

THE



BOULDER

motherlode chapter · sierra club

Issue No. 53 March. & April, 1993

Chairmans Column

It's hard to believe but two years are up and the time has come to elect a new Peak & Gorge Chairman. Before leaving I want to thank the many people who have helped me keep the spirit of peak climbing alive. Thanks to John Sarna for advise and a considerable amount of organization and for consistantly providing trips and trip write-ups. Thanks also to John, Bob & Pete for doing a great Job with the Boulder. Thanks to all the Peak & Gorge leaders for their numerous trips. Thanks to Robin Reed for being our christmas party hostess and Bob for selling the Tee-Shirts and Christi for being a lot of fun. Also thanks to Fred for taking over the gorge scrambling clinic and to Gary Walker for being treasurer. Finally thanks to all you Boulder subscribers who we never see but who keep resubscribing--don't stop now!

For those of you who are interested in being Peak & Gorge chair or in nominating someone come to the March meeting at my place. We will have nominations in March along with some slides of Mono Lake. If you want to coordinate summer trips with other leaders this is the time to do it. Also, the chapter is interested in publishing guide books again so if you would like to contribute come to the meeting. The election will be held in April at Al Gutowsky's house. I hope you will all attend.

See you on the trail.

John Watters, Chairman

SPRING CALENDAR

Mar. 6, Sat. Intermediate Ski Tour. Leader: Al Gutowsky, 457-3338

Mar. 7, Sun. Peak Climb/Intermediate Ski Tour. Stevens Peak. Leader: John Sarna, 429-8024.

Mar. 7, Sun. Intermediate Ski Tour. Leader, Fred Fischietto, 773-0870.

Mar. 13-15, Desert Survivors. White Cliffs Canyon. Leader, Bob Ellis (510) 482-0466.

Mar. 20-22, Desert Survivors. Cosco Petroglyphs. Leader: David McMullen, (510) 549-2645.

Mar. 23, Tues. Peak & Gorge Social Meeting. Nominations for Peak & Gorge Chair, Slides of Mono Lake, Coordinate summer trips. Host: John Watters, 845 Fulton Ave. #2056, 488-8467.

April 3-11, Desert Survivors. Death Valley Area Backpacks. Leader, Bob Ellis (510) 482-0466.

April 24, Sat. Ski Tour for Kids. Leader: John Sarna, 429-8024.

May 25, Tue. Peak & Gorge Social Meeting. Slides of past summer trips. Host John Besbekos, 4428 Old Dairy Rd. 729-2725.

Mar. 26-28. Joshua Tree Quiet Weekend. Desert Survivors. Leader: Rochelle Garratt (510) 769-1706.

May 28-31, Fri-Mon. Lava Beds National Monument. Leader: John Sarna, 429-8024.

June 8, Tues. Peak & Gorge Social Meeting. Gorge Scramble Clinic & Potluck. Host: Fred Fischietto, 773-0870. Meet at 6:30 p.m. at 1604 Valley View Court in Roseville. Take Riverside Exist off I-80, go east on Cirby, turn right on Vista Creek, turn right on Valley View Court.

June 11-13, Fri-Sun. Mt. Dubois. Leader: John Sarna, 429-8024.



BEGINNER'S CROSS-COUNTRY SKI TRIPS

WITH JOHN BESBEKOS



This is the first winter that I've spent more time in the Sierras than hiking on the coast. Having got my ski equipment near the end of the season last year at a Sierra Outfitter's clearance sale, I decided this would be the year to take advantage of the winter sports opportunities we have in California.

John Watters led a couple trips in the Echo Summit area, just south of Highway 50. The first visit was after a heavy snowfall and there was lots of very deep powder. You may have heard about the 3 snowboarder fatalities from falling into deep powder and not being able to get out. Fearing that I might drown if I fell while trying to negotiate a steep slope made it a high tension trip for me. On our second visit to the area in February it was much nicer. There was a solid base pack and a shallow powder on top which made my snow-plow turning much easier. We followed the route of a forest service road up a ridge then had a fun ski-run back down to the lower elevations.

Bob Buckles led a short tour up the popular Castle Peak trail across from Boreal off Interstate 80. This is where I had gone last season several times. This time however, I made it over the ridge at the end of the road and down the backside to the Sierra Club's Peter Grubb ski hut. The entire first floor was completely buried in the snow. There were about a half-dozen campers preparing to spend the weekend there. I guess I just don't have enough antifreeze in my blood to find that appealing.

