

# the SCREE

## Mountaineering Club of Alaska

MAY 2022

Volume 65, Number 5



**"You never conquer a mountain.  
You just stand on the top for a  
few moments. Then the wind  
blows your footprints away."**

**—Arlene Blum**

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**Mount Sanford, Wrangell Mountains**

**Minya Peak, Delta Range**

**Peak of the Month: Castle Mountain, Wrangell Mountains**

**MAY MEETING: Wednesday, May 4, 2022,**

**6:30 p.m. at Snow City Café**

**Presenter: Sophie Tidler on zero-waste  
adventuring, the winter Chugach Front  
Range Link-up.**



*"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—Abbey Collins assisted by Dawn Munroe*

## Cover Photo

Sean Casey on the long approach to Mt Sanford.

Photo by Benjamin Casey

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

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

## MAY MEETING

Wednesday May 4, at 6:30 p.m. at Snow City Café

Sophie Tidler's "Amateur Hours," a presentation on zero-waste adventuring, the winter Chugach Front Range Link-up, bike touring the Trans-Alaskan Pipeline and some other random adventures in not-so-high Alaskan mountains.

Sophie made the first female solo completion and the first winter traverse of the Front Range Link-up. The Link-up is a 12-peak traverse in the Chugach front range, summiting 12 peaks, traveling 35-40 miles, and ascending 15,000-20,000 feet.

We will also have an online option for those that cannot join in person:

Join Zoom Meeting <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83674706360...>

Meeting ID: 836 7470 6360

Passcode: 033973

One tap mobile

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Passcode: 033973

Find your local number:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/km5207kWZ>



## Announcements

### Proposal to Change the Name of the Suicide Peaks to North Yuyanq' Ch'ex and South Yuyanq' Ch'ex

The Alaska Historical Commission has requested comments from the MCA on a renewed proposal to change the name of the Suicide Peaks in the Front Range of the Western Chugach Mountains to North Yuyanq' Ch'ex and South Yuyanq' Ch'ex. Interested people may request additional details from, and provide comments to, Geographic Names Committee Chair Steve Gruhn at [geographicnames@mtclubak.org](mailto:geographicnames@mtclubak.org) by April 25, 2022.

Note that this is a renewed proposal that has been resubmitted after initially being rejected by the Alaska Historical Commission last year.

### Training

**MCA Summer Mountaineering School, July 15-23, 2022**— The Bomber Traverse- Basic Mountaineering instruction for accomplished backpackers. Hiking, climbing, and glacier travel in the Talkeetna Mountains. Learn: Snow travel, ice tool use, ice climbing, glacier travel, navigation, route finding, rappelling, rock climbing, fun, exploration, leadership skills and confidence building. Organizational meeting March 5. To sign up please contact trip leader Greg Bragiel ([unknownhiker@alaska.net](mailto:unknownhiker@alaska.net))

**Instructors needed** to assist with the Summer Mountaineering School. Please contact Greg Bragiel to help with any or all of the following:

- July 15- Meet at Kaladi Bros. Coffee on Tudor at 8 a.m. Stage 1 vehicle at Reed Lakes trailhead. Post hut closure signs. Hike to Mint. Hut Trip plan. Leave No Trace, Navigation and route-finding,
- July 16- Snow travel, Anchors, Running belay, Knots, Rope handling instructions, 10 essentials, Unplanned camping trip. (Service project: clean toilet/change barrels)
- July 17- Terminology, Glacier travel, Belaying, Ice climbing. (Service project)
- July 18- Hike to Bomber Hut, Navigation. Glacier travel/Crevasse rescue. (Service project)
- July 19- Visit bomber airplane/ Bomber Pass, Crevasse rescue, wilderness medicine (Service project)
- July 20- Hike Rainy Day Knoll, Navigation, Bouldering (Service project)
- July 21- Hike to Snowbird Lake, Water crossing, Navigation. Route finding, Hike Snowbird Lake area.
- July 22- Rappelling, Rock Climbing, Hike to Snowbird Hut
- July 23- Hike out to Reed Lake trailhead. Final Exam.



