



DESCENDANT

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University of Alaska
Fairbanks

Volume 24: No. 1

Alaska Alpine Club

May 1994

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Quote:

...There may be more to learn by climbing the same mountain a hundred times than by climbing a hundred different mountains.

-Richard Nelson, author "The Island Within"

...Climb the mountains and enjoy their good tidings. Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine into flowers. Streams will bring you their freshness and storms their energy and cares will fall off like autumn leaves.

-John Muir

Why I quit climbing?

by Roman Dial

When I was 16 years old, I moved to Fairbanks to become a mountain climber and go to college, with roughly that order of priority. By 24 I'd become a proficient climber - I won't mention my schooling - and the American Alpine Club honored me with the Boyd Everett Fellowship Award as "America's most promising alpinist under the age of 25." Unfortunately, the Alpine Club picked the wrong guy.

I was a Fairbanks mountaineer, and Fairbanks mountaineers had developed a philosophy that climbing was about adventure and personal development, rather than money, prestige and fame. Fairbanks climbers customarily chose obscure, unnamed peaks to climb. They'd fly in, then ski, walk, or float out.

Continued on page 4

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v. 24, no. 1
1994

President's Message

Well, it's that time of year when the club officers conclude their duties. This year has gone by so fast! Although it has been a very busy year, there still hasn't been enough time to complete on-going projects! I hope the next elected officers will carry on the torch. We need to generate more club involvement to realize our potential. It seems like the same volunteers end up sacrificing their personal lives year after year to carry out the club's basic needs for survival. The club must not just survive, but aspire to greater heights. So you members that want more satisfaction - get involved!

Our goal this year was to spark some interest in the club by coordinating several activities. I believe we managed to fulfill most of our goals in some form or another. Much thanks to our volunteers that have devoted their time in conducting our monthly slide presentations:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 1. Mt. Erebus, Antarctica | Jürgen Kienle |
| 2. Mt. Hayes, Alaska | Jon Miller,
Rich Chapell,
Steve Lewis |
| 3. Mt. Kosciusko, Australia | Roger Siglin |
| 4. Bradford Washburn Legacy | Mike Sfraga |
| 5. Rescue on Denali | Kevin Moore |

Listed below are some of the events that took place over the course of the year with varied success:

Avalanche Presentation and Workshop by Jill Fredston: Jill lived up to her reputation as one of the world's most knowledgeable professionals on the subject. Over 90 people attended on Friday and about 70 on Saturday! I believe those of us who attended will travel in the backcountry with added avalanche awareness.

The club purchased the video, "*Winning the Avalanche Game*" for those of you who are interested in checking it out. I highly recommend taking the outdoor workshop on Backcountry Avalanche Hazard Evaluation and Rescue Techniques located at Hatcher Pass conducted every December through March by the Alaska Mountain Safety Center, Inc. (345-3566). The cost is under \$200 for three days of intensive instruction. These workshops are very popular, so sign up in October or November at the very latest!

Banff Festival of Mountain Films: The club volunteered our time and services to UAF Student Activities by conducting a seminar on "Historical Aspects of Alaska Mountaineering" and manning an information booth for the expo. Thanks to Phillip Marshall for his informative remarks on the subject and for the volunteers who sacrificed their time manning the booth. Of course several on-lookers confused us with the Alaskan Alpine Club, including Student Activities so we scrounged up another booth. As it was, it worked out for the best since we attracted wanderers by hanging suspended from the pizzeria balcony. The mountain films were some of the best I have ever seen!

Club Day: Most of you probably were aware of it as far as the where, when, and how aspects (fliers were sent). From the turnout, six, I ask myself why? I can understand that the weather turned some members away and possibly other arrangements, but six! I actually begged these six to participate so that it wouldn't be a total loss. Actually, I can say this was a kind of experiment to see what kind of interest there would be for a club social event. Lesson learned! Hopefully the next officers in charge will come up with a more appealing social event. Two student members ended up riding their mountain bikes up and down Ester Dome trail twice, once during the regular scheduled event and once that night under a full lit moon. There were only four of us who skied down the trail during the day with snowy and windy conditions on top. It only took about an hour to ski to Ester for burgers and a brew or two. End of story!

Orienteering Class: This event was geared for students who weren't real familiar with reading map and compass. Thanks to Bob Groseclose for sharing his knowledge on the subject. We conducted a map reading exercise in Dornath's field off of Farmers Loop Road. I was wondering how we were going to split off into groups, but since only 4 students showed up I didn't have to worry, I just sobbed. Seriously though, they said they thought it was worthwhile and learned some valuable map reading skills. Some suggestions were to conduct the class in the White Mountains using Lee's Cabin as an overnight base or to make it a competition where groups would start at different directions over a broad area and see who finds all the markers first by tearing off a number at each location.

Student activities beat us to the punch for sponsoring *Jonathan Waterman*, renowned climber and author. He was up here promoting his latest book "*In the Shadow of Denali*" and discussed the controversial subject regarding the proposed \$200 climbing fee for Denali and Foraker. His opinions were well received and many comments were tossed around. The theme of his discussion can be found in the April 14th issue of the *Newsminer* (editorial section). The best part of the presentation was his newly released climbing video "*Surviving Denali*." We liked it so much that we purchased it for the club. Check it out!

