

the SCREE

Mountaineering Club of Alaska

March 2020

Volume 63, Number 3

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"Mountains know secrets we need to learn. That it might take time, it might be hard, but if you just hold on long enough, you will find the strength to rise up."
– Tyler Knott Gregson

MARCH MEETING: Wednesday, March 4, at 6:30 p.m. Chris Erickson will be presenting the crevasse rescue of Martin Takac.

"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

Colleen Metzger, Ben Michaelson, Edmund Eilbacher, and Gloria Rasch crossing the East Branch of the Eklutna Glacier.

Photo by Richard Rasch

MARCH MEETING

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

Chris Erickson will be presenting "Pinned: Inside the 14-hour crevasse rescue of Martin Takac and strategies for dealing with complicated crevasse rescues."

<https://www.google.com/maps/place/BP+Energy+Center/@61.1900534,-149.8658586,17z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m5!3m4!1s0x56c897b71cdbc81d:0x5058f26b0a2567f1!8m2!3d61.1900534!4d-149.8636699>

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@mtnclubak.org.

In the News

Gregg Erickson suggested that Alaska climbers in particular might find of interest a *New York Times* article pertaining to the human factors involved in avalanches. To read the article, visit <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/31/magazine/avalanche-school-heidi-julavits.html>.

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

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 Committee Chairman, at either huts@mtnclubak.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!

Article Submission: Text and photography submissions for *the Scree* can be sent as attachments to 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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Online? Click me!



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

Announcements

Trips

February 21-29: MCA Winter Mountaineering School

A comprehensive training program for individuals who are accomplished backpackers who wish to START learning mountaineering skills.

Course of instruction: Trip planning, food preparation, leadership, winter travel, gear selection/preparation, navigation, leave no trace, snow travel, snow anchors, running belay, rope handling, communication, terminology, knots, gear essentials, route finding, glacier travel, crevasse rescue, belaying, avalanche recognition, avalanche rescue, staying warm, nutrition/hydration, winter camping, snow shelters, wilderness medicine, rappelling, ice climbing, winter survival, stream crossing, confidence building, and more. NO course fee; however, students share trip expenses. Certificate of Participation issued when student fulfills course requirements. Lead Instructor: Greg Bragiel.

February 29-March 1: Serenity Falls Hut ice-climbing weekend.



Peak 5505 in the Western Chugach Mountains. Photo taken May 17, 2019, from the Twin Peaks area of the Eklutna River drainage to the northeast. The peak can be accessed from the Peters Creek Trail and by ridge hiking from Mount Eklutna around the Four Mile Creek drainage.

Photo by Frank Baker

Mount Katherine (8250 feet), Alaska Range, First Known Ascent

Text and photos by Zach Lovell



The previously unclimbed and unnamed peak (8250 feet) near the Dall Glacier climbed via its southwest ridge by Thomas Eaves and Zach Lovell in May 2019. Their route "Moon Walk" (III 60-degree snow) is shown, and they named the peak Mount Katherine.



The summit tower of Mount Katherine (8250 feet) from the southwest ridge during the first documented ascent of the peak in May 2019.

In an era of heightened climbing and skiing popularity, there are still many unexplored corners of the Alaska Range. Exploration can even come at moderate difficulties, which is exactly what Thomas Eaves and I found on the Dall Glacier during our mid-May expedition. The Dall Glacier is located on the south side of Mount Russell, ultimately flowing into the East Fork of the Yentna River at its terminus.

We flew onto the glacier on May 16 and immediately began scouting. Acting as guide, I recommended an unnamed peak east of the Dall Glacier (coordinates 62° 44' 49" North, 151° 47' 4" West) that offered an amicable southwest ridge rising above the serac-laden west face. We made our climb from May 19 to May 20, after waiting a few days to let a snow-shedding cycle run its course.

Given the warm temperatures, we departed at 6 p.m. and utilized skis to ascend low-angle glacier ramps toward the southwest ridge of the peak. After 4.5 miles and 1,900 feet of elevation gain, we reached our proposed line, cached our skis, and donned crampons. For 2,300 vertical feet, we were gifted with classic and aesthetic Alaskan ridge climbing with snow/névé and rock up to 60 degrees. As we neared the end of the ridge, a full moon emerged, casting a surreal glow upon us and the mountain's final tower. Our summit views were some of the most unique I've experienced in the range, with the Yentna River, Mount Russell, Mount Foraker, and Denali all joining us in a moonlit dance party.

"Moon Walk" (III 60-degree snow) was completed in 14 hours, camp to camp, including a total of 10.5 miles of travel and 4,200 feet of elevation gain/loss (2,300 feet of technical terrain). Thomas dubbed the peak Mount Katherine (8250 feet) for his wife and to hopefully gain endless favor with her for permission to go on future expeditions. There have been very few recorded trips on the Dall Glacier; there is much left to be explored.

Scree—March 2020



Thomas Eaves looking east from the summit of Mount Katherine (8250 feet) after Zach Lovell and he made the peak's first known ascent in May 2019, via the southwest ridge. The two climbed at night for good conditions and summited under a bright moon, leading to the route's name, "Moon Walk" (III 60° snow).



Thomas Eaves following a steep section low on the southwest ridge of Mount Katherine (8250 feet) during the first known ascent.

Wolfsbane Peak (6350 feet), Fist Range

Text and photos by Mat Brunton



Wolfsbane Peak from Peak 6250.

The Fist Range is a distinct sub-range of the Central Chugach Mountains between the human settlements of Valdez and Chitina. It is so named given its resemblance to a raised fist. Its distinct border is formed by the Copper River to the north and east, the Tiekel River to the south and west, and the Tonsina River to the northwest. While I'm currently aware of only very limited alpine access by way of any sort of trail, there is a typically very wet and rooty all-terrain vehicle- to rough foot trail in the vicinity of Ernestine and Mosquito Creeks that leaves from a trailhead just off the Richardson Highway. This trail provides an easement to a vast alpine area with unlimited opportunities for exceptional trekking and peakbagging. However, all routes east of Candy Stripe Lake (Lake 3680) require steep snow climbing and/or exposed 3rd- to 4th-class scrambling. That said, once beyond that crux of high alpine access, travel options ease dramatically.

For this trip, I ascended the steep northerly couloir to snowfield that leads to a 6100-foot point south of the pass that is about a mile east of Candy Stripe Lake. From that summit, I followed the ridge southeast over several minor peaks, including Peak 6250, to the most prominent summit of the ridgeline south of the pass known as Wolfsbane Peak. From Wolfsbane I retraced steps back to the north for a short distance, descending to a large saddle, from which I headed east toward the large, alpine lake at 3820 feet.

From the shores of the beautiful, alpine lake at 3820 feet, I headed north and then west back through a tarn-studded landscape full of veinous streams toward the pass just east of Candy Stripe Lake (to which the trail from the road led). Terrain in that area provided some of the best Alaskan backcountry trekking I had

ever experienced. It was high-quality terrain superior for trekking and camping that was much less crowded, way cheaper and easier to access, and with a much more reasonable carbon footprint than remote fly-in alpine areas in national parks like Wrangell-Saint Elias, Lake Clark, or Gates of the Arctic. There was abundant clean water everywhere, as well as endless opportunities for trekking and peakbagging.

From the pass, I descended what could be considered difficult 3rd-class or easy 4th-class terrain back to Candy Stripe Lake and the rough foot trail. Unfortunately, in my haste I didn't bother checking the GPS track at a crucial intersection where a spider web of rough hunting and game trails met. Quickly realizing I did not go the right way at that intersection, I spent some time trying to get back on track. But, alas, the maze was too complex and, being only a quarter-mile from the road, I decided to punch straight through the brush. That turned into a properly savage undertaking as much of the quarter-mile was spent wading thigh-to-waist-deep through brushy wetland and beaver ponds.

[Ed. note: For a video of Brunton's trip, visit <https://anchorageavalanchecenter.org/trip-reports/central-chugach/summer/wolfsbane-peak/>.]



Mount Titanic (9350 feet) and Tantalus (8910 feet):

Tantalizing Moments in the Revelation Mountains

Text and photos by Niek de Jonge

With Bas Visscher



Bas Visscher on his way to the top of Mount Titanic with Tantalus in the background.

From 11 March until 7 April, 2019, Bas Visscher and I visited the Revelation Mountains. After six days sitting out bad weather and enjoying the true Alaskan lifestyle, we finally got flown into the Revelations. The Fish Creek Glacier was the designated drop-off point. To our surprise we stepped out of the plane in waist-deep snow. When the sound of the propellers disappeared and the last snow crystals whirled down, we were surrounded by a deep and prevailing silence. “Well, here we are at last. Wow, what a snow!”

