautiful, clear, and cold when we set out at 6:00 a.m. to attempt the same peak once again. By then we were familiar with the approach, which went quickly, and we climbed steadily to



the dome-shaped summit of what we called Terrapin Peak. When we were near the top, we noticed two jets approaching. They appeared to be F-22 Stealth Fighters, but they weren't very stealthy that day. We could see and hear them when they were still far down the valley and flying relatively slowly. We waved as they got closer, and they responded by rocking their wings as they flew overhead.



*Left to right: Elliot Gaddy, Glenn Wilson, and Matthew Sanborn on an afternoon approach to Wandering Spirit Peak.*

On Day 5 we were out of camp at 6:00 a.m. for an attempt at a 9250-foot peak, which towered over our camp directly to the north. We returned to the col on the east ridge of Wandering Spirit Peak, and headed east until we were near the top of our objective. There were three high points, all within about 800 feet of each other. One on the north was all snow and rounded, one on the northeast was a built-up overhanging snow cap, and one on the southwest was a point of rock at the end of a narrow, snowy ridge. It wasn't clear which was the highest, so we climbed all three. We called this peak, with its trio of high points, The Boys.

It was snowing the next morning when we woke up at 4:00 a.m. We stayed in camp until noon and then went out in hazy, hot conditions for reconnaissance of two peaks at the southwest end of the valley.

We started out at 6:00 a.m. on Day 7 and returned to the southwest corner of the valley to attempt Peak 9360 by the southeast ridge. A sub-peak on the ridge appeared to be within reach, but the connecting ridge to the summit was still in question. From the sub-peak, which we climbed on belay due to exposure on the southwest side, we could see that the connecting knife-edged ridge to the main peak was largely composed of loose snow. We turned back. As we descended, a Cessna flew up the valley and then turned and headed out. We recognized it as a Talkeetna Air Taxi plane, and we learned later that it was Paul Roderick. He had been nearby and detoured over to check on us mid-trip.

Peak 8950, which towered over our camp to the south, was our

objective for Day 8. We climbed up a long ramp on its north side to a shoulder at 8600 feet. We viewed the steep north ridge, but large crevasses and an overhanging cornice kept us from continuing up that route. We traversed and descended the west face, just below the bergschrund, to near the base of the south ridge. We followed that up to a point where we decided to turn around. We rappelled part of the way back down.

From the day we arrived, we had our eyes on a peak at the head of the valley and evaluated route options as we viewed it from different angles. On Day 9 we were up at midnight and on our way by 1:30 a.m. for the best conditions to attempt Peak 10150, our most significant peak of the trip. We snowshoed a mile and a half west from camp to the base of the peak and switched to crampons for the steep ascent. The sky was clear, and a vivid alpenglow accompanied us most of the morning before sunrise. We climbed up the north side of the east slope to about 8900 feet, just above a large crevasse that extended horizontally across the slope. We



*Matthew Sanborn (left) and Paul Muscat in camp on a western tributary of the Yentna Glacier.*

turned south above the crevasse and traversed to the center of the slope, where we saw a clear path up to the north summit ridge. The summit itself was an unstable-looking snow cap, so we took turns tagging it on a stretched rope. Clouds were moving in as we descended, and snow was falling steadily by the time we returned to camp.

Some of the most exciting adventures we've had in recent years started as this one did when Joe sat

down with Steve Gruhn who provided destination ideas and valuable mountain information. Peak 10150 marked the highlight of our adventure here, and we named it Our Man Steve.

We called Talkeetna Air Taxi at noon for a flight out after concluding that we had done everything we wanted to do. Given the weather, it was agreed that we would call back later. When we called at 5:00 it was still snowing, but radar showed only a small system over our area that seemed to be moving away. We broke camp and soon we were picked up and on our way.



In nine days on the upper western lobe of the Yentna Glacier, we attempted to climb six peaks, and we successfully summited four. Of those four summits each was a first known ascent. Denali Ranger Tucker Chenoweth calls this place “Island in the Skye” for his daughter Skye, and it’s a term that seems fitting in many ways. Higher than the immediate surroundings, remote but only slightly removed from nearby centers of activity, this glacial basin has the feeling of isolated wilderness. Our group has visited a few places in different parts of Alaska that are like this – untouched, relatively unexplored, and not described in guidebooks. At first it seemed unusual to find even one such place. But now we’ve come to understand that in Alaska there are countless destinations where we can find our own routes up the peaks and enjoy a true wilderness experience.



*Left to right: Elliot Gaddy, James Kesterson, and Matthew Sanborn traversing the east slope of Our Man Steve alongside a bridged-over crevasse.*



*Paul Muscat (left) and Glenn Wilson on an early-morning ascent of Our Man Steve.*



*Glenn Wilson (left) and Paul Muscat climbing to the summit ridge of Our Man Steve. In the mid-distance are Terrapin Peak (left), Wandering Spirit Peak (center), and The Boys (right). On the skyline is Mount Foraker.*



*Left to right: Elliot Gaddy, James Kesterson, Matthew Sanborn, Paul Muscat, Glenn Wilson, and Joe Stock on the summit of Terrapin Peak. At left is the summit of Mount Russell.*

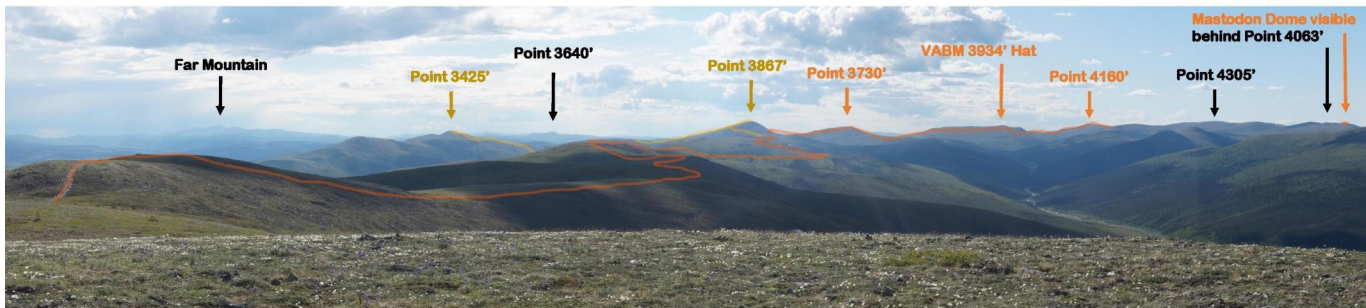


## A Walk in the Tanana Hills

Text and photos by Shane Ohms

Mastodon Dome (4418 feet), Peak 3867, Peak 3425, and Peak 3405

June 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>, 2019



*Above: Looking backwards, and forwards, from Peak 3405.*

*Below: Sunrise to the north, viewed between Mastodon Dome at left and Peak 4222 at right.*



