

AAC

2021-2022

Descent



Descent

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Cover Credit: Sean Marble
Left: Cover Contest runner-up by Will Kleiner

EDITOR'S NOTE



Thank you for supporting the Alaska Alpine Club!

70 years of the AAC...

...And the efforts of producing a local alpine club zine are as difficult as ever. As AAC history goes, the Descent is a local newsletter of the Fairbanks/UAF climbing community, published 2-3 times a year on 'a hit or miss basis.'

Based on how many planets it's taken to align for the Descent crew, and local community of ski hikers, winter climbers and alpine enthusiasts, to come together and create the latest edition, we don't see that production timeline changing anytime soon.

It's now been 28 years since the last Descent was distributed, but interior alpine activity has never ceased. We hope the revival of the Descent will serve as continuous motivating inspiration for all alpinists, old and new.

Thanks to the AAC members who worked on this edition of the Descent, and to the individuals who contributed.

A Greenwell

AAC

CALENDAR

January

AAC Intro SkiMo Course

SRC Club Ice Climbing Night

2nd Thursday monthly Skimo Race

Descent release

february

Peter MacKetih Grant Application Deadline

AAC Intro SkiMo Course

SRC Club Ice Climbing Night

AAC Pub Trivia

2nd Thursday monthly Skimo Race



MARCH

AAC Intro SkiMo Course

SRC Club Ice Climbing Night

2nd Thursday monthly Skimo Race

Arrigetch Climbing Presentation

April

Club Climbing Night

2nd Thursday monthly Skimo Race

'23-'24 Officer elections

MAY

Club Climbing Night

Want to organize a club trip? Members can use the AAC Google Group or Facebook to find partners!

Visit alaskaalpineclub.com for more details



SKIMO CLINIC

Traveling Safely in the Mountains - in Winter!

Each year, the Alaska Alpine Club (AAC) holds an introductory Ski Mountaineering (SkiMo) clinic open to members of the public and students alike, 18 years old and up. Registration opens in December and closes by the first day of the course, which this year is January 25th, and can be done via a form on the AAC website. To better ensure quality instruction and enough gear to go around, the course is usually capped to 30 participants. It's recommended that participants own or are able to borrow or rent the required gear and have prior experience winter camping and skiing or snowshoeing with a pack. This year, the cost of registration is \$150.

The SkiMo clinic runs for 7 weeks, January through March. Class lectures are taught once a week, with 4 weekend clinics spaced throughout. The last clinic session is an overnight on the Castner glacier that gives participants a chance to put a few of those hard-earned ski mountaineering skills to use. Topics that are covered in our course include:

- Staying warm
- Avalanche safety
- Climbing gear
- Crevasse rescue
- Roped travel
- Glaciers
- Winter camping
- First aid



Mountaineering: Freedom of the Hills. Required reading for the course, with chapters assigned each week.

All of the lectures and weekend clinics are taught by instructors who volunteer their time, and we definitely couldn't do it without them. Thank you!



P
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**Little light we see
Deep powder and
trees we ski
Joy, this brings to
me - Rosie F.**

**So heavy with rain
losing itself on the way
the giant gray cloud** - Jenni K.

A loud raven shrieks.
Nearly had a heart attack,
it sounded human

So young, green, and new
living only one summer
the life of a leaf

**Water cascades down
folded rock and rotten snow
at Dragonfly Creek**



**Animal Crossing
With fish, bugs, fruit, and fossils
I pay off my debt**

trail games

ALPHABETICAL CATEGORIES GAME

Pick a category (countries, fruits, sports, teas) and list words A-Z fitting the topic (Azerbaijan, blackberries, caber-toss, Darjeeling)

Hike-U

Create haiku's (5-7-5) based on your surroundings; examples below

A COLD ICY HAT
FROM THE MARGINS OF THE CREEK
SITS ATOP MY HEAD

BY GWEN MACANDER

The Rhyming Game

Each ongoing response must end with a word that rhymes with the last word spoken;

"Bro I'm so tired, my legs are literally dead"

"Keep trekking up this hill, let's get this bread!"

An Ode to Tolovana

HOT SPRINGS' HOTTEST HOSE
DIP THE TITS, EXPOSE THE TOES
SNOW DIP, FROZEN NOSE

Green Glass Doors

Spoons can go through the green glass doors, but forks cannot.
Coffee can definitely go through the green glass doors, but tea cannot.

Pebbles can go through, but stones cannot.

Creeks can go through, but rivers and streams cannot.

Why is this?

Copious Celestial Chagrin

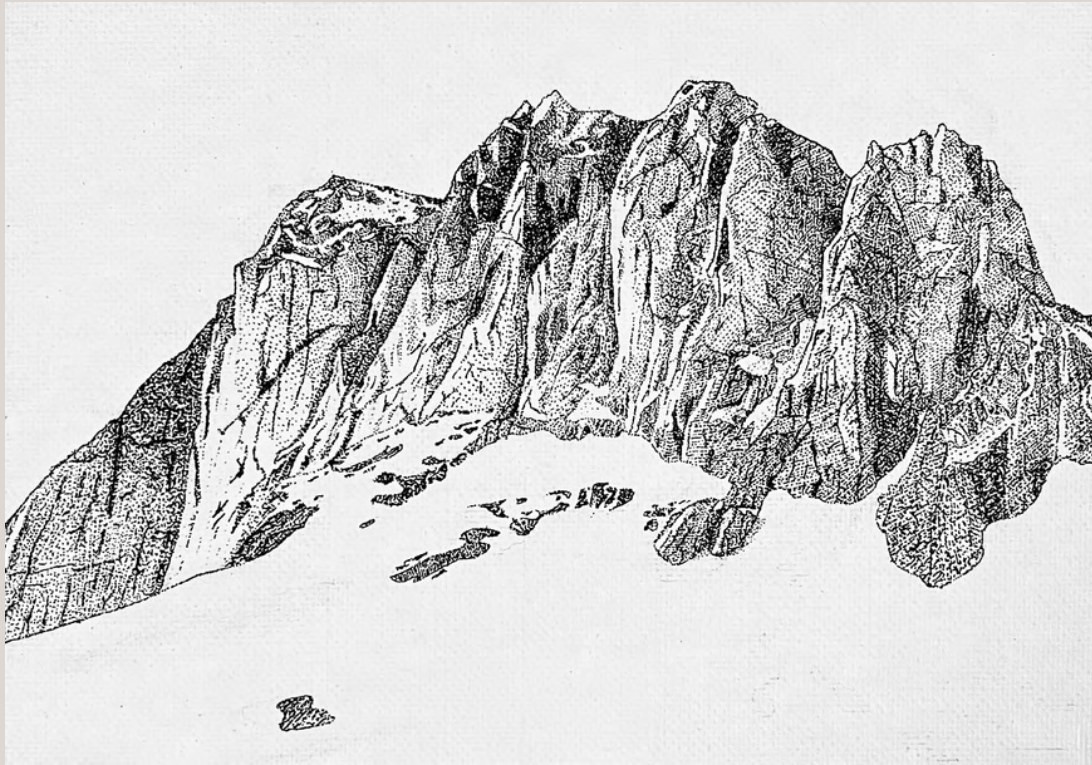
BY MICHAEL MARTINS

UNDER THE NIGHT'S SKY
THE NORTHERN LIGHTS SHINE BRIGHTLY
SADLY, NOT FOR ME.

BY SHANNON WILLIAMS

DENALI

graphite



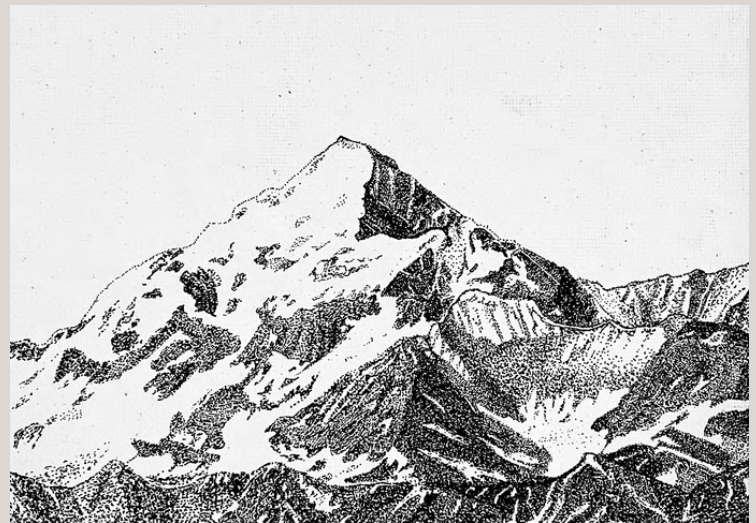
PETER ALVAREZ

INK

MOOSE'S TOOTH (LEFT)

MT. FORAKER (BOTTOM
LEFT)

MT. SAINT ELIAS
(BOTTOM RIGHT)



WHAT ARE THE ALPINISTS EATING OUT THERE?

