

the SCREE

Mountaineering Club of Alaska

SEPTEMBER 2023

Volume 66, Number 8



"... the ethereal and timeless power of the land, that union of what is beautiful and what is terrifying, is insistent."

— Barry Lopez, *Arctic Dreams*

October Meeting

Thursday, October 5, 2023

6:00-8:00 p.m. at the BP Energy Center

Presentation: MCA Calendar photographers will share the stories behind their photos.

Contents:

Rumbling Mountain (6520 feet), Endicott Mountains
Mount Drum (12010 feet) and Peak 6620, Wrangell Mountains
Mount Stevens (13966 feet), Alaska Range
The Citadel (8520 feet), Cathedral Spires, Kichatna Mountains
Cemetery Spire (7650 feet), Cathedral Spires, Kichatna Mountains
Peak of the Month: Talus Mountain (6429 feet), Schwatka Mountains

The Mountaineering Club of Alaska

www.mtnclubak.org

"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."

Cover Photo

Dave Hart descending Mount Drum, looking back up Steps 2 and 3 during a 14-hour summit day. Photo by Lee Helzer.

OCTOBER MEETING

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Presentation: MCA Calendar photographers will share the stories behind their photos.

Call for Volunteers

Everything the MCA provides is built by volunteers. We're currently seeking folks for these roles and more:

Board Members: Elections are coming up in October and multiple current board members are planning to step down for a break. If you're interested, please consider serving a two-year term.

Webmaster: responsible for administering website content and member accounts via Squarespace and Memberspace. Time commitment: 1-2 hours per month minimum, with a stack of projects and ideas waiting if you want more!

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Upcoming Elections - October

The October 5th General Meeting will include votes on new Officers and Directors to join the MCA Board for a two-year term. If you would like more information or to express interest in running, feel free to contact a current Board member.

Many of the board members whose positions are up for election have expressed an intent to step down from the board. Please consider volunteering your skills to keep the club running!

High turnout is critical

We will take nominations for candidates for two officer positions and three director positions. You may nominate yourself or another person, although they must accept the nomination in order to run. If they wish, candidates may make a short speech about their priorities and motivation for joining the Board before voting. The current positions up for election are:

President—Gerrit Verbeek

Treasurer—Peter Taylor

Director – Andy Kubic

Director – Heather Johnson

Director – Scott Parmelee

MCA Board Roles

President:

(a) To preside at all regular and executive meetings.

(b) To coordinate the efforts of the officers and committees.

Treasurer:

(a) To receive and disburse all club dues, fees, and other monies.

(b) To maintain complete financial records of the organization.

(c) All other duties as assigned by the Executive Committee.

Directors:

(a) To act as an advisor to the Executive Committee concerning matters of policy.

(b) All other duties as assigned by the Executive Committee

For the MCA Membership Application and Liability Waiver, visit <https://www.mtnclubak.org/membership>



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



Matanuska Glacier Ice Fest 2023

Want to learn to ice climb or improve your current techniques?

Friday, September 22, 2023, 5:00 p.m., to Sunday, September 24, 2023, 4:00 p.m.

66500 Glacier Park Road, Sutton-Alpine, Alaska, 99674

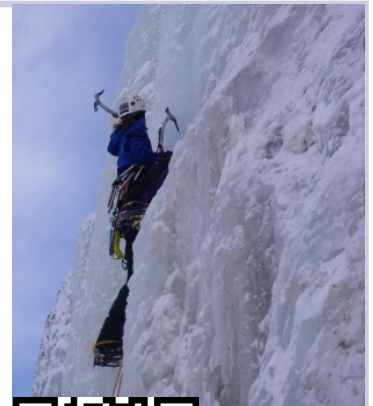
Learn modern ice climbing techniques, rope management skills, and socialize with other local climbers in a weekend. **All abilities** welcome. Must be 18 or older. Some equipment available.

Cost: \$95. (MCA membership also requires \$20-30).

Registration is only available online and will be open September 1st-15th.

Visit mtnclubak.org, the Training web-page, or Facebook to register, or for more information email mcaicefest@gmail.com.

Contact: Jayme Mack Fuller, 907-382-0212



Matanuska
Glacier

Announcements

Congratulations to Kathy Still!

On Friday, August 4, 2023, Kathy Still and her son Azriel Sellers stood atop the summit of Baleful Peak. It was Kathy's 120th summit in Chugach State Park. Upon her ascent she became the 11th person to stand atop the 120 recognized summits in Chugach State Park. Congratulations on attaining that goal, Kathy!



Baleful Peak
61.2889,
-148.83261



Kathy Still climbing Baleful
Peak. Photo by Azriel Sellers.

Something's Different in *the Scree*

Did you notice something different about the June/July issue of *the Scree*? That issue was the first since the January 2005 issue that Greg Bragiel's name did not appear in *the Scree* – a span of 221 consecutive issues. Greg's service as Chair of the Huts Committee – a position he held from September 2006 through May 2023 – was the primary reason for his name routinely appearing in *the Scree*, but his name appeared for other reasons, too. His photographs graced 6 covers and he led 75 trips, authored 21 trip reports, and gave 2 presentations during that 18-year period. Greg also served as the Mailing List/Database Entry Chair for 20 months and the Hiking and Climbing Committee Chair for 4 months during that time span. A big thanks to Greg for his service to the MCA. Scott Parmelee has assumed the role of the Huts Committee Chair.

But Greg cannot be replaced by only one person; many volunteers will be needed to adequately fill his shoes. There are still plenty of volunteer opportunities to serve the MCA. Contact the President at president@mtnclubak.org if you'd like to serve or

become more involved. Trip reports and other submissions can be emailed to mcascreed@gmail.com. Contact the Vice-President at vicepresident@mtnclubak.org to volunteer to give a presentation at an MCA meeting. To volunteer as the Webmaster, or Hiking and Climbing Committee Chair, contact board@mtnclubak.org.

The words of Willy Hersman (whose name appeared in 225 consecutive issues of *the Scree*) from the April 2002 issue seem appropriate: "As editor I found, like any volunteer effort, the person who gives gets more than the people who receive, a fact that you can only appreciate if you try it." I'm glad Greg tried it. And I'm glad, too, that Scott is now trying it as well.

Steve Gruhn

Freedom without Limits

Rumbling Mountain (6520 feet), Endicott Mountains

Text and photos by Tomasz Downarowicz

Rumbling
Mountain
68.01305,
-151.1555



Tomasz Downarowicz at camp
in Graylime Creek Valley.



Anaktuvuk Pass lies on the continental watershed between the watersheds of the Pacific and Arctic Oceans. It is a low pass connecting several vast valleys: Anaktuvuk River, John River, and the smallest of them, Inukpasugruk Creek, for simplicity, probably called Giant Creek. After less than an hour, the village finally disappeared from my sight. I passed three small, but picturesque, lakes where several American lesser scaup (*Aythya affinis*) resided. Nearby, I came across a horned lark (*Eremophila alpestris*) – a representative of one of the few Eurasian bird species found throughout North America. Visibility was excellent and I had a view far into all three valleys. Trees and even taller bushes do not grow here at any height. This is the realm of the tundra – only grass, moss, and stones are under your feet. In the privacy of the valley, I was no longer bothered by the cold wind and with the beautiful weather, which I was slowly starting to take for granted, it was actually warm. Moving parallel to the river, I encountered numerous white caribou antlers. Some of them are natural, seasonal drops, while others are a full set of antlers and a skull – proof that caribou is sometimes treated as food here. As if in response to this thought, I saw the silhouette of a wolf in front of me, right by the river. He also saw me and moved away in a direction perpendicular to the river. His further behavior was disturbing to say the least. Allowing me to overtake, he followed me for some time, keeping a constant distance of several hundred meters. Later I learned from Mike Haubert (Gates of the Arctic National Park Ranger) that this behavior dates back to the times when hunters roamed the area and wolves followed them to get the waste of gutted game. A little farther on, the swift long-tailed jaegers (*Stercorarius longicaudus*) ap-

peared only beyond the Arctic Circle, and the white-crowned sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*) with a nice, melodic singing. That day, despite a late start, I covered a large part of the valley. I set up my tent and around 11 p.m., I forced myself to fall asleep in the late afternoon setting. For the first time in my life, the sun didn't set for me that night. And it hasn't happened once in all my time in these mountains. Of course, sleeping in the valleys, I often lost sight of them, but the glow on the surrounding peaks always indicated its presence above the theoretical horizon line.

The following days passed in mostly splendid weather, surrounded by untouched nature, in complete, but not burdensome, solitude. I had these mountains all to myself, and they seemed to be kind to me.

