

# the SCREE

## Mountaineering Club of Alaska

JANUARY 2024

Volume 67, Number 1



**"Every man should pull  
a boat over a mountain  
once in his life."**

**– Werner Herzog**

### **January Meeting**

**Wednesday, January 10, 2024**

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

**Presenter: Joe Stock**

**Topic: An Instructional Overview of the  
Avalanche Avoidance System**

### **Contents:**

**Peak 4344, Kenai Mountains**

**Peak 6130, Peak 6220, Point 5610, and Peak 5619, Clearwater Mountains**

**Peak 6002 - Marsh Fork of the Canning River, Philip Smith Mountains**

**Great Nunatak (3647 feet), Central Chugach Mountains**

**Troublemint Spire (6850 feet), Talkeetna Mountains**

**Salt Peak (5455 feet), Shaker Peak (5080 feet), and Pepper Peak (5423 feet), Western  
Chugach Mountains**

**Indian Creek to Glen Alps, Western Chugach Mountains**

**The Ramp (5240 feet), Front Range**

**Peak 5505, Western Chugach Mountains**

**Wolverine Peak (4491 feet), Front Range**

**Peak of the Month: The Fin (13350 feet), Alaska Range**



*"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

Zack Fields and Tony DeMarco navigating the Sadlerochit Falls in the upper canyon of the Sadlerochit River. Photo by Mike Records.

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Presenter: Joe Stock

Topic: An Instructional Overview of the Avalanche Avoidance System

## Announcements

### Scheduled Trips:

#### Flattop Solstice Sleepout

December 22, 2023. No leader.

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Flattop Mountain:  
61.08922, -149.67030

## Contribute to the Scree!

Have something to share with the Alaska mountaineering community? Trip reports for all levels of mountaineering—from Flattop Mountain to Denali—are welcome and requested. We also welcome letters to the editor, notes, essays, poetry, photos, and the occasional creative writing piece. Contributions can be emailed as attachments to [mcascree@gmail.com](mailto:mcascree@gmail.com). Material should be submitted by the 11th of each month to appear in the following month's issue. We prefer text in MicroSoft Word format. Photos should include captions and photographer credits and should not be embedded in the text. While we're not sticklers on word count, submissions that are more than six pages per author will be split into multiple issues.

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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.**



# Announcements continued

## Scheduled Trips continued:

### Serenity Falls Cabin Sleepover

February 3-4, 2024

This trip will involve traveling 10 to 13 miles across/around Eklutna Lake to the Serenity Falls Cabin located near the West Fork of the Eklutna River. Depending upon conditions, there will be ice-climbing opportunities within one mile of the cabin. The cabin is reserved for Saturday night; we will have a group departing from the Eklutna Lake Trailhead at 7 a.m. on Saturday and will depart the cabin at 3 p.m. Sunday. If you're unable to make this departure time, you are welcome to travel on your own to and from the cabin. The waterfall-ice climbs near Serenity Falls are rated WI4 and higher, so this trip is not recommended for beginner ice climbers. There will be opportunities to climb with more experienced climbers if you are not comfortable leading ice. Other fun festivities will take place at the cabin and anyone not interested in ice climbing is welcome to join. There are 13 bunks available and additional floor space or winter camping, if preferred. For more information or to sign up, contact G Platte at

[guerinplatte@gmail.com](mailto:guerinplatte@gmail.com) or Andrew Holman at [andrew.s.holman@gmail.com](mailto:andrew.s.holman@gmail.com).



Serenity Falls Cabin  
61.29324, -148.97569.

### Moderate Ice Climbing in Eklutna Canyon

Saturday, February 3, 2024.

The goal of this trip is to give beginning ice climbers a chance to top-rope on moderate ice (WI2 - WI3). Details are still being determined; please contact Gerrit Verbeek ([gerrit.r.verbeek@gmail.com](mailto:gerrit.r.verbeek@gmail.com), 907-795-8288) if you are interested in attending as a beginner or as a more experienced climber capable of helping to set up top ropes.



Eklutna Canyon:  
61.4482, -149.33965

## Letter to the Editor

### Raisin Glacier Recollections

After reading last month's Cold Case investigation on the Raisin Glacier, perhaps I can provide some amplifying data of glacier conditions from earlier this past summer. In June of 2023, Kaleb Notte and I visited the Raisin Glacier en route to East Kiliak Peak (7150 feet). I believe the massive icefall featured on the cover of the December 2023 *Scree* is gone. On this page is a photo taken on the southern reaches of the Raisin Glacier around 6200 feet; the photo looks down the glacier toward Peters Creek.

There is an ice shelf farther down the glacier, my perspective above provides limited insights into its features. What remains a cold case, is the fate of the now famous ZZ Top choss rocks atop East Kiliak. The entire summit ridge was covered in snow and cornices during our brief 1 a.m. visit in 2023.

While on the subject of the Raisin Glacier, it's worth noting that Kaleb and I found very reasonable and non-standard access to the Raisin Glacier via Eagle River's Icicle Creek drainage and the Icicle Glacier. Kaleb and I started at the Eagle River Nature Center, took the Iditarod Trail to Icicle Creek, and bashed our way up the brushy game trail into the Icicle Creek drainage. We accessed the Icicle Glacier, roped up, and tromped up to about 5200 feet on the glacier. We used a 30-degree snow ramp located at 61.20923, -149.09280 to exit the Icicle Glacier and access the Raisin Glacier to the north. This was a very reasonable spring/early

summer route, but probably becomes tricky once the snow melts. I bring this up, because the established and standard access route for East Kiliak uses Ram Valley. The Eagle River Nature Center/Icicle Creek drainage approach is a very nice alternative with considerably less vertical elevation gain. Using Ram Valley for East Kiliak, the round-trip approximation is 21 miles and 11,000 feet of total elevation gain. The Eagle River Nature Center/Icicle Glacier round-trip approximation is 21 miles and 9,000 feet of total elevation gain.

Brendan Lee



East Kiliak Peak: 61.21377,  
-149.12222

*Photo from 6200 feet on the Raisin Glacier and looking east toward Peters Creek. The southern section of the photo (right) includes the mentioned 5800-foot mark with no visible icefall. Photo by Brendan Lee.*





## Peak 4344, Kenai Mountains

Text and photo by Brendan Lee

60.21534,  
-149.54115



It was a brisk morning on October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2023, the snow-free ground was frozen solid. Signs of impending winter could be seen all around, as snow accumulation blanketed the Kenai Mountains above 3000 feet. Dan Glatz, Theresa Pipek, Wayne Todd, Lena Lee, and I met at the Resurrection River Trailhead just off Exit Glacier Road near Seward. Our objective was an obscure peak to the north of the parking lot called Peak 4344. Peak 4344 sits immediately across the Resurrection River from the Exit Glacier, which was an enticing promise of glacial scenery. Typical for the Kenai Mountains, deep drainages and low passes give this mountain approximately 885 feet of prominence.

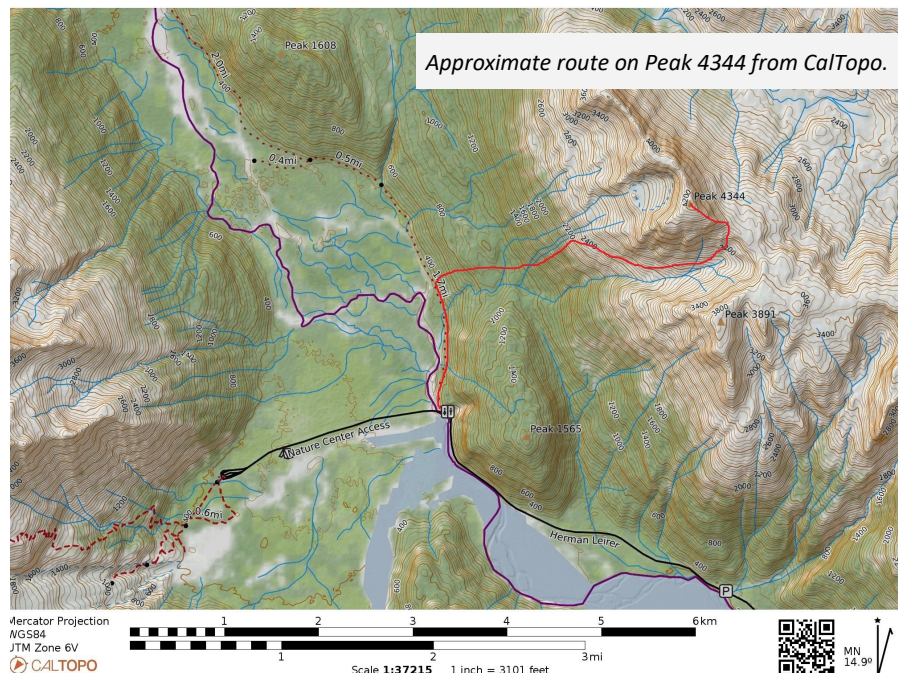
We hiked north on the Resurrection Trail for about one mile until we reached the drainage south of Peak 4344 [Ed. note: *Bydarky Creek*]. We began a moderate bushwhack to the east, taking advantage of dead brush and no snow. Eventually, we broke free from the shrubbery around 2300 feet. We enjoyed the bluebird morning and had a snack break at the base of 4344's southwest ridge. We were thankful we didn't have to endure the aforementioned bushwhack in a soggy, bug-filled summer suffer-fest. The southwest ridge of Peak 4344 looked rather exciting and slippery with unconsolidated snow, so we opted to continue onward in the southern drainage and eventually join the southeast ridge of Peak 4344 (see photo). We traversed to the south of the mountain across a frozen creek, and joined the southeast ridge at 3400 feet. A quick section of Class 3 scrambling on the southeast ridge demanded my attention with a fresh and slick dusting of snow. After the scrumbly section, a pleasant and scenic walk to the summit yielded amazing views of the surrounding peaks and valleys – Mount Ascension (5710 feet) to the north and the Resurrection Peaks to the east. I pointed to ridges and drainages asking Dan and Wayne all sorts of questions from their prior experiences in the area. The Harding Icefield and the Exit Glacier were particularly amazing sights to behold from our stance. Also in need of beholding were the loose items I unpacked on the summit, the breeze kicked up to a ferocious wind and tried to whisk them away as I sifted around in my bag for



*Lena Lee (right) and Wayne Todd navigate the upper Bydarky Creek drainage south of Peak 4344.*

a Zebra Cake. The wind cut our summit visit considerably, but we still managed to enjoy some conversation, share some memories, take some photos, and soak in the sights. I was unable to search for a cairn due to the amount of snow accumulation.