Brenin has brought a lot of recognition to the club through his countless ideas and public relation skills. Brenin made it possible for the club to tap into the *Bradford Washburn archives*. Mike Sfraga, founder of the Alaska Mountain Science Center and personal friend of Bradford Washburn, is the keeper but would be more than happy to share some more footage that has never been seen before. The club donated \$500 to the UAF Foundation in Terris Moore's name, which will go towards the Alaska Mountain Science Center. Joan Wadlow, UAF Chancellor, sent us a letter of appreciation for our contribution. Way to go Brenin!

The *hut building* prospect is still being kicked around. Hut Committee members decided on a "base hut" that is easily accessible from the Richardson Highway, yet somewhat hidden. The three main areas of consideration are Rainbow Ridge, the Castner drainage, and the Canwell drainage. Clem Rawert has been spearheading the effort by contacting government agencies regarding land acquisition and restrictions along the Richardson Highway. Clem said that many areas adjacent to the highway can be acquired through 20 year leases, use permits, or buy-outs. Clem stresses the importance of identifying a legal site at any of the three aforementioned locations. For those interested, we will be conducting a reconnaissance visit to these three areas sometime this summer when the snow is all melted and select the most favorable hut building sites.

Eventually, we will narrow it down to one hut site based on the legal ramifications. To realize this feat we'll have to come up with around \$8000 - \$10,000 for construction and materials. The club will have to rely on fund raising and/or our checking account and portion of the Peter McKeith fund. Hut Committee members are Clem Rawert, Bucky Wilson, Jürgen Kienle, Mike Masters, Mike Litzow, Brenin Humphreys, and Bill Cole. If you have any questions please contact Clem at 456-6314.

The *climbing wall* is probably the best success story I have to report this year thanks to the many hard

long hours of planning, organizing, and construction by Stan and Carol Justice, Franz Müter, and all those that assisted them in their endeavors.

Once again, the *Ski Mountaineering Classes* were a huge success thanks to the dedication and leadership of Stan Justice. Our appreciation goes out to the following instructors and trip leaders:

John Rose	Bob Groseclose	Roger Siglin
Franz Müter	Dick Flaharty	Mark Lockwood
Dave Gehrke	Phillip Marshall	Ted Lambert
Keith Echelmeyer	John Lieberman	
Doug Permenter	Brenin Humphreys	

The club is still going strong because of Stan Justice's enduring contributions. Thanks to Stan's instruction the club receives more students each year, which keeps the club out of the red. As long as we can alleviate part of the burden more and more each year, Stan may eventually get to enjoy a halfway more relaxing lifestyle. Lets applaud Stan for another successful climbing year!

On behalf of the club, I would like to personally thank the officers and my girlfriend. Thanks to our Secretary/Treasurer, Brenin Humphreys, who has done a great job keeping our accounts balanced, membership lists current, and was instrumental in organizing our slide shows. Because of Brenin, we are now "official" with our own genuine club card. Thanks to our Vice President, Bob Arnold, for the great refreshments and his time in balancing out the club's needs. Thanks to our councilor, Roger Siglin, for his entertaining slide show on Australia and help with the Ski Mountaineering class. Roger, your sense of humor certainly hasn't failed you yet - keep it up! Thanks to our advisors, Jürgen Kienle and John Keller for their valuable input in club activities. Jürgen's presentation on Antarctica was very interesting with excellent illustrations. Thanks to our editor, Franz Müter, for all his time and effort in publishing the *Descent* and thanks to Carol, Stan, and Franz for the planning, design, organization, and direction of the climbing wall. Thanks to Clem Rawert, lifetime member, for sharing his invaluable advice on leading the club and hut building efforts. Thanks to Doug Permenter, former Club President, for all his help on the fliers and positive reinforcement to carry out my duties. I would especially like to thank my girlfriend, Debbie Haase, who spent many hours typing and xeroxing. She also spent many hours putting together the fliers, baking, collecting money for the avalanche presentation, and putting up with all my bitchin' and moanin'. Certainly,

without Debbie's support, I never could have carried on as this year's President. If I left anybody out, I apologize, I'm sure you know who you are. Wow, this message has turned out to be an essay!

I just want to re-emphasize the potential of this club. As I said earlier, the sky is the limit for what this club can do. As you know, it takes a lot of effort from a few people, which can become quite cumbersome, or a little effort from all of you, which can keep the torch shining brightly for decades. Please send in your ideas for future slide shows, club activities, fund raisers, etc. All your comments and opinions will be very helpful.

I have enjoyed serving as President and hope to continue to contribute my time to the club. It has been a lot of fun!

Climb on!

Bill Cole

Why I quit climbing? *Continued from page 1*

Sometimes they packed 10, 20, 60 miles into the mountains, staggering beneath loads of gear needed for a technical ascent, then walked back out with tales of near death and success.

But it wasn't that I didn't want the Alpine Club's money. I readily accepted it as funding for a planned trip to Canada's Mount Logan and its Hummingbird Ridge with Canadian climber Dave Cheesmond - at the time, one of North America's finest alpinists - and Geof Radford, one of Anchorage's most experienced mountaineers. (Several years later, Cheesmond would die on Hummingbird Ridge with Catherine Freer, probably America's finest woman alpinist at the time of her death. And Radford would later die in an avalanche behind Flattop with Bruce Hickock during a day outing.)

