

the SCREE

Mountaineering Club of Alaska

FEBRUARY 2023

Volume 66, Number 2

"Evenings spent in a mountain hut are among the most sublime and intense that life holds."

-Primo Levi,
Bear Meat (tr. Alessandra Bastagli)



General Meeting
Thursday, March 2, 2023,
6:00 to 8:00 p.m. at the BP Energy Center
Presentation: Paragliding with
Bryan Friedrichs and Nate McClure

Contents:

Chititu Drainage, Saint Elias Mountains

Montague Island Traverse Attempt

Sentry Spire and Troublemint Peak, Talkeetna Mountains

Peak of the Month: Mount Marcus Baker (North Summit)

...plus memories and maintenance...



"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

Sophie Tidler in the south couloir of East Pyramid Peak, Saint Elias Mountains. See p. 5 for story.
Photo by Shane Ohms.

GENERAL MEETING

Thursday, March 2, 2023, from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. at the [B.P. Energy Center](#) 1014 Energy Ct, Anchorage, AK 99508.

Presentations:

Bryan Friedrichs and Nate McClure will discuss backcountry paragliding:

"We (Bryan and Nate) aim to provide an overview of recent adventure paragliding activity in Southcentral Alaska. In particular, where paragliders can be used as a tool to access, descend, and explore our local mountain ranges. We'll focus on a couple of flights carried out by members of the local community in a selection of different paragliding disciplines, and give a brief introduction into how one might get started in the sport, and the future possibilities opened up by modern gear."

To join by Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83674706360?pwd=VUY4VElyVEpqc2xmN29BbG1OKzR3dz09>

Mount Cerberus is Now Mount Young

Text by Steve Gruhn

On January 5, President Joe Biden signed the Don Young Recognition Act, which, among other things, tasked the U.S. Board on Geographic Names with changing the name of 2650-foot Mount Cerberus on Semisopchnoi Island to Mount Young in order to commemorate the late U.S. Representative Don Young, who died on March 18. On January 11 the U.S. BGN formally completed the name change.

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



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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.



Upcoming Events

Breaking Trail: Mountains and Molecules

The Mountaineering Club of Alaska and the Bear Tooth are proud to bring Arlene Blum to Alaska!

Among many lifetime accomplishments, Arlene was part of the first all-women expedition to summit Denali in 1970 and led the first group of Americans to climb Annapurna in 1978 (all women as well). She also has a successful career as a scientist and advocate, and her presentation will blend highlights from all of those passions. The presentation is described as follows:

“Arlene Blum, biophysical chemist, author, and mountaineer has led successful expeditions to some of the world’s most challenging mountains as well as scientific research to protect human health and the global environment. Blum shares her favorite images and dramatic stories from her memoir, *Breaking Trail: A Climbing Life*, illustrating her climbs of remote and beautiful high peaks and her scientific research and policy work with the Green Science Policy Institute to reduce the use of harmful chemicals.”

Please visit the [Bear Tooth website](#) for tickets.

This is an example of funded by the Giving Tuesday fundraiser. The board is offering complimentary tickets to the top donors in gratitude.



Snow Safety Pint Night March 23rd, 2023

6 p.m. at Double Shovel Cider Co.
502 W 58th Ave C, Anchorage, AK 99518

With Backcountry Hunters and Anglers. Join for a discussion of the importance of avalanche awareness when recreating in the backcountry on foot or on snowmachine, and a discussion of the necessary gear, plus resources and places to seek training. Thanks to Heather Johnson (MCA) and James Majetich (BHA) for organizing.

Eklutna Traverse April 10-17, 2023

Glacier travel. Must have appropriate experience with glacier travel and attended Avy 1 training. 8 participants maximum. Trip leader Greg Bragiel, unknownhiker@alaska.net

Call for Volunteers

Everything the MCA provides is built by a team of volunteers. We're currently seeking new folks for these roles:

Vice President: responsible for organizing speakers at each general monthly meeting, and other events. If you have a wide circle of cool friends, or want a great excuse to email anyone who has a cool story to share, this could be for you.

Webmaster: responsible for administering website content and member accounts via Squarespace and Memberspace.

Trips and Training: We welcome volunteers who can lead trips or training opportunities from several hours to several days. Whatever skillset you have, if you are interested in sharing it, someone would love to learn.

If you volunteer, your very own trip could appear in this next section...

Ship Creek Trail ('Arctic to Indian') Maintenance Trip

January 21, 2023

Text by Greg Bragiel



The Mountaineering Club of Alaska has maintained the north end of the Indian to Arctic trail for many years. Stuart Grenier first took me on this maintenance trip MANY years ago. We have teamed up with numerous members over the years to keep the northern five miles of this trail open for skiers traveling the traverse. Traditionally this has been an overnight adventure due to unknown trail conditions. It is typically a very cold trip; cold air from Indian Creek Pass flows downhill. Mother Nature takes over quickly and grows plenty of obstacles to catch ski poles, slap a skier in the face or make us remove skis to crawl under. Most times we clear trail to the beaver ponds at mile five before setting up camp. There have been trips where we only made it to where the trail meets the creek.