The first week we encountered bad weather with again lots of fresh snow. We spent time excavating a snow cave and a lot of reading. Occasionally fragments of the mountains surrounding us were looming out of the colorless fog. The mountains seemed too shy to show themselves without the protective cover of the clouds. The amount of snow made us drop our initial plan of a strategic base camp on a mountain pass to the north. We made numerous exploratory ski trips to that pass. Our heavily fought ski tracks were erased every single night. Almost as if the mountains wanted to teach us something, like a schoolteacher erasing notes from the chalkboard after each lesson, to prepare us for the big day – the big day that didn’t seem to come.

But then finally a big high pressure system came in. With the first blue skies and rays of sunlight we skied over the pass to the north side of Jezebel Peak. We were amazed that that side of the mountain was so extremely dry. That glacier lacked the thick snow cover

and was completely icy. A huge contrast with the waist-deep snow on the east side of the mountain. We skied down the winding mass of ice with visible crevasses and lots of disordered boulders. On the left we passed the dark and gloomy north face of Jezebel, immense seracs looming over us like weapons of mass destruction. Not surprisingly that face hadn’t been climbed. After a challenging day of skiing with heavy backpacks, and a burden of insecurity on our minds, we finally arrived underneath the north face of Mount Titanic. We immediately noticed the dryness of the face. At night we heard the ominous thunder of a snow avalanche crashing down the only plausible line on the face. As a result we lay awake and worried about the signal the mountain was giving us. We were a stone’s throw away from our main goal, but the goal then seemed further away than ever.

We tried the unclimbed north ridge of Titanic instead. At first sight we expected an easy climb over the ridge to the top. But arriving at the dawn of day on the shoulder, the view knocked our morale. A sentence from an expedition report immediately crossed my mind: “*In Alaska everything is bigger than it seems.*” We climbed on the ridge as much as possible, but sometimes we were forced to climb the flank on the east to surpass the deep gullies. Straightforward climbing was alternated with challenging and demanding pitches on bad-quality snow and high-quality granite. The money pitch was a beautiful corner leading up to a squeeze chimney surpassing a

gigantic chockstone. After a knife-edged ridge, we summited the top of Titanic, enjoying the arctic palette of colors and a stunning view of the Alaska Range. "This is what we came for!"

Our return trip to base camp was long and heavy. Whiteouts, steep firm, unexpected slides and constantly changing snow conditions made skiing a hellish undertaking. But skiing in a whiteout also caused hilarious, slapstick-like moments. Luckily the high pressure held, so we prepared for an attempt on the unclimbed north face of Peak 8910. Unfortunately we quickly climbed into a section with bare granite slabs without ice or any protection. From our highest point we caught a tantalizing glimpse of the perfect line through the face – close, but still unreachable.

We decided to take a step back in our ambition. From the base camp we tried a nice ridge to an unclimbed forepeak of Mount Obelisk. That attempt also stranded quickly, mainly due to the extremely bad snow quality. Back in base camp we hid in our sleeping bags and behind our e-readers. In my mind I tried to put our failed attempts into perspective. An appropriate quote from Ernest Hemingway caught my attention, "*The ultimate value of our lives is decided not by how we win but by how we lose.*"

No more time for reading. A strong low-pressure system built up over the Gulf of Alaska. On the last beautiful day we left base camp with a wind chill of -22 °Celsius (-8 °Fahrenheit). The objective was the south couloir of Peak 8910. At first we saw an easy line to the summit, but in Alaska looks can be deceiving. The biting cold gave way to the burning sun. And soon we climbed up the beautiful couloir surrounded by steep red granite walls. The couloir was interrupted in two places by steep sections without snow. We both enjoyed the short sections of technical climbing. Unfortunately the final ridge consisted of bizarre unconsolidated snow. We literally struggled through the snow like "fish on dry land" in search of some holds on the smooth granite slabs beneath. But our hard work paid off and we stood on the summit of Peak 8910. A beautiful mountain in a stunning mountain range deserves a name. We would like to name Peak 8910 "Tantalus" – a figure from Greek mythology that symbolized something that was highly desirable, but just out of reach. [Ed. note: On bivouac.com Peak 8910 has also been called Cyane Peak.]

Niek de Jonge is supported by Rab equipment UK.



A striking line to the top of Tantalus just to the left of the valley line below the top.



Bas Visscher with the beautiful north ridge of Mount Titanic in the background.



Bas Visscher's gaze says enough; it's time to leave the collapsing snow cave forever.

Niek de Jonge and Bas Visscher at the top of Tantalus (8910 feet) with the top of Mount Titanic in the background.

Eklutna Traverse: MCA Trip

Text by Colleen Metzger



*Team Snowshoes (Colleen Metzger, Ben Michaelson, Edmund Eilbacher, and Gloria Rasch)
crossing the East Branch of the Eklutna Glacier.*

Photo by Richard Rasch

I'm not ready for this.

I should not be leading this!

What if the snow is terrible?

As we crunched up the vast white expanse of the Eklutna Glacier, my brain was a mess of fears and doubts. I had just returned from a long conference out of state and felt behind in my training. I was also in charge of leading a rope team, something I had never done before. Sure, I had been an assistant leader on a previous MCA trip, but it seemed like a big step to be in charge of navigating a team over a series of glaciers and (more importantly) keeping them alive should there be a crevasse fall.

We were also trying something unusual. Our group consisted of a team of four skiers and my rope team of four snowshoers. We knew pacing would be more complicated with the mixed flotation, but we decided to give it a try anyway. I had wanted to do the Eklutna Traverse for ages, but I was not sure my skiing skills were up to the task.

So I was thrilled to find a few other takers who wanted to try the trip on snowshoes. I had heard tales of snowshoers who had been evacuated due to unforgiving snow conditions, and the fear that our snowshoe team would flounder in soft, punchy snow brought on by the unseasonably warm spring while the ski team effortlessly glided on ahead of us was just one more thing gnawing away in the back of my mind as we loaded our gear onto all-terrain vehicles and started bumping toward the trailhead.

The ATVs helped the 12.7-mile tedium of the flat Eklutna Lakeside Trail rush by, and soon we were picking our way up the rocky route to the Eklutna Glacier. *Here we go*, I psyched myself up as we started hiking, heading into the day with the most elevation, the most weight on our backs, and the most crevasses yawning around our trail. We had assumed one of our biggest hurdles would be simply getting onto the glacier, which in past years had evidently proven quite challenging. But the snow was grippy and the angle gradual, and we were up and on the glacier without issue. Once on the glaci-

er, it was a steady uphill on snow so firm we didn't even need snowshoes until we were nearly to the hut. Although it was one of our steeper days, the trek to Pichler's Perch was only five miles, a pretty laid-back mileage day (skipping the Eklutna Lakeside Trail sure helped!). We were on an ocean of white, surrounded everywhere by tempting, snow-frosted peaks. The little hut glinted at us from a rocky outcropping overlooking the glacier, and we all lounged outside



Team Snowshoes (Colleen Metzger, Ben Michaelson, Edmund Eilbacher, and Gloria Rasch) crossing the East Branch of the Eklutna Glacier.

Photo by Richard Rasch

when we reached the hut, taking in the frosty landscape. I had woken up in my warm, civilized bed and 10 hours later I was in that alien landscape of only rock and ice. I was euphoric.

The original plan was to take a rest day at Pichler's Perch. But there weren't a lot of day climbs in the area and no one was too spent from the fairly conservative five-mile hike in, so the group opted to charge ahead to Hans' Hut on Day Two.

The group was a fun and varied mix of people: Greg Bragiel was the organizer and soul of the group, and Greg, Kevin Chartier, Tyndall Ellis, and Rich Rasch comprised the ski team, with Rich as the ski team leader. Team snowshoe hosted myself, Gloria Rasch, Edmund Eilbacher, and Ben Michaelson. It was a great group of upbeat people eager to sharpen their glacier-travel skills. For sure the best way to bond with a group of people is to spend seven days tied together and seven nights crammed in a tiny shack sharing a five-gallon bucket as a bathroom. We were lucky to have an awesome group.