We retraced our path back down; the wind seemed to follow us on our descent. We arrived back in the parking lot before dark, and quickly formulated a plan to get burgers at the Trail Lake Lodge before finishing the drive back to Anchorage. Thank you to Lena, Wayne, Dan, and Theresa for a wonderful day in the mountains.





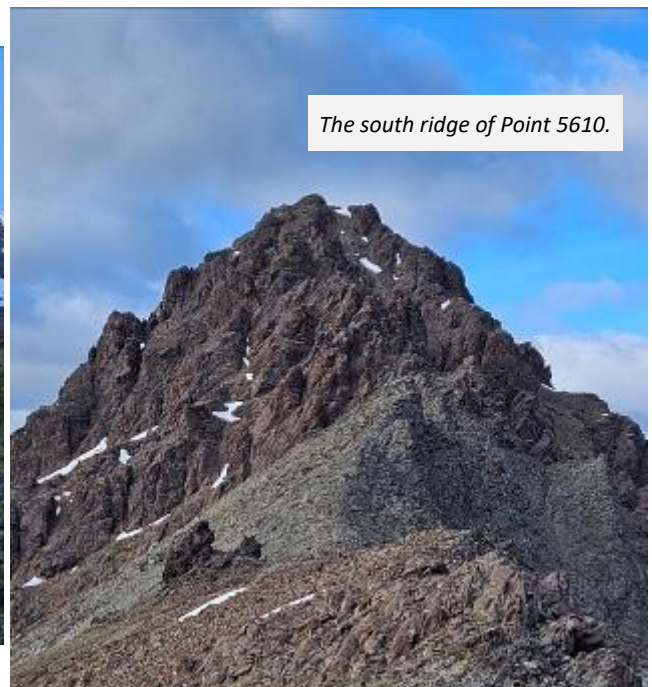
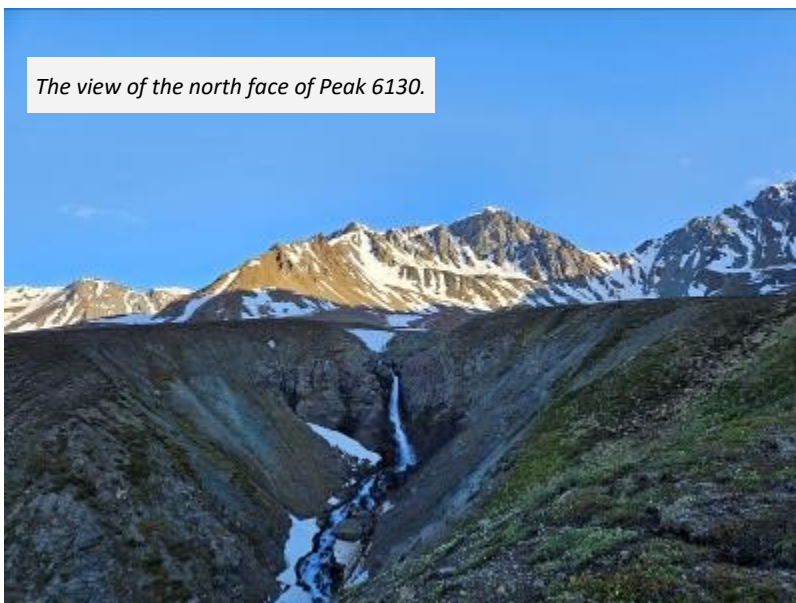
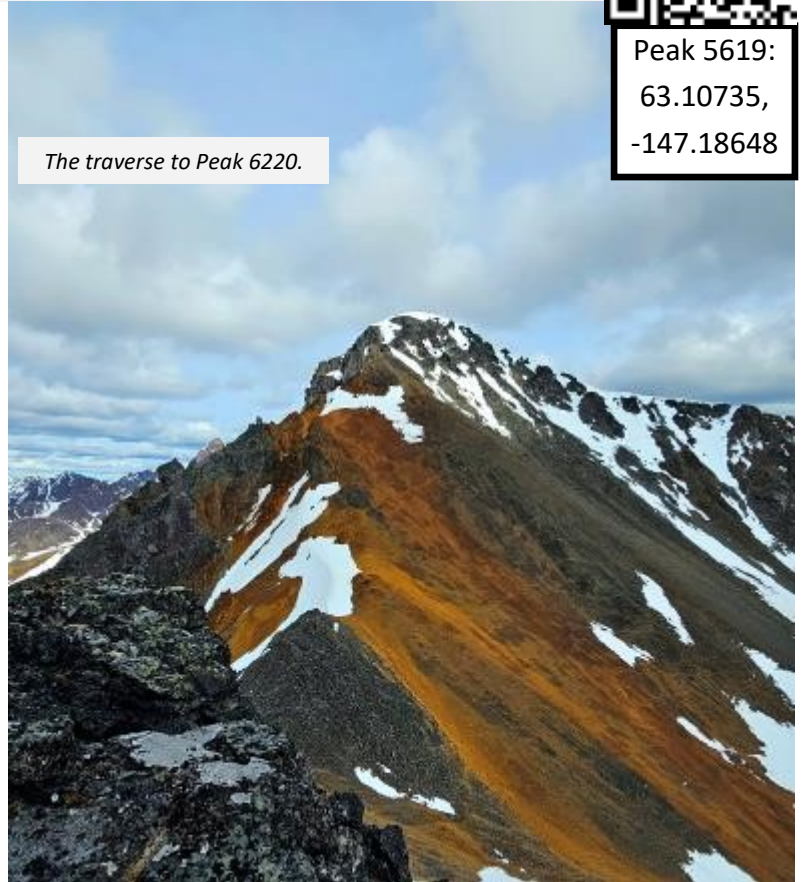
## Peak 6130, Peak 6220, Point 5610, and Peak 5619, Windy Creek, Clearwater Mountains

Text and photos by Kaleb Notte



Peak 5619:  
63.10735,  
-147.18648

Waiting for an early morning start on Caribou Tower (6350 feet), I traversed four summits to explore the zone. I went up the east ridge of Peak 6130 with easy Class 2 travel, but rewarding views everywhere. Peak 6220 is the highest peak on the ridge with the most prominence, so I jaunted over there with more Class 2 and easy travel. There was great scree for shooting down Peak 6130 to the col to the west and nice rock to hike up to the summit of 6220. From the summit, I dropped down a thousand feet into the bowl and gained the ridge toward Point 5610 and Peak 5619. I climbed the entire ridge of Point 5610 to Peak 5619. This ridge went at persistent Class 4 on excellent rock. It was probably the best rock I have ever climbed on in Alaska. I climbed Point 5610 first, as it had the same contour lines as Peak 5619 and was ensuring I hit the high point. This 300-foot prominence summit was a worthy objective on the traverse to the actual high point. Once I dropped off Point 5610 and hit the col, the ridge to Peak 5619 went at Class 2 to the summit back to camp. This area is beautiful, and peaks ranging from Class 2 walk-ups to technical Class 5 routes on peaks like Caribou Tower. There is a hiking trail up Alpine Creek behind the lodge to access the zone. Be mindful and stop at the lounge and buy a few beers and a meal to support the community.





## Peak 6002 - Marsh Fork of the Canning River, Philip Smith Mountains

Text and photos by Mike Records

Peak 6002  
68.73706,  
-146.21658



*Zack Fields admires the view to the southeast of Point 4610. Okiotak Peak is in the foreground above Fields with Mount Chamberlin on the skyline to the right of center.*

On a Friday night in the middle of June of 2023, Nyssa Landres, Tony DeMarco, Zack Fields, and I flew north out of Anchorage for 10 days in the Brooks Range. In Fairbanks we sardined into a small room at Pike's Waterfront Lodge, poached the Princess Cruise's greasy breakfast buffet, then crammed into Kirk Sweetsir's Cessna 185 for the flight into the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Our route was based on that of many that came before us. From the Marsh Fork of the Canning River, we planned to float down the Canning to Cache Creek. We'd hike over the Cache to the Sadlerochit River for the float to the edge of the mountains. Then, a short crossing to the Hulahula River for the paddle to the coast. Finally, there would be the slog across Arey Lagoon to Barter Island for the flight home from Kaktovik. Along the way we hoped to climb a few peaks, including Peak 6002 above the Marsh Fork. As Kirk's taildragger climbed above the taiga forest and bending rivers of the Interior, we left civilization behind. Soon the barren foothills of the Brooks Range were rising around us. Ahead, the spine of the northern Continental Divide had been plastered by a summer snowstorm. When caribou started to appear on the aufeis below the plane, we knew we'd made it to the heart of the Brooks Range. Gliding through Carter Pass, Kirk began the descent toward the little tundra landing strip.

We bounced to a stop on the soft bush wheels, then tumbled out of the plane. Everyone was excited to get away from the

busy staging area and take advantage of the beautiful day. Shouldering our packs, we waded across the river to climb Peak 6002, which loomed above us. Caribou trails brought us to the flanks of the peak, from where we followed a crumbling white limestone ridge upward. Climbing steep tundra and talus brought us to the shoulder of the peak with the tributaries of the Marsh Fork spilling away from us. It was incredible – perhaps one of my favorite vistas from the trip. Forward progress slowed substantially as we tiptoed along the ridge toward the summit. Five hundred vertical feet of sketchy, slippery, loose, and exposed crawling brought us to the top. In retrospect, the views from the shoulder were about as good, and way less dangerous. Reversing course, we tobogganed down a chute of isothermal snow toward our gear.

Back at the river, we ate dinner, loaded our gear into our two-person Forager packrafts, and pushed into the rain-swollen river. Floating down the Canning, we passed mountains squeezed into rolling folds of layered rock, shelves of aufeis, canyons inside of canyons, flocks of grazing caribou, lone muskoxen, nesting falcons, and crumbling permafrost. On Monday morning we left the Canning behind and started the wet bushwhack up the cobbles of Cache Creek. The inefficient travel of the lower Cache alternated between wading through knee-deep water, knee-deep cobbles, and knee-deep tussocks.