This year was a day trip for seven team members that cleared trail with saws, loppers and a chain saw, making it only to the border of JBER and Chugach State Park. Many thanks to Bill Posanka, Luke Grabarek, Caedmon Johnson, Sahara Iverson, Natalie Sears, Valentina Sears for your hard work.

Skiers, we hope you enjoy the trip!



Top Left: Natalie Sears (L) and Valentia Sears (R). Photo by Greg Bragiel;
Right Column, Top to Bottom: (1) Greg Bragiel, photo by Bill Posanka;
(2) Sahara Iverson and Bill Posanka. Photo by Greg Bragiel;
(3) Luke Grabarek. Photo by Bill Posanka;
(4) Caedmon Johnson. Photo by Bill Posanka.

East Pyramid Peak (8910'), Peak 6435, and Mount Holmes (7720'), Saint Elias Mountains

Text and Photos by Shane Ohms



Top: (From left to right) Calamity Point, Andrus Peak, Goodman Peak, Mount Holmes.

Bottom: Views from Mount Holmes, looking southeast.



How it all began:

At the elevation of ~4800' on some ridgeline between Tok and Glennallen, I had made camp at an odd occurrence of cell reception. With a company dipnetting trip in Chitina coming up in a few days I was already hoping to skew the following weekend plans toward something in McCarthy (gas prices were high in 2022 and I wanted to capitalize on my already being in the Copper River Basin). After checking the weather forecast and sentinel imaging, it was looking very promising for a bigger trip I had bookmarked and had been waiting on the right conditions for two years. I checked charter flight availability and texted solicitations to a few hardy friends who might have free enough schedules for a sporadic trip. After doing a circuit of peaks, I returned to my cell/internet service campsite and got a "yes" out of Sophie Tidler. I locked in our flights to/from the May Creek Landing Strip that night. My phone died the next morning, but everything was already in motion for Peak 8910 (also called East Pyramid Peak, and described in the 1988 American Alpine Journal report of its first ascent by Danny Kost).

(See <http://publications.americanalpineclub.org/articles/12198812301/North-America-United-States-Alaska-Pyramid-Peak-Saint-Elias-Mountains>).

On June 23rd, 2022, Shane Ohms and Sophia Tidler were dropped off at the May Creek landing strip with intent to climb over 'Rex Pass' (east of the Rex Glacier) and climb Peak 8910. On the first day (3 hours) we walked the 'road' to Chititu. It was from 2pm-5pm in the full heat of the day, but mosquitoes were so bad we had to wear our long sleeve rain gear and gloves. A hard and fast rain shower drenched us and forced us to pitch our tent (for mosquito protection) in the one building at Chititu still standing: the horse stable. It smelt of piss and a porcupine kept crawling back into the opposing corner of the stable despite our attempts to deter it. The bugs were so bad I refused to drink water for 12 hours so that I wouldn't have to go outside and pee.

On day 2 we pushed over Rex Pass. The first 3-4 miles up Rex Creek were actually hard travel, frequently having to bushwhack out and back onto the creek bed. With lower water flows, criss-crossing would be a more viable option for upstream travel. After 3-4 miles, we went high to an old rock glacier tongue and were done with the bushwhacking (for now), but we still wore rain coats and gloves in the hot summer sun because mosquitos. The views from Rex Pass were phenomenal. On the east side we made camp on a tributary of Young Creek and enjoyed a bugless night.

On day 3 we awoke early and wrapped into Peak 8910's south bowl (with the glacier). The route taken was a skinny, steep, but consistent, snow gully that went 2000' up to the southwest ridge. The snow was often hard and we sometimes had to be in the runnel funnel because the gully was so tight. The final 500' on the southwest ridge was rock and we took off our crampons. The summit was simple, and (by water bottle level) higher than the two points to the east. Also higher (obviously) than the separate 8875' spire to the west and which is its own individual peak [Ed. Note: Pyramid Peak]. On the descent, the hard snow was now soft and supersaturated. About an hour after getting off the mountain, we got caught in another brief rain going back to the tent, where we napped till it had passed. We awoke for the second half of the day and regained Rex Pass. The rock glacier wasn't the easiest walking so we instead walked the ridge to Peak 6435, camping a few hundred feet west below the summit on its ridge.

In the morning (day 4 now), we saw our first animal of the entire trip [besides the porcupine]; a ram, silhouetted on Peak 6435 above us. We broke camp and descended. To avoid a second bout with Rex Creek, we instead went up a ridge that put us on the main west ridge of Mount Holmes at 5700'. From here we hiked the west ridge to the summit, which had great views. We then returned to our packs and took a nap 'til 8:30 p.m. We waited until nighttime to do the 'shwacking because mosquitoes necessitated rain coats and gloves, and wearing those things in the heat of the day would be unbearable. The 'shwack down to Chititu Camp was very, very thick. It was so bad that it made Chititu 'road' easy to stay on.