## Mount Sanford from the Road (16,237 feet), Wrangell Mountains

Text and photos by Sean Casey



*Starting from the Chistochina River, Mount Sanford towering in the background.*

In March 2022, my brother, Ben, and I successfully climbed Mount Sanford (16,237 feet) in the Wrangell Mountains of Alaska. Starting from the nearest road, we traveled 82 miles and 15,000 vertical feet in 3 ½ days, summited in -55 degree weather, and skied 12,000 continuous feet directly off the summit.

I don't remember exactly where the idea started, but Mount Sanford has been on my radar for several years now. In June of 2021, I had tentative plans to fly in and attempt it, but this idea fell through at the last minute in favor of other adventures closer to home in Colorado. While searching for beta, I came across a trip report by Luc Mehl, who attempted to climb and ski Sanford from the road in 2011. He made it all the way to 15,000 feet before running out of daylight but came back two weeks later and successfully summited using snowmachines for the approach.

Lacking snowmachines and not wanting to turn this into a two-week fly-in expedition, we decided that walking in from the road for a human-powered attempt would be our best option. We flew from Denver to Anchorage and were up early on March 24 to make the 4-hour drive to the Chistochina River Trail pull off. The route starts by following the Chistochina River for two miles until it merges with the Copper River. This section

is the primary reason for doing this trip in March; wait another month for warmer temperatures and risk an open water crossing. I was concerned that crossing the Copper might be tricky, but it turned out to be a non-issue. Both rivers were still completely frozen over. We followed the Copper upstream for a mile before turning onto Boulder Creek and following it for the next 22 miles.

The approach up Boulder Creek is long, flat, and monotonous. We were very fortunate to find an old snowmachine track right out of the parking lot that continued the entire way up the Boulder Creek drainage (apparently this is a common area for trapping in the winter). Deep snow covered the creek, and without the firm snowmachine track to follow I don't think we would have made it. We traveled 19 miles on Day 1. The mountain still looked very far away.

Day 2 started by grinding out another 6 miles up Boulder Creek until it merges with the Sheep Creek drainage. Finally, we've made it to the base of the mountain! We turned right and began gaining elevation until we reached a large plateau at 5000 feet where most expeditions fly into. Here we ditched our sleds and shouldered the entire 60 pounds of gear for the climb up to high camp.



*Happy to be off Boulder Creek and heading up the Sheep Creek Drainage.*

We weaved through the moraine and onto the Sheep Glacier at 6,000 feet. There are some large cracks on the lower glacier between 7,000 feet and 8,500 feet, but they are easily spotted and given a wide girth. Snow bridges are bombproof this time of year, and we did not rope up for any part of the glacier. We had hoped to make a high camp near 10,000 feet, but by 7:30 p.m. we were running out of daylight (and energy) and were forced to stop at 9,000 feet. The temperature was -15 degrees before the sun set.

We were up and moving again by 7 a.m. the next morning. Up to this point, the upper mountain had been hidden behind a gentle roll near 10,500 feet. We eventually reached it and got our first good look at the summit and a confidence boost that we just might reach it. We also lost all protection from the on-coming wind, which was blowing at a stiff 25 miles per hour.

A few more low-angle miles took us to the base of what looked a whole lot like another mountain sitting on top of the one we had just climbed. Here the route steepens again, but it never exceeds 35 degrees and I had no trouble skinning.

We trudged along for hours; I was too cold to stop for long. At 15,000 feet we walked into a cloud that had been hanging around the summit, but the sun was trying hard to break through and gave everything an odd yellow and orange tint that made it feel like we were climbing on another planet. Around 16,000 feet, a monster crevasse marked that we are nearly to the top, and a gentle slope leads another quarter mile to the summit. Finally, at 4:55 p.m. – 5 minutes before our agreed upon turnaround time – we were standing at 16,237 feet on the summit of Mount Sanford. The

thermometer said it was -25 degrees out. Combine that with the 30+ mph wind and the wind chill was deep into the -50s.