Back then, we thought low budget was high style and that selling out commercially was parasitic. We lived cheaply and tripped in the mountains as often as possible. We rescued our own, abhorred Park Service permission procedures and climbed in ranges as remote from national recognition as they were from the road. Consequently, our route choices demanded skills in companionship, endurance and cornice climbing.

Nearly all Alaska mountains are a mixture of rock, ice and snow. To climb

steep, high peaks, then, requires skills in climbing all three types of terrain. We practiced our icecraft on the unclimbed big ice of , frozen waterfalls up to 600 feet tall. But these were primarily warm-ups in preparation for the steepest faces of the Alaska Range.

Our favorite rock crags were about an hour's drive from Fairbanks, followed by a two-hour walk. We knew that Alaska would never offer the weather



Author Roman Dial waits out some weather at the base of Hess Mountain.

and access that rock climbers enjoy in Colorado or California, so we made no attempt to emulate the style of those southern climes.

Rather we took Alaska for what it offered: distant mountains of shattered rock draped in perennial ice and snow. And it was the snow that usually presented the most difficulty and greatest danger.

Snow climbing, particularly cornice climbing, is an Alaska specialty, like long-distance mushing, glacier gazing and ski commuting. While cornices form on nearly any object exposed to wind-blown snow, the cornices of high Alaska mountains build year-round. Cornices in the Lower 48 are annuals. They grow during the winter, only to fall off in summer. Alaska cornices are perennials. They sometimes grow for centuries into dangling glaciers on high mountain shoulders.

After eight years of Alaska mountain travel I'd become a specialist. I'd ascend obscure, unclimbed mountain faces mixed with rock, ice and snow, descend steep corniced ridges, then exit 40 miles to the highway under muscle power.

Eventually, however, accidents began to happen. Mostly to other people. There was Carl Tobin, my best partner - indeed, the best

climber in Alaska - who could climb the hardest ice and snow, skate-ski unbroken trail, hump 100-pound loads of scientific bulk over bad-rock moraines - then paddle a six-man raft with a shovel and a ski pole to an empty highway with nothing but onion soup and lemon powder remaining in the food bag. In 1984, Tobin broke both legs 60 miles from the road. Caught up in a 2,000-foot avalanche on the unclimbed north face of "Ninety-Four Forty-Eight" he'd managed to ride it out, but not without breaking his femur and rotating his knee 360 degrees.

Carl's accident marked the end of his alpine climbing career. But not the end of mine. It

encouraged me to be more cautious, certainly, but I still thought most mountaineering accidents were avoidable.

In Carl's case, I figured he shouldn't have been climbing so close to his partner across unstable snow. Descending that steep north face, they were less than 10 feet apart when a slab broke loose between them. I envisioned their combined weight and movement had fractured the slope, sending Carl down the mountain.

Yes, I assumed accidents usually resulted from carelessness or poor judgment. Like when Kate Bull and Peter McKeith tumbled down Old Snowy in the Delta Mountains of the eastern Alaska Range. They'd been roped together moving up an icy face, but with no ice screws securing the rope to the mountain.

When Peter fell, he plucked Kate off, too. They slid 1,500 feet, crashing at the base. Peter died. Kate snapped both legs and an arm, spending a cold March night trapped between crevasses, with no food, water or shelter, the specter of her dead lover nearby. Two friends who'd spent the night in a nearby hut on the Castner Glacier found Kate the next day and were able to transport her to safety.

But then again, the lesson I brought away from the tragedy of Peter and Kate wasn't

that climbing was dangerous - but that moving together on a mountain face, roped but unprotected by anchors, wasn't a good idea. Better to un-rope and move together.

Like players in most high-risk games, I'd concluded that other people's accidents were other people's mistakes. Their misfortunes were lessons, not warnings. Besides, I had the right stuff: intelligence, experience and luck. Hell, maybe I was even charmed.

In mid-March 1985 I climbed with a new mountain partner - Chuck Comstock of Fairbanks - we climbed hard. We were in the eastern Alaska



Range, about 15 or 20 miles from the Richardson Highway, on top of 11,400-foot McGinnis Peak. We'd just completed the first ascent of "Cutthroat Couloir."

(So named after a dream, that climber Jim Bouchard once had during my first attempt of the couloir. In his dream, Bouchard saw us moving together up the steep ice, roped and unprotected - just as Kate and Peter had been on Old Snowy. This time, I slipped. As I hurtled down, threatening to take him with me, he unclipped the carabiner to the rope that connected us. I fell alone. Hence the name..."Cutthroat.")

Because of the extreme difficulties we'd overcome in the couloir, Chuck and I were feeling cocky, full of hubris - that exaggerated, fearless pride first identified by the ancient Greeks. Cutthroat Couloir cleaved the "Calendar Face" of McGinnis (so-called because it had once been featured on an Alaska Mountaineering and Hiking calendar poster). Having successfully made its first ascent, we elected to make an equally daring first descent of the Southeast Ridge.

The ridge had been attempted many times, but climbed only once. The first ascent party wrote in the American Alpine Journal that, having climbed up the ridge, they had no intention of going back down the same way. They descended an easier route instead. We'd found Cutthroat Couloir's thin ice over rock some of the most demanding mixed climbing we'd ever tried. Soon we found the Southeast Ridge's cornices equally difficult.