We arrived back at May Creek airstrip around 2 a.m., June 27th 2022... Sophie has two last comments: "Curse the road to Chititu!" + It was a terrible place to spend her birthday. Although, I might add; at least in not the worst of company."

A full and detailed write-up can be found at:
fromrockstorivers.com/2023/01/06/our-days-in-chititu/



Above: (1) Chititu horse stable;
 (2) Sophie Tidler and the views from Rex Pass.
 Below: In the south couloir of Peak 8910.



Montague Island Traverse Attempt

Text and Photos by Miles Knotek



Ben Americus traveling along the ridge.

Montague Island has long been a place that has lived large in my mind. For 30 consecutive years from 1988 to 2018, my father flew to San Juan Bay in the fall to harvest deer. I grew up fed by Montague. I joined him in 2009 and was able to experience the rugged beauty of the island helping him to provide meat for our family. Fast forward 13 years and I'm landing on the beach in San Juan Bay again.

I teamed up with Ben Americus from Cordova. The plan was to fly from Cordova and be dropped off by Cessna on the beach at San Juan Bay. We would then work our way north following the 60-mile spine of mountains that forms the crest of Montague Island. We would then drop down into Zaikof Bay at the northernmost point of the island to be picked up by floatplane. We took off from Cordova on July 31st. As we flew down to San Juan, we followed our route and marveled at its beauty. We had never seen such a long and continuous ridge all above treeline for so long. We took pictures and tried to make mental notes of potential cruxes along the route.

After landing in San Juan Bay, we followed the trail to the Forest Service cabin. I enjoyed flipping through the log, reading my father's entries dating back to the early 2000s. I even found my

2009 entry written in my scrawling script. From there, we pointed north to the ridge visible above stands of hemlock and spruce. After grunting through chin-deep ferns, overhead salmonberries and exceptionally slippery and steep grass slopes, we made it to treeline at the southernmost end of the ridge. The sky was blue and a marine layer rolled into the valley of San Juan Bay below us. We pointed ourselves north. The route from here on out was simple in concept: don't stray from the ridge and keep walking north.

We bumped along the ridge and in and out of bowls to avoid hemlock thickets blanketing the ridge at this lower elevation. Deer spooked seemingly around every corner and we marveled at their agility through rock bands and steep slopes. I lost count of deer sightings after 40 or 50 and we probably saw 150+ during our trip. As we continued north, the ridge trended higher in elevation and the hemlock gave way to open tundra - but tundra that did not resemble anything in Southcentral that I was used to. It more closely resembled a bog with shin deep sphagnum moss and deer cabbage with the occasional puddle or pond clinging to a rocky shelf. Even without any precipitation, we were soaked from the shins down.

We paused and made note atop Peak 2220. This peak marked the end of San Juan Bay and had the best view of our route to the north. After 6 hours on the move, the enormity of the task ahead started to dawn on us. We were averaging about a mile an hour with packs for a week, and slow terrain that varied between ankle rolling tundra and scree. It was at this point that I felt a bit daunted by how far we had to go.

We pushed on until about 10 p.m. when we made camp next to a puddle in a saddle above Tortuous Creek overlooking Jeannie Cove. Overlooking the expanse of the Pacific, it was undoubtedly the most beautiful campsite I've ever had. We knew that the next day we had the potential for some clouds and light rain to come in, so we settled in and planned to get up early to resume the next day.

I was awoken sometime in the early morning by the fabric of the tent pressing on my face. The weather had arrived and was fiercer than expected. As our foolishly windward location of our camp was buffeted by wind and rain, we made the easy decision to take a weather day. Ben caught up on sleep after a stressful move from Oregon back to Alaska the week prior and I read Doug Peacock's "Grizzly Years." Perhaps not the best choice considering Montague's notoriety with large brown bears. The weather worsened as we tried to fashion trekking poles into extra tent support and resorted to bailing out rain with a gallon Ziploc. Ben's tent was too short for me and I was forced to remain in a half fetal position. I was struck by a very intense feeling of vulnerability as we traded turns propping up the tent with our arms. There would be no walking out to the road to bail. We would just have to wait it out.

After 32 hours in the tent, the sky turned blue again and we emerged from our sopping tent. Ben told me a story of a friend who's father told her a childhood fib that in Cordova the sky's color is naturally gray and that it's the blue that blows in. It certainly felt that way. We packed up, strapping soaked sleeping bags, tents and clothes to the outsides of our packs and continued north under clear skies.

The geology of the ridge changed rapidly to be more narrow, rugged and rocky. We crested our two highest points of the trip thus far: Peaks 2673 and 2690 that both had incredible views of Prince William Sound, the Kenai Peninsula, and Chugach Mountains. Groups of deer followed the ridge in front of us, framed by the high peaks of the Chugach in the background. For a land dweller such as myself, it was such a unique experience to be hiking in the alpine with the ocean on both sides. The terrain became more challenging with short steep sections of what we called "tundraneering" and exceptionally loose sections of scree. We walked along sections the width of our shoes as the

slopes fell away to either side. A+ ridge walking in my book.

