MUGELNOOS

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The Route of the Ancients

"How long have you been skiing in the back country?" This was the question I asked on the first night out on a spring ski tour in late April 1991. We were sitting in a tent at 6 p.m., dinner was finished, it was still light, and it was too early to go to sleep. The answers I got were enlightening. We concluded that the five of us were probably held the World Record for time spent skiing and snow camping.

The people in the group were Les Wilson, Jerry Bach, Gus Benner, Chris Jones, and myself (Rich Henke). Our ages ranged from 45 to 59. Back country skiing experience averaged 24 years apiece, which was exceeded only by the average number of years spent snow camping-26 years! We concluded that we would have no excuses if we got lost.

We were very pleased to be doing a four-day spring tour in a year where there was almost no snow until mid-march. Our route started and finished at Onion Valley and had the objective of allowing each of us to see areas where we had not skied previously. We skied down from Kearsarge to Bubbs Creek and went south toward East Lake, crossing the Kings-Kern Divide at Harrison Pass. We then paralleled a portion of the high route as we crossed Shepherd Pass going east. Turning north, after Shepherd, we crossed Junction Pass into Center Basin. Finally we crossed a high pass just south of University Peak and had a 3500 foot ski descent past Robinson Lake back to our cars at Onion Valley.

We had some good spring snow but found that at the higher elevations, the snow had not consolidated enough to form good corn snow. The short section from Bullfrog Lake to Bubbs Creek was rated in the top ten of worst ski descents, but we found the ski descent of Shepherd Pass superb! This is one of the reasons that I prefer the easterly direction when skiing the high route. The descent from the top of the pass south of University Peak was also impressive but the snow was too hard for us to ski proficiently. I took a 150 foot sliding fall attempting a turn; kick turns were used quite frequently. Others in the group walked it.

We camped at East Lake (9,445 ft), Lake South America (11,941 ft), and Center Basin (11,800 ft). We attempted to climb Mt. Stanford but had to settle for Gregorys Monument at 13,800 ft.

The 35 mile trip included 10,800 ft of altitude gain. It was not technical although we did have to do some walking when crossing some of the passes. We had three ice axes in the group and found them to be quite useful to chop through the ice to obtain water in the lakes near where we camped. They were not needed for the passes but of course we didn't know that before the trip. We took no transceivers or shovels and did not need any as is almost always the case for late April\May tours in the Sierras. Our packs weights ranged from 30 to 33 lbs.

It is obvious that on this particular trip our many years of experience were vital. Other skiers wishing to attempt this route should be warned against the many dangers lurking in the high country-walking across passes, chopping holes in frozen lakes, and sliding on bruised rears down snowy slopes. We're lucky we made it out alive!

MUGELNOOS STAFF

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NEXT MEETING

Barring any unforseen changes in life as we have come to know it the next Ski Mountaineers meeting will be on the third Tuesday of November, 1991 located at:

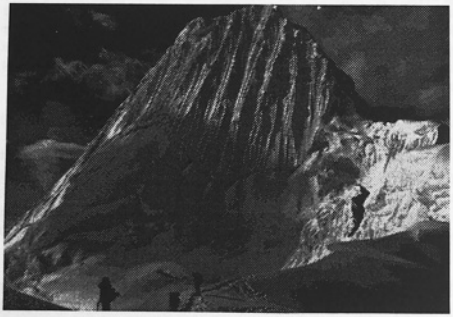
Griffith Park Ranger Station
Auditorium
4730 Crystal Springs Drive
Los Angeles, CA

NEXT EDITOR: Andy Fried has graciously offered his talent and his time in 1991- 1992 as the official year long editor of the illustrious and illuminating Mugelnoos.

UPCOMING TRIPS

May 25-28, Mt. Shasta
PRIVATE TRIP: contact Howard Schultz or Kathy Crandall.

NOTE: Keep in mind potential major corn action on Mt. San Jacinto and San Gorgonio. The snow pack was quite deep in March.



NEVADO ALPAMAYO

CLIMBING IN THE CORDILLERA BLANCA

In 1988 Andy Fried traveled to Peru and spent six weeks climbing in the Cordillera Blanca, of Peru. This area has for a long time been a center of Andean climbing and could be called the Switzerland of South America. Among the peaks climbed were Nevado Pisco, Nevado Alpamayo, and Nevado Huascaran.