Recipes

2021-2022

Alaska Alpine Club

Potato Potato

Serving size 2

by Alanna Greenwell and Gwen Macander

1 package instant mashed potatoes, preferred flavor

1-3 tablespoons of butter 6-8 oz crushed potato chips (inevitable)

3-5 oz of cheese (pepper jack, gouda, white cheddar, etc)

Spices for flavor (garlic salt, cracked pepper, thyme, chicken bullion, etc)

Optional: instant soup packet, for additional calories/flavor

Prepare instant mashed potatoes. Portion hot potatoes into bowls. Add butter, potato chips, cheese, spices. Add soup mixture if desired.

(More potato can be added for further potato emphasis i.e Potato Potato Potato)

Enjoy

Cabin-Style Salmon Pesto Pasta

by Jenni Klebesadel

This is a take on one of the simplest fool-proof ways to make salmon pesto pasta, but with some fresh veggies thrown in the mix. This recipe makes PLENTY to eat for 8 people (with everyone getting seconds, and a couple going back for thirds to empty the pot), so adjust the quantity of your ingredients accordingly.

5 packs "Chicken of the Sea" salmon (total of 25oz)

3 containers of pesto sauce (21oz)

2 packs spiral pasta (32oz)

1 jumbo white onion

2 green bell peppers

1 large head of broccoli

6 cloves garlic

Olive oil

Salt

Pepper

1. Begin by filling a large pot with water. Lightly salt, add pasta and bring to a boil.

2. Prep veg; skin and quarter onion, thinly slice and dice. The pieces should be so small that you cannot see them. If you're a big onion fan feel free to make them more visible. Chop garlic cloves, broccoli florets, and stalk, and bell peppers into thin inch-long strips.

3. Throw veg in a pan, add a good splash of olive oil and stir.

4. While the pasta is boiling, go ahead and add the salmon and pesto sauce into the veggie pan. Stir frequently.

5. Once the veggies are soft, then you're done! If veggies finish before the pasta, keep on low heat and stir often. Salt and pepper to taste.

Canwell Cocktail

Featured in the '79 edition of Descent, and 'highly requested'

Everclear

1 package of Jello

water

SkiMo Race Series

Bringing the Mtns to Fbx

Busy on Thursday nights?
You are now.

On the second Thursday of each month, Skimo skiers gather to pull on a race bib and a headlamp and rip some laps of the hills close to home. Races are held at various locations around Fairbanks at 6pm. Join the Facebook group 'Fairbanks Skimo Skiers' for race locations and details.



The first two races, held in November and December, were met with great enthusiasm and success. A big thank you to Tobias Albrigtsen, Jacob Case and Curtis Henry for putting it all together!

First Turns

Simeon Ramirez & Rosie Fordham



We left Fairbanks on a dreary Saturday afternoon, in pursuit of better promises among the Delta peaks. The drive was rather uneventful except for the quick spot of an elusive figure - Alpine Club President, Alanna Greenwell, driving back from her own adventure. Soon after leaving the military bases behind, we saw snow-blanketed ridges slowly stretch above the low-lying clouds, reaching out ever closer to the road as if to greet our long-awaited return. As my girlfriend, Rosie, and I drove up and down the snow-dotted pass, we remarked with a smile how old man Winter was already brimming with mischief by the 24th of September. We parked at Red Rock Canyon (or more suitably, White Rock Canyon) for the night. As we were about to prepare dinner, I realized that in my snowy lovestruck haze, I had left all my freeze-dried meals back at my apartment. As Rosie and I split a backup meal and power bars, our excitement was unfazed - since when does a failed plan mean anything but the start of the best adventures?

After a quick breakfast the next morning, we were off to Rainbow Ridge. Without leaving any time for niceties, Rosie was introduced to some real interior bushwhacking. (I concede, my choice of a route may be to blame.) Soon enough, however, we were out of the brush and booting up a surprisingly steep scree field.

About two hours of sustained hiking later we found ourselves in truly deep snow. Shortly thereafter, we were greeted with what I have come to know as the Deltas' signature special: wind slabs. Being cautious, we dug a pit and found not only the fairly reactive wind slab, but another troublesome slab about 1.5 feet down. Seeing things as they were, we decided to ski from here. Skins ripped and bindings clicked as we successfully transitioned for the first time of the season. We were able to ski about 1500 vertical feet of wonderful, unconsolidated powder before we had to give in to September conditions and walk the rest of the way to the car.

News of the Ancients of the Alaska Alpine Club

By Daniel Osborne, AkAC, member since 1967

The six climbers of the C4M4 1970 Mt McKinley expedition met for its first reunion this past June at the K'esugi Ken Campground of Denali State Park. The six climbers and one camp follower and their wives met to revisit old memories that we found were somewhat faded. A few years before 2020 I started planning for the reunion and contacting the six climbers. I was pleasantly surprised to find that we were all healthy and desired a reunion. I know that I had many a chance to not survive the ensuing last fifty years myself and figured others might not have been so lucky. The reunion was originally planned for the 50th year but Covid happens. But, 2022 was also the 50th anniversary for 3 of the McKinley climbers (Tom Kensler, Daniel Osborne, Dick Jablonski) as well as Peter Brown (he was a camp follower of C4M4), and John Hauck, who put up a new route of their climb of Mt Russell in 1972, which has become the "standard" route of Mt. Russell.



The six climbers of C4M4, (Charlies Colden Climbing Club, Mount McKinley Muldrow Marauders) were Tom Kensler, co-leader, Ed Minot, Dick Jablonski, from back east, and Steve O'Brien, Mike Sallee and me as the other co-leader, the last three being University of Alaska students. Our climb occurred in the month of June in 1970. We, being just students with some completing our final years of undergraduate university studies, had a very low budget for this endeavor.

There were no climbing grants or sponsorships, and deals from equipment manufacturers were non-existent then. Our plan was to hike in from Wonder Lake and start climbing when we reached the Muldrow Glacier at McGonagall Pass. Thus, we backpacked all our supplies (45 days worth) and with some deep wading across the McKinley River and the intervening creeks we arrived at McGonagall Pass in about five days. We basically followed the Sourdough's and Hudson Stuck's route. We were gone from Wonder Lake for 36 days, and five of us made it to the South Summit.

Since the Muldrow/Karsten's Ridge route is so well known, I will concentrate on topics UAF students who want to climb the same route today would find useful. Besides, the route has changed since the 2002 Denali earthquake, the recent Muldrow surge and climate change. The climb was not without adventure; one VB boot used in river crossings had a hole in it. That necessitated an air drop replacement. Tom Kensler developed High Altitude Cerebral Edema, HACE, at about 18,000, a problem little known and that none of us had heard of at that time.

While we had been schooled in watching for High Altitude Pulmonary Edema before leaving, there was really no treatment for it then. However, quickly realizing that having a non-ambulatory climber was not desired, we rapidly organized a midnight descent to 15,000 feet and radioed for help. After we had returned to Fairbanks, we learned Tom was the first climber to have been successfully rescued with HACE. The five of us remaining after the helicopter took Tom away, turned around and proceeded to make it up to the South Summit, but cancelled our attempt on the North Peak.

We all had limited funds; hungry students is an apt description for all of us. The trip cost to each climber was just less than \$150 (\$1,150 in 2022) plus any personal equipment expenses. We made do with what we had been using on shorter climbs. For a good example of the making do with what you had; one climber used his Levi's Stay-press jeans as his climbing pants, another wore two pairs of long johns, one back to front so the holes would not line up. Since some climbers did not have VB boots, we borrowed several pairs from the UA ROTC program, including the leaker. A CB radio (required by the NPS) was used for communications, the required equipment list also included snowshoes, so we took skis and snowshoes. Two of us took our skis up to the high camp on the Harper Glacier where they came in very handy for making a rescue litter to bring Tom down.

We used four, 150 foot, 3/8", "Goldline" ropes (nylon laid construction) not kernmantle type, as Goldline ropes pull much easier thru the snow and were plenty strong. We bought aluminum sheet metal and bent our own pickets in the Student Engineering Shop. We also made our own snow flukes, the flukes worked better than the pickets. To hold up the tents we sewed snow bags, a small nylon stuff sack with the drawstring rerouted through the bottom, and when filled with snow as dead-men tent anchors, they worked extremely well.