We were also SO LUCKY with weather on this trip. As we started toward Hans' Hut, a brilliant blue sky gleamed overhead, even though we were still in the shade of the massive mountains on either side of us. It was a long trek, nine miles, but as we left Pichler's Perch behind and hauled uphill, we found ourselves in a wonderland. We were trekking across a bowl of Cool Whip, a land of frosty swirls and puffy white peaks, the sun glinting down from the cloudless sky and making the whole world shimmer. Our pace was moderate, but I spent the whole trek gaping in awe at my surroundings so the miles passed quickly, and soon we were through

Whiteout Pass and dropping onto the Whiteout Glacier. The bluebird weather made me question the name of the pass, but Greg Bragiel, the only group member to have done the trek previously, assured us that the name was warranted. Whiteout Pass was usually a blinding, snowy area where it was hard to tell up from down. That was an experience I was happy to have avoided.

Most of Day Two I felt jubilant, awed, and buoyant, but toward

the end of the day, my jubilation started to fade. The last push to Hans' Hut was uphill. The first eight miles of the day had felt great, but chugging uphill and sidehilling (Have you sidehilled in snowshoes? It's TERRIBLE!) the last mile, exhaustion started to set in. My head started to pound, my stomach twisted in knots, my legs felt wobbly ... I can honestly say I have never been so thrilled to reach a hut in my life. I was in bed by 9:30 and had never been more happy.

On the third day, I took a rest day. That last push up to Hans' had not been the best time of my life, and while many of the group went for a day hike up to Whiteout Peak, I stayed behind. I thought a rest day would be beneficial, and happily Gloria Rasch also opted to stay behind. We took a short jaunt up to see the Blackout Glacier, but also enjoyed lounging in the sun and taking turns using the cabin to give ourselves backcountry spit baths.

On Day Four the group hiked to Hut Peak, and everyone joined for that journey. We clambered up the mixed snow and rock to the peak, gazing out over the icy expanse below. We again had brilliant sunny weather, making the snow crystalline, blindingly shimmery. I felt so fortunate to get to view that dreamscape and get to view it on a clear, sunny day. After all the stories about crazy storms pinning climbers down in Hans' Hut, just being able to see the view at all felt like an incredible gift.

That evening, as we did every evening, we played Greg Bragiel's famous "Dinner Show" game. Every climber prepared one dinner for the group, and each night contestants presented their dinner

with as much aplomb as possible before the group voted on what to eat. The winner didn't have to carry their heavy dinner anymore, a prize worth fighting for! As each night passed, the descriptions of meals grew more and more elaborate as contenders battled to have their meal chosen. It made for great entertainment. I also relished having conversations without access to the Internet. That evening a boisterous conversation about the origin of cows commenced, and without Wikipedia to instantly put an end to the debate, lengthy speculations were shuffled through. It made me nostalgic for the conversations of the '90s.

That night I stumbled from the cabin to pee and was rewarded with northern lights overhead. That clear sky was making both the days and nights glorious. It made tiptoeing into the cold, dark nights full of expectation.

Day Five we followed the Whiteout Glacier down to the Eagle Glacier. The trek was rolling and mostly downhill, the snow crusty and firm (good for snowshoers, if not the skiers). Good thing the route itself was fairly easy, because for the first time the weather was foggy and windy, making navigation challenging. And to top it off, as the Whiteout spilled down into the Eagle, we saw the most gaping crevasses of our entire trip. Tyndall took the lead on the ski team, deftly navigating our group through the ping-pong ball. By the time we stepped onto the Eagle Glacier, the weather had improved – it was much warmer, and the wind gave us a respite.

As we crossed the Eagle, we noticed small figures on the rise where Rosie's Roost was. People! We hauled uphill to the cabin, moving quickly since the wind had picked back up and was battering against us cruelly. As I neared the cabin I expected to find one or two other climbers hunkered inside. Instead, I was surprised to find an epic forest of skis planted outside the cabin. Six other climbers were already crowded in the hut. They were actually a

group of MCA-ers heading the opposite direction. We had a warm, rowdy night in the little cabin, and can now report that Rosie's Roost can comfortably sleep 14 people.

I can also report that all 14 of us had fun creating a toilet, since the bucket toilet that normally resides at the cabin seemed to have been swept away in a windstorm. Pooping in a Rubbermaid bin was an experience I'm not sure I want to repeat.

On Day Six we left Rosie's behind and headed across the West Fork Glacier up to the Raven Headwall. The Raven Headwall was steep – about 600 feet and straight down. We set up a running belay and inched down. From the top it looked like a sheer drop, but as we started climbing I realized that only the first hundred feet of so was crazy steep. The rest of the climb down was pretty mellow, and we made it safely onto the Raven Glacier. After the



From left: Colleen Metzger, Kevin Chartier, Tyndall Ellis, Greg Bragiel, and Richard Rasch dropping down the Raven Headwall.

Photo by Edmund Eilbacher



From left: Ben Michaelson, Colleen Metzger, Kevin Chartier, and Tyndall Ellis dropping down the Raven Headwall.

Photo by Edmund Eilbacher



From left: Tyndall Ellis, Greg Bragiel, Ben Michaelson, Kevin Chartier, Richard Rasch, Gloria Rasch, Colleen Metzger, and Edmund Eilbacher at Rosie's Roost.

Photo by Mike Meyers

headwall it was a leisurely downhill trek across the glacier, another day of glinting snow spread out beneath a blazing sun and a perfect blue sky. Because of the sun, however, we decided to stay at the Crow Pass Cabin for the night. We didn't want to continue to Girdwood so late in the day when it had been so warm, and opted to head out early the next morning when the snow would be cool and firm and less prone to avalanche. The door to the cabin was iced over, but we pried our way in and were able to really spread out – the cabin felt so spacious after the little A-frame huts. The last dinner was cooked, we slept our last night together, and the next morning we geared up one last time and headed into Girdwood. Out of the mountains, out of the sunshine and snow, and back to reality.



*From left: Richard Rasch, Greg Bragiel, Colleen Metzger, Gloria Rasch, Kevin Chartier, Ben Michaelson, Tyndall Ellis, and Edmund Eilbacher on the last day, leaving the Crow Pass Cabin.
Photo by Richard Rasch*



*From left: Gloria Rasch, Colleen Metzger, Edmund Eilbacher, and Ben Michaelson atop Hut Peak.
Photo by Richard Rasch*

*From left: Richard Rasch, Gloria Rasch, Colleen Metzger, Edmund Eilbacher, Tyndall Ellis, Greg Bragiel, Ben Michaelson, and Kevin Chartier atop Hut Peak.
Photo by Richard Rasch*



Green Butte (6145 feet) to Bonanza Peak (6983 feet), Wrangell Mountains

Text by Shane Ohms

September 7th and 8th, 2019



Mount Blackburn, the Kennicott Glacier, and Bonanza Peak (far right).

Photo by Shane Ohms

I forget exactly how this trip came to fruition, but it could have only started in the same fashion all my trips did – consulting the weather forecast. McCarthy looked good, so then it just became a matter of selecting an objective in that area. We came up with a few objectives, but the main one was to explore the Green Butte Mine and climb Green Butte.



*Shane Ohms traveling up McCarthy Creek.
Photo by Sophie Tidler*

Sophie Tidler drove from Anchorage and I from Fairbanks on a Friday after work, converging in the Glennallen gas station and continuing to McCarthy, which we reached close to midnight, and soon after slept in the bed of my pickup. Saturday morning came teeming with promise. Dramatic black and white views of the Kennicott Glacier, Mount Blackburn, and more rising above the electric fall foliage as we crossed the bridge into McCarthy. Eight a.m. – it was a cold morning, but expectations and energy

were high for whatever the trip would become.

Once we crossed the bridge, we turned south and began hiking up a trail on the south side of McCarthy Creek. Eventually, the south side of McCarthy Creek was ended by a steep bank. We crossed, and then crossed back before eventually coming to a cave. Online literature on the McCarthy Creek Trail had been sparse, but it had

alerted me to look out for such caves. These caves were originally carved so that horses could bring equipment deeper into the mountains during the copper-mining days. For us, they eased our upstream travel. The second and final cave came on the north-west side of McCarthy Creek where canyon walls pinched the stream tightly. Green Butte, laden with green, red, and yellows, became the view for about three miles of northward creek travel. We were glad to have a pair of water shoes for the trip and would recommend them to anyone heading up McCarthy Creek.



