



Cory Harelson coming up the Frasier Glacier under a mackerel sky
August 16, 2010

Photos by Alvin Walter

Alaska Skiing in August

By Alvin Walter

There aren't very many places that beckon skiers to the "Call of the Wild" in late summer as does Alaska. I still have vivid memories of a movie adventurer who was dropped off by a bush pilot in a remote area of Alaska when it sunk in to him just how much of a commitment

he made as he began to down his first mouse. Well, Cory Harelson and I weren't planning any mice dinners as there weren't any mice in the Wrangell Mountains on the Frasier Glacier that is at least 120 air miles from the closest road – however, we were committed to this glaciated mountainous wilderness for at least a week and a half to deal with whatever weather and adventures Alaska was going to dole out to us after the bush pilot tipped his wings at us on a last minute fly-by "salute" before he headed back to his remote Alaskan lodge.



Fun turns with Mt Saint Elias on the horizon - August 16, 2010 Photo by Alvin Walter

We were totally reliant on good weather for him to be able to pick us up in about ten days. The typical weather for the previous month had been impossible to fly in according to all accounts. Cory and I, however agreed to bring Southern California weather with us and we held true to our lucky charm status. The day we arrived we basked in glorious sunshine with mountainous vistas that are only rarely seen by the most committed mountaineers with skis.

Our immediate and obvious goals were negotiating substantial crevasse fields, avoid-

ing threatening seracs and titillating cornices, bagging glorious untrampled peaks via obscure one-in-a-lifetime routes, deal with all meteorological challenges, and most important was to have the kinds of thought experiences that go far beyond the physical challenges that will forever enrich our lives and those with whom we share our stories.

In 1932, there was a young Mongolian Princess who sums up our desired experience with the following plaintive words told to Maynard Owen Williams, a National Geographic Society special staff represen-

tative, "Perhaps your way of life is right for you, but it threatens ours. You are in a hurry and, hence barbaric." "You are entranced by mechanical toys, which you haven't mastered... "You find this a backward land... We Mongols" she continued, "are emancipated. 'A good horse and a wide plain under God's heaven,' that's our desire. And we realize it."

Our first base camp was set up near two peaks that were a virtual island in the middle of several vast glaciers. On our approach to the higher of the two, we worked our way around several large open and



Cory ascending a knife-ridge to Peak 11,237 — August 16, 2010

conspicuous crevasses and up over one corniced ridge to where we stood on soft afternoon snow in the direct fall line of a massive cornice showing a vertical fracture line indicating a short life to it and us if we proceeded further.

It was time to cash in some of our efforts and rack up some nice late spring quality turns down to a traverse line that headed through an intricate labyrinth of crevasses below a small hanging- but recently breaking up - glacier. Roping up was the only way to progress through to a ramp that looked like a solid makeable route to the more accessible second peak that we continued toward over a steep exposed black ice field just below the

nicely consolidated 800 foot pitch to the summit that we named after its elevation of 9,500 feet.

The 360 degree view was more magnificent than either of us could have imagined with Mt. Saint Elias and Mt. Logan standing tall to the east in clear and bright late afternoon sunlight that cast defining shadows that seemed to highlight routes to their lofty summits at 19+ K & 18+ K respectively and luring us to think we would have time to ski to and on their massive faces – only time was going to tell how realistic our perceptions were.

Our descent off Peak 9,500 to base put us in skiers' heaven with a more direct route on a

consolidated granular base where we only stopped to admire cascading and freefalling rivulets of melted ice pouring off the blue ice surface of more than one hanging glacier.

Seeing Mt. St. Elias and Mt. Logan inspired us to use our pulgas (sleds) to move our base camp close to some perceived goals which proved to be an arduous exhausting effort past a number of small yet man-sized swallowing crevasses and a recent straight line bear track. Yet despite the physical distractions, we found a comfortable rhythmic pace that allowed my thoughts to focus on things like melodic Andean music and the mountain loving people of South America, sea-going adventures in wild storms that my fisher-



Mt Logan from the west — August 16, 2010

man Grandfather related in stories, and such far out things as quantum physics where my exuberant college Professor was able to make me see all these tiny particles that we are all made up of that come together for a brief period of time then dissipate - yet forever leave the world changed for their existence. I feel a personal high that is on par with a peak experience and just bask in the internal glow until our rhythm is broken.