By noon on Tuesday, we were at the pass to Snow Creek. We threw down our packs, stuffed food in our mouths, wrapped jackets around our waists, and went hiking. There were bear tracks as we approached the summit of Point 4610, from where we swiveled to take in the eclectic 360-degree views. To the southeast was the solitary massif of Okiotak Peak, which we hoped to climb the following day. To the north, my eye was drawn to the rusty little Sadlerochit Mountains rising from the Arctic Plain. Satisfied with a great afternoon summit, we jogged back to our backpacks and continued for a few more miles to our camp along Talus Creek. Mount Chamberlin (8899 feet) loomed above us, while underneath us punchy snow and fresh snowmelt froze our feet and ankles as we trudged down the headwaters of Snow Creek.

Wednesday was scheduled for a day hike; we wouldn't need to move our camp. We'd hoped to climb Okiotak Peak (5320 feet), but it was guarded by dark clouds and the weather was obviously deteriorating. Instead, we hiked south up the benches paralleling Talus Creek. By the time we reached the pass to Eagle Creek, the cloud ceiling was touching the ground. Shivering in the cold fog, we felt our way back to the tents, where we hid from the hypothermic weather for the rest of the day. On Thursday morning, a short hike brought us to our put-in on the Sadlerochit. The river was high and we didn't know what we'd find. As we entered the first canyon, large horizon lines formed in front of us. The upper canyon was filled with retentive rapids and a 10-foot waterfall. Having survived the gnar of the first canyon, we entered an absolutely gorgeous flatwater canyon. Winding through bends of colorful rock, this is a classic section that I think anyone would enjoy. When the hypothermic river, ice fog, and frozen wind sucked the last drop of heat out of us, we crawled shivering onto the bank to set up our tents with fumbling, numb fingers in the first acceptable spot we could find. On Friday morning, we unzipped our tents to celebrate the return of the sun and an exceptional view of Chamberlin. We

pushed back into the river for a couple hours of floating to the nexus where the Sadlerochit Mountains intersected their namesake river where we would cross to the Hulahula River. There we pulled off the river for the day.

By early afternoon, we'd set up camp and it was time for a hike up the long ridge rising west above the river and the coastal plain. From the top of the sloping summit of Point 2575, we looked across the overflow ice of the coastal plain to the frozen mass of ice capping the Beaufort Sea. To the opposite direction, Mount Michelson (8852 feet) was just out of reach. Always curious about hydrology, Tony wanted to check out the warm Sadlerochit Spring on the way back to camp. On the edge of the coastal plain, and complete with moose tracks and aspen trees, the spring was an oasis in this frozen desert.

Saturday started with one last ferry across the Sadlerochit River followed by four miles of post-holing through tussocks to the Hulahula. The Hulahula River was about twice the size of the Sadlerochit, and quickly swept our rafts downriver as the mountains shrank behind us. Now over 40 miles away, Chamberlin was still breathtaking. Sunday morning started with the last two hours on the Hulahula, then the quarter-mile drag to the Okpilak River. Greased by the droppings of emperor geese, dragging our boats over the portage seemed pretty easy on our gear and probably worth it. Reaching the sluggish Okpilak, there was barely enough water to float. Crossing the lagoon to the barrier island was much the same. Shivering in our drysuits, we alternated dragging and slowly paddling the boats through the lifeless water. On Arey Island, we did a quick polar-bear check, then tried to warm up in the cold sun. There was a tailwind, and we hoped to avoid town, so decided to paddle across the lagoon toward the Dump Road. I thoroughly enjoyed watching the eiders buzz us as we floundered across the lagoon to Barter Island.

Trying to respect the local community, we camped in an inconspicuous spot below the high-tide line. On Monday we shook

the sand out of our tents and walked toward Kaktovik. We explored the library and photography at the Waldo Arms Hotel before treating ourselves to burgers and coffee. The owner Marty Connelly and everyone we met at Waldo's were friendly and welcoming; we felt that the price we paid for a warm lunch was a bargain for any wind-swept traveler. With souls full of new memories and Followers, we strolled to the airport for the flight back to reality.

Thanks to Ken Hill, Matt Rafferty, Becky King, Tony Perelli, Mary Krusen, Will Koeppen, and everyone else whose advice, experiences, and memories helped to make this trip a reality.



*Looking west from the landing strip at the Marsh Fork of the Canning River toward unnamed peaks in the upper reaches of the drainage.*



## Great Nunatak (3647 feet), Central Chugach Mountains

Text and photo by Westen Groh  
August 2023



61.10697,  
-147.01661



*Looking down the south ridge of Great Nunatak with views of Heather Bay and Prince William Sound.*

Immediately after guiding a four-day kayak trip with relentless 45-degree rain in Columbia Bay, one of the few multi-day stretches of good weather we had this summer was forecasted for the area. I had one full day in Valdez to dry out, unpack, and repack before heading back out. Two weeks prior, while guiding a trip farther into the East Branch of the Columbia Glacier than I had ever been before, I spied a potentially easy route to the summit of Great Nunatak. Geologist Grove Karl Gilbert on the 1899 Harriman expedition thought it to be the largest nunatak in Alaska and named it in his 1904 Harriman Expedition report titled [Alaska, Volume III: Glaciers and Glaciation](#). It remains the only officially named peak rising directly out of the water entirely in the Columbia Bay basin. These days, as a result of the Columbia Glacier's rapid retreat, the mountain is far from a nunatak. Only being touched to the east by a small amount of remnant ice and a tiny rock glacier to the north.

Unable to find any partners due to the last-minute nature of the trip, I went solo. After the two-hour water-taxi ride, I quickly found myself in a familiar position: navigating via kayak, the ice floes of Columbia Bay's East Branch. I quickly arrived at the nearly tidewater north-facing rock glacier and set up a camp near the toe around 2 p.m. The weather was phenomenal, and after brewing up some coffee, packing my backpack, and taking the longest cold plunge of my life (swimming around a large

iceberg), I started up the rock glacier toward the weakness in the mountain I had spotted a couple weeks earlier. The route was fairly easy hiking until about 2500 feet, where guarding the intended route was a group of five mountain goats that expressed no interest in moving for me. I opted to scramble up about 600 feet of Class 3-4 beautiful granite to give them some space, which put me just below the ridge. The ridge itself was mostly one to four feet wide with some big exposure on both sides all the way down to the water in spots. There were a couple gendarmes to navigate near the top and by 8 p.m., I was standing on the summit in golden light without a breath of wind. After three years of guiding kayak trips in Columbia Bay, it was deeply satisfying to have this new 360-degree view of the place. I had brought my 20-degree sleeping bag in my 30-liter pack along with quite a lot of smoked salmon, unsure of what the adventure would entail, and I found a perfect bivy ledge 10 feet below the summit. I spent the night up there watching a truly incredible auroral display, which started well before it was even dark. I hiked down in the morning after sunrise, loaded my kayak, and paddled again farther into the East Branch of the bay than I had ever been. Completely inspired by the place and in a state of pure bliss, I ended up crossing the entire calving face to Junction Point, where I spent one more night out before getting a pickup the next day. Great Nunatak is less than 4000 feet high, but it was one of the greatest mountains of my life.



## Troublemint Spire (6850 feet), Talkeetna Mountains, Winter Ascent

Text and photos by Kaleb Notte



*Rappelling on the way down  
from Troublemint Spire.*

With an unbelievable weather streak and stagnant avalanche conditions, I was awarded my chance to attempt a winter ascent of Troublemint Spire on January 6, 2023. With daylight being limited to 5 hours and 44 minutes, I knew I had to time getting to the col around sunrise. So, I started heading down the Mint Trail at 3:50 a.m. To my surprise, a full moon lit up the valley, and using a headlamp was unnecessary. The approach to the head of the valley went by fast. The whole valley was wind-blasted, so the approach was cruiser. Before I knew it, I was heading up the approach gully to reach the Doublemint Glacier. Somehow, I climbed up with my snowshoes on the steep bulletproof snow. I swung up to the remnants of the glacier and 200 feet short of the col. I swapped to crampons, as the snow was becoming too steep for snowshoes. This was the only part of the day I wallowed in deep snow. I was happy with the snowpack, just not delighted 200 feet took so long.

At the top of the col, I dropped 600 feet in elevation. The downclimb was straightforward, with the final 15 feet being near vertical, but with snow that axes would stick into. I swung around to the east face and went up a couloir I was convinced would bring me 150 feet short of the summit. I am good at

planning routes based on satellite imagery and topo maps, but I have yet to plan something so far back. The couloir was about 1,000 feet and deposited me right where I had planned. At 1 p.m., I finally felt the sun's warmth as I emerged on the ridge around 6600 feet.

The first half of the ridge was steep snow/ice that only my front points and axe tips would gain purchase – not very hard climbing, but room for error was next to none, as a self-arrest would be near impossible, and the slope slides straight over the Doublemint Glacier. After that the snow became softer, and the purchase was easier on the heart. The summit block was finally in sight. I went around climber's left and stayed clear of the only cornice I saw on the entire route.

I flaked the rope at the block and attached it to my harness. I knew digging out the rope on a single human-sized summit would not be fun. At first glance the summit block with snow seemed more leisurely than usual. The snow did help a bit, but most of the snow was a fine powder that just brushed off. First, I had to create a pocket to swing my right leg over and kick in to lift myself up, followed by kicking my left foot in. One more short step and I was on the summit of Troublemint.

The victory was short-lived. It was only an hour before sunset, and I wanted to get down the ridge before dark, so I started digging to find the anchor. The crack became visible. I placed a cam and clipped it to my harness to secure myself while feeding my rope through the anchor. I did a short rappel and down-climbed the snow section. I set up a second anchor because I did not want to downclimb the frozen section. After the second rappel, I could mostly shut my brain off, as the only objective hazard I had left was retracing my steps up through avalanche terrain. I had no concerns, but I always mentally note when I am in terrain traps.

As I was heading down the east couloir, I was in alpenglow heaven with a full moon in the background. The view made me forget that I still had to go over the 600-foot pass and 10 miles back

to the car. Climbing back over the pass with the last remaining light, I looked toward the Mint Hut. I had a light overnight pack, so staying the night was an option, but climbing this peak in a day was something I had set on my mind. After returning to the Little Susitna River, I resupplied with water and decided to slog out.

After filling up, I noticed my phone had died from the cold. I really did not want to hike the last eight miles without music. Luckily, I learned placing a hand warmer under the charger port, and one on the back of the phone will get it back running. The final hike out was done the same as the approach, completely under a full moon, blasting music all the way down the trail to keep my mind occupied. Nineteen hours later, my car was in sight.