*The Green Butte Mine directly above Sophie Tidler's head.
Photo by Shane Ohms*

At about 1:30 p.m., our McCarthy Creek travels came to an end at the confluence of the East and West Forks, for there we found a slightly overgrown trail for trucks (evident by two sets of wheel-worn impressions). Perfect! Where else could this trail possibly be going other than the Green Butte Mine? We filled up our water bottles (we didn't know it, but that would be our last fill-up until

Sunday morning) and began heading up the trail. The trail was a nice and unexpected surprise. It became more overgrown as we got higher, but it was still easy to track and sure beat bushwhacking. And then it just disappeared. We tried for a while to re-find it and if the trail were any good, we would have found it, but alas, it was gone. Seeing the Green Butte Mine bunkhouse above us, we gave up on finding a trail and accepted bushwhacking. It was a hot day. The bushwhacking was thick and uphill; it sucked. We picked up on the trail once again (as well as an old truck) and we followed it for what it was worth, but it soon became evident that the trail was heading back down to the creek. The trail wasn't much of a trail anymore anyway. Back to the bushwhacking. A couple cliff sections. A sea of yellow willows. And finally, after 4.5 hours, the sweaty remains of two climbers stumbled into the vicinity of the Green Butte Mine.

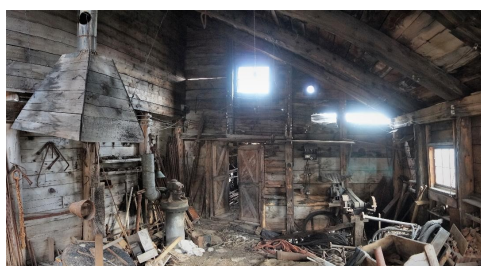
First, we happened upon the Green Butte Aerial Tram. There were lots of tools and supplies, some in heaps on the floor, some still hanging in place on the walls. Most intriguing, however, was the 1923 instruction manual for the Aerial Tram. I think I found the manual on the ground, but I put it on a little bookshelf in the entryway when we left. The next stop was the bunkhouse. On the ground floor was the kitchen and mess hall, a urinal (I believe their outhouse was outside), and a common area complete with a poker table, lockers, a fireplace, and porcupine quills. The second floor had about eight individual rooms with a mailbox for collecting outgoing mail at one end of the hallway. We had to be careful walking around some places because the floorboards were sometimes questionable. On the third floor, the floorboards were the most sketchy and the roof was somewhat destroyed, so I just peeked into the two living areas, which contained many beds. We had used the daylight and a sufficient block of time (6 p.m. to 8 p.m.) to explore the ruins, collect blue rocks, and make guesses at the lives the miners must have lived. The chilly night air was being ushered in, and it was only a matter of time before night's darkness would follow suit. We unpacked all but a little food, water, and layers, and began making our way up Green Butte.

Green Butte was an easy, low-angle climb that gave us views staring down the intimidating cliffs that comprised the west face of Green Butte. Being at the end of a long day, our ridge walk seemed to drag on until at 9:30 p.m. and at 6145 feet, we summited. As far as evidence of prior ascents goes, I recalled a circle of flat, white rocks that looked arranged, but I didn't look into it

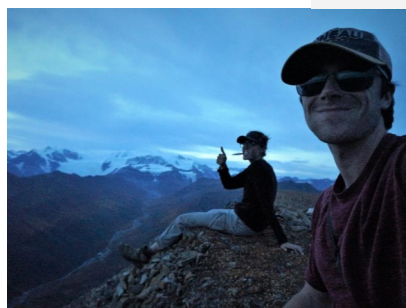
much. They might have been natural, but at any rate, my bet is the peak was first climbed by miners, either out of boredom or to scan the horizons for potential mining sites. Apparently Sophie was more finished with the day than I was; she brushed her teeth on the summit while I stuffed my face with banana chips. It was really dark on our return and we would have had even more difficulty and frustration finding the bunkhouse if we hadn't brought a GPS. Back at the bunkhouse we rolled out sleeping pads and bags in the common area and I replenished some much needed salt with a cold-soaked Mountain House mac 'n' cheese before settling in for the night.



*Green Butte Mine bunkhouse
Photo by Shane Ohms*



*The Green Butte Mine Aerial Tram room.
Photo by Shane Ohms*



*Sophie Tidler (left) and Shane Ohms on
Green Butte's summit.
Photo by Shane Ohms*

In the middle of the night Sophie, awakened me, saying she kept "hearing something walking around." I listened and heard something, too. Oh, grief; how could we go back to sleep with the thought of our faces sharing the same confined floor space as a porcu-

pine? I investigated with a walking stick in one hand and bear spray in the other. I found nothing and the noise wasn't heard again. In all reality it was probably the resident porcupine, but because I was never able to locate the critter, I wouldn't rule out the possibility that a miner's ghost still roamed the halls of the Green Butte bunkhouse, stumbling downstairs in the dark each night to relieve himself at the urinal before returning to his bed on the second (or third) floor.

Sunday morning came. There must have been a 10-degree temperature differential between the Green Butte Bunkhouse and the air outside, as the window panes were fogged up. We were still without a water source since leaving McCarthy Creek 18 hours earlier and had reserved just enough to wet our mouths and get down from the mine. Right ... getting down. We really didn't



*Sophie Tidler descending the
Green Butte Aerial Tram Gully.
Photo by Shane Ohms*

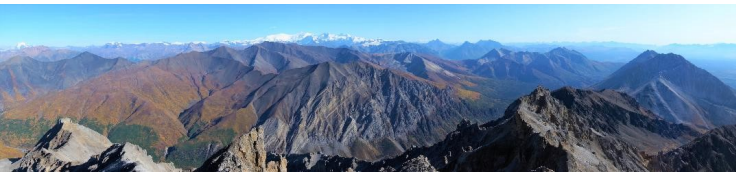
want to go back down the bushwhacking mess we had come up before, so we decided to go down the Green Butte Aerial Tram Gully. We couldn't see all the way down, and I wasn't totally sold that it would go, but Sophie rationalized that if the miners could put a tram up it, then it must have gone. Anything to avoid bushwhacking – we took it. It ended up being a really nice gully that quickly and efficiently brought us back down to the creek. At the bottom of the gully, we naturally came upon the Green Butte Stable. The roof of the Green Butte Stable was pretty collapsed and the building was sinking into the ground some, but stalls and water troughs for the horses were easily identified.

Notes to a future traveler: it is true that going up the scree in the Green Butte Aerial Tram Gully will suck more than coming down it (as is the nature of scree gullies), but if you ever plan on venturing



*Sophie Tidler at the Green Butte Mine Stable.
Photo by Shane Ohms*

up to the Green Butte Mine or Green Butte, I would advise you to not take the fake-out truck trail that leads to bushwhacking anguish and instead encourage you to utilize the straightforward Green Butte Aerial Tram Gully for BOTH the approach and the descent. A good way to locate and access this gully would be to first locate the Green Butte Stable, then hop around a couple ponds and take the prominent gully up from there.



*From Bonanza Peak, looking back at and beyond Green Butte.
Photo by Shane Ohms*

Sunday morning after getting down from the Green Butte Mine, Sophie Tidler and I were back in McCarthy Creek and needed to figure out how we wanted to get back to the bridge so we could make it back to work on Monday. There were some easier options, such as following McCarthy Creek back out or taking the pass between Porphyry Mountain and Bonanza Peak. If we made it to Kennicott by 7 p.m. (in 10 hours), we could get a ride back to the bridge. Ultimately we decided to push a little deeper to link up with the Mother Lode Mine and find some sort of passage over

the ridge back into Kennicott, hopefully in time for that final 7 p.m. shuttle. So we kept making our way up the West Fork of McCarthy Creek. When there was a trail, it was on the west side of the creek, so we mostly stuck to that side. With steep, high-reaching walls on both sides and it being September, sunlight didn't have a chance to spend much time down in the creek bed; it was quite cold. When we got close to the valley that was east of Bonanza and contained the Mother Lode Mine, we could see a peculiar green switchback going up the big pile of scree. Upon investigation, it appeared to be an old road. Deteriorated, but a road nonetheless. It was a long, low-angle switchback and Sophie decided to go straight up the scree while I took the longer, gradual road. The alders on the road got real thick after the switchback switched back, so Sophie and I reached the same point at basically the same time. We were in the sun then and it would be a hot day all the way to Kennicott.

The remnant road fizzled out and we were forced onto the steep toe of a crusty scree pile. That sucked a lot. I was fighting for every foot. I'd have four points of contact just barely keeping me where I was.