The weather forecast was looking fantastic in the Tanana Hills and the few people I know in Fairbanks were all unavailable. Knowing I would be solo, I looked for options that would stay well above timberline (a.k.a. bear territory) and max out my legs. Working within that criteria and weather window, I devised a 10,000-foot, 60-mile ridge walk covering four points that amassed 500 feet of prominence.

Friday came, I got off work and mowed the lawn. With responsibilities now aside, I embarked on my trip. At 11:30 p.m., I was departing the Pinnell Mountain Trailhead en route for Mastodon Dome. Two hours later, I was on Mastodon Dome, enjoying the darkest hour of the night from the highest point of my trek. It was two weeks before summer solstice and the sun barely dipped below the horizon. The sky was beautiful and colorful. In one of my panoramas, I was able to capture the pink morning sky, the moon, the sun, and the orange setting sky. I continued trending south for Point 4160. At Point 4160 I discovered a four-wheeler trail, which emerged and disappeared as I went down and up Point 3934, and Point 3730. Having not slept in a while, I promised myself a nap on Point 3730. That was deferred until Peak 3867 after I discovered that Point 3730 housed a large population of mosquitoes.

The four-wheeler trail skirted around the north of Peak 3867, but I

went up its western face. There was a breeze quelling the mosquitoes and I napped from 7 to 8:30 a.m. Next I plotted my course for Peak 3425. There was a good ¾-mile spent in the trees on a moose trail, so I tried to pass quickly. On the northern slopes of Peak 3425, I detoured to a little patch of snow. I filled my 1.5-liter bladder with water and put about four handfuls of snow in a gallon Ziploc bag. That would be my source of water for the next 20 miles.

Near the summit of Peak 3425, I found a nice caribou antler that I used some rocks to prop up in cairn-like fashion. Between Peaks 3867 and 3425 I found no trace of human activity. I descended and crossed back through the trees on the moose trail. I traversed the east side of Peak 3867 on a contour above timberline. Back on the four-wheeler trail, I continued east in aim of Peak 3405. I took a two-hour nap before a mile-long section that would be spent below timberline. Almost immediately upon entering the timbered section, I found bear tracks the size of my hand. I decided to keep going through, and I did so remarkably quickly. As I get closer, Peak 3405 seemed to be running away. If you kept cutting the distance between yourself and a point in half, would you ever get there? Eventually, yes, and I did at 5:35 p.m.

On Peak 3405, I enjoyed a summit beer and looked back on how



far I'd come ... and how far I had left to go. The orange line in the picture above indicates the path I followed in and out and the yellow indicates my detour from the four-wheeler trail. It had been all fun and games getting myself out there, then the work to get back began. With one liter of water remaining, there were 9.5 miles between me and my next snow patch on the north side of Peak 3867. At 6:00 I departed the summit and took another nap from 7 to 8 p.m. before dropping back into that mile-long stretch of trees for the second and final time. When I got to the snowfield, I topped off the 1.5-liter hydroflask with snow (I had saved some water to speed up melting). Then I took another nap from approximately 9 to 10 p.m.; I would have liked to have rested longer because I'd essentially been staving off sleep deprivation the entire trip (my four naps had proved quite restless due to either bugs or cool breezes). But having only brought a quarter-zip, I would need to hike through the night to stay warm. And so I did ... in a zombie-like trance.

It was unfortunate that I was unable to enjoy the second night with the same clear mind I had enjoyed the first. I was aware that a long and beautiful sunset/sunrise was taking place, but Shane was not there to enjoy it. From Point 3730 until the car, Shane was in a different place. Shane was busy holding the ship's wheel in both hands, the sole goal being to get the ship to harbor. I remember checking my GPS every 10 or so minutes because I really, really, really didn't want to take any more steps than necessary. I remember thinking about how good a can of baked beans and a banana with peanut butter would taste when I got back home, and so I decided to go the final 12 miles without food because it would make the meal in my mind taste better. I remember the sun being a red laser beam pointed right in my eyes as I made my way back up Point 3934. I remember feeling a token of joy when at 3:30 I topped out on Mastodon Dome again, thinking that "it'd all be downhill from here." After all, that was the highest point of the trip, right? And then I remember remembering how many bumps laid in the path between Mastodon Dome and the car. Even on the return from Mastodon Dome, I was tasked with about 700 feet more vertical. With my reserves running low and a mental state that was well beyond "done and checked out," 700 feet was a lot to pony up.

As the end got nearer, I would be walking for three minutes, sitting for three minutes. The only thing that kept me from rolling on my side and staying there for "just a little while" was the rationale that said, *"Ya know, Shane, hiking this last stretch is really hard, but if you don't keep making your small advances it will be even harder to pick yourself up when you eventually do decide to continue."* So at 6:30 a.m., I arrived at the car. I was anxious to get home to my craved meal, but after a few minutes on the road, I knew I needed to pull over and sleep. So I set an alarm for 1 hour and 20 minutes. When I awoke, I downed a five-hour energy and hit the road again thinking, *"There. That should do it."* I made it a bit farther, but not 30 minutes later my body said, *"No, Shane. No more naps. You need real sleep."* So I pulled over again and slept for a lovely seven hours. And yes, the baked beans and banana with peanut butter tasted amazing, especially after all my road "delays."



Shane Ohms on the summit of Peak 3425, with Peak 3867 behind.

#### Choate's Chuckle - Tom Choate

A: The route guide said the climb needed good protection.