The next morning I quickly reached the end of the valley with a fairly large lake, which turned out to be mostly frozen. On a small water surface, I observed birds found almost only in Alaska and northwestern Canada: a pair of harlequin ducks (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) with a rather funny coloration of white circles and crescents, and a greater yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*). A little earlier that day, from this category of birds, I also encountered the golden-crowned sparrow (*Zonotrichia atricapilla*). Through snow-covered Tinayguk Pass, I made my way to a short, but steep, valley with a nameless brook that flows into Savioyok Creek, a tributary of the Tinayguk River, which in turn is a tributary of the great Koyukuk River that flows into the Yukon River. The bottom of the valley quickly turned out to be very uncomfortable, so I decided to traverse its right slope. I was hoping to get to a point where I could see the wide southern part of the Tinayguk Valley before I lost all height. In a place where I found the view satisfactory, I arranged a stop and lunch. There is no problem with water in these mountains. Streams flow down the slopes every few dozen meters. The same is true in the tundra-covered valleys, where in addition, water soaks the moss and grasses so that it appears in every footprint. The layer of earth that never thaws (permafrost) at a depth of less than one meter prevents water from melting snow in the summer from soaking in here and the tundra is saturated with it like a sponge. The valley stretching out before me was unique in that there were small stretches of taiga in it, consisting of loosely standing, slender spruce needles covered all over. This is the northern border of the taiga and I

have not encountered trees anywhere else on my entire route. After lunch I started walking down the slope. It was covered with a scree composed of movable, large blocks of granite. Many of the ones I set foot on collapsed, often causing a small avalanche of rocks above me. Forced to be very careful, I advanced at a rate of one mile every three hours. At one point I heard and saw a great marmot. Finally, I found myself in a grassy area, from where I quickly descended to the bottom of the Savioyok Valley. In the place where this valley connects with Tinayguk, I set up a tent.

The northern part of the Tinayguk Valley took me the whole next day, which, considering its picturesqueness and variety, did not seem like a long time. At the beginning I had to cut the patches of forest seen yesterday from the slope. Old fallen trees made walking difficult. I reverted to the habit of making calls to warn of possible bears. Of the mammals, however, I only encountered a porcupine, which is easy to catch up with, but impossible to catch. It is even difficult to see its face, because this animal constantly turns its back, bristling on its back, several centimeters long, sharp spikes. Then I passed a tundra lake inhabited by short-billed gulls, lesser scaup, and greater yellowlegs. Behind another forest, there was a view of the treeless, hilly upper part of the valley, with the river sunk into a rock gorge. The moist tundra here abounds in multicolored mosses with fluffy cushions covering stones half submerged in water. Both in the forest and in the tundra, I encountered a lot of animal droppings and imprints of hooves of various sizes. I was surprised by the lack of direct contact with the game. Only farther on did I manage to spot a moose with two calves moving up the slope. Watching these animals, I marveled at how quickly and effortlessly they gained height. In a few minutes they had climbed so high that I was beginning to slowly lose sight of them. For a human, this approach would certainly take well over an hour. Late in the evening, I pitched my little camp at the mouth of a creek leading northward, not given any name on the map.

In the morning, sticking only my head out of the tent, I routinely surveyed the area with my binoculars. On the opposite slope, about a mile away, something bright was moving among the low bushes. After a while I had no doubts – it was a light-colored grizzly bear. His presence, though so distant, made me realize again that I am not the absolute master of the situation here. The side valley approach went remarkably well, and by 3:00 p.m., I reached the snow-covered pass at the foot of Rumbling Mountain, one of the few whose name appears on my otherwise-very-accurate map. Behind the pass, there is a precipitous descent into a deep valley of a large (although not named on the map) river. I planned to start a two-to-three day return to Anaktuvuk Pass. My provision was for six days. On an even-

tual extra day, my plan was to fast, but only until the afternoon, when I returned to Fairbanks. However, the prospect of returning seemed premature to me at the moment. I had a great desire to enjoy my freedom longer and continue to roam these endless, desolate areas freely. I made a food inventory: three Chinese soups, one and a half dehydrated lunches for two, one dehydrated serving of beans, and several oatmeal wafers. I unfolded the maps. The valley in front of me forked a few miles below. I was at the end of its northern branch. The eastern branch ended in a not very high pass, which could be crossed to the great valley of Graylime Creek, a tributary of the Anaktuvuk River. From there it was possible to return to Anaktuvuk Pass in three days. I decided to eat "lunches" every other day, on the other days I would be satisfied with wafers and go through this extended route. I had additional plans for today. It was June 22, 2003, the day of the summer solstice. I decided at midnight to be in a place where nothing obstructs the view of the sun. My choice fell on Rumbling Mountain towering above me with an elevation of 6520 feet. I set up my tent on the pass, secured my belongings, and around eight o'clock, without load, started up. The ascent was not particularly difficult and after two hours I was at the top. The magnificent full panorama was a sight that stayed in my memory for a long time. Maybe snowy peaks, deep spring valleys, and above all, the awareness that there was no house, bridge, road or other trace of human interference in sight, and possibly that there were simply no other people there either. I've calculated that astronomical midnight here is 2:05 a.m. The shift is due to the extension of one time zone to the whole of Alaska and the use of Daylight Saving Time. Having plenty of time, I decided to go down to the tent, eat something and return here closer to midnight. I repeated my approach on the already known route; it went better than the first time, and when I was back on top, I still had almost an hour to spare. In order not to get cold, I ran on the top or ran down and ran up the slope. It might have looked quite comical, but I had no witnesses. At 2:05, the sun was exactly due north, about one diameter above 7105-foot Bremen Peak. Only now have I really sealed my presence beyond the Arctic Circle.

The descent from the pass turned out to be very strenuous. As Mike had predicted, the north side was covered with deep wet snow. The only way to get over it was downhill, but the first few meters were a real challenge. Near the rocks, the snow was melted from below and was breaking. Sunken above the waist, I had to dig myself out to be able to move my leg at all. It was equally difficult to walk across the snowfields without a slope. It was Sisyphean work to dig out your feet and put them on a level strip of snow, only to collapse again, especially if you had several hundred meters of such terrain ahead of you. A little more



Partial panorama from Rumbling Mountain at astronomical midnight on summer solstice, 2003. Full image is available [here](#).

effective turned out to be the method of "plowing," discovered after some time, consisting in pushing oneself by force using the harder ground under the snow over a very picturesque pass leading to the Graylime Creek valley. I spent the next night on a stony hill within this very valley.

Two types of passes can be distinguished in these mountains. The first are the passes located high on mountain ridges and are crossings between separated valleys. I've had two such trips. Two miles ahead of me, Ernie Pass (like Anaktuvuk Pass) is of the second type: it is only a slight rise in the bottom of a vast, almost horizontal and optically uniform valley. It separates the sources of two rivers flowing in opposite directions (Graylime Creek and Ernie Creek). Leaving my packed backpack on my hill, I went to the pass to at least take a look at the menacingly, and at the same time romantically, named Precipice Valley. On Ernie Pass itself I saw a scene where two ravens were attacking a large bird of prey sitting on the ground. When he finally got up in the air, I could identify him. It was a golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), due to the golden color of the head. For many years I looked for this bird in vain in our mountains, here I saw it for the first time in my life. On the way back, I passed through the breeding grounds of the American golden plover (*Pluvialis dominica*), an exclusively arctic species. These ornately colored birds were clearly dissuading me by letting me get a short distance and then running with their wings down. It indicated the presence of nests hidden in the grass, but rather young ones. That day I also saw the Lapland longspur (*Calcarius lapponicus*) and the Smith's longspur (*Calcarius pictus*) – two very similar and typically arctic passerine species and the semipalmated plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) also found only in the vicinity of the Arctic Circle. I went back for my backpack and continued down Graylime Creek. From the south it started to cloud over a bit, the sky turned light gray, so I remembered this part of the valley as gloomy and colorless, which oddly fits its name "gray limestone." At the mouth of Graylime, I had to cross the Anaktuvuk River. In total, I walked a huge distance that day. If I persisted, I could be near the settlement the next evening. I set up my tent by a small lake hidden behind a large hill in the middle of the valley. A funny-colored long-tailed duck (*Clangula hyemalis*) with long tail feathers swam across the lake. All night I was accompanied by her voice, reminiscent of the grumbling of an old

woman, which is probably the reason for its former name "oldsquaw."

Despite the cloudy weather, to which I am completely accustomed, I did not want to leave these pristine, uninhabited areas yet. My strict diet was also not burdensome at all. I just realized that living close to shops, we consume much more food than our bodies' vital energy needs require. Leaving the tent and most of my luggage, I went to explore the areas north of the Anaktuvuk River. There was an area of low plateau with limestone gorges and small lakes. I spent the whole day wandering around this plateau, stubbornly searching for herds of caribou. This area was covered with numerous traces of them. The droppings lay thickly, as in pastures in the times of sheep grazing. This comparison was also suggested by limestone rocks covered with moss. Drops of antlers and bones turned white in the meadows every few dozen meters. Here and there I found shredded remains of corpses with whole chunks of skin and hair not yet stiffened, evidence of relatively recent feeding by wolves or perhaps bears. However, I have not met a single caribou anywhere. I decided that these animals are here in large numbers, but only periodically. Perhaps I was on their seasonal migrations, but now they seemed to be elsewhere. A brief, fleeting drizzle was the only occasion I had to put on my raincoat, which was just unnecessary weight for the entire trip to Alaska. I spent the night in the same place by the lake, but my long-tailed duck companion was no longer there.

