

the SCREE

Mountaineering Club
of Alaska

June 2020

Volume 63, Number 6



JUNE MEETING: Canceled

“Don’t wait for the perfect moment, take the moment and make it perfect.”

– Zoey Sayward

Contents

Peak 4550, K'esugi Ridge

Swede Mountain

Jain Mountain

Mount Ascension

Berg Peak, Highbush Peak, and Blueberry Hill

Peak 4762, Kenai Mountains

Begich Peak and Boggs Peak

Raina Peak

Alaska Mountain Wilderness Ski Classic

Peak of the Month: East Pyramid Peak

"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

Carrie Wang on Fresno Ridge of Peak 4762 in the Kenai Mountains.
Photo by Wayne Todd

JUNE MEETING The June 3 meeting has been canceled.

Mentorship Program

The MCA Mentorship program is temporarily on hold as per social/physical distancing guidelines. MCA will continue to follow guidance from the CDC and state/national government. If you are interested in being mentored or connecting with and mentoring beginner and intermediate folks, please email mentorship@mtnclubak.org. MCA will send an email update when the program resumes.

Proposed Geographic Names

The Domestic Names Committee of the U.S. Board on Geographic Names received a proposal to name a glacier at the head of Boulder Creek in the Cathedral Mountains of the Alaska Range as the "Creasons Glacier" to honor a deceased member of the proponent's family. Because the glacier had been called the Boulder Glacier in an article on page 71 of the April 2002 issue of *High Mountain Sports*, in a report on page 237 of the 2002 *American Alpine Journal*, and again in the December 2010 *Scree*, the MCA's Geographic Names Committee submitted a counter-proposal to name the feature the Boulder Glacier. Interested parties can submit comments to BGNEEXEC@usgs.gov.

Steve Gruhn

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. Hut-meisters 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!

HIKERS....

The Mint Hut will be closed for maintenance July 17-19.

The Bomber Hut will be closed for maintenance July 20-22.

If you are hiking in these areas, bring a tent and plan to camp outside.

— Greg Bragiel, MCA Huts Committee Chairman

All EKLUTNA TRAVERSE HUTS – Eklutna Traverse travelers should take trash-compactor bags along for depositing human waste on-site. Use 5-gallon bucket lined with trash-compactor bag; place tied bag into onsite human-waste barrel. Human-waste system WAG bags have been used inappropriately. WAG bags are for packing out, NOT placing into onsite human-waste barrels. If you want WAG bags, contact MCA Huts Committee Chairman Greg Bragiel at 350-5146.

Trips

June 19: MCA Annual Summer Solstice Campout on Flattop Mountain. No leader.

Article Submission: Text and photography submissions for *the Scree* can be sent as attachments to mcascreed@gmail.com. Articles should be submitted by the 11th of each month to appear in the next issue of *the Scree*. Do not submit material in the body of the email. Do not submit photos embedded in the text file. Send the photo files separately. Send high resolution file photos separately, including captions for each photo. We prefer articles that are under 1,000 words. If you have a blog, website, video, or photo links, send us the link. Cover photo selections are based on portraits of human endeavor in the outdoors. Please submit at least one vertically-oriented photo for consideration for the cover. Please don't forget to submit photo captions.

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

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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.

Peak 4550, K'esugi Ridge

Text and photos by Slow-Plodding Human Porter (SPHP)



The Little Coal Creek Trail steepens. K'esugi Mountain (4750 feet) is at center.



The Little Coal Creek Trail ends here, but continues on as the K'esugi Ridge Trail to Pass 3550 (right). K'esugi Mountain is at left. Photo looks southwest.

Day 20 of Lupe's 2019 Dingo vacation to the Yukon Territory and Alaska!

August 24, 2019, 8:44 a.m., 46°F, Little Coal Creek Trailhead Milepost 163.9 Parks Highway, Denali State Park – Blue skies and no smoke at all! A glorious morning. Expectations were high! A return to Denali State Park's beloved K'esugi Ridge was on Lupe's agenda. The Little Coal Creek Trail would get her up there. Ultimate destination, an off-trail exploration of Peak 4550!

The Little Coal Creek Trail began as a nearly level trek in a ferny forest. Lupe trotted along watching for squirrels, with occasional success. A joyful start!

After crossing two small tributaries of Little Coal Creek and passing a pond, the trail began to climb. For quite a long way, trees and bushes hid all views. Eventually things began to open up. Tantalizing glimpses of the Alaska Range appeared beyond the Chulitna River valley.

Lupe had never enjoyed such a clear day on the way up to K'esugi Ridge before! Even Denali (20310 feet) was in sight.

As impressive as Denali and the Alaska Range were, the beauty of K'esugi Ridge was also stunning. The trail steepened considerably shortly before the American dingo reached the tundra.

The 3.3-mile-long Little Coal Creek Trail ended as Lupe reached gentler slopes near K'esugi Mountain (4750 feet). She was now up on massive K'esugi Ridge!

The end of the Little Coal Creek Trail was a mere technicality. The trail actually kept going, but as the K'esugi Ridge Trail. Pass 3550 on the other side of the Little Coal Creek valley was now the next objective. Skirting along the base of K'esugi Mountain, the K'esugi Ridge Trail headed right for it.

Lupe crossed the main channel of Little Coal Creek. She never saw it, but heard the stream gurgling beneath a boulder field that slowed Slow-Plodding Human Porter (SPHP) down considerably.

Upon reaching Pass 3550, Loopster again had a sweeping view of the Chulitna River valley and the Alaska Range. Ahead, the K'esugi Ridge Trail descended a broad, open slope.

For more than a mile, the trail was wide and nearly flat. Lupe passed a couple of scenic tarns. A mile and a half from Pass 3550, a larger tarn appeared. Beyond it was the long ridge leading to Peak 4550.

Lupe stuck with the K'esugi Ridge Trail past the big tarn. Soon after, the trail crossed a stream. The American dingo didn't have much farther to go to reach the start of the long ridge leading to Peak 4550.

Upon reaching the base of the ridge, Lupe finally abandoned the trail. Turning south, she climbed a slope that grew rocky and steep shortly before Loop made it up to the ridgeline.

Ahead, a rumpled region of tundra and rock stretched away toward a series of higher benches. Most of the tundra was a mix of

red and cream colors. Bushes added a few splashes of yellow or orange. Greens were evident wherever the ground was damp. Dark gray rocks covered the steeper slopes.

As SPHP picked a way higher, Lupe roamed the landscape. Alaska was suffering a drought. Instead of exhibiting its usual soft sponginess, the parched tundra crunched underpaw. Wherever possible, SPHP stayed on rocks to avoid unnecessary damage.

Eventually Lupe reached the upper end of this first region. Before her was a similar area that sloped more gently. Beyond this plain was a ridge more formidable than anything she'd come to so far.

After crossing the plain, Lupe began an ascent of the more formidable ridge. This region was steeper and rockier, but still not all that difficult. The slope was a long one, though. Soon the Carolina dog was ready for water and a break.

The top of the formidable ridge wasn't actually a top, just the end of the steepest part of the climb. A rocky region ahead led toward a big tundra-covered slope. A somewhat higher ridge was in view beyond it. Maybe that was the summit?

Nearing the edge of the tundra, Lupe came to a giant boulder, easily the biggest rock in the vicinity. From the boulder, she saw yet another more-distant ridge that might be even higher.

From the giant boulder, a short stroll on the tundra brought Lupe to a pancake-flat plain. The more-distant ridge did appear higher than the one now close at paw. The American dingo headed for it.

The slopes leading up onto this second ridge were an easy trek. The top turned out to be a flattish region with three highpoints. The south highpoint was 20 feet lower than the other two, which were so close to being the same elevation it was hard to tell which might be highest.

No doubt about it! Lupe had made it to Peak 4550. She arrived at the center highpoint where a thick, round stone sat amid similar boulders.

The northeast highpoint 200 feet away was different. It consisted

of a narrow ridge of much smaller rocks. Since the northeast highpoint looked just as high as the center one, to truly claim her peakbagging success, Loop had to go over there, too.

Having been to both the center and northeast highpoints, it was still difficult to say which might be the true summit. The south highpoint was clearly out of the running, but having come so far, the Carolina dog visited it, too. She was rewarded with a sweeping view of the Susitna Valley.

Although not a difficult trek, Peak 4550 had been a long one. Now that she'd visited all three highpoints, Lupe was ready to relax. She returned to the center highpoint with its scenic boulders, selecting a comfy spot. Surrounded by the glory of Alaska atop K'esugi Ridge's Peak 4550, the American dingo basked in the slanting rays of

the late afternoon sun.

A perfect late summer day! Who would ever want to leave? Yet 1.5 hours after arriving up on Peak 4550, Lupe was ready. Once again she stood poised atop the highest rocks.

Onward! Puppy ho!

Oh, there was more, so much more!

Let's do some exploring, Looper!

Lupe was all in favor of that! Returning to Peak 4550's northeast highpoint, she paused only briefly before starting down the rocky north slope.

The Carolina dog visited K'esugi Stonehenge. She explored Pass 3950 between Peak 4550 and K'esugi West. She peered down steep slopes on glistening tarns.

