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A SKI CIRCUMNAVIGATION OF THE PALISADES *Eddy Muzer*

private trip

I had never been to the Palisades, although it was on the top of my list of areas to visit. I knew its reputation -- one of the highest, most spectacular, and finest climbing areas in the Sierra. But I had never heard anybody connect it with skiing.

I jumped at the chance to join Mark Goebel, Joy Fagert, and Dick Smith on a four day ski circumnavigtion of the Palisades. I would get a thorough look at the Palisades and I would do it skis!

DAY ONE

A car shuttle was required. After leaving a car at Glacier Lodge, the four of us crammed into one car and drove towards South Lake. A few miles below the lake we encountered slushy snow and parked the car rather than chance driving any further. The weather was perfect, warm and sunny, with a full moon for the nights.

We left the car at 10am (elevation appox 9500) and carried our skis until we had climbed several hundred feet above South Lake. We skied past Long Lake at 1pm and had lunch. Just below Bishop Pass, there was some icy conditions which forced us pull out our ice axes and carry our skis. We topped out on Bishop Pass at 4pm (elev 12,400), and descended a few hundred feet into the Dusy Basin and made camp in the shadows of Mt. Aggassiz, Mt. Winchell, and Thunderbolt.

DAY TWO

Easter morning. We broke camp at 9:30, and skied through the Dusy Basin (elev 11,393) and climbed up to Knapsack pass (elev 11,673) by noon. A few lenticular clouds had formed in the skies, and I wondered if our perfect weather was going to change.

We dropped down slightly into the Palisade basin and skied under the giant west face of North Palisade. Mark, Joy, and Dick spent a few rest stops guessing the route up North Pal's west face.

This was a two-pass day, and at 3:30 we found ourselves at the top of Potluck Pass (elev 12,000). On the other side of the pass there was a 300 foot section of steep rock and snow ledges. There was no obvious route and we spent 45 minutes scouting for a way to descend. The route we chose was about 40 yards to the north (towards the Palisades) from the saddle at the pass. From there we descended down some ramps and at one point we had to hand packs down and climb down a steep 20 foot snow slope, facing in and using our ice axes. We camped a 90 second ski from the base of the ledges.

The weather had completely changed, but it was one of the most spectacular nights I had ever seen. We were camped at the base of the Palisade Crest and Norman Clyde, and mist and clouds were moving in and out of these giant peaks as a full moon rose behind them.

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Next Issue: January 17, 1988
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Photo Deadline: January 3, 1988

Next Mugelnoon Meeting

Tuesday, Jan. 17, 1988. 7:30 PM
Griffith Park Ranger Station.

Leader Change Notice

Program: "Peruvian Giants" by
Andy Fried. Highlights of his
recent climb of Huascaran and
other Peruvian biggies.

Nancy Gordon will replace Pete
Matulavich as the assistant
leader on the 12/31-1/2/89
Ostrander Hut Trip.

MOUNT SHASTA * North & South Sides
May 28-30, 1988**

Mark Goebel

As no one else has seen fit to tell of the events of last May, I am filing a report of that experience. Maybe the others just want to forget the snowy night and the long drive.

Being a major peak on the northern horizon, and obviously a fine mountain for skiing and climbing, it wasn't surprising that 10 or 12 SMS members, friends and associates travelled the long miles to meet sleepy eyed for breakfast in the historical town of Weed. Our group of travellers included commuters from as far a San Diego and diverse as Truckee. Lending an expeditionary atmosphere were other groups gathering for their pre-assault meeting, including clients and guides for Alpine Skills International. Everyone with intentions on the mountain were wondering of only one thing, the WEATHER. For it was raining like mad and the forecast was for more of the same. But finally, we learned of a chance clearing and set off for the northside. Primary access to North Gate is via Military Pass Road and then several signed roads, maybe. Obtain topo, Forest Service map and Mt. Shasta Climbers Review from The Fifth Season climbing shop in Mt. Shasta City. This is a very complete climbing and skiing shop. They even rent plastic boots, alpine touring skis and skins.

After wandering awhile, we did reach the roadhead, and as we started up the trail, snow soon started falling. Later we met a climber in one of those fancy gore-tex suits, and he told of escaping from high camp, high winds and destroyed tents. Thinking he probably exaggerated just a bit, we pressed on. However, upon attaining the ridge just below our proposed camp at 9500', the storm struck when it was suppose to be abating. Realizing the chances for the peak were slim, and a horrible night guaranteed, this reporter and Joy Fagert did a U-turn and headed back to Weed.