Daniel Osborne packing in building supplies for the Lower Canwell hut. May, 1968

This also freed up skis, poles and ice axes for use other than holding up a tent. Almost all the food was purchased locally at a Fairbanks grocery store, the Market Basket. They kindly gave us a small discount because of the large size of the purchase, \$526 (\$4,040 in 2022). The grocery store food was supplemented by a few #10 cans, of freeze-dried vegetables and TVP (Textured Vegetable Protein) to be added to the glop. Dinner consisted of glop and dessert. Jell-O Instant Cheese Cake was a highlight of the trip, made with Foremost "Milkman" dried 2% milk, then more reasonably priced. On other nights we had instant pudding, made in a water bottle and poured out. Glop was some canned meat, some starch, freeze dried vegetables, and dry soup mix. The meat varied from canned tuna, corned beef, to Spam. The starches were noodles, dried potatoes, and rice.

It was cooked up, with excess water, in a large light weight pressure cooker which cooked everything quickly and which rehydrated the climbers. Breakfast consisted of oatmeal or Roman Meal (a multi whole grain cooked cereal, no longer in production) and Cream of Wheat in rotation, with butter, brown sugar, and dried fruit (raisins, apricots, etc.). Lunch consisted of either sausage or cheese, crackers, gorp and a chocolate bar of some kind. The gorp was made 1/3 each of nuts, candy, dried fruit. As to be expected, a robust secondary trade market emerged around the tastier components. Drinks were plentiful and consisted of instant sugar flavored Kool-Aid, and similar drinks, hot chocolate, hot Jell-O, and lots of hot black tea. We took 45 days of food since several parties had recently spent more than 14 days storm bound, including a party from Fairbanks. If Tom hadn't been pulled out via helicopter or we had continued to the North Peak also, we would have used up almost all the food. A black plastic sheet (10'x10') laid on the snow, was used to melt snow for water at the lower elevations, and saved many hours of stove running and produced several gallons of water each day.




"If Tom hadn't been pulled out via helicopter or we had continued to the North Peak, we would have also used up almost all the food."

Traveling at night below Karsten's Ridge reduced sun burn (high SP factor sun block was not available then). Night travel also had the advantage of keeping dry, stronger snow bridges, lower avalanche activity, and better sleeping, because we frequently slept without our sleeping bags thus saving their dryness and warmth for higher on the mountain. We all used the same full size closed cell foam pads that when placed in the tents carpeted the entire floor, this also kept our bags dry.

The US Army helicopter rescue made major newspapers on the east coast since there were three easterner climbers involved, and the Anchorage News, but not the Fairbanks Daily News Miner.

The reunion was great and all thoroughly enjoyed themselves. The wives, who mostly had not previously met all enjoyed meeting the other climbers and wives. We chartered a special flightseeing trip with Talkeetna Air Taxi around Mt Russell and Denali to see where we had been and the changes to the routes in the last fifty years, which were many. A post note, two of the eastern climbers settled in Anchorage after the climb.



PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND'S SARGENT ICEFIELD A MULTI-MODAL ADVENTURE

By Jon Miller

Trip partner Marc Oggier surveys the route between Contact Glacier and Sargent Icefield. In the background, Nellie Juan Glacier and the lagoon.

On a nice April day, there's nowhere I'd prefer to be than high in the mountains above Prince William Sound, where the skiing can be fantastic and the mountaineering superb. Fresh snow with cool temperatures brings powder, often steep and deep from summits to tidewater. Warm spring sunshine and clear nights mean crampons crunching up firm surfaces in the morning and "ego snow" on the way down. But then there's the usual maritime weather: rain, fog, drizzle and lots of wet snow which, in turn, spells avalanches, crumbling cornices, and ice-clogged climbing skins.

Marc's message was exciting - and improbable: "Strong high pressure coming! Forecast models all agree! Meet you in Valdez on the 5th." It's not that you can't get great weather on the coast, but a long spell of clear - or even dry - days precisely when you want them? Good luck! I figured we'd have a good time... but after many foiled efforts, doubted we'd accomplish the modest objective we'd been trying to pull off for years: sail across Prince William Sound to Port Nellie Juan, where glaciers spilling from the Sargent Icefield have carved an exposed granite batholith into handsome exfoliating slabs and soaring walls. We'd stash our sea kayaks in Kings Bay, anchor the sailboat a day's paddle away below the Contact Glacier, climb up onto the icefield to spend a few days skiing and peak-bagging in the high country, then descend the Falling Glacier to the coast and paddle back to the boat. Short. Simple... sort of.

It started snowing as we hauled skis, snowshoes, packs, Xtra-tuffs, ski boots, shrimp pots, sea kayaks, and a mountain of food down the harbor ramp to my 32' sloop, *Spindrifft*. Imported cheeses and wine, rustic walnut bread and baguette, home-made salami and smoked salmon... It's a delight to indulge in Marc's Swiss cooking, but contemplating those heavy packs tempered my gastronomic anticipation - if the weather even gave us a chance to load them up.

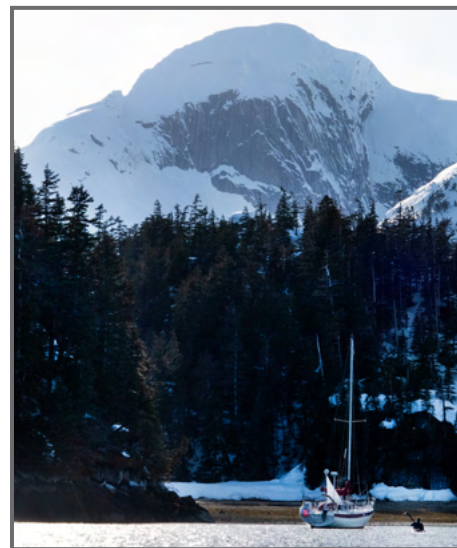
Heavy snow fell through the night and visibility was less than a quarter mile as we set out at daybreak, our bow parting slush-laden water that crumpled like soaked tissue paper. We motored by GPS for hours without seeing a trace of land then, as wind and waves built, headed into the open Sound. Much later, in dimming evening light and abating snowfall, the headlands of Naked Island appeared through the murk. We doused our sails, and slid into a serene anchorage and a welcome hot meal. "You *sure* that high pressure is still on track?!"



Easy traveling towards the pass between Nellie Juan and Falling Glaciers

Morning brought an answer - crystal clear! Stunning! We headed west in calm water, with peak-strewn islands on every side. Steaming up Port Nellie Juan, a welter of steep, crowded peaks marked our destination, where a sheer, Half Dome-like face with pale, streaked granite dominated the skyline above our anchorage. "I'd sure like to get to the top of that," I confided. The topo showed a narrow glacial tongue inching up the back side, so just maybe we could find a way...

Next day we cached kayaks below our exit glacier, barely getting a view of the upper descent route before the clouds closed in. Good - not too crevassed, but fresh wolverine prints altered our plan to leave food in the kayaks. We anchored the sailboat securely - an oxymoronic statement, because as soon as one leaves a boat, gremlins (wind, waves, flotsam...) begin to bedevil the best laid plans - then waited out a blustery day to see how the boat fared in 25 knot downdrafts. With three anchors and a shoreline we figured that, however twisted up our ground tackle might be in five days, the boat would probably still be here when we returned.



Spindrift anchored in the port

Our first camp atop Contact Glacier provided a front-row seat as the Nellie Juan Glacier calved into the ice-covered lagoon below. Elsewhere, we saw surprisingly little avalanche activity except for massive glide fractures off polished granite. Our route up onto the icefield passed under a suspect buttress, and an early morning departure, while minimizing wet snow avalanche hazard, still exposed us to these unpredictable releases. So we spaced out, moved fast, and after a bit of icy skinning we were soon out of harm's way, skiing over the surreal topography of stagnant seracs on the margin of Nellie Juan's calving face, looking over the frozen lagoon on one side and golden granite walls on the other.



Approaching the recently de-glaciated gully leading to Nellie Juan Glacier

On our third day, from a high camp on the divide, we made a long excursion to the west, overlooking broad reaches of the icefield and its distributary glaciers to the south. Spectacular! I wish I could say the down-skiing back to camp was great, but it wasn't. Just enough patchy powder to tempt one into making turns and - WHAM! - back to treacherous breakable crust. On our last day before dropping back to sea level, we ascended a side glacier to the back of our lovely granite dome, and were able to climb most of the way on skis, then kick steps to the corniced summit, happy to see *Spindrift* 3,500 feet below. The return to camp rewarded us with a bit of cold powder on the north and passably good corn snow on the southern exposures.

