

World Wide Web Address: <http://www.climber.org/pcs>

## Next General Meeting

**Date:** Tuesday, October 12

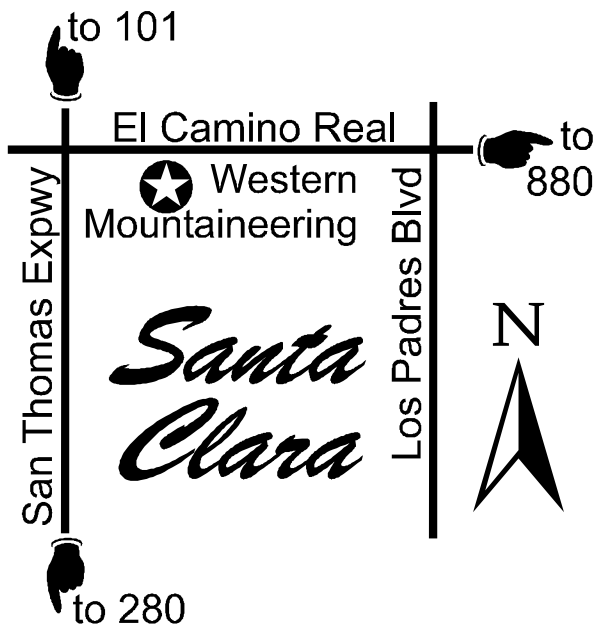
**Time:** 8:00 PM

**Program:** Climbing in the McKinley area in 1952

Come and hear this historic perspective on climbing. Dr. Winslow Briggs will talk on his experiences on climbing in the McKinley area in 1952. Dr. Briggs is an internationally renowned plant biologist at Stanford University.

**Directions:** 2344 El Camino Real, Santa Clara (between San Thomas and Los Padres), parking in the rear.

From 101: Exit at San Thomas Expressway, Go South to El Camino Real. Turn left and the Western Mountaineering will be immediately to your right.



Deadline for submissions to the next Scree is Sunday 10/24/99 Meetings are the 2nd Tuesday of each month.

## Advance Trip Planning Meeting

**Date:** Tuesday, October 26, 1999

**Time:** 8:00 PM

**Place:** Home of Arun Mahajan,  
arun@tollbridgetech.com

Winter is Coming Winter is Coming, and it is time to start thinking about winter trips. Arun, again, offered to open his house for this meeting.

Bring your calendars, maps, guide books and trip ideas. Advance planing of summer trips is also welcome.

Disclaimer: The purpose of the meeting is to help leaders schedule trips so there are no conflicts or duplications. Trips proposed in this meeting are not automatically sponsored by the Sierra Club. A separate submission of the trip to the section's scheduler will be required before a trip is sponsored.

Directions From 101:

1. Take the Oregon Expressway exit in Palo Alto.
2. Go west, through a few lights. After Bryant is the Alma exit. It is a sharp right. If you miss it, you will know because you go under an overpass.
3. After taking the exit, follow the exit road till it meets Alma.
4. Go north (right turn) on Alma for a few blocks passing roads like California, Santa Rita, Rinconada, Seale. These roads are on the right. The CalTrain tracks are on the left of Alma.
5. After Seale is Tennyson. My townhouse is in a 4-plex, 1745 Alma, the second unit from the road. It is north of Tennyson but south of the next road, Lowell. Off street parking on Tennyson or Lowell, there is none in the complex for guests, I am afraid.

From 280:

1. Take the Page Mill Road exit in Palo Alto.
2. Drive east on Page Mill, go through El Camino
3. Alma (north) is a sharp right turn within half a mile of the El Camino junction.
4. Follow the directions mentioned in 4 above.

• Ron Karpel

## Wilderness First Aid

To help trip leaders and would-be leaders get the required First Aid certificate, the Chapter sponsors a First Aid class each quarter, based on a nationally recognized first aid text, but with added material and emphasis on wilderness situations with no phone to dial 911. The next First Aid classes will be Saturday, November 20 and Sunday, November 21 at the Peninsula Conservation Center in Palo Alto (from Bayshore/Hwy. 101 at San Antonio, turn toward the Bay; turn left at 1st stoplight, then right at Corporation Way to park behind PCC). Class is 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. (1 hour for your bag lunch) and is limited to 12 people. To sign up, send choice of day, and a check for \$38 with a stamped, self-addressed business-sized envelope to: Health Education Services, 200 Waverly, Menlo Park, CA 94025. Cancellations get partial refund if a substitute attends (you get to keep the Wilderness First Aid book). For more information, call 650-321-6500.