*Alpenglow view while heading down the east couloir of Troublemint Spire.*



## Salt Peak (5455 feet), Shaker Peak (5080 feet), and Pepper Peak (5423 feet), Western Chugach Mountains

Text and photo by Greg Higgins

Pepper Peak:  
61.43378,  
-149.09664



*The nasty southwest ridge that descends from Pepper Peak—best done in daylight.*

the ones with downfall trees and then the thick willow patches higher up.

The views only got better and better as I ascended under the overcast skies, which made for cool and nice climbing. Around 3500 feet, the ridge lost some of its steepness. At 4200 feet, I put on an extra pair of socks to make the long east-side traverse into the low point at 4500 feet that led to the summit of Salt Peak. I reached that spot at 4 p.m. Forty minutes hiking into deepening snow put me on the summit of Salt Peak just before 5. I realized before going up that I had a time problem if I wanted to get down in the light. Knowing that I would not make it, I changed my plans so that I would reach sum-

mit of Pepper Peak around 7 p.m. That would give me time to get off the steep upper slopes on the descent of the standard trail while I still had light.

I retraced my steps back to the col and then went straight to the top of Shaker Peak. That looked like it offered a good route back to Pepper Peak's east ridge. The traditional way to reach that ridge is to traverse to the north, but with a foot of new snow covering all landmarks, I could not determine where that traverse began. I crossed over Shaker's summit just after 6 p.m. and continued toward Pepper without taking a break. It was a long slog to its summit, which I reached around 7:15. On the way there I surprisingly saw both black bear and brown bear tracks. It was cold with a sharp wind on the top, so I set out quickly to get down as far as I could before the light failed. Fortunately, there had been other hikers there, so I had a trail in the snow to follow.

Night found me around 8:15, just as a magnificent full moon began to appear on the horizon. I had managed to get off the steep areas and was now lower on the trail that led to the Twin Peaks Trail. I spent two hours making my way downward. The sky had some haze, and I was quickly in the trees, so the moon did not help me much. Following a cone of light focused on the ground in front of you is surreal and disorienting. I was quite happy to reach my truck around 10:20 p.m. My Gaia app had my distance at 12-¾ miles and my total elevation gain at 5,500 feet.

Nearly perfect weather for hiking was predicted for Thursday, September 28, 2023. It had been a difficult summer for good weather, so I decided on Wednesday to climb something since I had Thursday free. I had been looking at the map and wondered about going overland to climb Salt Peak. Shannon and I went up there two years ago, and we ran out of steam on the summit of Pepper Peak. I did make the crossing to the final slope doing the traverse below Shaker Peak, but I turned around before ascending the final 900 feet to Salt's summit. That trip was in part truncated by running out of fuel. We brought a stove to heat snow for water and I had grabbed the wrong container.

On the map I decided that if I was willing to plow through brush, the steep slopes of Shaker's south ridge that led to Yuditnu Creek should offer a straight-line approach to Shaker's and Salt's summits. I find this a good time of year for bush bashing, since many plants are getting into winter mode and there are no bugs to deal with. With this in mind I left the Eklutna Lake Parking Lot at 10:15 a.m. for the leisurely stroll along the lake. After about an hour, I turned uphill, unfortunately at the point on the road near Yuditnu Creek that is the farthest from the slopes. This ensured that I got to spend several hours making my way through the brush to reach the thinner terrain that started around 2500 feet. Nevertheless, it was not too unpleasant meandering near the creek at times. The worst areas were

## Wandering in the Weeds (with Bugs), Western Chugach Mountains

Text by Greg Higgins, photo by Shannon Higgins



Point 3505 on Bidarka  
Peak's North Ridge:  
61.07349, -149.46506



*Greg Higgins above the ocean of clouds in Shaman Valley.*

Aug 3, 2023, 12:30 PM

Shannon and I agree: Do not hike this route again in August! We got a later start around 3 p.m. from the Indian Creek Trailhead, but had high hopes of getting into the Shaman Valley. This was not to be. The trail up the creek was very overgrown and easily lost in places. And 2023 seemed to be the “year of the black fly,” as we found in Prince William Sound in July. We had to hike in head nets much of the time, which was miserable in high grass, intruding willow, and “biting” parsnip. Some of the bridges across the harder creek crossings were also in disrepair. I lost my balance trying to reach one bridge making a 5.4 “tree move,” and fell into the creek, soaking myself. Despite the embarrassment and shock, it turned out well, because being wet cooled me in the late afternoon sun.

After four or five hours of hiking, we struggled through the pass, which was not clearly marked. Getting there required following a brush-encroached trail that was a constant struggle. The one moose we encountered was there and she was happy to see us move on. Weary of the weeds, we traversed right into a beautiful valley system that is found north of Bidarka Peak (3835 feet), where we pitched a late camp around 2700 feet.

The next morning a heavy fog rolled in from the Turnagain Arm side of the pass below us. Shannon captured the above photo below as we were moving up from our camp toward the ridge at 3100 feet overlooking the valley system south of Shaman Dome (4010 feet). We decided at the ridge to abandon our

original goal which was “Teardrop Lake” a mile and a half west of Bird’s Eye Peak (4970 feet). We changed our destination to simply climb over the twin summits listed as Point 3505 on the ridge north of Bidarka. Getting there required some up and down and a lot of traversing. The second summit was well worth the view.

Coming down the northwest ridge of this point was one of the most pleasant ridge hikes I have ever done. Much of it was gentle alpine terrain with no bad gendarmes to bypass. Better yet – the ridge lined us up to connect with the Ship Lake Trail with minimum bushwhacking. The hike to the lake was easy, although the bugs were back at this lower elevation. We got close to the lake before stopping for dinner and a long break around 5 p.m. Whenever we would take a long break, we would put up the core of our Big Agnes tent to act as a bug screen. That worked quite well.

Refreshed after our break, we made the 1,300-foot hike up to Ship Lake Pass, where we could see clouds dripping over the ridge. Much of this hike was done with head nets. We got up the pass in just over an hour and walked into the clouds. Instantly the bugs disappeared and were never a problem again. We wandered down in the mist and set up our tent for the night somewhere along the creek at 3500 feet. We were in the clouds with about 20 yards of visibility all night. Friday morning, we finally walked below the clouds and back to Glen Alps in about 2-½ hours. A shared Uber ride got us home easily and then we drove back to Indian to collect our truck.



## The Ramp (5240 feet), Front Range

Text and photo by Greg Higgins  
September 24, 2023



*The west ridge of The Ramp.*

Shannon and I left the house at the same time around 2 p.m. She was headed to work and I was setting out to hike to Hidden Lake. I packed for snow since it had been raining in Anchorage. I guessed right, because there was new snow on the ridges just below 4000 feet. I pedaled out of Glen Alps around 2:10 in light rain for the overcast trip to the bike rack at the Hidden Lake Trail. It took about 20 minutes to get there. The Powerline Pass Trail had many hikers and there were few parking spaces when I got to Glen Alps. However, by the time I got to the Hidden Lake Trailhead, the crowds had thinned considerably. While locking up my bike, I watched a large black bear high on the north side of Peak Two, probably looking for berries.

It took about an hour and twenty minutes to reach the lake. There were a few other hikers despite the rain and clouds. After taking a break I noticed on the Gaia app there is supposed to be a trail to The Ramp above Hidden Lake that joins its west ridge. I also saw several hikers above me on that trail. The two times I had climbed The Ramp, we went to Ship Lake Pass to its southwest and then ascended the south-facing slopes. My first trip was in 1972 when Loretta and I went to the top under sunny skies on September 10. We went down the west ridge to regain the South Fork of Campbell Creek that way. A week later Dave Williams and I went back up to Hidden Lake and then the end of The Ramp's west ridge to a gendarme that marks the western highpoint before it descends to join the southeast ridge of Hidden Peak (5105 feet). We called it

"Hekla's Knob" after Dave's dog, who enjoyed the new snow on that trip. Eight years later on July 16, 1980, was my last visit to The Ramp on a trip with my mother, Loretta, and Rick O'Kelly who brought his new puppy named Bear. Rick had to carry the puppy a lot on the way back, as he would sit down and refuse to move when he got tired.

I set out for the trail above around 4 p.m., going up the steep eastern slopes above Hidden Lake. New snow began to fall as I continued upward, following the tracks of the hikers I had seen earlier. In an hour I reached the final notched low point where the ridge turned steeply upward. From there the snow increased as I made my way up the final slopes to the summit. I had forgotten how steep and blocky the summit area was and it was a bit tricky in the new snow getting up and down safely. I reached the summit at 6 p.m. in a snowstorm. I spent only seven minutes on top getting into my dry gear and changing my boots for downhill, adding my gaiters, which I had carried in my pack. I went down to the south to reach Ship Lake Pass. From there I retraced the route Shannon and I had used earlier in 2023 on our return from Bidarka Valley. I knew I was going to be short on daylight, so the only break I took was to watch a large black bear running up the hill to the south across the creek. I got back to my bike in a little over two hours. I was just able to cycle out to my car at 8:45 without resorting to my headlamp, which I had remembered this time. Gaia had my trip at 3,000 feet of elevation gain and 12 miles round trip, with 4 of those on the bike.

## Fifty-Five O Five (Peak 5505) Finally, Western Chugach Mountains

Text and photo by Greg Higgins



In 2021 I climbed Peak 4009 [Ed. note: Frank Baker has called that peak Flag Mountain.] to the east of Mount Eklutna (4065 feet). On that trip I looked admiringly at the ridge systems on both sides that lead up to Peak 5505 above the headwaters of Four Mile Creek. I thought of various ways I might climb it. Being older, it seemed prudent to plan on a camp somewhere up the valley. After Shannon and I spent 48 hours wandering around in the Chugach the week before, I wondered if I might be in good enough shape to try it in a single day. August 6 was that day. I guessed that the rainy weather forecast

might work to my advantage to provide cooler conditions for climbing, and that is exactly what happened.

I rode my bike to Four Mile Creek and cached it in the woods. The first obstacle was crossing the creek. I could find no good way that did not involve steep cliffs with overhanging willows. After multiple flogs through the weeds, I decided to just jump into the creek and start out wet. Since one thousand feet of wet brush followed, this was the correct strategy. Making the leap into the creek was psychologically like crossing the Rubicon. I was committed.