The going was slow, painstaking, dangerous. All day we'd wound around fluted mushrooms of snow, rode skinny ridgelines like they were barebacked horses, wiggled down rimy cracks like alpine chimney sweeps bristling in picks and points. I stopped in a gap in the ridge, then belayed Chuck, trying to safeguard his passage by careful management of the twin umbilical cords between us.

The sun was low in the southwest and cast crisp blue shadows rimmed in orange. I shuddered as the wind picked up. There was no place to camp on the narrow col marking the end of McGinnis' Southeast Ridge. Beyond the gap between peaks, the ridge climbed up and over a 10,000-foot satellite summit. Below the col, steep faces dropped under overhangs of rime ice and snow to glaciers thousands of feet below.

I was upset when Chuck arrived. "Why didn't you stop us back there when you were leading?" I blurted. "There's been no place to camp since we

changed leads back on the hanging glacier!" I attempted to pin the blame for the late hour and lack of a suitable camp on him.

Chuck was silent.

"Can't you see, there's no place to set up the tent or even dig a cave," I continued. "The ridge coming up looks really hard. You should've stopped us back there! Now what are we going to do?"

"Well, why didn't you stop us back there?"

Chuck said.

"You were leading 150 feet ahead of me," I answered. "I didn't check it out. That was your job!"

"OK, fine Roman. Here." He untied a twin rope from his harness and threw it at my cramponed feet. "Let's split. I got a stove and cook pot. You got a stove and cook pot. We both got shovels. Take your rope and we'll go our separate ways."

I looked down at the naked end of the rope. We balanced on edge. Rime ice and cornices bulged over glaciers half a vertical mile below. The physical exposure dwarfed even a climber's ego.

"Chuck, I'm sorry," I said. "I was wrong...you're right. It's my fault. I should've said something back there on that hanger. Maybe we can camp on this col ... Chuck please, tie back into the rope."

He snorted. I looked apprehensively beyond the col where cornices curled over the ridge line like white gyrfalcon talons.

"Really, Chuck I mean it ... I'm sorry ... no place to camp up here ... gettin' cold, Chuck ... man, tie-in, please."

Belligerently, he re-tied - and the moment passed.

Chuck led off again. Twin lines paid out to a tight rope. His trough curved along the ridge crest, the broadest it'd been since the summit. Half a rope length out, Chuck staked a four-foot aluminum snow picket to the ridge and clipped us in.

I edged forward a little, leaving a bit of slack in the rope at my feet. I raised my camera - then decided to wait until we reached the talons for a better picture.

Chuck probed the cornice overhanging the slope with his ax, bending, poking, bending ... then in one fluid motion, disappearing from sight. Chuck had fallen. The rope followed. I jumped in the other direction, clear of the ridge.

Cartwheeling into space, bouncing downward off the slope. I was surprised by how much time I had to think. I prayed God I wouldn't break any bones. Falling, everything was a blur. I felt relaxed, no pain. Not even fear.... Then about 200 feet down, I came to

a stop. The rope had saved me. It stretched tight over the ridge. I had no idea what had happened to Chuck on the other side.

I took stock: Ice tools, crampons, clothes, hardware rack, camera - all intact. Helmet... where was my helmet? I looked down. Far below, an orange dot still fell, accelerating for the Black Rapids Glacier. I thought: Had the rope broken, that would have been me, careening toward the glacier in a tangled wreck of pack, tools, crampons and bones. Instead, I not only wasn't dead, I wasn't even hurt.

I looked up. The ridge bulged above me. I pawed at the snow with my feet. It gave way like granulated sugar after it's become damp in the box and crusted. I dug deeper, looking for something substantial enough to climb, but there was nothing.

So I dangled on the rope, wondering about its anchor on the other side. Chuck had been leading, I was following. Chuck had broken the cornice. I had jumped in the opposite direction to arrest our fall. Chuck had fallen down the windy north face into shadow and ice and rock. I'd fallen into soft rime and sunshine on the windless south side. I was alive and unharmed. And Chuck? I clipped my Jumar ascenders to the rope and mechanically pulled my way up, wondering if the sturdy anchor was a dead body on the other end.

On top, the ridge had wrecked and the rope sliced deeply into the remaining snow. A 15-foot chunk of cornice 5 feet deep had broken free and dropped Chuck into a witch's cauldron of a couloir. Granite blocks jabbed through black ice. The wind whipped spindrift through an arctic shadow. I peered down - and saw Chuck's dark figure moving slowly upward, coils of rope dangling below him. He was alive.

"Chuck!" I called. "You all right?"

"Yeah!" he yelled back. "I hurt my hand, but other than that I'm OK!"

"Hold on Chuck!" We'll descend from here!"

I pounded a picket into the hard snow left behind by the cornice and hollered to Chuck to sink in an ice screw. Then I rappelled down and joined him.

"Good god, Chuck." I said, "what happened?" He looked all right. No blood, no deformities.

"I saw this hole in the snow, and I bent over to look in," he replied. "I thought maybe we could camp in it. And then I was falling and all this snow was hitting me so hard I thought the rope would snap."

"And when it stopped, well, there I was."