• *Marg Ottenberg*

## Congratulations Bill Isherwood!

Congratulations to Bill Isherwood on completing the ascent of all the 14'ers in the lower 48. On September 5, 1999, Bill climbed his 68<sup>th</sup> and final peak, Capitol Peak in Colorado's Elk Range. The weather was sunny and warm for the season, with a touch of fresh snow on the north faces from earlier in the week. Bill joined John Esterl, an active PCS'er before he moved to Albuquerque, who has a mere 31 14'ers to his credit, and yours truly, Chris MacIntosh for class-4 rated Capitol, one of the most challenging Colorado 14'ers. It offers great views, some interesting scrambles (yes, I was glad of Bill's rope for the one-hundred-foot horizontal "Knife Edge") and looks really impressive from camp near Capitol Lake. Although John and I used hard hats in the upper portion of the climb they were untested, fortunately. Footnote: Dana Isherwood completed the same set of peaks more than a decade ago. Long may Bill and Dana climb!

• *Chris Macintosh*

## Are You Interested In Topo Maps?

The chances are that if you send away sometime to the USGS for some hard-to-find topo maps, you will receive (along with your ordered maps) information encouraging you to join what is called the EARTH SCIENCE CORPS program. It is an opportunity for you to become a fully certified USGS field rep, assigned to a topo map quadrangle in an area of your choice. The USGS is painfully understaffed and needs interested and willing volunteers to field check and provide updates on roads, trails, springs, reservoirs, park and wilderness boundaries, benchmark conditions, etc. All that is required is that you provide your quadrangle updates to the USGS in Reston, Virginia on an annual basis. They provide the topos, you make your notations on them and send them back. They file your notations, and include them in future topo map updated printings. I initially chose the "Gilroy Hot Springs" quad, since I have done a certain amount of hiking in the southern portion of Henry Coe State Park. There were significant boundary, trail, and small reservoir changes. Currently I have taken on the Junipero Serra quad, since I find myself in the Arroyo Seco fairly often.

One is provided with an official badge, which entitles you to do official business; like approaching private landowners and having a better chance of gaining access to their property for field checking.

It is fun and it is a way to give more direction and purpose to the recreational hikes you might be taking in your quadrangle area.

For those of a more scientific or technical bent, there are opportunities in cartography, hydrology, surveying, etc.

If you want to learn more, write to:

Earth Science Corps  
MS 51  
U.S. Geological Survey  
Reston, Virginia 22092

• *Paul Danielson, VWA member/volunteer*

## The Tumpline

A tumpline is a simple strap that runs from the top of the head and around the bottom of a pack. This is probably the oldest technique of human load carriage. Native Americans, French Voyageurs, and North American mountain men have been known to carry heavy, bulky loads long distances with this method. And today, many people in developing countries still use tumplines to carry loads that may be 70% of their body weight.

I have used a tumpline to carry knapsacks for the past four years and I have enjoyed the reactions I get from other hikers. I once encountered some US Marines from the Mountain Warfare Training Center near Bridgeport. Our brief greeting was punctuated by the word, "sir," while they stared at that strap on top of my head. More often, young people laugh at me and ask if I am a Sherpa. But occasionally someone asks me why I am using such a weird device. I reply: "Because it is easier."

In 1994 I took part in a mountaineering expedition to Cho Oyu, a 26,748-foot mountain approximately 15 miles northwest of Mt. Everest. We hired six Nepalese climbing Sherpas to assist us with load carrying.

These Sherpas were skilled, professional climbers, outfitted with the most up-to-date mountaineering clothing and equipment. But despite having state of the art packs, with shaped, load-bearing waist-belts and shoulder straps, they carried them using tumplines. I recalled that the noted American climber and equipment designer Yvon Chouinard had described the virtues of the tumpline in the 1980 Chouinard Equipment catalog. While he had originally started using the tumpline as therapy for chronic back pain, once his back pain had disappeared he noted that it was easier to carry a pack with this seemingly primitive method. So I picked up one of the Sherpa's packs. The massive load crushed my shoulders but it felt a little better once the waist belt was tightened. The Sherpa suggested that I unfasten the waist belt and then he adjusted the tumpline so that most of the load was carried by it with only a small amount of weight on the shoulder straps. But with the tumpline the weight seemed to disappear. My torso was completely unrestricted and I was able to breathe easier without the "corset" of the waist belt and shoulder straps.

I experimented further with the tumpline after I returned home. I carried a load of water once a week during my daily afternoon hike (2 miles one way with 1,270 feet of gain) along a good dirt road in the mountains behind my home. To be fair, I should state that it took me a long time to get used to the strain on my neck. I used it on 14 of my afternoon hikes and on five weekend trips before embarking on a hundred mile, two-week hike in the High

Sierra. On my afternoon hikes with a 53-pound load I averaged 49 minutes 14 seconds with the tumpline and 52:30 with the load-bearing waist belt. With 66 pounds I averaged 52:25 with the tumpline and 58:18 with the waist belt. And on the two-week hike I alternated between using the tumpline and the waist belt each day. I found that I could hike faster, breathe easier, and felt less tired at the end of the day with the tumpline than I did with the waist belt.