Eventually I reached Point 4509, where I was able to dry out some. From there the route played out over about three miles of up and down as I bypassed various high points on the ridge that took me southeast to the summit. I made myself move in ½-hour intervals with breaks after each push. Giving up altitude after various points was painful, especially the 300 feet beyond Point 4996. Having left around 11 a.m., I finally pushed onto the welcome summit around 6:30 p.m. There was a rough cairn there, but nothing else. The summit itself was a lovely table-sized mound covered in soft alpine sedge. Awesome views of Mount Rumble (7530 feet) and the larger peaks up Peters Creek were worth the trip.



Not wanting to go down my up route and then regain altitude, I decided to go down to pick up the Peters Creek Trail where it intersected Ninemile Creek. That meant dropping into the steep bowl off the southwest side of the summit. I woefully misjudged the distance and difficulty, and it took me 2-½ hours to get down to the trail. The last section of side sloping through tall bentgrass, fireweed, and dwarf birch was particularly unpleasant. That put me on the trail at 9:30 p.m. with seven miles of trail to hike in failing light. The first two miles to Sevenmile Creek were miserable, with the trail overgrown and often bogged out. But from Sevenmile Creek the going markedly improved, making it feasible for my goal to reach terra cognita at Four Mile Creek before I completely lost the light. Despite the dark, I was still able to continue hiking all the way back to the trailhead without a headlamp, which I had conveniently forgotten to bring. That meant my bike had to spend the night in the woods, as I could think of no way to ride it out without a headlamp. I got back to the car just after midnight. My GPS unit had my distance at 17.8 miles with about 5,000 feet of vertical up and down.



## Backyard Variations – Hiking Wolverine Peak (4491 feet), Front Range

Text and photo by Greg Higgins

61.1348,  
-149.61414



*Shannon Higgins on the summit of Wolverine Peak, with late season snow in the Front Range.*

Frustrated by the slow arrival of spring conditions, Shannon and I turned our attention to places closer to home that are already accessible. For years driving up O'Malley Road, I have admired the southwest ridge of Rusty Point that dominates the view when driving east. It has also caught my attention on our trips up the Middle Fork of Campbell Creek. We finally set out around noon on May 27 to look at this area more closely. The trail from Glen Alps was mostly free of snow, so reaching the Middle Fork of Campbell Creek was easy. Hiking through this area, we saw many golden-crowned sparrows and occasional hermit thrushes in the brushy area that wraps around the outflow of The Football Field. Two Canada jays also greeted us along Powerline Pass Trail.

Fording the creek became the most difficult problem of the day. We moved well east before finding the right combination of flat water with no deep spots. We carried our boots and pants across the bitterly cold water, happy to reach the far bank quickly. We were well east of the southwest ridge by that time, so we headed directly up the hill. Dozens of Dall sheep watched from above as we made our way upward toward them. They never appeared in distress and let us pass within yards of them. The few clusters of rams we saw never even stood up as we passed. Above the woods the Ranunculus family was well represented with narcissus anemones and subalpine buttercups everywhere. Recently reading Steve Brusatte's [The Rise and Reign of the Mammals](#), I learned that a favorite food of the extinct mammoth was the buttercup, based on stomach remains of intact carcasses. The high-angled meadows gradually funneled into narrower chutes. About 70 minutes after leav-

ing the creek, we were surprised to find ourselves suddenly on the ridge a stone's throw away from the summit of Rusty Point (3590 feet).

We turned to the east and walked the ridge toward Wolverine Peak, getting to the low point in about a ½ hour. My original intention from there was to descend into the high valley that is south of the Wolverine Peak Trail. I wanted to

look for wheatears in the valley, as the terrain looks as if it would be inviting for them. I have seen nesting birds in The Football Field and it seemed logical that they might be found there as well. The wheatears are amazing birds that make their way to Alaska from Africa for their breeding season.

Shannon suggested that because we were so close, we move on to the summit of Wolverine Peak. That became our alternate plan. It took us about 45 minutes to reach the summit. The wind picked up a bit and scattered snow fell at times, so we did not tarry on the summit. We left it just after 5 p.m. We went down the standard trail through much rotten snow on the ridge. There were tracks from hikers earlier in the year that post-holed to thigh level in many spots. One enterprising hiker had thought to bring snowshoes up for this section. Before starting the long downhill slog to the bench below, we stopped and I put on my new compression knee braces. They helped make this section more enjoyable. The lower trail back to the Near Point Trail junction had many sections of mushy snow and mud. We reached the Prospect Heights Trailhead around 8 p.m. In the old days we would have faced the long walk back to our car if hitchhiking failed. Now this problem is easily solved by calling Lyft. Shannon's phone travel app had our journey listed at 12 miles.

## Peak of the Month: The Fin

Text by Steve Gruhn



**Mountain Range:** Alaska Range

**Borough:** Denali Borough

**Drainages:** Northeast Fork of the Yentna Glacier, Northwest Fork of the Lacuna Glacier, and Herron Glacier

**Latitude/Longitude:** 62° 56' 23" North, 151° 31' 19" West

**Elevation:** 13350 (± 50) feet (elevation reported on the USGS' 1958 *Talkeetna (D-4)* quadrangle; however, the USGS' 2014 *Talkeetna D-4 NE* map indicates that the summit is between 13920 and 14040 feet and the Alaska Department of Natural Resources online map indicates the summit is between 13950 and 14000 feet)

**Adjacent Peaks:** Mount Foraker (17400 feet), Bat's Ears Peak (11044 feet), Peak 9550 in the North Fork of the Yentna Glacier and Herron Glacier drainages, and Peak 6930 in the Herron Glacier drainage

**Distinctness:** 590 feet from Mount Foraker (data from the *Talkeetna (D-4)* quadrangle; however, other sources indicate a distinctness of 1200 feet.)

**Prominence:** 590 feet from Mount Foraker (data from the *Talkeetna (D-4)* quadrangle; however, other sources indicate a distinctness of 1200 feet.)

**USGS Maps:** 1:63,360: *Talkeetna (D-4)*, 1:25,000: *Talkeetna D-4 NE*

**First Recorded Ascent:** March 26, 1977, by Earl Redman and Mike Sallee

**Route of First Recorded Ascent:** East ridge

**Access Point:** Purkeypile Airstrip

On July 4, 1934, Carl Anderson, T. Graham Brown, Charlie Houston, and Chychele Waterston set out from the Mount McKinley Park Road (now the Denali Park Road) in the vicinity of Mount Eielson (5802 feet) in support of an attempt to make the first ascent of Mount Foraker (17400 feet). En route they established camps at McKinley Bar on July 4, the Muddy River on July 5, and Birch Creek on July 6. They reached the Foraker River early on the morning of July 8 and camped four miles downstream from the snout of the Foraker Glacier. Later that day the four ascended Spyglass Hill (5960 feet) to aid in their plan to climb Mount Foraker. From the summit of Spyglass Hill, they observed a subsidiary summit on the west ridge of Mount Foraker. Three days later they ascended Scree Peak (8050 feet) to further plan their route up Mount Foraker. From the summit of Scree Peak, they had an unobstructed view of that subsidiary summit, which they deemed "fine and difficult" and called it The Fin. In the ensuing months, Houston and Brown both authored reports of their successful ascent, with Waterston, of Mount Foraker. Houston's reports appeared in his native United States and Brown's in his homeland, the United Kingdom. Houston's reports didn't mention the name of The Fin.

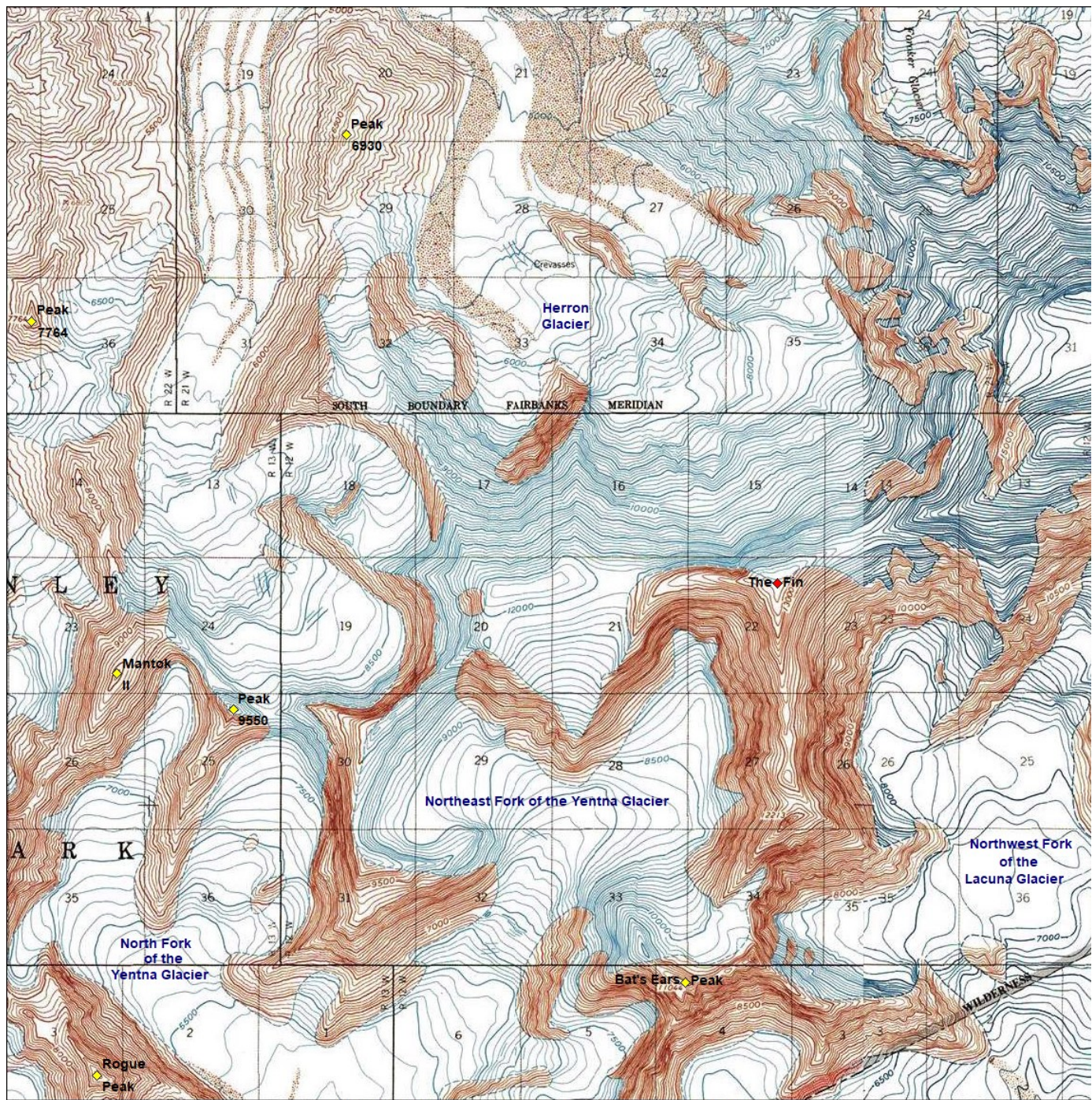
Brown mentioned the name of The Fin in a 1935 report published in Europe, but the American mountaineering public became more familiar with Houston's more readily available account of the trip. Consequently, the moniker fell into the dustbin of history.