## Mount Williwaw (5445 feet), Front Range

Text and photos by Greg Higgins

July 7, 2019

On July 7th my wife Shannon and I climbed Mount Williwaw from the ridge to the northwest of the summit. Our camp was located at the first lake in the North Fork of Campbell Creek drainage and we went up the steep face to the left of where the ridge turned upward when viewed from there to join the ridge somewhere near the middle where it leveled out. Our initial route mostly followed imaginary gullies and chutes that I had optimistically picked out by binoculars the evening before.

After reaching the ridge we worked our way toward the summit, staying on the edge when possible. It was typical Chugach terrain. If you like complex route-finding problems in steep and broken chutes up and around gendarmes that are mostly blind ends, then this climb is for you! Eventually we met the easier ground south of the summit, which we took to the top.

On top we found a Geo-Point register placed in 2005 in a small cairn. There were about 20 climbs logged since that placement. That was my third time visiting that summit. The first was in 1973 when Paul Carnicelli, Tom Mullins, Jim Lacau, Dave Stephens, and I came up and back from our bench camp toward Koktoya Peak while we were completing a traverse to Eagle River. We had all taken the late Bob Spurr's Mountaineering Class at Alaska Methodist University together. My more recent time was in the 1980s when the late Tim Neale and I came up and back in one day from Glen Alps using the Rock Lake approach to the summit's south.



*View toward the North Fork of Campbell Creek showing Lakes One and Two above Long Lake.*

Going down we chose to descend the Northeast Ridge, as we had done on my first trip there. That route followed the ridge at times, but made much use of the extensive sheep trails on the Ship Creek side of the ridge. From the low-point bench we turned left and used as many snow fields as possible to make our way back to Lake Two in the North Fork drainage before ascending back to our camp.



*Mount Williwaw summit cairn and register*



*Shannon and Greg Higgins on the summit of Mount Williwaw.*



# Marathon Mountain (4826 feet), Northeast Ridge, Kenai Mountains

Text and photos by Mat Brunton

If there's a mountain around Seward that people know about, it's likely Marathon Mountain. Marathon's fame is due to the annual race that's been taking place on the Fourth of July for over a century. It brings hordes to the otherwise small and relatively quiet Alaskan town, and clogs the Seward Highway (the only route south out of Anchorage, and north out of Seward).

While the race is known simply as "Mount Marathon," the uphill/downhill race course doesn't even come close to the summit; it only goes up to "Race Point," which is about 1,800 feet and a mile and a half east of the true summit. The true summit of Marathon doesn't seem to get reached that often. There is a false summit with a register, and it seems like it only sees about a half dozen to a dozen visitors a year. The true summit lies just a bit farther west, but requires a glacier crossing with a very exposed section along a knife-edge ridge of ice or snow (depending on season) with steep and icy slopes (more than 1,000 feet of exposure) off both sides. Having done the route in late September, with no soft snow on the glacier (it was either exposed blue ice or old, hard firn), I was glad to have sharp, steel, front-points on stiff mountain boots and an ice tool.

The route began on the Marathon Jeep Trail, which was pretty civilized by Alaskan standards. That trail became narrower and brushier near the alpine, but was still very straightforward. It petered out in the tundra above timberline and off-trail route-finding from there led to the northeast ridge, which could be taken over false summits all the way to the true summit. Depending on the route taken up to the northeast ridge, it's 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> class. The 3<sup>rd</sup>-class options, while less exposed, featured loose scree. The 4<sup>th</sup>-class options provided more secure footing, but were quite exposed in places. Once on the northeast ridge itself it was pretty easy scrambling, but definitely very exposed in places. No technical gear was required to reach the prominent false summit with the register.

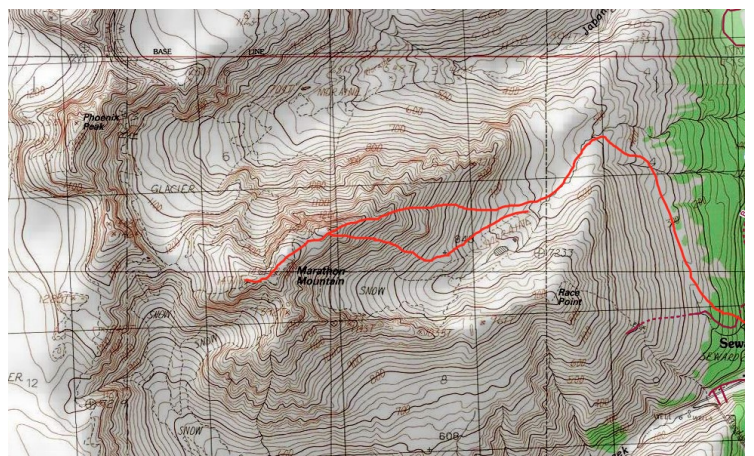
Beyond there, and to reach the true summit, crampons and an axe or ice tool are advisable. With softer snow earlier in the season, aluminum 'pons and a lightweight axe would likely suffice. Late season, burlier boots and 'pons with an actual ice tool are recommended as the exposed crossing would be tricky without either – and a fall, while the crossing is easy with the right gear, would likely be un-survivable. The views in all directions, especially over Resurrection Bay and toward the Harding Icefield, were absolutely spectacular.



*Views south toward Resurrection Bay from near the summit of Marathon Mountain.*

## Gear:

- Scarpa Rebel Pro GTX boots;
- Petzl Irvis Hybrid crampons;
- Petzl Laser Speed Light ice screws;
- Petzl Spatha knife;
- Petzl Altitude harness;
- Black Diamond Venom ice axe;
- Black Diamond Oz alpine draws;
- Black Diamond Nitron locking carabiners;
- Black Diamond Blitz 28 pack;
- Black Diamond Revolt headlamp;
- J-Snare V-thread tool;
- CAMP Speed helmet;
- Julbo photochromatic sunglasses;
- 6-millimeter cordelette; and
- InReach.