My hiking and climbing friends were skeptical that this ancient method was better than their modern corsets so I contacted John Kirk, the Load-Bearing Team Leader at the US Army's Natick Research, Development, and Engineering Center at Natick, Massachusetts. He replied: "When soldiers who typically carry 60-100 lbs in a rucksack have been instructed to carry loads on their heads . . . they have a difficult time with it." But he referred me to the cover story of the February 1986 issue of Nature. The authors of this article measured the oxygen consumption of African tribal women, the Luo (who balance the load on top of their heads) and the Kikuyu (who use the tumpline). The women walked on a motorized treadmill with and without loads. Loads of up to 20% of body weight had no perceptible effect on oxygen consumption and, presumably, on energy cost. In other words, they carried the equivalent of 20% of their body weight free. Increasing the loads from 20% to 70% of body weight increased the energetic cost (based on oxygen consumption) of the African tribal women from 0% to 50%. They compared their findings with similar studies of US army recruits. Army recruits carrying backpacks (with just shoulder straps and no waist belt) with 20% of body weight loads increased oxygen consumption by 13% and 70% loads by nearly 100%. (I believe that it would have been more relevant to measure the oxygen consumption of experienced, fit hikers using packs with load-bearing waist belts.)

As far as I know, tumplines are not commercially available. I make my own by using 18 inches of 2-inch wide seat belt webbing for the head strap. I then sew seven feet of 1-inch flat webbing to one side of the head strap. On the other side of the head strap I attach a ladder lock buckle and run the one-inch strap through it. The rest of the one-inch strap goes down the sides and underneath my pack. Most external frames have the packs attached to the upper two-thirds of the frame and I have found that it makes no difference if the strap goes immediately beneath the pack and above the sleeping bag or if it runs beneath the sleeping bag. The head strap goes on top of the forward part of my head, just above (not on) my forehead. I usually place a washcloth inside of my hat (not so much for padding but for absorbing perspiration from my bald head) and place the tumpline on top of my hat. I don't attach the pack's waist belt and only have a small part of the load carried by the shoulder straps (to keep the pack from swaying) while most of the pack weight is carried by the tumpline. But I do resort to using the waist belt and the shoulder straps when hiking downhill, especially along a steep, narrow trail. I don't need to breathe so much going downhill, I am usually hiking faster and I typically need to turn my head frequently to see where to place my feet.

While I encourage hikers to try the tumpline I also want to urge everyone to take it easy when you first use a tumpline. Novice backpackers (using a waist belt) should not carry more than 20% of their body weight in a pack and even with this weight restriction those on their first overnight hike probably felt new muscles the next day. The beginner's tumpline load should be light, perhaps no more than 15% of body weight, and even then your neck may be stiff the following day.

Start by carrying a small daypack with a tumpline. Take it easy and gradually increase the pack weight. Your neck and back muscles will slowly get stronger and I believe that you'll find it easier to carry a pack. But best of all, the pleasure you get from hiking will increase.

• R. J. Secor

## PCS Trips

PCS trips must be submitted through the Scheduler (see back cover for details). Trips not received from the Scheduler will be listed as PRIVATE, without recourse.

### Mt. Dubois

Peak: Mount Dubois, 13,559', Class 2  
Dates: October 2-4, 1999 (Saturday - Monday)  
Map: Boundary Peak 7.5'  
Leaders: Bill Kirkpatrick H (408) 293-2447  
Wmkirk@earthlink.net  
Ahmad Zandi H (408) 255-4233  
Zandi@zandi.com

If you've wondered about the White Mountains, join us on this climb of the second-highest peak in the range. We will hike from the Fish Lake Valley on the Nevada side, near the Chiatovich Creek.

### Kern Peak

Peak: Kern Peak (11510) LIST FINISH!  
Dates: Oct 2-3 Sat-Sun  
Leader: Steve Eckert <eckert@climber.org>  
Co-Leader: Erik Siering

Help the leader celebrate finishing the SPS Peaks List in good style. The 9-mile pack in, over almost-flat terrain with uncrowded camping, should give rise to a nice party Saturday. A quick 7-mile romp to the peak on Sunday and we're back in camp for the stroll back to the cars. Reserve a spot early and pack the good stuff (for the mother of all happy hours)! Co-listed with the Angeles Chapter SPS.

### We been Owen it to ourselves

Peaks: Sirretta Peak, class 1, 9977; Owens Peak, class 2, 8453  
Dates: Oct 23-24 Sat-Sun  
Maps: Kernville, Inyokern  
Leaders: Aaron Schuman & Arun Mahajan  
H 650-968-9184 W 650-943-7532  
aaron\_schuman@yahoo.com  
Details: <http://sj.znet.com/~cynthiam/owens.html>

Way off in the driest corner of the Sierra Nevada there's a subrange of mountains that's covered with junipers and jackrabbits, and it sports some right purty desert vistas: we're aimin to go there. Join us for the Saturday afternoon hike to Sirretta, the Sunday hike to Owens Peak, or for both days.

