



World Wide Web Address: <http://lomaprieta.sierraclub.org/pcs/>

Next General Meeting

Date: Tuesday, February 10
Time: 7:00 PM
Program: Trekking and Climbing in the Himalayas: the Khumbu Region - by Chris Kramar

Join us for a slide show of a 3-week trek and some peak climbs in the Khumbu region.

Location: Peninsula Conservation Center
 3921 East Bayshore Rd
 Palo Alto, CA

Directions: From 101: Exit at San Antonio Road, Go East to the first traffic light, Turn left and follow Bayshore Rd to the PCC on the corner of Corporation Way. A sign marking the PCC is out front. Park behind.

Deadline for submissions to the next Scree is Sunday 2/22/2004 Meetings are the 2nd Tuesday of each month.

Summer PCS trip Planning Meeting

If you are a PCS leader or are interested in leading trips for the PCS, then....

It's that time of year again to plan a season of wondering trips. Summer means warm nice weather, and long long day hours.

I'd like to host a trip schedule meeting on February 10th, 2004 6pm at PCC. It's right before our regular PCS monthly meeting, so you don't have to make an extra trip, and hope you'll find time to attend.

Looking forward to seeing you all!

• Linda Sun, PCS scheduler

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. Diller

Peak: Mt Diller, 9057'
Dates: February 14-15, 2004
Map: USGS 7.5 min Lassen Peak

Leaders: Stephane Mouradian, (650) 551-0392(H),
 smouradian@hotmail.com

Co-Leader: Kelly Maas

This trip will start at the Lassen Chalet. First day we will head from Sulphur Works toward Diller, drop off our packs below the saddle, summit Diller and come back to the packs to set camp. The second day, we will head toward Ski Heil peak and attempt Eagle Peak if time allows. Return will be via the snowed in Lassen Park road.

Because a lot of this trip will be cross country, it would be difficult to coordinate snowshoers and skiers. We require that you be a skier in order to join this trip. You will need some backcountry skis with skins and be comfortable breaking tracks. In addition, trip members should have experience with winter conditions, including snow camping and use of ice axe and crampons which maybe required to summit Diller.

Mokelumne Peak

Peak: Mokelumne Peak 9334', class 2 snow
Date: March 13-14, 2004 (Sat-Sun)
Maps: 7.5' series Mokelumne Peak quad
Leader: Pat Callery (haishan1@yahoo.com)
Co-Leader: Stephane Mouradian

Mokelumne Peak is a very prominent mountain, plainly visible from both highways 88 and 4, set in isolated splendor far west from the Sierra Crest. We will approach the peak from the north, starting from Highway 88 near Silver Lake. This trip will be long and strenuous, particularly on Sunday. Participants must be in good physical condition and be proficient with ski or snowshoe travel and winter camping.

Participants should also have experience climbing with ice axe and crampons, and experience with avalanche safety equipment such as beacon, probe, and shovel.

Mt Diablo

Peaks: 4 Peaks of Mt. Diablo (3,849'), 4E, class 1
Date: Saturday, March 20, 2004
Leaders: Bob Suzuki, 408-259-0772(H)
 SuzukiR@sd-star.com
 Sue LeederH: 831-457-9555(H),
 SueLeeder@OneBox.com

Carpool Time: 7:00 AM

Carpool Location: No Host at Cubberly High (Middlefield & Montrose) in Palo Alto

Time at Trail Head: 8:15 AM

Trail Head Location: Rock City near South Gate (opens 8 am)

Enjoy an 18 mile loop in this beautiful East Bay park. Wear boots as sections of trail may be muddy. Heavy rain cancels. Co-listed with the Day Hiking Section.

Cathedral Peak (4th) and Eichorn Pinnacle

Tuolumne Meadows, CA

July 20, 2003

An old and not very unusual story; life divides into "before-the-kids" and "after-the-kids" with a lot fewer mountains after. The rack hangs in my basement, the musty rope beside it. The slightly sweet smell of unused climbing shoes, the dreams of routes - two on a rope, the mountain landscape surrounding us, snow, rock and ice gleaming in the pale-blue sky, far above our mundane city life.

It's July, and vacation-with-the-inlaws time. A cottage just outside Yosemite Park in California. The Sierras! My wife takes pity on me and puts me in touch with one of her old climbing partners in the Sierra Club Peak Climbing Section. A. and I discuss options. I've been to the Valley before; it will be baking down there this time of year - the sun beating off the rocky walls and emanating in shimmery waves from the idling tourbuses; the babble of climbers from all over the world queuing up for the easy climbs and dropping gear on each other....no, let's not go to the Valley.

Instead, I'm keen on historic Cathedral Peak and the flat-out outrageous Eichorn Pinnacle, high up (almost 11,000 feet) in Tuolumne Meadows. The climb that has spawned a million web sites, it seems. A.'s done both before but is happy to revisit.