And oh, what a happy time it was! Lupe explored and sniffed to her heart's content, roaming seldom-seen parts of beautiful K'esugi

Ridge. It was an evening in dingo heaven!

Who could ask for anything more? (End 11:06 p.m., 42°F.)

Revised and condensed from an original post at <https://www.adventuresoflupe.com/?p=26593>.



Denali from Peak 4550. Photo looks northwest.



The Susitna Valley from the south high point. Photo looks south.

Swede Mountain (4660 feet), Amphitheater Mountains

Text and photos by Slow-Plodding Human Porter (SPHP)



At the official end of the Swede Mountain Trail. Photo looks north.



Swede Mountain from the Denali Highway. Photo looks south-southwest.

Day 25 of Lupe's 2019 dingo vacation to the Yukon Territory and Alaska!

I don't know, Loopster. Kind of looking like a no-go.

Well, we're here now, SPHP. Let's at least check it out.

Smart, Dingo! A path left the pullout! Beyond the pavement a single sheet of information was posted behind a cloudy piece of plexiglass.

Hah! I guessed wrong, Loop.

About what?

The name of this mountain. The topo map doesn't show any name for it. Since it's only a few miles from the Tangle Lakes, I've just been calling it Tangle Lakes Peak. It actually does have a name, though. Says here, this is the trail to Swede Mountain (4660 feet)!

Oh, so we've got a trail to the top? That changes everything, doesn't it?

Yes, indeedy! According to this, the trail doesn't go to the top, though. It only goes as far as the alpine. Probably just as good! If it gets us above the bushes, Swede Mountain ought to be a cinch!

The Slow-Plodding Human Porter (SPHP) had slept poorly. Still early. How about a nap while waiting for the air to clear? The American Dingo was willing.

10:21 a.m., Swede Mountain Trailhead southeast of Round Tangle Lake along the Denali Highway – Better! At least the nap had done some good. The air, however, remained hazy. Looking more and more like smoke again from forest fires much farther west. Even

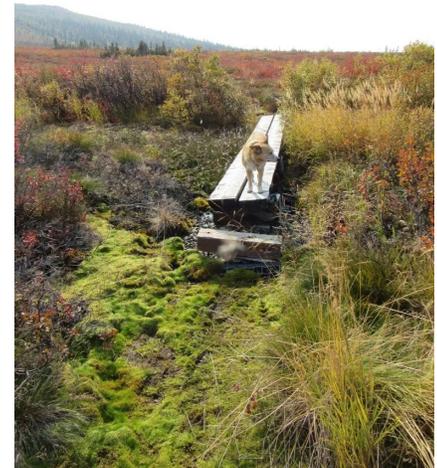
so, the Carolina dog was here. She might as well take a stab at Swede Mountain.

As soon as SPHP was ready, Lupe hit the trail heading south into the bushes. A swamp was visible in a low spot off to the east. The trail went down an embankment to lowlands, then turned southwest.

Within five minutes, Lupe came to an unmarked fork. Staying left proved to be the way to go. Almost immediately, the trail curved east and crossed a plank bridge. It then turned south again toward Swede Mountain. Lupe found herself following a path of plastic grids.

The plastic grids went on and on, crossing a low region. In places, the grids were completely overgrown. By the time they ended, Loop was at the edge of a stunted forest.

The trail steepened, but with occasional level stretches, too. The forest eventually gave way to tall bushes, and even relatively open spots. As Lupe climbed, the trail began trending southeast.



Walking the planks on the Swede Mountain Trail. Photo looks east.

Near the end, the route steepened again. The trail had been going east when it suddenly veered southwest. A set of stone steps led higher.

Lupe was now up on the rim of the long slope she had been climbing. She soon came to a cairn perched on a big rock. This appeared to be the end of the official 1.5-mile-long Swede Mountain Trail.

Loop was still miles from the top of Swede Mountain. Gently rounded slopes led toward a huge high point way off to the south.

The description of the Swede Mountain Trail back at the trailhead had promised to get Lupe up to the alpine. True enough, the region right around the boulder where the cairn sat was mostly low tundra, but chest-high bushes still dominated the enormous slope ahead.

Lupe discovered a second cairn 100 feet from the first one back at the big rock. Beyond this second cairn a readily discernible path continued up into the bush. How far it might go was unknown.

Trending steadily north, the trail went on and on. Sometimes it faded, but never so badly that Lupe couldn't follow it.

For a long way the situation hardly changed. By the time the trail faded away for good, a small ridge was only a little farther. This ridge proved to be the northeast edge of a 30- or 40-foot-deep drainage cutting southeast/northwest across the long slope Lupe had been ascending. The drainage was choked with alders.

Which way? Pacing along the ridge revealed a path slicing down into the ravine at a point where there were hardly any alders. An easy way across the drainage!

Minutes later, Lupe was climbing up the other side. Still lots of bushes ahead, but patches of tundra, too. Things were starting to open up! The American dingo came to a second drainage, but simply followed it higher. She didn't need to cross it.

The tall bushes finally gave out. Abandoning the edge of the ravine, Lupe turned south-southeast, heading straight for Swede Mountain. The vast colorful slope was an easy trudge higher. Seemed inevitable now that the Carolina dog would soon be standing proudly on top of Swede Mountain! Two big hills were ahead, and she was gaining on them with every step.

Scree—June 2020



On the stone steps of the Swede Mountain Trail. Photo looks southwest.

Reaching the top of the closest hill revealed a couple of surprises. First of all, the hill wasn't really a hill, just a rise leading to a wide, flat plain. The second hill wasn't too far away. It no longer appeared to be a hill, either, merely a slope leading to yet another plain a little higher up. A big rectangular box sat up there close to the edge. Farther south, an even higher hill was now in sight.

Naturally, the mysterious box had to be investigated. Crossing the plain, Lupe climbed the next slope. The box turned out to be the Tangle Lakes repeater station owned by Copper Valley Telecom.

Continuing south to the top of the next rise, Lupe discovered she still hadn't reached Swede Mountain's summit. Across another

plain was a two-tier hill. Well beyond the two-tier hill, was yet another hill that looked even higher. Hardly seemed possible the summit could still be that far away!

A huge boulder stood out on the plain leading to the double-tiered hill. SPHP dubbed it "Disentangled Boulder" in honor of being in the Tangle Lakes District, and the boulder having somehow managed to disentangle itself from the rest of the mountain to bask in

luxurious sunshine.

From Disentangled Boulder, it wasn't much farther to the base of the two-tier hill. A short climb got Loop up to a smaller plain leading to the last bump higher. A choice of easy routes between large rocks led up onto the bump.

This was it – the summit of Swede Mountain! The distant hill seen from the plain where the Disentangled Boulder rested was clearly lower. Lupe didn't have to go all the way over there.



On Disentangled Boulder. Photo looks south-southeast.

Swede Mountain's summit encompassed three acres of medium-sized rocks intermixed with tundra. Over at the southeast edge, a single grassy mound stood a few feet higher than anything else.

The southwest rim of the summit region was nearly as high as the grassy mound, and offered views of nearby lower hills to the south. Lupe and SPHP went over there to relax.

Would have been so much better on a clear day! The smoky haze was worse than ever. Sadly, the intricate Tangle Lakes which ought to have been on display in the lowlands a few miles west were scarcely visible. In all directions, anything anywhere close to the

horizon was an indistinct smudge.

Yet it was still incredible to be here.

Forty serene minutes flew by. Better take a tour before time was up! Going counter-clockwise around the summit's perimeter, Lupe returned to the grassy mound, the true summit of Swede Mountain.

Continuing around the summit, Lupe gazed down a rocky slope leading to a giant golden east shoulder. From the north edge, she saw the final plain she had crossed to get here. Loopster would soon be crossing it again.

To the west, the Tangle Lakes could now be seen with the naked eye, but so weakly the camera couldn't pick them up. Having gone full circle, Lupe reached the south rim again.

And that was it. The Carolina dog headed north, cutting across the middle of Swede Mountain's summit. Near the north edge, she paused, lingering as SPHP started down.

The return trip was marvelous! A final stop at Disentangled Boulder, then an easy downhill grade, crossing one plain and slope after another, all while reveling in the beauty of this isolated Alaskan peak.

Back at the Denali Highway (6:27 p.m.), SPHP moved the G6 to the dirt parking area across from the paved trailhead pullout. Dinner facing west. Way over there, the sun was sinking between two new friends, Whistle Ridge and East Glacier Gap Mountain (6060 feet). Now Swede Mountain was a friend never to be forgotten, too.

Revised and condensed from an original post at <https://www.adventuresoflupe.com/?p=27047>.



