



MUGELNOOS

DECEMBER 15, 1992

Number 698

THE TEN STEPS of the Stairway to Heaven

How to become a ski mountaineer and live to tell about it.

Story by Gordon Wiltsie

In this age when even the wild-est mountain backcountry is crowd-
ed in summer, winter brings an op-
portunity to find solitude, to dis-
cover the earth around us and to
test our skills against the same
natural forces that have created and
shaped our very human evolution.

For those willing to ski beyond
lift lines, for those willing to car-
ry more than a day pack into the
mountains, the highs of ski moun-
taineering border on ecstasy. Imag-
ine yourself climbing sensuous
contours of a wilderness bowl,
high above the last twisted timber-
line snags, clear, cold silence
broken only by eagles crying, the
chirp of a pica, or soft mantras
from wind and distant falling wa-
ter. Add laughter of your friends as
you plummet turn after turn
through glorious breakable crust—
snow almost blinding you as it
glints and flashes in the high alti-
tude sun — and you have all the in-
gredients of a perfect adventure.

Backcountry skiing, or ski moun-
taineering, is not a simple sport,
but a merging of skills drawn from
nearly every self-propelled outdoor
challenge. Only recently have
enough Americans become profi-
cient at all of the prerequisites for
ski mountaineering to begin its
boom.

Yet many of these are extensions
of logic and simple common
sense, and with careful direction
nearly anyone who both loves to
ski and is willing to give their
skeleton a workout can very quick-
ly begin skiing their way to wil-
derness education. There's no way
to start but to do it, and this is
one education that's a lot more fun
than math class. Basically, mas-
tery comes in 10 "simple" steps.

1. Learn to ski

It is possible for a nonskier to
become a ski mountaineer. With
climbing skins affixed for both as-
cents and descents, basic maneu-
vering from place to place is no
great technical challenge. But why
bother skiing instead of slogging
on snowshoes? To have enough
fun to justify all the calories ex-
pended getting to high and lonely
terrain, you have to be a good ski-
er — not just on perfectly groomed
slopes, but in deep snow, whether
light enough to float on the wind
or dense, crusted and windpacked.
Backcountry snow can sometimes
seem like froth on a witch's caul-
dron. Techniques to carve, jump or
wallow through it are ever-
changing hybrids between cross-
country and downhill. Those com-
ing to ski mountaineering from a

Alpine skiers, on the other hand,
should learn to telemark, wax and
enjoy climbing up steep hills
without a lift.

2. Get hip to fashions

Fortunately, we aren't cave peo-
ple and we have a vast industrial
technical network ever-devising
new and better ways for us to be
comfortable in the world around us
— wildness included. But caution
is in order when choosing. Much
outdoor clothing and equipment is
designed as much for flash and
courtship as for more basic warmth
and dry comfort. Make the most of
what our technology offers. We
don't have to travel like ski moun-
taineering pioneer Orland Barthol-
omew, who used hoe handles for
ski poles and carried cast iron
pots, doublebit axes and a 12-
pound down robe. Instead we can
choose exotic lightweight fibers
that insulate even when drenched,
tiny gas stoves, freeze-dried food,
sophisticated tents and skinny
skis that slide and turn as well as
the best downhill comps. Figuring
out what works best takes a little
time and resarch. Learn words like
fiberpile, polypropylene and Qual-
lofil. Read magazines. Talk to
friends. Test gear under the sprink-

Cont. page 3

THE MUGELNOOS IS 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 PAYMENTS ARE NOT TAX DEDUCTABLE AS CHARITABLE CONTRIBUTIONS.

May 1-2	Hilton Lakes Ski Camp	Scot Jamison / Ken McElvany
May 8-9	Ski Mountaineers Peak	Gerry Holleman / Paul Harris
May 15-16	Basin Mtn Ski and Ice Fishing	Reiner Stenzel Owen Maloy
May 22-24	Mt Conness and Mt Dana	Reiner Stenzel Scot Jamison
May 28-31	Mt Shasta via Hotlum-Bolam Glacier	Nancy Gordon Bill Lingle
May 29-31	Mt Ritter, Thousand Island Lake	Reiner Stenzel Howard Schultz

MUGELNOOS STAFF

EDITOR ANDY FRIED
 MUGELPRINTER ANDY FRIED
 MUGELMAILER PAT HOLLEMAN
 MUGELPROOFER DIANN FRIED

NEXT MEETING

JAN. 19, 1993 7:30 PM GRIFFITH PARK RANGER STATION AUDITORIUM 4730 CRYSTAL SPRINGS DRIVE, LOS ANGELES, CA.