After days of warm sunshine, inevitable afternoon avalanches sluiced down gullies, turning our exit route into a bowling alley and prompting an early morning escape. King's Bay was as smooth as glass, mirroring surrounding peaks as we loaded our kayaks and paddled back to the boat, glad to use different muscles. Returning to Valdez, we attempted two more climbs. The Great Nunatak above Columbia Bay was laughably unsuccessful as we wallowed through deep, rotten snow and dense alders, but on our penultimate day we bookended our climatological reprieve by summiting a 5,000' peak as the Sound's usual weather closed back in.

If you like multi-modal challenges consider checking out the mountains of Prince William Sound. But beware, the highly irregular schedule of rewards is powerfully addictive.



Ridge to the last summit. Clouds and snowfall descend after two weeks of mostly clear weather

Huntington and Hunter

By Ethan Berkeland

Late April and early May in the Central Alaska Range were terribly cold in 2022. When Paul Roderick flew Balin Miller, Frankie Dunbar, and I into the Tokositna Glacier on May 3rd, only one party had summited Huntington thus far. Unfortunately, one member of that party ultimately lost their toes to frostbite after returning from the trip. That knowledge weighed heavily on our minds as we entered the range with a cold and stormy forecast. However, the weather improved, and on May 5th we were presented with a satisfactory weather window to make an honest attempt on Mt. Huntington.

Our desired route, the Harvard Route, was occupied by a French-Canadian team. Rather than create congestion, we opted for the Nettle-Quirk, better known as the West Face Couloir. This route is generally considered the path of least resistance to the summit of Mt. Huntington, but still presents pitch after pitch of steep ice with incredible exposure. We launched as a team of three and quickly made it to the ice couloir after climbing the entrance snow slopes. We climbed the entire couloir in 6 long pitches to a bivy cave. The cave provided a small, sitting bivy for three, and we all managed to catch a few hours of sleep before the morning arrived.



Flying out of Talkeetna

The difficulties of the second day proved greater than anticipated; we were all feeling the negative effects of elevation as we rose up the summit icefield towards the summit ridge. Dark clouds swelling in the distance only added to our internal struggles. Balin surmounted the summit ridge to find unconsolidated snow that reached depths of up to a body length. We all coexisted in silent apprehension. When Balin suggested descending, we were quick to agree and soon, we were rappelling our line of ascent. It was then that Balin showed the first outward signs of altitude sickness when he began puking at a rappel anchor. We made sure Balin got down safe and arrived back at camp at a reasonable hour in the evening. Needless to say, two days on the glacier was not sufficient acclimatization for us Alaskans who dwell near sea level.

The next five days were stormy and cold, with a few days of what felt like a high of -15F during the day. Snow piled up on both our camp and on our objective. Luckily, the vast amount of food we brought kept us happy, and our selection of wild Alaskan game was unparalleled: musk ox burger, bear sausage, sockeye salmon, and caribou chorizo, all harvested by us and our families.

On May 11th, the skies dawned clear and calm, and though the forecast was bad, we decided to go up and have a look at the Harvard Route. We quickly climbed to the base of The Spiral where the real technical climbing began. From there we could spot another stormfront approaching and decided to descend rather than push on. After a stormy day in camp, Frankie flew back out to Talkeetna while Balin and I waited patiently for another weather window.



Balin, cleaning The Nose



Top: Approaching Mt. Huntington
Bottom: Traversing the summit ridge

A few days later, a large high pressure system approached the range, which would go on to last for nearly three weeks and provide one of the best bouts of good weather the Alaska Range had ever seen. Balin and I launched on the Harvard Route on May 15th around 8 am. We blasted up the terrain we had climbed on our previous attempt and were quickly climbing the crux mixed pitches. We arrived at The Nose bivy at 4:30 pm, made camp, took a break, and then Balin climbed and fixed The Nose, so we could simply ascend a rope in the morning. We had a comfortable bivy, got up early, and merged with the West Face Couloir after a few scrappy mixed pitches. We both felt much better at this point than we had on our first attempt and managed to reach the summit by noon. Serendipitously, a Talkeetna Air Taxi pilot happened to spot us right as we summited and buzzed by to take some summit photos from the air. The summit was breathtaking, but a long descent awaited us, which went smoothly with the exception of a stuck rope right below the summit ridge. We made it back to camp by 10 pm where some friends had flown in for their own attempt on the formidable peak.

The next day, we lounged in camp with our friends, attempting to recover from the strenuous endeavor we had just completed. Throughout the day, it became clear that the weather window would last much longer and conditions on most routes would be quite good. We were very tempted to fly back to Talkeetna and take advantage of beautiful spring weather in Anchorage, but ultimately, the temptation of more climbing was greater. We agreed to bump over to the Kahiltna Glacier and attempt the North Buttress of Mt. Hunter via the Bibler Klewin.

Two days after summiting Mt. Huntington, we woke up early and made our way from Kahiltna Basecamp to the base of the North Buttress. A few days prior, a videographer who was filming another party on the Bibler-Klewin died in a crevasse just a short distance from our approach. This unfortunate accident and the absurd size of the North Buttress itself led to a lot of anxiety and fear as we approached our objective. However, there was also much excitement present as this was a route I had dreamed about since I started climbing, and at that time, a route I thought beyond my reach.

As we began up the Mugs start, any fear and anxiety faded away as we enjoyed the engaging, moderate mixed climbing up to the first crux, The Prow. The Prow was less difficult than we had feared; great hooks and many fixed pitons made it feel almost casual. After a pendulum, we were on the McNerthney ice dagger which was much harder than expected and led us to the infamous Tamara's Traverse, which is perhaps the most picturesque pitch of climbing anywhere. We soon arrived at our first bivy on the first ice band, which was an unpleasant sitting bivy, but at least we were warm.

Left: Balin approaching Mt. Hunter

Middle: Ethan onsighting The Prow

Right: Balin on the 3rd pitch of The Shaft



The next morning, we started up a "5.8" pitch which accesses the 400 foot ice hose known as The Shaft. The 5.8 pitch proved very difficult and attempting to top out the pitch, I took a large leader fall. I was shaken but physically unharmed. Balin graciously took the lead, determined to continue upward progress. He also had a difficult time, and could not even manage to aid through the section. Instead, he attempted a variation that involved traversing directly beneath a truck-sized snow mushroom. This was by far the scariest part of the climb: attempting not to disturb the mushroom that could easily crush you.

We made it to the base of The Shaft and swung leads up it. Each of these incredibly long pitches involved overhanging ice, but the sheer quality of the climbing made the pitches enjoyable as well as challenging. The next crux, The Vision, was relatively straightforward, and we made our way through it uneventfully. We moved quickly up the third ice band towards the last crux of the route: the Bibler/Come Again Exit. However, as we approached the last technical pitches, snow mushrooms began falling like bombs in a war zone. The sun had just hit the face and was rapidly warming it, causing unstable conditions. We decided to retreat to the third ice band bivy for our second night on the route and tackle the final technical pitches in the morning.

When we awoke, we quickly made our way to the top of the difficulties on the buttress, but at that point, our timeframe necessitated descent rather than continuing to the summit. Rappelling the North Buttress of Mt. Hunter is no small task, and it took us about ten hours. We arrived back at camp buzzing from what we had just done. We were both happy to get on the route, let alone make it to the top of the technical pitches. In the back of my mind, however, I knew, I would return at some point to complete the route to the summit. This trip was supported by an American Alpine Club Live Your Dream Grant.



Ethan and Balin on the summit of Mt. Huntington

Our Days In Chititu

By Shane Ohms

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 and climb Peak 8910. On the first day (3 hours) we walked the 'road' to Chititu. It was from 2 pm - 5 pm 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, crisscrossing 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 mosquitoes. The views from Rex Pass were phenomenal. On the back side we made camp on 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 goes 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 which is its own individual 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.



View from Mt. Holmes

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 till 8:30 pm. We waited until night time to do the schwacking because mosquitoes necessitated rain coats and gloves, and wearing those things in the heat of the day would be unbearable. The schwack 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 am today, June 27th 2022..... And the plane has just now landed to pick us up. 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.

This is a trip summary I wrote at the May Creek Cabin log book after our trip. A full and detailed write-up (and more pics) can be found at: <https://fromrockstorivers.com/2023/01/06/our-days-in-chititu/>





The Road to Chititu - By Shane Ohms

Chititu, Chititu.

Curse the road to Chititu.

