

# THE ANGELES NEWS

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A newsheet published by and for the Ski Mountaineers and Rock Climbing Sections of the Sierra Club's Angeles Chapter since 1938. Send subscriptions and address changes to Pat Holleman, 1638 6th St., Manhattan Beach, CA 90266. \$7 per year due in October. **SUBSCRIPTION COST IS NOT TAX DEDUCTIBLE AS A CHARITABLE CONTRIBUTION.**

## 1988-89 MOUNTAIN TRAVEL SOUTH POLE EXPEDITION (continued from March Issue)

Getting down to practical matters, let's discuss equipment used on the journey. The trip operator, Adventure Network, had agreed to obtain skis suitable for the expected conditions. Leader Martyn Williams used his connections as a "tele downhill" demo team member for Karhu to get two excellent models. My favorite was the Karhu "Pantera Combi" - a combination skating/diagonal stride ski. They were incredibly narrow (1 3/4"), light, responsive, and very durable. Despite having only a plastic edge, they provided excellent control on the hard wind-blasted surfaces we had most of the way. They were sensational to ski parallel on a sunny, steepish, rolling knoll in the Pirrit Hills that was coated with a thin layer of Antarctic corn. It was a pleasure to hear them hiss through the rime-covered soft surface on the Polar Plateau. A Salomon SNS binding was used to connect them to the Thinsulate-filled Merrell "Alta" single layer ankle-covering touring boots. These boots provided precise control and were wonderfully light and easy on the feet. We used them with one thin inner pair of polypropylene socks, a Patagonia vapor barrier liner, and an outer medium thickness polypro sock. When used with the excellent two-piece insulated boot cover-gators made by Supersport Mfg. Ltd. (1346 Clark Drive, Vancouver, B.C.), they were very warm. Because this lightweight combination made for almost effortless skiing, I decided to try to use it even when the temperatures began to dip below -10 of as we got up onto the Polar Plateau at 9000 feet. To increase their warmth, I "hot-rodged" them by stuffing a layer of 1/4" closed cell foam between the two boot covers. This extended from the sole of the boot, over the foot, and all the way up to the knee. Also I used string to tie the toe portion of the overboots down, as they otherwise had a tendency to gape open there. These modifications worked well, and my toes were warm even at -22 of as we approached the Pole.

About half of the 9 skiers used this "skating" ski because it was so comfortable. It wasn't because we were able to skate much, as the sastrugi made clear shots of smooth snow a rarity. Also we found it hard to maintain a skating rhythm with the loads we carried - even though they were only 15-25 pounds. Carrying this in a backpack wasn't so bad, but while pulling it on a small plastic sled as most did, the surface bumps would catch the sled and pull one off balance. Another factor limiting the amount of skating done was that it was so much faster than the diagonal stride most were using, that it would separate the group. Normally we wanted to stay within a few hundred yards of one another for safety reasons, as we always travelled unroped. Although we had ropes, harnesses, and crevasse rescue gear along, fortunate route finding that avoided steeper grades kept us out of the crevasse fields we all expected to see. We only encountered one small area of partly drifted-in crevasses on a blue ice section at the foot of the Thiel Mountains. This was similar to the experience of Swan on the Footsteps of Scott Expedition in 1985-86. They reported finding no crevasses on their 70 day journey up the Beardmore Glacier to the Pole. We dropped all but 2 sets of technical gear when we skied through our base camp after the first 3 days of travel, and sent even that back once up on the Polar Plateau.

Getting back to skis, the other half of the skiers used a very stable 2 1/4" wide telemark ski with a partial metal edge, the Karhu "Kontak Edge." It was like skiing on rails compared to the zippy "Pantera Combi," and was much easier on bumpy terrain. The tele skis were well suited to slogging along at the usual minimal glide, almost walking pace. They were, however, significantly heavier than the

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NEXT EDITOR:

THIS WILL BE THE LAST ISSUE OF  
 MUGELNOOS UNTIL FALL. A MAILING  
 WILL BE SENT IN THE FALL ADVISING OF  
 UPCOMING ACTIVITIES AND MUGELNOOS  
 EDITORS. HAVE A GOOD SUMMER!!!

UPCOMING TRIPS

ROCK CREEK & RITTER TRIPS  
 HAVE BEEN CANCELLED

1988-89 OFFICERS

(43 BALLOTS RECEIVED)  
 JOY GOEBEL, OWEN MALLOY, REINER  
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NEW ADDRESS:

EDDIE NUNEZ  
 641 JACKSON ST  
 PASADENA, CA. 91104  
 (818) 789-4051

FOR SALE:

2 PAIR CLIMBING SHOES SZ 12  
 USED 3 TIMES. LEROY RUSS  
 (213) 227-4973

A PERSONAL NOTE

I knew John and Ruth Mendenhall, and admired and respected them both immensely. The last thing I wanted was to offend their memory. My article in the April Mugelnoos was an attempt at recalling some lighthearted moments in my association with two remarkable people over the years. Jim Murray, I am not. Humor is a fragile thing, especially at a time of bereavement, and my endeavor failed.