We have decided on a new base camp location, pitch the tent, dig a kitchen, then begin building a wind break wall when Cory suddenly loses half his height then regains it

with a bit of a struggle and tells me he stepped into a crevasse. It was within four feet of the tent and there was no clue of its existence since it was only about a foot wide at the top and covered with two feet of snow that gave it an eerie blue glow much deeper. We probed around and Cory did another partial disappearing act into a similar crevasse about 15 feet from the other side of the tent. Welcome to the Alaskan world of glaciers and crevasses is what Mother Nature seemed to be telling us and we took that as a clue that we seriously needed to watch our steps, probe everywhere we went and stay on skis as much as possi-

ble.

During the night we got some rain, snow, and a bit of wind that cleared long enough in the morning for us to explore another smaller glacier with seracs, melted pools of ice, steep black ice, and a steep cornice ridge that was layered on unstable marble like snow (known as T.G.) that sloughed as we approached. We grasped the warning and descended to the steep black ice that we down-cramponed then enjoyed a fine run back to the Bud Lites with Lime that we brought along as contraband that made for a nice celebration at the end of the day.



Upside-down rainbow on Glitter Ridge — August 20, 2010

Now we were ready for a day to explore beyond our line of sight and go to where we believed no man or woman had gone before. The journey was killer – open maws of gaping ice, 60+ degree runneled slopes above bergschrunds, 100 foot wide areas of snow on a Temperature Gradient (T. G.) base that went “whump” as we passed, and that high looming unnamed peak that came into view after hours of exertion.

It all was disclosed to us on a mostly clear, calm, day under a mackerel clouded sky that projected a checkerboard pattern of sunlight that created the visual effect of an artist’s painting.

At about 200 ft. below our summit goal and just before we crossed the bergschrund, we broke out the crampons to ascend the double exposed knife-edge ridge to the summit. Cory, with his expertise in 5th class climbing, led the way as I followed with much trepidation since the variable snow conditions and extreme exposure had me thinking too much about the consequences of the slightest mishap – yet within the next 20 minutes we were both standing on the top and ecstatic about our accomplishment and the mind-bending views of all that was around us even at the late Alaskan hour of 9 p.m.

We also quickly realized that Mt. Logan and Mt. St. Elias are such huge mountains that our original view days earlier and many miles back did not accurately put into scale their true distance from us until now. They were days from us and not within the time constraints of this adventure making our new summit that we named 11,237 (for its elevation) our turn-around point. We down-climbed below the bergschrund for practical reasons, then skied downhill continuously for the next 1.5 hours and arrived at camp after dark. It was one awesome day!



Exploding Cornice near camp - August 18, 2010

The next few days were of less duration yet still filled with excitement and adventure. We were able to climb a north slope in perfect powdery conditions to a ridge that reflected all the colors of a prism spectrum and gave both of us our first glimpse ever of an upside-down rainbow being reflected off the snow that also made for some heavenly skiing back down.

At camp the next day, while capturing images of the immediate terrain, a huge hanging cornice partially broke off and exploded in clouds of spray as I continued documenting its demise. This was a good reminder of the fragility of this

wild environment we put ourselves in.

Later in the day as we were moving our camp and pulling the pulgas over the exact same solid track we came in on but in slightly warmer conditions, the softer snow suddenly collapsed under me forcing an attempted prostrate position as my pulga thumped me in the back. I knew Cory wanted to charge forward and help me out, yet we were linked together with a lifeline that had to remain taut to keep me from sinking further into that perfectly hidden crevasse. Fortunately, without sinking much below my waist despite having skis on, I was able to get my pack and pulga

off my back and crawl like a Komodo Dragon out of the immediate threat only to look back into that bottomless cavern over which I hovered to realize I didn't really want to go down there -- so on we went.

The weather had been deteriorating and very low visibility on a choice peak next to camp thwarted a summit attempt that opened the option of yo-yo-ing its lower steep (45+ degree) slopes about a half dozen times on a thin layer of consolidated granules that maximized moving photo filming ops – not to mention having a bit of relatively reckless fun.

Our last full day was a virtual



Looking back to the crevasse that I fell into — August 16, 2010

white-out with some wind where I skied beyond the limits of base camp visibility and returned to spend the rest of the day in the tent pondering the point of our fiendish determination to explore and take risks in this isolated ever-changing part of the world on frozen water. It all comes down to this to me –

All life on earth began in a proverbial soup of hydrocarbons that grew more complex ultimately becoming living organisms that evolved into the highest form of life by taking risks (evolutionarily speaking) and thus by the mother molecule deoxyribonucleic acid that has stored our history in every cell

of our bodies we are living our destiny at the point of mother nature's spear that will continue to drive us to seek the unknown and have a little adventurous fun in the process.