A couple of hours drive, up, up into the Meadows, the baking lowland temperatures (even at 7am) slowly moderating. 9:30am and we set off up the trail. A vivid contrast with British Columbia and its trails of fresh moist earth through the dank forest, devils club, slide alder, and rock fuzzed with moss. This is old, old, another world entirely. A dusty earth packed down around rounded stones. Dry wood, and far higher in the sky than one expects a bright sun beating down. The unmapped and unmarked climbers access route (it must be at least 50 years old); well-trodden along a creek, winds through the sparse alpine forest. The smell of the thick gnarled pines around the yellowed grass, and glare of the light. After a few hours we angle off the trail, up the scrubby slope to Cathedral's North Ridge. Loose scree and sand between the stunted bushes. To the left the fabled south-east buttress route, 5.6 climbing for pitch after glorious pitch. Aaahh...but we don't have time today. At least 4 parties already there, the ring of clanking metal, cries back and forth from either end of their ropes, silhouetted against the blue sky. For us a scramble over the ridge crest, then traverse on small ledges cutting through slabs, across, and then up. Weaving back and forth across larger steps, the summit invisible until we attain a narrow windy notch. Even then the route is mysterious, hidden, a 4th class crack around a corner.

The rope comes out, I tie in. Step across on ledges, then up the crack, edging in my floppy running shoes. God, I'm out of practice. I flail on the generous holds, remembering that this very step was climbed first, solo, by John Muir 135 years ago. The rock is gorgeous, a lovely golden granite. The summit itself is flat, although small, and bisected by a crack perfectly suitable for gear. Apparently club trips occasionally put up to a dozen people up there at the same time. Something like stuffing a phone booth or a VW bug I suppose. In the center, the rusty remains of a rap bolt; the latest victim of a longstanding ethics war. "If John Muir didn't need it..." etc. I try to remember the basics of anchor construction. Equalize, equalize, a tangle of linked webbing lying along the crack.

Hmmm. I'm sure it will hold, but this is definitely not the most elegant anchor I've ever made.

Suddenly the deserted summit becomes crowded - a soloist topping out, a group of 4 just behind, all coming off the SE buttress route. A. wants the challenge of coming up ropeless; more power to him. I'm a father; that just isn't an option any more. The responsibility of that weighs me down, but in some ways it also frees me. We shake hands on the summit, then downclimb to let the others up.

Enough time for Eichorn Pinnacle? A. thinks not, but I don't see why it isn't possible. The weather is as good as it can get. Hours till sunset. The Pinnacle from here looks amazing, a vertical pillar splitting the sky a few hundred meters away to the west. "Let's just go and have a look and then decide", I say, but I want more than a look. There's a tightness in my chest, a hunger and a lust for much much more than a look. The classic climbers lie, tricking your partner into commitment - I've been on both sides of it before. How long since I had that feeling last? How long will it be till the next time?

We begin to look around the right side, a slope of blocky granite. Finally see what looks like the route; a diagonal weakness that traverses onto the face to bypass a roof. Hmmm. A. offers to lead the first pitch and I'm OK with that. Man, it looks steep for 5.4 (Jules Eichorn soloed this in 1932). Suddenly apprehensive but unwilling to back off now. A. leads off slowly, disappearing around a corner. In the quiet cool shade I slowly pay out the rope, looking off at peaks far in the distance. A virgin landscape for me.

Eventually he sets up a belay, and I follow. The route edges out along a series of ledges, one awkward, then goes up over a bulge past a few pins worn shiny with use, to a little nook.

2nd pitch is mine, a short (and slightly overhanging) chimney. It feels harder than 5.4, maybe the "correct" route is around the corner? To heck with it - straight up. A few moves, then it's a breeze. Good holds on giant fins and flakes. Ah, what a view. The parched granite domes roll away to all horizons, except to the south where visibility is blotted out by an isolated afternoon rainstorm! A. comes up. We examine the register; I see Galen Rowell's name. RIP. A few tiny spots of rain drift across the summit, and we hurriedly rig the rappel. Straight down, right to our packs on the starting ledge using the rope stretch. Wow. In contrast to the crowds at the main peak we have been gloriously alone for this sidetrip.

We descend the slabs on Cathedral's west side, and back into the woods. A bit of bushwacking finally, a slight echo of the feeling I love in the B.C. backcountry, although the travel in this sparse open forest has nothing in common with the dense thickets of home. We soon pick up the wide and well-trodden Muir trail, and then it's a bee-line back to the car. Home for dinner!

• Rich Pawlowicz.

How Can You Lose a 14,000' Mountain?

Split Mountain Attempt (14,058 ft)

August 23-24, 2004

Split Mountain, 14058 feet. This was supposed to be an easy 2nd 14er in my quest to compile a few high peaks before the Trip (Kilimanjaro). I'd wised up a lot since White Mountain -- I was going to take altitude seriously, I had a GPS so I wouldn't have to worry about hoping some kindly soul would show me the way out, and I'd even talked my brother into lending me his

coveted and still pristine 4-wheel drive Xterra (I think it's actually about 2 years old but he takes very good care of it).