NEXT ISSUE: JAN. 19 1993

ISSUE DEADLINE JANUARY 10, 1993 ALL PHOTOS, SLIDES, AND ARTICLES (TYPED OR 5 1/4' DISKS WP OR ASCII) SHOULD BE SENT TO: ANDY FRIED, MUGELNOOS EDITOR, c/o TEC GROUP 10727 WHITE OAK AVE. SUITE #205, GRANADA HILLS, CA 91344. IF YOU WISH TO HAVE PHOTOS RETURNED AFTER PUBLICATION INCLUDE A SELF ADDRESSED STAMPED ENVELOPE. WE ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR LOST PHOTOS.

UPCOMING TRIPS:

DATE	LOCATION	LEADERS
Dec 31-Jan 3	Ostrander Hut, Yosemite	Eddie Nunez Nancy Gordon
Jan 9	Local Introductory Tour	Paul Harris Walt Boge
Jan 16	XC Downhill Clinic, Local Mtns	Howard Schultz / Mark Goebel
Jan 17	Local Introductory Tour	Greg Jordan / Paul Harris
Jan 23	Mt San Jacinto	Pete Matulavich / Reiner Stenzel
Jan 30-31	Ski Mtners Training Camp	Paul Harris / Mark Goebel
Jan 31	-----Jump Turn Clinic. cancelled-----	
Feb 6-7	Mt Baldy, San Antonio Hut	Marcia Male Nancy Gordon
Feb 13	Local Introductory Tour	Mark Goebel Eddie Nunez
Feb 13-14	Mammoth Condo Weekend	Owen Maloy Kathy Crandall
Feb 13-15	Pear Lake, Sequoia N. P.	Greg Jordan Reiner Stenzel
Feb 20-21	Snowshelter Course	Reiner Stenzel Howard Schultz
Feb 27-28	XC Downhill Practice, Keller Hut	Nancy Gordon Paul Harris
Mar 6	Mt Pinos-Mt Abel Traverse	Reiner Stenzel Nancy Gordon
Mar 6-7	Nordic Holiday Races, Yosemite	Gerry Holleman / Pat Holleman
Mar 12-14	Patriarch Grove, White Mtns	Eddie Nunez / Howard Schultz
Mar 12-14	Bodie and Buckeye Hot Springs	Reiner Stenzel / Greg Jordan
Mar 13-14	Mt Baldy, San Antonio Hut	Marcia Male / Pete Matulavich
Mar 20-21	Introductory Tour, Mammoth	Owen Maloy / Kathy Crandall
Mar 20-21	Jump Turn Clinic, Mt Baldy	Craig Dostie / Howard Schultz
Mar 27-28	SMS Wilderness Ski Race	Don Pies / Nancy Gordon
Mar 27-28	Convict Canyon	Ken McElvany / Scot Jamison
Apr 3-4	San Geronio Wilderness Area	Mark Goebel / Howard Schultz
Apr 17-18	Blue Couloir and Mammoth Tour	Gerry Holleman Pat Holleman
Apr 24-25	Onion Valley	Howard Schultz Reiner Stenzel

MUGELNOOS RENEWAL NOTICE!

To renew your Mugelnoos subscription for 1993, send a check for \$7.00 payable to "Mugelnoos" to the Mugelmailer: Pat Holleman, 1638 6th St., Manhattan Beach, CA 90266. The sales tax exemption has been legally restored for subscription periodicals such as the Mugelnoos, so the SMS is returning to the previous method of using subscription payments rather than requesting donations to the section for expenses.

PATTY BOYER has moved and is living in God's country — by the American River between Auburn and Placerville off Highway 49. (1 hour to Tahoe, 30 minutes to x-country). Her new address is P.O. Box 979, Lotus, CA 95651. Phone: (916)642-8453.

FOR SALE: 1992 Canadian Alpine Journal: featuring St. Elias, Fairweather Traverse, Mt McArthur, Kluane, Garibaldi, Squamish, Rock Around Banff, Rockies news and more. Superb photography. \$5.00 - call (818) 790-4275 Norman (also Interalp 65cm axe \$10, numerous Chouinard 'biners)

FOR SALE - Tua Performance Skis, 190cm, used once, \$150.00
 Tua Tute Neige skis, 195cm, w/3 pin Voile' releasable bindings, \$125.00
 Phoenix Classic skis, 200cm, w/3 pin Voile' releasable bindings, \$100.00
 Karhu XCD GT skis, waxable, 180cm, w/3 pin bindings, \$70.00
 Merrell Ultra Boots, mens 8, Brand new in box, \$175.00
 Gregory Pack Rock Creek, 3200 cu in, used twice, \$125.00
 Please call Everett at (213) 261-9012