We didn't stay long. Ten minutes to rip skins, mess with boots, take a few bad summit selfies and we clicked in. The top 2,000 feet was sculpted by wind and we skied carefully through the clouds, following what remained of our skin track and flags. After that the snow quality improved and we descended quickly into the thicker air and back to camp. I looked at my watch; it took us 10 hours to climb 7,500 feet and just 1 hour and 10 minutes to descend.

We quickly packed up camp and dropped another 6000 feet to our sleds. The light was flat and skiing with heavy packs through the crevasse field was tricky, but we were still off the glacier in less than an hour. Packs went into the sleds, and we pushed a few more miles down to Boulder Creek to flowing water.

The 25 miles back to the car the next day were not quite as flat as I remembered on the way in, and we made the uneventful trip with daylight to spare. Beta is fairly limited on remote Alaska peaks like Sanford, but as far as I can tell this was only the third human-powered climb of the mountain: the first being the first ascent by Bradford Washburn and Terris Moore in 1938, and the second a 16-day solo effort by Dave Johnston in 1984. Also, at 19 years old I would plug Ben as likely the youngest to summit. I thought the trip was a unique way to climb and ski an Alaska giant.



*Approaching the Sheep Glacier*





*Crevasse field at 8000'. Avoided to climber's right*



*Gaining elevation on the Sheep Glacier*



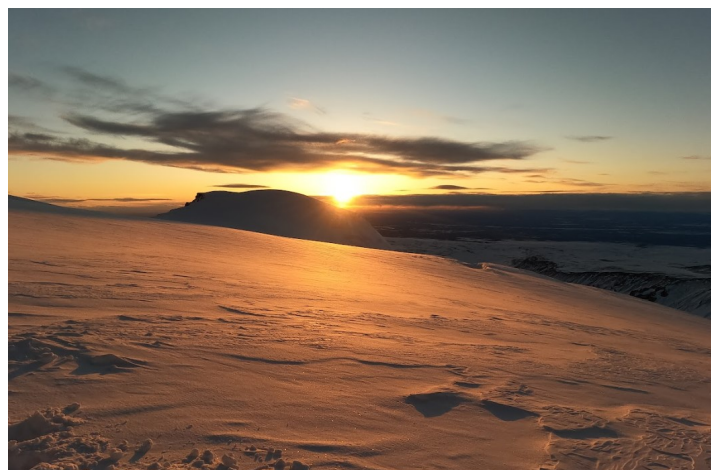
*We made camp at the top of this ridge at 9000'*



*High on the mountain, with the Sheep Glacier in the background*



*The summit of Mount Sanford is a large, barren plateau. The point we stopped at seemed to be as high as anywhere else. Wish I had better pictures from the top but happy to have all my fingers instead!*



*Sunset from High camp before our Summit Bid*



## Autumn in the Deltas: Minya Peak (7,750 feet), Delta Range

Text and photos by Abbey Collins



*Andrew Holman cresting a ridge on the way to Minya Peak.*

Sometime around 7 a.m. in early September, 2021, we stood high on a ridge in the Delta Range, on route to Minya Peak. Below us, the blues and grays of the surrounding glaciers contrasted with the onset of autumn colors along the Richardson Highway. It was a spectacular scene, but as I realized the summit was nearly two miles away, I no longer wanted anything to do with any of it.

Andrew Holman and I had planned to spend a week in early September peakbagging along the Dalton Highway, but the night before our planned departure, with rain in the forecast, we took a detour to the Deltas. Our plan: hike about 5 miles from a trailhead just outside Paxson, up the Gulkana Glacier, to an old USGS hut. In the morning, we'd head toward Minya Peak.

With a plan in place, we left for Paxson in the morning.

The turnoff for the Gulkana Glacier trail is not marked, but Andrew had been there before. After finding our way down a small maze of rocky roads, we took our time loading our packs – both wincing as we put them on and realized how heavy they were.