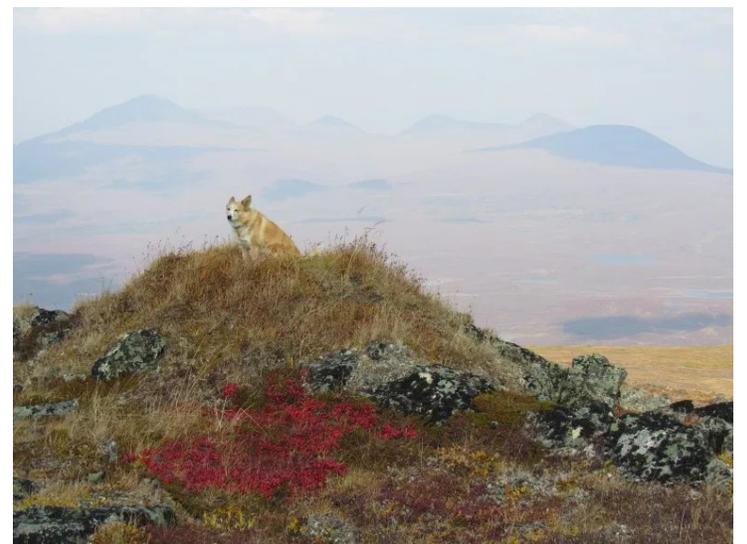
*On the grassy mound, the true summit of Swede Mountain.
Photo looks south-southeast.*



Point 4540 (left) and the 4650-foot south summit (right) from the summit of Swede Mountain. Photo looks south.



*At the end of the official trail once more. Round Tangle Lake is at left.
Photo looks north-northwest.*



Tangle Mountain (5715 feet; at left) from the grassy mound on the summit of Swede Mountain. Photo looks northeast.

Jain Mountain (6150 feet), Little Fist Range

Text and photos by Mat Brunton



One of the many tarns up Boulder Creek on the approach.

When I was 18 or 19, I was first introduced to (and my worldview significantly influenced by) eastern religions. Prior to that, my spirituality had only been influenced by the Protestant Christianity I was raised with (fortunately, for the sake of open-mindedness, through a very liberal Lutheran denomination) and the vagaries of WASP (white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant) folk beliefs. An Indian Philosophy class at Miami University of Ohio, with Professor Rama Rao Pappu, catalyzed simmering subconscious changes to my worldview.

Perhaps most significantly, it introduced me to the practice of yoga. It was quite the spectacle when Professor Pappu brought his visiting yogi friend into class. The Indian yogi, dressed in traditional garb, had a lecture hall full of white, primarily Midwestern, young adults doing yoga. That introduction inspired me to learn more about yoga, and regular yoga practice has been a significant part of my life for over 14 years.

Professor Pappu's class also introduced me to Jainism, and I specifically remember his recounting of witnessing Jains in his younger days in India. A broom was a fundamental component of Jain attire. The broom was used to mindfully and gently brush away ants and any other small insects from the path of the Jain's feet, in order that the Jain maintain its strict vow of Ahimsa and not harm or kill any sentient being (in this case, an insect by stepping on it).

I hope Alaska can be influenced by Jainism, and Alaskans adopt

more Ahimsaic (non-harming, compassionate) practices in their daily lives. Our current economy, that values profit more than people and has little regard for ecology, is doing a lot of harm to the environment. Given that we're part of the environment, that economy is doing a lot of harm to each and every one of us – even if we're not an under-privileged or oppressed member of society.

On a smoky, early July day in 2019, I climbed an obscure, but prominent (900-foot prominence), summit dubbed Jain Mountain (about 6150 feet) in the seldom-visited Little Fist sub-range of the Central Chugach Mountains that exists between the Tielke and Tonsina Rivers. This area is somewhat reminiscent of the Summit Lake area of the Kenai Mountains that lies west of the Seward Highway (i.e., upper Devils, Fresno, and Colorado Creeks). Like the Summit Lake area of the Kenai Mountains are to the Kenai Mountains farther south, the terrain in the Little Fist Range of the Central Chugach (while still very rugged) is mellower than the terrain to its south.

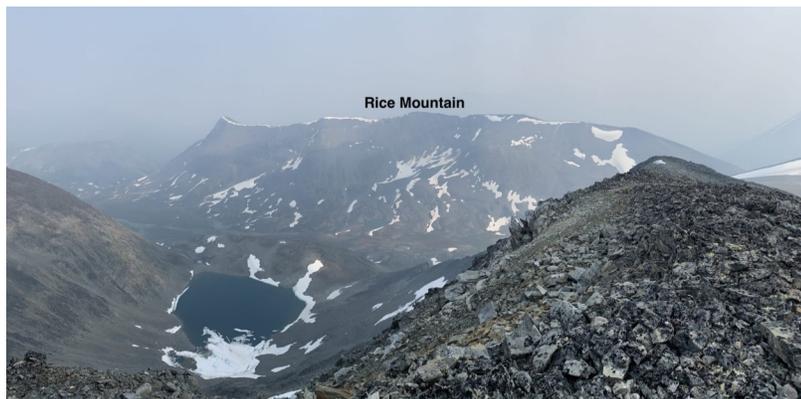
*Monkshood
(a.k.a. Wolfsbane) at Boulder
Creek timberline.*



The access to this area is the same as for Mount Tiekel (6350 feet) and South Tiekel (6504 feet; see my trip report in the February 2020 *Scree*). Big thanks to Lance Breeding for maintaining the alpine access trail. To access Jain Mountain, follow the Boulder Creek trail to the alpine. Follow Lance's cairns to the southeastern tributary of Boulder Creek around 3000 feet. Ford this easy-to-cross, but brushy, tributary. Head north and then west toward the two northwestern tributaries to Boulder Creek that bring one to the upper elevation valleys west of Rice Mountain (5650 feet; which is identified on USGS maps). Scramble the 3rd-Class south ridge of Jain Mountain.

This relatively remote and seldom-visited (outside of the Valdez heli-ski season) part of the state affords limitless opportunity for exploration: backpacking, peakbagging, technical mountaineering, packrafting, etc. The neighborhood-maintained trails up Boulder and Stuart Creeks provide access to vast and relatively brush-free, high-alpine Chugach terrain. While it's public land, the locals aren't accustomed to non-local recreational traffic. Tread lightly, be respectful and friendly, and you shouldn't have any issues exploring this wondrous corner of The Great Land.

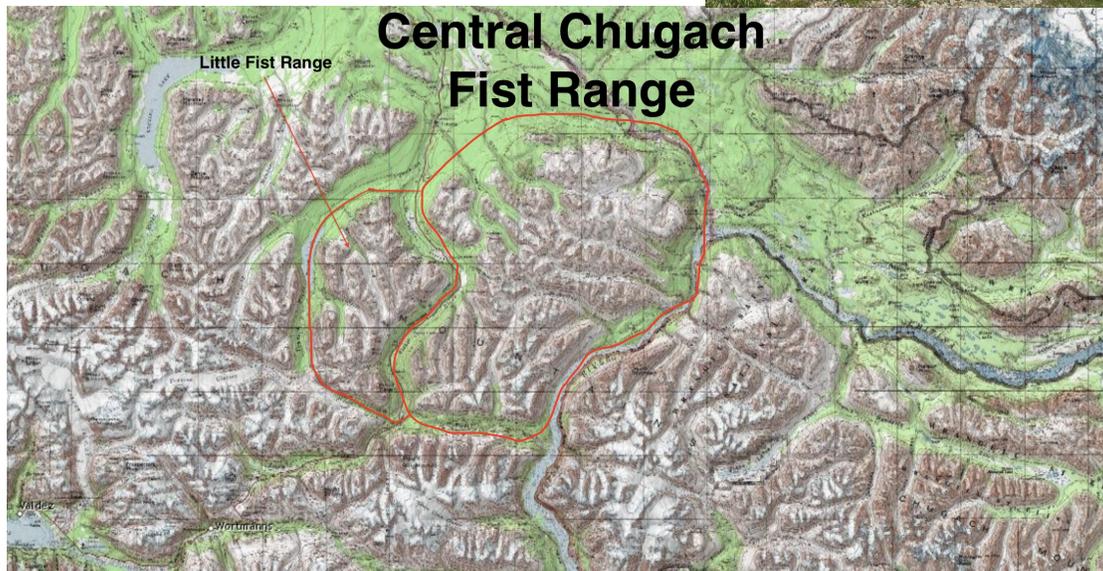
[To view a video of Brunton's trip, visit <https://anchorageavalanchecenter.org/trip-reports/central-chugach/summer/jain-mountain/>.]



*Above: View east from Jain Mountain's summit to Rice Mountain (5650 feet).
Below: View of Mount Tiekel (6350 feet) and South Tiekel (6504 feet) from the approach gully.*



Mount Tiekel from the approach gully.



Operation Mount Ascension (5710 feet) Spring Summit, Kenai Mountains

Text by Jackie Klecka

With Vince Stewart



A view of Mount Ascension as Jackie Klecka made her way around the neighboring ridgeline. Can you spot Vince Stewart?

Photo by Jackie Klecka



Vince Stewart bootpacking to the summit of Mount Ascension!

Photo by Jackie Klecka

If you haven't heard of Type II fun, a quick google search will tell you it's the type of fun that "is miserable while it's happening, but fun in retrospect." The effort in getting to and from the peak of Mount Ascension in April 2020 certainly had its Type II moments, but the moment of summit was truly remarkable and made the 17-mile and over 5,000-foot-elevation-gain day totally worth it.

A late start on a Friday night found us hiking 2.5 miles uphill to the Dale Clemens Cabin past midnight, in the dark, bear spray in hand, camping pack on back and backcountry pack and equipment on front, and post-holing.