The elevation of The Fin has been reported as 13300 feet, 13350 feet, 13800 feet, 13900 feet, 13975 feet, 13980 feet, and 14000 feet. For this article I have used the elevation derived from the USGS' 1958 *Talkeetna (D-4)*, *Alaska*, quadrangle –

*From left: Dave Hawley, Dan Solie, and Mike Sallee near the Swift Fork of the Kuskokwim River west of The Fin. The Fin is on the skyline, above and slightly to the right of Sallee's pack, with the massif of Mount Foraker looming behind it. Denali is at left. Photo by Earl Redman.*







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

13350 feet, half a contour interval above the highest contour depicted on that map.

In 1976 Tim Carpenter, Jerry Croft, Peter Millar, Ralph Moore, Dick Morse, and Jeff Thomas attempted to gain the west ridge of Mount Foraker via its south spur. They reached 13000 feet on the south ridge of The Fin, which guarded Mount Foraker's southwest flank, but a cornice break caused them to lose a pack containing their climbing hardware. This loss, some 300 vertical feet short of the summit of The Fin, prompted the team to retreat.

The following year David Dausel, Dave Hawley, Barb Purdy, Earl Redman, Mike Sallee, and Dan Solie attempted the northwest spur of Mount Foraker's west ridge. Chuck Hawley (Dave's

father) flew Dave Hawley and Purdy from Anchorage to Farewell on March 6, 1977. The same day he flew to McKinley Park (now Denali Park) and picked up Redman, Sallee, and Solie and flew them to Farewell. Also on the same day, Horace Black flew Dausel from Fairbanks to the Purkeypile Airstrip near Boulder Creek north of the Cathedral Mountains, then continued to Farewell, where he picked up Dave Hawley and Purdy, flew them to the Purkeypile Airstrip, and returned to Farewell for the evening. The next day Black flew Redman, Sallee, and Solie to the Purkeypile Airstrip. The team began ferrying loads, skiing up Boulder Creek, and then up the Swift Fork of the Kuskokwim River, over the terminal moraine of the Chedotlothna Glacier, and over a 6980-foot pass to the western fork of the Herron Glacier. They carried the last load of their gear to the western



fork of the Herron Glacier on March 16.

On March 17, 1977, the six-person team ascended a small glacier that flowed to the eastern fork of the Herron Glacier. That evening they dug a snow cave at 8100 feet. The team continued to ferry loads up the ridge, heading southeast. Dave Hawley and Purdy turned around at 9100 feet and the next day decided to quit the expedition and return to the Purkeypile Airstrip. Dausel, Redman, Sallee, and Solie continued on, establishing snow-cave camps at 11000 feet and at 12150 feet about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile after they reached the ridge overlooking the Northeast Fork of the Yentna Glacier. Unaware of the name given The Fin by the 1934 party, the team assigned a descriptive name to the peak to the east. The descriptive name wasn't a fluke ... but then again, it was. Because of its resemblance to the flukes of Mount Foraker's cetacean-like massif, the team referred to The Fin as the Whale's Tail.

On March 23 the four traversed The Fin on its north side, wanting to avoid any unneeded elevation gain, and established a snow-cave camp at 12800 feet near the col between The Fin and Mount Foraker. The next morning, March 24, the lead rope team of Sallee and Redman reached 14400 feet, but despite waiting for 15 minutes, there was no sign of Dausel and Solie. So, wondering if they needed some assistance, Redman and Sallee turned back to see if they could speed things along. Scuff marks and ice axe trenches in the snow, however, revealed the truth that there would be no hurrying the pace – the other rope team had taken a 600-foot fall. Solie had been leading Dausel by a full rope length and had been jerked off his feet when one of Dausel's footsteps in the corn snow had given way. Dausel had immediately gone into a self-arrest position, but Solie's speed after tumbling two full rope lengths had jerked Dausel from his stance. The two had tumbled for 600 feet until coming to rest at a snow-filled bergschrund – the last one before a 4,100-foot drop to the Northwest Fork of the Lacuna Glacier. Both men had sustained broken ankles and broken ribs.

Redman radioed for a helicopter rescue, but a storm was building, which meant that Sallee and he had to dig another snow cave to wait for better weather. A full 48 hours after the fall, Evergreen Helicopters' Bell 205 helicopter arrived on March 26, picked up Dausel and Solie, and whisked them to Anchorage,

Scree—January 2024



*Earl Redman on the summit of The Fin. Photo by Mike Sallee.*

leaving Redman and Sallee alone on the ridge.

Redman and Sallee decided that it was prudent to descend, so they aborted the attempt on Mount Foraker and, wanting to avoid the “nasty side-hilling” they had encountered on their traverse below The Fin, climbed up the east ridge of The Fin into a growing lenticular cloud. They made the first ascent of The Fin after hiking for two hours in the fog. The two continued over the summit and descended the west ridge to their camp at 12150 feet, where they were pinned by a windstorm for three days.

On March 30 the duo resumed their descent in clear weather, but high winds. As they descended, a gust of wind knocked Sallee from his feet. Sallee's rapid sliding down the 40° ice slope pulled Redman from his self-arrest position and both tumbled down the mountain until they landed in a snow-filled crevasse 1,000 feet below where Sallee had initially fallen. The fall had resulted in a

dislocated shoulder, a cracked rib, a sprained ankle, a wrenched knee, and cuts and scrapes. But the two were able to continue their descent to their 8100-foot camp. On April 1 they reached their ski cache and the next evening they reached the Purkeypile Airstrip where Dave Hawley and Purdy greeted them. On April 3 Black arrived on schedule to fly Dave Hawley and Purdy to Farewell to meet Chuck Hawley for a return flight to Anchorage. Black then returned to the Purkeypile Airstrip and flew Redman and Sallee to Otto Lake west of Healy. From there, the two caught rides to return to McKinley Park.

The next month Nancey Goforth, Erik LeRoy, Chris Liddle, and Murray Marvin were flown to the 5300-foot level of the Northeast Fork of the Yentna Glacier. Over the ensuing weeks after landing on May 9, 1977, the four climbed northeast to 10360 feet and, confronted with two kilometers of corniced knife-edged ridge, opted to descend to the 8500-foot level of the Northeast Fork of the Yentna Glacier. From there they ascended a 2,000-foot couloir that consisted of 50° to 55° protectable, hard ice and deposited them just west of The Fin, where they placed their fourth camp. They climbed the west ridge of The Fin using the occasional ice screw for protection, making its second ascent. They placed their fifth camp at 13000 feet east of The Fin and their sixth camp at 16300 feet. On June 15 they departed their sixth camp, climbed to the summit of Mount Foraker, and returned to their camp at 13000 feet. Then

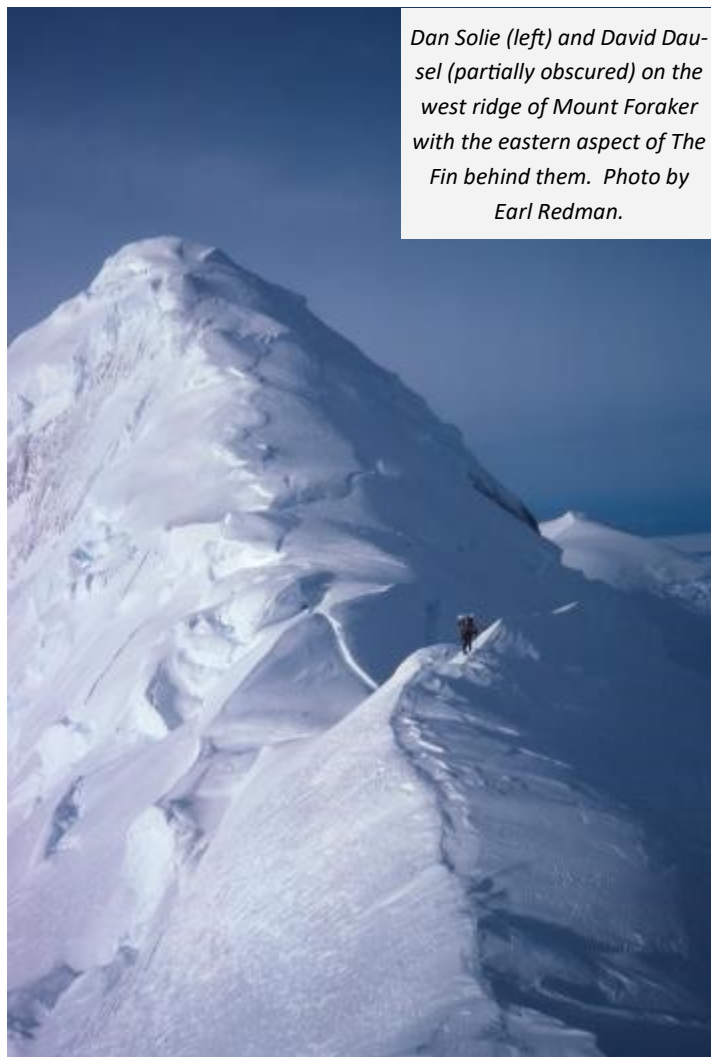


they ascended the east ridge of The Fin, thereby making its third ascent, and descended the west ridge. They returned to their base camp on June 25. In his article in the 1978 *American Alpine Journal*, LeRoy resurrected the name The Fin, after it had resided in history's dustbin for more than four decades.