My short plan: leave Friday night, drive to the far side of the Tioga Pass and camp as close to 10,000 feet as I could get, hopefully getting to sleep before midnight and sleeping for a complete night. Saturday morning, complete the drive to Bishop, get my wilderness camping permit from the ranger station there, have a good breakfast, and get started around noon to 1 pm. Hike up from the trailhead to Red Mountain Lake over a 3 or 4 hour stretch, camp at Red Mountain Lake overnight, and finish off Split Mountain early Sunday, returning to the car triumphantly by mid afternoon. I'd even printed off a topo map from the web to assist me, and had read every Split Mountain trip report I could find. No problems!

For my trip to the trailhead (which has been described as quite hard to find) in McMurry Meadows, I used a combination of the directions from Dave Johnson and the official Ranger handout. There are a bunch of more detailed directions on the climber.org website, but I didn't find those as useful as the nice and simple ones from Dave. Generally, it seemed as long as you stayed on the main 'road' and didn't deviate off into a side road, it was actually fairly straight forward. I was using GPS and odometer to track my progress, and my numbers were slightly off from the ones Dave suggested, but not enough to cause more than a bit of consternation. The 12' pipe crossing seems legendary, but I didn't see anything like that ... returning, I think I might have found the spot people were talking about, but it seems to have been shored up with dirt so it doesn't project out of the road so much anymore.

Upon reaching the trailhead, I noted there was one other vehicle parked there already. Farther down the road were 2 more, so I guess there were a few people out there besides me; although I wouldn't see them on this hike. This definitely isn't the spot to count on random passer-bys for assistance.

After unloading my backpack, I checked my gear. I had four gallons of water I would be carrying with me (for 32 pounds -- 2 in the backpack, 1 in hand, 1 in daypack), my tent, sleeping bag, food. Actually not a ton of gear, but easily up in the 50 pound backpack range courtesy of the water. I started my trek at 12:06 pm Saturday, that would be just about the last thing to go according to plan.

I found the first part of the hike fairly straightforward, a dusty trail led up past a spring and gradually went up the first hill to climber's right of the Red Lake Creek bed. After reaching a fairly good elevation (you can look down on the parking lot far below and see your dot, I mean car), it curves around following the right hand side of the valley containing the end of Red Lake Creek. There were two spots along this path which were tricky because the path crossed large areas of small boulders (and you couldn't see the path during the boulder crossing). On the first one, the boulder area is fairly narrow and you can see the path on the far side when you start, so it's fairly trivial. The second one is much longer and requires 'finding' the path after you cross. On the way up, I was able to do so successfully; I crossed directly straight and ended up a few hundred feet to climber's left of the path. On the way down, I wasn't able to find the path after crossing (it was to descender's left as makes sense given my up experience) and had to revert to using the GPS. The path also often goes into bushes or around rocks, which require looking around a bit to see where the right path resumes. In several of these cases, people had followed the wrong way and made a bit of a path, but it was easy to detect since these wrong ways deadended within a few tens of feet.

Eventually I reached the 'jungle' section of the trek. You can actually see it down in the valley for quite some time before

you arrive at it, so it's not a big surprise when you do reach it. The jungle was quite tricky, and I lost the trail a couple of times immediately, but was able to re-find it. Finally, I lost it for good, and decided I wasn't too far away from Red Lake, I'd just 'go direct'. Well, kiddies, when those other trip reports say 'if the trail seems tough, you aren't on the trail, go back and find the trail', they mean 'Go back and find the trail'. I wasn't so smart.

From the jungle, I opted to exit the valley and climb up to the ridge line on the climber's left. The climb up to the ridge line wasn't particularly hard; a lot of loose dirt and slogging. Once on top, it was actually fairly easy to follow the ridge line. There were a bunch of psuedo-paths up there, but nothing that clearly was my path. I was watching the other side of the valley (climber's right) for likely paths exiting from the jungle, but didn't see any. To this day, I don't know if the jungle exit was to climber's left, climber's right, or if the right path went directly up the creek valley.

At the head of the creek valley, I saw a long vertical shaft which, from a distance appeared it might be climbable to ascend to the next small ridge. After some consideration, I decided that was an unlikely way to go and I should not sacrifice the altitude I'd already gained, so I continued circling to the left to the intersection of the two ridge lines, where I was able to climb down from mine and over to the next without too much problem. Now, when I say 'without too much problem', I mean climbing over rocks, pulling myself through trees, and generally being a menace. When I got over to the other ridge, I climbed up to where its walls fell steeply off into the creek bed (above the large climbing split, which I guess would be a waterfall if there were water in the creek). I sat on top of a rock, and contemplated the view below, and sifted some dirt out of my hiking shoes.

My new plan was to follow the line of the creek bed, which obviously would lead to the lake. Or so I hoped. I did this for what seemed like hours. There was some class 3 type scrambling over rocks pretty much all the time. Not particularly dangerous, though quite laborious. I was slightly around 9000' feet or so at this point, and I knew Red Lake was at 10500', so I didn't think I was far. Plus the GPS was taunting me with Split Mountain only being about 2.3 miles away.