Its as far from a 'road' as its far from new.

I'd rather walk to Timbuktu

- (Hell, I'd probably get there faster too) -

"What is a view?"

I wouldn't know; I'm on the road to Chititu!

There is only heat, sweat, rain, and soaking shoes.

Mosquitos, mud, and alders too.

But still the gold rush whispers "if you make it, it'll make you."

Chititu, Chititu.

"What even is in Chititu?"

The list is short, but its the truth:

Rust. Mushrooms. And porcupine poop.

In the only building that has a roof:

a stinkin' stable unfit for horses' hooves.

So no; there isn't shit to do in Chititu.

- (Known by some as 'Shititu') -

Next time I'm there I'll pass right on through.

I still curse the sweat, and the rain, and the soaking shoes,

the mosquitos, and the mud, and the alders too.

Because survivors don't talk about their days in Chititu.

They curse them.



Sublime

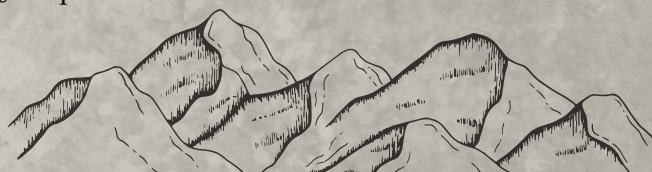
What is it about the sublime,
That indefatigable urge to roam, to see
Which calls to us?
A siren's song, a gelid will o' the wisp,
Out from warmth and home
To seek instead cold, lonesome stone,
Grueling miles, snow-laden peaks.
Is it a choice we truly make?
To climb,
Foot beyond foot and ax beyond ax, or
Once glimpsed,
Does the mountain take hold of our hearts,
Our imagination, our souls,
Whispering in our ears but
"Up, up, always up."
The cold wind casts spears of ice upon our backs,
Feet numbed, muscles aching,
And we stand, at last,
On the summit of our journey.
How and why disappear entirely,
What cause could be clearer,
Which decision more inevitable?
Looking out, mountain beyond mountain,
A scale incomprehensible,
The self vanishes and all that remains,
A voice, beckoning,
"Up, up, always up."

POETRY

By Ryan Fischer

Fatigue

One step in chase of another.
Left,
Right,
Left.
A fog is settling in
Down wrought iron slopes
And in my soul.
Feet ache in their sodden shoes,
A thick white rime clings
To collar, coat, and stone.
Each step, each bite of steel into ice
A rebellion against gravity,
Against the death of will.
While will remains, so do I,
And the summit
Moves with each step closer.
Such a strange meditation,
This pursuit of peaks and clouds
That in the pain, in the fatigue,
We feel most alive.
Right,
Left,
Right,
One step in chase of another.





AN INSIDER'S GUIDE

Hey there, Jenni here! Have you ever wondered what happens behind the scenes at the climbing gym? How do we get the holds on the wall? Do we plan out a route on the ground or completely wing it? Why are the grades always wrong? If these questions are your own, you've come to the right place! I'll do my best to try and answer them satisfactorily.

First, a little bit of background about myself - I'm a mechanical engineering student here at UAF and I've been helping set routes for a little over a year now. I set routes mostly on the top rope wall, but I've done some boulder setting as well. Looking back through the Notes app on my phone, I've set a total of 57 routes in my time (yes, I keep track!)



A typical setting day begins with switching out the good climbing ropes for the setting ropes, and then stripping the oldest routes. To strip a route, we ascend and belay ourselves up one side of the rope, switch the ascender over to our side of the rope once we reach the top, then haul up a bucket and remove holds from the top down. Once we reach the bottom of the route, it's time to set. Some setters will have their entire route planned, or have certain moves they want to try and will set the route around those moves. Me? I plan out the bottom, attempt to plan the rest, settle on deciding at least the direction it will go, then end up winging an uncomfortable amount of it. We all test the moves as we go however, so it's not complete guesswork. Once the routes are set, we'll forerun them to ensure their overall functionality and determine the grades. Grades are ultimately decided on by comparing the routes' difficulties to those of already existing gym routes, as well as the others that were just set. At the UAF gym we try our best to match our grades to outdoor grades.



That is, a 5.9 climb at our gym should be fairly similar in difficulty to a 5.9 out at Grapefruit. That said, grading is not an exact science - there are so many variables!

When setting, there are several things a setter must keep in mind. The first of these is that a route should follow the 3 F's:

1. The route should be *Fun*,
2. It should be *Functional*,
3. And it should be *Fair*.

Essentially, the route should look so fun or intriguing that it inspires people to climb it. If you've ever been walking by the gym and thought, "that looks like a cool route, I want to try it!" then that setter can sleep peacefully at night. A route's moves should also make sense, working with the body's mechanics and not against them. The holds need to lie flat against the wall, so that fingers cannot get pinched or stuck. The route should also have a rhythm to it, which is often what makes a climb so enjoyable - it's that feeling of flowing up the wall and finally linking those moves together. The final consideration is avoiding setting routes that rely on reachiness. For this, we try to set for the average height so the routes are as fair for everyone as possible.



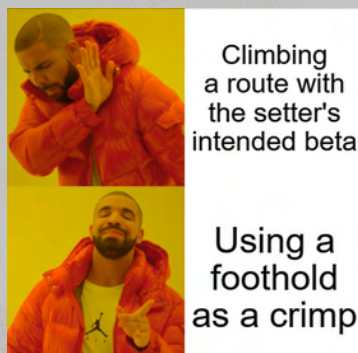
To expand on that - setting for the average height means not setting at the edge of our reach. If you've ever been stuck on a route because you can't reach the next hold... chances are there's an intentional trick to climbing the route - try moving your feet up, maybe edging or smearing on the features of the wall, or maybe it's just a good ol' fashioned dyno! If none of these tips work, our apologies! You are likely shorter than average.



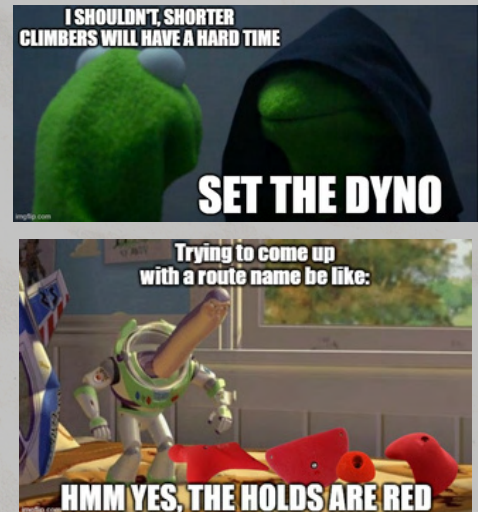
Just like how climbs provide challenges, challenges abound in the world of setting. With all the gear required, there's a lot to think about - and when you're 30 feet up in the air you can't afford to forget the basic safety requirements! So instead, you'll forget the little things. Things that aren't dangerous if you forget or mess up, but can add up to be quite aggravating..

Common mistakes include: leaving the grigri (used for belaying up the bucket) down in the bucket that's on the ground, forgetting to switch the ascender over to the other rope (very inconvenient when you're trying to lower), forgetting to bring up an impact driver, ratchet, or Allen wrench, leaving behind tape that's supposed to mark the finish hold(s) of a route, not hauling up enough holds, bringing the wrong size bolts, getting the bolt stuck in the T-nut... the list goes on.

When setting, it's disturbingly easy to get stuck in a rut. For a while there I was fascinated with high-steps. I mean, they're a near perfect move! You don't have to be tall to climb them, they're easy (for me at least), and the route looks crazy from the ground. There could be a huge gap in the wall and it would be tempting to think, "there're no holds in that section, it looks impossible!" But if you're able to get a foot on that high-step, its remarkable how much further you can reach after standing up on that leg. I must've set 3 or 4 routes in a row that incorporated high-steps, and it wasn't until I was climbing at another gym with a few high-steppy routes that I realized it can get a little bothersome to climb when done repeatedly.



Another challenge that setters may face is setter's block. More than once I've been halfway up a route and just finished setting a pretty slick move, and then I've looked down and realized I set the exact same move at the beginning of the route. Or I'll be down on the ground looking up at my unfinished route, hemming and hawing between going left to stem in a dihedral, or going straight up over a bulge in the wall, or even going towards the right, but then that would require different holds...