*Sophie Tidler pushing farther up McCarthy Creek.
Photo by Shane Ohms*

I'd spend a minute sometimes working at it like a puzzle, feeling out how close each hold was to crumbling and then trying to figure which arm or foot I should move next in order to gain a little more elevation. Further exacerbating my me was all the heat and dust. Oh, how much dust got kicked up in the process; it was unbelievable. A couple times I'd make a bad move, and slide down, slowly, grabbing at sharp, hopeless garbage until coming to a lucky stop on some combination of holds that were just barely enough. And then I'd pick up the remnants of my patience and try again, getting a little farther each time until, presto! I was atop the toe!

We continued up 1,500 more feet to reach the shambles of the Mother Lode Mine. On the way I found a cool dense rock with a lot of blue. I'd picked up a lot of rocks back at the Green Butte Mine, but that one had to be loaded with copper (it weighed in at 5 pounds after I got home). It was super cool and I liked it, so I put it in my backpack. The mountain environment there at the Mother Lode was harsher because no structures were left standing and everything seemed to be overrun with scree. We found some tobacco tins, boots with spikes coming out from the soles,

and a box of luxury bathing goods. Continuing upward, we found a lot of tunnels. The entrance to one was easily accessible, so we went in. We couldn't go in too far because a couple hundred feet in, the mine was boarded up. There was ice on the floor, which felt amazing compared to the roasting sun outside, but the hour was 1:30 p.m. and we had a shuttle to catch in 5.5 hours, so back out into the sun we went.



*The Mother Lode Mine and the Everlasting East Gully's entrance above Sophie Tidler.
Photo by Shane Ohms*

The next segment of the trip was the Everlasting East Gully. It was the east gully of Bonanza Peak and, mark my words, it was everlasting. The scree in Bonanza Peak's east gully was like no other. It appeared to bear an inherent and expressed desire to resist, and at times prevent, the upward movement of travelers. If anyone ever finds themselves in need of stair stepper to train both physical and mental stamina, look no further than the Everlasting East Gully on a hot day. Lemonade Gatorade mix was a magical elixir in that place. The gully deposited us on the ridge 200 feet shy of the summit. Looking south, we saw two people on a lower peak with an intimidating ridge separating us. We went north for Bonanza Peak and nearly at the summit, an elevation of 6983 feet, I found a clam shell fossil (I actually found three, but I only kept the better one)! It was crazy to think that that peak used to be on the floor of the ocean once upon a time.



*The Everlasting East Gully
Photo by Shane Ohms*

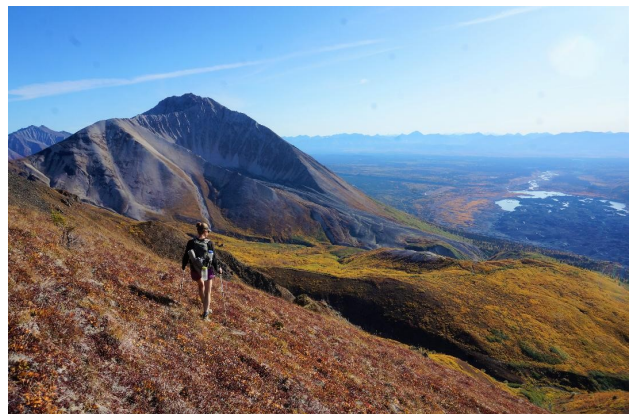
On the summit, it was a beautiful bluebird day. Views of so many new mountains (this was my first trip into the Wrangell Mountains). Blackburn to the north was beautiful; the colors down low were beautiful. Everything was just so great. We stayed up there from 3:30 'til 3:50. Only 20 minutes, but it felt so much longer

than that. Getting down then, right; we still had three hours to catch the shuttle. We utilized the south face to get down into a valley. Along the way there was a building that housed a big wheel and must have been a collection point for much ore back in its operation. We didn't stop to hang out there for very long. We traversed the mountainside to the south for a while, then dipped into a creek to the south that we planned to follow out to the main trail. The creek was OK. Some combination of slippery rocks and thick alders, but it was what we had expected it to be before dropping in, so I couldn't complain.



*Sophie Tidler (left) and Shane Ohms on the summit of Bonanza Peak.
Photo by Shane Ohms*

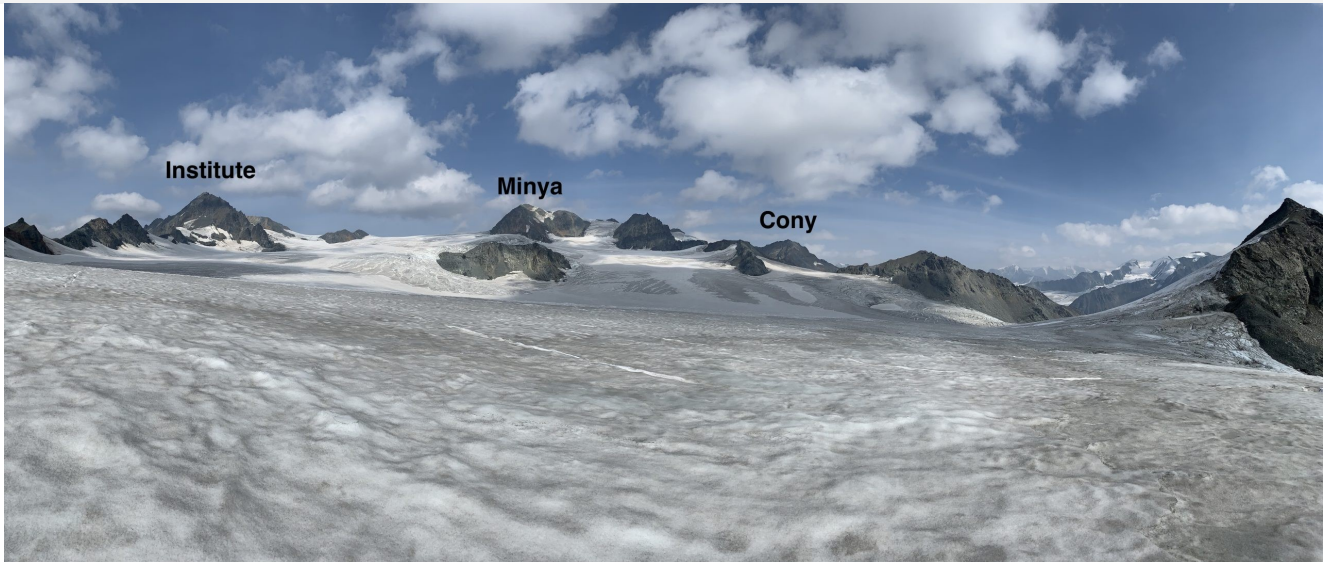
We hit the main trail at 6:30 and rolled into Kennicott right at 7, but the place was already shut down. It wasn't completely dead, though, it was just that all the life was sequestered under a single roof. Apparently that was the last weekend of Kennicott's tourist season, so all the local hotel and guiding services were having a big end-of-year celebration in one of the lodges. Because everyone had begun drinking, nobody could operate a company vehicle to run us back to the bridge, even if they wanted to. (Upon reflection, I should have tried to snag a beer for the road). Only five more miles to go then ... thankfully, a third of the way into the walk we scored seats in the bed of a pickup with a questionable tow-gate latch. At about 8 p.m., we were back at the car and without further ado, we were heading back to Glennallen and then off to work Monday morning. I honestly don't think you can squeeze much more out of a standard two-day weekend, but Lord knows, I'll never stop trying.



*Sophie Tidler descending to Kennicott.
Photo by Shane Ohms*

Minya Peak (7750 feet), Delta Range

Text and photos by Mat Brunton



Institute Peak, Minya Peak, and Cony Mountain from above the Gabriel Icefall to the south.

I'm in a Salt Lake County public library thinking about Alaska. About a week ago I told myself that there's nothing worth going south of the border (Canadian) for again. Nothing in the Lower 48 is as inspiring as the northlands of Alberta, British Columbia, Yukon Territory, and Alaska.

A day or two ago I spent a bit of time thinking of what it is about Alaska that I love and miss so much. It might be driving down billboard- and development-free highways for hundreds of miles immersed in a void of wilderness. Staring across Great Salt Lake today, I thought it may be the verdant lushness (that sometimes, admittedly, pisses me off due to the nasty weather that makes it possible). Preparing photos for this trip report, I thought it might be the mountainous contrast of rock, ice, snow, and thick vegetation that only the far north provides.