## Inyo & Keynot

May 31, 1999

If you're looking for an enjoyable climb in the spring, you might try the Inyo Mountains. Keynot and Inyo are the second and third highest peaks in the Inyo Range at 11,101' and 10,975' respectively.

On Memorial Day, Richard and I decided to climb these two DPS peaks which offer spectacular views of the snow-capped Sierra.

If you don't have a 4WD vehicle, you will have to hike an extra two miles round trip.

At the trailhead where we camped the night before the climb, we met DPSSer Linda McDermott who was leading a private trip. She suggested we climb Inyo and Keynot on separate days since it considerably shortens the second day and makes for an earlier drive home. Good advice.

Of course, the DPS group was climbing both peaks as a day hike. With lighter packs they could travel faster, but it's a strenuous hike with 6500' of elevation gain and 10.5 miles.

A challenge of the trip is the fact that unless there is snow, you must carry all your water. We packed in six liters each the few miles and almost 2000' gain to Bedsprings Camp (no water, actual rusty bed springs.)

We left about 7 a.m., arrived at Bedsprings Camp around noon, set up our camp and left most of our water. (We had heard the DPS group pass our truck at 5 a.m.) Around 2 p.m. we headed for the 10,080' saddle between Inyo and Keynot.

Near the summit of Mt. Inyo there is a natural rock shelter under a huge boulder with some old tools and other artifacts lying about. A bronze plaque on a nearby pine explains that this shelter was used by Marion Howard, the beekeeper of McElvoy Canyon.

I had read about him in the DPS newsletter and was really glad to find the shelter.

The next day's climb of Keynot was really a treat. This peak has one of the finest bristlecone pine forests I have ever seen.

One tree is about 12 feet in diameter. And as we descended the ridge to the saddle, the view of the Sierra across Owens Valley is unparalleled.

For those of you who like fast scree slopes, the descent from Bedsprings into Union Wash is reputed to be one of the fastest around.

The icing on the cake, so to speak, was the profusion of flowers at the trailhead: Palmer's Penstemon, Prickly Poppy (my favorite), Birdcage Evening Primrose (very showy), Golden Princes Plume, Engelmann's Hedgehog, Beavertail cactus, desert aster, and Jimson weed along the road.

• *Debbie Bulger*

## Mt. Tallac (9,735')

Sunday August 29, 1999

Last Sunday While on a family trip to South Lake Tahoe I became extremely cynical at the little city by the Lake and decided to head for the woods. Since Tallac is on the List and I'd never done it... The hike is short 4.6 miles to the top and 3200'.

The country is crowded but beautiful nonetheless. I started at about 7:30 AM. At that time there were a handful of cars at the

trailhead. I used the standard TH at the end of the Shelby CG / Mt. Tallac turnoff to Hwy 89 (west side Lake Tahoe). This is

a mere 10 minutes north on 89 from the "Y" (Hwy50/Hwy89 junction). The morning of the 29th was clear and bright and the hiking went very quickly. Not too many people on the trail that early in the AM. Most, I guess, still recovering from Casino Life. Floating Island Lake came and went and then Cathedral Lake. A scout group was camped here and needless to say it was extremely noisy. I quickly left the area and started to climb the only moderately strenuous section of the climb. There is a ~500' section that goes to Tallacs West Ridge. From here about another miles hike, on trail, will take you to the top. I met a guy with a large German Shepard on the way down.

Obviously this was the dog route! The view from the top was fantastic. All of Lake Tahoe was visible to the East and Desolation Wilderness to the West. Lake Gilmore looked particularly beautiful this early in the morning. I did the usual 360 panorama shots, had some brunch and started back. I was back down by 12:30pm. I completely enjoyable hike and summit and a much needed relief from the metropolis of South Lake Tahoe.

• *Mike Rinaldi*

## PPV over LDW

September 4-6, 1999

Pettit Peak (10788'), Volunteer Peak (10481'), Piute Mtn (10541')PCS trip, 3-6 Sep 1999, Leader: Steve Eckert. Participants: Linda Roman, Ron Norton, Roger Pantos, Anthony Stegman.

NOTE: The web version of this report will have photos including a route traced on Piute.

It seems the PCS seldom climbs these low elevation peaks, but the SPS website is littered with stories about how people came back at or after dark every night while trying to squeeze all three peaks (and sometimes adding Tower) into a 3-day weekend. I decided to relax a bit and add a fourth day. The extra time, a fun group, and a one-way route that covered new territory every day, all combined to turn what could have been a grunt into a great Labor Day weekend trip.

The gain from Saddlebag is the same as the gain from Twin, but there is a lot of downhill on the way in from Saddlebag. Another advantage of starting at Saddlebag is that you can get permits right at the lake (starting at 630am), and there is NO QUOTA even if you're crossing into Yosemite.