Also, the misstated dates and facts in the final paragraph were covered correctly in the fine article by Ruth's sister, Joan Dyar Clark. (JW)

BAD NEWS DEPT.

A REPORT IN THE VENTURA COUNTY EDITION OF THE OF THE LOS ANGELES TIMES ON THURSDAY, MAY 4, 1989 (SEE COPY ENCLOSED) REPORTS THAT CHOUNARD EQUIPMENT LTD. HAS FILED FOR PROTECTION UNDER CHAP. 11 OF THE BANKRUPTCY CODE. THIS ACTION WAS THE RESULT OF LAW SUITS FILED AGAINST THE FIRM BY PERSONS INJURED USING CLIMBING EQUIP. NO EQUIPMENT FAILED OR BROKE.

BALDY HUT REPORT

A small group of the faithful showed up to answer the emergency call for help in relocating the biffy. On April 22 the new hole was dug -- actually, the old original 1936 hole was re-dug. Doing most of the nasty pick & shovel work in the hole were Martin Hardy, Bill Lingle, Vince DeRochers, and Troy Wedberg. Lending moral support were Mark Goebel, Jerry Held and John Wedberg. Meanwhile the Hut kitchen was given a sprucing up, and the spice cabinet was updated with fresh ingredients by Joy Goebel. The plan for the outhouse is to build a platform over the new (old) hole and move the present structure onto it. DeRochers, Wedberg and Craig Dostie packed up the lumber on April 28th, so now all we need are a few carpenter types (amateur or professional) to finish the job. If you can lend a hand call Gary Johnson (213)425-3263. (JW)

THE WED. BUSINESS SECTION OF THE L.A. TIMES REPORTS THAT WILDERNESS EXPERIENCE OF CHATSWORTH HAS AGAIN FILED FOR PROTECTION UNDER CHAPTER 11 OF THE BANKRUPTCY CODE. POOR SALES AND NOT LAW SUITS WERE THE CAUSE. A VISIT TO THE NORTHRIDGE OUTLET ON SATICOY ON MONDAY FOUND 70% MARKDOWNS ON MANY ITEMS.

## First Ascent of Mt. Asgard

FREE SLIDE SHOW  
 BY SPORT CHALET  
 PT. LOMA STORE 5/30  
 HUNTINGTON BCH 5/31  
 AND LA CANADA HIGH  
 SCHOOL AUDITORIUM  
 4469 OAK GROVE DR.  
 JUNE 1. ALL START  
 AT 7:30 PM

others, when the weight of the Rottefella 3-pin 75mm Nordic Norm telemark binding and double boots were added in. These boots were Scarpas and were very warm when worn with the British Berghaus Thinsulate-lined, rubber-randed "Skywalk" knee-high overboot-gators. The trouble with this combination was that the higher weight took considerably more energy to ski. Also the boots really beat up everyone's feet, producing lots of blisters. Halfway through the trip Jerry Corr displayed a pair of heel blisters over 2" long. He is a very tough guy and was able to continue when Mike Sharp "witch-doctored" a larger pair with extensive ankle padding, so Jerry's heels never touched the back of the boot again.

Another boot that could be used with the Kodiak skis were the white "bunny" boots we normally used for walking around camp. They were Canadian military boots made by Acton, with canvas outers and felt liners, and were worn with lots of thick socks. Although they were supposed to be good down to -60 OF for 8 hours, they didn't seem that warm and weren't really any warmer than down-topped, Polarguard-bottomed booties. The Acton boots could be used, though, on skis via a plastic/webbing binding made by Berwin of Minneapolis. They provided terrible control, but enabled a few of us to continue when telemark boot blisters had done us in, and they let J. K. Bajaj ski the last 4 days despite a toe that had received frost injury from the Scarpa boots.

We had a few Bonna "Conquest" skis along and Torl Murden liked their narrow 2" width and full metal edge. A fourth ski type, the Bonna "Flare XL," had inadvertently been left behind in Chile, but there weren't too many days when the snow was soft enough to develop the tracks these skis were designed to handle.