There are other reasons. I originally moved to Alaska, in part, to get as far away from "America" as possible without having to deal with an immigration epic. Alaska definitely delivered. While it has become more "American" (due to "development" and "progress" in the form of box stores, chains, and cookie-cutter housing) over my 14

years of residence, Alaska is uniquely un-American. "Alaskan exceptionalism" is a concept on par with "American exceptionalism."

The Delta Range, a sub-range in the eastern Alaska Range, is an exceptional place. It offers great road-accessible adventures for the low-budget- and carbon-conscious. Minya Peak is a wondrous day-trip for the fit and competent mountain traveler.

Late summer to early autumn is a favorite time of year in Alaska. I do hate the autumn shoulder season when it's wet, muddy, cold, nothing dries, and there's snow on the mountains (but not enough to ski). But, before the first permanent snowfall sticks to the mountains for good and makes the rock slick, there's a magical window

for glaciated peakbagging. The rock is dry, the tundra and forest colors are outrageous, and the glaciers are great for travel as crevasses are either open or bridged with relatively reliable névé.

Thus, on sunny August 30, 2019, I completed a solo summit daytrip of Minya Peak. In addition to the standard daypack with appropriate food and layers, I brought an axe and crampons. Three-season mountain boots were the footwear of choice.



Minya Peak as seen from the southwest on the descent.

Not being able to find much beta on Minya routes, I first climbed to the saddle between Minya and Institute Peak, thinking I'd go for the north ridge. That turned out to be a no-go, given the choss and exposure factor (also considering an annoying section requiring a short transition in and out of crampons). Not being discouraged given the beautiful day, despite not having identified any other obvious route, I figured I'd poke around in hopes of finding reasonable passage to the summit.

I traversed south and then east to see if I could gain the east ridge via the glaciated south-facing slope that led to it. Getting to the base of the south side of Minya required solving a crevasse maze. After weaving through crevasses and arriving at the base of the glaciated south-facing slope that led to the base of the east ridge, it became clear that the steepness and exposure of that route would require two ice tools.

Again not deterred, I looked closer and found a potential route from the glacier onto the south ridge. Linking long sections of 30-degree titled glacier-ice sidewalks between BIG crevasses, I was pleased to find there was not a gaping moat and I could easily hop off the glacier onto scree at the base of the south ridge's east side.

From there, the precarious nature of the footwork changed from tiptoeing around on crampons to scrambling incredibly loose choss. About halfway up the south ridge, the nature of the footing again changed: from treadmill choss with trekking pole assist to hands-required scrambling. However, the hands weren't reliable as there's a serious risk of dislodging dangerously large chunks of rock. After that sketchy section of loose crud scrambling, the ridge mellowed out to relatively flat scree before a final (also relatively flat) glaciated section to the summit proper.

After taking in the summit views (which were incredible, even though obscured by the unprecedented statewide wildfire smoke of summer 2019), I retraced my steps down the south ridge and along the traversing glacier sidewalks before charting a new route south back toward my approach via the glaciated valley between Ogive Mountain and Point 6570. A downhill scree boogie, stream crossing, and interesting cable bridge



Looking across the Canwell Glacier from the saddle between Minya Peak and Institute Peak.

brought me back to the Gulkana Glacier Trail. Shortly thereafter I was having dinner in the back of the Cache Camper in the beautiful Gulkana River valley (an absolutely amazing place for car camping).

[Ed. note: To view a video of Brunton's trip, visit <https://anchorageavalanchecenter.org/trip-reports/alaska-range/deltas/minya-peak/>.]



South ridge route on Minya Peak as seen from the southwest on the descent.



Winter Sun Seeking Nourishes the Soul

Text by Frank E. Baker



Sunset over Mount Gordon Lyon, as viewed from Mile High Saddle.

Photo by Frank Baker

You've seen them – trees and flowers that bend and stretch toward the light. We humans aren't any different. Our bodies crave vitamin D and those photons seem to magically recharge our batteries. During the darkest months of the year, we find ourselves craning our necks toward a cloud-shrouded sun that hangs wearily above the horizon. We visit tanning salons; we sit in front of full spectrum lights; or we might jump on a commercial airliner and migrate, like geese, to southern climes.

But if you're like me, with an almost apoplectic aversion to air travel and deathly fear of skin cancer from tanning beds, you look upward to the sun-illuminated mountains and, without much thought, go there. And with a dearth of snow in our immediate area this winter, it's been quite easy to access the south-facing ridges where the sun does shine. During winters with heavier snows and increasing avalanche dangers, I'm very careful about where I go.

A few of the high places near Eagle River that I like to go for sunshine include the ridge south of Mount Baldy that leads to Blacktail Ptarmigan Rocks; the ridges both west and east of Mile High Saddle; the ridge west of South Fork of Eagle River Valley; the Twin Peaks Trail above Eklutna Lake; and if I'm down south and the snow isn't too deep, the Bird Ridge Trail.

Trails have been icy, so Kahtoolas or some kind of microspikes are mandatory gear. I've recently learned there is a big difference between dull and sharp Kahtoolas, especially if you cross a plate of hard ice devilishly covered by a thin layer of snow. I haven't yet figured out a way to sharpen dull Kahtoolas, or if anyone does that commercially, but would like to hear from readers if they have any information. REI said it was too labor intensive.

With unseasonably warm temperatures this winter (until late December and first two weeks of January 2020), staying warm hadn't been that difficult. Our nearby ridges can be windy, often coming from the southeast. Finding a windbreak while basking in the sun on a south-facing slope can be challenging. I always carry extra clothing, so even if I'm in a cold spot, I can overdress and stay warm while enjoying the sunlight.

If you time it right and it's relatively clear, the locations listed above will provide at least three hours of sunlight during December and January, the darkest months of the year. From my south-facing house, I receive about 1 hour, 10 minutes of direct sunlight on December 21, and more on each side of that date.

I recall a sunny, but cold, January day a few years ago when I sat near a rock on the ridge leading to Blacktail Ptarmigan Rocks, cocooned in an 800-weight goose down coat that probably made me look like a black, round ball. Something told me to glance to my left. Sitting there about 10 yards away was a round white ball of puffed up feathers, a ptarmigan, also looking south toward the sun. It made me laugh.

Bouncing Sunlight. While people travel thousands of miles to enjoy the sun, industrious engineers and scientists have developed ways of redirecting sunlight. The Norwegian town of Rjukan, for example, lies in a narrow valley and receives direct sunlight only about six months of the year. Since 2013, however, it receives winter sunlight via mirrors installed high on a mountain overlooking the valley. For more information on that project, visit

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/06/rjukan-sun-norway-town-mirrors>.



Dr. Scott Sims with his dog Bailey ascending the ridge west of the South Fork of the Eagle River Valley.

Photo by Frank Baker

Russian scientists have experimented with giant “space-mirrors” to bring sunlight into dark areas within northern Siberia, and this technology has been considered in other locations. I don’t think we’d like large mirrors perched atop our mountain ridges. Instead, I encourage folks to get outdoors, breathe the fresh air, stretch the legs, and climb up into those sunny zones I described, or find your own. Bodenbug Butte up toward Palmer, for example, is an easy hike and puts one into some nice winter sunshine.

Winter sun is a guaranteed energy and morale booster. I once thought one could not feel any warmth radiating from the sun until late January, but after many years of clambering around in the mountains, I’ve learned that even in December, during our shortest days, one can feel some heat from our nearest star.

Frank E. Baker is a freelance writer and MCA member who lives in Eagle River with his wife Rebekah, a retired elementary school teacher. To reach Frank email frankeagleriver@gmail.com.



*Sheltered from a north wind, Frank Baker and Pete Panarese take a break on the cliffs above the Eagle River Valley, near Mile High Saddle.
Photo by Scott Sims*



*Pete Panarese leads (from left) Jeff Worrell, Al Beck, and Sue Panarese on the ridge near Blacktail Ptarmigan Rocks, near Eagle River.
Photo by Frank Baker*



*From left: Sue Panarese, Pete Panarese, Al Beck, and Jeff Worrell take a lunch break near the base of Blacktail Ptarmigan Rocks.
Photo by Frank Baker*



*From left: Jeff Worrell, Pete Panarese, Sue Panarese, and Al Beck silhouetted in December’s low-hanging sun.
Photo by Frank Baker*

Keystone Couloirs, Central Chugach Mountains

Text and photos by Mat Brunton

The potential for a decent weekend in the Valdez area upon my return from a three-month road trip to explore the terrain, snowpacks, and avalanche programs of Canada, Montana, Wyoming, and Utah motivated me to make quick work of the drive from Lake Louise, Alberta, to Taylor Brown's place in less than two and a half days solo.