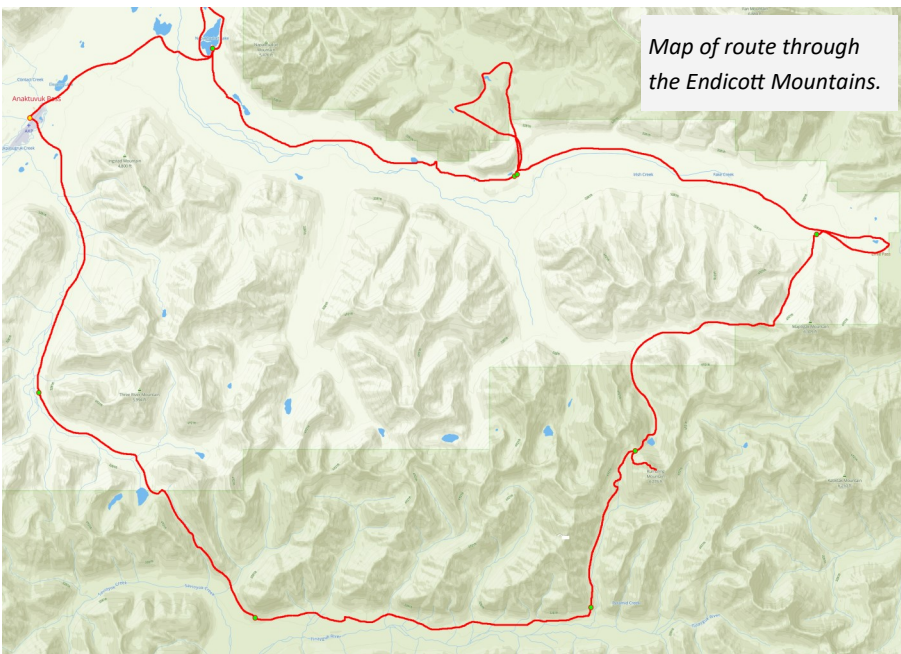
The next day brought an improvement in the weather. The easy hike along the flat valley floor was varied by crossing the side tributaries and bird watching. The valley was inhabited by numerous charadriiformes: in addition to the American golden plovers and greater yellowlegs seen earlier, there were upland sandpipers (*Bartramia longicauda*) that jolted their heads while running, and flocks of red-necked phalaropes (*Phalaropus lobatus*) roamed around the lakes. The latter have, like coots, lobes on their toes that enable them to swim. However, these lobes do not allow them to land on the water in the style of ducks or swans; they use a completely different technique. When flying low over the water, they simply fold their wings. Being very light, they fall into the water like little plugs. I spent a lot of time looking at these extremely colorful and funny birds. In some places the landscape resembled some paradise garden. On the rocky shore of one of the lakes another charadrii was feeding –

the wandering tattler (*Heteroscelus incanus*) found only in Alaska. On the water, of the more interesting species of ducks, there were pintail (*Anas acuta*) and red-breasted merganser (*Mergus serrator*). In addition to short-billed gulls, the Arctic terns (*Sterna paradisaea*) floated in the air, known for the longest seasonal migration of birds – from the north to the south of the polar regions (and back). I even managed to find a bird's nest. In drier terrain, I met a rock ptarmigan (*Lagopus muta*), which I had once seen in the Swiss Alps. With some disbelief I listened to the song of the hermit thrush (*Hylocichla guttata*), its range of occurrence reaches, according to the atlas, only to southern Alaska. The Hungarian researcher Peter Szőke recorded birdsong and listened to them in slow motion many times. In this way he discovered fantastic melodies in the singing of many genres. In this view, the hermit thrush is one of the most beautiful singers, although in "real time" its verse is short and quite inconspicuous.

In the evening I set up my tent on the shore of the vast Napaktualuit Lake, at the foot of a lofty rock, in which I saw the silhouette of a person wrapped in a fur hood. It was sunny and warm, although storm clouds were gathering in the north. Since I haven't had a chance to wash myself thoroughly for many days, I decided to check the temperature of the water in the lake. Surprisingly, it wasn't icy cold. The lake was shallow and had warmed up in the last sunny weeks. Soon I was in the water. The paradox was that with every movement I was setting my personal record for approaching the North Pole. After a bath and an extremely modest meal, I decided that there would be no storm after all. The clouds dispersed, leaving little decorative balls clinging to the peaks surrounding the valley. I went for a walk around the lake. In its center there was an island with a tundra swan (*Cygnus columbianus*) nest, and a pair of glaucous gulls

(*Larus hyperboreus*) hovered above it). Both species inhabit only coasts in the Arctic zone. Over the rock in the shape of a hooded figure, I noticed a large, bright falcon flying by, but I'm not sure if it was a cosmopolitan peregrine falcon or a gyrfalcon typical only for the Arctic. Walking around the lake, I got even closer to the pole. The Brooks Range ends here. Before me was a vast tundra plain in the lower part of the Anaktuvuk River valley, which flowed through the Colville River into the Arctic Ocean. It is there that numerous herds of caribou have migrated for the summer, of which I have seen so many traces in the mountains, and there, on the very coast, live the few polar bears in Alaska, which, unlike grizzlies, are exclusively carnivorous and do not go out of the way of a man, but can treat him like a potential victim.

At night I again had the opportunity to admire the sun shining directly in the north – this time I could do it directly from the tent. It was my last night in the Arctic zone. In the morning, with glorious windless weather the surface of the lake reflected the disappearing Brooks Range with perfect symmetry. Soon I crossed the Anaktuvuk River, divided into many braids at this point, and laboriously trampled the deep moss, overgrown with tufted grass, heading south through a table-level, gently rising valley. It was on this plain that I had my last ornithological adventure in Alaska. Suddenly, a long-tailed jaeger appeared above me. I must have passed near its nest as it was very clearly attacking me. Like gulls and some charadriiformes, it swooped down on me from a distance, as if it wanted to strike me, at the last moment it took flight a few meters above my head. He repeated this maneuver several times, each time closing the distance. On one occasion he did it so close that I seriously feared that this live bullet would really hit me in the head. The bird made another turn and gained momentum again. He was diving



in a straight line, aiming precisely at me. I stood dumbfounded looking at the distance melting in my eyes. When the jaeger was just around the corner, I couldn't stand it and ducked violently. A heavy backpack, leaning from the vertical, completed the work. I fell to the ground, laughing inwardly at myself as a small feisty bird knocked me out.

Soon the appearance of the surrounding peaks began to match the image seen earlier. After reaching the elevation, I saw ahead of me, less than two miles away, the barracks of the settlement of Anaktuvuk Pass. My nine-day loop has been closed.

More photos on page 19

Mount Drum (12010 feet), Southwest Ridge, and Peak 6620, Wrangell Mountains

Text by Dave Hart

Mount Drum
62.11528,
-144.63965



Joe Chmielowski and Lee Helzer descending Step 3 on summit day. Step 2's thumb is visible below. Photo by Dave Hart.

2 p.m., we were flown individually to our 6300-foot base camp on the Klawasi Glacier on the southwest side of our southwest ridge route.

We left five days of extra food and supplies at base camp and immediately snowshoed a mile to the 7000-foot ridge crest, where we ditched our snowshoes under some rocks. From there we cramponed to our first camp at 7500 feet under sunny and calm skies. After setting camp in our t-shirts, we were living high on the hog until Todd Kelsey inReach-messaged us that evening, asking if we were ready for a windy night. *How bad could it be*, we thought? We had five fat days of food and eight days of fuel with us.

From May 12 to 23, 2023, Lee Helzer, Joe Chmielowski, and I spent 12 days climbing the southwest ridge (Alaska grade 2+) of Mount Drum in the Wrangell Mountains. Drum towers above Glennallen to the east, and mistakenly appears higher than its larger and well-known neighbors Mount Sanford and Mount Wrangell. It also rightfully appears more challenging to climb, with no easy route to the summit.

I had previously attempted Drum with Judith Terpstra in June 1997, turning back in a storm at 11200 feet (reference my article in the September 1997 *Scree*). Joe had also previously attempted the peak with Todd Shearer in late-May 2004, turning back in a storm on top of the lower 11620-foot western summit (reference Joe's article in the May 2013 *Scree*). Between Joe and I we had waited a total of 45 years to return, although for Lee it was his first visit. Lee correctly sensed a lot of motivation for us get up Mount Drum this time.

We heard that a group of three guides Cody Simmons, Eli Huftalin, and Stephen Weindling from Saint Elias Alpine Guides had summited Drum in early May 2023. Cody graciously spent some time on a call with us to provide some recent beta. That allowed us to refine our gear list a bit, and reassure us the crevasse situation was pretty mellow, and there were no unexpected surprises.

With Paul Claus not flying climbers into the Wrangell and Saint Elias ranges this spring, Zack Knaebel of Tok Air Service skillfully filled the gap of flying climbers into the range this summer (www.tokairservice.com). Zack flies both a PA-18 Super Cub and a Cessna 185, each on wheel skis. Zack met us with his Super Cub at the Gulkana Airport on a sunny Friday, May 12. By *Scree*—September 2023

We woke Saturday morning, May 13, to a ground blizzard with light snow, limited visibility and strong winds. We still had cell service, so checked the Windy app weather forecast. It was not good with 35-to-45-mile-per-hour winds forecast for the next five days. Fortunately, there was a brief weather break that evening, when we managed a quick two-hour push to our 9500-foot high camp using a couple pickets for running belays around 9000 feet. We arrived at 7 p.m. in increasing winds and clouds and dug a marginal camp. This camp is on the ridge crest, exposed to the southern winds blowing up the Copper River Valley.