Our efforts were not in vain, however, as Saturday morning yielded bluebird skies and sunshine soaking the surrounding mountains. We set out from the cabin on our backcountry skis with the goal to summit the 5710-foot Mount Ascension looming behind Lost Lake. The intent was to cross the ravine and head straight toward the base. From a higher vantage point, we quickly realized crossing the ravine was not feasible and our expectations of summiting quickly sank. We leisurely continued, enjoying the sun's warmth, until our hopes were reignited by the sight of snow-machine tracks on a bluff above Lost Lake that wrapped around the mountain and led to the base of Mount Ascension. In the full afternoon heat by that point, we tracked on, choosing to continue at each decision point, until we found ourselves at the base.

After assessing the snowpack and terrain, we decided it was safe enough. We began the climb, which only got steeper, and noted in retrospect that boot-packing might have been the better option. The snow layers felt uniform and stable as we periodically poked our poles into the corn-like stuff on the ascent. I kept my distance behind Vince nonetheless, and little surface pieces of snow tumbled my direction as we passed each other going opposite direc-

tions of the switchbacks. Fortunately, the ski skins held on to the snow well and we continued zigzagging upward.

Within 100 feet of the peak, we took our skis off and hiked the remaining way to our goal. We crested over the top of the peak, double checked that we were not standing on an unbeknownst cornice, and then took a moment to absorb the views around us. Words or pictures cannot do justice; the views overlooking the Harding Icefield, Bear Lake, Kenai Lake, Lost Lake, and the snow-capped surrounding mountains in the evening rays was breathtaking. A craggy, vertical, cornice-topped cliff was to our right and a deep valley below all the magnificent mountains to our left. In front of us was a sheer drop, and behind us the 5710 feet we ascended to that point.

Needless to say, the spring skiing through the corn-like snow down the mountain was incredible. The view from Mount Ascension made any Type II fun certainly worth it.

Happy trails!



Vince Stewart (left) and Jackie Klecka on the summit of Mount Ascension.

Photo by Vince Stewart

Berg Peak (3917 feet), Highbush Peak (4669 feet), and Blueberry Hill (4531 feet), Berry Peaks

Text and photos by Mat Brunton



The Berry Peaks from Berg Peak's east ridge.

March 2020 was an epic month for ski mountaineering in South-central Alaska. I was able to bag 11 new more-than-500-foot-prominence peaks in the Chugach and Kenai Mountains. Before I knew I'd be out of work indefinitely due to COVID-19, I had a week off for Spring Break. As opposed to the Spring Break 2019 week I had off, during which nasty weather only provided me with one day of ice climbing, the weather and conditions during Spring Break 2020 were what a ski-alpinist's dreams are made of. As usual when the "gettin's good," I entered a frenzied state of mind to get as much of that gettin' as I could.

It had been a few years since I'd visited the Berry Peaks area of the Western Chugach Mountains. On March 25, 2017, Brian Harder and Travis Baldwin joined me for a ski-peakbagging linkup of Bramble Knoll (3264 feet; ascent of the northwest ridge, descent of the north face), Bearberry Point (3245 feet; ascent of the south ridge, descent of the amazing 2,000-foot north aspect chutes and spines), and Lowbush Peak (4229 feet; ascent from the south, descent to the north) starting on the Seward Highway at Kern Creek and ending at Alyeska Resort via Winner Creek.

The following autumn, on September 30, I biked and hiked solo up to Berry Pass and did a high alpine ridge traverse to the southwest summiting Nagoon Mountain (4403 feet), Lingon Mountain (4098 feet), and making an attempt on Highbush Peak. About halfway up the northeast ridge of Highbush, it became too exposed and chossy, forcing me to turn around. From the Lingon-Highbush pass, I descended the glaciated upper valley to its drainage tributary of Winner Creek. I clambered over wet boulders and trudged directly down the tributary, rather than bushwhack through dense Chugach jungle, to reach the Winner Creek Trail and my stashed bike.

On March 10, 2020, (for my first Spring Break adventure) Jess Tran and I climbed and skied Berg Peak from the Girdwood Nordic Trailhead via Winner Creek. We skinned up to the Berg-Highbush pass, and from there climbed the east ridge to the summit. We descended south and then southwest from the summit, down a steep

chute to mellow and open slopes (through impeccable and sunny spring powder), almost 3,000 feet to Kern Creek. From there we ascended to the Hibbs-Berg pass and back to Winner Creek and the Nordic Trailhead.

The following day, I rallied Sam Inouye for Highbush. We took the same initial approach that Jess and I'd used the day before, skied a wonderful and sunny southeast-facing run off Berg, climbed a southwest-facing couloir on Highbush to the south ridge, and followed the south ridge (a very esthetic alpine climb with amazing views) to the summit. We then descended the southwest face and wrapped around to the Lingon-Highbush pass for our return to the trailhead via the Winner Creek Trail.

The next day I was back to the Berry Peaks again with Jess Tran. This time, from Peterson Creek on the Seward Highway. We followed the first mapped tributary (also a more-than-1,500-foot avalanche path) up to the Blueberry Hill alpine. We then climbed the main, most prominent, southwest-facing couloir of Blueberry Hill. From the top, it was a short and easy boot up to Blueberry Hill's summit. The more-than-4,000-foot descent back down to Peterson Creek was an amazing and varied run: steep couloir, to mellow and open alpine slopes, to glades, and ending with steep drainage chutes opening up to a smoothed-over avalanche debris fan.

After these three days of Berry Peakbagging, I only had one remaining peak (albeit the most formidable) to finish off this area of the 166 Western Chugach more-than-500-foot-prominence summits: Kinnikinnick Mountain (4470 feet). Ten days after our ascent of Blueberry Hill, Jess and I were blessed with perfect conditions for the suspected fourth ascent, and likely first ski descent, of Kinnikinnick. That trip report can be found in the May 2020 issue of *the Scree*.

[Ed. note: to view Brunton's video of his trips, visit <https://anchorageavalanchecenter.org/trip-reports/western-chugach/berg-highbush-blueberry-hill/>.]



Sam Inouye skinning the final bit to Highbush Peak's summit.

Peak 4762, Kenai Mountains

Text by Wayne L. Todd

May 3, 2020



Carrie Wang approaching Peak 4762. Fresno benchmark is behind her at left.

Photo by Wayne Todd

Skis or snowshoes, skis or snowshoes? We opt for snowshoes as bare ground is visible for "most" of our route up the southwest ridge to the Fresno benchmark. A rough road across the highway and 50 yards north from the Manitoba Mountain parking lot is noted on the reconnaissance drive-by.

Walking up a road toward your new peak destination, how easy is that? The road ends at the power lines, but the up-ridge view doesn't look horrible regarding brush blockage. Carrie Wang and I first avoid the hemlocks, knowing they are typically frustrating to travel through. The open sections are still laden with a couple feet of snow, though – snow that is quite soft after an above-freezing night, and our 9 a.m. start. I note that time is when more-driven fellow mountaineers summited a nearby peak just a few days prior.

Testing out the hemlocks, which are extremely tall for southcentral Alaska, we pleasantly discover very little understory. Up we go, avoiding snow where practical. The forest ends and we're forced onto snow, expecting to immediately need the snowshoes, but our lighter bodies mostly stay on top. Just the steeper southwest aspects fail and I only resort to crawling once. The S word is mentioned numerous times

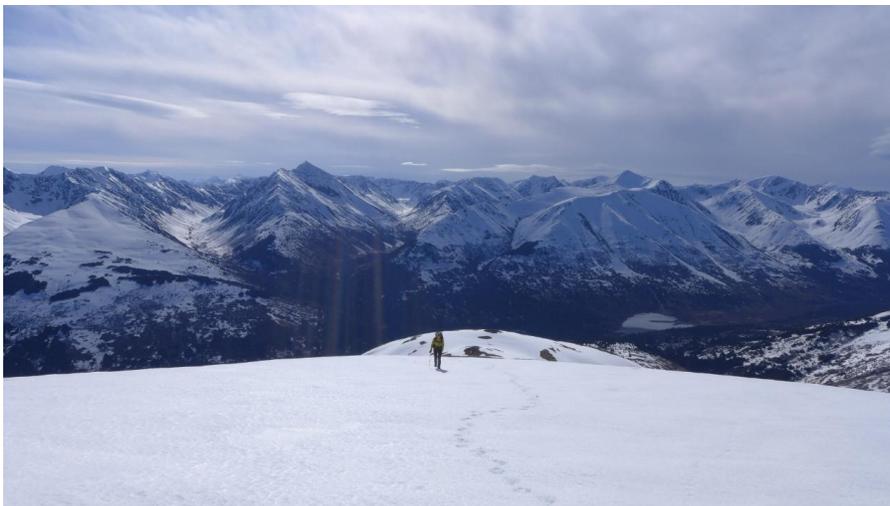
but we gain sporadic snow-free terrain and up higher, the snow is mostly firm. We follow some bear tracks that might actually be human. At a confirmed human-step-kicked section, the "booter" took a much shorter left step than right.

The sky is still nicely blue by Fresno, except southward, and over-viewing the terrain, I can see why this is a popular ski destination. The ridge narrows and steepens significantly after Fresno, and coupled with snice on the north terrain, we don crampons. These stay on way too long and do not help when sinking to my thigh in wet snow on those dang steeper southwest slopes. I wonder if the crampon points weaken crust snow, making it more likely to break through.