We took the \$6 boat ride to save 2 miles of boring walk around the lake, and stepped into high alpine terrain dotted with little lakes. We went past

Steelhead Lake, but should have went further west near Cascade Lake to avoid a few bumps. The low point of the ridge south of Shepherd Crest has a good use trail and a metal "Yosemite" sign, letting you know you're on the right route to McCabe Lake. Avoid the outlet of McCabe, going north around the east end of the 10400' contour, and follow either side of the stream in great tundra and duff until you pick up the trail just above 9400' on the south side.

We picked up the Pacific Crest Trail down in Virginia Canyon, and followed it into Matterhorn Canyon where we stopped for dinner before packing another hour into the hanging valley that holds Wilson Creek. This is big-tree country, and the only good

camping along Wilson Creek is where the trail first approaches the stream (8900'). We were well over a thousand feet below our cars, and we had climbed over 3000' to get there! A warm and restful night lead to an early start the next morning. 3 hours of hiking got us to Smedberg lake, a shallow green spot surrounded by slabs. The swampy edges would be mosquito hell in the summer, but we were there after a few hard frosts and had no problems.

Tony rested while the other four hoisted day packs and headed for Pettit. We weren't sure we'd have time to do Volunteer that day, and wanted to get the furthest peak first. Well, everything can change, and we soon found ourselves scrambling up a little 3rd class (Roger's first), cutting below the lower part of the east face to the south ridge via the bench at about 9800'.

The terrain between the peaks was "tortured" to say the least, and we wanted a high vantage to pick the best route. Volunteer is very scenic but not a very hard climb (see picture of Smedberg Lake from the summit), and was Roger's first peak from the SPS list.

The traverse to Pettit is not trivial, and we followed the advice of staying at 10000' as long as we could... but the traverse gets nasty as you approach the east end of Rodgers Lake, so we swung up to the 10400' saddle and followed the ridge south to Pettit. The register is on the middle bump, and the descent to Rodgers Lake can be done mostly brush-free. The high country east and north of Pettit is dotted with tiny lakes, and surely deserves a visit sometime in the future. (Andy Spellman had written "I could eat scrapple with hoagie oil" in the register - fill me in if you know what that means!)

Back in camp around 5pm, we headed to the outlet of Smedberg to camp. Tony had been visited by a ranger who thought our scattered gear represented a camp, and who was about to cite it for being too close to the lake. There was time for a dip in the lake, a large flat rock we could all cook on, the smoke from controlled burns was behind us, and we had time to pat ourselves on the back for a 3500' day with two peaks AND some backpacking.

Sunday morning, we ditched the trail and headed cross-country down the Smedberg drainage. The PCT goes up/down over 300' to avoid the slabs we enjoyed, and we picked up the trail as it switchbacked down through the 8800' contour line. Mostly downhill walking lead us to the Benson Lake turnoff, near where Linda took a surprise bath while crossing a shallow stream: Some of us waded the 4" sandy stream, but Linda had fabric boots and chose a nearby log instead. It turned out to have floating debris around it, which looked attached but actually hid a deep pool. Between two logs, up to her armpits in the pool, it took a bit of a tug to hoist her out. This was more surprising than dangerous, because the flow was very slow, but in fast-water conditions such a mistake could be costly.

We climbed the PCT until it leaves the drainage for Seavey Pass, around 8600', dumped our packs and headed to Piute's northeast ridge. If I do this peak again, I'll probably leave the trail at 8400', and diagonal south into the bowl east-southeast of the peak. There is a lake and some good trees there, neither of which show on the map. Going to the east ridge from this bowl, instead of hitting the ridge further north, would avoid most of the up-and-down climbing we did along the ridge crest. It would NOT avoid the tedious climb from the trail to the ridge, which is thin sage-type brush over talus.

All of us had chest/throat irritation from the aromatic plants we were walking on by the time we reached the ridge at 9700'. The view from here stopped us cold: We expected another class 2

slog, but were looking at sheer cliffs with no obvious path through them! Secor's book indicates there is a right (sandy) and left (vegetation) chute, but doesn't mention that both routes start at the upper right (north) corner of the permanent snowfield shown just below 10000' on the 7.5' topo. The left "chute" isn't a chute at all, it's a very steep ramp that turns sharply to the right and becomes a narrow exposed ledge behind a few trees. It's a great route for ascending, but we came down the screen chute because the vegetation seemed too hard and slick for an easy/safe descent. See the web photo for a picture of this face overlaid with the two routes: You can run the crest of the NE ridge all the way to the snowfield, or you can traverse the south side. Either way there are a few third class moves unless you make time-consuming detours.

The big surprise came just after we hit Piute's north ridge at the saddle just below 10400'. Following this ridge is NOT second class, and you can't traverse around the hard parts because it's a cliff on both sides. The third class stretch is very short, and soon you're strolling across sand to the summit blocks. It seems the forest service was burning Deep Canyon or Piute Creek, with plumes of smoke rising from at least 5 sources. The only register entries this year were dozens of people from various trail crews, who felt the need to use an entire register page per person. It took longer to climb Piute than we intended, but it was the best climbing of the trip in terms of route finding and impressive granite faces. At 4000' total climbing (backpacking and peak climbing) it was our tallest day (but with the shortest mileage).