A surprisingly good trail leads from our parking spot to the toe of the glacier. Near its start, a wobbly cable bridge allows you to cross the river without getting wet. I walked one step at a time, careful to avoid the few broken wooden steps, attempting to look at my feet without looking at the running water below, which makes me dizzy.

Closer to the glacier we had to cross the river again, this time without the convenience of a bridge. Andrew's long legs and confidence allowed him to easily cross at a constriction while I continued to work my way up the riverbed in search of easier access. I didn't find it, and ended up climbing up and over a small ice cave.

On the glacier, we kept our crampons and rope in our packs and traveled easily up the ice. As the USGS hut came into sight, so did a number of large, exposed crevasses. We worked our way around them as I dreamt of dinner and removing my pack.



*Andrew Holman crosses a cable bridge on the way to the Gulkana Glacier.*



At the hut, we shared meals and beers and went to sleep early, setting two alarms -- one to remind us to check for northern lights sometime after midnight, and one to start climbing.

After the second alarm, we reluctantly worked our way out of our sleeping bags and into the cool morning air. The initial scramble up the rocky ridge behind the hut was enough to quickly warm our bodies and muster excitement about the coming day.

As we crested the ridge and I saw how much work we had to do, my motivation sank. We were facing a bergschrund and long, snow-covered ridges that didn't look particularly easy to navigate. My feet got cold as sloppy snow soaked my boots while I led us across a relatively flat snowfield.

Andrew took the lead at the bergschrund, and quickly found passage via a wide snowbridge -- much easier than it looked from far away.

Navigation to the summit along the snow-covered ridge was tedious and slow, but fairly pleasant on a mild autumn day. Somewhere along the way we pulled out our ropes and harnesses.

At the summit I pulled every layer out of my pack and still couldn't get warm, as strong winds tore across the glaciers below. Still, the surrounding landscape -- white snowfields and blue ice, autumn leaves and towering, distant, Alaska Range peaks -- made it a hard place to leave.

Our established boot pack and a brief glissade made the return to the warmth of the unheated hut easier; we opted to stay another night, not yet ready to leave our glacial perch.

We fell asleep early, with light still streaming into the dirty glass windows, and woke up early, just as rain began to fall onto the glacier -- just in time for our trek across the glacier and back to the car.