On Thursday, Aug. 15, 1991 he will present a slide show from this expedition for the West Los Angeles Group of The Sierra Club. If you have ever thought of climbing in Peru, or if you if you just enjoy a good slide show please join us at the Felicia Mahood Center, 11338 Santa Monica Blvd at Corinth, 1 block west os Sawtelle Bl. Time about 7:30 pm.

SPRING HAS SPRUNG

DUCK Pass Area/ Mt McGee April 20-21, 1991: Howard Schultz, Marcia Male, Don Button, Seth Clark.

Fickle weather produced another indecisive morning. With high winds and horizontal snow, the parking lot near Twin Lakes in Mammoth is a place to defer all outdoor activities in lew of a jacuzzi and bottle of wine. By 10 am the group was ready for a day ski at least and headed up Lake Mary road to Coldwater Creek Campground. The flurries seemed to stabilize and it became a gorgeous ski tour in quiet falling snow flakes. The chickadees followed our every move looking for handouts from outstretched arms. This forest was protecting us from the winds we could see on occasion on the ridges. Touring up Mammoth Creek to the ridgepoint at 10,600, we had a great lunch in a hole, watching Mammoth mountain and Duck Pass get hammered in snow and winds. This window lasted about 30 minutes, and we were off into the trees again for delightful hard pack with 4-5 inches of new snow on top.

Back at the Campground at 3:15 we considered a run back up, when someone suggested heading over to Convict Lake for a snow camp, allowing Howard to complete his leader training requirements, and maybe giving us a head start on Mt. McGee in the AM. Unanimously, we had a mission. Racing out along Lake Mary to the cars was a blast. In the cars and on the way, via a social call to Andy Fried and LeRoy Russ's condo, and a Buffalo Berger at Berger's Berger, we arrived at the trailhead packed and ready at 6:30 pm. The on-off flurries and sun continued, and the wind was cold off of a lovely thawed Convict Lake. But we were psyched. This canyon is so beautiful. Mt Morrison just towers high above and all nearby slopes were snow covered, except of course, for our 500 ft climb to a ridge for camp. Spring is not complete without a good share of bushwacking. By 7:30, we found a great camp at 8100 feet, the clouds were near gone, the wind died, and we witnessed a colorful sunset at 8:00 .

The night continued clear with a bright half moon. We awoke to a beautiful day. Starting up the canyon towards Mt. Aggie, the snow was hard ice at 0730 but we were hopeful for corn at noon. Three and a half hours later we were on the summit of Mt. Mcgee (10871 ft). As we had lunch in partial sun, we watched the storm over the White Mountains, and rain on Crowley Lake. To the south we could see Mt. Abbott, to the north Mono Lake and the Matterhorn Peak area. The descent was a joyful, over 2800ft., of mostly linked turns. Hard pack near the summit, perfect corn between 9000 and 10,000ft, and near perfect corn the last 100 ft.

Mission Accomplished. A new leader to be voted in and two new members who had to exhibit massive degrees of flexibility in plans and techniques. You guys were great! Thanks for a great weekend. Oh, by the way our last 500 ft was the most challenging from camp, as we chose to remain on skis to the road... 35-40°of MUCK.....that's spring skiing for ya!

Marcia

Colorado's San Juan Mountains - A Great Ski Tour

An ideal ski tour is when one skis a long distance in a remote area and is able to stay high the entire way. This criteria has been used by George Lowe and myself for many years in planning our ski trips. The San Juan Mountains in Southern Colorado had an additional attraction; the route we picked followed the Continental Divide. Our trip started near Silverton at an elevation of 10,000 feet and followed the Divide in a general Southeast direction for 75 miles until it reached a highway at Wolf Creek Pass. No roads came close to our route. We didn't expect to see anyone during the tour and we weren't disappointed.

Greg Jordan and I flew to Denver on 4 April 1991, met George, and drove from Denver to near Silverton that evening, arriving very late. The next morning we met George Kenney, a local resident who had agreed to shuttle our car to the Wolf Creek Pass ski area.