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From Weed, the mountain looked like a milk shake was being poured over it, but we hoped the next day's weather would allow an attempt on the south side. Arising early, we drove to Bunny Flats and were soon hiking on snow to the Sierra Club Hut at Horse Camp, 2 miles from the road. It was cold and a large cloud hung over the mountain, but we would go as high as possible, and at least get ski run out of the deal. For some reason, the snowfields were down to a lower elevation on the south than on the north. Since the south side is the regular "trade route", hundred's of climbers were on the route. Many were poorly equipped with cotton clothing, work boots, and were not wearing dark glasses. Some carried all their gear in a plastic bag tied to their belt.

Upon reaching the hut, we marveled at all the tents, and could see a line of climbers far ahead, postholing through the new snow. We however, mounted our skis, and quickly traversed upwards. At about 9000', we started to encounter very high winds and also returning climbers from a windy night at 10,000' Lake Helen. In fact, it was a major exodus. I think only if one had weights on their feet and wore a Mt. Everest suit could the summit been possible. At this point we opted for a ski run, and delightfully enjoyed 1500 feet of powder down to the hut. It was so good, we skied most of it again after lunch, and then skied almost to the car. In Mt. Shasta City, we met the others who descended after a stormy night on the ridge.

Observations...if you want to climb and ski Mt Shasta, be ready to wait around awhile. The next day when we had to leave, the mountain cleared. We did enjoy a nice hike in Castle Crags State Park among the high granite domes. A climbers paradise. The dome we climbed afforded great views of both Shasta and Lassen, both very white and profiled against the blue sky. Unfortunately, we had reservations for an evening flight home from Sacramento and many miles yet to drive...

MG

DAY THREE (Continued from bottom page one.)

The weather had cleared and we left camp at 9:30. We climbed a "no name pass" (elev 12,400), possibly Cirque pass, and finally had some downhill ski terrain. We removed our skins and made some fine turns down to Palisade Lakes (elev 10,800) and the John Muir trail. We ate lunch at the lakes and continued up to camp just below Southfork pass, which is the saddle between Disappointment and The Thumb.

DAY FOUR

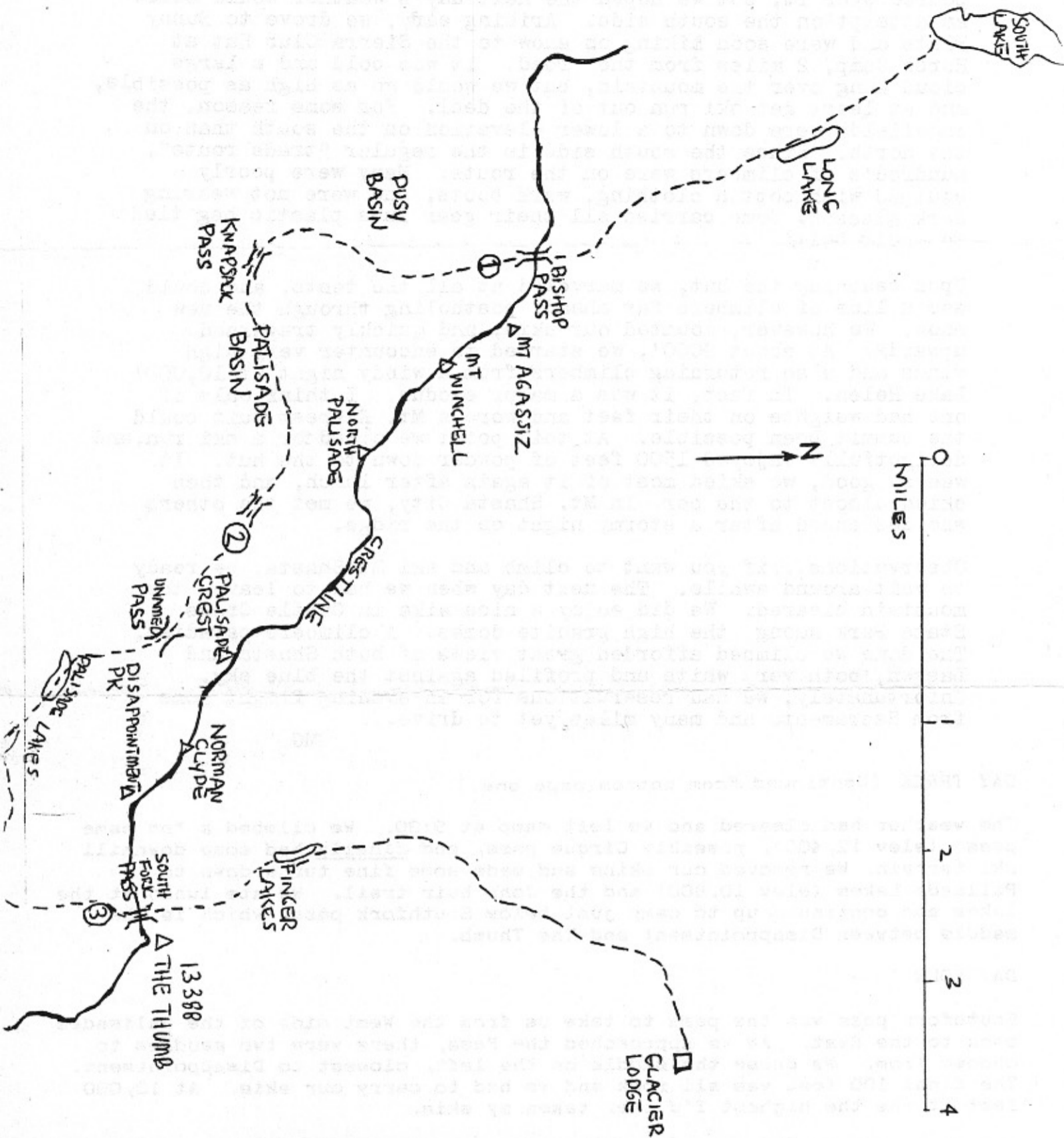
Southfork pass was the pass to take us from the West side of the Palisades back to the East. As we approached the Pass, there were two saddles to choose from. We chose the saddle on the left, closest to Disappointment. The final 100 feet was all rock and we had to carry our skis. At 13,000 feet it was the highest I'd ever taken my skis.