The Central Chugach Mountains were coming out of Alaska's deep freeze of January 2020, but were still cold as f---. A big storm had just deposited a few feet of snow in the mountains, with a copious amount of that making it all the way down to sea level. On top of a healthy sea-level snowpack for early February, and all waterways being frozen about as solid as they get, it was great to come home to an "old-school" Alaskan winter.

I spent the first couple days taking advantage of the generally short annual window for skiing from sea level out of the Port of Valdez. The Comstock, Embick, Mount Francis area was a fantastic zone for this with a very short drive from town. My first day out the storm system departed with clearing skies by midday. Conditions were typically maritime: extremely dense and wind buffed powder. Despite the big storm on top of extremely weak facets that developed from the dry and very cold weather of January, storm snow on the coast seemed to be bonding rapidly.

As usual, the full clear out to high pressure came with the typically atrocious outflow north winds that rape the Thompson Pass-to-Valdez corridor. Nevertheless, there was still good sheltered skiing in the Comstock, Embick, Francis area and I was able to tick off another new couloir on day two.

Day three, another storm system was rolling in with decreasing visibility. While it had warmed significantly, wind-chill values were still at subzero double digits everywhere. We nixed skiing in the alpine due to flat light, and ice climbing due to the cold. Luckily, Taylor always had creative options in mind. We were able to ski some incredible couloirs in Keystone Canyon that were relatively sheltered. The emphasis is on relatively, as I almost got frostbite in a private place when I relieved myself, but didn't get my fly fully zipped due to my climbing harness. The wind was so intense we were transported without effort from couloir one downstream to couloir two via the iced-over Lowe River. The wind blew us over the ice with such rapidity, skiing the icy river was the most thrilling part of the day.

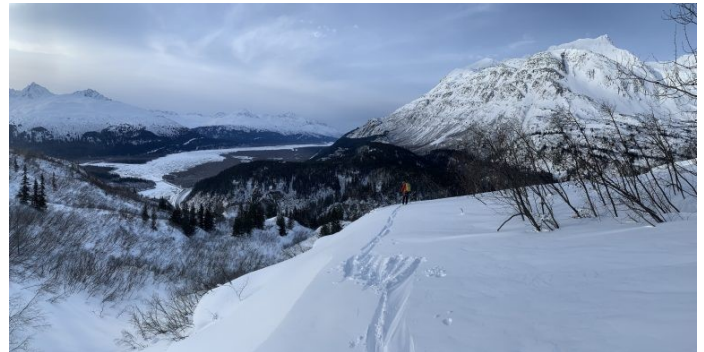
The first couloir we skied was the "Love's Way" ice climb approach gully. With less snow this is more often a WI2 gully. We followed it for about 2,000 feet to above the Trans-Alaska Pipeline road near brushline. It could be followed even higher into upper-elevation

glaciated terrain.

After being blown downstream, we then climbed the gully next to "Hung Jury" for about 1,000 feet.

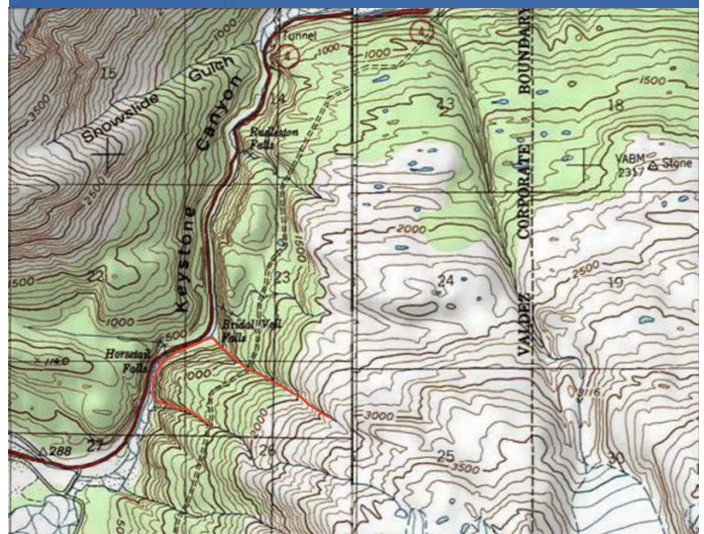
[Ed. note: To view a video of the trip, visit

<https://anchorageavalanchecenter.org/trip-reports/central-chugach/winter/keystone-couloirs/>.]



Above: Taylor Brown overlooking the Lowe River.

Below: The upper north bowl of Mount Francis.



Peak of the Month: Hey Tor, Umingmak Hills

Text by Steve Gruhn

Borough: North Slope Borough

Drainage: Kongakut River

Latitude/Longitude: 69° 28' 23" North, 141° 28' 26" West

Elevation: 2275 feet

Adjacent Peaks: Demarcation Dome (2730 feet) and Peak 2150 in the Kongakut River drainage

Distinctness: 615 feet from Demarcation Dome

Prominence: 615 feet From Demarcation Dome

USGS Maps: 1:63,360: Demarcation Point (B-1) and 1:25,000: Demarcation Point B-1 NW

First Recorded Ascent: August 10, 2007, by Christopher Hey, Jonathan Hey, and Maria Hey

Route of First Recorded Ascent: South-southeast ridge

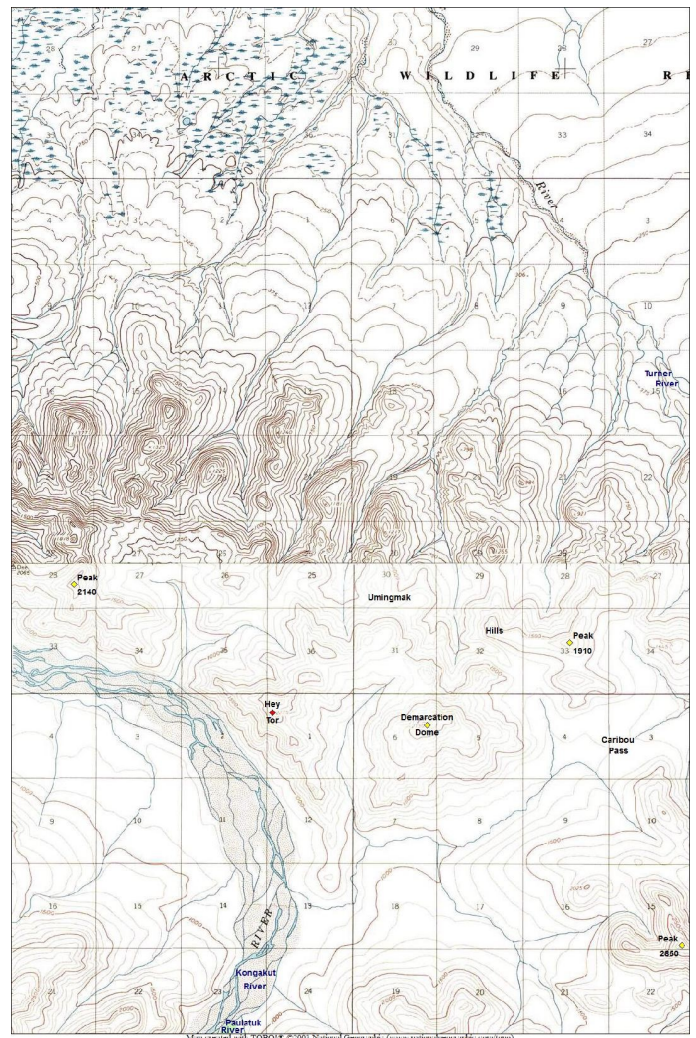
Access Point: Confluence of Drain Creek and the Kongakut River

On August 2, 2007, Keith Hawkings, Christopher Hey, Jessie Hey, Jonathan "Jono" Hey, Maria Hey, Nancy Hey, Tony Hey, Jonathan Hoare, and Jack Mosby flew with Wright Air Service from Fairbanks to the Drain Creek airstrip via Arctic Village.

The next day the group floated a couple miles in rafts down the Kongakut River and established a campsite on the west side of the river. On August 4 all except Hawkings and Mosby set out to climb a 3663-foot peak on the east end of Bathtub Ridge. Upon reaching the summit, they called the peak Mosby Peak in honor of the group member who hadn't made the climb. On the fourth through seventh days the group alternated paddling down the Kongakut River and hiking. On August 8 eight team members climbed a 3750-foot peak at the west end of the Whale Mountain massif. They dubbed that summit Hawkings Peak in honor of the sole group member who hadn't made the climb. The following day the team floated 17 miles to a campsite on the east side of the big bend in the Kongakut River.