*Heading up the Gulkana Glacier in the late afternoon in September, 2021.*



*A USGS research hut perched in the Gulkana Glacier.*



*Our bootpack shows the route we took to and from the summit.*

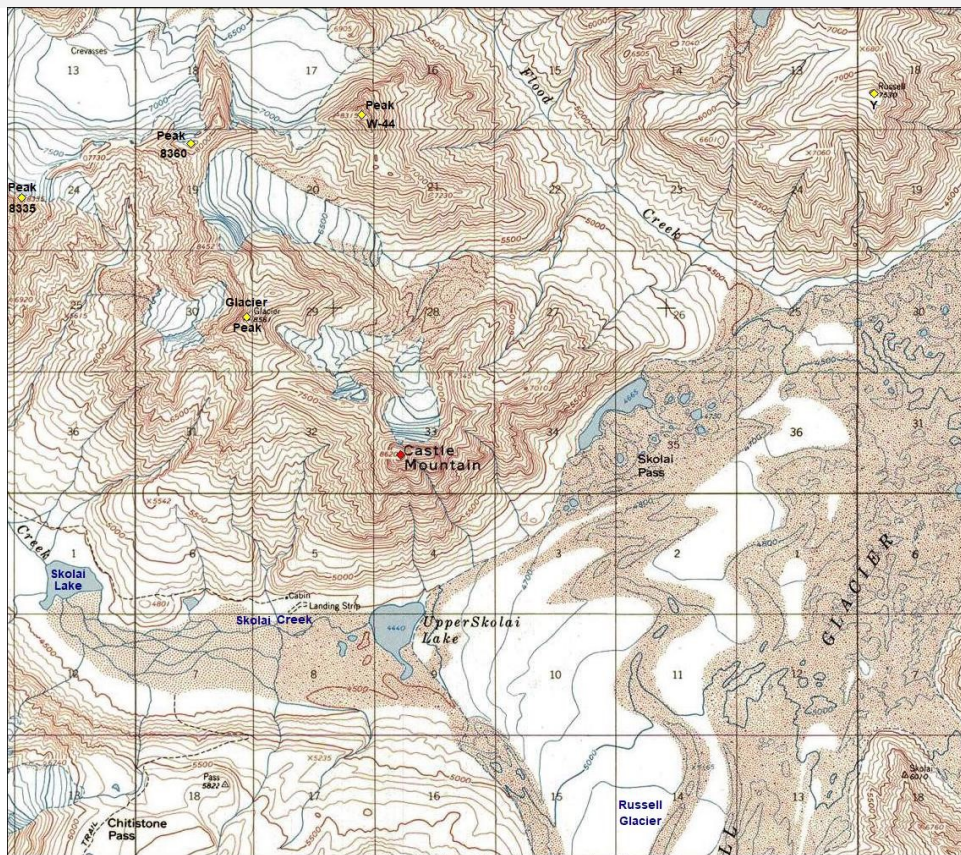


*Andrew Holman, returning from a successful summit of Minya Peak.*



## Peak of the Month: Castle Mountain (8,620 feet), Wrangell Mountains

Text by Steve Gruhn, photos by Danny Kost



**Mountain Range:** Wrangell Mountains

**Borough:** Unorganized Borough

**Adjacent Pass:** Skolai Pass

**Latitude/Longitude:** 61° 38' 54" North, 141° 59' 7" West

**Elevation:** 8,620 feet

**Adjacent Peaks:** Glacier Peak (8,561 feet) and Peak 10650 in the East Fork of the Russell Glacier and West Fork of the Russell

Glacier drainages in the Saint Elias Mountains

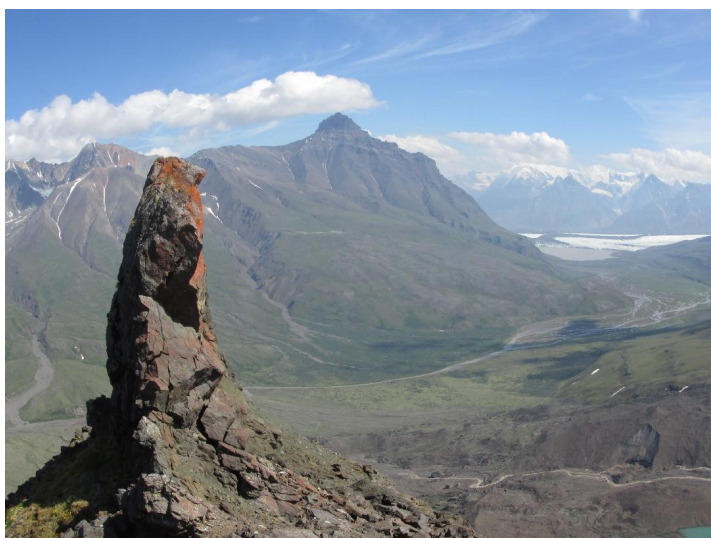
**Distinctness:** 1,150 feet from Glacier Peak

**Prominence:** 1,200 feet from Mulgrave Peak (8840 feet)

**USGS Maps:** 1:63,360: McCarthy (C-3), 1:25,000: McCarthy C-3 NW

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

**Access Point:** McCarthy



*Southwest aspect of Castle Mountain as viewed from the northeast ridge of Mount Baldwin. Glacier Peak is the rust-colored summit to the left of the rock spire in the foreground.*

Castle Mountain sits immediately west of Skolai Pass, which marks the boundary between the Wrangell Mountains and the Saint Elias Mountains to the east. It has a distinctive castellated turret of a summit that marks the northeast end of the Goat Trail through Chitistone Pass.