As I said, I continued following the creek, on the climber's left side. As I ascended, the slope down into the creek valley (bed) became more and more gradual. I was still looking at my topo map, and trying to make heads or tails out of what I knew. Now, remember, this was the first time reading a topo map. Eventually, I decided (based on the map which had the actual trail marked on it), that the trail was following the ridge on climber's right of the bed, not the one on the left (where I was). I also saw that the creek led to another steep wall/waterfall section, and that the segment of rock on the left did not appear climbable - at least with my skills. Much higher up, I thought I saw a wall which might surround Red Lake. In my mind's eye, Red Lake is surrounded by a ridge to the east, and that ridge drops off steeply, requiring the ascender to either find a path through the ridge line, or to climb the ridge wall. I wanted the path, and I thought I saw a break in the ridge which might be it on the right.

So, armed with that new theory, I descended down into the creek bed from the left-hand side and started to climb up out of the creek bed to the right. The climbing up there was pretty hard; the incline was steep, and everything was loose. I found myself using just about any handhold to help pull myself up the bloody slope. And remember, I had the 50 pound+ pack on too, so it was quite some exercise.

Eventually, the sun began to set. I had to face the fact that I wouldn't be camping in the luxurious digs of Red Lake tonight. In fact, the slope was so covered in rocks and steep, I determined that my tent would be of little use, lacking either a site with either space or structural integrity. I cleared out an area of rocks about 3 feet wide by 7 feet long, threw down the sleeping bag pad, unrolled the sleeping bag, and called it a campsite. I don't know if the wilderness camping permit would approve. They definitely wouldn't approve of my 'storage' of bear food, which involved putting it about 50 feet away and hoping if the bears ate it, they'd stop at the contents of the backpack and not move on to the contents of the sleeping bag.

The night was nice and horrible. Nice because it was a reasonable temperature, and I was comfortable, and the views of the night sky (and shooting stars) were awesome. Horrible because I kept hearing rock falls and 'things moving around' which made me fear I would either be crushed or eaten by dawn. Luckily neither of those happened!

With the new day beginning, I again started my ascent. I decided mentally that if I could reach Red Lake by 10am, I'd still give Split a shot, otherwise that was my turnaround point. Re-invigorated after a night of sleep, I polished off the climb to the top of the little slope I was on, and ran smack into a very unclimbable wall. So, I decided to traverse to climber's right around the little 'peak' I was on, again in the hopes of intersecting the real trail off to the right somewhere. Around 10am, I was way up on the side of the peak, rock climbing over some rocks with my back to the rocks because of some contortions to try to get past some tree formations. I had a huge slip and started to slide off the rocks into a fairly bad drop (probably about 100-150 feet). My backpack got tangled in the tree that I was trying to get around, and pulled me to a stop.

I took a moment to evaluate things; determined I was way over my head in rock climbing, way overloaded for the kind of climbing I was now doing, there didn't appear to be any chance things were going to get easier 'just over there', the trail was nowhere in sight, and honestly, despite the night's recovery, my energy and carefulness were down due to fatigue. All these factors pointed one way... down. So, I scrapped the ascent, and headed down.

For the trip down, I descended back into the valley of the creek bed, and decided just to follow the bed. This wasn't so wise either. Remember that waterfall? Yeah, I didn't, but when I got to it, it all came back. I was going to chimney down the part I thought was climbable from the other side, so I threw my backpack off the side, and when it vanished into a tiny little blur at the bottom, I decided it was too high for un-roped climbing. If I'd had a rope, it would have been an easy and fun rappel down, too bad!

I walked back up the creek bed until the sides of the gorge decreased in steepness enough that I could haul myself up out of it. Climbing without the pack was much easier! Once on top, I returned to the spot where I'd cleared my shoes the previous day, that was pretty funny, actually finding a spot that I'd been to before in the middle of nowhere. Then I climbed around and eventually descended (via some chimneying, so I got to play rock climber) to the backpack.

To make a very long story shorter, I picked up the backpack, hiked back along my entry route (the south ridge along the creek bed) to the spot where the jungle was, and then used the GPS to merge back to my original path. Humorously enough, I picked up the path much deeper in the jungle than I'd ever made it, so I found parts of the path I hadn't seen before. Duh. I should have done that the day before!!

The rest of the walk back was pretty pedestrian. I lost the path crossing one of the boulder gardens, as I mentioned. And then I decided the GPS was wrong when it kept telling me I needed to go north, so I went south looking for the path. But I was wrong, and the GPS was right. After I got back on the path, it was a quick and easy trip back to the car.

Someday, I'll return to Split, and next time, I'll follow the trail like a real hiker.

PS: Since I didn't get to Red Lake, I never even saw Split Mountain during this whole trip. How sad!

• Robert Greene

Mt. Winchell and Mt. Gayley

September 19-21, 2003

Mount Winchell (13,775') and Mount Gayley (13,510') are located in one of the more 'exclusive neighborhoods' of the sierra - the Palisades. With neighbors like North Palisade, Mt. Sill, Starlight and Thunderbolt peaks, it is easy to see how these fine climbs might be overlooked. As we discovered on an early fall trip to this spectacular area, both of these climbs are worthy objectives and should not be overlooked.