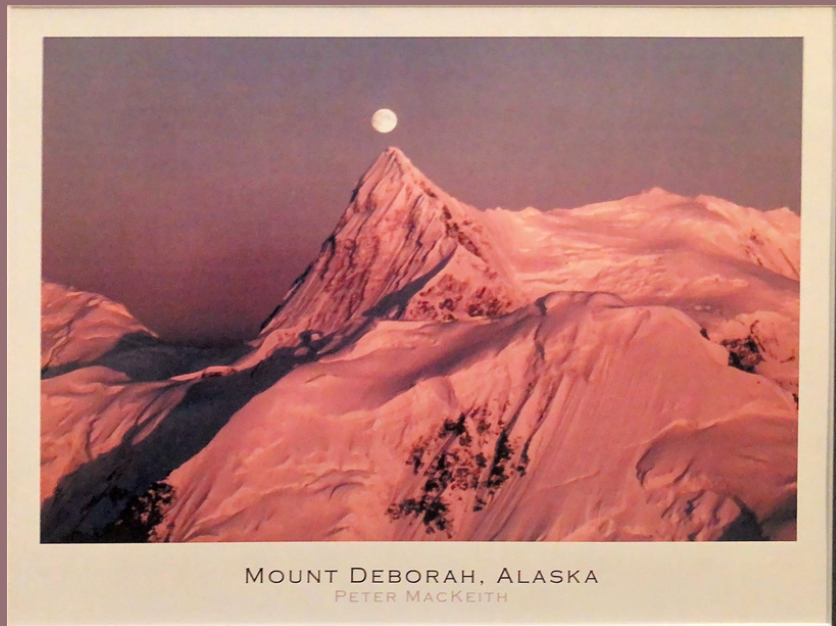
Once the setting is done, then comes the naming! Coming up with a route name is honestly one of the best parts of the job. I often have a name in mind from the start, and try to set the route accordingly. Previous themes have included 80's music, Disney movies, Kung Fu Panda, the Sound of Music, Shrek, Avengers, puns, memes, and most recently the Lord of the Rings.



At the end of the day, it really is a pleasure setting for you climbers. The single best part of route setting is seeing someone else climb your route. Whether that's seeing the move you envisioned in your mind in action, watching someone figure out a new way to climb the route and break your beta in the process, or just overhearing people talk about it. That's why we set - to allow climbers to forget about the problems of the day and instead focus on the problems on the wall, to hang out with other climbers, to challenge themselves, and to have fun. If you're having a good time, then we're doing something right.

AAC

PETER MACKEITH CLIMBING GRANT



The "Peter MacKeith Memorial Endowment Fund for Climbing" was established in 1981 by the family of Peter MacKeith, late president of the Alaska Alpine Club, in honor of Peter's love for climbing and of his climbing achievements in Alaska, Afghanistan, Greenland, and Iceland. The Alaska Alpine Club (AAC) was given the responsibility of distributing the earnings from the endowment for the purpose of supporting worthwhile mountaineering ventures by AAC members in Alaska or elsewhere in the world.



PETER MACKEITH
1949-1980

Born: London, England

Educated: Churchill College, Cambridge (Engineering BA with Honors 1970 & Electrical Sciences BA with Honors 1971); Imperial College, London (MS, Physics/Optics 1974); University of Alaska Fairbanks (Ph.D. Graduate student, Glaciology 1976-1980)

Scientist, climber, photographer and delightful friend, Peter MacKeith was killed in a climbing accident in the Alaska Range in May of 1980.

Top: Flying in a small plane, MacKeith caught Mt. Debora under the full moon bathed in fleeting Alpine Glow. (image provided by pilot Rod March)

Corner: Peter MacKeith with his camera, straddling a stream on the surface of a glacier on the north ridge of Mt. Wrangell, the site of his Ph.D. Research. (photo by Daniel Solie 1979)

REQUIREMENTS FOR SUBMITTING A PROPOSAL

All recipients must have been Alaska Alpine Club members for at least one year prior to receiving the grant. Expedition members who are not members of the Alaska Alpine Club are not eligible.

The proposal must contain the following information:

Names, addresses and resume of climbing experience for each expedition member, including those that are not members of the Alaska Alpine Club and do not receive a grant.

A description of the climbing objective, including a topo map of the area (a good black and white copy is sufficient).

A description of how the party plans to carry out the climb and the approximate dates of the climb.

A budget for the expedition explaining how the climbing grant will be used.

Explanation of financial need.

A description of what the applicants have done and will do for the Alaska Alpine Club.

Signed liability release forms for all party members requesting money.

The deadline has been extended to February 28th, 2023.

Please email proposals to:
alaska.alpine.club@gmail.com

More information can be found at
alaskaalpineclub.com

PETER
MACKETH
GRANT
RECIPIENT

MT HAYES NORTH RIDGE

By Sean Marble

The north ridge of Mt Hayes (13,832') is a quintessential Alaskan backcountry mountain climb. It has it all: Super Cub bush landings on a remote strip; steep, exposed climbing among an endless sea of peaks; long days of bushwhacking and postholing; and a demanding float on a river with unknown risks and obstacles around every corner. Ben Smith, Curtis Henry, Keane Richards and I attempted to climb the north ridge in May 2022. We received the 2022 Peter Mackeith Climbing Grant and the CalTopo Adventure Grant, which covered our one-way airfare entirely and made the trip possible.

We left Fairbanks on May 8th and headed down the Richardson Highway. The past three weeks had been perfectly clear, offering a view of the entire range with virtually no wind. We awoke Monday to fresh snow and a low ceiling. After waiting all day, we decided to take advantage of the 18 hours of daylight and headed to the south side of the range. As soon as we exited the main pass, the clouds disappeared, and we kite skied in warm sunlight all evening. The weather was the exact same on Tuesday, so we headed down to the same spot and practiced crevasse rescue scenarios. We finally got a call from the pilot Wednesday morning as we were eating breakfast. We packed up quickly and met the pilot Keane off at the Golden Eagle Outfitter hangar. He would fly out from Delta Junction, and we would meet the pilot at an airstrip farther down the highway.

We were all shuttled into a small patch of snow protected from the glacier around 4,200'.

A stash of packrafting gear and extra food was buried as deep as we could dig to protect it from curious critters.

From there we travelled 4 miles up the Hayes glacier to set up a camp on a smaller side glacier.

Despite the huge cracks visible in the satellite imagery, we had no crevasse encounters.

We set up camp at 6,500' across from a stunning ice fall. Excited to get up to the ridge, we were moving by 5:30 am. 1,000' of soft and punchy snow brought us to the ridge, and Ben and Curtis stashed their skis. The rest of the day was a straightforward ridge climb with one or two leg punches in crevasses. 10 hours of travel brought us to our campsite at 9,000'.

The forecast called for a storm rolling in the next day, so we dug in expecting winds and snow. Our camp was dug into a snowdrift that blocked most of the winds, but occasionally a gust would whip spindrift around the camp in circles. We dug a cooking shelter into the snowdrift, a latrine in a neighboring crevasse, and set up our tents. An hour after Curtis and I crawled into our tent for the night, the storm blew in and nearly blew our tent down.

We packed up in haste and quickly expanded our cooking cave.



As we descended into the quickly growing winds, I looked back to see a lenticular cloud engulf the summit and extend miles to the west. It was about to get nasty. At the top of the ice wall, the winds were a sustained 60 mph. Having no good snow to build an anchor in, we placed a few pickets and screws for mental protection and downclimbed. Eventually we used one solid picket to lower off. We returned to camp and were in a blizzard an hour later. We hunkered in the cave, shoveling the entrance every 20 minutes so we weren't snowed in.

In the morning, we decided to descend off the mountain. Fearful of what could have happened if we were on the summit ridge when the storm rolled in and an approaching time crunch, it was an easy decision to make. We packed up and started down. Reversing the knife-edge ridge seemed easier than coming up; the snow on the west side was perfect for front pointing and super fun.

As soon as we finished the cave, the winds died down and would not pick up for the rest of the night. Surprisingly, the cave was more pleasant than the tent.

The going was slow, the cornices huge, and the drops long. By 10 pm we made it to 11,000' and decided to call it a night.

The only problem, any flat area was extremely exposed to storms. We decided to chop a tent platform into the west side of the ridge, but the snow was more like ice at this elevation. We spent 2 hours chopping away to get a tiny tent platform. The back of our platform was bordered by a crevasse of unknown size. After a carefully choreographed dance to pitch the tents, we crawled in and got to sleep by 1 am. The next day was cloudy and snowy. Curtis and I dug another snow cave, not wanting a repeat of the first night. The going was slow as we chopped out ice chunk after ice chunk. Eventually we finished, despite breaking a shovel, and created a cozy home for the next few days. Weather looked good for the following day, so we planned a summit push.