We rappelled a thousand feet into the night, leaving the black ice of the gully to emerge into the soft snow of the lower face. There we dug a cave and slept in a cramped bivouac, rappelling the remaining thousand feet in the morning.

We skied off the glacier and on to the flat ice of McGinnis Creek, which whisked us from the lifeless mountains to the living forest in no time. I felt exhilarated with the sweetness of life. We skied out fast.

At the time, I had fully planned to return for another climb. I'd even left my rope and carabiners near the base of McGinnis, cached for the next ascent.

But something happened in the weeks that followed, as I thought about my experience and what I wanted to do with my life. And so I changed course. I married Peggy, my girlfriend of five years. I gave up taking big risks on big mountains and decided to risk marriage instead.

The mountains don't care how good you are anyway. The list of dead climbers includes more of the best than the worst. And I for one, chose to be a has-been at 25 rather than a dead legend at 30.

The American Alpine Club should have given the money to Chuck. He stayed out there another seven years, until one day in 1992 - in search of obscure glory on an unclimbed face in the Alaska Range - he and Brian Teal were avalanched off.

They didn't die, but they were scared. Like I had been. Like we all are eventually, when the thrill gives way to reason.

Roman Dial teaches biology and math at Alaska Pacific University. This article first appeared in "We Alaskans", a weekend supplement to the "Anchorage Daily News. Reprinted with permission.

The Trip

by Dmitry Z. *Reflections on a recent Ski mountaineering class trip to Black Rapids.*

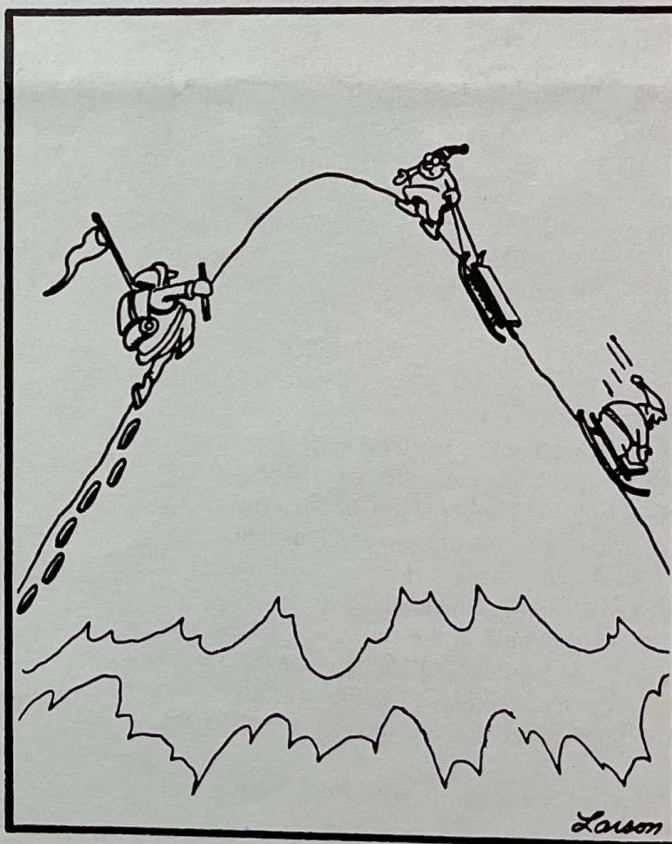
The walls of ice made it all worthwhile. Especially the clean blue walls seen at a distance. You can't see those things from the road - you have to make an effort, take your time, and endure the cold. The cold was what kept many from coming. For those who went it was not a constant problem, but it was a constant fact to keep in mind, something to worry about. You worry about it in the car, you worry about it as you get out and get your pack ready, you worry about it as you make your first steps on skis. I guess the psychological pressure is just the price you have to pay for being able to cross the rivers and creeks easily, for not having to deal with mosquitoes or bears and for those hot drinks in the mornings (they just don't seem to be as satisfying in summer). Hopefully your toes warm up after a couple of miles of skiing, and you start to enjoy the trip, even though there are not too many things to be called enjoyable. Unless, of course, you are like me and just watching the ridges and gullies around you makes you happy.

A few hours go by and the shiny ice cliffs appear at a distance. They make a great contrast to the uninteresting landscape of the valley bottom, covered with little snowy hills that you've been watching for quite a while by now. Getting to the ice becomes something to look forward to and even the fact that the snow becomes dirtier cannot destroy your high spirits. The ice walls grow and layers of dirt and sand between the layers of dark blue ice become visible - approaching them makes you smaller and smaller. A few big and seemingly deep ice caves are interrupting the straightness of the wall - they offer perfect shelter from wind and maybe even from the cold, since one can hear the water flowing "somewhere down there", but nobody wants to become a permanent part of the glacier in case the ice collapses, and camp is set up in a windier, but safer place.

The campsite offers great opportunities for prussiking and ice climbing practice, but as soon as anybody stops moving the cold starts to gain back its power and makes one

worry about a warm place to sleep rather than improving one's mountaineering skills. That's why it was later called survival trip. Nevertheless, people did manage to enjoy their visit to the Black Rapids glacier - going hiking around the place rewarded you with beautiful views of the little snowy peaks rising from the valley and with the walls of cleaner, more attractive ice further up the glacier. The prussiking rope did not stay idle for long and some people got to experience a slide down into the ice caves as they dared to enter without crampons. As the sun left this part of the earth, so did the activity - the tents filled up with their occupants eager to slip into their sleeping bags, and the only snow cave was now warming up because of the people in it.