On August 10 Christopher, Jono, and Maria Hey hiked up the south-southeast ridge of a 2275-foot peak north of their campsite. From the summit, which Jono called Hey Tor, they could see the Beaufort Sea. They retraced their steps on their return to their campsite.

On August 11 Wright Air Service picked up the party from a gravel bar in the middle of the Kongakut River about a mile north of their camp and flew them to Fairbanks in two airplanes – one stopping in Arctic Village and the other stopping in Fort Yukon en route.



Richard Laronde and his party climbed Hey Tor on June 22, 2010, via the same route as the 2007 Hey party.

I don't know of a third ascent of Hey Tor.

The information in this column came from Jono Hey's photographs available at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/palojono/sets/72157601663815539/>; from Laronde's trip report available at <http://icetent.com/kongakut.htm>, and from my correspondence with Jono Hey.



*Southwest aspect of Hey Tor, as viewed from the Kongakut River.
Photo by Jono Hey*

Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

January 29, 2020, at 5:30 p.m., 3900 C Street, Suite 900

Roll Call

Mike Meyers (President) - Present
Gerrit Verbeek (Vice-President) - Present
Jordan Haffener (Secretary) - Present
Katherine Cooper (Treasurer) - Absent
Tom Meacham (Director) - Present
Jonathan Rupp Strong (Director) - Present
Lila Hobbs (Director) - Present
Andy Kubic (Director) - Present
Heather Johnson (Director) - Present
Nathan Pooler (Director) - Absent
Visitor: Curtis Townsend

Scribe: Jordan Haffener

Committee Reports

President (Mike Meyers)

- Researching MCA shirts, mugs, hats with resale and thank-you options.
- Communication with club
 - We need a better way to communicate with ONLY the paid members.
 - ◆ Facebook does not allow to separate paid/not paid.
 - ◆ Free ListServ continues headed by Carlene Van Tol. Not many use this.
 - ◆ Important news can be posted on membership sign-in page.
 - ◆ Forums have been looked into, but it doesn't seem like a feasible option.
 - ◆ Agreed to cancel meet-up account as this is not a useful platform at this point.
 - ◆ Look into using the same platform that is used to send out *the Scree*.

Vice-President (Gerrit Verbeek)

- Looking into Paypal payment errors – complaints of members unable to pay dues.
- April 1st Speakers – Ines Papert and Luka Lindic
 - Bear Tooth is interested in helping the MCA with this fundraiser.
 - ◆ Talks of splitting fundraiser earnings with Ines and Luka.
 - ◆ Need to rely/coordinate with Alaska Rock Gym, Alaska Avalanche School, Alaska Mountaineering & Hiking (AMH), etc., to promote the event.
 - ◆ Curtis Townsend to cancel the MCA general meeting for April once Bear Tooth is booked.

- Gear budget – Work on a plan to consolidate, liquidate old gear.
 - Decided to dedicate gear funds to cover rental costs at AMH instead of buying more gear.
- Do we want to get involved with supporting visiting alpinists? Create a sign-up flyer and present it to members to get a feel for interest.

Secretary (Jordan Haffener)

- GENERAL meeting reservations are up to date? Yes, until December 2, 2020.
- BOARD meeting reservations are up to date? Yes, until December 30, 2020.

Treasurer (Katherine Cooper)

- 2020 Budget is approved.

Liability Committee (Tom Meacham)

- Family memberships only sign one waiver?
 - Issues with family members seeing expired membership notices, despite active family memberships.
 - Take hard copies of waivers for trips/events since family members of active members will not have signed a membership waiver online.

Awards Committee (Tom Meacham, Charlie Sink, Max Neale)

- February meeting to be called.
- Gerrit to submit a nomination.

Trips Committee (Needs chair)

- January – Five Fingers ice climbing trip with Nathan and Mike. Took 10 members out climbing.
- February – MCA has rented Serenity Falls Hut for the weekend of February 28 to March 1.
- March – Turnagain Tailgate (Heather). There will be several other booths, Chugach National Forest Avalanche Information Center, Ski AK, Black Diamond. Maybe set up a small group activity like skiing Center Ridge or Tincan Proper.
- May – MCA R.A.C.E [Recreational Alpine Cooperative Event].
 - Cost: \$20 discount for members (Can we charge a fee?).
 - Will need to develop a plan to reduce liability.
 - Safety plan, forecast plan, volunteers with radios and first-aid kit, etc.
 - Mandatory to have a partner, helmet, microspikes or crampons, rope, harness, two prusiks, ice screw, mountain axe, avalanche gear?

- Andy to call Alaska Division of Mining, Land, and Water to see what we need if we go over 50.
- Chris Marrano from Black Diamond wants to support the MCA, help with this event, donations, permitting, etc.
- June – Summer Solstice Campout on Flattop Mountain.
- July – Hub meet-up to break into side trips – event format over rigid trip format.
 - Powerline Pass, Rabbit Lake, Rainbow Ridge.
- August –
- September – Matanuska Icefest.
- October –
- November –
- December – Christmas Party.

Huts Committee (Jonathan Rupp Strong, Greg Bragiel, Cory Hinds, Vicky Lytle)

- Hut instructional signs with specific warning on fires/carbon monoxide/lack of oxygen (Chugach State Park meeting). How

to close it down, leave no trace, etc. Something universal to all huts.

- Rosie's Roost re-skin project is moving forward.

Mentorship (Lila Hobbs, Katherine Cooper)

- Ski mentors needed. Advertise Heather's "Bash at the Pass" to connect with other skiers.
- Lila to send follow-up to mentors/mentees to gauge how many people have gotten out.
- Take hard copies of waivers for trips/events since family members of active members will not have signed a membership waiver online .

Date and Location of next Meetings

- General: February 5, 2020, 6:30 to 9 p.m., BP Energy Center.
- Board: February 26, 2020, 6 to 8 p.m., BP Energy Center.

General Meeting Minutes

February 5, 2020, 6:30 p.m. at the BP Energy Center

- Thank you card sent to Pizza Man for hosting Christmas party last minute.
- Serenity Falls Hut reserved February 29, 2020. First come, first served for bunk space.
- Greg Bragiel described previous trips in preparation for Winter Mountaineering Class. October pack check. November hike, and learned to cross rivers. January, another trip was conducted starting at the Glen Alps Trailhead. Lessons learned; communication with trip leaders is essential. Be prepared. Bring the right gear. Drink water; eat food.
- Mike Meyers described May, June, and July summer "meet-up" trips.
- Six new folks introduced themselves tonight.
- Katherine Cooper announced that Ines Papert will be coming to Alaska in April at Bear Tooth.
- Nathan Pooler presented "Climbing in Mongolia."
- Announcement: Curtis Townsend is taking over role as club secretary.

Mountaineering Club of Alaska

President Mike Meyers mcmeayers24@msn.com
Vice-President Gerrit Verbeek 903-512-4286
Secretary Curtis Townsend 355-9820
Treasurer Katherine Cooper 209-253-8489

Director 1 (term expires in 2020) Jonathan Rupp Strong 202-6484
Director 2 (term expires in 2020) Lila Hobbs 229-3754
Director 3 (term expires in 2021) Tom Meacham 346-1077
Director 4 (term expires in 2021) Heather Johnson hjohnson@mdausa.org
Director 5 (term expires in 2021) Andy Kubic andy.kubic@gmail.com
Director 6 (term expires in 2021) Nathan Pooler Nathan.lee.pooler@gmail.com

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

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

The Scree is a monthly publication of the Mountaineering Club of Alaska. Articles, notes, and letters submitted for publication in the newsletter should be emailed to MCAScree@gmail.com. Material should be submitted by the 11th of the month to appear in the next month's *Scree*.

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

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

Mailing list/database entry: Katherine Cooper or 209-253-8489 or membership@mtnclubak.org

Hiking and Climbing Committee: Hans Schlegel—hans.schlegel@live.com or hcc@mtnclubak.org

Mentorship: Katherine Cooper and Lila Hobbs—mentorship@mtnclubak.org

Huts: Greg Bragiel—350-5146 or huts@mtnclubak.org

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Librarian: Gwendolyn Higgins—library@mtnclubak.org

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

Web: www.mtnclubak.org

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

*Thomas Eaves looking north from the summit of Mount Katherine (8250 feet) after Zach Lovell and he made the peak's first documented ascent in May 2019.
Photo by Zach Lovell*

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