Barney Jones took me and Alan Cooke to the Big Bend area near the trail-head for Loch Leven Lakes for some lessons. The snowpack was very hard and icy. We had little problem going uphill but Alan and I had more than our share of crashes when we went skidding downhill. We worked our way up-hill, crossing the railroad tracks and eventually coming to a bowl where a lake lay buried under the snow. It was here that Barney patiently tried to teach us some rudimentary turning techniques. After lunch we headed back down. The one good thing about the hard icy snow was that this being Alan's first trip he was able to take off his skis and walk down some of the steep tight turns in the road. I ended up joining him after doing only marginally better on the slippery surface.

My favorite place so far has been Tahoe Meadows in north Tahoe on the Nevada side. This is the place where I first decided that cross-country skiing is fun. It is the perfect beginners area. It is a large bowl that you can ski at any level you want. You can warm up on the flat and then head up the sides for some nice long downhill runs with no trees to crash into. You can leave your pack in the car, ski down to the end of the bowl and back. Then eat lunch in the warm vehicle while you watch the bob-sledders on the opposite side of the road. After your confidence has been built up you can take a trail on the edge of the bowl at treeline that goes up to a spectacular overlook of Lake Tahoe.

Apr 30-May 2, Fri-Sat

Ski Tour/Snow Camp/Peak Climb

PRIVATE TRIP--MT SHASTINA Plan to ski into Hidden Valley, climb Shastina, and ski out Sunday morning. I am open to other ideas too. Call Bob Buckles, 624-3620 if interested.

Jun 4-6, Fri-Sat

Ski Tour

PRIVATE TRIP--LASSEN PARK I am interested in climbing Lassen Peak and other ski touring in this area. Spring snow was great at this time a couple years ago. I'm open to snow camping or motels as group prefers. If interested, call Bob Buckles, 624-3620.

HIKERS WHO DIDN'T MAKE IT

Some have called Alaska the final frontier, and many have hiked in the cold, storm-racked mountain ranges of this State, including an expedition by Peak and Gorge founder Gene Markeley (has this ever been written up in the *Boulder*). Its reputation is one of stark beauty, mitigated by the need to be aware of the cold and its ever-present danger to life and limb. Solo trips into Alaska's back-country are much more dangerous, but of course, that makes them all the more attractive to the few people who thrive on risky ventures. There is a toll. In an article titled "Death of an Innocent" which appeared in the January 1993 issue of *Outside* magazine, stories are told of Christopher McCandless and two others whose sojourn into the Alaska back-country led to their untimely demise. One story is of an accomplished mountaineer:

There is, for example, the sad tale of John Mallon Waterman, a visionary climber much celebrated for making one of the most astonishing first ascents in the history of North American mountaineering - and extremely dangerous 145-day solo climb of Mount Hunter's Southeast Spur. Upon completing this epic deed in 1979, though, he found that instead of putting his demons to rest, success merely agitated them

In the years that followed, Waterman's mind unraveled. He took to prancing around Fairbanks in a black cape and announced he was running for president under the banner of the Feed the Starving Party, the main priority of which was to ensure that nobody on the planet died of hunger. To publicize his campaign, he laid plans to make a solo ascent of Denali, in winter, with a minimum of food.

After his first attempt on the mountain was aborted prematurely, Waterman committed himself to the Anchorage Psychiatric Institute but checked out after two weeks, convinced that there was a conspiracy afoot to put him away permanently. Then, in the winter of 1981, he launched another solo attempt on Denali. He was last placed on the upper Ruth Glacier, heading unroped through the middle of a deadly crevasse field enroute to the mountain's difficult East Buttress, carrying neither sleeping bag nor tent. He was never seen after that, but a note was later found atop some of this gear in a nearby shelter. It read, "3-13-81 - My last kiss 1:42 PM."

The second story is of a wayward photographer who may have been unaware of the risks.

Carol McCunn, a likable, absentminded Texan who in 1981 paid a bush pilot to drop him at a lake deep in the Brooks Range to photograph wildlife. He flew in with 500 rolls of film and 1,400 pounds of provisions but forgot to arrange for the pilot to pick him up again. Nobody realized he was missing until state troopers came across his body a year later, lying beside a 100-page diary that documented his demise. Rather than starve, McCunn had reclined in his tent and shot himself in the head.