In March 1912 Asa Columbus Baldwin's party traveled from McCarthy to Skolai Pass with a pack train of horses dragging sleds. Baldwin's mission from the U.S. government and the



International Boundary Commission was to perform survey work and establish a triangulation network connecting stations along the White River to those in the Anderson Glacier area. In field notes prepared while conducting this work, Baldwin referred to the peak immediately west of Skolai Pass as Skolai Peak. That name was not destined to last long, though.

On June 10, 1914, USGS topographer Calvin Earl Giffin, his assistant, and three camp hands left McCarthy with 10 pack horses. Initially the party traveled eastward with Stephen Reid Capps Jr.'s geological party, heading eastward toward the upper Nizina River. Once across the Nizina Glacier, the parties separated to conduct their work. Giffin began the laborious process of mapping some 3,000 square miles in the vicinity of the White River and the Nutzotin Mountains by heading up Skolai Creek to Skolai Pass. As part of his topographical work, Giffin produced a field map that included the descriptive name of Castle Mountain. This was the first known use of the name for that peak. Giffin and his party continued their topographical fieldwork until August 23 and returned to civilization at Chitina via Chisana and Nabesna.

Giffin's topographic map was published in 1916 as part of Reid's report on the geology of the Chisana-White River District.

On August 25, 1917, Joe Browder, A. James Dyer, Mickie Gallaher, J.P. Hubrick, Lee Mighell, J.H. Murie, W.T. Sato, and William Thomas Young set out from McCarthy with a train of

pack horses. After traveling to the headwaters of the Nizina River, crossing the Nizina Glacier, and ascending Skolai Creek to Upper Skolai Lake, the party established a camp on August 28, which they used as a base for sheep hunting. On August 29, Mighell and Young attempted to ascend Castle Mountain via its southeast and west aspects, respectively. Both encountered difficulty in climbing, so they turned back well short of the summit, with Young reporting that his route overlooking Flood Creek was steep and exposed. The party later continued eastward into the Yukon Territory, reaching as far as Tepee Lake before turning around for McCarthy.

Despite its proximity to an airstrip near Upper Skolai Lake, I do not know of any ascents to the summit of Castle Mountain. You could be the first to reach its summit.

The information for this article came from Capps's 1916 report titled "The Chisana-White River District, Alaska" (USGS Bulletin 630); from Giffin's 1916 *Reconnaissance Map of Chisana-White River District, Alaska* (contained in USGS Bulletin 630); from Young's four-part article titled "On the Glacier Trail," which appeared in the October, November, and December 1918 and January 1919 issues of *Outdoor Life*; from the International Boundary Commission's "Joint Report on the Survey and Demarcation of the International Boundary between the United States and Canada along the 141<sup>st</sup> Meridian from the Arctic Ocean to Mount St. Elias," dated December 15, 1918; and from my correspondence with Danny Kost.



South aspect of Castle Mountain as viewed from the Goat Trail near Chitistone Pass. Glacier Peak is the rust-colored summit at left.



# Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

March 30, 2022, at 7:00-8:00 p.m., at Anchorage Brewing

## Roll Call

Gerrit Verbeek (President) - Present  
Nathan Pooler (Vice-President) - Present  
Curtis Townsend (Secretary) - Absent  
Katherine Cooper (Treasurer) - Present  
Brendan Lee (Director) - Present  
Josh Pickle (Director) - Absent  
Heather Johnson (Director) - Absent  
Andy Kubic (Director) - Present  
Peter Taylor (Director) - Present  
Mike Meyers (Past President) - Absent

**Scribe:** Nathan Pooler

## Action Items

- Gerrit, Peter, Heather and Andy to help add photo credits to the website. Gerrit or Andy can add the others to the website admins with editing privileges. April 3 Update: Thanks to Peter Taylor for adding an interim message.
- Katherine to check on Snow City Café for the May General meeting. Nathan will also look for locations and speakers.
- Board will contact Tim Silvers to request a handover of email administration. Gerrit will get the handover, and check if Brendan can attend as well
- Nathan to check the By-Laws for rules on membership schedules. The default membership in Squarespace is one year from the day of sign-up, not January 1st – January 1st.
- Steve Gruhn is offering his database of peak references to place on the website as a map. Gerrit and Brendan will work on this.
- Gerrit will speak to motorized and non-motorized communities about responsible hut usage – reports coming in about people pooping outside on snow instead of digging out a drifted-in outhouse.