An Updated Word from the Chair

By Jim Garvey, Chair of the SMS

In January, I attended a Sierra Club Angeles Chapter retreat that all of the Groups, Sections and Committees were asked to attend. This meeting was well attended and was called to give the Chapter Executive Committee ideas and feedback on three general agenda items, how to reduce expenses, how to increase revenue and how to increase the productive use of electronic communications and social media. The Angeles Chapter membership and budget has significantly declined over the past several years and the chapter is projected to run at a deficit by the end of 2011. The issues of an aging membership, maintaining a leadership base and how to attract and retain younger members were also discussed.

On a smaller scale, our section and many others are experiencing many of the same pressures and issues that are facing the chapter. The biggest issue I see facing the SMS is our dwindling cadre of leaders and the subsequently fewer outings that the SMS can offer to retain its members and to attract new members. In the November 1 through February 28 issue of the Chapter Schedule of Activities the only listed SMS outing in an advance notice for a March 10 joint outing, co-led by Keith Martin, with OC Sierra Singles and Wilderness Adventures. This will be the only SMS outing listed in the Chapter Schedule of Activities this winter as the submission deadline for the next Schedule (March 1 through July 4) was last November. I feel that having outings listed in the widely distributed hard copy Chapter Schedule of Activities is an important tool in reaching potential new members.

According to the SMS Outings Chair, Mark Goebel, out of the 12 SMS Leaders, eight are current with all requirements to lead club sanctioned SMS outings. There are some club sanctioned outings posted on the SMS website, led by Reiner Stenzel, Mark Goebel, Keith Martin and Ted Lenzie. Also Ted has posted many private trips. Many thanks to these leaders for their dedication and effort. Congratulations to May Adachi for completing the club requirements for

a leadership rating, she is now working on finishing her provisional trips.

I would encourage all members to be active and engaged in your SMS. If you are a leader, lead an outing, especially one for newer backcountry skiers and those interested in an introduction to the sport. If you are not a leader, post a "private trip" on the website to your favorite mountain area, either locally or in the Sierra. Be active and participate in SMS outings. There are Baldy Hut trips scheduled in February and March; attend one, ski and have fun with your fellow members. Become a leader, I know it's a process, but at the end of the day without new leaders to fill the ski boots of those who have led in the past the SMS will, at best, be diminished as an organization in the not so distant future. These are some of the many things as members we can do individually to keep the SMS viable as one of the oldest functioning backcountry skiing organizations in the country.

The SMS is, at its core, an outings driven organization. Outings are and have been our primary reason for existence. A full and varied list of SMS outings at different skill levels and locations is what has always attracted new members to the organization and helped to retain existing members. Those new members, in turn, have become the next generation of leaders. Without offering outings led by its leaders, old and new, what is the attraction of the SMS to potential members?

Remember, we are all like-minded in our joy of being in the mountains and challenging ourselves on their slopes. Being a member of the SMS gives us the opportunity to share with others that joy and the experiences gained by being in the snow-covered mountains and to be part of a long tradition.

The Mugelnoos is going digital with this edition and is available on the SMS website. However, a printed copy of this edition will be mailed to those members who don't have an e-mail address in our database. Please contact the Mugemailer, May Adachi, if you would like more information. This change was agreed to by the management committee and will greatly reduce our operating expenses, save resources and improve communications with the membership.

Cheers,
Jim

Leadership Training Program

By May Adachi

I'm not there yet, but am definitely on the road to becoming an I rated leader for Sierra Club. I wouldn't have contemplated such a goal, if it wasn't for that conversation in the Rock Creek yurt, last spring, when the group was lamenting the small number of SMS leaders. Was it the barley wine that made Tom Marsh, Reiner Stenzel, & Ken Deemer all mention to me that I'd make a good leader? Whatever, I was pleasantly SHOCKED!

Still, I may never have started the process of becoming an I (off trail) rated leader if in April my husband, Ryousuke, had not had to go out of town for a week, an infrequent occurrence. I jumped at the chance to get OUT of town, myself, on the weekend portions of my husband's trip away by checking the Sierra Club schedule. I came upon a navigation noodle, Joshua Tree. Nav noodle? Sounded nerdy, & I am, unfortunately, no geek, but I did know the navigation check off is 1 of the requirements for the I rating. So, I signed up with Bob Meyers, navigation chair, borrowed a mirrored compass with declination, & ordered the 2 topos for the Saturday practice & Sunday check off.

I also rechecked the schedule, & found the required 1 day LCT seminar scheduled for Saturday, 3 days way. Lucky me! I signed up.