That night the winds increased as forecast, and on Sunday, May 14, we woke to one of the tent poles pressing against our faces. I went outside at 6 a.m. to find one of the poles had broken. We spent the next several hours quarrying blocks, re-anchoring the tent, and replacing a pole section which Lee fortunately had in his repair kit. By early afternoon, we had a pretty secure camp with 270-degree snow walls, 6 feet tall, encircling our tent.

Monday and Tuesday were more of the same, with daily trips outside to reinforce the snow walls, secure the guy lines, and dig out drifted snow. We ultimately had a good quarry system in place and were able to build a full encirclement shelter, with 8-foot-tall and three-blocks-thick walls on the windward side. With nowhere to hide, we spent significant time ensuring we had the best shelter possible.

Wednesday, May 17, was the crest of the storm, with winds forecast to 55 mph, and certainly higher as they funneled over the ridge crest by our tent. Although our snow walls took the

brunt of the winds, the turbulent gusts that shook the tent had our attention. By noon we were hunkered in the tent wearing our boots and full outdoor clothes ready to retreat to a nearby crevasse in case the tent failed. Knowing we were at the tail end of the storm and that the next two days would allow a summit attempt and descent helped our morale. Aside from a noisy night, all was well.

Thursday morning, May 18, we woke at 4 a.m. with plans to be moving to the summit by 6 a.m. We anticipated a 12-to-14-hour summit day, so wanted to start as early as possible. The winds were late in subsiding, so we didn't leave camp until 7 a.m., when the sun reached our camp to counteract the 20 mph gusts.

There are four cruxes to the southwest ridge, known as Steps 1 through 4. I took Step 1, which consisted of 700 feet of increasingly steep snow, topped by a couple hundred yards of narrow ridge walking with exposed cornices, and then a 50-degree down-climb to a nice campsite at 10200 feet, where I camped with Judith in 1997. The winds over the past week removed all loose snow, making travel quick and efficient. I placed four pickets on the snow face and then relied on topography to protect the ridge traverse. We reached the 10200-foot campsite at 9 a.m.

Joe took over Steps 2 and 3 and used six pickets each for those two steps. Each consisted of ascending steepish ridge traverses with a couple small down-climbs at the end. The finned second step was particularly intimidating from below, but much mellow-er once on it. There are nice campsites after both Steps 2 and 3, but it would not be worth carrying camp that far. We reached the top of Step 2 just after 11 a.m., making decent time.

Lee was excited to lead the fourth and final step, which was the shortest, yet steepest, section of the climb. He headed out with our six pickets, following the faint crampon points of the previous team from earlier that month. That early in the morning, the slopes were very hard, forcing Lee to spend some time kicking out each step to facilitate our descent later that evening down the 45-to-50-degree slope. Two rope lengths of running belay pickets saw Lee on top to easier terrain. Joe and I fol-

High camp at 9500 feet after the five-day windstorm battered the tent. Step 1 rises above camp with the summit visible at right, seemingly lower. Photo by Dave Hart.



lowed up and reconvened at 1 p.m. for a welcome rest a few hundred feet below the western 11620-foot false summit. That was a welcome end of the technical difficulties. From there on, it was just a long slog up and over the false summit, then across the 1.5-mile plateau to the true summit. We reached the false summit at 1:30 p.m., where Joe led down 400 feet to the plateau and on to the main summit. We ditched our backpacks at the base of the final 300-foot climb to the summit. It was a joy to climb this short section unencumbered by our backpacks. We reached the top at 3 p.m., eight hours after leaving camp. The wind had subsided to 10 mph with sun and no clouds. It was a very relaxing summit, aside from knowing we still had six hours of exposed descent in front of us. But for then we savored the moment, and shared some cheese and chocolate. Sanford, Wrangell, Mount Jarvis, and Mount Blackburn were prominent on the skyline to our east and south. I have fond memories of my many expeditions to those and nearby peaks 15, 20, and even 30 years ago. It was nice to be back in the range, standing atop a peak I'd coveted for so long.

We spent 10 minutes on top. Then Lee led us back to our packs and up and over the false summit. In our rush to the summit, we took only a couple pictures on the ascent, but were now able to take our time on the descent and take some photos. I led down the fourth step, with pickets as running belays. Joe again led the third and second steps, which were much more challenging with the afternoon sun warming the slope and snow balling onto our crampons. Lee had the pleasure of leading the first step, and the exhilarating narrow ridge traverse above the final slope. Like the fourth step, that was easier on descent, with softer snow allowing better steps compared to the morning hardpack slopes.



From left: Dave Hart, Lee Helzer, and Joe Chmielowski take a summit selfie with the southwest face of Mount Sanford in the distance. Photo by Dave Hart.

Trip itinerary table.				
	Activity	Distance (miles)	Time (hours)	Gain/Loss (feet)
Day 1	LZ to 7500 Camp	1	2	+1200
Day 2	7500 to 9500 Camp	1	3	+2000
Day 3	Weather Day	-	-	-
Day 4	Weather Day	-	-	-
Day 5	Weather Day	-	-	-
Day 6	Weather Day	-	-	-
Day 7	To Summit and back	5.2	14	+3250
Day 8	9500 to Basecamp	1.85	3	-3200
Day 9	Weather Day – Peak 6620	2.65	3	+1350
Day 10	Weather Day – Peak 6950	1	1.5	+800
Day 11	Lee fly out / Weather Day	-	-	-
Day 12	Dave/Joe Fly out	-	-	-

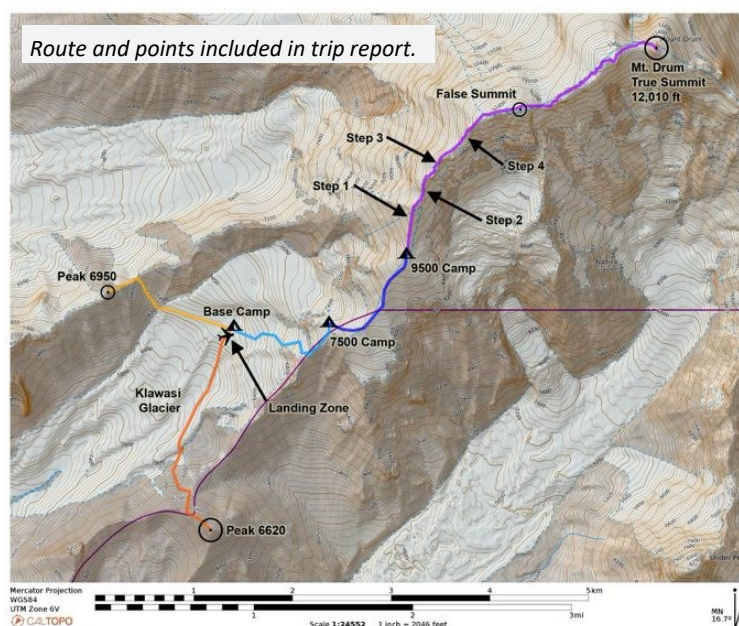
Lee led us into camp at 9 p.m. after 14 hours of travel. It was great to be back. We spent a couple hours melting snow and eating after our long day. Unfortunately, the Windy weather forecast had again changed for the worse, with increasing winds the next day. So, we planned for a 4 a.m. wakeup, and 6 a.m. departure for base camp.

Our short and windy night didn't allow the rest we deserved, and at 5:30 a.m. Friday, May 19, we had packed up camp and were heading down. We cautiously descended the slopes below camp, placing a few more pickets than on the descent, noting our fatigue and caution. We reached our snowshoe cache by 8 a.m. The hardpack snow, having been through wind blasting and freeze-thaw over the past week, allowed us to descend all the way to base camp in boots by 8:30 a.m. What a welcome site.

Unfortunately, our pilot Zack was busy flying other clients that day, so we were unable to fly out. We relaxed in the sun, protected from the high winds buffeting the upper mountain. We set up camp, preparing for the storm that would arrive that afternoon. The next two days we hiked two local peaks in the snowstorm for something to do, and to get cell reception. Saturday, May 20, we hiked up the northwest ridge of Peak 6620. On Sunday, May 21, we hiked up Point 6930, hoping to continue on to Ruddy Mountain (7510 feet), but the winds were too high to allow that.

Finally on Monday afternoon we got a message from Zack that he would try to get us out later that afternoon. Zack managed to land at 3 p.m. in marginal, turbulent wind and take Lee back to the Gulkana Airport. He returned for Joe and me, but the winds did not allow a pickup that evening. Lee drove home that night, while Joe and I waited for the next morning, hoping the winds would subside. If not, we had plans to hike 12 miles to the public use cabin at Chelle Lake to get a tundra pickup before the next storm that was due to hit the next night.

Fortunately, Zack returned the next morning for us, and we were both in Gulkana by noon. Joe's brother from Copper Center took us to his house for a nice lunch then drive us to Eureka



Lodge where Renee Ernster met us and drove us the rest of the way to Anchorage.