Friday Sept 19th

Our group consisted of Steve Eckert, Greg Jacobus, Paul Morash, Suzanne Pletcher, Susan Zaleschuck and myself. Five of us met at 7:30 a.m. and began our leisurely hike into Sam Mack Meadow (Suzanne would join us in camp later). Even with a relaxed pace and ample breaks we were in camp by 1:00 p.m. Rather than put our extra time to productive use, most of us chose to read, snooze and otherwise laze around camp enjoying the beautiful weather until dinner time.

Saturday Sept. 20th

We were up and moving by 7:00 a.m. for the day's objective, Mt. Winchell. Our route out of Sam Mack Meadow took us southwest up a steep talus slope along the small stream that feeds the meadow. As we crossed the stream near the top of the slope, we had to be extra careful due to ice that had formed on some of the rocks. We continued following this small drainage to its source - a small lake just south of Sam Mack Lake. We passed this lake along the east shore while admiring the unique ice patterns that had formed in shallow parts of the lake. We also spotted a couple of nice bivy sites that had been carved out of the talus.

From here we meandered up and down and through the moraines until we were at the foot of the southeast face. We then followed the first shallow gully that took us northeast and towards the east arte (our intended route). Rather than following this gully all the way to the east arte, we took a more direct route by turning into a steep chute that headed northwest. This chute, which has a prominent band of white rock near the top, terminates on the east arte. Once on the arte, we enjoyed solid, 3rd class climbing all the way to the summit where we topped out around noon. We spent an hour or so enjoying the expansive views and warm weather and then headed back down. Instead of retracing our ascent route, we stayed true to the arte down to about 13,000 ft where the angle eases and the fun down climbing ends.

Others contemplating this route might want to get onto the arte as low as possible (it looked to us like it would go all the way from its beginning at ~12,400'). While this is not the most direct route, it would be the most aesthetic.

After a relaxed hike back, we were in camp at 4:00 where we spent the remainder of the afternoon and evening watching a seemingly endless parade of climbing parties trudging into the already crowded meadow.

Sunday Sept. 21

Since I wanted to make it back to the trailhead at a reasonable hour, I was able to convince everyone that we should leave for Mt. Gayley at first light (6:00 a.m.). Mt biggest fear as we worked our way out of the meadow in the early morning light, was stepping on one of our late arriving neighbors who may have been forced to sleep on one of the last flat spots left in the area - the trail! Luckily, there were no such unfortunate encounters and in no time at all we were at Gayley camp surveying the next portion of our climb.

Our plan was to ascend to Glacier Notch via the Palisade Glacier and then climb the southwest ridge of Gayley. During yesterday's climb we'd all had a good look at the section of the glacier we would be on - and it looked nasty! Lots of rubble and rock fall - an unpleasant route at best. As we worked our way through the boulder field towards the glacier, I kept glancing at the west face of Gayley wishing a route would materialize. Then, almost simultaneously, Suzanne, Paul and I all pointed out a defect in the west face that might work - serendipity? Perhaps not, but it was a hell of a lot closer than continuing over to the glacier, so we all agreed to give it a go.

We dropped our crampons and ice axes at the base of the west face and headed up a steep (and sometimes loose) gully that angled off to the southeast (climbers right). About half way up, this gully ends and we worked our way left on a couple of short ramps until we found a steep chute that led us up to the southwest ridge (Note: we hit the ridge about midway between Glacier Notch and the summit). From here it was an easy climb along the 'yellow brick road' to the summit where we arrived at 9:00 a.m. After a quick snack we retraced our route back to camp, packed up and headed back to the cars (3:15 p.m.) and civilization.

My thanks to everyone who joined me on this perfect sierra weekend for a couple of very enjoyable class 3 climbs.

• Ron Norton

Holiday Highs

Tucki Mountain, 6726', Pahrump Peak, 5750, Black Mountain, 3941

December, 2003

Our annual Christmas desert trip got off to an inauspicious start when we opened the truck camper shell (at the motel) and discovered sleeping bags, blankets, and other gear sopping wet, not only with rain but with white gas from our leaking Coleman stove. We had left Santa Cruz in a steady rain expecting it to stop after we crossed the Tehachapi, but instead, the downpour increased in intensity forcing Richard Stover and me to pull off Highway 395 due to lack of visibility. We abandoned our plan to camp in the El Paso range near Ridgecrest and headed for a motel room.

We spent the evening watching our stuff tumble in the motel's dryers and part of the next morning buying a new gasket for the stove as well as plastic tarps and duct tape for the truck windows. Richard looked on the bright side postulating that the water may have kept the sleeping bags from catching fire from the gas.

With only a two-day window of clear weather predicted, we decided to go for Tucki which we had planned as a two-day backpack from Skidoo. Just getting to the former mining town of Skidoo was an adventure. Sections of the paved Emigrant Canyon Road had been flooded and the dirt Skidoo Road was covered in snow for much of the way. Not a problem except for

the winding narrow parts with big drop offs.