The drive from Ridgeway to Silverton is one of the most beautiful in Colorado. The snow capped peaks here are sharp and precipitous. We passed through Ouray, a picturesque town perched against a mountainside. After crossing Red Mountain pass, we drove through Silverton, headed East, and stopped at the Stony Pass Trail head. We were underway about 9:30am. Our packs averaged about 42 pounds including food for 7 days.

We carried shovels and transceivers since the San Juan Mountains are known for lots of avalanche activity. We were able to avoid potential problems fairly easily during the trip but we saw much prior avalanche activity. Of most concern were pockets of temperature gradient snow at the base of the winter snow cover on steep North facing slopes, but we saw wet snow South facing slides as well. About midway in the trip, we saw the remnants of a slide with a fracture line 4 feet deep which extended at least 1/2 mile. Forget your shovels if you are around when one this size lets loose!

For the first two days of the tour the weather was clear and warm, the skiing was pleasant and we had good downhill runs. Morning skiing was on hard crusty snow which was ideal for parallel turns. As the snow softened in the sun, telemark turns worked well. Later in the day, skis would begin to break through on some turns and the skiing became much more challenging. Early starts are mandatory if one expects to ski long distances in the high mountains in the spring. Only in this way can one get maximum benefit from the hard icy snow that is easy and fast.

We used our hanging stove system in a vented tent which allowed us to melt snow and eat breakfast while we were still warm in our sleeping bags. Usually, the sun hit our tent before we emerged, although we were packed and skiing before 7:00am.

On day 3, we had cloud cover and were concerned about the weather. However, the weather remained stable and the overcast sky had the

continued p.5

advantage of keeping the snow from turning slushy in the afternoon which increased our skiing enjoyment.

Route finding was not difficult. We were able to stay on the divide nearly all the time. This tour did stay high! Our maximum elevation was 12,800 feet and our lowest campsite was at 11,840 feet. The others were all over 12,000 feet. We dropped to 10,600 feet briefly on two occasions but stayed over 12,000 feet for most of the trip. On several occasions during the trip, we were able to ski along a high ridge for several miles, with steep drop offs on both sides. I enjoyed this area the most; this is what it should be like when skiing the Continental Divide.

I planned this to be a six day trip. However, our 5th camp was still 18 miles from the finish and that evening we debated whether we should relax and take a 7th day. However, that night, strong winds started blowing from the South and it seemed as if a storm might be coming in. Our altimeter indicated the pressure was dropping also. The following morning, we got our earliest start (6:15am) and decided to try to get out before the storm hit. From what we had seen of avalanche activity in this area, a heavy snowstorm could cause us to sit tight for several days while we waited for it to become safe enough to travel.

Our 6th day was marked by the first technical areas in the trip (we had to kick steps down some snowfields) and also by extremely high winds. While traveling East along a beautiful high ridge, we estimated that winds from the South were hitting us at a speed of 45-55 mph. We had to plant our left pole carefully before lifting our right ski to avoid being blown over! We were glad we weren't having to ski directly into the wind. By mid afternoon, we were on the East side of the divide and sheltered somewhat from the wind. At 6:00pm, we saw the road leading to Wolf Creek Pass and opted to ski down a gully directly to the road rather than continuing to the pass.

We had good skiing for 1000 feet and we proceeded on foot down the gully. We had to kick steps in steep snow to bypass a waterfall after which the angle of the gully lessened. We had on headlamps now and anticipated reaching the road in minutes. Then we reached a cliff and could only see darkness below. It took us an hour before we finally found a way down this last 300 foot cliff. We finally reached the road at 9:00pm. By 2:30am we were back in Denver, driving through some snow showers on the way. We got out just in time.

Back in Denver, the storm continued on and off for several days. Our tour could have been considerably less enjoyable had we started a few days later. The total length of the trip was 75 miles including about 17,500 vertical feet of elevation gain. As we traced our actual route on maps on George's dining room table, we estimated that we had actually skied down about 8,300 feet (Skiing was defined as attempting to turn not necessarily succeeding).

The tour probably had the highest average elevation of any trip I have done. Although the mountains were not as spectacular as the Wind Rivers or the Tetons, skiing for miles along ridges above 12,000 feet was an exciting and wonderful experience.

R.H.