Mount Drum lived up to its reputation as a challenging peak with many reasons not to reach the summit. The southwest Hurricane Ridge certainly deserves respect. Patience and determination were the main reasons for our success this time.

Mount Drum notes:

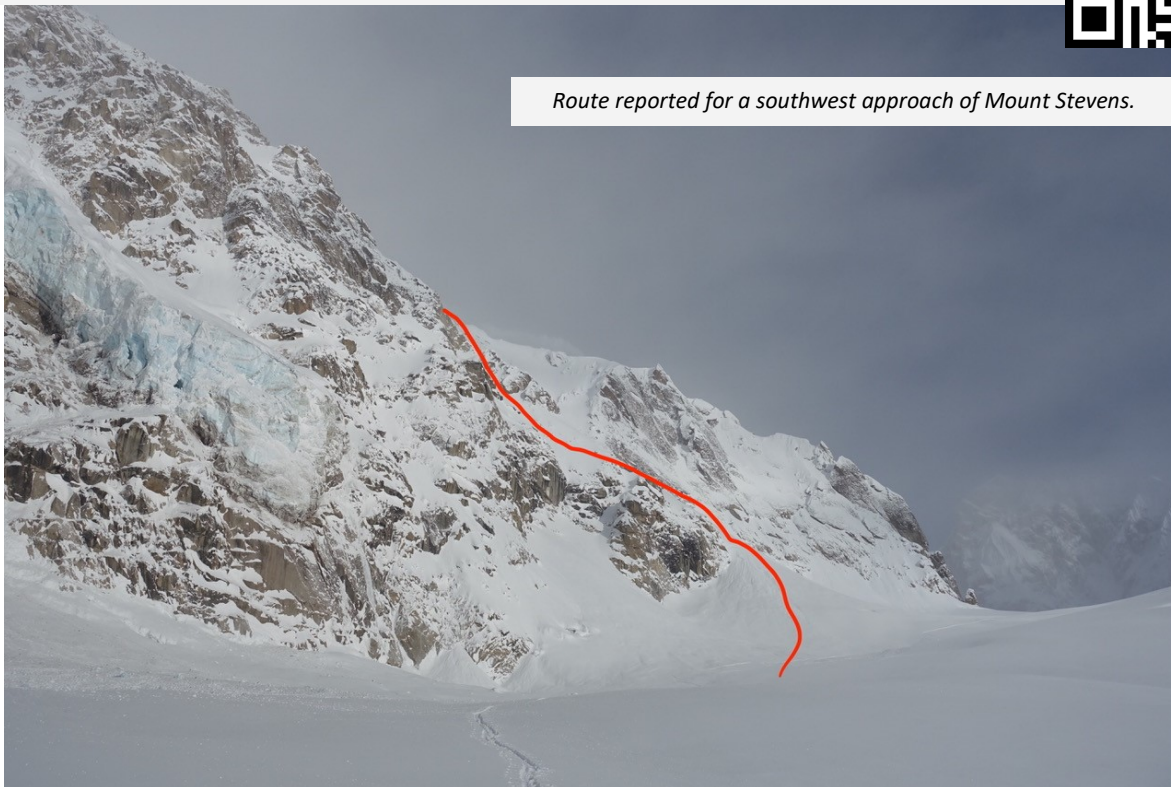
- The National Park Service lists Drum as the 70th-tallest peak in Alaska and the 35th-tallest peak in the Wrangell-Saint Elias National Park, though depending on peak definitions, this ranking may vary.
- Drum is #25 on the list of the 65 ultra-prominent peaks within Alaska. With Drum, Lee and I have climbed seven of these 65 peaks together over the last seven years, while Joe and I have climbed five of them together over the last six years. Drum is my 25th peak on this challenging list.
- Drum was my 30th glacier expedition into the Canadian and Alaskan Wrangell and Saint Elias Mountains since 1993, yet my first one since 2013, when I visited the remote Bear Glacier area with Ben Still, Greg Encelewski, Galen Flint, and Hannah North (see my August 2013 *Scree* article). Little did I know then that I wouldn't return to this area for 10 years. It reminded me how much I enjoy these longer trips into this remote part of world.
- Fly-in access to our base camp at 6300 feet is convenient, yet risky. Weather and especially wind has to be favorable to get in and out. A wiser choice might be landing lower down in the valley, or even on the tundra in June. Either of these would allow more certain entry and exit, at the expense of an additional half-day approach and descent. Worth it, in retrospect. Zack has several sites he can land in April, May, or June, depending on the season.

Winter, Hunter, and I

Mount Stevens (13966 feet), Alaska Range

Text and photos by Lonnie Dupre

Mount Stevens
62.92077,
-151.0663



Route reported for a southwest approach of Mount Stevens.

The Alaska Range in March, or any time in winter, is spectacular! The low light, sunrises, and sunsets bring out the contours of the mountains. The lower elevations appear dark blue, the ridges are white, and the peaks are tipped in pink. Looking southwest, one sees hundreds of summits stretching to the horizon.

The visual spectrum goes from the most beautiful place to the most dangerous. The scale of the landscape tricks one's sense of distance. An estimated two-hour ski to a particular point takes one entire day. I feel fortunate and lucky to have the health and fitness to experience such a place and in a time of year that few others get to see.

My goal on the range was to visit an old friend — Mount Hunter (14573 feet). This was my sixth time on Hunter, four of which have been solo in winter, including this attempt to summit. My objective was to climb the southwest ridge to Hunter's 13966-foot south peak [*Ed. note: Mount Stevens*]. No one had ever ascended it in winter.

Native Alaskans still refer to Mount Hunter by its Native name, "*Begguya*," meaning Denali's Child. But this mountain is no child's play. It is the steepest and most technical of the three great peaks in Denali National Park. It will humble even the biggest of egos among climbers, as they watch their plane leave them behind.

After the plane dropped me off, I shouldered my backpack and clipped into my seven-foot-long birch skis. The extra-long, handcrafted skis keep me on top of the snow bridges, and out of the crevasses, of the Kahiltna Glacier. But as the plane banked out of sight, and silence replaced the hum of the motor, anxiety and fear set in. And there you are, insignificant in such an overwhelming landscape — half-wanting to scream in hopes that the pilot will hear you and come back!

Getting to Hunter's rarely-climbed southwest ridge required two and a half days, while pulling a 150-pound sled of supplies south down the Kahiltna. I was alone, but surrounded by the sight and thundering sounds of avalanches and ice exploding off mountainsides from overhanging glaciers called seracs, which kept me nervously entertained.

The challenge with Hunter is the sustained, technical climbing in extreme cold, along with the short days of winter. It would test the limits of my capabilities. There are so many unknowns: the condition of the route, unstable weather, crevasses. And being alone in the long nights of darkness, in a challenging environment, poses additional psychological hurdles.

For a bit of history, the first winter ascent of Mount Hunter's north peak took place in March 1980 by a three-person team — Gary Bocarde, Paul Denkwalter, and Vern Tejas. Later, the Japanese mountaineer Masatoshi Kuriaki, famous for his solo winter climbs, attempted Mount Hunter 10 times. One year Masatoshi took 83 days to reach his last camp at 12000 feet,

only to have the weather turn him back. We can learn from his perseverance and patience. On his last attempt, he was rescued by helicopter at 8400 feet, after being separated from his supplies due to avalanche hazards.

I've had enough experience on the standard southwest ridge route to know that the narrow access couloir avalanches regularly. Though rarely climbed, it has claimed the lives of two experienced mountaineers, and injured three others.

I set up camp near the couloir, but well outside its debris zone and that of a serac a short distance east. Within a few hours, my findings were confirmed again this year when the roar of snow flushing out the couloir hit my ears. Seconds later, my tent was blasted by wind-driven snow. The decision was made. I wasn't going up that couloir, worrying every step of the way up and down. Been there, done that.

Early the next morning, I skied 45 minutes east, farther up the shelf glacier to another couloir I explored a few years ago. That couloir was a bit wider, had side protection, and was less steep in the beginning. I could also ski to the base, thereby gaining a few hundred feet of elevation, and it was a more direct route to the summit.

At first glance, it looked like a no-go due to seracs above. But after further inspection, I found that the seracs were not a problem because their ice debris funnels down an east shoot of the couloir. It was early, and I could climb high before the sun would hit the slope. I decided to go for it.

The snow was shin-deep, but stable. It was hard work with a week's worth of supplies in my pack. The farther up, the steeper it became. After gaining 3000 feet, the couloir narrowed, and gradually formed a ridge at 10000 feet.

Tired from the climb, I looked for tent spots, but there were none. Needing to travel light, I had to decide whether to take a shovel or a tent, not both. I should have taken a shovel. At least I could have dug a cave on a protected flank of the couloir. I also took my lightweight sleeping bag instead of my heavier one. And hoped that my clothing would make up the difference in lost insulation.