The ridge undulates more than expected and coupled with the steeper terrain, we rationalize the snowshoes decision. As I round the mellow bowl before the rounded summit, a ptarmigan greeter

waits surprisingly long before flying off. Perhaps his observation of the fairly slow-paced bipeds alleviates any concerns about being consumed. The tight pole gripping for weight distribution surely helps with only post-holing abruptly every 20 to 30 steps.

As with other mountaineering in similar peak-height areas, the



Carrie Wang hiking up the southeast ridge of Fresno benchmark.

Photo by Wayne Todd

views are quite good and there's also the acknowledgment that, damn, there are a lot of peaks around here. The gray sky has overlapped us by the top and coupled with a stiff breeze, a long summit picnic is dismissed.

Off we go with variable clouds and breezes that change both the lighting and perceived temperatures rather frequently. We now double our post-holing, but it's still more esthetic not to wear "the" 'shoes. Unlike our ascent, we now have good views of the avoided cornices, which aren't significantly overhung, so more easily travel on the ridge top.

At Fresno we ditch crampons on the ever-softening snow. Admittedly skis would be sweet here to descend the very snow-covered fall line. As we descend the southwest ridge, the post-holing becomes much more prevalent and Carrie finally proclaims, "this is stupid," and dons the snowshoes.

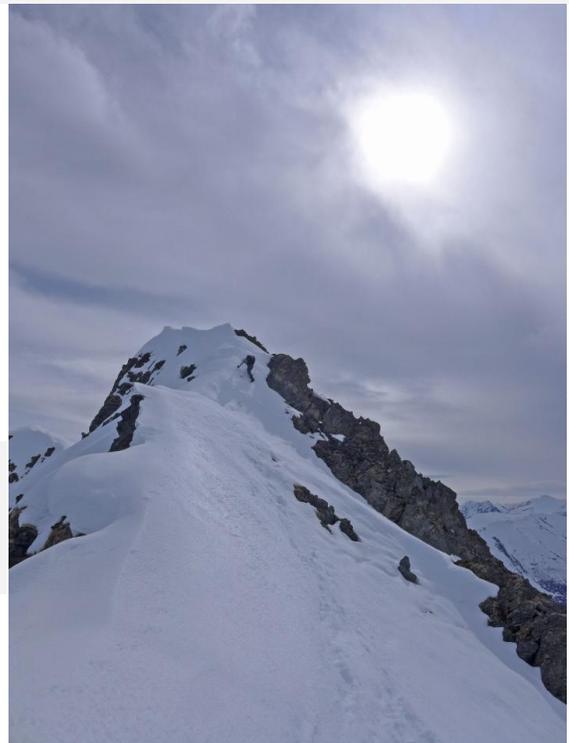
I decide it's time for one of those odd male quests of adverse "logic" and decide I'm not going to wear snowshoes this day, regardless. For the next mile I suffer many a posthole even with connecting snow-free patches, bearing much weight on my poles, and following the snowshoe tracks. One rationale is "this is a better workout," except my knees and back really don't like it.

Back in the trees, I wait for her to put snowshoes away. The hike down is easy with "the" 'shoes nestled in the packs. A couple days later I don't know why my wrists are still sore.

Seven hours (four up, two and a half down, without transitions).



*Wayne Todd on a corniced ridge.
Photo by Carrie Wang*



*Carrie Wang down-climbing
the ridge between Fresno
benchmark and Peak 4762.
Photo by Wayne Todd*



*Carrie Wang (left) and Wayne Todd on the summit of Peak 4762.
Photo by Wayne Todd*



*Carrie Wang on a point between Fresno benchmark and Peak 4762.
Photo by Wayne Todd*

Begich Peak (4623 feet) and Boggs Peak (4518 feet), Central Chugach Mountains

Text and photos by Mat Brunton



Adam Loomis descending east from Begich Peak's summit.



**Boggs Peak, south ridge
from high point of crux section**

Boggs Peak from the high point of the crux section. From here a very steep, firm, and exposed down-climb was necessary (it required actual sticks with the ice tool and careful footing with crampons).

The Portage area is relatively neglected when it comes to skiing, much like the Western Chugach Mountains of Chugach State Park were prior to the COVID-19 travel restrictions. Neither of these areas appeal to “powder snobs,” but their terrain and bigness more than compensate for those of us looking for more than “boring powder.” Skiing and climbing around Portage provides a truly Alaskan big-mountain experience. Whereas the world-renowned big-mountain skiing venue of the Valdez area Central Chugach Mountains is a five-hour drive from Anchorage, we’ve got a slice of it less than an hour away by way of the Portage-Whittier area in the Central Chugach.

This area gets a lot of weather, more often than not has “character-building” snow, access is from near sea level (with the lower elevations remaining relatively brown and snow-free some seasons), and it’s generally ignored from a forecasting perspective by the Chugach National Forest Avalanche Information Center (a.k.a. Turnagain Pass Avalanche Center). The terrain is also heavily glaciated and relatively big and complex compared to neighboring Turnagain Pass. All of these factors contribute to the Portage area’s emptiness relative to the crowdedness of Turnagain.

Several years ago, Sam Inouye and I completed a big linkup summiting and skiing Bard, Carpathian, and Byron Peaks in a single day. I’d gone back to Portage in more recent years to ice climb and ski other prominent peaks (Middle Glacier Peak and Explorer Peak) on the south side of Portage Valley, even realizing that (with stable avalanche conditions) non-motorized travel to the Skookum Glacier via Portage Valley is faster than motorized access from the Placer. Despite these great experiences in Portage Valley, I didn’t really get hooked until autumn 2019.

During the fall of 2019, having become more enamored with glacier travel during that time of year (when crevasses are generally wide open or bridged with super solid névé and firn), I summited a few other peaks in the Portage-Whittier area (Maynard Mountain, Shakespeare Shoulder, and Begich Peak) while adding even more to my to-do list. I climbed the nearly-1200-foot prominence of Begich Peak on October 12 with Adam Loomis.

Adam and I walked from the parking area at Portage Lake along the Bear Valley railroad tracks to the train tunnel. From there we bushwhacked-scrambled (with a short section of wet, loose, and mossy 4th Class on the ascent) up the east face of Point 2780 to the south ridge of Begich.

We were prepared for snow on the upper route, but didn’t expect as much as there was. We resorted to crawling through several sections (see my video at <https://anchorageavalanchecenter.org/trip-reports/central-chugach/winter/begich-boggs/>) to get as much surface-area flotation as possible. Other than the difficult over-snow travel with just mountaineering boots, the route above the steep east-facing slopes is relatively straightforward and doesn’t exceed 3rd Class.

When planning this trip, I’d considered the possibility of tagging both Begich Peak and Boggs Peak. The roughness of the terrain and deep snow had pretty much nixed that idea before we even got to Begich’s summit. Looking north at the route from Begich to Boggs, it became obvious we definitely didn’t have time for a link-up.

So on March 14, 2020, after driving through the tunnel in Whittier

to howling winds that changed our plans there, Jess Tran and I climbed and skied Boggs as a fallback. From a climbing (mountaineering) perspective, conditions were excellent. From a skiing perspective, not so much (and this is why, as discussed above, Portage sees relatively little alpine-touring traffic).

We skinned from the Portage Lake parking area, across the railroad tracks, and up Bear Valley to a forested knoll and the southeast face of Boggs. This southeast face is huge avalanche terrain: a continuous more than 3,000 feet of it. But Portage has a maritime snow-pack, with relatively good stability in general, and these southerly slopes had already been processed by a few days of high pressure. Uphill-travel conditions were quite efficient.

We were able to skin (albeit with ski crampons being mandatory) to the 4000-foot false summit of Boggs. From there, things got much more interesting and some proper Chugach mountaineering was in order. Given the technical and questionable (I didn't have any beta, nor could I find any) nature of the ridge, Jess opted to remain at the false summit and enjoy the perfect spring day (relatively warm, sunny, and no wind). I left my skis on the false summit, got out my ice tool, and began the ridge climb to the true summit.

The initial section of the south ridge from the false summit wasn't too spicy (only mildly exposed and with relatively soft snow for good booting), but the crux of the entire route came quickly.

Beyond the crux section the ridge was engaging and required some thoughtful route-finding, but the climbing was solid and exposure not as threatening.

[Ed. note: To view Brunton's video of the Begich Peak and Boggs Peak ascents, visit <https://anchorageavalanchecenter.org/trip-reports/central-chugach/winter/begich-boggs/>.]



Jess Tran skinning up Bear Valley.



Adam Loomis on the southeast ridge of Begich Peak.



Adam Loomis on the summit of Begich Peak with view to the west-northwest.



Jess Tran on the false summit of Boggs Peak (with a closer look at the crux section).



Boggs Peak's south ridge from the false summit.

Raina Peak (6798 feet) Traverse, with Sun and Sons, Western Chugach Mountains

Text and photos by Wayne L. Todd

April 18, 2020



East view from Raina Peak.

Skinning directly from the car under the power lines, Cory Hinds leads, which is his position most of the day. At the plowed road, the skis briefly come off. This energetic group includes Cory's son Peter, their exchange student Nils Kolb, and their friend Nick Jablonski. Skinning again from the road, we are appreciative of the trail the landowners made specifically for access to Ram Valley.