Back at the packs, where Tony had been waiting patiently, we stomped up the PCT toward Seavey Pass. Camp was at Lake 9000, again in the trees and again with time to take a dip and have dinner before it got dark. There is a picture of this lake on the web, which was almost as beautiful as the hidden 8800' lake we passed coming down from Piute (a bit north of where we went up).

The next morning I spent some time dispersing stacks of firewood and breaking up fire rings, then we popped over Seavey and headed "downhill" to the cars. Well, almost. It turns out that Peeler Lake is the high point of the hike out (1400' of gain)! It has two outlets and no inlets, but looking at the map I had been convinced that one stream flowed in and the other flowed out. Sigh. The terrain on the hike out was sometimes dramatic, but mostly flat and open in stark contrast to our entry route.

Around Barney Lake we started seeing "shore birds" - larger groups of clean looking people who weren't in great shape, meaning they couldn't be far from their cars. Did I mention it was hot? Mid-afternoon at 8000' in the full sun made Barney Lake's trees-and-breeze seem like heaven, and we took a long lunch there before gritting our teeth for the last four miles down to Twin Lake.

Walking into a mobile home park with restaurants and boat docks and barking dogs after several days in the backcountry is a shock to your sensibilities.

We decided to have a late lunch, since Tony had finally gotten his appetite back. In a surprise turn of events, I didn't keep my lunch (or much of anything else) down, for reasons still unknown. Since we had to get back to the cars left at Saddlebag Lake, we were all crammed into Ron's Toyota pickup: my partners were kind (or wise) enough to give me the front seat, and Ron was good at stopping on command, so we made our way to Lee Vining in 5-mile increments without serious internal accidents.

• Steve Eckert

# Don't Need Ham Anymore

September 19-19, 1999,

Needham Mtn (12,520), private trip

Leader: Steve Eckert

Participants: Rebecca Eckert, Bill Isherwood, Tanya Knaus, and Alex Sapozhnikov

Driving to the trailhead I knew we might be in trouble. The Mineral King road is always winding and narrow, but this time it had pine needles and evidence of temporary streams crossing it, indicating there had been a MAJOR rain/wind storm that afternoon. Not to be deterred, Rebecca and I pulled into the soggy campground under clearing skies and struggled to light a campfire on wet ashes. This was her first backpacking trip, and we were going to start it right (with s'mores and lawn chairs) even if it meant using our permit reservation to kindle the flames! A bushel of wood and a bag of marshmallows later, we turned in. No rain until just before dawn on Saturday, when lightning and a shower woke us up.

Everyone was at the appointed meeting place early, the ranger was friendly, and we were ready to walk when Larry Sokolsky and Denise Ellestad decided to back out. They had been chased down the same trail once before by a close lightning storm, and the early morning clouds had them running scared. (I hadn't seen any big storm forecast, the ranger said the worst was supposed to come through Saturday evening, and our departing members acknowledged that they might be making a mistake. They did!)

Choosing a one-mile-per-hour pace, we sauntered up the short trail to Monarch Lake (the signs say Sawtooth Pass) in about four hours. Once it threatened to rain, but rain jackets were mostly used as windbreakers. Neither Tanya nor Rebecca had climbed a Sierra peak before, so it was fun to enjoy the trail through their eyes as if I hadn't been up it half a dozen times before - see [RebeccaOnMonarchTrail.jpg](#). We saw deer, grouse, squirrels, and marmots at close range (30' or less). Something about this area makes animals behave as if you're in a petting zoo. They don't run away! I never got Alex to pronounce his last name, but we talked about everything else along the way.

OK, so we're at camp and our food is in the bear boxes. Now what? It's early afternoon, I'd like to scout the passes above Upper Monarch Lake to see if we can bypass the sandy Sawtooth trail, but the clouds are heavy so we set up camp instead. Minutes after the tents are up the first shower hits and we dive inside for a nap. Sun, rain, sun, hail, all afternoon. We lunch on a rock overlooking the lake, but choose to sleep the afternoon away instead of getting wet and risking a lightning strike. The clouds broke just enough for a stunning sunset ([MonarchLakeSunset.jpg](#)) and we drifted to bed just after dark, ending the evening with a cake that Tanya BAKED IN CAMP. Those camp stove ovens actually work!

Sunday morning most of us left camp at first light (a cohesive and eager group that was a joy to climb with) while Rebecca slept in and read a book. (On her first backpack, it's enough to be camped at 10,400' and having a great time in a completely new environment, which you can visit vicariously by viewing [MineralPeakFromMonarchLake.jpg](#)) There are several use trails to Upper Monarch, from where we turned south to the lower saddle via an easy talus chute that Bill called a "shear zone". There was minor confusion over which lake was in view, but noting a lack of islands and checking with a compass verified that it was Crystal Lake. Next time I'm in the area I'll take the trail to

Crystal instead of Monarch. It's a beautiful valley, not littered with trash like the Monarch area.