# Magpie Peak (5812 feet), Western Chugach Mountains

Text by Mat Brunton



*Brian Harder on the ridge between the north and south aspects of Magpie Peak.*

*Photo by Mat Brunton*

On March 11, 2017, Brian Harder and I completed another possible first descent in the Western Chugach Mountains (Girdwood area). We ascended Magpie Peak's south couloir, and descended its north-face couloir. That was our second attempt. The first attempt was nixed on the apron of the south couloir due to rapidly deteriorating snow conditions: abundant sunshine had unavoidable rime chunks showering down and we deemed it to be unsafe to proceed (we instead ascended Raggedtop Mountain to its summit, and completed a likely first descent down the north ridge into a northerly chute into Raggedtop's northern cirque). An even earlier start made our second attempt at Magpie possible. That day was a modest approximately seven miles and 6,000 feet, and involved a short section of technical climbing.

## Gear:

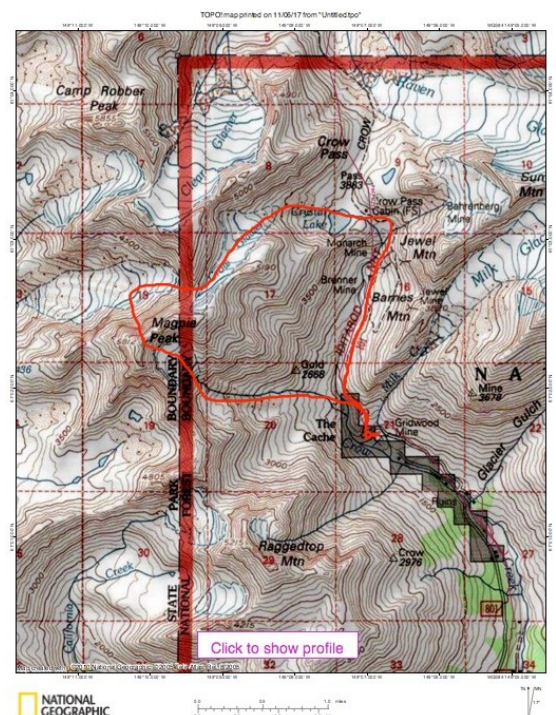
- Pieps DSP Pro avalanche beacon;
- Black Diamond Deploy shovel;
- Black Diamond QuickDraw Tour probe;
- Black Diamond Snow Saw Pro;
- Black Diamond Helio 105 skis;
- Dynafit Superlite 2.0 bindings;
- Dynafit ski crampons;
- Dynafit TLT6 boots;
- Black Diamond mohair mix skins;
- Petzl Irvis Hybrid crampons;
- Smartwool ski socks;
- Mountain Hardwear Chockstone pants;
- Mountain Hardwear Compressor pants;
- Patagonia Capilene boxers;
- Patagonia Duckbill hat;
- Tech t-shirt;
- Outdoor Research Cathode hooded jacket;
- Black Diamond Coefficient fleece hoody;
- Black Diamond Hot Forge Hybrid hoody;
- Black Diamond Helio gloves;

- Black Diamond Cirque 35 pack;
- Black Diamond Traverse ski poles;
- Black Diamond pitons;
- 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);
- 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.; and
- Emergency kit: InReach, space blanket, narcotic pain killer, herbs, etc.



*Mat Brunton leading a pitch of steep rock and rime to top out the south couloir on Magpie Peak.*

*Photo by Brian Harder*





## "White Pillar Route #1" on West Tower, Mendenhall Towers

Text by Dylan Miller; photos by Gabe Hayden

I was on an extended break from work that I took the time off to go climbing with my father and some other friends. Dad and I had been planning to do a few different peaks for a while now. But sadly the week's forecast was of straight rain. Eventually all plans fell through, and it looked like I'd just be hanging out. Then a one-day weather window opened up on a Friday, I shot my friend Gabe Hayden a text asking about the Mendenhall Towers, since I knew he had been up there a week prior. Magically he was psyched to try to squeeze in a climb. In fact that week prior he had seen a line that looked like it would offer steep, clean climbing, so we decided to try our luck.

Our plan was to get a helicopter bump a way up the Mendenhall Glacier since they flew that way all day anyway and had some "deadheads" going up. The following day we would hike the rest of the way in, climb, and hike out the next day. Thursday, Friday, Saturday. With Friday being the only good-weather day.

So we packed our gear, jumped in a heli, got dropped off in the mist and rain, set up the tent, had dinner and went to bed by 6:30, for we were going to wake up at 3 a.m.

The alarm went off and we were up, we blasted up the remaining approach to the base of the towers and got to our line, which looked incredible and was totally dry.

Instantly I spotted a splitter crack up a clean, blank face on the buttress we planned to climb. Gabe said, "Take it away" and I racked up. Right off the glacier was where the hardest moves were, a vertical thin crack was too small for tips, but offered available crimps. Foot smears and lay-backing got us to better holds and soon into a fat, easy, hand crack. Then a run-out, blanky, and slightly reachy crimp traverse brought us into the splitter that we had spotted from the glacier. That was a glorious vertical hand crack that went for 40 feet to the belay. Perfect introduction to a new route!

Gabe told me to keep rolling with it, so I took the second lead as well. Continued fun crack climbing up a few more benches soon led to a horrific, mossy slab, which only took gear placements of small nuts and red aliens. At one point I almost gave up when I had to traverse 10 feet right to exit with no more pro, nor holds really, in sight. After cleaning moss off a few hand- and footholds, a sketchy hand-foot match got me out of there ... For future



*Route of "White Pillar Route #1" on West Tower.*

climbers, before the slab there were multiple exit options that looked to be 5.6 to 5.9 climbing.

Gabe took the lead after all that and ran up 5th-class and 5.6 terrain. Clean and fun. We gained a big ledge system at the base of a 200-foot, nearly-vertical headwall lined with crack after crack. That was what caught Gabe's eye in the first place to try this line. The rock was so clean and white that we could see this headwall from miles away. We sat at the base for a little bit, deciding which line to take. The steep wall was somewhat imposing and hard-looking, now that we were directly under it. We picked a more obvious line that looked like a continuous crack system as far as we could see. Gabe led out. Again, hard thin moves right off the bat, protected with red and yellow aliens. Thin cracks and face holds made that a heady 5.10 pitch. Gabe reached a small ledge and built a belay.

I was on lead again and the next pitch of that headwall was a right-facing corner with splintered, irregular cracks ranging from hands to micro on the left panel and virtually nothing on the right face. Some technical lay-backing, footwork, and placement made for a stellar pitch, 5.10 ... again!