POTPOURRI

COMMENTARY

- OPINION

- HUMOR

Killer of the Over-Prepared...

Much has recently appeared in the literature about the value of physical conditioning to the outdoor activist. This follows the line that the better the physical condition you are in, the better your climbing and the safer you are. Recent research has indicated that nothing could be farther from the truth. In fact, *the person in the poorest physical condition is the one most likely to survive.* This writer accepts the fact that this is a controversial subject, but feels that the material contained herein will shed new light on the supposed validity of physical training. The main areas where physical fitness has mistakenly been considered an attribute—mountain illnesses, accidents, and rescues; are actually the areas where the physically *un*prepared have a better chance for survival.

Mountain sickness and related illnesses have long plagued Cascade climbers; while more serious ramifications such as Pulmonary and Cerebrial Edema have frequently been encountered on real mountains. What is not widely known is that almost 100% of the individuals stricken are those who would be classed as "in the peak of condition". The lack of these illnesses among the under-conditioned climbers is due to a fundamental physiological premise, the *Principle of Maximized Effort.* This states that when a disproportionate period of time is spent in a supine position (which maximizes the effort to regain the activity), then the desire to regain the activity (get up) geometrically declines. To the layman, this can crudely be equated to the idea that the person is too lazy to go high enough to get sick. While this tends to limit the number of successful climbs, it greatly increases the safety and comfort with which those climbs are done.

According to the statistics of the Mountain Rescue Association, most of the climbing accidents occur during falls. Closer analysis shows that the poorest conditioned (most obese) individuals suffer *both fewer and less* severe injuries. The lower injury rate is also due to the Principle of Maximized Effort in that the poorly conditioned climber is less likely to go high enough to fall anywhere. The lowered severity of the injuries is due to the cushioning effect of fatty tissues. The obese climber tends to plop on his "spare tire" which acts as a shock absorber, while the well-toned muscles of the athletic individual transmits the shock to the vital organs.

Since the usual result of an accident is some form of rescue effort, the frequency and complexity of the rescues with respect to the physical conditioning of the victim should be examined. Fewer rescues of the poorly conditioned are necessary simply because, as in the preceeding topics, they don't go far enough to get into trouble. The rescue effort expended for the unfit victim is usually less complex than for the well-conditioned climber. This is due to the previously mentioned padding effect, which is especially important on snow where many of the accidents tend to be ice axe and crevasse oriented. The thicker torso of the poorly conditioned climber serves as a barrier to the sharp point of the ice axe and thus protects the internal organs from what would normally be fatal punctures. With respect to crevasse rescues, the larger body of the unfit person does not fall as far into a narrowing crevasse. (Fat climbers are usually better glacier climbers because they have an innate ability to find hidden crevasses which could endanger the rest of the party.)

In conclusion, one should carefully weigh the consequences before undertaking a program of physical conditioning by asking the question, "If mountains don't care, why should I?" The quicker the stereotype of the "rugged mountaineer" is atrophied, the quicker the mountains will be truly safe.

—Bruce Caldwell
Outdoor Program
Oregon State University

SEYMOUR CHWAST

t Men

HEN HARRIGAN

Answering the Howl

HE COMES DOWN from three months alone in the mountains, his eyes wary and haunted, his nerves already jangly from the prospect of city life. Though he does not speak of it, he had a rough time up there in the tundra. He may yet lose a toe to frostbite, and his famous dog with the eerie, colorless eyes — Denali — has disappeared in a lightning storm.

His hands are frightful: the thick nails opaque as parchment, the knuckles swollen and scraped, the span of the fingers unnaturally wide from gripping perilous handholds on the cliff face. He chipped a front tooth in a fall down a scree slope, and when you try to engage him in conversation he has a distracting habit of sucking air against the exposed nerve just to feel the pain. He is courteous but skittish, full of bitter wisdom and secret thoughts. His first night back in the city, unable to sleep, he walks out into the yard at 3 in the morning, lies down in the cold grass and weeps for his lost dog.

Now that's my idea of a man.

I've always wanted to be one of these guys: a lone wolf, austere and independent, a secular saint of the wilderness. As a teen-ager, sporting glasses, braces, global acne and Lee's "Husky" jeans, I found it consoling to think of myself in years to come as a solitary wanderer, impatient with civilization, indifferent to comfort, lulled by the sounds of howling beasts.