The ridge was low-angled, so I chopped out a ledge using the small adze on my ice axe. It took forever. Finally, at 8:45 p.m., I had a spot level enough for two-thirds of the tent floor. On three sides of the tent, the ledge abruptly dropped off for several hundred feet. The back side was anchored in three places to the ice. I had a 12-inch platform at the entrance of the tent to take off my crampons. I chuckled to myself at how I was going to poop from such a dangerous position.

I wasn't excited to be in such a precarious location, knowing that a storm was coming. However, the winds were forecast to be only 20 miles per hour (mph) at my elevation.

Just after I melted water and got a bite to eat, the first gust hit. A burst of wind, then calm. I had this eerie feeling that the huge temperature swing from cold to warm in the next 12 hours would bring high winds. Then I was hit with another gust, and another — each more violent than the last.

During a minute of calm, I unzipped the door and stood in the entrance to reach and tighten the lines to the anchors. I ducked back in just before the next gust could catch me and the open door of my tent. Immediately after I got the door zipped, I could hear the winds sounding like a train.

Anchor lines began humming, and the nylon fabric snapped and cracked like a whip. Then an episode of fiery violence hit my poor four-pound tent. Inside was like being in a loose stuff sack with all your gear, and feeling as though a giant, on the outside, was shaking the tiny tent to mix the contents. Stove, cups, bowls, spoons, electronics, and fuel bottles went flying back and forth from floor to ceiling. Winds at 50, 60, 70 mph — I'm not sure. Being perched on the crest of a ridge made everything worse.

The whole tent began levitating and was off the snow, except for the spot under my ass. I reached up and pulled down the tent-poles, bending them toward my body to reduce the chance of wind catching the tent. At this point, I didn't care if the poles broke, I just didn't want the tent to kite me off the ridge to a new location 3000 feet below.

By 2 a.m., I was completely exhausted from hanging onto the tent and pressing my back against the force of the wind on the fabric. Wearing my harness, I clipped into a section of rap line I had spooled up in the tent. I took out my knife and cut a hole in the floor and passed the line through and clipped onto my axe anchor buried in the snow. I reinforced the snow around the axe by pouring water over the area to freeze. Shivering from the cold, I climbed into my bag — boots and all. I said to myself that I did all I could to save myself.

Woke up at 6 a.m. The nightmare was over — not a puff a wind. Though feeling weak and disheveled, I was anxious to see if there would be a way through the rock face ahead. It looked impossible.

I began climbing the ridge out of camp when suddenly the axe handle poked through a thin snow bridge covering a deadly ridge crevasse. I'm usually pretty good at detecting these obstacles by observing variations in the snow surface, but this gap caught me completely by surprise and shook my confidence. I chopped down a bit for a better look. I stared into the abyss — a big, dark, inescapable hole that I could fall into. The thought of slowly freezing solid, squeezed down a black hole, and missing until the end of time, made my stomach queasy. It was so deep that warm air from below was coming out and forming icicles on the rim. I managed to plunge my axe handles into the opposite side of the crack and leverage myself safely over and above it.

I proceeded another 1000 feet up, front-pointing on a 60-to-70-degree slope of névé, and made the rocks at 11000 feet. It was like being guided to a secret passageway. The ridge led me directly to a cut in the rocks, a narrow gully that laid down to about 35 to 40 degrees. Wriggling up between slabs of granite, I could see that the gully opened up into a low-angled field of rock, snow, and ice, with likely access to the broad southwest ridge 500 feet above, but I couldn't be sure. From there it was a straightforward ridge climb to Hunter's south summit [*Ed. note: Mount Stevens*].

I might have found a way, but felt uneasy soloing the rocks with a bulky pack and not being rested after the storm. A slip would be fatal. Clear judgment overcame ego. That was the highest point I'd reach, but I felt very good about my accomplishment. Even though there was no summit, I forged a new line up part of a very steep mountain. With a belay one might stitch together the last 500 feet of mixed climbing to the ridge. The main crux is the sustained 4000 feet of climbing with no suitable place to camp in the steep terrain.

I down-climbed on front-points to my campsite at 10000 feet. With a night of rest, I got an early start for a long day of down-climbing. By late morning I was back to my lovely skis. I always miss them and was happy to see them poked in the ground where I left them. I felt safe and secure again with birch boards on my feet. I shuffled down toward camp where I had buried a duffel bag of supplies, my tent, and orange sled. I had left three feet of the sled sticking out of the snow so I would be able to easily spot it.

As I approached the site, I noticed something was amiss. The landscape was peppered with chunks of blue ice, from the size of baseballs to wheelbarrows. Behind and up to my right, I could see a chunk of ice — the size of a two-story house — that had calved off the serac above. When it hit the bottom of the mountain, it exploded into thousands of deadly projectiles, showering the landscape in the shape of a humongous baseball diamond. My sled and supplies were gone. Nothing!

I began walking around the ice debris looking for any sign of my gear. I spotted a little blue — it was my shovel! Then I noticed a few square inches of orange from under a boulder of ice. My sled! I dug and pulled the plastic sled free from its demise. I thought for sure it would be cracked from the impact of the blast, but it survived with only a nasty twist.

My duffel, however, was no longer there. I searched around, then spotted something red, farther down the glacier. My duffel! I couldn't believe how the blast had taken a buried, 40-pound duffel, excavated it, and launched it 200 yards down the glacier. Had I been in my tent at the time, I certainly would have been killed. Even though I placed this cache well outside an old debris zone, the force was powerful enough to send ice flying farther than I could've imagined. Lesson learned.

With gear intact, I spent the next two days skiing up the Kahiltna Glacier to the landing zone to reunite with Paul [*Ed. note: Paul Roderick*] from Talkeetna Air Taxi.

I learn so much about myself and the mountains each time I'm out there. For me it's like pushing the reset button on life to bring everything back to a calm and normalcy in an otherwise hectic world. The mountains humble and sand away any rough edges of ego, and I come away with a renewed appreciation for the workings of this unique environment. I go there to get in synch with a steady, old friend, to laugh and cry, then guide me on my way. After all, isn't that what friends are for?



Lonnie Dupre at Kahiltna
Base Camp in March 2023.

First Ascent – “Borealis Face,” The Citadel (8520 feet), and First Ascent – “Superfly Couloir,” Rise and Shine (7850 feet), Cathedral Spires, Kichatna Mountains

Text by Zach Lovell

The Citadel
62.42317,
-152.72175



Time is often an unhelpful metric when weighing the value of a trip in the mountains. Even a few days can gift the richest of experiences when partnership, conditions, and luck line up. From April 18th to 21st, Joseph Hobby and I were fortunate to have such an alignment with two new routes on back-to-back days in the Cathedral Spires of the Kichatna Mountains during a brief period of good weather amidst a stormy spring.

On April 18th, Paul Roderick of Talkeetna Air Taxi graciously pioneered a landing onto the Shelf Glacier with Joseph and me as eager passengers... we had landed in a candy shop filled with sweet alpine climbing. We spent the rest of the day assessing conditions and enjoying as much sun as we could amidst an otherwise shaded amphitheater.

The next day we skied to the base of The Citadel, aiming for the northwest face. This face was likely in the sights of David Roberts, Arthur Davidson, David Johnston, Pete Meisler, and Richard Millikan in 1966 when they set up an advanced basecamp on the Shelf Glacier and reported that their target was The Citadel in the 1967 *American Alpine Journal* [Ed. note: see pages 272 through 278]. They experienced three days of poor weather and descended back to base camp, having never made an attempt. After first seeing this aspect of The Citadel in 2021 from a neighboring ridge [Ed. note: see pages 153 through 155 of the 2022 AAJ], I did a substantial amount of research that confirmed this face had remained unclimbed. Speculation had led me to believe such an obvious line wasn't climbed simply because of its difficulty to access or view from other glaciers.

Our proposed route began with an overhung bergschrund that gave way to snow climbing and ice runnels that offered quick and secure soloing that minimized exposure to snow mushrooms hanging above. Halfway up the route we roped up and simul-climbed through