This trail has larger obstacles, such as downed trees, so we practice ski yoga to clamber through and over them. Early morning sun casts a prevalent shadow onto an adjacent peak-clinging cloud.

Rather than following the ski track into Ram Valley, we angle slightly left into the Falling Water Creek valley, soon finding another solid skin track. In a few places we skin on alpine. Fresh bear tracks cross this track and meander over a ridge. The day is already bluing nicely, as predicted by the spot feature on the National Weather Service (NWS) forecast site.

At a gloriously warm and sunny break spot, we're intrigued by edged small ghost clouds above our destination ridge. Entering shadow, we crampon up the ice-hard skin track on a prominent northwest-facing gully. Commenting to Nick about his crampons, I learn he is the son of Jeff Jablonski, a mountaineer active in the 1990s. We hike into a muggy fog, which creates interesting piercing ridge shadows.

Topping out on the ridge, we escape the fog and enter the amazing peak-viewing zone, most of them still wearing winter snow. A right turn and just minutes later, we're on top of Raina Peak, with

more astounding views of the Western Chugach Mountains. We also note Anchorage is draped in cloud, also forecast by the NWS. After a hearty break of food and water (compliments of Cory's stove), and many pictures (GoPro video for the young three), we descend back to the saddle for skins-off time.

The south-facing slopes have been warming nicely and after an initial breakable-crust section, the skiing is creamy. I trail this group of advanced skiers. At *one* chute where Cory warns of rocks, Peter and Nils decide to straight-shoot it to avoid the edge rocks. I witness a spectacular wipeout, which affirms my decision to maintain turns, albeit with higher rock-encounter risk. Very warm temperatures lead to delayering, down to skin with the young ones. Recent animal tracks cross the valley.



Cory Hinds below the summit of Raina Peak with Ram Valley below.

Excitement erupts at a slush pond from the three as they have been looking for such a spot for some time. Soon a kicker is built on the far side. Cory and I are skeptical as to even the successful crossing of the pond, and he makes a bet. With the soft, sticky snow, the three ski from higher up the ridge each round to gain more speed. Amazingly they all always made it across the pond, though never with enough speed to make flips. I don't know if Peter collects his bet money.

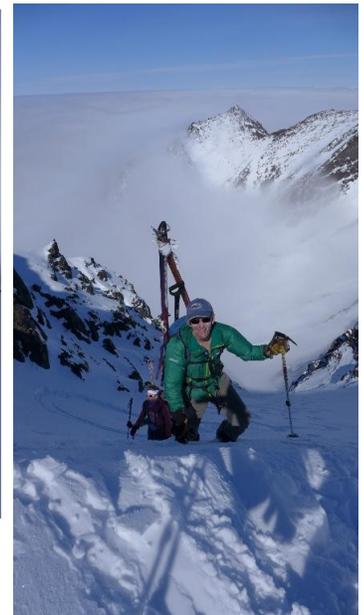
As we round the corner to regain the property trail, the snow gets wickedly isothermic, causing numerous slow-motion wipeouts and ski craters. The trail skiing is freestyle, so after numerous events with my joints still intact, I join Nick for a boot descent. We wrap up a great ski-mountaineering day with facemasks (for the short ride down the hill) rather than beer, one of the new norms.

To view Peter Hinds' short ski video, visit <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ig4C7Af9gJ9AgJsFMNzKI-6-y46YNBVI/view>.

Eight hours (without slush cup), 10 miles, 5400 feet.



Cory Hinds (right) and Peter Hinds kicking steps up the north gully of Raina Peak.



Cory Hinds topping out of the north gully.



Cory Hinds, Peter Hinds, and Nick Jablonski skinning up Falling Water Valley.



Nick Jablonski nails the slush crossing as Peter Hinds cheers him on.



From left to right: Nils Kolb, Cory Hinds, Peter Hinds, and Nick Jablonski pose with a Pleasant Mountain backdrop.



Cory Hinds, (right), Peter Hinds (center), and Nick Jablonski skin up Falling Water Valley.

Feelin' F.A.B.: Extreme Nordic Skiing in the Alaska Mountain Wilderness Ski Classic, Wrangell Mountains

Text by Taylor Bracher

on Ahtna and Upper Tanana Athabascan Lands

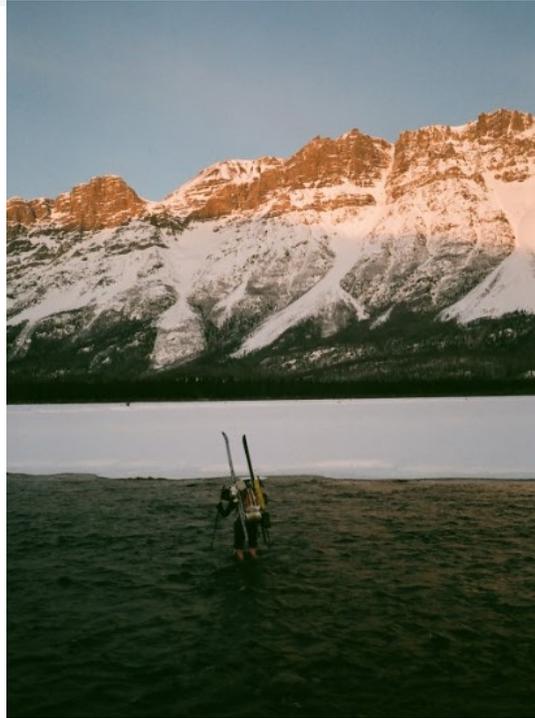
"Holy!... S--t!" Emily Sullivan yells out in short spurts between deep breaths. "It's just as bad as I remember!" It is too difficult to discern if she's laughing or crying. Probably both.

We walk across the icy open waters of the Nizina River, with our pants rolled up above our knees and our skis and boots strapped on our packs. I use my skate-ski poles to balance as my bare feet try to feel their way over the slick river rocks, but they go numb before I finish the crossing. My shin bleeds when I break through shelf ice on the shore, and my feet protest in pain, a thousand tiny daggers stabbing them as we haphazardly try to dry off and get back in our ski boots. We need to get moving – to warm back up and because we have so much more ground to cover, and more open water ahead. This is the Alaska Mountain Wilderness Ski Classic, and these river crossings are all too familiar.

Last March, we were in the same spot in the same event, trying to ski over two mountain ranges from McCarthy to Log Cabin Wilderness Lodge near Tok (more than 160 miles). But after heavy rain, an unprecedented early river breakup, and red-flag avalanche conditions, all participants of the 2019 AMWSC turned around on the second day. The horrendous conditions and abrupt end to a highly anticipated experience were a huge letdown for most of us, and Emily and I promised each other we would seek out more fun and less suffering on a spring adventure in 2020, preferably a trip with fat powder skis and steep lines, instead of long days, skinny skis, heavy packs, and open-river crossings.

So why are we here a year later, doing the very thing we swore we wouldn't? This is a question we ask ourselves many times as we inch our way across the glaciers and rivers of the Wrangell Mountains.

—
Each morning, I shoulder my 40-pound pack and my feet protest in my plastic ski boots, while my hips blister where my glacier harness and pack overlap. To maximize efficiency, we take breaks while



*Taylor Bracher crossing the Nizina River.
Photo by Emily Sullivan*

standing up, and keep food, water, and sunscreen accessible while moving. We encounter very slow trail-breaking through sugar snow, and have a route-finding snafu that sets us back. The days are hot as the sun reflects off the snow, but there is a disturbance in the weather headed our way. We feel the pressure to make miles as we slowly fall behind our intended schedule.

On our third day, we navigate the heavily crevassed Whiskey Hill Glacier without issue, but don't make our pass below Presidents Chair (10372 feet) before dark. We set up camp at approximately 7200 feet and build snow walls around our tent in anticipation of the incoming wind-storm. Once we stop skiing, our boot liners, wet from days of sweat, freeze solid while our feet are still inside them. We're hungry. We're dehydrated. Neither

of us has gotten much sleep. The wind picks up.

I look to Emily, who is eating her dinner inside her sleeping bag, and say, "Promise me that, no matter what I say after this, you won't let me do this again."

"Oh yeah, I promise. No way," she replies. We are in agreement.



*Taylor Bracher at the 7200-foot camp above the Whiskey Hill Glacier north and east of Presidents Chair.
Photo by Emily Sullivan*

In the morning, I pop out of the tent and wind pelts snow onto my face. I squint, but am unable to see the hill we're camped on, much less the huge crevasses between us and our 8300-foot pass below Presidents Chair. Last night, Emily received a weather forecast on her inReach that suggested this storm would be short-lived, but intense. We wait. I don't know what is louder, the tent flapping in the wind or my stomach growling. I ration my food, knowing I should save the calories for when I'm moving.

By midday we have enough visibility to feel comfortable packing up and making forward progress. I stuff my frozen boot liners back in their shells, and force my feet inside, a laborious process that involves lots of grunting and cursing. The visibility is in and out and travel is slow going. We inch forward when we can see, then wait as clouds move back in. Inch forward, then wait. Finally, after lots of patience and navigating by GPS, we strap our skis to our backpacks, hop over a bergschrund, and boot-pack over icy rocks to the pass.