Back to the navigation: I was so lame, so clueless that I wasn't allowed to even try to check off on Sunday, but was, instead, shadowed & instructed by a very patient assistant examiner. It took me 4 more tries, August to November, Mt. Pinos, Grinnell Ridge, & twice more at Joshua Tree to finally be able to check off, & boy, I was completely ecstatic when I finally made it!

During the summer I also took the required 1 day 1st aid course, a prerequisite to a required wilderness 1st aid course. I did sign up for Steve Schuster's spring 2011 course, Harwood, as the fall 2010 course was already full when I checked into it. I was, though, given the delightful chance to volunteer cook for Steve's fall 2010 course, Harwood also, giving me a taste of what to expect in his spring course.

To go for the lower rating, O (trail), while working on the I rating, was advise given me, so I co-led a provisional O trip with Mark Goebel a very small group of wonderful people, over night, to the Baldy hut & peak, mid September.

I'll get my 2 required provisional I trips posted here & on the SMS webpage, as soon as I can, so they can be undertaken once I've completed the spring wilderness 1st aid class! Any suggestions for these trips? Want to come? You want to become an I leader, too, don't you?

Two really unexpected bonuses have come out of my very positive LTP experience: my son, Yoshi, 26, will come with me to Joshua Tree for the December nav noodle! I'm hoping he gets the bug! It also spurred my interest in rock climbing, so I've signed up for a course, late this spring. Please write me, please, if you have any questions about LTP, or suggestions. madachi@teac.com

Alto cumulus Mackerel Sky

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

A **mackerel sky** is an indicator of moisture (the cloud) and instability (the cirrus-cumulus form) at intermediate levels (2400–6100 m, 8000–20,000 ft). If the lower atmosphere is stable and no moist air moves in, the weather will most likely remain dry. However, moisture at lower levels combined with surface temperature instability can lead to rain showers or thunderstorms should the rising moist air reach this layer. In the winter it is often said to precede snowstorms and flurries. Mackerel skies are spoken of in the popular bywords, "Mackerel in the sky, three days dry," "Mackerel sky, mackerel sky. Never long wet and never long dry," and the nautical weather rhyme, "Mare's tails and mackerel scales / Make tall ships carry low sails." The phrase 'mackerel sky' came from the fact that it looks similar to the markings of an adult king mackerel.

(Note: Alvin Walter refers to a "mackerel sky" in his story on page 1.)

Book Reviews by Mark Goebel

“Images of America — SKIING IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA”

by Ingrid P. Wicken, 2007,
127pgs, Arcadia Publishing (\$19.99 paperback).

Ingrid P. Wicken is the author of *Pray for Snow: The History of Skiing in Southern California* and the founder and owner of the California Ski Library. Her most recent book *Skiing In Southern California* presents the Southern California ski story by way of photographs and brief narratives. Readers learn that popular early winter destinations included Lake Arrowhead for popular winter carnivals beginning in 1927, Big Bear Lake's first ski lift in 1938, and Big Pines was nationally known for world class ski jumping contests.

Chapter 2 is “Sierra Club Skiing” with many photos of Sierra Club Ski Mountaineer Section members, early ski ascents in the local mountains, building the San Antonio (one is of my father helping to carry a large metal barrel up to the Baldy Hut in 1935. When I first hiked to the hut in the later 1950's, he pointed to the barrel sitting in the basement and proudly told that “he helped to carry it up”) and Keller Ski huts, and SMS races on Baldy and San Geronio.

Other chapters cover ski jumping, Southern California ski clubs, well known local skiers, the development of local ski areas in the San Bernardino and San Gabriel Mountains, San Geronio skiing, and early skiing in the Eastern Sierra.

For anyone interested in local ski history, *Skiing In Southern California* belongs on your shelf along with Ingrid's earlier book. I found my copy at the Booky Joint in Mammoth Lakes.

“Backcountry Skiing California's Eastern Sierra”

by Dan Mingori and Nate Greenberg, 2008,
240 pgs, Wolverine Publishing (\$29 paperback).

The authors are highly skilled and dedicated backcountry riders living in Mammoth Lakes. Nate Greenberg helped to found the Eastern Sierra Avalanche Center in 2005. This guide covers 188 ski and snowboard descents between Tioga Pass and Bishop Creek. An early Warning page states “This book is intended for advanced/expert skiers and

snowboarders”, and “The easiest runs in this book would be considered black diamond terrain at virtually any ski resort in the US – the majority of them would be double black diamond, or harder.”