The night brought the wind with it - and forgot to pick it up in the morning. The flapping of the tent walls



drew the suspicion and the white snow dancing around the top of the nearby 8,000' peak proved it; but you did not really start to feel it until you walked out of the nice low depression where most of the tents were. The wind didn't make it easier, it didn't make it any more fun, and it definitely was not blowing in the right direction. Looking for the next wand through the face protection and walking on bare ice patches was hard enough without it! The clouds seemed to be lower and more gloomy, the ice seemed to be slicker and less stable and the cars seemed to be further away than we parked them.

Nevertheless, it was very satisfying to think that you probably would not do so many things at home as you did here in those two days.

Watching the last few people on the windy snow field lonely drag themselves to the highway brought a thought to my mind: maybe it is such a tradition, but we must stay closer together on these group trips - that would reduce the potential dangers of the trips and maybe then you would see some names in the essays about them.

Northwest Ridge of Mt. Brooks

by Ian McRae

When you are first introduced to someone, you don't just reach out and grab their plums right away - it's best to get to know them first. The same is true for mountains.

The Northwest Ridge of Mt. Brooks was certainly a plum. Why it remained unclimbed for so long, we'll never know. Instead of jumping on the route right away, Randy Waitman and I first climbed the mountain's trade route, the North Ridge, in August 1991. This decision, admittedly, was not so much based on "respect for the mountain" as it was on the fact that our third partner, backcountry ranger Rich Irving, had his heart set on the North Ridge and could not be persuaded to try the unclimbed ridge that year.

The result was that when we returned the following year in August of 1992, strengthened by the addition of Claris Dickess and Michele Morseth to the team, Mt. Brooks gave us the first ascent of the prize Northwest Ridge with no trouble at all. Things went so well on this expedition it was spooky. Nor was it any coincidence that all the climbers on our 4-person team were year-round residents of Fairbanks, while a team of "summer seasonals" had been turned back just prior to our ascent. The mountain is aware, and is particular to whom it yields.

On the 3-day approach hike, wolves howled all around our tent at Turtle Hill, a sure sign of success. Picking our way across the Muldrow Glacier from McGonagall Pass, we were lucky to find passage across the great "Rift Valley" of the Muldrow, an ice gorge with vertical walls formed by the river that flows down the center of the glacier. A two-day snow storm descended on our base camp on the Traleika Glacier, which served the dual purpose of giving our aching

bodies a chance to rest before the climb, and of solidifying the horrible scree in the 1700 foot couloir which would give us access to the crest of the Northwest Ridge.

At base camp on the Traleika Glacier, an ominously peculiar *booming* noise coming from the south brought us wide-eyed out of our tents the night before the climb. The booming lasted intermittently for 2 hours. Not until weeks later were we to discover the source of this weird noise.

The 1700 foot couloir allowed us to bypass some ugly rock towers which lie at the foot of the ridge. I suspect it will be a long time before anyone bothers to traverse these towers to make the first ascent of the Northwest Ridge complete. At the top of the couloir we roped up and simul-climbed several pitches of 45° ice. A large flat area on the shoulder of the first prominent bend in the ridge provided an excellent bivouac. With one North Face tent and three sleeping bags between four people, we were plenty warm, and had wonderfully light packs besides. A flightseeing plane flew by not more than 300 meters away from the cliff. Members of the climbing team attempted to enact an orgy scene in front of the tent in order to reinforce the image of mountain climbers as barbaric heathens. Somewhere, some tourists had a spectacular picture of our bivouac.

The next morning we flatfooted and frontpointed along until we came to a rock band. A move or two of 5.7 brought us to the cruiser upper ridge. We topped out on the summit of Mt. Brooks in a high wind.

The descent down the North Ridge was helped along by the fact that Randy and I already knew the

route, on which we made our second bivouac halfway down.

The most dangerous moments of the entire expedition came the following day at the foot of the North Ridge where we scrambled unroped down slanting beds of tundra covered with loose schist. Climbers wishing to climb Mt. Brooks should consider the Northwest Ridge as a worthwhile and only slightly more challenging alternative to the popular North Ridge.

Back at Eielson Visitor Center, wierded out among the buses and tourists, our first question posed to the rangers was: "What was the booming noise we heard

on the afternoon of August 21?" It was Mt. Spurr, we were informed, blowing its top, 120 miles to the south. Apparently, the acoustic wave travels at upper levels of the atmosphere and is not audible until it echoes off something, such as the upper slopes of McKinley. Anchorage residents did not hear a thing, though they could see the volcano erupting perfectly well, while the four of us on the Traleika Glacier heard it perfectly well but had no idea what was going on. I mourned the passing of the world's most spectacular hot tub, the 105° lake which used to exist at an altitude of 8000 feet in the crater of Mt. Spurr. It is a trip we missed out on and will never be able to do.

Excerpt from 'The closest dragon'

by Jeff Apple Benowitz. On the first winter ascent of the northeast ridge of McGinnis (possibly the first winter ascent ever of McGinnis) by Ian McRae and Jeff Apple Benowitz.