It was Gabe's lead again, the third pitch of that silver wall. An obvious line, a left-facing corner with a right in-cut, mostly-.75 crack. Gabe took off into lay-back city. An awkward high-step mantle



with small hands broke the rhythm. Looking up, I was glad I was following that pitch. At the top of the pitch was a small roof that looked like it was giving some uncertainty about exiting, but Gabe made quick work of it and was out of sight. A minute later he was off belay. After some consideration we gave the pitch a 10+ grade and quality.

We were now on top of the headwall and entering 3rd- to 5th-class ridge climbing. We started simul-climbing. Just when we neared the top, we were forced to belay out up another shot pitch. Twin cracks of .4 fingers made it short and savvy and another awesome pitch! Great way to end the route. That put us on top.

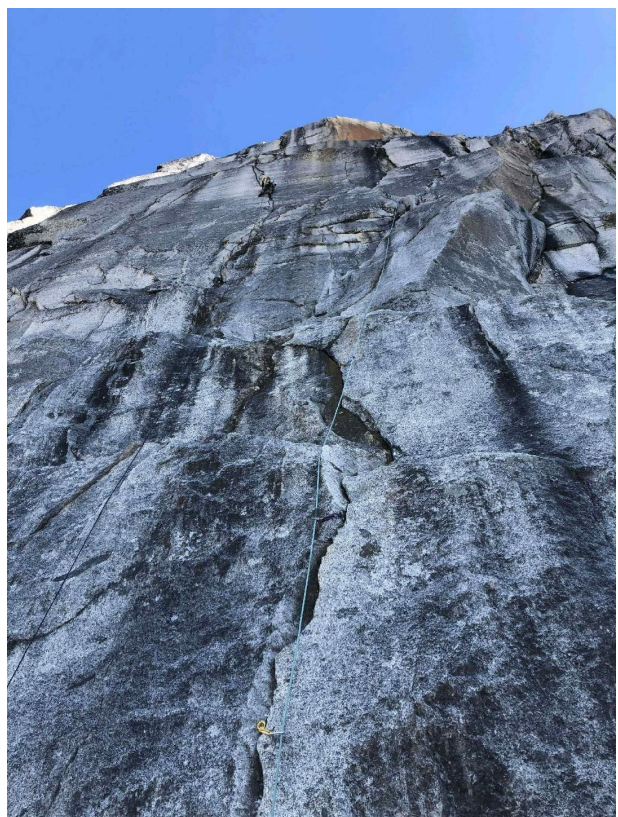
By that time misty clouds had moved over the towers and surrounding mountains. Views appeared and disappeared. Looking over, the Main Tower looked ominous, holding thick clouds on the north side while the south remained visible. The clouds rolled over the summit like ocean breakers. We shared some of Jerry's sausages, crackers, and cheese, then picked our descent line.

Six or seven clean, hassle-free rappels and we were back on the glacier where we had started. A few hours later we were back at camp. Energized, we decided to pack up and make for a break to a lower part of the glacier with the intention of getting out before the rain hit the next day. With the long daylight hours we cruised until midnight and set up the First Light and passed out. The next day we were back in town a few hours before the rain hit.

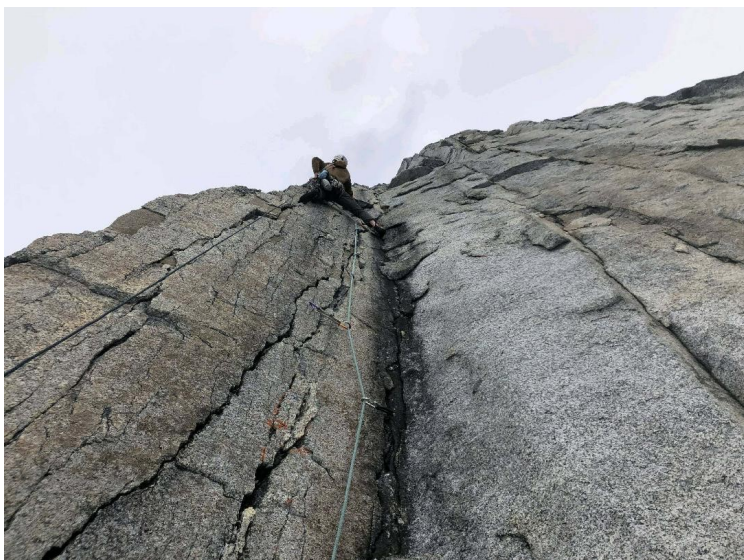
We dubbed our line "White Pillar Route #1" a.k.a. "The Gear Gobbler" 5.10c/d.



*The white pillar portion of the West Tower.*



*Dylan Miller leading a splitter handcrack pitch off the Mendenhall Glacier on "White Pillar Route #1."*



*Dylan Miller leading the second pitch of the white pillar portion on "White Pillar Route #1."*



# "King Cobra" on Mount Barrille (7650 feet), Alaska Range – Alaskan Big Wall Free Climbing

Text by Alastair McDowell

*Another serac rips from the summit ice cliffs of neighboring Mount Dickey, and the familiar roar of avalanche thunders through the valley. My calves shake on crumbling footholds, the infamous "Cracker Jack Gravel" of the Ruth Gorge*

*I'm balanced on an arete well above my last piece. I reach for a pecker piton and weld it into a thin crack with my free hand, tightening my crimp on the other. I launch into the corner above, loaded with tottering loose flakes*

*The world disintegrates below as I fire in two hand jams, choss exploding hundreds of meters down the sheer east face of Mount Barrille, swallowed up by the glacier below. Chemicals flood my brain: relief. Another piece of the puzzle unlocked.*

We came to Alaska for the Kichatna Mountains, lured by a dream of El-Capitan-sized walls set on remote glaciers. Living on the wall with a week of supplies, on-sighting finger cracks on a steep headwall under a midnight sun.

But the Kichatnas' reputation for abysmal weather held true. After four days sifting in Talkeetna waiting for the elusive flying window, our patience ran dry. Time running out, we hatched a new plan.