I don't know of a fourth ascent to the summit of The Fin. However, there have been a couple significant climbs on the southern aspects of The Fin that did not reach the summit.

On April 20, 2007, Paul Roderick dropped off Peter Doucette, Ben Gilmore, and Freddie Wilkinson on the Yentna Glacier outside the Denali Wilderness Area, where aircraft landings are prohibited. The trio skied up the Northeast Fork of the Yentna Glacier to its confluence with the North Fork of the Yentna Glacier, where they established a base camp at about 5200 feet. They then ventured up the North Fork where all three climbed

Mantok I (9330 feet) and Doucette and Wilkinson ascended Rogue Peak (8950 feet). After returning to base camp, the team planned a route to access the glacial basin at the head of the Northeast Fork. Leaving at 3 a.m. on May 3, they alternated skiing and cramponing as they side-hilled along the lower slopes of a steep, avalanche-prone wall northwest of the icefall that drained the basin above. Once above the icefall, the party skied up into the basin, looking for a suitable campsite. There weren't any. So, the three made do by kicking out a ledge for the tent under a steep rock wall some 50 to 100 meters past the bergschrund. As they waited for their early-morning start, spindrift continuously poured onto their tent and rockfall pierced it. They dug out a snow cave and caught five hours of rest. At 6 a.m. on May 4, they launched up the 3,800-foot wall on the southwest aspect of The Fin that the trio called "The Fin Wall," ascending a couloir that led to the crux chimney. As they climbed, a snowstorm began to approach from the south. After 15 hours they crested the west ridge of The Fin at 12900 feet, some 450 feet below the summit. But they would go no higher, as they made the prudent decision to retreat in the face of the approaching storm. The trio downclimbed, made more than 20 rappels over nine hours to reach their snow cave, and after resting for a couple hours, retreated back to their base camp, arriving on May 5, 24 hours after departing the ridge. Wilkinson rated their climb of "The Fin Wall" to the west ridge of The Fin as



*Dan Solie (left) and David Dausel (partially obscured) on the west ridge of Mount Foraker with the eastern aspect of The Fin behind them. Photo by Earl Redman.*

Alaska Grade 6 NEI 5+.

On May 5, 2011, Mark Allen and Graham Zimmerman were flown from Talkeetna to the Kahiltna Glacier base camp. They set out on a three-and-a-half-day ski trip to the Northwest Fork of the Lacuna Glacier to attempt Point 12213, which they called Voyager Peak, on The Fin's south ridge. On May 9 the duo began to ascend the southeast ridge, what they termed the "Lunar Spur," of Voyager Peak. After climbing up to M5 and A12 for a day and a half, weather and snow conditions prompted them to rappel the southeast ridge and southeast buttress of Voyager Peak. The pair rated the 2,500-foot climb as Alaska Grade 4. The team returned to their base camp on the May 11, climbed Mount Hunter on the 14<sup>th</sup>, and set out again on the 20<sup>th</sup> for the Northwest Fork of the Lacuna Glacier, arriving on the 21<sup>st</sup>. On the evening of the 23<sup>rd</sup>, the party departed from the 7500-foot level of the glacier and began ascending the central

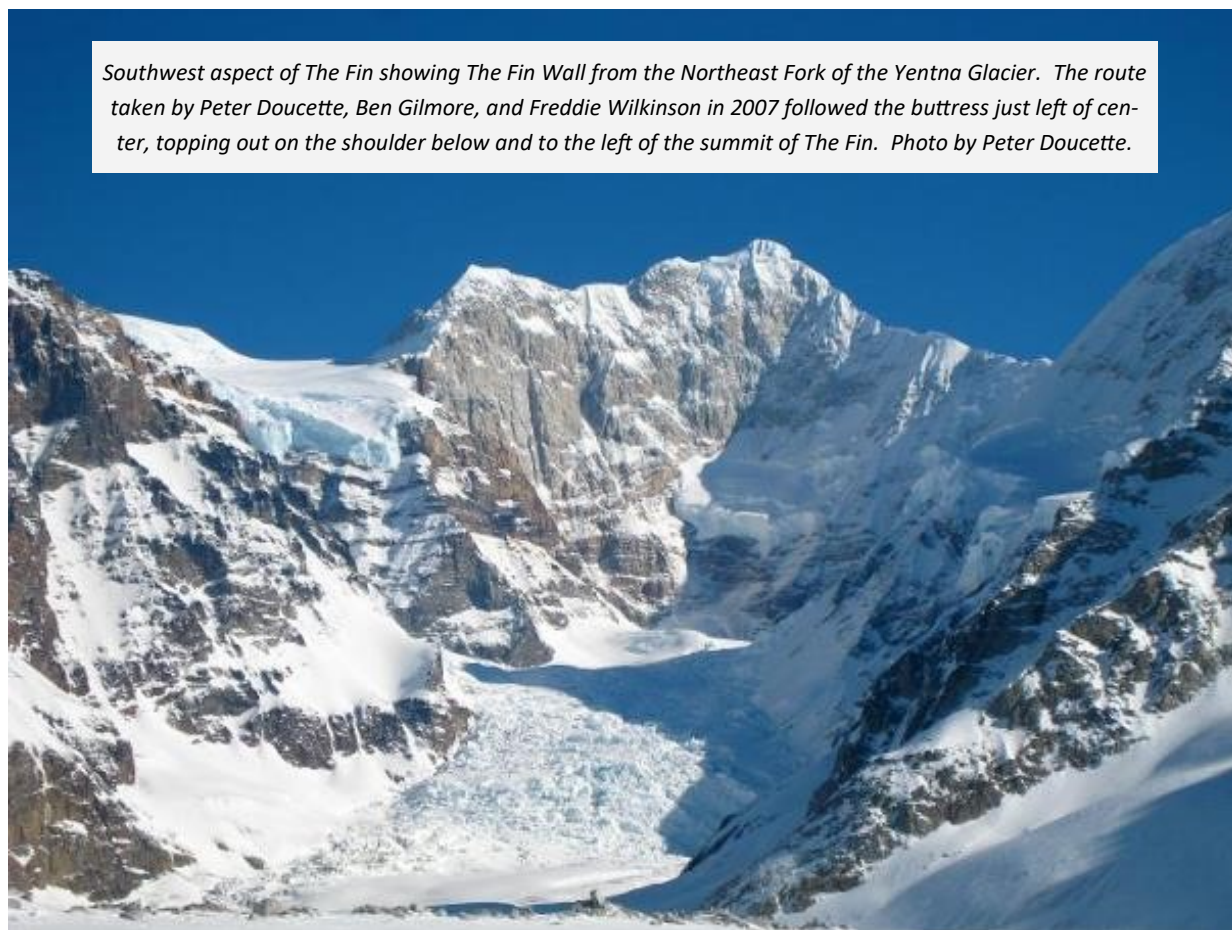
buttress, which they dubbed the "Nebula Arête," of Voyager Peak's south face. The pair reached the same point that they had reached on the 9<sup>th</sup>, but retreated in the face of impending weather, rappelling the same route as they had descended two weeks earlier, and returning to their 7500-foot camp on the night of the 24<sup>th</sup>. The duo rated the 3,500-foot climb as Alaska Grade 5, M6, A12, A1. On the night of the 26<sup>th</sup>, the team began a third attempt, this time heading up the south face's central couloir, left of the "Nebula Arête," reaching the top of Voyager Peak the next morning, and then again rappelling the southeast ridge and southeast buttress to their campsite. They rated their 4,500-foot route, which they called "To the Center," as Alaska Grade 4, A12. They returned to their Kahiltna Glacier base camp on May 28.

The information for this column came from Brown's article titled "Mount Foraker, Alaska. (Denali's Queen.)," which was published on pages 14 through 48 of the May 1935 *Alpine Journal*; from Millar's report titled "Foraker Attempt," which appeared on page 152 of the 1977 *AAJ*; from Redman's trip report titled "There (Sort of) and Back Again," which was published (with only minor differences) in both the August 1977 *Scree* and the September 1977 *Descent*; from LeRoy's article titled "Foraker's Southwest Ridge," which appeared on pages 359 through 365 of the 1978 *AAJ*; from Redman's 2007 "What's that Fool Doing up There?"; from Wilkinson's May 11, 2007,

report titled “Inaccessible, Modern Route on The Fin,” which was published on the *Alpinist* newswire at <https://alpinist.com/newswire/inaccessible-modern-route-on-the-fin/>; from Wilkinson’s October 24, 2007, report titled “Fin Wall Mount Foraker, Alaska,” which appeared on *Climbing*’s website at <https://www.climbing.com/news/fin-wall-mount-foraker-alaska/?scope=anon>; from Wilkinson’s article titled “The Fin Wall,” which appeared on pages 48 through 55 of the 2008 *AAJ*; from a report titled “The Fin, Fin Wall to summit ridge; Rogue Peak, first ascent, northeast face; Mantok I, first ascent, All Talk Couloir,” which appeared on pages 152 and 153 of the 2008 *AAJ*; from Allen’s three blog posts published on May 13, 18, and 31, 2011, and respectively titled “Dispatch one – Lacuna Glacier,” “Dispatch two – Mt. Hunter, West Ridge,” and “Dispatch Three- First Ascent of Peak 12,214 and three routes opened,” available at <https://returnofthejollyroger.blogspot.com/>; from Zimmerman’s trip report titled “Adventure on the Northwest Fork of the Lacuna Glacier,” which was published in the September 2011 *Scree*; from Zimmerman’s 2011 Mount Everest Foundation expedition report titled “Lacuna Foraker Expedition 2011 (11/23);” from Zimmerman’s report titled “Voyager Peak (12,213’), south face, To the Center,” which appeared on pages 120 and 121 of the 2012 *AAJ*; and from my correspondence with Allen, Doucette, Redman, Solie, Wilkinson, and Zimmerman.



