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# BOULDER

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## motherlode chapter · sierra club

MARCH-APRIL 1986 ISSUE #14

### THE CHAIR'S CORNER

You will notice that the spring schedule includes more opportunities to increase your wilderness skills. The winter schedule contained map and compass training and, if you missed it because of the 'big flood' or whatever, you will have another chance. Snow climbing/ice axe training, as well as basic rockclimbing, will again be included. Due to the Club imposed insurance prohibitions on Class 4 and above climbing and instruction, the rock training will be limited to permitted Class 3 activities. Because of a certain lack of clarity in the Club's November 1 memorandum regarding insurance restrictions, the Section's training coordinator, Doug Joy, has sent an inquiry to the national office in which he relates specific scenarios to determine the degree to which additional climbing equipment and techniques, including rappels, constitute allowed or prohibited activities while on 'Class 3 terrain' during trips and instructional sessions. This is a very complex issue which includes the problem of how we, or the American Alpine Club (from which the Sierra Club is taking its definitions), or the insurance companies define (and accept) classifications of climbing-related activities. Climbers can probably debate for hours about the degree to which climbing classifications depend upon terrain, equipment used, and conditions of the climb.

I have asked that Peak and Gorge steering committee members review and comment upon the draft list of responsibilities of trip participants, leaders, and section chairs; and the draft outings incident report form, both of which were provided by the Outings Guidelines Committee. Legal opinion is being sought regarding the use of such a form. The form would not be used when a Sierra Club Accident Report is completed. An incident has been defined as an outings situation threatening the safety of trip participants. It has been proposed that either the persons directly involved should complete it or at least review it. It is my belief that incidents should be evaluated objectively (with input from the involved parties) and in a constructive manner with the primary purpose being to promote outing safety by learning from the episode.

## FOR YOUR CALENDAR

Don't forget to mail your applications for wilderness permits for the national parks and popular wilderness areas in California.

- Mar 18 Tues P&G meeting at Gene Markley's, 7016 Filbert Ave. at 7:00p.m. Gene will host this special meeting to explain the Dan Dobbins Fund for Youth. Mountaineering adventures in Ecuador by Boris Nahlovsky. Bring something to eat or drink to share.
- Apr 9 Wed Leadership training. Required for all new leaders. 7 p.m. CSUS Student Union.
- Apr 10 Thu Navigation training using terrain, map, and compass. Attendance at Apr 12 field trip expected. Register with Doug Joy by April 1. (443-7564)
- Apr 12 Sat Navigation field practice for attendees of Apr 10 session.
- Apr 15 Tues P&G meeting at Roger Rollin's, 6604 Gingerloop Court, 7 p.m., especially for all P & G leaders, assistant leaders, and persons interested in being future leaders. Finalize summer planning. Bring a snack or drink to share.
- Apr 19 Sat Snow climbing practice.
- May 17 Sat Rockclimbing practice.
- May 20 Tues P & G meeting. Wilderness first aid by Dr. Judith Fairchild. At home of Barney Jones, 7425 Midiron Dr., 7 p.m.
- Jun 17 Tues P&G meeting to learn about gorge scrambling.

## SPRING TRIPS PREVIEW

- March 15 Mt. Diablo and North Peak - Class 1  
March 22 Roundtop via north couloir snow climb. Private, non-Club trip. Contact Roger Ehret (929-7615) or Boris Nahlovsky (1-677-4600).
- April 19 Snow climbing practice.  
April 19 Summit City Peak. Winter ski peak climb. 18-20 miles.  
April 19-27 Utah canyon country - Escalante River backpack.  
Apr 26-May 4 Canyon backpack near Natural Bridges Nat'l. Monument, Utah.  
May 10-11 Mt. Walt, Sawtooth Ridge. Alpine skiing gear.  
May 17 Mt. Haskell. Class 1-2.  
May 17 Rockclimbing training.  
May 17-18 So. Yolla Bolly. Class 1-2. Backpack in coast range.  
May 24-26 "Somewhere" Memorial Day peak climb.  
June 7-8 Iron Mtn. - Class 3. Snow climb. Devil's Postpile area.  
June 7-8 Buena Vista Pk. (Cl. 1) & Chilnualna falls. Yosemite.  
June 14 Mt. Fillmore and La Porte area. Class 2. Mts. Etna & Stafford.  
June 14-15 Mt. Baldwin, Bloody Mtn. & Laurel. Class 2. Convict Lake area.