I jab my skate-ski poles into the rime and joke, "I love Nordic skiing!"

We quickly drop onto the other side of the pass, and the views open up, revealing dramatic peaks all around us. Light, fluffy snow falls out of a cloudless sky like glitter. We power-wedge downhill, still roped up, through a couple of inches of sparkle powder.

"Emily! What are we doing?" She knows what I'm asking.

"Skinning downhill! Roped up! Through fresh snow! On Nordic skis!" she replies.

"The Wilderness Classic!" I shout.

Soon, we drop the rope and rip skins. We double-pole down the glacier through the new snow, shimmering in the March sunshine. The sun kisses our cheeks and Emily and I leave behind the stress of the previous days. We strap our sleeping bags to the outside of our backpacks to let them dry out while we ski. It's not long be-



The Presidents Chair Glacier
Photo by Emily Sullivan



Views from the Presidents Chair Glacier.
Photo by Taylor Bracher

fore one of us giggles and says, "I'm having fun!"

"Me, too!"

—
Fading Affect Bias (F.A.B.) is the phenomenon where positive experiences retain emotional intensity, while negative memories fade much faster. When reflecting on our backcountry adventures, we tend to let go of memories of the heinous terrain, our suffering feet, or brutal weather, and hold onto the feelings of accomplish-

ment from a summit, the glow of a sunrise, or the excitement of wolverine tracks in the snow. It has also been shown that over time, events that were perceived as negative in the moment can ultimately come to prompt positive emotions upon recall. Our brains can trick us into remembering things in a better light.

Emily and I enjoy the brief relief on the sparkly President's Chair Glacier, but getting over the Presidents Chair pass was only the first of two major hurdles on our route, and what lies ahead is arguably a much greater challenge. The Nabesna Glacier, fed from the icefield on Mount Wrangell, is the longest interior valley glacier in the world. And we have to cross it.

—
We were given useful directions from those who had traveled this route before about how to get across and down the Nabesna's massive crevasses and rugged moraine, but once on the edge of the glacier, Emily and I know that not even the most detailed instructions can adequately describe what we got ourselves into. We look across a sea of ice and rock. Waves of blue seem flash-frozen in time, and we slowly pick our way across their crests. The new snow from the previous day's storm still

clings to the glacier, obscuring the distinction between solid blue ice and crevasses filled with old snow. Our metal ski edges scrape the ice bare whenever our skis slip out from under our feet. We switch to crampons, and I almost immediately put a leg in a crevasse.

Emily and I stand together, as frozen as the ice beneath our feet, fully aware that the only way forward is across. "We just have to

do it.”

At this moment, a team of three we had been leapfrogging with for the whole trip catches up to us on the glacier’s edge. We all agree that there is safety in numbers, and the five of us navigate the three-mile crossing of the Nabesna together, followed by about 10 more miles of descent on the ice to the toe of the glacier. It is very tedious travel, requiring switching back-and-forth between skis and crampons, backtracking and weaving, and some very gripped skiing down blue ice between crevasses.

“I’d probably be fine never coming here again,” I tell Emily.

“This is the glacier of my nightmares,” she replies.

And then we laugh and say, “We love Nordic skiing!”

—
We have to get off the glacier for a short stint, where the Nabesna makes a small icefall as it loses elevation. At dusk I break trail through bottomless sugar snow and alder bushes while we look for a place to camp. Emily turns on her inReach to ask our friend Eric Parsons, who is ahead of us by about a day, for beta about getting back on the glacier in the morning.

Her inReach buzzes, and she reads aloud to me, “Very high avy conditions in Noyes area, full burial, all ok. Exit Nabesna Road.” The message is brief, but the instructions clear. Immediately, we are both struck with emotion. A couple tears stream down my face while I bushwhack through the alder.

Six event participants – our friends – took a different way from McCarthy and were ahead of us on the route to Log Cabin, and someone was buried in an avalanche. Emily and I would ski to the small town of Nabesna, cutting our trip short and avoiding the avalanche terrain altogether. After all of the mental and physical stress of everything we had been through so far, now we experience the height of emotional stress. “*All okay*,” I keep repeating to myself. “*They’re all okay*.”

Over the course of the evening and the following morning, we piece together where all 12 event participants are in the mountains. Everyone keeps in contact with Dave Cramer, the event coordinator, and we all know our respective exit strategies to avoid avalanche terrain. Emily and I still don’t have any other details on the incident, so I continue to remind myself, “*All okay*.”

The following morning, getting back on the Nabesna Glacier and off at the toe proves really straightforward, and soon Emily and I cruise on the Nabesna River. The river is notorious for a headwind, but the sun is strong and the wind provides perfect relief from its intensity. We ski past a note written by a ski pole in the snow. “Go Emily Taylor Ben Lindsay Curtis !!!” Left by Eric the day before, it is the perfect morale boost to keep us going, and illustrates the camaraderie of this wilderness “race.”

On our final day of the AMWSC, Emily and I break trail for 30 miles to Nabesna, and make the quickest time of the whole trip. In Nabesna, we will wait for the rest of the crew instructed to exit early, get picked up by Dave (who brings coffee and cookies), and be swept away to Log Cabin Wilderness Lodge, where we will shower and greet the others who ski in from the Tetlin River. A week after starting our trips in McCarthy, we will all be together, safe, sharing stories, laughter, tears, and hugs.

We take one final break to refill our water bottles at an open lead on the Nabesna River, where we celebrate the feelings of strength, empowerment, and freedom that come from working hard and overcoming more than we thought possible in the mountains. We are both weathered from a week outside, our noses crispy and red from the sun and our dirty hair pasted to our foreheads. Our bodies are hardened from the elements, but our memories of the cracked up Nabesna Glacier already start to soften, and we are having so much fun. I tell Emily that my backpack just feels like part of my body now. She jokes that the blisters on her feet have become old friends. We acknowledge that we’ve found a primal rhythm out here, and that navigating the rugged landscape of the Wrangell Mountains feels easier than navigating the “real world” we left behind a week earlier.

Emily tells me, “I know I belong right here.”

I ask, “You wanna do this again next year?”



Emily Sullivan cruising toward the sunset.

Photo by Taylor Bracher



Joining teams to cross the Nabesna Glacier

Photo by Taylor Bracher

Peak of the Month: East Pyramid Peak

Text by Steve Gruhn

Mountain Range: Alaska Range; Tripyramid Peaks

Borough: Denali Borough

Drainages: Brooks Glacier and Traleika Glacier

Latitude/Longitude: 63° 10' 2" North, 150° 39' 43" West

Elevation: 11250 feet

Adjacent Peaks: West Pyramid Peak (11720 feet) and Mount Brooks (11940 feet)

Distinctness: 720 feet from West Pyramid Peak

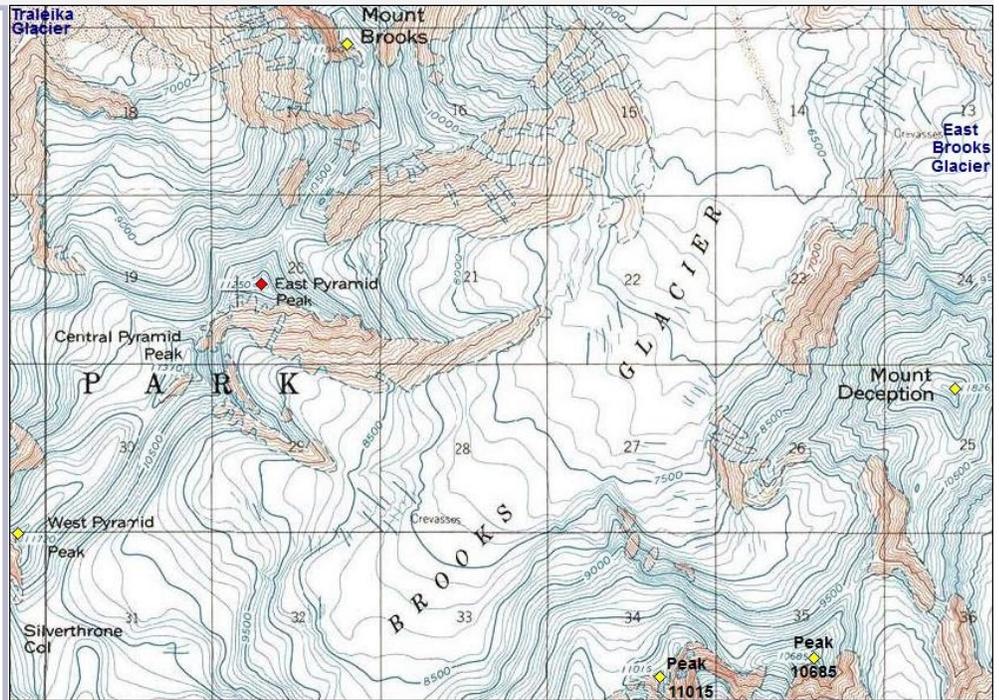
Prominence: 720 feet from West Pyramid Peak

USGS Map: 1:63,360: Mt. McKinley (A-2); 1:25,000: Denali A-2 NE

First Recorded Ascent: August 26, 1965, by John H. Bousman, William Bousman, Earl Hamilton, William May, and Hallam Murray

Route of First Recorded Ascent: North ridge

Access Point: Wonder Lake



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



Crux of the southwest ridge of East Pyramid Peak as viewed from Central Pyramid Peak.
Photo by Ryan Wichelns

Dwarfed by Denali (20310 feet) some 13 miles to the west-southwest, East Pyramid Peak is, by my count, tied for the 151st highest peak in Alaska, tied for the 51st highest peak in the Alaska Range, and tied for the 38th highest peak in Denali National Park.