At 3:30 am the weather looked great. A gorgeous sunrise illuminated our tiny perch and the rest of the range. We were off by 5. From camp, the biggest obstacle visible was a huge glacial ice wall blocking the entire ridge. Within 30 minutes, we arrived at its base. Unsure of what to expect on the route, we had brought a handful of ice screws and technical tools. Going straight up and over would be crazy with our amount of gear. Ben and I explored a route off to the right, but the wall just kept going. We ended up going left, climbing 30' of glacier ice, then nearly a rope length of snice (halfway between snow and ice) that barely took pickets.

It took 2 hours to climb 200'. While we continued up a snow slope above the wall, the winds began to pick up. Keane and Curtis waited for us at 12,000', and by then the winds were ripping.

At 8,500' we descended into the clouds. With so little ridge left, we kept going until we found the skis that marked our ascent path.

Keane and I plunge-stepped our way down, leaving Curtis and Ben to get some turns. In the flat light and punchy snow, they decided to walk down, much to the amusement of me and Keane.

Day 7 was the hardest day of the whole trip. Keane and I started down the glacier on snowshoes. Eventually Ben and Curtis would join us on snowshoes once again due to a snow crust. We travelled the 4 miles to the airstrip quickly and unburied our gear. It survived the squirrels!



Ben and Keane's tent perched on our tent platform on summit attempt morning.

After a relaxing lunch on tundra, we loaded up our packs and began the 10-mile trek to our put-in on the Little Delta River.

With 70+ lb packs, we knew this wouldn't be fun... we had no idea.

The farther we went, the softer the snow got. Keane and I stopped halfway across the Hayes Glacier for a bouldering break. We got some fun first and likely last ascents in our climbing boots. Hours later, as we approached the terminus of the glacier, we started to posthole. Our snowshoes made no difference, and every other step we sank to our hips. We struggled for 7 miles, until we descended to Hayes Creek hoping it would be floatable. It was not. We continued our struggle.

Eventually we made it to where the snow thinned and we could walk on tundra, but now we had a mile of tussocks to deal with.

We met up with Ben and Curtis, who had only a slightly better experience, pitched camp at the river on a sand bar and built a fire.



Mt. Hayes summit ridge

Solid ground was glorious.

The next morning was slow. We got up, built a fire, relaxed, and drank coffee. Eventually we decided we should get moving, so we hiked the last ¼ mile to the river and inflated our packrafts.

We pushed off at 2:30 pm. The first few miles of the float were a fun, splashy, class II river. It was shallow and involved a lot of butt scooting. A handful of small rapids were a blast to run.

As the river got larger, the overflow started. Throughout the winter, sections of the river overflowed and froze. Now, these sections were 2'-6' thick with ice.

The river entrenched itself or was diverted. The risk increased dramatically. There was always the possibility to round a corner and find an ice jam, ice bridge, or the river diverting through brush.

With the entrenching of the river, there were limited spots to bail if a hazard was encountered, as the ice walls rose to 6' high on either side.



One of the many seemingly endless sections of overflow ice. Whatever happened, we were trapped and committed to the float.

In one location, the river flowed through a section of alders, so we got out and dragged our boats on top of the ice for a half mile. In another location, the river flowed under the ice, so we dragged again. In some places, the river divided into many shallow channels: more dragging. By mile 23 it was getting late, so we pulled over to look for a camp site.

While approaching our sand bar, an ice shelf collapsed near Ben, and he surfed the wave downriver. An exciting end to the day.

Our final day started earlier; we were floating by 8:30 am. We encountered more ice jams and more boat dragging. Then river diverted through the forest, so we dragged. Finally, the river opened again, and we could once again float. We floated through one more overflow section; this one was by far the worst. The walls towered 8' over us, and the channel narrowed.

While Keane and I waited for Ben and Curtis to run the next corner and give us the all-clear, a massive ice ledge collapsed and nearly washed us away. As we continued, the overflow gave way to logs. Summer runoff had not pushed the winter's carnage downstream yet, so we navigated around huge piles of logs and uprooted trees.

The river picked up speed. By 1 pm, we arrived at the Tanana River and had the only 2 relaxing miles of the whole float.

The entirety of the Little Delta was mentally exhausting, constantly being prepared for whatever lay around the corner.

Once we reached the take-out, a short hike brought us to the highway and our shuttle vehicle. Upon reaching town, temperatures soared above 70°F and the trees were in full on bloom. What a dramatic change from 2 days earlier and 11,000' higher.

We are all still amazed at the adventure we were able to pull off, and incredibly grateful for the support of CalTopo and the Alaska Alpine Club. This adventure would not have been possible if not for that support. Although we did not summit, we all returned safely, and I'm sure we'll be back to Mt Hayes again in the future.



Team Hayes at the end of their trip



PETER
MACKETH
GRANT
RECIPIENT

FIRST WORLD HUNGER

IN THE ARRIGETCH

BY TRISTAN O'DONOGHUE

In July of 2022 I traveled to the Arrigetch valley with my climbing partner and longtime friend, Ethan Berkeland.

We had our sights set on the inspiring granite walls that are often mythologized by those that partake in remote Alaskan climbing adventures. We set aside nearly three weeks of prized Alaskan summer, in Ethan's case, a valuable month of work, to dedicate towards this trip. Surely this would be plenty of time to satisfy our intimate desire for splitter pitches and seldom reached summits.

Landing at Circle Lake, 12 miles from the major Arrigetch valley peaks, was somewhat anticlimactic.

Both Ethan and I had been on separate climbing trips into the Alaska range the prior spring where one can land directly at a base camp in the middle of the largest peaks on the continent.

Your heart drops into your stomach with premonitions of "I have to climb that?!".

Here, you are not greeted by impressive peaks but rather by a boggy swamp ridden with mosquitoes and tasked with hauling the enormous amount of climbing gear and living necessities, 12 miles to the alpine environment.

With nearly 350 pounds of gear we had no choice but to commit to hauling all of our gear in two loads. No big deal, we figured, it'll just take some time, which we had much of. On the first night, we thought it would be a good objective to haul both of our loads the two miles to the edge of the creek where we would find the established hiking trail. After four grueling hours of cursing, sweating, and tripping up in some incredibly formidable tussocks we decided the last load back at Circle Lake could wait until the morning.

Only then did I realize all my sleeping gear was in that second load two miles away, but it might as well have been 200 miles. In that moment I'd have sooner slept naked and cold than have to repeat that excruciating experience so immediately.



The first glimpse of the Arrigetch and Aquarius peaks on the hike up. The same view I would look at with some contempt while leaving the valley many days later

Instead, I wrapped our rain fly around me for warmth until Ethan violently ripped it off me in the middle of the night as it began to rain.

The next morning, when arriving back at the creek from repeating that horrendous 2 mile stretch of tussocks our food insecurity began to set in and haunt us for the remainder of our trip.

Ethan had been working in Wiseman the month prior and planned to meet me at the nearby airstrip where Brooks Range Aviation would retrieve us at, it was then left up to me to plan and pack all of our belongings we'd need for the duration of the trip. In a deranged three day period, I had gathered all of Ethan's gear from his parents basement and rummaged through a stache of Mountain House meals I had been hanging onto, which later we learned had all expired in 2014,



Looking up Arrigetch creek with a view of Xanadu, Ariel, and Caliban (L-R)



Approaching the north face of Elephant's Tooth with the eventual route of ascent going directly up the center of the peak.

and spent several hundred dollars at a variety of local gear and grocery stores throughout Fairbanks.

As I lay all these belongings across my cabin floor it shook me to think we'd be bringing all this crap up with us. What didn't cross my mind was the possibility that it wouldn't be enough. This realization would occur on the side of Arrigetch creek on day 2 of our trip as we pondered what we'd have for lunch the next 18 days.

We decided on skipping lunch for the remainder of our haul days up the creek to our basecamp which would set aside more food for the period we'd potentially be climbing. A few nuts and a coveted meat stick would suffice to continue our push higher into the valley each day. Finally, upon reaching the alpine with the last of our second haul we were able to take a break from the arduous labor our bodies carried out over the last four days. Thanks to inclement weather a single rest day would turn into seven.

It seemed the only good weather window of the summer had just ended. Our first clear view of Xanadu's Grayling wall, our primary objective, revealed no snow on any of its ledges.

On the first day of rain as we recovered from our approach, we still schemed ambitiously of how we'd storm up the spooky-looking north face with our freshly purchased aid rack and a level of aid-climbing experience which summed to Ethan doing the Regular NW route of Halfdome the fall prior.