## ACCIDENT REPORT--SLIP ON SNOW

On July 27, 1985, a climber participating in a rock climbing section outing was injured climbing in the Palisades.

The group's objective was to climb Mt. Sill by the Swiss Arete route. We left our base camp early, and made good time across the Palisade Glacier and up to Glacier Col. From there, we had planned to climb up the north couloir to a point where we could scramble over to the arete and the technical rock climbing would begin. As I started up the snow at the base of the couloir, however, I encountered icy conditions. I led the group off onto third class rock at the right of the couloir.

The climb was neither steep nor difficult, but required some care because of loose rock. I climbed first, followed by Linus Platt. Al Vargas, Bob Grow, and Spencer Abe followed not far behind.

Higher up, while the other climbers all stayed on the rock, Linus stepped out onto a patch of snow at the edge of the couloir. According to Al Vargas, Linus stepped onto the snow without first planting his ice axe, testing his foothold, or protecting himself with a handhold on the rock. Linus' foot slipped out from under him. He immediately went into self-arrest position, but slid into some rocks a few feet below, which knocked the ice axe out of his hands. His momentum carried him across the rocky area, and he continued down the couloir for another fifty or sixty feet before coming to a rough stop in another area where rocks protruded through the snow at the edge of the couloir.

Linus suffered a deep cut to his wrist. I shouted down instructions to stop the bleeding immediately, using direct pressure. Spencer Abe stopped the bleeding and bandaged the wound.

As I climbed down past the snow patch, I observed that its surface looked deceptively like corn snow. As Linus should have realized from looking at the snow near the center of the couloir, and from the hardness of the snow we had crossed below, there was only a thin layer of soft snow, melted by the morning sun, on top of hard, icy snow below. His tracks showed that he stepped out onto the snow with one foot, which immediately slipped out.

I examined Linus and found no serious injuries, other than the cut to his wrist, but I considered the cut to be serious enough that we should take him to a hospital emergency room. Linus made it down safely under his own power. As a precaution we belayed Linus on many of the steeper sections, recognizing that his injuries might affect his climbing.

When we returned to base camp, we divided most of Linus' gear among the other climbers, so that Linus would not have to carry down a heavy load. Linus and I left immediately, setting a fast pace, and made it to the cars before dark. We drove to the emergency room of a hospital in Bishop, where Al met us later. Bob and Spencer waited until the next day to complete the long hike out.

Linus required surgery on his wrist. I asked the emergency room physician--who had himself climbed the Swiss Arete several times and had recently climbed Mt. Everest--for any advice on what we should have done in response to the accident. He said Spencer had done an excellent job bandaging the wound. The doctor also said we were wise to hike out immediately; if we had rested for the night before hiking out, the chances of successful surgery would have been reduced.

### ANALYSIS

The accident resulted from the climber's failure to exercise adequate care in moving onto the snow. Linus should have recognized that the slopes might be icy. A climber who slips on an icy slope may pick up speed quickly, and it may be very difficult to self-arrest, even if the slope is not very steep. Linus should have tested the snow before moving out over it. He should also have protected himself by planting his ice axe, securing a handhold on the rock, or both.

A basic rule on both rock and snow is that if there's any doubt, you should test your holds before committing your weight to them. Snow conditions may vary from year to year or due to changes in weather, exposure, or time of day. It is especially

important to test the snow, with a foot or an ice axe, before making the first move onto a snow slope. Testing the snow helps both to determine how safe the slope will be, and what technique to use in crossing it. If the snow is soft enough that you don't have to worry about slipping, you may have to worry about falling through. Sometimes, the snow at the edge of a snowfield is only a thin crust, supported by the rocks next to it. Climbers may be injured when they plunge through to the rocks below, especially if they are moving forward and their momentum carries them past the point where their legs plunge through.