As we checked the weather on the inReach, we saw that we had about 48 hours until another even larger storm system was forecasted to arrive. We messaged our pilot to arrange a pickup the following night. He flies both fixed wing and heli, so we planned to hike as far as we could, before a heli pick up the next night wherever we ended with a decent LZ. We continued on bolstered knowing we had to make the most of our last day and a half. We were quickly greeted with bad news: we had to be picked up tonight. Due to the incoming weather and having to get other groups out, he had to get us tonight. Disappointed, yet understanding, we made a plan to hike as far as possible before a late evening pickup.

We pushed on before reaching a point roughly above the headwaters of the Patton River that continuing on would have meant moving into more technical and rocky terrain not conducive to a heli landing. So we called it there, already 12 hours of hiking into the day. We found a beautiful landing spot on a moraine above the headwaters of Hanning Bay and made dinner while we waited for Steve from Ridgeline Aviation to pick us up.

We lifted off around 10 pm and followed the ridge north back to Cordova. Painted in reds and golds of the last light, I felt overcome with how beautiful Montague is and also with the realization of how much farther we had to go. Now after one of the wettest summers on record, I feel very fortunate that we made it out there at all. With only 2 days of walking, we estimated we made it about 30% of our intended route. It would require a full week of perfect weather to complete, given our pace. We both agreed that we learned more on this trip than any other we had taken before. We are already planning how to get back there and how we would do the trip differently. Top of the list is a better tent!



Aerial view of our intended route.



More photos while the sun was shining.



Sentry Spire (6050 feet) and Troublemint Peak (6850 feet), Talkeetna Mountains

Text and Photos by Martin Ksok



Left: Marcin on Troublemint. Photo by Peter Taylor.



Right: Peter pinching Sentry Spire. Photo by Kazumi Ishibashi.

Over the last few summers I have been making forays into the Mint area, slowly climbing the surrounding peaks. For the following objectives I was joined by Peter Taylor, with whom I've had the pleasure of spending more and more time in the mountains.

Sentry Spire was a short scramble with a long approach. We were accompanied to the Mint Hut by his wife Kazumi. After a night in a full hut Peter and I trudged to the col between Sentry and Troublemint Spire; the crux was now behind us. We roped up for the scramble as it starts with a steep step, which was at the time covered in wet, black lichen and dirt.

Immediately the angle eases off and presents an easy but vegetated slab, and at the end of the fifty meter rope a steeper crack provides an opportunity for a good anchor. To finish we ascended the crack for a second pitch and the summit. I think we made two rappels, mostly due to the tricky, wet rock. The unsightliness and dubious necessity of the last one bugged me so much that when we returned for Troublemint in a few weeks and the rock was dry I reclinced the initial step and retrieved the anchor.

For Troublemint we followed a similar strategy, spending two nights at the hut, although we had it to ourselves this time. Start time was also earlier in anticipation for a long day, which didn't truly materialize since we were back in eight hours or so. We climbed the Southeast Ridge which seems to be the line of most ascents nowadays. The Linear Accelerator gully might be falling out of favor being a snow/ice/rock route. Once one reaches the col the ridge route is a fine way for attaining the summit. It varies between various angles of scrambling and a possibility of airy slab moves if chosen. It is fairly easy to follow. Sticking to the ridge we arrived at a fun, narrow section with lots of exposure but low angle, which deposited us on a catwalk around the right side of a gendarme. More scrambling, grassy blocks and steps brought us to the east side of the summit block, which I knew to be the easier way up, and it is quite easy compared to the slabby, featureless west aspect. Protectable cracks led the way to the top of the peak where I built an awkward anchor for belaying Peter. The tiny summit is the icing on the cake here, it tests one's ability to find comfort in exposed environments. I cleaned up the rat's nest anchor and left one solid nut for retreating. I don't recall the actual number of rappels, maybe three, and we did a lot of ropeless down-climbing over now familiar terrain on the return to the col. We spent another night in the hut in a celebratory mood before a hike/bike return.

Memories of the 1959 Marcus Baker Expedition

Text by Gregg Erickson

"The palest ink is better than the best memory"

From Proverbs and Common Sayings from the Chinese,
Arthur H. Smith, ed. (1914)

When I was invited to join this mind-blowing expedition, I counted it as a major life event of my 18 years. I was the novice in our party of four. The others:

- Paul Crews [Sr.] was an Anchorage mechanical engineer and the owner of a successful consulting business. As I described in the September 2017 *Scree*, Paul was my mountaineering mentor.
- Helga Bading (now Helga Byhre), was the smallest in our party, weighing maybe a little over 100 lbs. Only a few years older than I, but an experienced climber, she was also one of my climbing mentors. She and her husband emigrated from Germany and ran a successful fur business in Anchorage.
- Hans Metz, the oldest in our party, was an experienced European mountain guide, and now a well-regarded Anchorage ski instructor. He suffered cold injuries during the Wehrmacht's invasion of the Soviet Union that left him with an aversion to drinking cold water and a susceptibility to frozen toes.

Looking back today, 63 years later, I am amazed at how little I remember of the adventure, but a few vivid recollections survived.