.....After building a wall in the cave entrance food and water were feasted on. Tomorrow the ice palace would be reached. Feet inspection showed no major damage. One tiny bleb, but nothing to worry about. Listening to the radio weather reports across the state brought the news of snow and wind everywhere. Strong and healthy tomorrow, we will fight our way down the ridge.

Waking up groggy on Tuesday, Ian tried to light the stove. We couldn't find a lighter that would light.

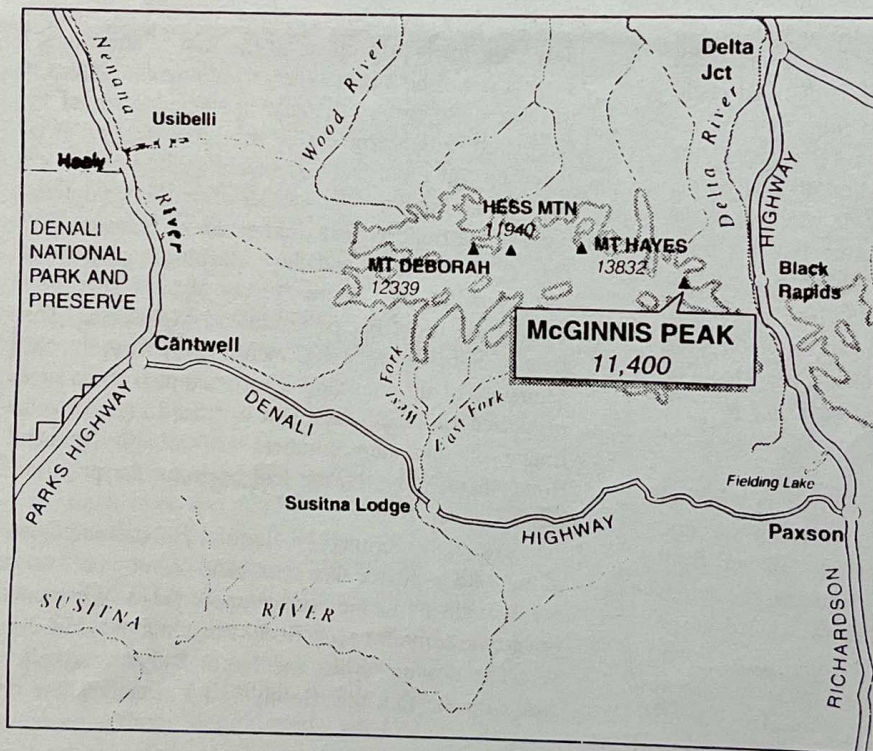
Finally I found a working lighter, but the flame was way strange. Ian had seen that sort of flame before. Lack o' oxygen! Ian started to dig thru our cave entrance in a panic. After he dumped snow in my down bag I took over the tunneling. The visibility outside was grim. Wind and lots of snow. The wind dropped about five feet of snow during the night on our side of the ridge.

Ian dug a trench up to the ridge that was literally taller than I was. Petrified of avalanches, I belayed

Ian from inside the cave. Half-way out of the notch, Ian fixed one of our ropes and climbed back down. The wind was way too nasty to negotiate a corniced ridge.

Returning to the cave, still positive, we passed the radio back and forth. A wire was loose in the radio and for it to work we had to bang it occasionally. I found myself in my bag, shivering uncontrollably, banging the radio on my forehead, wondering about my true mental state.

The religious station had the best weather report. They said on Friday the skies were going to be clear and



cold. I could survive a few more days in the cave, but definitely feeling weaker every day.

Wednesday, a tiny bag of dried veggies, soy protein, and a few drops of Tabasco sauce was all we had left of our food. Down to drinking 1/2 a quart of water a day. We could smell the chocolate chip-walnut-raisin bread down in the ice palace. Ian tunneled out and said the weather was more of the same. He shoveled back onto the ridge. Our trench was now above his head. Making it to the top of the notch, Ian fixed the lines before retreating. The wind was even stronger today.

At this rate we're history. My feet were beginning to go and Ian's hands were numb. To stay warm in our soggy down bags we had been sleeping on our sides. Since our brains were mashed potatoes we didn't wake up when the blood was cut off to our arms. Waking with numb hands was way scary. The cold we caught in Valdez finally died. Guess there wasn't enough food for it to survive in our bodies.

Laying in the cave, cold and depressed, I wish I had been nicer to my folks last time I saw them. Ian was planning on visiting his folks if we got off the mountain. The Christian weather was grim. More wind and snow. Ian found my stash and entered stoner mode, while I entered a state of Zen. Well, more of a semi-unconscious state than a state of enlightenment.

We told people to look for us after 14 days. I dreamt of them coming early with a helicopter and flying us home. Ian found Jesus as a geomorphological force inside the cave.

On Thursday morning Ian tunneled out and told me to pack up for ice palace. I just wanted to lay and wait for better weather. Back in the cave we pushed about four pitches down the ridge before Ian's eyes froze shut. Feet cold, spirit bashed, we needed water. On top of our cave, 15 feet of snow had accumulated. Cold and miserable we took turns taking Tabasco hits. Drinking Tabasco sauce at least made us think we were warm. Looking at the map we saw an escape route down the north side of the ridge. Probably

would get buried by numerous seracs hanging above the route, but descending the double corniced ridge in a white out was not happening. If the weather doesn't clear soon we're his-to-ry.