In March and April 1945, a U.S. Army Air Forces party conducted testing on clothing and equipment in cold-weather conditions on the Brooks Glacier. Bradford Washburn led the testing party and while there began to unofficially name geographic features in the area. On August 23, 1946, Washburn officially proposed the name Mount Tripyramid for the massif between the Brooks Glacier and the Traleika Glacier. Washburn had selected the name because the feature reminded him of Mount Tripyramid in New Hampshire's Sandwich Range. The U.S. Board on Geographic Names, however, didn't care for the notion of the entire massif

being named as one mountain. On April 22, 1948, after learning of the BGN's disapproval, Washburn suggested the names East Pyramid Peak, Central Pyramid Peak, and West Pyramid Peak for the three summits of the massif. On September 3, 1948, the BGN approved the names.

On August 2, 1965, William "Bill" May set out from Wonder Lake on foot, accompanying horse packer Berle Eli Mercer, his son, Mercer's son's friend, Virginia Hill "Ginny" Wood, and Wayne Merry, who ferried supplies up Cache Creek to Oastler Pass. May's team had hired a pilot to air drop supplies to them but found that Mount McKinley National Park had recently implemented a new policy that prohibited air-dropping supplies on the north side of Denali. They were fortunate to have found Mercer on short notice just before the start of hunting season beyond the park boundary.

The following day John H. Bousman, William "Bill" Bousman, Earl Hamilton, and Hallam "Hal" Murray set out across the McKinley River in hopes of reaching May, who would be at Oastler Pass that evening. After depositing May and the cargo at Oastler Pass on August 3, Mercer's horse-packing crew returned to Wonder Lake. The morning of August 4, May climbed Oastler Mountain (6415 feet) and that evening the five-man team was reunited at Oastler Pass. In the ensuing days the team explored the Traleika Glacier and Brooks Glacier en route to ascending Mount Tatum (11140 feet), Mount Carpe (12550 feet), and Mount Deception (11826 feet).

On August 22 the team established a camp at about 8200 feet on a western tributary to the Brooks Glacier. On August 26, after three days of snow, the party headed up the tributary glacier to the saddle between Mount Brooks and East Pyramid Peak and ascended the north ridge of the latter via what John Bousman described as "a devious yet pleasant route."

The next day the Bousman brothers and Murray climbed Mount Brooks and then the entire team raced the oncoming winter as they returned to Wonder Lake and the Mount McKinley Park Road (now known as the Denali Park Road), arriving on August 30.

On June 27, 2015, Geoff Lyman, Gabe Messercola, Ryan Wichelns, and Greg Zegas departed the Denali Park Road and headed up Glacier Creek, bound for the Brooks Glacier. On July 4 the party established a base camp on the moraine at the confluence of the Brooks Glacier and the Muldrow Glacier. On July 5 the party established a camp at 6600 feet on the Brooks Glacier. On July 6 Messercola and Wichelns began climbing toward Silverthrone Col, where they established a camp on July 7. The duo climbed Mount Silverthrone (13220 feet) the next day and West Pyramid Peak the day after that, spending the night near the summit of Central



*Earl Hamilton (left) belays and John Bousman (foreground) watches as Hal Murray (right) pokes his ice axe through the summit cornice of East Pyramid Peak.
Photo by Bill May*



*Southwest ridge of East Pyramid Peak and crux of the route as viewed from the saddle between Central Pyramid Peak and East Pyramid Peak.
Photo by Ryan Wichelns*

Pyramid Peak. On July 10 the pair down-climbed and rappelled to the saddle between Central Pyramid Peak and East Pyramid Peak. From there the two climbed up steep ice and soft powder (and everything in between) to ascend the southwest ridge of East Pyramid Peak. They descended to the col between East Pyramid Peak and Mount Brooks and then climbed Mount Brooks the next day. On July 12 they returned to their base camp at the confluence of the Brooks Glacier and the Muldrow Glacier.

I don't know of a third ascent of East Pyramid Peak.

The information for this article came from the BGN's Case Study for East Pyramid Peak; John Bousman's trip report titled "Boston-Brooks-Traleika Expedition 1965," which appeared in the January 1966 *Scree*; from John Bousman's report titled "Boston Brooks-Traleika Expedition, Alaska Range," which appeared on pages 120 and 121 of the 1966 *American Alpine Journal*; from Kenneth A. Henderson's "North American Notes," which appeared on pages 316 through 318 of the 1966 *Alpine Journal*; from Michael Sfraga's 2004 *Bradford Washburn: A Life of Exploration*; from John Bousman's 2015 *An Alaskan Apprenticeship: Learning to Climb in a Hard Land*; from Wichelns' trip report titled "Lack of Cornices Allows First Mount Silverthrone to Mount Brooks Traverse," which appeared in the October 2015 *Scree*; from Wichelns' report titled "Mt. Silverthrone to Mt. Brooks Traverse," which appeared on page 146 of the 2016 *AAJ*; from John Bousman's 2019 *The Alaskan Years: Still a Hard Land*; from my correspondence with Bill Bousman, May, Murray, and Wichelns; and from my personal conversations with John Bousman.



*East Pyramid Peak (right) and Central Pyramid Peak as viewed from the Brooks Glacier.
Photo by Ryan Wichelns*

Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

April 29, 2020, at 6:00-8:00 p.m., conducted online via Google Meet

Roll Call

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

Scribe: Curtis Townsend

Committee Reports

President (Mike Meyers)

- Andy to buy tent for about \$250.
- Newest MCA Liability Waiver last printed in April 2019 *Scree*, it ran again in the May issue due to problems with website not being updatable.
- Tom to contact Billy Finley to discuss posting waiver on the website.

Vice-President (Gerrit Verbeek)

- Nathan is going to coordinate with Gerrit to create an online meeting with a presenter.

Secretary (Curtis Townsend)

- BP Energy Center has been reserved through April 2021, general and board meetings.
- Curtis has canceled all meetings at the Energy Center until September.

Treasurer (Katherine Cooper)

- REI has received an invoice for calendars.
- Katherine wasn't present. She emailed the following to us prior to the meeting: "I made the purchase of vent modifications via Stan last week. Have had a few memberships come through via paypal and a few more in the mail."

Liability Committee (Tom Meacham)

- By-Laws

Parks Advisory (Tom Meacham and Ralph Baldwin)

- June 13, 50th anniversary Alaska State Parks celebration at Arctic Valley.

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

- Meeting to be called for award nominees.

Trips Committee (Needs chair)

- Summer trips are postponed until further notice pending restrictions being lifted.
- June 19 – Flattop Mountain social: More than 20 people requires a special-use permit (\$150).
- July 10 – Rabbit Lake meet-up camping Friday night. SUP is for 12 campers, but we can have up to 20 hikers without a SUP. Event format over rigid trip format.
- August 7 – Williwaw Lakes meet-up camping Friday night. SUP is for 12 campers, but we can have up to 20 hikers without a SUP. Event format over rigid trip format.
- September – MCA Annual Matanuska Glacier Icefest.
- October –
- November –
- December – MCA Annual Christmas Party.

Training Committee

- Look into trip-leader training video.

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

- Hut instructional signs with specific warning on fires/lack of oxygen (Chugach State Park meeting). Jonathan and Mike to work on instructional signs.
- Will not publish the budget increase in *the Scree* until we know for certain this project is going to happen this summer. Will need to make a decision by June 1, as this is the go/no-go deadline for the helicopter outfit.
- Scandinavian Peaks Hut door open.

Mentorship (Lila Hobbs, Katherine Cooper)

- Mentorship is on hold due to COVID-19.

Communications Committee (Lila Hobbs)

- Lila to look into position names on the website.
- Lila to investigate how to keep board member's names current.
- Mike – invite Billy Finley and Tim Silvers to attend a future board meeting to discuss website things.

Date and Location of next Meetings

- General Meetings canceled until September unless we stream the meeting.
- Next Board Meeting on May 27, 2020, from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. via Google Meet.

Mountaineering Club of Alaska

President	Mike Meyers	mcmeayers24@msn.com	Director 1 (term expires in 2020)	Jonathan Rupp Strong	202-6484
Vice-President	Gerrit Verbeek	903-513-4286	Director 2 (term expires in 2020)	Lila Hobbs	229-3754
Secretary	Curtis Townsend	355-9820	Director 3 (term expires in 2021)	Tom Meacham	346-1077
Treasurer	Katherine Cooper	209-253-8489	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@mtclubak.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@mtclubak.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@mtclubak.org

Hiking and Climbing Committee: Vacant—training@mtclubak.org

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

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

Calendar: Vicky Ho—512-470-8640 or hovcky@gmail.com

Librarian: Gwendolyn Higgins—library@mtclubak.org

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

Web: www.mtclubak.org

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

Emily Sullivan below Presidents Chair.

Photo by Taylor Bracher

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