77 Pounds

The most enduring of my memories is the size and weight of my packsack. This was long before the era of freeze-dried edibles and super lightweight climbing gear. My crampons were welded chunks of Austrian iron that must have weighed a pound each, my rope a hefty piece of nylon with a magnetic attraction to dirt and water. The food for what would be a week or more on the mountain was mostly noodles, beans, sugar, and oatmeal. Nuts, some dried fruit, a sausage, a little chocolate, and cheese provided treats.

The night before we were to drive to our drop off point on the Glenn Highway, Dad, who had helped load my pack, wanted to know the weight I would be carrying. We noted my weight on our bathroom scale. Then Dad helped me don my pack. By subtraction, the pack weighed 77 lbs. My pilot's license issued a year later, which I still have, says I weighed 155 lbs.

Crevasses

We awoke on the fourth day of our trek with tent walls sagging under nine inches of new snow. In her account of our climb published in *the Scree* [Ed. Note: September 1959] Helga wrote:

"[But] at 7 a.m. I felt a ray of warmth. Within seconds I was out of the tent ... shaking powder snow off me like a poodle. ... The world around us shown like diamonds. One by one the mountains around us unveiled. In their new snowy robes, they seemed to rise vertically from the glacier

bottom. Even Gregg (the sleeper) emerged from the tent to see what all the 'ah's' and 'oh's' about and he exclaimed, 'Where else but in the Himalayas can you find such a sight.'"

I vaguely recall that spectacular scene, but what I remember clearly is how the new snow concealed the myriad of small crevasses. Hans did most of the trailbreaking. Despite his skill and careful probing, he often dropped into a crevasse, usually and fortunately just a leg or two. When the front climber stepped into a crevasse the other climber on the rope (we roped 2 and 2) would fall on his/her ice axe. It was slow going, and I was tense with the effort to stay focused on Helga's every step at the forward end of my rope while still trying to place each step in the posthole footprints of those ahead.

Those behind would occasionally go down anyway. Twice that day my leg broke through the snow and I found myself up to my crotch or waist in the powder, with one or two legs waving in the abyss below. Lifting my body and the cumbersome backpack to a standing position without sliding back into the crevasse was not easy.

Willow Wands

Visibility was terrible as we made the final push toward what we thought was the summit. As the ridge we were following leveled out, we were often in fog. When not in the fog, the light was flat, and dark clouds lay above and below. I noticed the blowing snow was obliterating our tracks behind us and was concerned. For just this eventuality we had humped a bundle of willow wands 45 miles up the Matanuska Glacier. Paul was now pushing the sticks into the snow every couple of rope lengths to guide our return. But what about the route before we started marking our path? The wind had started suddenly and was probably obscuring that earlier trail as well.

As I passed one of the sticks I watched as a gust toppled it. I reinserted it.

On top of that, Paul ran out of wands as we headed up what turned out to be the last few hundred feet to the north summit.

Looking back on that moment on the summit, I guess I just assumed that Paul and Hans knew what they were doing. Amidst the roar of the wind, and with everyone gasping in the thin air, there was no easy way to communicate my concern anyway.

We lingered only a minute or two. Perhaps others were as apprehensive as I about finding our way down from this massive wind-swept, fog-shrouded plateau. We were certainly cold; Hans told me later that on the summit he lost feeling in his toes, which he believed were starting to freeze.

In the end, Paul and Hans, using compass bearings and guided by the wands that remained upright, led us down safely. I guess they did know what they were doing. Or maybe we were just lucky. Probably both.

Peak of the Month: North Peak of Mount Marcus Baker (12360 feet), Chugach Mountains

Text by Steve Gruhn

Mountain Range: Central Chugach Mountains

Borough: Matanuska-Susitna Borough

Adjacent Pass: M & M Pass

Latitude/Longitude: 61° 28' 16"

North, 147° 43' 16" West

Elevation: 12360 feet

Adjacent Peaks: Middle Summit of Mount Marcus Baker (12820 feet) and Icing Peak (10955 feet)