The third story of McCandless is of a rash but competent hiker, who had already survived a few solo trips into wild-lands with minimal food and equipment. He went into an area near Denali carrying only a rifle and a 25 to 30 pound pack with some clothes and rice, despite dire warnings by the last (Alaskan) man to see him alive. He carried only a sketchy map, wanting a white wilderness experience while he lived off the land. He actually did fairly well at first, and would probably have lived to brag about his adventure, except for two major miscalculations. First, he assumed he'd be able to cross the Teklanika River on the way out, as he'd done on the way in before the river thawed in the Spring. But it was a raging torrent in July, and he could easily have been swept away where he wanted to cross it and finish with a short hike from there to a major highway. He turned back to base-camp (an abandoned bus) and probably waited for the cool fall weather to again turn the river to ice. His second mistake is well-told by *Outside* magazine:

For the rest of July McCandless fell back into his routine of hunting and gathering. His snapshots and journal entries indicate that over those three weeks he killed 35 squirrels, four spruce grouse, five jays and woodpeckers, and two frogs, which he supplemented with wild potatoes, wild rhubarb, various berries, and mushrooms. Despite this apparent munificence, the meat he'd been killing was very lean, and he was consuming fewer calories than he was burning. After three months on a marginal diet, McCandless had run up a sizable caloric deficit. He was balanced on a precarious, razor-thin edge. And then, on July 30, he made the mistake that pulled him down.

His journal entry for that date reads: "Extremely weak. Fault of pot[at]o seed. Much trouble just to stand up. Starving, Great Jeopardy." McCandless had been digging and eating the root of the wild potato - *Hedysarum alpinum*, a common area wildflower also known as Eskimo potato, which Kari's book [on edible plants in Alaska] told him was widely eaten by native Alaskans - for more than a month without ill effect. On July 14 he apparently started eating the pea-like seedpods of the plant as well, again without ill effect. There is, however, a closely related plant - wild sweet pea, *Hedysarum mackenzii* - that is very difficult to distinguish from wild potato, grows beside it, and is poisonous. In all likelihood McCandless mistakenly ate some seeds from the wild sweet pea and became gravely ill.

Laid low by the poisonous seeds, he was too weak to hunt effectively and thus slid toward starvation. Things began to spin out of control with terrible speed. "DAY 100! MADE IT!" he noted jubilantly on August 5, proud of achieving such a significant milestone, "But in weakest condition of life. Death looms as serious threat. Too weak to walk out."

Unfortunately, rescue was not forthcoming in this real-world adventure, and McCandless died of starvation in mid-August, leaving this brief note:

I have had a happy life and thank the Lord. Goodbye and may God bless all!

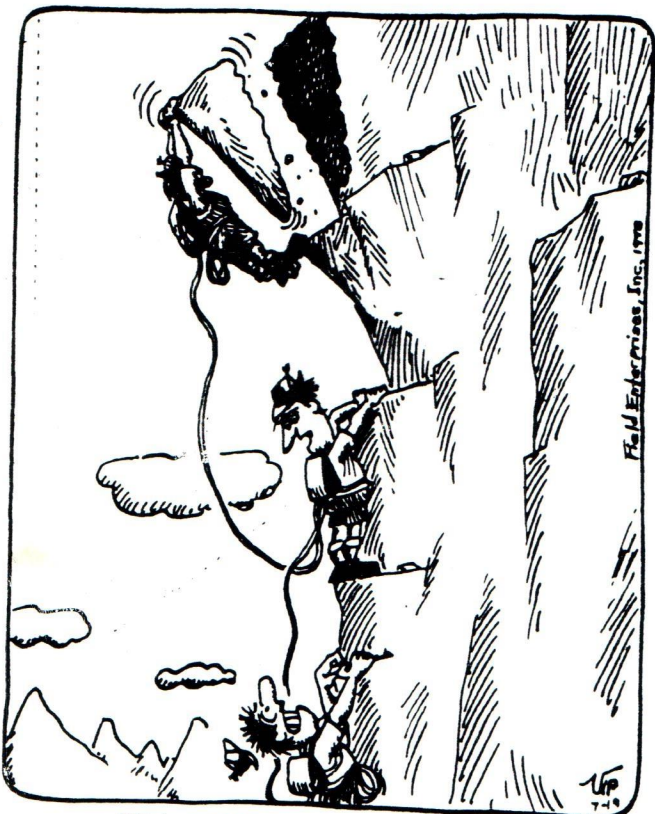
If only he could have survived another three weeks, the hunters who found his body would have rescued him.