*Ben Gilmore on the lower middle section of The Fin Wall on the southwest aspect of The Fin. Photo by Freddie Wilkinson.*



*Southwest aspect of The Fin showing The Fin Wall from the Northeast Fork of the Yentna Glacier. The route taken by Peter Doucette, Ben Gilmore, and Freddie Wilkinson in 2007 followed the buttress just left of center, topping out on the shoulder below and to the left of the summit of The Fin. Photo by Peter Doucette.*



## Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

November 29, 2023, 6:30-8:30 p.m. at 1628 Woodcutter Court, Anchorage

### Roll Call

Peter Taylor (President) – Present  
Rebecca Marks (Vice President) – Present  
Donell Irwin (Secretary) – Present  
Dominick Curtiss (Treasurer) – Present  
Tom McIntyre (Director) – Present

Andrew Holman (Director) – Present  
Matt Nedom (Director) – Present  
G Platt (Director) – Present  
Reux Stearns (Director) – Absent  
Lang Van Dommelen (Director) – Present

Guests in attendance:

Lane Christenson, Jaime Bronga, Gerrit Verbeek, Josh Wilson

Scribe: Donell

### Announcements

- Christmas party December 14th at Onsite Brewing Company 6-8 p.m.
- Thank you Jaime Bronga for being spokesperson for MCA and answering emails.

### Financial Report

- Presentation and discussion of the 2024 budget proposal.
- Discussed the handling of recent donations coming in from YouTube.
- 2024 budget proposal to be presented at January membership meeting.

### General Membership

- We currently have 607 paid members.
- Discussed "family membership" and the possibility of having multiple logins for one family, also looking to clarify the language of what a family membership is.

### Huts

- Window order for Mint Hut is being processed.
- \$20,000 of club funds will be allocated to the Mint Hut project to meet the external grant requirements essential to comply with the Mat-Su Trails & Parks Foundation grant regulations.
- The Mint Hut project will take place on-site between July 22-30, 2024. There will be work parties to paint pieces in Anchorage or the Valley prior to this date.

### Trips\Training

- Update on Rigging International Group crevasse rescue- work in progress
- Discussed Serenity Falls Cabin reservation for February 3-4, 2024, discussed details and planning including recruiting lead climbers, confirming numbers, snowmachine information, Eventbrite, event description. Not for beginner ice climbers.
- Gerrit Verbeek is interested in taking people ice climbing in Eklutna Canyon February 3, 2024.
- Alaska Rock Gym is still a possible option for using the yoga room and meeting room, and will touch base again in January about future possibilities.

### Speaker\Outreach

- Joe Stock will present at the January membership meeting.
- Kathy Still will present at the February membership meeting.

### Advertising

- Discussion on the progress of the paid administrative job description.

### General Discussion

- Discussed the library. Need to continue removing all items from The Hoarding Marmot, find the next home for the library, decide what to do with old materials that are not being used (possibly donate to Anchorage Public Library or American Alpine Club), and invite the club librarian to the next board meeting to discuss options for the library. There are a few people that have offered to donate more items.

- Reviewed and discussed 2023 Strategic Plan
- Although Dominick Curtiss, the MCA Treasurer, is employed as an accountant, he wants it to be clear that he is not being supported or represented by his employer, Clifton Larson Allen, LLP, in any way in regard to his participation with MCA, or his position as MCA treasurer.

#### **Board Votes**

- Voted yes to allocate \$20,000 of club funds to the Mint Hut project to meet the external grant requirements essential to comply with the Mat-Su Trails & Parks Foundation grant regulations.
- Voted yes to authorize Gerrit Verbeek for ice-climbing training on February 3.
- Voted yes to adopt the 2024 budget proposal to be presented at the January membership meeting.

#### **Action Items**

- Matt Nedom to begin checking the PO box at the post office.
- Dominick Curtiss to transfer money from YouTube donations into Mint Hut account.
- Jaime Bronga to send thank you emails to YouTube donors.
- Lang Van Dommelen will check with Alaska Rock Gym again in January.

#### **Previous/Upcoming Agenda**

- Library
- Paid position
- Strategic plan
- Discuss Valdez chapter

#### **Time and Location of next Meeting**

- Christmas party December 14, 2023, at Onsite Brewing Company from 6-8 p.m.
- January Membership Meeting Wednesday, January 10, 2024, at the BP Energy Center from 6-8 p.m.
- December/January Board Meeting Wednesday, January 17th, at 6:30-8:30 p.m., location to be determined

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### **Notes on the Proposed 2024 Budget**

The proposed 2024 budget is drafted as business as usual, but includes recognition of Mint-Hut-expansion costs and associated grant income.

Hut-maintenance costs have been prepared by the Huts Committee and recognize the current realities of servicing and maintaining our hut network.

*Scree* costs recognize current printing costs. *Scree* subscriptions are at zero, pending further investigation of accounting for this minor income stream.

Membership income has been conservatively projected, due to dues-to-date for 2023 coming in lower than projected. Further analysis could see changes in this income line.

Training income and expenses are subject to further adjustment as we await analysis of IceFest financials and plans for 2024.

There will be a vote to approve the Proposed 2024 Budget at the January 10 general membership meeting.



## Proposed 2024 Budget

	Proposed 2024 Budget	2023 through 11/12/23	2023 Budget	2022 Actual	2021 Actual	2020 Actual	2019 Actual
<b>Income</b>							
Donations	\$1,500	\$4	\$1,500	\$7,103	\$17,200	\$7,175	\$455
Events	\$1,200	\$2,673	\$1,200				
Interest Income	\$120	\$206	\$204	\$350	\$0	\$196	\$0
Membership dues	\$18,000	\$15,436	\$20,004	\$18,979	\$15,019	\$16,581	\$15,608
MCA products	\$300		\$300	\$0	\$0	\$706	\$710
Photo calendar	\$3,000	\$587	\$3,000	\$3,336	\$1,419	\$2,820	\$2,423
Scree subscriptions	\$0	\$0	\$504	\$0	\$0	\$270	\$225
Training income	\$3,000	\$3,777	\$3,000	\$2,625	\$3,239	\$0	\$5,086
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$27,120</b>	<b>\$22,684</b>	<b>\$29,412</b>	<b>\$32,394</b>	<b>\$36,877</b>	<b>\$27,748</b>	<b>\$24,507</b>
<b>Less Cost of Sales</b>							
MCA Products expense	\$300	\$0	\$300	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$300
Photo calendar expense	\$2,500	\$2,064	\$2,004	\$2,090	\$74	\$1,275	\$1,530
<b>Total Cost of Sales</b>	<b>\$2,800</b>	<b>\$2,064</b>	<b>\$2,304</b>	<b>\$2,090</b>	<b>\$74</b>	<b>\$1,275</b>	<b>\$1,830</b>
<b>Gross Profit</b>	<b>\$24,320</b>	<b>\$20,620</b>	<b>\$27,108</b>	<b>\$30,304</b>	<b>\$36,803</b>	<b>\$26,473</b>	<b>\$22,677</b>
<b>Less Operating Expenses</b>							
Administrative	\$2,500	\$1,587	\$2,496	\$1,302	\$1,197	\$684	\$579
Awards	\$350	\$0	\$348	\$0	\$149	\$0	\$0
Club equipment	\$650	\$552	\$648	\$662	\$519	\$561	\$480
Event expense	\$600	\$1,760					
General Meeting	\$2,900	\$299	\$3,504	\$100	\$481	\$941	\$43
Hut maintenance	\$7,550	\$3,246	\$3,000	\$13,209	\$23,384	\$19,704	\$3,176
Insurance	\$1,200	\$0	\$1,116	\$0	\$30	\$0	\$100
Library	\$100	\$0	\$72	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Scree	\$3,780	\$1,719	\$2,496	\$2,768	\$1,877	\$1,988	\$1,240
Training expenses	\$5,000	\$2,688	\$5,004	\$2,152	\$2,606	\$80	\$3,702
<b>Total Operating Expenses</b>	<b>\$24,630</b>	<b>\$11,851</b>	<b>\$18,684</b>	<b>\$20,192</b>	<b>\$30,242</b>	<b>\$23,958</b>	<b>\$9,319</b>
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$24,630</b>	<b>\$11,851</b>	<b>\$18,684</b>	<b>\$20,192</b>	<b>\$30,242</b>	<b>\$23,958</b>	<b>\$9,319</b>
<b>Net Surplus/Deficit</b>	<b>-\$310</b>		<b>\$8,424</b>	<b>\$10,111</b>	<b>\$6,560</b>	<b>\$2,514</b>	<b>\$13,358</b>
<b>Reserve</b>							
Bank accounts 11/11/23	\$78,956						
Grant pledged 2023	\$60,000						
<b>Capital expenditure</b>							
Mint hut expansion	-\$80,000						
Net Surplus/Deficit from operations	-\$310						
<b>Budgeted Net reserve 12/31/24</b>	<b>\$58,646</b>						

# Mountaineering Club of Alaska

President Peter Taylor [president@mtnclubak.org](mailto:president@mtnclubak.org)  
Vice-President Rebecca Marks [vicepresident@mtnclubak.org](mailto:vicepresident@mtnclubak.org)  
Secretary Donell Irwin [secretary@mtnclubak.org](mailto:secretary@mtnclubak.org)  
Treasurer Dominick Curtiss [treasurer@mtnclubak.org](mailto:treasurer@mtnclubak.org)  
Director 1 (term expires in 2025) Reux Stearns [board@mtnclubak.org](mailto:board@mtnclubak.org)  
Director 2 (term expires in 2025) Lang Van Dommelen [board@mtnclubak.org](mailto:board@mtnclubak.org)  
Director 3 (term expires in 2025) G Platte [board@mtnclubak.org](mailto:board@mtnclubak.org)  
Director 4 (term expires in 2024) Andrew Holman [board@mtnclubak.org](mailto:board@mtnclubak.org)  
Director 5 (term expires in 2024) Matt Nedom [board@mtnclubak.org](mailto:board@mtnclubak.org)  
Director 6 (term expires in 2024) Tom McIntyre [board@mtnclubak.org](mailto:board@mtnclubak.org)

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*. Captions should accompany all submitted photos.

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: Annie Shane—[membership@mtnclubak.org](mailto:membership@mtnclubak.org)  
Hiking and Climbing Committee: *Vacant*—[training@mtnclubak.org](mailto:training@mtnclubak.org)  
Huts: Scott Parmelee—[huts@mtnclubak.org](mailto:huts@mtnclubak.org)  
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Find MCAK listserv at <https://groups.io/g/MCAK>.

*The terminus of the Columbia Glacier as viewed from Great Nunatak. At lower left, the piece of land jutting out in front of the glacier was covered by ice as recently as 2020. Photo by Westen Groh*

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