The east side of the pass was the surprise of the trip. The only way down was a steep chute of very hard snow. Dick Smith spent an hour chopping a ramp to the ^{other} side of the snow chute. We crossed his ramp and were able to down climb the rock to avoid the steepest 200 feet of the chute. Mark then went out and chopped steps down the rest of the chute. Mark made a comparison of the difficulty of this chute to climbing the standard route up North Pal, but add a heavy pack, unweildy skis, and take away the crampons. Adrenaline is wonderful thing!

The ski descent was suprisingly very skiable. I left my skins on expecting the snow to vanish around the next bend, but it didn't. Down much lower, the snow was rotten and we found ourselves sinking up to our waists in snow. We arrived at Glacier Lodge (elev 8400) at 4:00, and drove back to South Lake to complete the car shuttle.

EFN

Map For SKI CIRCUMNAVIGATION OF THE PALISADES



DOWN CLARK BLUES
 (or, "Lessons Forgotten Bite Back")

Funny how the sight of one's pack, airborne, dwindling as it falls, brings sinking sensations to internal organs. Not to mention bad words. An outrageous fine day turns to doo-doo as your camera, water, clothes, climbing shoes, and rack, all included, say bye-bye on a trip of their own. It helps a little when at least part of the package comes to rest, in sight, only 400 or so feet below...

(Continued on page Five)

The urge to get into the mountains sometimes conquers well-known rules of thumb. No one to climb with, so I went alone. Nothing very ambitious in mind, just the NW ridge of Mt. Clark in southern Yosemite Park. Roper calls it a classic, and rates it 4th class, which as everyone knows means anything up to about 5.6. After a not-to-be recommended bushwhack up the Clark fork (go in from Little Yosemite!), an early start, and a slog to reach the ridge, the fun begins. The surrealistic landscape of sculptured pinnacles and domes south of Tuolumne Meadows pops into view, and Half Dome to the north shrinks to a minor outcrop. The final ridge of the last 500 feet of Clark presents the only difficulties, sweeping up steep and narrow and blade-like. The rope comes out for a couple of pitches of self-belayed climbing, including 3 or 4 steep jam cracks. The last hundred feet to the top, along the ridge top, are a narrow sidewalk in the sky, with sheer drops on both sides. Too much.