The basic rule of travel on snow slopes--don't move either foot unless the other foot and your ice axe are firmly planted--applies with equal force to the first step, except that a good handhold on the rock may be substituted for use of the ice axe.

In addition to being concerned about Linus' wrist injury, the group had to be concerned about the possibility that he would go into shock. He didn't. He climbed out safely, and maintained his stamina through the long hike out. If Linus had not maintained a cool head after the accident, the group would have had a more difficult time. A helicopter rescue would have been dangerous because of afternoon thunder-showers, and probably would not have been any faster than hiking out.

The snow was unusually hard for late July. Last year's snow pack melted off early. In many areas, the snow left on the ground in late summer was left over, not from the previous winter, but from earlier years. In planning trips after a dry winter, we should expect less snow, but harder snow, than in normal years.

Andy Sawyer

Northern Yosemite July 18 -27, 1986

7 - 9 Days

If you are interesting in spending 7 to 9 days this summer hiking in Northern Yosemite National Park give me a call. I've always wanted to hike through the canyon country of north-east Yosemite National Park, so I'm placing this note to see if anyone else is interested in joining me. My tentative plans are to start the hike at Kennedy Meadows and come out via Virginia Canyon over Virginia Pass to the Green Lakes Trailhead (Bridgeport). The hike would follow the Tahoe-Yosemite trail with 2 layover days to climb some of the peaks along the way, e.g., Grizzly, Bigelow, Puite, Regulation, Volunteer, to name a few. We would spend the mornings hiking and the afternoons kicking back. A group commissary is a must. If you would be interested in joining me in planning this trip give me a call. Leader: Al Gutowsky, 457-3338.

During the day long drive, I remembered flying over the Schell Creek Range a few years ago. At the time, this high and wild range was blanketed with a heavy snow covering that looked like it would never be snow free. But, alas, the summer temperatures heat the Great Basin and quickly melt its white coat.

My wife and I reached the Timber Creek access just in time to set up camp and enjoy her good fixens. The Forest Service campground looks to be new (restrooms, paved camping areas, tables) but we chose to camp in a semi-primitive area above to isolate ourselves from a large group of campers with their armament of sophisticated trailers, motorbikes and three-wheeled erosion devices. Although Timber Creek is small we noticed trout in each pool. Dipper played about the plunging creek along with flocks of Blue Grouse feeding in the meadow. Huge aspens, richly carved dating to 1905, lined the stream.

The following morning we headed up the creek staying to the left. Soon the stream vanished and we noticed herds of deer unlike what you see in the Sierras. We proceeded up a ridge on the right one half of a mile prior to the end of the streams drainage. Half way up the ridge thirteen large mule deer (all bucks) were feeding and resting. We came out on a north saddle just below the summit. Small rock circles were scattered about. We've seen these structures along ridges and peaks throughout the Great Basin. Could they be the blinds that the sheepstealers used to hunt the bighorn?

Mountain bluebirds, unidentified swallows, prairie falcons and a golden eagle played in the wind while my wife and I enjoyed lunch. The great vista from the top of North Schell included views of Mt. Moriah and Mt. Wheeler of the Snake range and South Schell with a fine cirque north of the peak. It was too smoky for a view of the Rubies. We were the only ones to sign the register for 1985 and only two people signed it during 1984. We descended via a southwestern scramble route.

The Schell Creek Range is the fourth highest range in Nevada (Hart - Hiking the Great Basin). The upper reaches of the ridgeline is quite barren. The climb of North Schell Peak and your descent, depending upon your condition and length of stay on top, can be accomplished in five to six hours.