What I take from these three sad stories, especially that of McCandless, is first that people are not fragile, being able to venture out into the unknown and survive extreme conditions even with minimal preparation. The second is that unanticipated problems typically will arise which, for those who are prepared, do no more than cramp one's style, or for those who purposely push themselves to the edge, either to find excitement or to reach extreme goals, end in disaster.

John Sarna

BIG GEORGE

By Virgil Partch



"Now we'll find out how good he really is."

THIS FUNNY WORLD



"Mark my words, that team is headed for trouble."

Did the phrase "peak climb" scare people off? Had they heard that it was icy? Was everyone at a Super Bowl party? Was it that they didn't know this new ski trip leader? Didn't anyone like me! Finally, Ted, the only person who had called, showed up at the parking lot. After questioning whether we really wanted to go, Ted decided to he did want to try his new rondenee gear and I decided my yard could wait another day.

As we prepared to start, I took a closer look at Ted's rondenee set up. He had a pair of fat Black Diamond skis without friction wax, making any uphill movement impossible without climbing skins. The binding assembly had a heel connection which could be set to have free movement similar to cross country binding or locked down, much like a light weight alpine binding. There was also an additional small bar which, when flipped into place, elevated the heel about two inches above the ski to make steep climbing easier on the legs. The boots were made of a plastic outer shell, softer than alpine ski boots, and a removable soft inner boot. According to Ted, the boots also took quick locking rigid crampons. He had bought the set up for steep terrain backcountry like Shasta. Cost of set up, about \$800 new.

The conditions for the trip fit Ted's equipment quite well. We began with a steady climb up the standard path to Castle Pass. Conditions were hard and icy with very little give in the snow. Though I have skied this route in similar conditions without any, the climbing skins made the trip much easier today. When we reached the steep hill climbing up over the pass, the heel lifts on Ted's bindings allowed him to take a very steep angle without stressing his leg muscles. The descent to Peter Grubb Hut was even easier after Ted removed the climbing skins and locked in his heels. A few quick parallel turns and he was down the hill. Meanwhile, I crashed a couple times as I tried to turn on the hard surface, then settled for long traverses with step turns.

It was when we left the Hut that the disadvantage of Ted's setup was most apparent. We had a long stretch which was level to slightly uphill. Without wax, Ted was immediately forced back to using skins. His bindings and skis were also too rigid for effective kick and glide technique. The rondenee gear appears to be fine for direct uphill assaults but not for more moderate terrain with constantly changing conditions. Lucky for Ted, we soon began climbing again. We began to curve clockwise up the side of Basin Peak. As we climbed out of the trees, we entered a hillside sculpted by the wind. The snow was raised into small wavelike forms. We continued upward, eventually reaching the northwest side of the peak. There we found a series of steps, three to five feet high, cut into the snow by the wind. The north side of the peak had a cornice which appeared to extend ten feet or more out from the cliff. The wind rose to an icy blast as we climbed up onto the flat ridge leading to the peak. It was a small rock outcropping, almost buried in snow. I took a couple quick pictures then we retreated to a more sheltered spot. Though the sky was clear, the wind continued to chill us, cutting short our lunch.

The wind also kept the snow from softening. I put my skis on my pack and walked down past the steps before even trying to ski. With some trouble, Ted made it below the steps on his skis and, with ease began his descent towards the hut. I struggled behind, fighting with my skis as they pitched up and down the "snow waves" which the wind had formed. When we reached the trees, I finally began to find enough soft snow for controlled turns. After getting back near the hut, we put on skins and began the climb back over the ridge. I got off the ridge with an unimpressive technique, sliding on my back, using a ski pole for self arrest. It works. The last leg back to the highway was a

little better as the snow had gotten afternoon sun in most places and no wind. I got in a few real turns and only a couple more falls. We reached the car six and a half hours after our start. A good day for Ted. A bit rougher for me but still nice.

Bob Buckles.

ANDESITE TWICE

13 FEB 93

After the poor showing for my Basin Peak trip, I was surprised to suddenly be thrust into position of leading this trip for Fred Fischietto. Fred was having knee problems so I got elected to lead our group of six in search of good snow. We met Al Gutowsky as we parked our cars at the Castle Peak Sno-Park area. Al and another friend were getting ready to ski Andesite and Basin Peaks. Our group decided his pace would be a bit more than we wanted this day. We did take advantage of some of his trail breaking though. After following Al's tracks a short way, I started off on a separate, less steep approach, traversing the south side of Andesite Peak (8219'). Trail breaking was a bit of work as I sank in 6-10 inches of snow. We rotated trail breaking as we continued uphill, curving around the peak until we were just below the summit. The sky was clear but conditions were very windy as we reached the top. After pulling up the hoods of our parkas, taking a few pictures and admiring the scenery, we began our descent down the north side to the ridge top of Castle Pass. The snow was a bit deep and slow, making for an easy coast to the low point of the ridge. We followed the trail on to Peter Grubb hut, where we again ran into Al. Al had just finished lunch and was ready to start up Basin Peak.