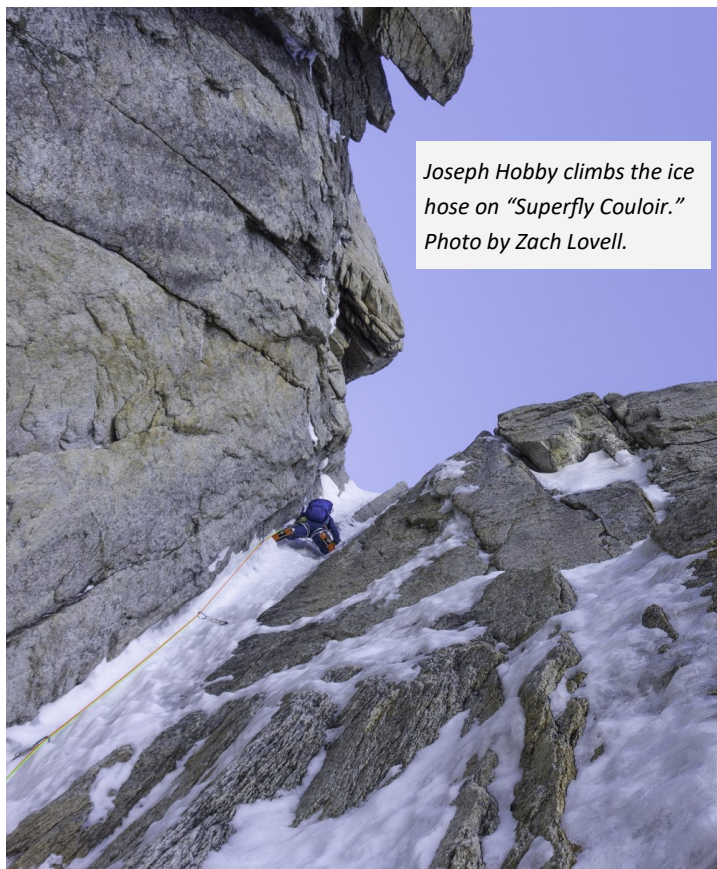
quality, but thin, alpine ice with sections up to 85 degrees. On the upper face, conditions were more variable with steep, fluted snow and ice covering rock slabs that required a slightly wandering line, but gifted us with beautiful exposure. In an incredible stroke of luck, Paul Roderick flew overhead as we neared the summit with none other than Mark Twight and Blair Speed taking photos while on a trip down memory lane. We reached the breath-taking summit of The Citadel in four hours and switched into summit outfits discovered on a sale rack in an Anchorage Walmart. Our descent generally reversed our ascent route with several rappels and down-climbs near the top and bottom of the route. Tedious anchor building in crack-less rock caused the descent to take over three hours. The “Borealis Face” (2,000 feet, 85-degree ice/snow) is “classic” Alaska climbing and worth a visit from future parties seeking an ice/snow route away from the crowds.

On April 20th we awoke to the chirp of my satellite phone with the latest weather forecast. Our plans for a rest day would need to change if we wanted another objective before flying out. After some discussion, we headed to an easterly couloir/ice hose on an unnamed formation (approximate coordinates of: 62.44251° North, 152.73491° West) immediately southeast of Riesenstein Spire (8050 feet). After skinning over the bergschrund, we donned crampons and simul-soloed until we reached more difficult climbing, starting with an incredible 60-meter AI5 ice hose that required a few mixed moves at the top.

Much to our surprise, the crux of the route came from a snowy, overhung chockstone that required extensive snow excavation, creative aid, and an exciting mixed exit. After reaching the col we climbed a rope length to the nearest point south of Riesenstein Spire as the sun was setting, giving us an incredible light show across the Cul-de-sac and Tatina Glacier areas. We descended our route



Zach Lovell on “Superfly Couloir.”
Photo by Joseph Hobby.



Joseph Hobby climbs the ice hose on "Superfly Couloir." Photo by Zach Lovell.



Route line for "Borealis Face" on The Citadel. Photo by Zach Lovell.



Location of "Superfly Couloir." Photo by Zach Lovell.

quickly with bountiful rock gear for rappels and secure down-climbing past the ice hose. "Superfly Couloir" (1,700 feet, A15, A2, M6) was ascended in 7 hours and the round trip from camp took about 10 hours. There are no other reported routes on this formation (even from the Cul-de-sac Glacier), so we named it the "Rise and Shine." Rise and Shine has a plateau-esque top with a few subtle summits/points that are at similar elevations from 7800 to 7900 feet.

After three days on the go, Joseph and I finally had a moment to soak in our experience as the northern lights came out when we got back to camp. An explosion of phosphorous green illuminated the sky as we drank our half-frozen beers. Despite the early morning hour, we were wide awake and briefly impervious to

the cold tugging at our faces. Two successful climbs in back-to-back days caused our minds to drift like the sky before us, a surrealism furthered by a lack of sleep. Joseph and I gazed into the green sea above, both of us utterly present and unwilling to cheapen the moment with words. When we both did finally fall asleep it was only for a few precious hours before the sun came up again and we began packing up camp to fly out.



Joseph Hobby on "Borealis Face." Photo by Zach Lovell.



The Citadel summit selfie of Zach Lovell (left) and Joseph Hobby (right).

"Gold Rush" on Cemetery Spire (7650 feet), Cathedral Spires

Text by Silvia Loreggian



Cemetery Spire

62.44748, -152.73958

Italian mountaineers Silvia Loreggian and Stefano Ragazzo have established what is likely to be a new climb on Cemetery Spire in the Cathedral Spires group of the Kichatna Mountains. "Gold Rush" (600 meters, 5.12a A1+) was climbed with one bivy from June 4 to 6, 2023.

The two arrived in Alaska in mid-May for their first expedition in the Alaska Range. The weather had not been good during their trip, but at the first opportunity they flew into the massif where they established base camp on the Cul-de-sac Glacier. At first unsettled weather forced them to remain stuck in their tents: it was snowy every night and then every day a few hours of sun were quickly melting the snow and the situation was quite dangerous because of many avalanches. During the night the temperatures were below 0° Celsius, but when the sun came out, the temperature increased immediately. They had a friend in Italy, Giacomo Poletti, who managed the weather forecast for them and transmitted it once per day. When the meteorologist wrote to them: *"You have 30 to 33 hours with no precipitation, but high winds,"* they made the most of a short weather window to climb a logical line up the southwest face of Cemetery Spire, located directly above their tent.

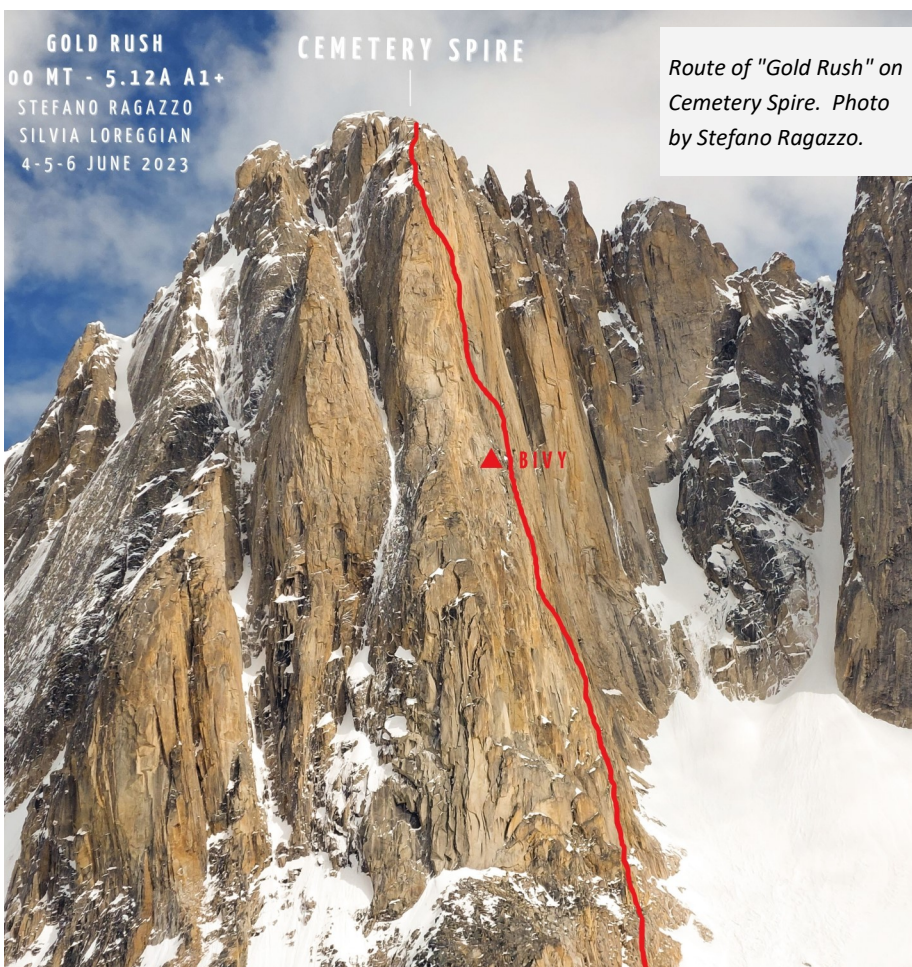
The approach for Cemetery Spire was quite fast: 20 feet on the flat glacier and then up 200 meters on a snow couloir by skis and then 200 meters of easy terrain with mixed climbing, grade III.

The two set off on the afternoon of June 4, established the first two pitches, then returned to base camp because that night the weather was not yet good. They wanted to check the quality of the rock before making their attempt and they found it beautiful on those first two pitches.

The next day at 6 a.m., they started up from the tent and, once having approached the wall and juggled up the fixed ropes, they climbed non-stop all day long. They reached the summit at around 10 p.m. and they immediately began the descent due to the cold and high wind, which proved to be very difficult indeed, with strong winds making rope management difficult. It was always light and this

gave them the opportunity to keep going until they had enough energy. At around 3 in the morning, they bivouacked briefly, sitting on a small ledge to recuperate. They tried to warm up a little bit by resting in their sleeping bags and having some lyophilized food. Then three hours later they continued their descent. That proved more complicated than the actual ascent. At one point they had to abandon 30 meters of rope when it became stuck on the rough granite. They were not far from the ground, at that point, so they managed the descent with some shorter rappels.