An hour later Paul Roderick of Talkeetna Air Taxi was flying us into the Ruth Gorge. Our eyes lit up as the huge granite faces filled the windows of our small Otter ski plane. Mount Barrille, and the famed "Cobra Pillar" appeared. Almost 1,000 meters of steep, featured granite, capped with snow, and plenty of potential for a new line.

We arrived midday and the weather was perfect, so we went straight to work. As two teams of two, we would alternate 12-hour shifts to continuously push our ropes up the wall, capitalizing on the eternal daylight of a high Alaskan summer.

Dan Joll and Kim Ladiges packed sleds for every eventuality and set off to quest up a new line on the face right of the "Cobra Pillar." Meanwhile, John Price and I established our glacier base camp.

With John's telephoto lens we watched our friends inch up the first pitches. By the time our paths crossed on the glacier around 3 a.m., the haul bag of supplies was already hanging a respectable 120 meters up the wall.



*Landing on the Ruth Glacier with Talkeetna Air Taxi.*

*Photo by John Price*

John and I jumared the fixed rope and racked up for an intimidating warm up: a wet, arching off-width crack.

Above, heinous, crozzly rock kept us on edge. After dawn, the heat of the sun warmed snow patches on the summit, sending slough avalanches cascading down the face unnervingly close to our side. We continued with trepidation, but I was eventually shut down by a disgusting corner, fused with a miserable excuse for granite.

On the next shift, Kim managed to pass this crux with an M7 lock-off, utilizing the rear hook of our piton hammer. But the atrocious rock tired him, also; so by the mantra of his mentor Twid Turner, only one word echoed through Kim's head: "Penji, penji, penji!" (\*Translation: pendulum.)

So Kim aborted ship and swung off into a new crack system far to the left. Twelve hours, two pitches. This was proving hard work.

But we had now fixed into a potential nook to set up our first portaledge camp, so the following day John and I laboriously hauled up seven days of supplies into the alcove.

Meanwhile back in base camp, Dan and Kim watched in horror as a rare slough ripped from the top of the mountain, plunging directly toward John and me at the belay.

I looked up to see a river of wet snow crashing through the rock arch we hoped would protect us. I pressed my body close to the rock. Snow slush poured over us, soaking us to the bone. With relief the torrent subsided, fortunately without any chunks of rock

or ice. A close call.

The radio crackled in my chest pocket; it was Dan.

"Guys, do you copy?"

"Yes ... We're both OK."

"Good ... I think we can tolerate the bad rock. But now that our line seems to still be in the firing line, we're not keen on the overhead hazard."

I scooped more snow out of my jacket hood.

"You're telling me ... Let's get out of here."

That day it took 10 hours to haul, and 5 hours to descend, as we navigated a maze of steep and traversing abseils with 80-kilogram haul bags dangling from our harnesses.

After four days of effort, it was back to the drawing board; plus, we needed a rest. The everlasting daylight was playing havoc on our body clocks.

Between servings of bacon grease and whipped-cream coffee, it became apparent the only sliver of the mountain relatively safe from avalanche was the central prow, which we believed to host the classic "Cobra Pillar" route.

In our haste leaving Talkeetna, we had only one vague photo of the face showing lines, no names, no topo, leaving the rest to speculation ...

Determined to climb quality virgin terrain rather than crawling up an existing route in a slow big-wall style, we restarted questing up corners, hoping to link into mega cracks firing up the buttress. John started leading up our proposed line and discovered a multitude of fixed gear low on the route with fun 5.10 climbing, confirming that we must have started up the "Cobra Pillar."

So from a major cave low down, we branched out to the right: Kim spied a thin face-climbing traverse to access a new crack system. From a strenuous knee-bar, he laboriously hand-drilled a bolt and was able to crimp his way across the steep wall.

Upon reaching into a wide crack and looking upward, he could not believe what he had discovered. Pitch after pitch of continuous splitter, off-width.

Five- and six-inch-wide cracks rocketed straight up the proudest part of the prow.



*Alastair McDowell jumaring a wild series of fixed ropes to the high point.*

*Photo by John Price*

Kim was in heaven. He led out mega pitches of glorious heel-toes and butterfly jams, as good as anything in Tasmania. It was some of the highest quality climbing any of us had ever encountered in the mountains.

Adding to the delight they discovered a set of ledges to set up camp. The following day we worked together as four to haul up heavy loads and establish our main portaledge camp 350 meters up the wall. We were

then poised for the upper pillar.

But that evening, a sickness that had been nagging John suddenly exacerbated, requiring a late-night evacuation mission. Fortunately, our five ropes strung together just reached the glacier, and John was able to fly back to town the following day.

With Kim and Dan exhausted from their all-nighter saving John, I took over the lead for the day. And so followed the "pecker piton pitch" described above, which proved to be one of the most intense memories engraved in my mind from the wall.

I gained new appreciation of how it felt to discover brilliant climbing in its raw, natural state.

With the help of my friends' wisdom, I was able to unearth incredible hand cracks, finger cracks, stemming corners, and roofs, riding them of their dangerous blocks and loose gravel, hammer and wire brush on hand.

The thought that this might become a real classic spurred us on in our mission. Having climbed in many of the popular granite climbing zones, we genuinely thought this route contained some of the best alpine rock climbing in the world. Where else do you find 15 sustained pitches of 5.10 to 5.11 crack climbing stacked on top of each other, in the mountains, where each one in its own right would be a crag classic?



*John Price, stoked as ever.*

*Photo by Dan Joll*

Ropes fixed high, it was finally time for a push to the summit. Above, we rejoined the "Cobra Pillar" route with its sensational arching splitter to crest the pillar. We stripped down into alpine mode and began simul-climbing more moderate ground.

Or so we thought. Kim led through increasingly wet cracks, drenched by melt from the summit's still-heavy and unstable snowpack. Our worst fears were confirmed: we were too early in the season to safely reach the summit.



Nearing the final technical pitch, the quantity of snow lying above become painfully apparent. It threatened to release at any moment.

The decision to descend was sore, but simple; there were just two hundred meters of moderate, yet dangerous, terrain between us and the summit. As mountaineers we all heartily craved to stand on top, but would also quickly turn back when the conditions dictated otherwise.