We had our lunch in front of the hut, then started back up the ridge to the pass. Don and Pat decided to call it a day and skied down the ridge to follow the short route out. Merrilyn, Roger and Ed continued with me back up Andesite for a second look at the peak. It turned out to be plenty of work as we could not use the downhill trails for the climb up in the steeper sections. After reaching the top, we were looking forward to the final downhill stretch. Unfortunately, I had misjudged the conditions. The day had been warm and the snow on the south side was soft and slow for the most part. The exception was that anytime you went into the shade you hit breakable crust. After all the work to get some elevation for the trip out, we ended up skiing in the tracks that we had made coming in that morning. I kept thinking of the run we could have taken down the standard route from the ridge as I settled for a kick and glide stroke back to the road.

Bob Buckles

I HEARD IT THROUGH THE PEAKVINE III

Howard Steidtmann and **Tobi Tyler** climbed **Pinto, Eagle #1, Martinez,** and **Palen** over Christmas on a private trip to the Mojave Desert.

John Sarna's trip to the Desert netted **Kingston, Stewart,** and **Granite #1** plus **Smith** and **Old Dad** for Howard and Tobi last weekend!

WATERHOUSE PEAK (9497') 4X

DECEMBER 13, 1992

Having never climbed this peak outside the ski season, it became, for me, a good checkout tour. I nearly broke my thumb on a rock during the 1977 drought, and I was really frustrated while on an "intermediate" tour the group proceeded to perform its standard "kick-turn/traverse" maneuver during a storm, totally ignoring an excellent powder run down the north side!

Finally, in Jan. '92, I was able to ski my "Yamagata Gully," a steep tree run down this north side with **Steve Thaw**. Then, this season, the early, abundant snows gave to **Pat McGaughy** and me one of the better powder runs that I have had, ending much too shortly, after the miniscule 1,800' slopes ran out to Grass Lake.

Most of the day I wore 5 layers--lightweight capilene tops, stretch synchilla vest, synchilla jacket, a large capilene-lined shelled vest, then my Gore-Tex parka, as well as midweight capilene bottoms under my Europa downhill bibs, and then synchilla cap and Black Diamond gloves. With a high that day of 32° F at the Lake, I worried about my cold-numbered toes and had to loosen laces on my probably too snug Asolo Snowfields. Happily, warm blood resumed coursing into my feet once we left the summit and began our downhill run. We finished the tour by 3 p.m., allowing for a safe drive home on pre-iced-up roads.

PY

MAMMOTH CONDO WEEKEND WITH THE SMS, 1993

FEBRUARY 13-14, 1993

I left Sacramento early Friday to drive leisurely down U.S. 395 to experience the High Sierra in a winter majesty not seen in 7 years! Enjoying fine weather all weekend long, people went downhilling or touring at their pleasure.

Saturday, Owen and I, finding from the USFS that no Sno-Park permits were being issued for the Rock Creek roadhead, as it was not plowed (Rock Creek Lodge shut down?), chose to meet the challenging conditions of "Morrison Canyon," the standard descent route from Mt. Morrison. We broke trail to about 9,600', and then began our downhill search for the best powder. We found a good, steep, north-facing slope, and I amazed myself by cutting through horrendous stretches of breakable crust with my new **Tua Wilderness** backcountry skis (equivalent to Black Diamond Tote Neige). Talk about a difference! Anyone want to buy a pair of Karhu XCD-GT's? We both made S's down for most of the slopes, and then traversed the final moraine slope back down to Convict Lake.

We met the others, who all had a nice 3-pin day at June, then feasted on a catered meal from **Anything Goes**, operated by Susie Beck, the ex- of the famous Dave Beck (author of "Ski Touring in California," the original touring guidebook). The chicken, vegetables and rice pilaf were very good.