They came back to their skis on the snow couloir happy and safe around 10 a.m. and only at that point did they start relaxing and realizing the coolness they had experienced with this climb. They skied down to their tent and they had a big recovery, falling asleep in the middle of the day! From their tent the line they climbed was well visible and they could look at it for the following few days with great satisfaction.





Stefano Ragazzo and Silvia Loreggian looking at the Cathedral Spires from base camp on the Cul-de-sac Glacier. Photo by Stefano Ragazzo.

Only the descent belays were left *in situ*, and these include seven hand-planted 8-millimeter bolts, two pitons, and two nuts. The descent belays were not always in the same line they ascended. Toward the end of the ascent, about 200 meters below the summit, they came across an old destroyed belay, most likely from a previous attempt.

The new 600-meter line is called "Gold Rush," is graded 5.12a A1+, and has been described by the two alpinists as "*the biggest*

adventure we've been looking forward to for years!"

After this climb, the weather forced them in a tent again for a few days until a very short clearance in the sky allowed the airplane from Talkeetna Air Taxi to land on the glacier, pick them up, and bring them back to civilization.

Silvia Loreggian and Stefano Ragazzo thank: SCARPA, The North Face Italia, Grivel, and TotemMT.



Stefano Ragazzo opening up the 7th pitch of "Gold Rush" on Cemetery Spire. Photo by Silvia Loreggian.



Stefano Ragazzo takes a selfie with Silvia Loreggian on Cemetery Spire.

Peak of the Month: Talus Mountain

Text by Steve Gruhn

Mountain Range:

Brooks Range;
Schwata Mountains

Borough: Northwest
Arctic Borough

Adjacent Pass: Angiaak
Pass

Latitude/Longitude:
67° 29' 3" North, 155°
8' 48" West



Elevation: 6429 feet

Adjacent Peaks: Bread
Loaf Peak (5477 feet)
and Angiaak Peak (6711
feet)

Distinctness: 2119 feet
from Bread Loaf Peak

Prominence: 2489 feet
from either Peak 6750
in the Arch Creek and
Iyahuna Creek
drainages or Peak 6995
in the Arch Creek
drainage

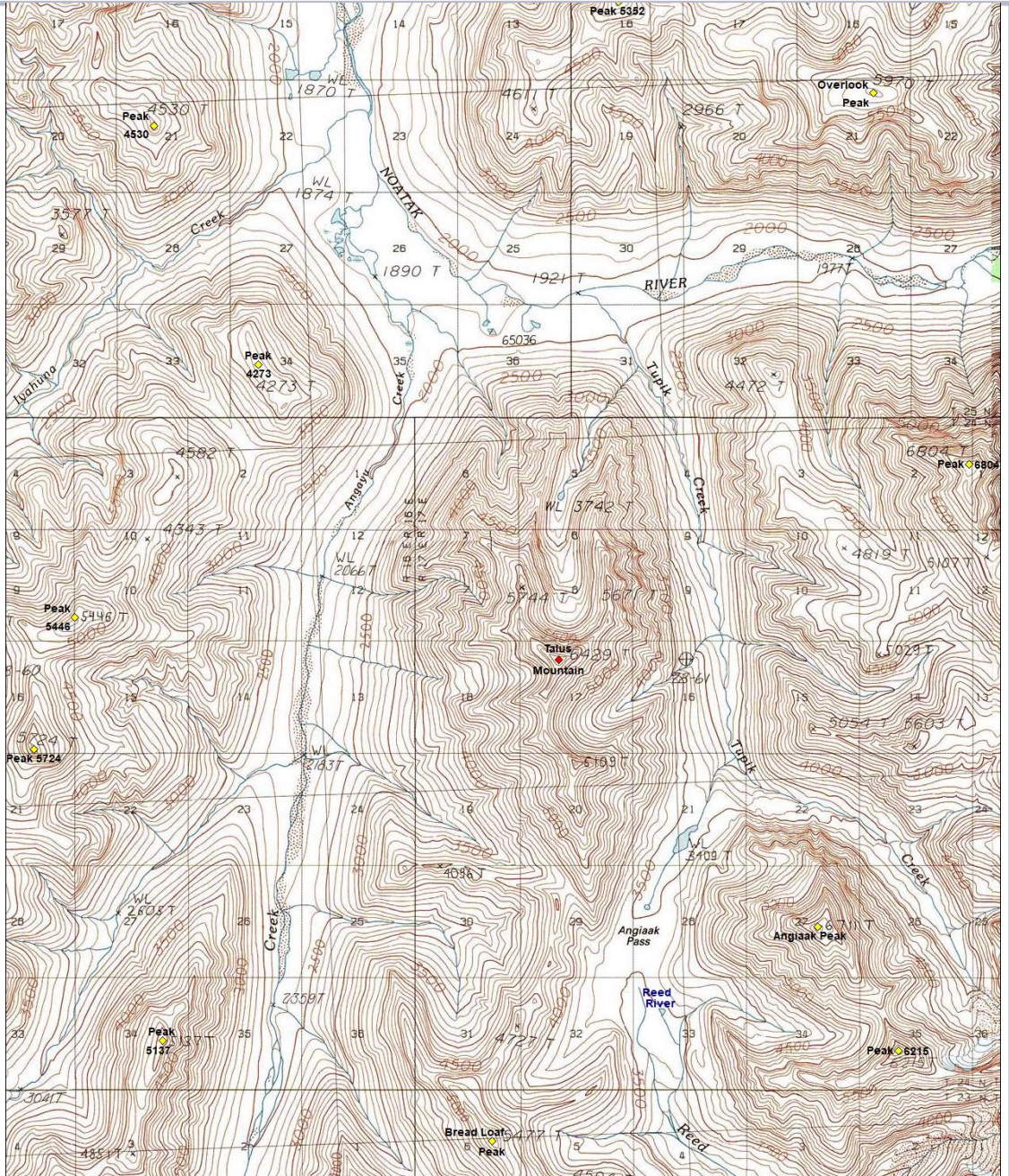
USGS Maps: 1:63,360:
Survey Pass (B-5),
1:25,000: Survey Pass
B-5 NE

First Recorded Ascent:

August 14, 1968, by John Vincent Hoeman

Route of First Recorded Ascent: South ridge

Access Point: 1875-foot level west of Iyahuna Creek



Talus Mountain is the twelfth-highest peak and the 29th-most prominent peak in the Northwest Arctic Borough.

On August 10, 1968, Daryl Morris flew Vin Hoeman and his wife Grace Hoeman from Bettles to a gravel bar at an elevation of about 1875 feet on the west side of Iyahuna Creek. The following day the Hoemans arrived at a campsite along the northeast side of the Reed River at an elevation of about 2950 feet, having hiked some 15 miles over Angiaak Pass. At the

campsite the Hoemans met Alvin DeMaria, Charles Loucks, David Roberts, and Sharon Roberts, who had arrived there on August 1 after having been flown to Iyahuna Creek on July 27.

Later in the evening of August 11, Vin Hoeman climbed 5014-foot Spalook Peak, southwest of and across the Reed River from their camp, which the Robertses had climbed on August 3rd. On August 12, while DeMaria, Loucks, and the Robertses climbed Bread Loaf Peak, the Hoemans climbed Mount Igikpak

(8276 feet), which DeMaria, Loucks, and David Roberts had climbed on the 9th.

After a day of rest, Vin Hoeman departed camp on August 14 and hiked through Angiaak Pass and ascended the south ridge of Talus Mountain, which he named due to the piles of loose rocks along the base of the peak. He returned to camp that evening.

On August 15 the entire six-member party climbed Sikspak Peak (7646 feet) east of Tupik Creek. On the 16th the Hoemans departed the campsite and began a circuit that would take them west of Angayu Creek and then north of the Noatak River. On August 19 the Hoemans climbed Mount Chitiok (6333 feet). On August 21 the Hoemans climbed Peak 5352 in the Twelvemile Creek drainage, Overlook Peak (5970 feet), and Mount Papiok (6530 feet). On August 22 Al DeMaria and Chuck Loucks climbed Angiaak Peak.

By August 24 all six members of the party had convened at the gravel bar west of Iyahuna Creek to await Morris's scheduled

pickup and subsequent return flight to Bettles a couple days later.

On August 25 the Hoemans climbed Leucosticte Peak (6074 feet) northwest of Iyahuna Creek.

On August 26 Morris picked up the entire party at the gravel bar and flew them to Bettles.

I don't know of a second ascent of Talus Mountain.

The information for this column came from David Roberts's article titled "Igikpak: or, A Lark in the Arctic," which was published on pages 8 through 17 of the June 1969 *Summit*; from David Roberts's article titled "Igikpak," which was published on pages 295 through 303 of the 1969 *American Alpine Journal*; and from Vin Hoeman's unpublished "Mountain Journal," which is archived at the University of Alaska Anchorage/Alaska Pacific University Consortium Library.

Additional photos by Tomasz Downarowicz from story: Freedom without Limits (pages 4-7)



Inakpasugruk Creek Valley.



American golden plover.



Approaching Rumbling Mountain.



Greater yellowlegs.

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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*. Captions should accompany all submitted photos.

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Joe Chmielowski leading Step 3 on Mount Drum with Lee Helzer preparing to follow. Photo by Dave Hart.

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