## Board Votes/Decisions

- Voted to approve Coleman Ahrens to the open Board position. Coleman will serve out the remainder of the term, until October 2022.
- Decided to arrange some fun trips for Board members and volunteers during the summer. Andy Kubic to coordinate.

## Board Discussion

- Multiple reports of snowmachine poaching in non-motorized areas of Hatcher Pass. Cory Hinds is working on it and will let us know what we should do
- Bill Pagaran is trying to organize community support for renaming the Suicides, and would potentially like to speak to Club membership.
- Gabriela coming to Alaska in a week, Andy wants to explore an idea of a yearly thank to volunteers by doing a trip:
  - Andy suggests July 24-26 and everyone will check availability
  - Andy will send out email to Gabriela & board for anyone that can help get her out.

## Time and location of next meeting

- General Meeting May 4th, 2022 (Wednesday, Katherine working to confirm Snow City Cafe)
- Next Board Meeting on April 27, 2022, venue T.B.A.

# Mountaineering Club of Alaska

President	Gerrit Verbeek	<a href="mailto:president@mtnclubak.org">president@mtnclubak.org</a>	Director 1 (term expires in 2022)	Coleman Ahrens	
Vice-President	Nathan Pooler	<a href="mailto:vicepresident@mtnclubak.org">vicepresident@mtnclubak.org</a>	Director 2 (term expires in 2022)	Brendan Lee	<a href="mailto:brendanlee718@yahoo.com">brendanlee718@yahoo.com</a>
Secretary	Curtis Townsend	<a href="mailto:secretary@mtnclubak.org">secretary@mtnclubak.org</a>	Director 3 (term expires in 2022)	Josh Pickle	<a href="mailto:joshuampickle@gmail.com">joshuampickle@gmail.com</a>
Treasurer	Katherine Cooper	<a href="mailto:treasurer@mtnclubak.org">treasurer@mtnclubak.org</a>	Director 4 (term expires in 2023)	Heather Johnson	<a href="mailto:hjohnson2211@gmail.com">hjohnson2211@gmail.com</a>
			Director 5 (term expires in 2023)	Andy Kubic	<a href="mailto:andy.kubic@gmail.com">andy.kubic@gmail.com</a>
			Director 6 (term expires in 2023)	Peter Taylor	<a href="mailto:peter@petertaylor.co.nz">peter@petertaylor.co.nz</a>

Annual membership dues: Basic ("Dirtbag") \$20, Single \$30, Family \$40

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

*The Scree* is a monthly publication of the Mountaineering Club of Alaska. Articles, notes, and letters submitted for publication in the newsletter should be emailed to [MCAScree@gmail.com](mailto:MCAScree@gmail.com). 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](mailto:vicepresident@mtnclubak.org).

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

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

Hiking and Climbing Committee: Vacant—[training@mtnclubak.org](mailto:training@mtnclubak.org)

Mentorship: Katherine Cooper and Lila Hobbs—[mentorship@mtnclubak.org](mailto:mentorship@mtnclubak.org)

Huts: Greg Bragiel—350-5146 or [huts@mtnclubak.org](mailto:huts@mtnclubak.org)

Calendar: Lexi Trainer

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

Find MCAK listserv at <https://groups.io/g/MCAK>.

*.Andrew Holman takes a break on the way to the Gulkana Glacier.  
Photo by Abbey Collins*

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Anchorage, AK 99524-3561