We each carried two gallons of water and headed for the Martin cabin where we hoped to spend the night. Tucki is an easy climb but about 14 miles and an up and down 4300 feet of elevation gain roundtrip from Skidoo. I knew we didn't have enough daylight to do it as a day hike. From the start, we crunched on fresh snow, delighting in the kit fox and kangaroo rat tracks on either side. The descent down the first canyon on what appeared to be a washed-out miner's trail from yesteryear had a little added edge from the combination of the heavy packs, the steep slope, and the fresh snow.

The Martin cabin was indeed well-stocked as billed. Especially with mouse poops. Not wanting to stir up the Hantavirus, we removed the floor mats and replaced them (shaken out) after we left. We spread our sleeping bags and bivy sacks on the dirt floor. That evening my thermometer registered 5 degrees F. The water bottles not next to our bags froze solid.

On the cold summit the next day we discovered that Doug Mantle had run up the peak two weeks before for the 6th time.

Back at Stovepipe Wells we rewarded ourselves with dinner out. True to the weather forecast, it sprinkled that night. The next day we explored the nearby sand dunes with our trusty copy of "Geology Underfoot in Death Valley and Owens Valley" by Sharp and Glazner (highly recommended) and headed for Tecopa Hot Springs.

Our next peak, delayed a day by rain, was Pahrump, by far the most fun. This beautiful striped peak involves boulder hopping up a wash, walking through notches past a window rock, and traversing a summit ridge that is narrow enough to cause some folks knees to shake, especially if the wind is blustery. Just after dusk as we walked down the alluvial fan, we watched from the distance as a car stopped and a person with a flashlight peered into our truck windows. Too far away to do anything, all we could do was watch and hope everything would still be there when we arrived. Perhaps it was the sheriff just doing his job on New Year's Eve.

On New Year's Day we climbed Black Mountain near Barstow. It was a short, fun tromp over basalt chunks to a very windy and cold benchmark. As night fell we drove south on Black Canyon Road and continued south in the dark on a road which was not on the map. Suddenly, there was water all around us, and our truck sank deeper into the sand and slipped sideways even in 4WD. We concluded that Harper Dry Lake is wet this year. Luckily we could still turn around and retreated to the north and eventually found our way into Hinkley and home, our truck covered with mud looking like a real ORV.

• Debbie Bulger

Mt. Tallac: Winter Ascent of The Central

January 18, 2004

Some mountain had to be #2 on the Sierra Peaks Section list to fall, and Mount Tallac was it. On the way, a relatively easy hike turned into an epic battle for life and death for my partner and me. We definitely got a bit more adventure on this particular day than we expected!

Mount Tallac Ascent Summary Danger Precarious free solo mixed climb with no skills, virtually no equipment, and just a healthy helping of luck. Thrills The threat of sudden, imminent

death is always exciting ... I guess. Injuries Sprained my big toes using snowshoes.

By the Book

We started out using the route information for the Northeast Ridge posted on Summit Post. The directions to the 'trailhead' were relatively straightforward, and we were easily able to find the dead end in the subdivision despite copious January snow. We camped overnight, and started 'nice and early' Sunday morning at 9am for the short jaunt to the summit. We had a bit of gear, so as soon as we jumped on the trail, we strapped it on. I had some rental Tubbs snowshoes I was trying out -- my first time using snowshoes. My partner had some crampons he'd just bought, and was using crampons for the first time. The start of the trail was fairly easy to follow, and we angled southwest out of the trees -- eventually we came out into the very bottom of the northeast bowl. After some inspection of our maps, directions, and keen observation of the progress of other parties, we decided to ascend to the ridge on the south side of the bowl, in between the main bowl and the northeast bowl. The trail picked up steepness here, but both our crampons and snowshoes were doing great. After slightly more than an hour, we exited the ridge and turned northwest, along the top of the bowl. Everything was by the book, and a short traverse would lead us to the south trail to the summit proper. The Deviation

As we edged along the upper reach of the bowl, we passed a skier who was climbing up a little ways into a chute and then skiing down. We looked up past him, and right up that chute, we saw a highly visible high point. It was the right way, so we thought to ourselves, 'hey, there's the summit... it's right there!' We had to know, so we had a brief discussion with our new friend.

Us: Hey, does that go up to the top?

Him: Sure, but there's some technical climbing at the very end.

Us: How much?

Him: About 10 feet.

Me: Dude, I'm almost 10 feet tall, I'll just boost you up.

Partner: Yeah, 10 feet is nothing.

Him: (looking worried) It's vertical at the end.

[As a side note, it appears from inspection of pictures and snowboard route information that the chute we were looking at is 'The Central' on the NE buttress.]