June 11, 1985

### Long Canyon Gorge Scramble

Two Lincoln High School sophomores joined me for an introduction to gorge scrambling. These two possible future Peak and Gorgers were raring to go at 7:30 AM at the Raley's parking lot in Auburn. Buckeye Flat on the Rubicon River was our destination for dropping off a vehicle and it wasn't until 10:30 AM when we parked our second vehicle. Sierra Club members worked on this trail in 1980 but today there is little trace of any improvements. We quickly dropped down the ridge, occasionally locating an old blaze on a huge old black oak or ponderosa pine. It's fairly easy to follow the old trail until you're half way down, then the blazes become spotty. The trail crossed a dry wash a couple hundred feet above the river before we slid into the river. The entire descent took nearly a hour and resulted in some shaky legs.

After lunch, I decided to try to locate a high waterfall upstream. We scrambled for approximately a mile but failed to locate the falls. The canyon had become very narrow with some fine pools but the falls will have to wait for another visit. It wasn't until 3:00 PM that we reached our original out in on Long Canyon. The two plus miles down to the Rubicon River were mixed with flat stretches and a few deep pools. Near the last quarter mile the canyon narrows and deep wading or swimming is a necessity. A tight granite gorge soon opens up with intermittent pools. Just prior to meeting the wide Rubicon River we passed mining gear at one large pool. As we walked up the road at Buckeye Flat to our vehicles a healthy looking four foot Northern Pacific rattlesnake was out for its evening mouse. We gave it a moment or two to leave the road and finally arrived at our vehicle by 8:00 PM. We were back in Auburn by 10:30 PM. It was a long day but we saw no signs of recent visits in the upper reaches of the canyon, giving one a feeling of being in a truly wild area of the Sierras.

## INDIANHEAD (3960')

### FIRST ATTEMPT--1969

On Thanksgiving Weekend in 1969 I had a big desert trip (now called the Super Desert Trip) and my objective was to see if the Salton Sea was warm enough to swim in during the winter time. Just having left a year in tropical Venezuela, I missed my warm Caribbean swimming. I found out that the Salton Sea was a cool, briny, sink-hole for the sewage of Mexicali, B.C. and various agricultural runoffs. After talking to the Salton Sea State Park Ranger, I got a graph of Salton Sea temperatures versus month of the year. As I recall it, it fluctuates from 40°F to over 100°F in September! After my Salton Sea "research" I headed up to see Borrego Palm Canyon and its miles of palm trees. Soaring above the palms are thousands of feet of dry, hot, granitic rock. I charged 2000' up the main rib heading down to the stream and basked in the hot, dry, desert sun. I didn't go any further because I didn't know I was on a peak. ("Indianhead was added to the Desert Peak List (DPS) in the late 70's.) After the ridge climb I headed for "El Gato Negro" in Mexicali, B.

### SECOND ATTEMPT--1981

Thanksgiving 1981 the Mother Lode Chapter and I met Jim Pritchard down at Chiriaco Summit, did Orocopia Peak, camped out at the Salton Sea and tried "Indianhead" the next day. Believe it or not, it rained on us down at the Salton Sea and in Borrego Canyon itself. Dave Vandershaf led a group up the canyon and to try "Indianhead." I stayed down on the desert floor due to a bad neck. They didn't get "Indianhead" either that year.

### THIRD ATTEMPT--1985

Leaving a balmy 87°F in Long Beach I headed out to the Salton Sea Christmas Day 1985. Waking up to a damp sleeping bag I then raced off to Borrego Springs on S22 from Salton City (my dream town). Heading up the trail, past the first palm trees, I zoomed up the canyon, spotted the "Indianhead" (also called "Old Rain in the Face"), checked my map and arrived on top in 3 hours (a great class 2 scramble up the dry waterfalls and around the catclaws). Lots of native bunchgrass up there.

The view down from the summit "Indianhead" is a dramatic 3000' down (straight down) to the palm trees. The summit was real nice. It was about 80°F and clear blue skies. A great day to be up there way above the desert floor. I could see snowcapped Mt. San Jacinto, El Toro, and the town of Borrego Springs ( famous for the El Zorro Hotel). I saw the DPS Thanksgiving 1985 group signups in the register with my friend Pete Yamagata's signature. It was an easy 1½ hours down and a great desert day and a fine and friendly desert peak. I highly recommend "Indianhead" and Borrego Palm Canyon. After the peak I visited "Oh My God Hot Springs."