A trial by fire, we scoffed and plotted away. By the third day of non-stop precipitation the Grayling wall, starting a good 1,000 feet above our basecamp, had been fully consumed in snow and the reality of our situation was beginning to set in; we would likely not be attempting the unclimbed face. After six days of rain and averaging around 1,000 calories per day Ethan's girlfriend, Jenna, messaged us that there would be a small window of decent weather approaching. Finally we were able to do some climbing. We settled on an appealing line up the north face of Elephant's tooth which conveniently was directly above our basecamp.

On the morning of our first attempt we were immediately rained off after the first pitch of chossy climbing. While disappointed in having to bail, we agreed it was the most fun either of us had had in the last week, plus we got to stuff our faces with delicious snacks we'd set aside strictly for climbing days! Things were looking up.



Celebratory selfie after topping out on Elephant's tooth with the Aquarius ridge in the background. The notch directly above my head being the obvious end to our ridge traverse.

The second attempt on the peak the following day was much more routine.

Swapping leads through six engaging pitches and 900' of vertical terrain with difficulties up to 5.11 brought us to its summit. From later research we would discover pitches 2, 3 and 5 were climbed by a party in 2010 (See AAJ 2012; Stucki et al) which avoided the prized 4th pitch finger crack we had eyed from below.

From the summit we glimpsed our first real view of the Arrigetch valley. Blown away by its beauty we sat there for several minutes with smiles across our faces at where we were. We took a summit selfie, shook hands, and began to descend the 4th class east ridge as dark clouds began to loom.

They would eventually catch us right as we entered our cook tent for a late night snack and for a few sips of R&R rationed for that week.

The next morning brought the return of more rain & snow. With a full day of climbing behind us it was slightly easier to stew in the tent knowing we had managed to climb something on what was turning out to be more of a camping trip.

It was an added bonus that we had rationed our post climbing days to include ample calories for us to feast on. A food day! As the rain continued on, we had ample time to hike along the valley floor of Arrigetch creek to seek out other possible objectives if the weather turned in our favor.

Our hiking back and forth along the valley floor paralleled along a ridgeline 2,000 feet above that separates Arrigetch creek from Aquarius creek and it began to catch our attention. Noting that it lacked snow accumulation, and recalling an obscure Instagram comment from Roman Dial that it was one of the objectives yet to be completed in the range, we agreed it would be our new goal.

View from our basecamp with Elephant's tooth and the Aquarius ridge above the cook tent and the snowy peaks of Arrigetch creek upstream.



As we spent days waiting for blue skies, we entertained ourselves by visiting our new friends, the only other climbing party in the range, who were camped at the head of Aquarius valley. They seemed to be taking the bad weather even worse than we were. Only once did we truly break down in our resolve to ration our food. During one of those rainy days, Ethan began to scoop spoonfuls of Nuttella into his mouth. I didn't have the will to stop him and I too joined in the Nutella debauchery. As for our friends, morbid comments regarding their approach from Aiyagomahala valley and "taking a gun for the 15 hour descent off West Maiden so you could just shoot yourself instead" left us with a better perspective of our mental fortitude. Three days before we were set to begin hiking out, a clear weather window arrived. We got up at 6:00 in the morning and began hiking to our objective by 7:00. Starting up the east ridge of the Elephant's Tooth on familiar ground we reached the first peak we would traverse and encountered our only stuck rope along the route. On the third rappel off the south face of the Tooth, Ethan clipped into an old piton while hammering another in the same mediocre crack for our next rappel. Upon doing so, the old piton popped out of the expanding crack, leaving Ethan unattached but safely perched on a ledge.

Encountering numerous rappel anchors that we repurposed would end up saving us at the end of the day when we ran out of our own rappel cord. Any evidence of previous parties reaching summits along the ridge from the valleys below stopped about halfway through the ridgeline when we encountered the crux summit of the traverse. Features we coined Spongebob and Patrick ended up being a total of 4 pitches of climbing on beautiful well protected rock which finished atop Patrick with a splitter corner crack. The crack started at a width of 4 inches then narrowed down to thin hands as it became gently overhanging. We hadn't brought a #4 with us and belaying Ethan through the start of the corner was an impressive feat to witness above terrible protection.

We had joked previously about finding a single hard pitch along the traverse to bolster the grade of the entire route.

After surmounting Patrick and getting a full view of the remaining ridgeline yet to be traversed, a bout of rain and snow would begin. We sat for roughly 30 minutes in a depressed stupor about what to do. While the precipitation was light, it was enough to wet the lichen on the rock, making the terrain very slippery.

We acknowledged with so much exposed 4th and 5th class soloing this was a concern but ultimately chose to continue on. Soon after I found myself down humping an arete after Ethan and nearly greasing off into Aquarius valley.

An experience that left me doubting the efficacy of staying unroped on this terrain while frustrated and insecure that it was I who was constantly getting gripped on these exposed sections when Ethan would have seemingly little issue.



One of the many 4th to 5th class scrambles we'd encounter along the ridgeline.

We reached a notch in the ridge that we both agreed was a logical conclusion to the ridge. We did six rappels to the head of the Arrigetch valley and from there we stumbled in a dazed, sleep-deprived psychosis along the familiar valley floor back to our basecamp returning at five in the morning and twenty two hours on the move. To summarize, we opted to rope up for eight pitches, completed fourteen rappels, and three miles of fourth to fifth class terrain we scrambled over. It was undoubtedly my most memorable day in the mountains.

With one more possible day for climbing following our rest day we decided to hike once more to the back of Arrigetch creek and repeat the Virga Dihedrals on the east buttress of Xanadu (see AAJ 2019; Steph Williams et al). The first two pitches offered some of the finest granite climbing anywhere. An adjacent crack was also climbed which was coined Virga crack (35m, 5.10a) which would continue up for several more pitches as a future prospect.

Several days of fine weather and excellent climbing were under our belt and we were content with our time in the valley. With a pickup scheduled at Takahula lake we had to begin our pack out, an effort neither of us looked forward to. In order to maximize our time to climb, we had to complete our double hauls back to the toe of the valley in a single day.

This was beginning to feel overwhelming as we estimated it to be a roughly 8 mile stretch we would have to hike down and back up then down again. Walking down with my final load of the day wet, hungry, and exhausted I took one final glance at the view of the mountains and said to myself "fuck this place" and trucked down the well established trail alongside the creek not looking back. So would conclude our time spent in the Arrigetch valley.



Looking back along the ridgeline with the lakes of Aquarius valley far below. Elephant's tooth in the background.

The float out along the Alatna river was exactly what we needed at the end of our nearly three week trip. A slow, meandering and beautiful river with sunny weather allowed us to recover both mentally and physically from our time above the treeline. We arrived at Takahula lake with empty bear barrels and hungry stomachs. We awaited our pickup the next day with great anticipation especially after experiencing an abundance of human feces surrounding the idyllic beach where we were expected to be picked up. During our orientation meeting several weeks prior the ranger had made comment to this issue but we had only poked fun at her "poop issue in the Arrigetech" until now.



The first of three pitches to gain the summit of this unclimbed peak, Patrick, along the Aquarius ridgeline.



Soaking up the sun along the Alatna river on day two of our float to Takahula lake.

Looking back at the trip with several months of time to process, regain the several pounds I lost, and evaluate how I spent my July, I've slowly come to grow fond of the many days spent entirely looking at the inside of our cook tent and disagreeing between ourselves on what a true wilderness should be defined as. To me, it is an experience that few people get to have these days with so many distractions. As starlink-like services become accessible, true isolation with one's thoughts may be a distant recollection in wilderness areas. It left me feeling different about the active role in which the online connectedness I often crave should play in my happiness and well being.

The climbing was also pretty good.

It excites me to think about returning to that same place in the future knowing what to expect now. It seems rare that serious climbing parties return to the Arrigetech for a second time based on journal reports. An observation I believe is due to the fact that the logistical and meteorological conditions make it very hard on the psyche compared to other expedition locations. However, as an angsty young interior climber, these are features I and my predecessors often have had to cope with for any decent climbing nearby. With enough time to forget the exhausting load hauling and terrible weather we had to endure, I'm sure I'll find myself back in one of the most beautiful places in my home state, wholly regretting my decisions once again. This trip was partially funded by the Peter Mackeith Climbing Grant through the Alaska Alpine Club and the Mountaineering Fellowship Fund through the American Alpine Club.



The third pitch of this summit block along the ridgeline being the crux 5.11b of the whole traverse.

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PAGE 11; FAIRBANKS SKIMO RACERS, NOLAN EARNEST,
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