Distinctness: 740 feet from the Middle Summit of Mount Marcus Baker

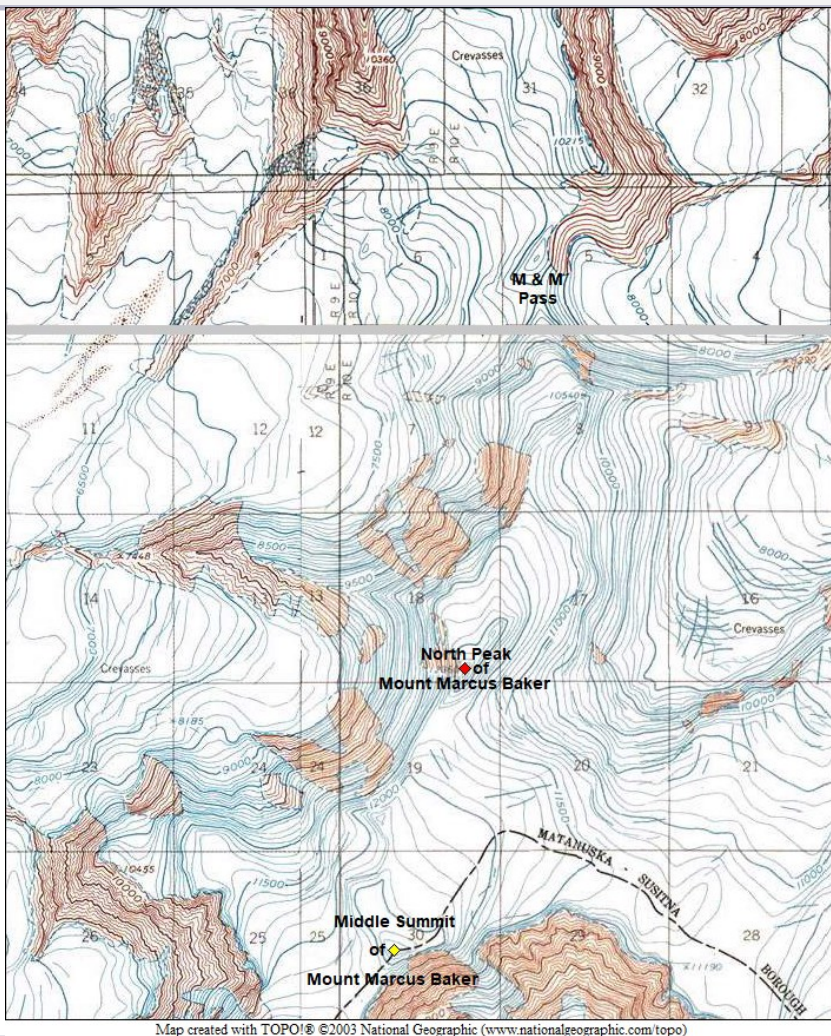
Prominence: 740 feet from the Middle Summit of Mount Marcus Baker

USGS Maps: 1:63,360: Anchorage (B-2), 1:25:000: Anchorage B-2 NW

First Recorded Ascent: June 19, 1938, by Norman Bright, Norman Dyhrenfurth, Peter Gabriel, and Henry Bradford Washburn Jr.

Route of First Recorded Ascent: North ridge

Access Point: 5300-foot level of the West Fork of the Matanuska Glacier



In 1916 James Warren Bagley named the 13176-foot highest peak in the Chugach Mountains Mount Saint Agnes in honor of his wife, the former Agnes Stevens. In March 1959 Bradford Washburn related a story to Francis P. Farquhar that Bagley added the "Saint" in hopes that it would conceal the spousal source of the name, thereby allowing it to stick.

But stick, it would not. On February 18, 1924, Alfred Hulse Brooks submitted a proposal to change the name of the peak to Mount Marcus Baker, to commemorate the naturalist for William Healey Dall's Alaska expeditions, geologist and cartographer for the U.S. Coast Survey and U.S. Geological Survey, member of the U.S. Board on Geographic Names, co-founder of the National Geographic Society, and editor of *National Geographic Magazine*. The USBGN approved Brooks's proposal on March 5, 1924.

Not yet knowing of the 1924 name change, Washburn planned a 1938 expedition to climb the peak, which he referenced by its former name. In May 1938 Harvard University's Institute of Geographical Exploration sponsored a four-man expedition to make the first ascent of the peak. On May 27 Bob Reeve flew

Peter Gabriel and Brad Washburn in his Fairchild 51 airplane from Valdez to the 5300-foot level of the West Fork of the Matanuska Glacier, where they established a base camp on a dry medial moraine. Reeve flew Norman Bright to that base camp on May 31 and followed up by depositing Norman Dyhrenfurth at base camp on June 1.

After receiving subsequent air drops, the team established Camp II at the 5950-foot level of the West Fork of the Matanuska Glacier. After a storm the team found a route on the left side of the icefall to the upper basin, where they established Camp III at 6900 feet on June 10. On June 12 they established Camp IV at 7500 feet at the base of the north ridge of the peak. In the early morning hours of June 16, they established Camp V at 9000 feet on the peak's north ridge. After a few hours of rest, they packed up and moved camp again. In the evening of that same day, they erected their tent at 9800 feet on the peak's north ridge for their final campsite, Camp VI.

Setting out on snowshoes at 9 a.m. on June 19, the four-man party ascended the north ridge, switched to crampons just before noon after reaching 11000 feet, and reached what is now known as the North Peak of Mount Marcus Baker at 12:50 p.m., encountering a knife-edged arête of wind-packed icy snow for the last 300 feet. They descended the exceedingly steep and icy southwest ridge of the North Peak and later that afternoon they reached the true summit of Mount Marcus Baker, having bypassed the Middle Summit via its west shoulder 150 feet below the peak. They returned to Camp VI at 10:30 p.m. via their same route, re-ascending the North Peak in the process.

They descended to Camp II on June 20. On June 23 Reeve landed just below Camp II and in two flights returned the four men to Valdez.