From the saddle between Upper Monarch and Crystal, we headed east on the ridge, then sidehilled a bit south to the saddle between Crystal and Amphitheater Lake. This saddle is high class 2 on the west side and VERY easy class 3 on the east side. (See [CrystalAmphitheaterPassEast.jpg](#) for a picture that makes it look a bit worse than it really was - remember that Tanya, in the picture, had never done class 3 before!) We zigzagged a bit, then dropped nearly to the lakeshore. I think it would be better to stay high and get on the ridge, to avoid some steep friction slabs, but either way you can almost do this without your hands. Going around Amphitheater's outlet is the best way to see the sights of the SE drainage, and the slab/tundra walking to the base of Needham is some of the finest the Sierra has to offer. This approach avoids the nasty sandy boulder slog from Sawtooth, and is highly recommended as more aesthetic (and far less up-and-down gain than the south Sawtooth ridge route recommended by Secor).

Bill turned his sights on Sawtooth, wanting to shorten the day, while we picked our way through a short boulder field, and found a use trail that traverses the sand to the first saddle west of Needham. From there it's a grunt to the peak, but not terribly hard going. The summit block is not really class 2, and neither Tanya nor Alex wanted to step up the last 4' onto a narrow block (only room for 2). Everyone touched the top, and I was pleased that inexperienced climbers kept their cool and took their time with the few class 3 moves required to get to the summit register. Have a look at [NeedhamSummitBlock.jpg](#) for a fun climbing technique that reminded me of Mark Adrian on Center Peak last year.

We savored the top for an hour, and while going down discovered that Alex had "hit the wall" with altitude problems. Slowly, with great determination, we made our way around the other side of Amphitheater to check out the saddle between Upper Monarch and Amphitheater. I got within 10' of the saddle, finding moderate class 3 ledges that lead almost to the south end of the low spot, but 5' of under clings with brush in them would have been required to top out. Bummer. Dropping down 150' we traversed back to our original saddle, staying high to go above the slabs that cliff into the lake. This direction is moderate class 3, but harder than going around the outlet side of the lake. See [SawtoothAmphitheaterFromNeedham.pdf](#) for a panorama with our routes traced over it.

Retracing our steps to camp, we arrived about 3:30pm without a single drop of rain. The pictures show patchy cloud cover, but the storm had roared through camp Saturday night (wind but no lightning) and left us alone. Poor Larry and Denise were on our minds as we packed out and the sun sank while cotton candy clouds settled over all the area peaks. Fall weather is never predictable, but if you're willing to risk the occasional shower you are rewarded with dramatic cloud accents. The drive out included sunset in steep canyons, and we finished the trip with a good dinner at the Noisy Water Café in Three Rivers.

I'm glad everyone had a good time, but I'm especially happy/proud that my wife had no problems and enjoyed her first trip. I now have only one more peak to finish the SPS Peaks List, and she'll be on that trip also. Stay tuned, and look for the Kern Peak list finish report in an upcoming SPS Echo. (If you don't get the Echo, contact [SSullivan0@aol.com](mailto:SSullivan0@aol.com) for an application.)

• Steve Eckert

# Clarence Coronation

September 11, 1999

The faces of mountains are as varied as the faces of men. Some are broad, some craggy, some frail, and some furrowed. They can be fresh, wizened, bulky, weak, open, penetrating, familiar, secretive, tender, radiant, unexpected and unknowable.

The face of Mount Clarence King is an illustration from a children's story. It rises sheer and narrow, gathering itself in as it lifts itself towards its featureless, furious, conical culmination. Clarence King is a mountain of myth, a mountain of dreams, a mountain that should never have existed in such a rock-real country.

We set out to limn its ledges, to challenge its chimneys, and, if the mountain would allow us, to stand on the boulder where first ascender Bolton Brown stood, when he declaimed:

"It is a true spire of rock, an upstosed corner at the meeting of three great mountain walls ... The top of the summit-block slopes northwest, is about fifteen feet across, and smooth as a cobblestone. If you fall off one side, you will be killed in the vicinity; if you fall off any of the other sides, you will be pulverized in the remote nadir beneath."

We were Ron Karpel, John Wilkinson, Arun Mahajan, Rich Leiker, and me, Aaron Schuman. On September 11, 1999, we blithely sauntered forth from Onion Valley. An adult male bear saluted our crossing over Kearsarge Pass, over Glen Pass, over Rae Col, and into Sixty Lakes Basin. Fatigued but impatient, we watched the galaxy-dappled and meteor-streaked dome slowly turn away. At dawn we rose to disturb a flock of pheasants and explore the mountain's lower reaches. We gained the saddle of the ridge uniting Clarence King with Mount Cotter.