1992-1993 Ski Mountaineer Leaders

Walt Boge 13260 Cumston St Van Nuys 91401 818 781-4576	Bill Lingle 23660 Baltar St West Hills 91304 818 884-3269
Kathy Crandall 1864 Foothill Blvd La Cañada 91011 818 790-9252	Marcia Male 1459 Westgate Ave, #1 Los Angeles 90025 310 479-0758
Craig Dostie 6438A Penn St Moorpark 93021 805 523-0413	Owen Maloy P O Box 2083 Mammoth Lakes 93546-2083 H 619 934-9511 W 619 934-4533
Mark Goebel 9522 Innsbruck Dr Huntington Beach 92646 714 963-9384	Pete Matulavich 126 Calle Candida San Dimas 91773 714 599-6148
Nancy Gordon 6550 Erenview Ave West Hills 91307 818 884-8065	Ken McElvany 2058 Shorewood Upland 91786 714 982-4780
Paul Harris PO Box 70765 Pasadena 91107 818 577-4800	Eddie Nunez 296 Chester Newport Beach 92660 714 644-0527
Gerry and Pat Holleman 1638 6th St Manhattan Beach 90266 310 374-4654	Don Pies 1606 Haynes Lane Redondo Beach 90278 310 318-6251
Scot Jamison 2517 King Way Claremont 91711-1720 H 714 626-1712 W 818 963-41 01	Howard Schultz 17045 Burton St Van Nuys 91406 818 344-8313
Greg Jordan 22633 Ticonderoga Rd Calabasas 91302 818 884-3269	Reiner Stenzel 519 Almar Ave Pacific Palisades 90272 310 454-9787

The Ten Steps cont. from page 1

3. Learn to carry your house on your back

Freedom always has its price, and in the hills that means carrying on your back everything you need to eat, drink, be merry and warm. Thanks to new light-weight gear and sophisticated internal frame packs that hug hips and shoulders almost like a second skin, this need not be as miserable as it sounds. Thirty or 40 pounds can be enough for several days, and if even this sounds too heavy, there is always the option of hut systems like those at Rock Creek, where you can get away without carrying a tent, or sometimes even food and a sleeping bag.

Skiing with a pack takes some grovelling in the snow to learn. No special technique is really needed, simply perfection of ones you already know. Slogging uphill, extra pounds make any wax a little slippery, requiring greater vigilance and balance. Rocketing downhill, a pack magnifies any extraneous body motion and develops a will of its own if you are prone to counter-rotation, flailing arms or unnecessary unweighting. Either way, you can easily feel like a drunken Cossack dancer. Since repeatedly digging out from deep snow crashes with a heavy load can wear you out more than 10,000 feet of climbing, it's worth getting used to your pack before leaving the roadhead. Learn, for instance, the anticipatory, uphill fall.

The best hint for carrying a pack, though, is to limit what enters it. Try packing with the awareness that certain Hindu ascetics can travel across miles of snow bar-

foot and clad only in a saffron robe. This does not mean throwing out essential survival equipment, but does suggest making it efficient and frugal. It's worth a little asceticism in the tent if it adds spring to your kicking, gliding and telemarking during the day.

4. Find a mentor

While the first three steps can be largely self-taught, the next few are more ethereal, even a bit Catch 22. To travel safely in wintry mountains, for instance, you have to know something about rock, snow, weather and staying snug and dry for day after day atop a vast ocean of frozen water. But to learn this, you have to travel in wintry mountains, and there's nothing like an experienced friend or a professional backcountry ski guide to speed your education.



Ten years ago, outside of Europe there was scarcely a ski mountaineering school to be found anywhere. Now there is at least one for virtually every major range in the United States, and finding a guide need not be difficult. For those without years to invest mastering the next four steps, it's the only safe way to leave the lifts behind.

5. Learn about mountains

It is not enough to look at a mountain and say, "That's beauti-

ful!" Learn how to find your way through fog and snow with map and compass, how to build an emergency fire when it's raining, how to find a safe route from pass to pass, how to predict bad weather and how to make emergency shelters like snow caves and igloos. You'll seldom need these skills, but you don't want to be forced to learn them when your tent suddenly blows its seams at midnight, with snow driving sideways and temperatures below zero.

Because backcountry skiers often chance upon similar obstacles as mountain climbers — like crevasses and cliffs of rock or ice — it's also useful, sometimes essential, to learn how to surmount these with climbing tools and techniques.

6. Learn about snow

No earthly molecule is as endlessly malleable or fickle as simple water. Without its complex cycling between oceans, clouds, snow and streams, there would be neither skiing nor life itself. Even in its crystalline form as snow, there are enough manifestations that Eskimos need 20 words to describe what type they mean and these are but a few of many that a ski mountaineer encounters over the years. Think of your last season on the lifts. Chances are you saw powder, slop, spring corn, ice, sastruggi, hoarfrost and a dozen other manifestations.