All the skis were waxable, since the increased glide would help on such a long trip. Also the snow surface changed only gradually from week to week and finding the best wax wasn't difficult. We used Swix and Rex brands in both rub-on stick and Klister tube types. Shirley Metz, more accustomed to cosmetics than cross-country waxes, initially referred to the gooey stuff as "Glistex," to the great amusement of all. We started out with blue, then progressed through green, magenta, polar, and arctic. If the snow surface was very abrasive, rewaxing was needed at every hour's rest stop. In softer conditions the morning's waxing sometimes lasted all day. I learned that during our 5-10 minute breaks it was a good idea to take the skis off first and stick the tails in the snow so their bottoms would face toward the sun. By the time the pack had been dropped and was ready to sit on, the skis were warmed and ready to receive new wax if needed. Then we'd turn the bases away from the sun, so they'd cool off during the rest of the break. That way they wouldn't stick to the cold surface once we got going again.

For poles we used Life Link "Backcountry" avalanche probe models - not because we were worried about snowslides in Antarctica's interior, but because they were durable and different inserts could be used to extend their length to suit. Mine were pretty long (165cm for my 6' 2" frame) and helped my arms achieve a good glide. I did manage to fall really hard on one pole and break the 7075-T6 alloy shaft, but no others had been damaged during the trip and fortunately we had a spare.

(to be continued)

#### 1989 UNIMPAIRED SNOWMELT RUNOFF FORECASTS

These figures are the water runoff forecasts in percent of normal, based on a 53 year average. They do not necessarily represent the amount of snow on the ground, but instead indicate the water levels we can expect to find during stream crossings this coming spring and summer.

Merced, 60%; San Joaquin, 58%; Kings, 59%; Kaweah, 50%; Tule, 43%; Kern, 51%; Owens, 64%; Mono, 76%. The Owens basin breaks down as follows: Long Valley, 72%; Long Valley to Tinemaha, 64%; Tinemaha to Haiwee, 66%.

Last year's average of these river basin forecasts works out to 38% of normal, while the 1989 average is 58% of normal.

These figures were provided to me by Kevin Covert, who aside from being an outstanding hydrographer for the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, was also a student in last year's RCS course.

RJS

ONION VALLEY SKI TOUR

April 15-16, 1989

A record number of skiers, 21, turned out for this trip. Possibly the attraction was the mistaken belief that the skiing would be "easy because of the Valley location". Whatever, we had a large number of novice skiers who were able to experience the fun (challenge?) of skiing about, and over logs, trees, boulders, and the everchanging terrain of the backcountry. Fortunately we all experienced excellent corn snow for 99% of the weekend along with clear weather.

The road up to the "Valley" was open all the way, and we walked the trail to Gilbert Lake before donning skis on Saturday. Several hours were spent skiing a small bowl of corn above Matlock Lk.; and later some ventured up and into a chute at the base of University Pk. along with some the "Chute Corp" from the ASTC.

The group dwindled down to 16 on Sunday when we explored Robinson Basin up to about 11,000 Ft. The return was again down on crisp corn snow which remained good right on down to the "Valley".

MG

MAMMOTH AND THE BLUE COULOIR

Apr. 28-30, 1989

Because of low and uncertain snow on the west side, the Pear Lake trip was switched to Mammoth, where 3 days before, 12" of snow fell. This reporter and Kathy Crandall spent Friday skiing Mammoth and enjoyed short lines, chopped powder on Dave's and Climax, and excellent spring snow on the lower slopes. The lifts should continue thru May.

The remainder of the group, all 4 of them, arrived Friday nite at Owen's Base Camp; and Saturday we joined the Opening Day Fishermen on the hike up to Lk. Mary from Twin Lakes. We continued by ski to the Blue Couloir, a large gap in the Mammoth Crest, west of Duck Pass. The Blue was covered with about 8" of Tuesdays new snow, and it was now in the cream of wheat stage. Anyway, we all left our signatures and many turns on the way back to the Lakes.

Sunday, the skies were grey and the wind was up. As a result, the snowcast was for frozen granular, and we lost our enthusiasm. After some shopping, we briefly explored the Buttermilk boulders near Bishop, and then headed home after lunch.

MG

## THE MUGELNOOS

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1989 RCS-R

# Mountain Gear Firm Files for Bankruptcy as 4 Lawsuits Loom

By DENISE HAMILTON,  
*Times Staff Writer*

While Yvon Chouinard may be best known for founding Patagonia, the Ventura-based distributor of outdoor clothing, the seeds of his \$70-million empire were in the functional climbing gear he first fashioned in the early 1960s in a metalworking shed in his parents' back yard. Chouinard Equipment Ltd. posted only \$6 million in sales last year. But it was the industry leader, buoyed by the reputations of its high-performance gear and its high-profile founder, who has spent months at a time climbing treacherous ice in Antarctica or scaling Himalayan peaks without taking oxygen.