I'm crying. I never cry. I returned from an unsuccessful climb last November to find out that my girlfriend had moved out and another friend of mine was in my house going crazy and getting ready to commit himself. Did I cry then? Nope, didn't even occur to me. I'm crying now cause I got a good weather report. The college radio station played "Ya wanna go down. Ya wanna get stoned?" Kept on waiting for a message on the radio from friends, but no one was aware that we had a radio, let alone of our plight.

On Friday our entrance was buried a good 12 feet deep. The trench up to the ridge was filled and the wind howled on. Lying in the cave, I tried to ignore the sounds emitting from the walls of the cave. Creak, creak, creak Ian became suddenly aware of the sounds. I told him I didn't hear them. CREAK!!! All around the cave the sound was growing. Shit, should we get dressed and dig a new cave? I felt too cold and weak for such a proposition. Creak, I grabbed my boots and ax and kept them near and tight. Sure was glad I was sleeping near the cave entrance.

If only I had paid more attention in electrical engineering. Then again, if only I had taken electrical engineering. I'm sure McGyver could find a way to turn the radio into a transmitter. Me, I could barely get it to receive without almost constantly banging it on my thick skull.

Sitting on a ridge, 20 miles from a road, creak, trying to remember, creak, all that we could, creak, about snow structure. Creak, ugh just ignore it. Both of us finally resigned to die and let the creaking be. We started to talk in "ifs" and "would ofs". Ian and I talked about what we "would of" done "if" we survived the cave.

All night the wind and my stomach churned. Expecting a large dig out, I plunged my shovel into the cave entrance.....

Odds and Ends

Club gear needed

Have you upgraded so now have a closet full of old climbing gear gathering dust? Or have you quit climbing and Value Village wouldn't take your gear? Well....Give it to AAC!

Our selection of **ice axes and crampons** was not sufficient to meet the needs of this year's climbing

class. So, we are looking for more gear. If you're not in a position to donate your old gear we could buy it at a reasonable price.

Contact Stan Justice @ 479-5017.

SRC Climbing Wall News

The student Rec Center Climbing Wall opened on March 18 and was a resounding success. It proved to be one of the most popular attractions at the SRC. Apparently, there had been a lot of pent-up demand for an indoor rock wall as indicated by the number of climbers who showed up with their rock shoes. A lot of first time climbers were instantly hooked to the sport and patiently waited for their turn during peak hours. Spontaneously, routes from 5.8 to 5.10c marked by colored tape showed up on the wall, and spectators were drawn to the wall by the performance art.

So far the volunteer instructors have given classes and/or certified over 400 climbing wall users. If you have not been certified to use the wall, consider doing it as soon as possible. We will probably start charging \$5.00 for the certification class this summer. Until then it will be free. Funds will be used for maintenance and new construction.

The Alaska Alpine Club has contributed about \$1200 towards the wall, mainly for putting in the belay pipes, and purchasing gri-gri belay devices. The university paid for the roughly 500 modular handholds. Thanks should be given to those volunteers who have donated hours of their time and expertise for instruction of new climbers and construction of the wall, they have made the operation of the indoor rock wall a success:

Ryan Anderson	Åshild Pedersen
Eric Breitenberger	Wayne Pepler
Rhett Buchanan	Julie Rowland
Willow Jones	Larry Santoni
Carol Justice	Doug Schutte
Stan Justice	Rick Studley
Ken Larimore	Mikkel Tamstorf
Franz Müter	

person who donated socket wrench

Belay Pipe Construction and Design:
Jon Stahl - "You can hang a truck off that pipe"
Mike Ruckhaus - "Good for 5000 lbs"

And finally thanks to Tom Wells, the UAF interim athletic director, for getting the UAF approvals needed for the wall and navigating it through the University system, and for his guidance.

The first SRC climbing competition took place on Friday, April 22. This event was organized by Ryan Anderson and friends. Results will be published in the next newsletter.
Carol J.

Book Review

Jonathan Waterman revealed his latest book during a March 25 lecture at UAF. In a chain of stories, he presents an intimate diary of his experiences and trials as a ranger, guide, and climber on the "high one". From Cook to Tejas, the historic settings of the major routes and changing human roles and attitudes are traced.

He provides thoughtful impressions of encounters with celebrated climbers such as Reinhold Messner and Mugs Stump. Extensive sections drawn from close personal contact cover the life and work of Bradford Washburn and the obsessive soloist John "the other" Waterman. Case studies outline human triumph and tragedy, the politics of rescue, guiding, park service development, ethical and philosophical issues of mountaineering, and the deadly 1992 season. Brief detours take the reader to the slopes of Mts Hunter, Logan, Sanford, and Washington, through a crevasse field with the Kahiltna Pass Bear, ice climbing nude in winter, and into tales of Athabaskan mythology.

Waterman's casual, poetic prose makes for pleasurable and often humorous reading. Eight pages of photos help bring the stories to life, and generous references to related titles are included. Two thumbs up for the tent-bound, all this is packed into a light, slim paperback.
- Brenin H.

(In the Shadow of Denali - Life and Death on Alaska's Mt. McKinley, Dell Publishing, New York, 1994, \$11.95, 246p., 9.2 ounces)



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here

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