Unfortunately, common sense was in short supply that day. I don't know where this vision I had that we would go up the chute, and be standing on some flat ground where we could prepare the final assault on the last ten feet came from, but that's what I had in my mind as we turned up into the chute, and started climbing. For a few minutes, we were both able to make good progress with our equipment directly up the slope. My snowshoes began to fade soon though, and I started to traverse back and forth across the slope as the angle increased. My partner reached one side of the rock face, and sat down on a small outcropping to have a small bit to eat. My snowshoes continued to underperform (almost certainly due to lack of skill) and I was soon hardly getting any purchase at all from them, and mostly succeeding only in pushing ever greater amounts of snow down the slope. For the last twenty feet getting to the lunch rock, I lost all snowshoe purchase and just climbed up by using my arms as rudimentary climbing poles. I clambered up on top of the small (for two of us) rock outcropping, and we had a brief discussion - it looked like my snowshoes weren't giving me any advantage now, so we agreed I would remove the shoes (going with just hiking boots -- without crampons) and he'd step-kick steps for me to follow. I

gained his ice axe to give me some kind of arrest capability in case of falls.

We finished our lunch, and we were off. The kick-step method worked masterfully and we traversed back and forth across the chute, making very rapid upward progress over fairly consolidated snow. He'd kick-step the lead, I'd kick-step and consolidate his steps, I'd run solid self belays (with the ice ax) directly under him when he executed turns in his traverse. There was an element of danger, but it was fairly controlled risk. Soon we passed the highest snowboard tracks where someone had entered the chute from the hanging face. We both considered moving up onto the face at that point, but the angle of the chute itself appeared lower and less exposed than the face above. That was probably the last easy exit from the chute. We continued upward, kick-stepping. Eventually, one of his kicks broke through the snow into a hollow pocket near a boulder. We moved around that and continued upward. As we moved up, the angle of the slope continued to increase, but always, it appeared that just 'beyond that rock' or 'after one more traverse' the angle decreased.

Finally, we reached a split in the chute -- the larger section went up to the left, while a smaller chute broke off to the right. We both wanted to go up the larger chute to the left, but every time my partner moved that way, he found huge pockets in the snow pack. We'd have to go to the right, and try to hug the wall and use it for added support. We moved over to the far right wall, and scrambled up the slope another 10-15 feet, no longer kick stepping, but rather using the rock wall to provide purchase. The snow condition was now very unconsolidated, and my partner was getting less and less benefit from the crampons as the grainy snow poured off around him as soon as he put weight on it. I felt I was in even worse shape, without even the benefit of crampons to get some purchase. My hiking boots weren't giving me any kind of real grip on the exposed rock surfaces either

The next thirty minutes seemed like an eternity. My partner was about 10-15 feet above me, and was slowly and painfully working his way around a rather large boulder - he thought after clearing the boulder we might be able to 'belly-flop' our way up onto the top of the Hanging Face. Meanwhile, I'd had to move off the rock face due to lack of sustainable position, and now found myself about 5 feet across a slushy snow slide standing on top of this tiny pine bush. It really didn't look like it was prepared to handle 200 pound loads. And, of course, the exposure was fairly dramatic since the view was the direct line down the chute into the bowl. The slope we were on felt like it was about 80 degrees, but a picture I took shows it was only about 50; still pretty steep for the conditions. While I clutched the tree, I must admit that I lamented our lack of a rope so we could even belay each other; much less any kind of protection so we could at least lock in a fall, and of course, my lack of a pair of crampons. Having a protected climb can really make quite a difference. It was also about this point when I started to wonder if I'd be able to cling to the tree long enough for the rescue choppers to find me...

But back to the story. My partner was making slow progress, but he was worried about me since I wasn't on the face, and was stranded out in the snow pile. He had a few choice words that amounted to 'you gotta move back onto that rock face', and, of course, he was right, I wasn't going anywhere with just the ice axe, though I did (briefly) consider trying some other routes to get back into some consolidated snow. In the end I slugged my way back onto the wall with a bit of aggressive downclimbing, and then slowly slowly started the climb back up to where he was. I'm guessing this part was probably only a class 4 section, but it the tiny little cracks and flakes I was using as hand holds

made it feel worse than any of those 5.6 routes at Planet Granite. I also found I couldn't really get multiple hand and foot holds because of the small exposed surface area, so I ended up doing some flunky chimneying technique where I'd get a good single hand and foot hold on the rock surface and jam my other leg perpendicular to the rock wall into the snow (beyond where my partner's passage had disturbed it). Using this method, I was able to ever so slowly haul myself up the slope to where my partner was.