So industry observers were surprised last month when the firm announced it was filing for protection under Chapter 11 of the U.S. Bankruptcy Code. Company officials claimed that the firm's finances were sound but said that pending lawsuits and the rising cost of liability insurance prompted the move.

"I've taken a lot of pride in making the

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Yvon Chouinard

# GEAR: Firm Files for Bankruptcy

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world's best climbing equipment and trying to do a good job at it, but times have changed," Chouinard said this week. "Nobody wants to take responsibility for their actions, to say, 'I screwed up, it's my fault, I didn't bother to learn how to use the gear.'"

Company officials said that four lawsuits blame Chouinard for injuries allegedly caused by inadequate instructions and warnings on climbing harnesses and other equipment.

Chouinard denies the allegations. Officials of Lost Arrow, the umbrella firm that runs Patagonia, Chouinard Equipment and several other companies, declined to identify the plaintiffs, or to say where or when the suits had been filed.

"No equipment failed and no equipment broke, but when people get hurt . . . they sue," said Kevin Sweeney, a Lost Arrow spokesman.

## Inexperienced Climbers

Chouinard said that none of the lawsuits were filed by experienced climbers. They were filed by beginners in climbing school, a window washer and an actor who used the equipment on stage, he said.

Lost Arrow officials, who donate 10% of pretax profits to climbing and environmental causes, said they aren't trying to evade their responsibilities or liabilities. They said they are trying to ensure the company's survival.

They want to sever ties with Chouinard Equipment because they fear that Lost Arrow's \$70 million in assets could be attached if a lawsuit against the mountaineering subsidiary succeeds.

As a result, Lost Arrow is trying to sell Chouinard Equipment. Lost Arrow officials hope Chouinard's 70 employees will be able to raise the money to buy the company themselves.

"It definitely sets a precedent in the industry," said George Bracksieck, editor of Rock and Ice, a climbing magazine based in Boulder, Colo. "People have sued over

**'People have sued over equipment failure before, but this is the first time one of the major manufacturers of equipment has taken Chapter 11 because of suits.'**

**George Bracksieck**  
Rock and Ice magazine

equipment failure before, but this is the first time one of the major manufacturers of equipment has taken Chapter 11 because of suits."

The increasing number of lawsuits and rising liability insurance costs already have put mountaineers between a rock and a hard place. Last October, liability concerns prompted the Sierra Club to drop all club-sponsored climbing trips requiring ropes or ice axes.

## 300 Trips Dropped

The Los Angeles Sierra Club chapter has dismantled part of its popular mountaineering training course and dropped 300 mountaineering trips from its extensive program of outings.

Some outdoor equipment business people fear that both manufacturers and consumers stand to lose if the suits against Chouinard succeed.

"It would have a chilling effect on the climbing industry," said Michael Kennedy, editor of Climbing, a magazine based in Carbonade, Colo. "The equipment won't be as good, and people won't have the money to do testing and development. You'll end up with a lot of

smaller, fly-by-night companies."

Throughout the industry, climbing aficionados and business people say that while more people are climbing today than ever before, mountaineering remains a high-risk sport with inherent dangers.

"You can have the best equipment, but if you're high off the ground and make an error, you can get killed pretty easily, and I think that needs to be emphasized," Kennedy said.

Chouinard is one of only a few firms to file for Chapter 11 in the wake of pending lawsuits. Johns Manville, which manufactured asbestos, and A.H. Robins, which made the Dalkon shield, an intra-uterine device that caused severe medical problems for some women, filed for reorganization in two well-publicized cases.

Legal experts said Chouinard might be making a smart move.

"Filing Chapter 11 is not something that is socially reprehensible," said Kenneth N. Klee, a UCLA law school professor who helped draft the U.S. Bankruptcy Code. "They could be doing two socially progressive things: Keeping the business intact while they find out if they are liable and keeping their employees in jobs while they litigate this issue."

"They're being pretty straightforward," agreed Chris Hughes, editor of Specialty News, a Bend, Ore., trade newsletter for the outdoor industry. "It's a genuine problem for the whole outdoor industry."

Lost Arrow officials hope that the sale of Chouinard to its employees or another owner might help to discourage further lawsuits and reduce liability insurance costs.

They added that Lost Arrow would retain responsibility for lawsuits filed against products sold before the ownership transfer.

In any case, many who are familiar with Chouinard said the filing signifies the end of an era.

Said Sweeney: "The company's roots were in hardware gear and to sever those roots does cause sadness around here."