We arrived back at portaledge camp around 5 a.m. to find our precious Radix meals ravaged by ravens, powdered spinach and berries strewn across the rocks. The carnage back down at glacier camp was equally atrocious.

Fortunately, our own Raven of Denali was already in full flight, ready to pluck us from our glacial squalor, and back to the living world.

#### Route beta

Pitch 1) Depending on bergschrund height, 20 to 40 meters straight up shallow corner cracks to a small stance with three fixed wires. 5.8.

Pitch 2) Up and around a small roof to the left, then nice corners and face climbing to a stance. 5.10, 40 meters.

Pitch 3) Stem box, pull around roof to left, then up a nice finger-crack corner. Below a large block, move out left to the newly cleaned hand-and-finger crack to finish underneath the massive roof. 5.10+, 40 meters.

Pitch 4) From here "Cobra Pillar" goes left and "King Cobra" goes right. Step across the gully and climb overhanging hands into an off-width. 5.10+, 20 meters.

Pitch 5) 5.9 chimney past old rivet at roof. Place gear and down-climb two meters; step right on good holds around an arête to no-hands stance and bolt. Climb up two moves then down-climb right to a side pull and reach into finger crack. 5.11, 35 meters.

Pitch 6) 5.10 off-width for 50 meters. Starts as fists and moves to off-width. As it turns to chimney, pass a bolt and move right to an excellent hand/fist/off-width with bolt belay.



*Dan Joll relaxing into another night on the portaledge.*

*Photo by Kim Ladiges*



*Kim Ladiges following finger cracks above the roof of the stem-box pitch.*

*Photo by Dan Joll*

Pitch 7) The "Monster Off-Width," with a roof then belay at a small stance near the midpoint of the pillar. Right-hand version is the best and is 5.10 off-width, but you can also go left at mid-height and do the piker's variant, an easier 5.9 off-width. There is a single bolt belay at the base of the 5.8 version.

Pitch 8) Climb a finger crack on the right-hand side of the pillar to where it fuses. Then traverse right around an arête and quest up past two fixed peckers. This turns to a hand crack through roof (right side out of the roof is better) and single bolt belay on a small ledge. 5.10 R, 35 meters.

Pitch 9) Move up cracks and eventually left onto the middle of the pillar. Belay at a fixed pin (supplement with nuts/small cams) for a semi-hanging stance. 5.10, 35 meters.

Pitch 10) Follow two finger cracks, eventually moving to the right-most crack. This pitch is where you join the "Cobra Pillar" route. Thirty-five-meter belay just right of the fixed rap anchor at the base of yet another off-width. 5.11, 35 meter. The route now rejoins the "Cobra Pillar" route.

Pitch 11) 5.9 off-width, 35 meters to chossy ledge. (5.11a in "Cobra Pillar" topo.)

Pitch 12) Amazing hands/fingers splitter right on the headwall fixed belay as part of the "Cobra Pillar" rappel line. 5.10, 50 meters.

Pitch 13) Forty to 50 meters to the end of the arching finger/layback crack, then loose face-climbing and a bit of choss, too, to reach top of "Cobra Pillar." 5.10+, 50 meters.

Pitch 14 - Summit) Two hundred fifty meters of climbing up to 5.11 followed by 200 meters of moderate terrain to the summit, depending on snow conditions. We did not climb this final 200 meters due to dangerous snow conditions above.

Descent) All belays have been re-equipped with fresh cord/bolts as of June 2019. The descent rap line is clean and direct.

#### Rack

Double set of cams from 0.1-6, triples of 0.4-0.75.

Micro nuts, regular nuts.

Two 60-meter ropes to descend.





could be difficult to catch when it was good. Maybe because they're the epitome of "pinner" and from the trailhead look like they may not even be continuous or "wide enough" to ski. Maybe because a lot of snow snobs simply scoff at the idea of skiing the (often wind-swept) Western Chugach. Whatever! The Western Chugach offers world-class ski-mountaineering opportunities that can be done on a dirtbag budget, with the amenities of a city nearby ... albeit with a difficult entrance exam: a high level of fitness for the long approaches and acuity in regard to avalanche assessment and technical back-country-travel skills.

Over the course of several years skiing with Randoman Brian Harder, he'd learned to trust my judgment when it came to adventure skiing. Most of the time, he'd been handsomely rewarded. Such was the case with our discovery of the goodness the Eagle Lake couloirs held. I've been back to this zone about four times now, and it's really incredible. There is a low-angle skin-track route all the way up the backside of the couloirs. During our second season (2017) of skiing those lines, during which they had a thinner upper-elevation snow-pack, we installed a rappel anchor above the chockstone boulder in the West Eagle Lake Couloir (it was filled in and ski-able, although only about 190 centimeters wide, in 2016).

The first time (March 2016) Randoman and I headed back to check out those lines, we didn't really know if they "went." We also weren't aware of the mellow, skin-able route up the backside. We headed up the west couloir first, and even by the time we were "walled-in," still didn't know if the couloir went. We just headed up. About 3/4 of the way up there was either a narrow choke or an overhanging chockstone boulder. In 2016 we made it through what was an approximately 190-centimeter choke without issue and only had to deal with a bit of scrambling to top out the line.

As we hugged the rock wall on the way up (and topped out via the rock scramble) rather than exposing ourselves to the more open, but loaded, skier's entrance, we cautiously tiptoed into that loaded entrance with the first skier on belay.

In 2016, with the chockstone filled in and after I had been belayed into and ski-cut the upper portion, Randoman styled the descent (while making his usual fashion statement).

About a year later (in April 2017), we returned to this sacred temple of Randoism. However, our first trip only had us skiing the east couloir (it had no narrow chokes that could entail exposure on thinner years), as we were shut down in the west couloir by crotch-deep trenching at the bottom and (having circled around for the mellow skin-track route up the backside) the exposed chockstone from the top down; we didn't have rappel gear because we didn't think we'd need it based on 2016 conditions. We returned a few weeks later via the backside, skin-track approach and installed an anchor.