This guide contains many stunning color photographs (with peaks and routes identified) and detailed color topo maps. Each route has a narrative summary plus a chart containing Summit Elevation, Trailhead Elevation, Average Vertical, Hiking Distance, Trailhead, Aspect(s), Slope/Difficulty, Terrain, USGS Quad Maps, GPS coordinates, and Map and Photo guidebook page numbers. The routes are organized into six regions: Tioga Pass, June Lake, Mammoth Lakes, Convict Creek, McGee Creek, Rock Creek, Pine Creek, and Bishop. Difficulty ratings are assigned to each route, describing the consequences and exposure associated with each descent. They range from “C/E: 1 Falling is generally OK, as you will most likely be able to stop yourself should you fall while skiing”, to “C/E: 5 Falling on one of these descents will most certainly be fatal.” As an example, the east face of False White, just north of Tioga Pass is rated C/E:1; the Blue Couloir is rated C/E: 2; the Dana Couloir is rated C/E: 3; and the summit entrance of North Couloir on Red Slate is C/E: 5.

This newest Sierra backcountry ski guide clearly demonstrates that with modern gear and high level skills, today's aggressive backcountry skiers are descending routes earlier generations would not have thought possible. It is interesting to view the evolution of backcountry skiing (skiing ever steeper slopes) by looking at earlier guide books. Starting with *Sierra Spring Ski-Touring* by H.J. Burhenne, 1971 (28 one-day tours to 28 peaks (only 4 rated as requiring expert skiing and strenuous mountaineering); *Ski Touring In California* by David Beck, 1980 (tours for beginners or seasoned skiers, and all tours skiable on light metal-edged XC skis); *Backcountry Skiing in the High Sierra* by John Moynier, 1992 (still lots of tours and 17 classic peak descents, but a later edition eliminated many tours and added more descent routes); and *50 Classic Backcountry Ski and Snowboard Summits in California* by Paul Richins, Jr. (peak descents from Mt. Shasta to Mt. Whitney. The era of plastic boots and fatter and shorter skis has arrived.)

While many (most?) of the routes described in *Backcountry Skiing California's Eastern Sierra* may have limited appeal to older skiers, I still enjoy reading the descriptions and viewing the great photos of what is considered cutting edge for today's ski mountaineers.

**For the SMS Schedule of Trips and the List of Trip Leaders,
see the Section's Website at:**

<http://angeles.sierraclub.org/skimt/>

Wolfgang Lert

Wolfgang Lert died in his San Francisco home on Feb 13, 2009, at the age of 91.

He was one of the founders of the SMS as well as a builder of the San Antonio Ski Hut. In 1936-37 he made a beautiful movie, "The Original Mugelhupf Movie" filmed on Mt. Baldy. This video (23 minutes) opens and closes with scenes of Wolfgang Lert skiing in 1997 (age 80) and 2001 (age 85). He introduces several old films, which are accompanied by music and narration. His first ski memories are from 1930 in Arosa, Switzerland, where he and his younger brother traveled for ski lessons. The film demonstrates equipment and techniques of the day. This is followed by scenes from Mt Rainier in 1933, after Wolfgang's family moved to the

United States. Darroch Crookes leads a group schussing above Paradise and demonstrates turns and tricks. Next comes Yosemite in 1935 with scenes of powder skiing, Count Felix Schaffgotsch touring, and Hannes Schroll demonstrating state-of-the-art parallel turns at Badger Pass. Lert was Schroll's first ski pupil in the U.S. The final part of this video, and its heart, is a ski chase filmed on Mt San Antonio ("Baldy") above Los Angeles during the winter of 1936-37. Well made and well narrated--a delight.

During the preparation for the Ski Hut's 70th Anniversary, and replacing the aging roof, I contacted him and received permission to sell DVD copies of his movie to raise money for a new roof which was completed in 2008. I sold many copies to SMS members as well as the Mammoth Museum. Every time I go to the Hut I admire all these ski

enthusiast who built the Hut with their hard labor and started one of the oldest Ski Club in US.

Submitted by:

Bahram Manahedgi

Ski Hut Committee
SMS member

To buy a copy of the "Mugelhupf" DVD, send a check for \$20.00 to:

Sierra Club -
- San Antonio Ski Hut
PO BOX 641145
Los Angeles, CA 90064

Bahram Manahedgi reports:

Craig Dostie, the editor of "Coulour Magazine," has a new "Earn Your Turns" website:

www.earnyourturns.com

This site has a lot of useful information for back-country skiers — gear, weather, trip reports and more !!

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