And yet, here you find me: lining up a putt on the tricky Tyrannosaurus Rex hole at Peter Pan Golf; sitting out in the backyard chucking Pup-Peroni snacks to an overstimulated and mentally deficient dog; setting aside "Walden" to read a newspaper article about Ted Danson's hairpiece.

The fact is, I was never really lone-wolf material, though I tried hard to cultivate an air of lofty solitude. When I was in my early 20's, I told one and all that I would be leaving any day for the Big Thicket. The Big Thicket! I wasn't exactly sure what this place was — knowing only that it was a dense swath of primeval forest in East Texas — but the name excited my lone-wolf imagination. I would melt into the Big Thicket for six months, eight months, a year, and then emerge from it as skittish as a panther, my soul on fire and my mind full of hard-won lore.

But I kept putting off the moment of departure, thinking of all the upcoming movies I would miss and starting to wonder what exactly I would be doing out there in the woods all day by myself. "You're still here?" friends would exclaim when they saw me. "I heard you were living in the Big Thicket!"

Finally, to save face, I went. It was August, the worst time to set foot in a steaming East Texas forest. For two days I tramped around the sloughs and baygalls, ate beef jerky and cookies and mopped the sweat out of my eyes with a dish towel. The woods were gloomy and dark, filled with undifferentiated trees and odious fungi. I had no interest in them. I had thought I would teach myself the names and habits of every woodland creature, but I just sat there in my tent, crestfallen, counting the hours till it might be respect-

Stephen Harrigan is a senior editor at Texas Monthly magazine. His next book, "Water and Light," a history of the Caribbean coral reef, will be published next year.

see p. eight

The true lone wolf sees a woman not as a conquest but as a source of temporary consolation.

able for me to return home. The awful truth assaulted me: I was not a lone wolf after all. I was a lonely wolf.

I have known this about myself for quite a few years now, but have never lost my fascination with this role I was never destined to play. The other day I was reading a biography of John Muir, the great naturalist who was, for my money, the ultimate lone wolf. Muir was a brilliant, passionate, crotchety man, his handsome features obscured by a beard as wild and scraggly as a bird's nest. His great love was Yosemite Valley, with which he was locked in a lifelong spiritual embrace that made his human-to-human relationships a mere afterthought. He was famous for climbing a Douglas spruce in the middle of a violent lightning storm high in the mountains, where he swayed back and forth in the topmost branches and howled in crazy happiness. He filled his pen with sequoia sap and wrote rapturous letters to his friends — "Ink cannot tell the glow that lights me at this moment.... Hotels and human impurity will be far below. I will fuse in spirit skies." Once, a beautiful French writer came to Yosemite, hired Muir as her guide, made him the main character in a novel and chased after him for months, but Muir would not submit. "His all-consuming passion for the wilderness," writes a biographer, "lay like a sword between himself and love for any woman."

Few lone wolves have ever been as kinkily celibate as Muir ("The King tree and I have sworn eternal love..."), but when it comes to women you will find most lone wolves on the wary end of the scale. They are caught between the desire to be a lusty animal and the fear of becoming a caged beast. At every moment they are nervously reckoning the potential limits to their freedom. Usually they are not secretive about this apprehension, which they refer to chivalrously as "a weakness" or "a problem I seem to have." However — since they are walking advertisements of domestic catastrophe — they do not really regard it as their fault that women find their remoteness, their ethereal self-absorption so alluring. In fact, I think, they *are* blameless. Lone wolves are not, after all, ski bums. The true lone wolf is selfish but pure. He sees a woman not as a conquest but as a source of temporary consolation, someone who will give him strength as he trudges along on his epic spiritual errand.

What is that errand exactly? Lone wolves are often articulate — and can be good talkers once you break through their many layers of shyness and reserve — but chances are they can't tell you what they're looking for. Let's give them the benefit of the doubt and say that they are not running away from responsibility but heading incrementally toward salvation. They paddle their sea kayaks through the islands of British Columbia. They rappel precipitous rock walls to monitor the welfare of peregrine-falcon chicks. They set up their tepees in the cottonwoods, eat a button or two of peyote and wait for their spirit animals to pay them a visit. They are not fooling around. Their lives are missions. Nature has spoken their names and called them into her embrace.