On August 29, 1959, Helga Bading, Paul Crews Sr., Gregg Erickson, and Hans Metz departed from Mile 102 of the Glenn Highway and crossed the Matanuska River on a cable. They made their first camp about three or four miles from the road and their second camp some 16 miles up the glacier. They established their third camp on a ridge in the clouds in an attempt to bypass an icefall. But it was not the ridge they wanted to climb, so they descended that ridge at a different point and returned to the West Fork of the Matanuska Glacier. From there they headed upglacier to establish their fourth camp at about 9000 feet. On September 2 they reached the North Peak of Mount Marcus Baker, having followed the route of the 1938 first ascent party from their 9000-foot camp. They returned by roughly the same route, arriving at the highway on September 5.

On June 7, 1975, Mark Fouts, Charles R. Hammond, and Ward Warren set out up the Matanuska Glacier, roughly following the same route as the 1959 second ascent party. They received an airdrop of supplies on June 11. On June 14 the trio ascended the North Peak of Mount Marcus Baker, following the route taken by the previous parties. They received another airdrop of food the following day. They began their exit on June 16, rising early and ascending M & M Pass (so named because it served as their route between the Matanuska and Marcus Baker Glaciers). They then descended the Marcus Baker Glacier to Grasshopper Valley, arriving at the airstrip there on June 19. From there they were flown to Anchorage.

In August 1975 Kate Allen, Randall Jones, Dennis Schmitt, and John Wittmayer set out up the Matanuska Glacier. For 12 days they relayed supplies up the glacier. Along the way Schmitt climbed Peak C-9 (8490 feet) west of the Icing Glacier via its three-mile-long northeast ridge. On the sixth day Jones and Schmitt traversed the North Peak of Mount Marcus Baker, arrived at the true summit, and camped at the col south of the Middle Summit. Allen and Whitmayer joined them on the true summit the following day, having traversed the North Peak. They camped again at the col. The next day all party members retreated by ascending the southwest ridge of the North Peak and descending the northeast ridge to the West Fork of the Matanuska Glacier. They followed their tracks to the road, arriving 12 days after they had left.

On February 8, 1976, Robin Bowen, Greg Durocher, and Brian Okonek began skiing up the Matanuska Glacier from Glacier Park. By February 12 they had established a base camp at 6800 feet and were headed higher. On February 14 the trio climbed the North Peak of Mount Marcus Baker and the Middle Summit of Mount Marcus Baker. After receiving an airdrop of snacks at the saddle between the Middle Summit and the true summit, they reached the true summit and returned via the same route. On February 16 Bowen and Okonek climbed Icing Peak via its west ridge. The party then followed its tracks to the road, arriving on February 22.

On April 11, 1982, David Blanchet, Michael Dunn, Stephen Koslow, and Mark Skok set out from Lion Head, skiing up the Matanuska Glacier. They followed roughly the same route as the previous parties. On April 22 they set out from a snow cave at 12000 feet on the northeast ridge and climbed that ridge to the North Peak of Mount Marcus Baker, descended its southwest ridge, ascended the Middle Summit from the north, descended its southwest ridge, and ascended the northeast aspect of the true summit. They retraced their tracks and returned to King Mountain Lodge on April 24.

On December 28, 1987, John Cafmeyer, Frank Jenkins, and Sylvia Lane skied with sleds from the Matanuska Glacier Lodge up the Matanuska Glacier. On January 2, 1988, they set up a base camp at 7200 feet on the east side of Mount Marcus Baker's northeast ridge. On January 3 Lane remained in base camp while Cafmeyer and Jenkins cramponed up Point 10910 and then hacked out a snow cave at a saddle just below the North Peak of Mount Marcus Baker. On January 4 Cafmeyer and Jenkins climbed up and over the North Peak (à cheval at its crest), down-climbed 700 feet of ice to the saddle between the North Peak and the Middle Summit, and then gained the true summit. The duo returned to their snow cave that evening and spent January 5 inside while a storm blew outside. On January 6 they returned to their base camp to find it snowed in and Lane's lifeless body some 30 feet downglacier. On January 9 Cafmeyer and Jenkins departed base camp and returned to the parking lot on January 11.

On March 30 and 31, 1997, Mike Meekin flew Jim Francis, Cory Hinds, Elena Hinds, Mike Ohms, Michelle Potkin, and Chris Riggio to the 7000-foot level of the West Fork of the Matanuska Glacier. On April 1 the lead rope team of Francis and the Hindses skied up to 9000 feet and established a camp there before a windstorm hit. The second rope team of Ohms, Potkin, and Riggio turned around and returned to base camp to wait out the storm. After waiting out the storm and whiteout, both teams departed on April 3. The first team reached 11500 feet and the second team reached the 9000-foot camp. On April 4 the lead rope team placed snow pickets as they simul-climbed the knife-edge ridge of the North Peak of Mount Marcus Baker. The lead team descended Styrofoam snow to the saddle between the North Peak and the Middle Summit, ascended both the Middle Summit and the true summit, and then retraced its route to the 11500-foot camp. Meanwhile, the second rope team reached 10000 feet and returned to the 9000-foot camp. Both teams were reunited at base camp the following day. After sitting out a storm day, they descended to

the 5500-foot level of the West Fork of the Matanuska Glacier, where Meekin picked up Francis and Ohms. The remaining four members of the party skied to the Scandinavian Peaks Hut, arriving on April 8. On April 11 while the Hindses climbed Iceland Peak (8870 feet) via its east ridge from Iceland Pass, Potkin and Riggio departed for the highway, arriving on April 15. On April 12 the Hindses climbed Finland Peak (9405 feet) via its north ridge. The next day they climbed Sweden Peak (9030 feet) via its east ridge. On April 15 they began their ski out to the highway.