BILL HAUSER  
1/7/86



TUOLUMNE PEAK (10,845') REVISITED

SEPTEMBER 28, 1985

Meeting at an early 6 a.m. in Sacramento, two cars left at 6:15 a.m. to make the four hour drive for this unlisted, but highly worthy summit located near the geographic center of Yosemite National Park. After a short stop in Oakdale for breakfast, we arrived at the trailhead, Snow Flat (8847') to meet the Nahlovskys and the Bakers. We waited till 10:30 a.m. as the other car from Sac failed to show up. We started up the May Lake trail in cool hiking weather. About  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile after the lake, with its fine views of Mt. Hoffman, there is an unsigned junction with a faint trail that heads somewhat for the peak.

We soon reached the saddle from which the route up the south slope of the peak was obvious, and we reached the top to sign in at 1:40 p.m. The views were as they were last year--crystal clear with views ranging from Tower Peak (and beyond) to the Lyell group. Unexplained was a distinctly white mountain to the left of Tower whose appearance was attributed to either a freak snowstorm or some quirk of geology---very unusual! Also, unfortunately, the peaks towards the Valley were somewhat obscured by haze.

On our return, we met the two persons who had apparently arrived some minutes after we had left for the climb. I had left a note on my car windshield warning them from starting after us, as one of the persons had gotten lost on a previous climb. While the others stayed to do Dana and Gibbs, Barney Jones and Leo Krastins and myself speedily departed for the return to Sacramento, I made a few stops to photograph the beautifully red dogwood along 120. Enjoying a murky sunset while descending the New Priest Grade, we had dinner in Oakdale and were home by 9:30-10:00 p.m.

Pete Yamagata

RUBICON PEAK (9183') SKI TOUR

JANUARY 19, 1986

John Bowers and Stan Lemke met me at CSUS for my first tour this season. We drove through South Shore to enjoy a quick view of Emerald Bay in mild and sunny weather. We reached the subdivision (Rubicon Estates?--forget the name) to drive about to find an appropriate parking spot and trailhead about 500 feet above the lake level. We started up a ridge to our left, probably because ski tracks seemed to be headed that way. We soon gained the NE slope/ridge of the peak which made fine touring. This route passes to the south of Lonely Gulch and takes one to the left side of that great north slope. Two of us used skins and one waxed. We zigzagged up the north slope and reached the ridge just NW of the top. I abhorred continuing to the top due to ice and windpack, but, I thought, the climb must succeed!

As we ate lunch after climbing to the high point of class 2 rocks, we were met by two others, one of which, a John P-- of Truckee, stated that this was his eighth ascent this year, with fifteen ascents last year, and these were the worst conditions he had ever seen. I warned the others to be very careful on our descent. One of the other tourers wanted to take my picture skiing down with the peak and the lake as backdrop. As I felt obliged to, having felt the same way myself many times, I whipped off two stem turns. The frozen snow made easy sideslipping, and John P-- show his finesse in parallel turning, whooshing down the upper slope. Our group stayed together, basically sideslipping, kick-turning, and traversing. Further down where the snow began to thaw, I managed to crank through a number of telemarks. We followed tracks back to the cars, arriving by 4-4:30 and got home after a dinner at Carl's Jr. in Placerville.

Pete Yamagata



PEAK AND GORGE BOULDER:

Published six times a year by the Peak and Gorge Section, Mother Lode Chapter, Sierra Club

SUBSCRIPTIONS:

Dues are \$4.00 a year and are delinquent February 24. Subscriptions expire December 31. Please send remittance, payable to Peak and Gorge, to treasurer Harry Erl, 2520 Greenwood Avenue, Sacramento, CA 95821

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We encourage you to send articles and letters pertaining to Peak and Gorge business and activities. Please send single-spaced copy to the editor prior to the first of odd months.

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MATTERHORN PEAK (12,264') looms highest in the Sawtooth Ridge area along Eastern Yosemite. The peak, mantled in its spring-time snows, makes a fine goal for skiing or snow climbing adventures.