I've noticed that lone wolves, in the ripeness of their years, often settle down finally and make adorable husbands. (It even happened to John Muir.) Maybe for an armchair lone wolf like me the process works in reverse. Every now and then, faintly, I think I hear my name being called again. And why not? Maybe one day I will grow intolerably restless and, as if in a trance, get down my backpack from the attic and slip out of the house, leaving a note stuck to the refrigerator with a Bart Simpson magnet — "Gone to the Brooks Range. Back whenever." From time to time I will send home pressed Alpine flowers and surprisingly adequate sketches of marmots. "You should never have married that jerk," my wife's friends will tell her. "Yeah," she'll say, "but it's my own fault. I knew the first time I laid eyes on him that he was a real lone wolf." ■

N.Y. Times
April 1991

SKIING THE SEQUOIA RAIN FOREST

Now that it has snowed in the mountains, it may be snowing on the Mugelnoos Editors desk with stories. Photos of giant Sequoias covered in snow has been an image I've wanted to try and make for a long time. As we know, for several years, the snow part has been hard to get,and the right timing with life events is always hard to get. So with the big bumps we've had and a phone call from my skiing mentor,time was right to zoom up past Porterville to a relatively unknown state park (Mt. Home) which is loaded with big trees.

However, what was planned as skiing a couple of miles on a clear day turned into an all day event. A 12 mile cement slog with poor lighting for making image we thought. (The sunset turned out to be fantastic) It was a good day to be skiing. (Like any day) The sun was popping in and out every few minutes covering our ascent along the road with shadows and spot lighting for a dramatic effect. Looking to the north and the east at times afforded us spectacular views of the higher peaks with the same dramatic effect. Mt. Moses was in view. We broke for lunch after 6 miles of skiing. As we soaked up a few rays and ate, clouds blew in and out around the higher peaks with the sun spot lighting at times. After about an hour we were skiing again, moving a little slower after eating. As the day went on the sun won more time shinning then behind the clouds. The snow coated trees started dropping off that snow and one needed to keep an eye out for snow balls from heaven. This is where the rain forest part comes in. By mid-afternoon the clouds were back, thick and black. The temperature was about 45 degrees so even the shaded trees were raining melted snow. Quite an experience, being on the snow with balmy temps gliding passed giant Sequoias that are raining down on you and standing under the clouds (not the trees) to stay dry.

Skiing around giant Sequoias with a thick sugar laying of snow was a long awaited delight. Winter time and these big trees make for a great ski destination, no matter what the weather or snow conditions.

John Muir once said his favorite grove of big trees was the Mountain Home area.

Dave Wyman, Dave Finch and Jim Valensi made this trip on April 3, 1991.

J.V.

THINK CORN SNOW

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Nothing Could Be Finer Than To Be In Colorado When It's Snowing!
Vail, Colorado - April 1991

The most wonderful thing next to backcountry skiing is waking up at a destination resort like Vail and knowing that the only thing on your agenda is skiing downhill. Skiing more than six hours a day for five days with 4-8 inches of fresh powder falling three out of the five days has got to be one of life's greatest highs.

This trip I decided to take only my Rossignol 4G skis. Having well over 100 days on Telemark gear and only 8 days on Alpine gear my entire skiing life of 5 or 6 years has put me at an unusual "disadvantage." The withdrawal was severe as I audibly sighed at the sight of each Telemark skier encountered. But by the fifth day of skiing, improved style, speed, and a higher confidence level burst forth as I shussed the ungroomed areas of the China Bowl, as I skied the trees, as I search for air, and even as I tailed Suzy Chaffee on a run. Eeyah! Sheer joy!

My backcountry skills and experience saved the day when three of us got stuck on an ungroomed expert only run in a white-out with high winds and heavy snow falling. (We all make mistakes.) It was like skiing with your eyes closed on steep,bumpy terrain with a fear factor of 10 (on a scale of 1-10). One of our group froze in terror, sure that he was not going to get out of this alive. After a series of many traverses, beaucoup kick turns, and a constant barrage of verbal reassurance, we finally got to a groomed intermediate trail and sought out shelter to recoup. -N.G.

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