*Brian Harder on the mellow backside skin-track approach to the Eagle Lake couloirs.  
Photo by Mat Brunton*



*Mat Brunton in the east Eagle Lake couloir.  
Photo by Brian Harder*



*Mat Brunton being belayed into the entrance of the west Eagle Lake couloir for the first known descent.  
Photo by Brian Harder*



# Peak of the Month: Peak of Many Couloirs

Text by Steve Gruhn

**Mountain Range:** Talkeetna Mountains

**Borough:** Matanuska-Susitna Borough

**Drainages:** East Fork of the Talkeetna Glacier, Chickaloon Glacier, and Clear Creek

**Latitude/Longitude:** 62° 7' 37" North, 148° 28' 42" West

**Elevation:** 8530±30 feet

**Adjacent Peaks:** Peak 8450 in the East Fork of the Talkeetna Glacier and Chickaloon Glacier drainages, Peak 7850 in the Chickaloon Glacier and Clear Creek drainages, and Peak 6950 in the Talkeetna River drainage

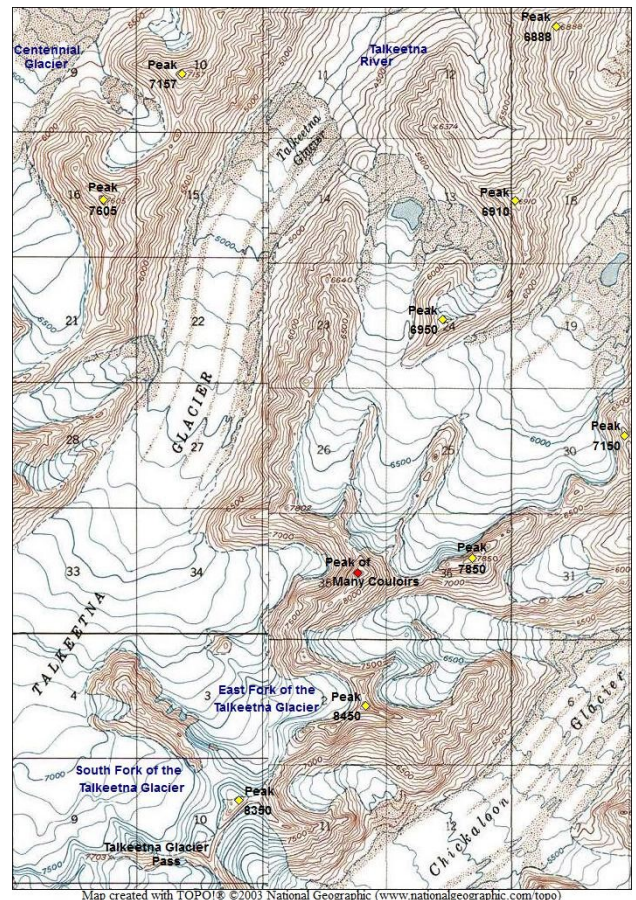
**Distinctness:** 700 feet from Peak 8450

**Prominence:** 970 feet from Bulldog Mountain (8780 feet)

**USGS Maps:** 1:63,360: Talkeetna Mountains (A-3); 1:25,000: Talkeetna Mountains A-3 NW

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

**Access Point:** 6700-Foot level of the Talkeetna Glacier



West-southwest aspect of Peak of Many Couloirs (left of center). Parsons and Stath ascended one of the couloirs immediately left of the summit. Finley and Lamoureux ascended the broad couloir at far left.

Photo by Billy Finley

On April 19, 2008, Mike Meekin flew Billy Finley, Eric Parsons, Yvonne Lamoureux, and Bryce Stath one-at-a-time in a Piper Super Cub to the 6700-foot level of the Talkeetna Glacier.

The next day the team climbed

Mount Sovereign (8849 feet). On the 23rd Parsons and Stath climbed Lonely Peak (8517 feet).

On April 24 the party skied north down the Talkeetna Glacier toward a massif that Parsons and Stath had called the Peak of Many Couloirs. Parsons and Stath climbed a west-facing chute north of the summit of the peak and Finley and Lamoureux ascended a west-facing couloir north of Point 7802 on the long northwest ridge of the peak. Parsons and Stath reached the north ridge of the Peak of Many Couloirs, but Parsons described the ridge as "super exposed and sketchy." Farther to the northwest Finley and Lamoureux reached the northwest ridge of Point 7802

only to find chest-deep unconsolidated snow over rock and at least two large towers blocking their progress to the southeast. Both rope teams retreated.

The following days brought a storm, whiteout, and one venture to the western portion of the Talkeetna Glacier. On the 29th Meekin returned and flew the party one-at-a-time back to the Glenn Highway.

I don't know of any ascents to the summit of the Peak of Many Couloirs. Yours could be the first.

The information for this column came from a post on Finley's blog (<https://www.akmountain.com/2008/04/19/talkeetna-glacier/>;

from a post on Parsons' blog

(<http://epiceric.blogspot.com/2008/04/back.html>);

from Parsons' video documenting their trip

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SHv6v0c1Pho>);

and from my correspondence with Finley, Parsons, Katie Libby, and Dennis Ronsse.

Dennis Ronsse on the summit of Peak 6910, showing the north-northeast aspect of Peak of Many Couloirs in the center background.

Photo by Katie Libby





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Mailing list/database entry: Katherine Cooper—209-253-8489 - [membership@mtclubak.org](mailto:membership@mtclubak.org)

Hiking and Climbing Committee: Gerrit Verbeek—903-512-4286 or [hcc@mtclubak.org](mailto:hcc@mtclubak.org)

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Calendar: Stuart Grenier—337-5127 or [stugrenier@gmail.com](mailto:stugrenier@gmail.com)

Librarian: Charlotte Foley—603-493-7146 or [library@mtclubak.org](mailto:library@mtclubak.org)

*Scree* Editor: [MCAScree@gmail.com](mailto:MCAScree@gmail.com) Steve Gruhn assisted by Dawn Munroe (350-5121) [dawn.talbott@yahoo.com](mailto:dawn.talbott@yahoo.com)

Web: [www.mtclubak.org](http://www.mtclubak.org)

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

*Mark Robson climbing Peak 5919 in the North Baird Glacier  
and Glory Lake drainages of the Coast Mountains.  
Photo by Simon Richardson*

Mountaineering Club of Alaska  
Box 243561  
Anchorage, AK 99524-3561