The information for this column came from Dall's obituary of Baker, published in 1906 on pages 277 through 285 of Volume 14 of the *Bulletin of the Philosophical Society of Washington*; from Washburn's article titled "The Ascent of Mt. St. Agnes, Chugach Range, Alaska," which was published on pages 207 through 221 of the November 1939 *Alpine Journal*; from Washburn's article titled "The Ascent of Mt. St. Agnes," which was published on pages 255 through 264 of the 1939 *American Alpine Journal*; from Bading's trip report titled "Marcus Baker," which appeared in the September 1959 *Scree*; from Farquhar's article titled "Naming Alaska's Mountains, With Some Accounts of Their First Ascents," which was published on pages 211 through 232 of the 1959 *AAJ*; from Bading's report titled "Mount Marcus Baker, Chugach Range," which appeared on pages 107 and 108 of the 1960 *AAJ*; from Fouts's trip report titled "M & M Traverse, Matanuska and Marcus Baker Glaciers," which appeared in the August 1975 *Scree*; from Okonek's trip report titled "Climbs up the Matanuska Glacier," which appeared in the March 1976 *Scree*; from Schmitt's trip report titled "1975 Chugach Expedition," which appeared in the May, June, July, August, September, October 1976 *Descent*; from Hammond's report titled "Marcus Baker, North Summit," which appeared on pages 437 and 438 of the 1976 *AAJ*; from Okonek's report titled "Marcus Baker, First Winter Ascent, Chugach Mountains," which appeared on pages 166 and 167 of the 1977 *AAJ*; from Greg Higgins's "History Corner" column that appeared in the August 1981 *Scree*; from Skok's trip report titled "Marcus Baker Climb," which appeared in the June 1982 *Scree*; from Cafmeyer's trip report titled "Marcus Baker: 13176," which appeared in the February 1988 *Scree*; from Tom Lane's report titled "Fatigue, Exposure, Weather, Carbon Monoxide, Alaska, Mount Marcus Baker," which was published on pages 18 and 19 of the 1988 *Accidents in North American Mountaineering*; from Cory Hinds's trip report titled "Ski Mountaineering in the Scandinavian Peaks," which appeared in the May 1997 *Scree*; from Cory Hinds's trip report titled "Mount Marcus Baker from the North," which appeared in the June 1997 *Scree*; and from my correspondence with Erickson, Fouts, Cory Hinds, Okonek, and Schmitt.



Top: North ridge of the North Peak of Mount Marcus Baker.

Photo by Mark Fouts.

Bottom: Elena Hinds and Jimmy Francis in front of the south aspect of the North Peak of Mount Marcus Baker. Photo by Cory Hinds.



Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

The MCA Board did not meet in December due to holidays.

January General Meeting Minutes

This is a brief note to record that at the January 11th general meeting, roughly 40 MCA members in attendance voted unanimously to approve the proposed budget for 2023. Thanks to Katherine Cooper for her work to create the budget, and for her years of service as Treasurer to the MCA. Katherine stepped down from the Board of the MCA for a well-deserved break and will be replaced by Peter Taylor.



In Turnagain Pass during ski season, not all that glitters is gold...

Photo by Gerrit Verbeek.

Mountaineering Club of Alaska

President	Gerrit Verbeek	president@mtnclubak.org	Director 1 (term expires in 2023)	Heather Johnson	board@mtnclubak.org
Vice-President	<i>Vacant</i>	vicepresident@mtnclubak.org	Director 2 (term expires in 2023)	Andy Kubic	board@mtnclubak.org
Secretary	Donell Irwin	secretary@mtnclubak.org	Director 3 (term expires in 2023)	Scott Parmelee	board@mtnclubak.org
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			Director 5 (term expires in 2024)	Matt Nedom	board@mtnclubak.org
			Director 6 (term expires in 2024)	Tom McIntyre	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.

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

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

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

Mailing list/database entry: Peter Taylor, membership@mtnclubak.org

Hiking and Climbing Committee: *Vacant*—training@mtnclubak.org

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

Calendar: Lexi Trainer

Librarian: Gwen Higgins—library@mtnclubak.org

Scree Editor: *Vacant* — MCAScree@gmail.com

Web: www.mtnclubak.org

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

Ben Americus atop Peak 2220, Montague Island, looking north.

See p. 7 for the story

Photo by Miles Knotek

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