Up slopes strewn with blocks of granite the size of hibernating bears we slipped in silence. The angle steepened. We were funneled onto a diminishing ridge by a blank face on our left and a precipice on our right. We arrived at the jam crack and squeeze chimney described by our predecessors. With the help of a rope, we surmounted this obstacle, but to make the thin passage we were obliged to leave our backpacks behind. Would the next challenge be so narrow as to force us to abandon our clothing and climb as naked as newborns?

At last we stood before the forehead of the mountain, tall, smooth and vertical. We slipped a few steps down and to the right. Ron led. I belayed. A crack followed by one ungainly move put Ron in front of Bolton Brown's spire. Possessing only one hand hold and one foot hold, Ron stepped out over the abyss. The emptiness beneath him seemed to extend all the way to the center of the earth. The space was so large, so compelling, that it was as though the vacant void had substance and the mountain was mere ether. A circling pair of golden eagles looked up at Ron in bewilderment. Then there was a scarcely audible tap of rubber sole on stone, and Ron stood on the ceiling.

Ron wrapped King's crown with a twenty foot loop of webbing. He secured himself to this anchor and belayed each of us up to the platform. For a moment - who can say how long it endured - we five sat together outside of earthly space, outside of time.

The eagle squawked a warning about the rising storm clouds. Her cry broke the spell. We descended from the block. One rappel took us down to a ledge. A second long rappel would take us onto easy scree. I was the first one down the rope, and I took shelter behind a boulder. Rich fastened his harness and prepared to drop. The doubled rope, dangling beneath him, knocked loose a hefty rock. Four voices yelled at me in terror as a ton of granite ricocheted down the mountainside. I covered in my makeshift

booth and stared as the waterfall of stone roared past me. Rich came off rappel nearby. Arun, the next man down, stopped three quarters of the way to the end, and called out that the rope had been cut. Indeed it had. Climbing ropes are made from the same fiber as bulletproof vests. Kevlar is hard to cut, but this rockfall succeeded where a bullet would have failed. The sheath was almost completely gone, and the frayed fibers of the core protruded dangerously. Arun disengaged and downclimbed the remainder of the way to where Rich and I waited, then John and Ron joined us.

After a visit to eternity and a brush with mortality, we walked down the slopes of the mountain to our camp.

Monday morning, we awoke with tired bodies, a damaged rope, and a profound sense of accomplishment. Though we had come to climb Mount Gardiner as well as Mount Clarence King, we decided that we didn't need to climb both in order to feel satisfied. We went home one day early. After all, we had been to the most daunting summit in the Sierra Nevada.

• Aaron Schuman

Ron Karpel adds:

Secor recommends a 20 foot sling to protect the summit. I found this to be somewhat insecure, because the summit horn is quite flat and the sling is held by gravity alone. There are no cracks or any other means to set up pro up there. As a last resort, I threw a 4 foot sling to back up the 20 foot one over the summit horn. Turned out that the 4 foot sling got jammed in place better than the 20 foot one. I think the best way to get down is to downclimb the climbing route under tension and protection from above. The last person can downclimb with protection provided from below and the rope running through the slings on the summit. Once everybody is down a good jerk from below will get the slings down.

## Private Trips

Private trips may be submitted directly to the Scree Editor, but are not insured, sponsored, or supervised by the Sierra Club. They are listed here because they may be of interest to PCS members.

### Whitney the Easy Way

Peak: Mt. Whitney (14,495'), class 1  
Dates: Oct 22-24, Fri-Sun  
Contact: Nancy Fitzsimmons (408)-957-9683  
Pkclimber@aol.com

Co Contact: Adrian Van Gorden 408-779-2320

Climb Mt. Whitney by the regular trail; enough of that mountaineers stuff. We will spend Friday night at Outpost Camp at about 10,300', and on Saturday start early and go all the way to the top. Back to the cars before noon on Sunday. Significant snow in the days preceding will cancel. Ice Ax and crampons may be needed.

### Cherry Creek Canyon

Peak: None - Cherry Creek Canyon  
Date: October 9-10  
Leader: Kai Wiedman (650) 347-5234

Don't miss this adventure backpack into one of the most beautiful granite canyons near Yosemite. Witness Cherry Creek charge forcefully through narrow slots. Gaze at granite domes in the distance. The scenery of this 25-mile loop backpack will dazzle you as you experience one of the Sierras' best kept secrets.

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**Scree** is the monthly journal of the Peak Climbing Section of the Sierra Club, Loma Prieta Chapter.

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## Rock Climbing Classifications

The following trip classifications are to assist you in choosing trips for which you are qualified. No simple rating system can anticipate all possible conditions.

- Class 1: Walking on a trail.
- Class 2: Walking cross-country, using hands for balance.
- Class 3: Requires use of hands for climbing, rope may be used.
- Class 4: Requires rope belays.
- Class 5: Technical rock climbing.

**Deadline for submissions to the next Scree is Sunday 10/24/99. Meetings are the second Tuesday of each month.**



Peak Climbing Section, 789 Daffodil Way, San Jose CA 95117

"Vy can't ve chust climb?" - John Salathe

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