While I'd been playing rock climber, my partner had moved up to an area of deeper snow. Unfortunately when he tried to kick step into it, the snow was still too loose and his steps wouldn't have the firmness to support moving up. But he'd come up with an alternate idea and was scooping out large flat steps that he could kneel onto and gradually move up. Over the next hour, we moved progressively up the slope by cutting steps, kneeling onto them, then standing up on them. The steps were solid enough we both felt some measure of safety after the previous 'clinging to the rock face' experience. Finally, finally, after a couple dozen steps, the slope's angle decreased enough that he was able to kick-step again, and minutes later, we crossed over the top of the ridgeline, and could see the true summit, about 2000 feet away and 500 feet higher than we were. Our adventure in The Central had come to an end! The Short Finale

We ascended the bowl face directly to the summit (we crossed the ridge line almost immediately to the north of it. This section was a little steeper than the real 'NE Ridge' hiking route (which was farther to the west) but had already been ascended numerous times, so we had deep steps to step into all the way up. At 4:30, we finally reached the summit. We'd spent over 4 hours in the chute, and had accumulated a world's slowest ascent speed of 6:54 from trailhead to summit. The weather all weekend had been perfect, and we were rewarded with some fine views from the summit of Lake Tahoe, Jacks, Dicks, Freel, Rose and other nearby mountains. Gilmore Lake was frozen over, and looked pretty cool. As is my typical luck, there was no summit registry to be found, so after a mere handful of minutes we were on our way back down.

Going down was a lot faster, we used the direct bowl descent with massive postholing and returned to the trailhead in just 92 minutes
Summary

Crampons are a must for snowy climbing.

Ice Axe is a must for snowy climbing.

If you think you're going to do something crazy, bring some rope and at least some minimal protection.

Turn around before it's 'too hard' to go farther up because it's always harder to go down than up.

Novices should stick to the 'existing' trails so they don't get themselves in hot water.

I only have 8 lives left.

• *Robert Greene*

Private Trip To Marriage Peak

Class 10

January 17, 2004

Although most other participants had been there before, it was Nancy and Tom's first attempt at Marriage Peak. The excitement had been mounting all week and on "the day" Nancy was the first to rise. She was joined by Sarah and they started towards the peak around 8 a.m. There was a layer of dense fog and it was cold but they both hoped the sun would

appear soon. By the time Maggie and Landa caught up with them the sky had cleared and the sun was out.

Meanwhile Leighton had started out with Tom, and Bruce, Kelly and Charles joined them as they raced to meet up with the Ladies. Very close to the saddle everyone rendezvoused and Emma joined the procession. Emma carried a basket of rose petals which she dropped along the trail so no one would lose their way back. Charles was busy taking pictures while everyone else concentrated on getting to the top without a miss step.

Tom and Bruce were the first to reach the peak and there awaited Edie, the peak goddess, to perform the much anticipated ceremony. As the others climbed the last 50 feet Nancy was met by her father, Bob, who gracefully guided her to Tom's side. Gone were the purple leggings and multicolored shorts and fleece. Nancy's gown of white glimmered in the sun as she and Tom joined hands and faced their family and friends. Poems were read by Ron and Maia and the ceremony ended with the traditional kiss.

The celebration lasted most of the day with lots of fun had by all. Alas, daylight waned and it was time to descend. Full of merriment and joy, everyone returned to the trail head happy about the successful ascent. They gathered round to say their goodbyes and give their best wishes to the two who were "Just Married," Nancy and Tom.

Participants: Nancy Fitzsimmons, Tom Driscoll, Sarah and Bruce Bousfield, Maggie Leiker, Landa Robillard, Kelly Maas, Leighton Nakata, Emma Kreider, Ron Karpel, Maia Pindar, Edie Nelson, Charles Schafer and Bob Fitzsimmons.

• *Landa Robillard*

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.

Lonely at the Top

Date: Mar 6-7 (Sat-Sun)

Peak: Lone Pine Peak (12,943')

Difficulty: class 2, ice axe, crampons, skis, snowshoes, snow travel

Contact: Aaron Schuman, climberaaron@comcast.net

Lone Pine Peak is a jagged ridge, and outlined by March snow, it will horrify even stout hearted climbers. But approached from the east, there is a gap in the peak's defenses. We will attempt to pass through that gap and make a class 2 ski and snowshoe winter ascent. And yes, it will be Lonely at the top.

Note: This trip is filled but, there is a waiting list.

Birch Society

Peak: Birch Mountain (13,602'), Mount Tinemaha (12,520')

Date: Apr 2-4 (Fri-Sun)

Difficulty: class 2, ice axe, crampons, skis, snowshoes, snow travel

Contact: Aaron Schuman, climberaaron@comcast.net

Two big peaks, both just east of the Sierra crest, are dusty and thirsty in the summer, but in April, they are a pleasure to do as an early spring snow climb. We'll make our approach up Tinemaha Creek, camp two nights at a flat site near the creek headwaters, climb Birch from the south and Tinemaha from the north.

Note: This trip is filled but, there is a waiting list.

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Hard copy subscriptions are \$13. Subscription applications and checks payable to "PCS" should be mailed to the Treasurer so they arrive before the last Tuesday of the expiration month. If you are on the official email list (lomap-pcs-announce@lists.sierraclub.org) or the email list the PCS feeds (pcs-issues@climber.org), you have a free EScree subscription. For email list details, send "info lomap-pcs-announce" to "listserv@lists.sierraclub.org", or send anything to "info@climber.org". EScree subscribers should send a subscription form to the Treasurer to become voting PCS members at no charge. The Scree is on the web as both plain text and fully formatted Adobe Acrobat/PDF.

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 2/22/2004. 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

First Class Mail - Dated Material