Lunch on top, euphoric. Hmm, someone named Larry Tidball made the last entry in this register. Roper says the SE ridge is only 3rd class, so pack up the gear and relax. Starting down, to the south, one comes to the site of Clarence King's famous "wild leap" during the first ascent in 1866. This is a somewhat dicey long step across, with no bomber jugs and 25-story vertical drop beneath. Does the little light go on, the bell go ding? Do the words, "many mishaps are visited on relaxed climbers, downclimbing" jump into consciousness? Nooooo. I'm just pissed at having to dig out the rope and set up a minimal anchor, S.O.P. for me at least, alone up here. A loop in the rope end goes over a wedged block, and the pack gets tied to the tail of the knot, just to guard against an accidental bump. Does he use a bomber knot? Nooooo. So: step across, flip the rope off the block, and just pull the pack across, right? Oops.....

Watching the bits and pieces come to rest in the big hanging cirque on the south side of the mountain, I consider the situation. I'm in shorts and t-shirt, I have 100 feet of 9 mm rope to play with, and possibly if I follow the ridge down I can traverse into the cirque and pick up my gear. Unfortunately Roper has gotten confused about the routes, and there is no 3rd class way to get where I want to go. The regular route, up from Merced lake, gets me off the mountain but on the wrong side of a long escarpment that separates me from my camp. No good. So, it's either walk around many miles, or rap into the cirque. Just what I wanted to do, Dulfer down some free rappels at the end of the day. Prusiks for anchors? Hmm... So, somewhat later, I'm tiptoeing around on a steep slab above another big drop, collecting busted up gear and wondering how many times I'll have to learn this f**#@' lesson. "it's my own fault, baby...." JS

Jim Shitko

FREE-HEEL SKIING THE SECRETS OF TELEMAR AND PARALLEL TECHNIQUES--IN ALL CONDITIONS, Paul Parker, Published 1988; Chelsea Green Publishing Co, Chelsea, Vermont; 33 black and white photos; 172pp.; \$19.95.

Reviewed by Larry Coats, Rock & Ice, Nov./Dec. 1988 #28.

Ski techniques are not easily learned from a book. The key to skiing well is the ability to flow smoothly from one fully dynamic position to the next. Trying to hold any of these positions too long results in a break in the flow. The problem faced by ski-technique authors is that of reducing a dynamic flow into a series of static pictures. It is akin to taking still pictures of an epic film: you can get the general idea, but you miss out on the feeling. In this respect, author and worldclass skinny skier Paul Parker would do well to supplement the publication of "Free-Heel Skiing" with a video.

(Continued from Page Five)

In a pleasing format carefully copied from his boss' (Chouinard's) "Climbing Ice", Parker treats us to an easy-to-read book with just enough photographs and adventure stories to keep us inspired. The illustrations work well in this size book, and sequences do help to clarify some of the concepts outlined in the text, although some seem a bit repetitious. The historical chapter contains some interesting ski trivia, and Parker tries hard not to weigh down the "Equipment" section with too much esoteric nonsense.

The meat of an instruction book, however, is the instruction, and Parker takes the reader through free-heel technique in a logical, and carefully structured progression perfected by the Professional Ski Instructors of America and one which he helped to develop. As a skier who had to master his backcountry techniques in the backcountry, I found the very alpine orientation of the teaching progression fascinating; no doubt a skier would learn much more quickly following this program at a ski area, than flailing in the boonies.

It becomes obvious that Parker is a master instructor when he begins to move away from technical descriptions of body positions and starts to describe what a move should feel like. Under poling technique, he tells us to "sting" the snow for braking; for edging we should feel pressure on our "big toe, little toe;" to unweight we should "stand tall and sink;" and, to get used to letting our feet get out away from our torsos, we should let our outside knee "chase" our inside boot. Most skiers of any ability will find these "feeling indicators" to be much more helpful than being told to use "simultaneous turn initiation."

The section most difficult for any author of a technique book always comes at the end: advanced tricks for advanced readers. Parker handles this problem very well indeed--without resorting to any of the word-heaviness so many authors fall into when describing incredibly subtle techniques. Parker describes "hop and hope" techniques for crud and crust, "log walking" for stepping over Volkswagen-sized moguls, and "now" turns for hard snow, all in a manner that makes one feel like they could actually go out and ski that stuff!

"Free-Heel Skiing" is very useful book which blends alpine and free-heel techniques in the most thorough examination yet written. Beginners and experts alike will enjoy and benefit from reading and rereading key sections, and anyone, whose heart doesn't beat a little faster when reading Parker's accounts of his many ski adventures, just isn't a backcountry skier.

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