Sunday, we drove to 120 East and to the end of the plowed road (Junction of South Tufa road) and began skiing through the sagebrush flats, then up into the Mono Craters. We climbed **Pk. 8443'** from which we enjoyed great views of the **Sierra Escarpment** as well as of Mono Lake. I was reminded by the diffuse mountain light of the Sierra Club notecard, "Ogre Stump," taken by our once own Tony Jewell! After a long lunch on top, we skied down to our ascent route up a north-facing bowl, where the telemarking difficulties separated the good skiers from the bad! Photographically, this was one of the best short tours that I have done, with pine trees growing out of volcanic formations looking like a well-tended rock garden!

After returning to the condo and seeing some of the others off, the remaining four of us split for dinner, myself waiting in line 40 minutes for some KFC with the others cooking a pasta meal at home. This was indeed one of the great holiday weekends of the skiing year! We watched "The Telemark Movie," a 1987 video production.

I am signed up for 4 more SMS (Ski Mountaineers Section) outings this season, including a number of peak ascents, so if anyone wishes to go for another great skiing adventure, give me a call! PY (444-6319)

December 2, 1992

Dear friend, associate, or acquaintance of Judith A. Fairchild, MD:

I regret to inform you that Judith passed away on Thanksgiving morning, November 26, 1992, after hospitalization for a serious fall from her horse two days prior.

Even those with a brief acquaintance with Judith knew her as a dynamic woman who demanded everything from life that was rightfully hers. She was accomplished, colorful, artistic, and a champion of animals, especially wildlife. When not practicing emergency room medicine or traveling the world, she spent most of her time at home with her dogs and wolf dogs, often knitting or cross-stitching. But Judith also was an avid enthusiast of skiing, sailing, hiking and climbing, bird watching, writing, and collecting fine art (mostly depicting wolves). She supported wildlife rescue and recovery efforts with her actions as well as donations. During the last couple of years, she came to love riding, and she and her horse Albert were in constant training for show-jumping events. This year, Judith served as a Director on the board of the Friends of the Folsom Zoo, a small zoo that cares for non-releasable injured, orphaned, or ex-pet wildlife. As an animal rights activist, it was the only zoo she felt good about.

Because Judith had so many friends from widely diverse interest groups, and most of us knew few of her other friends, I hope you will share this sad news with any others who would appreciate knowing.

Judith willed her entire estate for the care of her animals, under the direction of two long-time friends. Donations in her memory may be made to the Friends of the Folsom Zoo, P. O. Box 704, Folsom, California, USA, 95630, where a larger-than-life-size bronze statue of a wolf is being constructed, which will be dedicated to her memory, in acknowledgement of her support and great love of wolves.

A memorial service is planned for Sunday, December 13, 1992. It will be held at 12 Noon in Ancil Hoffman Park, in Carmichael, CA (map included). If the weather is rainy, please come by Judith's house between Noon and 4 PM, and share memories of Judith.

For more information, you may call or write to Terry Jenkins, 2461 Indian Rock Road, Cool, CA, 95614, phone (916) 888-6867; Vicki Valentine, 7215 Brookridge Court, Citrus Heights, CA, 95610, phone (916) 726-2988; or call Kathe MacDonald at (916) 366-8731.

Sincerely,

Terry Jenkins
Terry Jenkins

THE BOULDER: Published bimonthly by the Peak and Gorge Outings Section,
Mother Lode Chapter, Sierra Club.

Editors: John Besbekos, Bob Buckles, and Pete Yamagata.

Subscriptions: Dues are \$6.00 per year (6 issues). Address labels will note what
issue will be your last unless you renew. Send checks (payable to
"Peak and Gorge") to this Section's Treasurer: Gary Walker,
P.O. Box 141, Weimar, CA 95736, who can be called at 637-4240.

Submittals: We encourage you to submit copy for publication. Articles,
letters, fiction, poetry, and artwork that would be of interest to
the Peak and Gorge Section are welcome. Copy should be typed
single-spaced on 8.5 x 11" paper with half-to one-inch margins,
and sent to: Boulder Editorial Committee; C/O John Besbekos;
P.O. Box 417415, Sacramento, CA 95841; phone 729-2725.
Submittals will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-
addressed stamped envelope.

DEADLINE: About a week before social meetings on even-numbered months.
The next deadline is: April 13, 1993

Boulder Editorial Committee
C/O John Besbekos
P.O. Box 417415
Sacramento, CA 95841



White Bengal Tiger

.....paid til issue 55
John Sarna
545 Windward Way #114
Sacramento, CA 95831



ECHO PEAKS
2/21/92
Ellen Van Fleet