Depending on how well each layer of its crystals stick together, snow is either ideal for skiing, or for launching itself in massive avalanches. Even snow scientists cannot predict exactly which slopes are dangerous and which are not. And not all avalanches immediately follow a storm.

MAMMOTH LAKES NOW HAS A NEW MOUNTAINEERING AND SKIING STORE, LOCATED NEXT TO THE PLAZA THEATER ON OLD MAMMOTH ROAD. PAT FISHER HAS OPENED PAT'S BACKCOUNTRY STORE, AND SELLS CLIMBING EQUIPMENT AND X-C SKI GEAR. THEY WILL ALSO RENT GOOD TELEMAR GEAR (IF YOU WANT TO INTRODUCE SOMEONE TO 3-PIN SKIING THIS IS THE PLACE TO BRING THEM). DROP BY NEXT TIME YOU ARE IN MAMMOTH. LOCAL SKI EXPERT JOHN MOYNIER IS OFTEN ON HAND AND CAN ANSWER QUESTIONS. PHONE (619) 934-2008

Many bowls experience a second cycle when melting in the spring — just when the corn's getting good. There is much to learn here and it is essential for backcountry skiers to get expert, on-snow instruction at an avalanche seminar. It's a lot more fun wahooing down through neck-deep powder when you know enough to determine whether or not the snow itself might start skiing as well.

7. Establish a zen of motion

Not all winter mountaineering challenges are so obvious as route-finding, avoiding avalanches and keeping warm. Little things can threaten as well. Spill your cooking pot inside a tent's tight quarters and you're set for a soggy, miserable night. If you throw down a pack carelessly, it might slide 3,000 feet down the bowl you just climbed. Pitch your tent under a tree in a storm, and half a ton of branchbound snow may give you a big hug. Change your stove's gas cannister while a candle's burning and you can watch your ripstop life support vanish in a ball of flame. Mishaps like these happen even to experienced skiers, especially at the end of a long, tiring day. And for each of us, new ones wait to be discovered.

More important than memorizing lists of potential hazards, is simply developing an awareness of the reactions to everything you do. Just turning around unexpectedly or making a step without looking can yield chagrin. Better to develop a little voice that quietly questions your every move. Think ahead and exercise brain cells.

Even a zen master has his lapses, though, and few of us are completely prescient. Therefore, travel prepared for the worst. Learn basic first aid, mountain climbing and self rescue techniques and don't go anywhere beyond the road without at least the rudimentary splints (your ski-poles?), bandages and ski-to-sled conversion kits (parachute cord?) that all of us pray we will never need.

8. Learn humility

Discretion is said to be the better part of valor, and nowhere is this truer than deep into mountainous backcountry. In our highly competitive world, it is often tempting to proceed even when conditions are unsafe or beyond our personal skills. When there is no ski patrol to bail you out, this can lead to disaster. Learn your limits. If they

are exceeded, back off and accept defeat gracefully. The mountains aren't going away. They'll still be around for a rematch.

Nature's forces are bigger than any one person — or even all of civilization. Ignore their warnings and you can be ground to dust by the same inexorable power that in time will wash even mountains away to the sea. In stealing our pleasures from snowy faces and bowls it is important to remember that we're doing just that. Shy of Saint Peter's gate, there is no court of appeal for those who flaunt mountain gods and then get caught.

9. Tread lightly

For all our purple mountains' majesty, the life communities they support — which often are the reason we visit them — can be very fragile. Though few rangers patrol winter backcountry, this does not give us a license to trample. Just as it is ecologically sound to camp, wash and excrete discretely in the summer, so goes it in winter as well. Indeed even more vigilance is required. So garbage and other waste doesn't merely slip from sight and mind by disappearing under the snow. Respect the privacy and solitude of others you might encounter and try to leave nothing but your slowly drifting tracks.

10. Have fun!

It is a sad truth that backcountry skiing can never be completely safe. But this proximity to "the edge" is part of what lures many of us. For all of the watchfulness we need, however, there's nothing more annoying than a skier who takes self-preservation too seriously. Aside from whatever transcendental uplifting we receive from challenging ourselves in wintry terrain, the real reason most of us ski the backcountry is simply that it is usually fun. Kill that fun with constant clucking and quailing, and we might as well just stay on the lifts, where our safety is the responsibility of others.

Indeed, the 10 steps just described are the means, not the end. Take each one carefully, file them forever in the front of your consciousness and you're ready to graduate to true freedom of the hills, whatever season, whatever the conditions.

A former mountain guide, Gordon Wiltzie is a well known adventure writer and photographer, and resides with his family in Bishop.

Reprinted with permission.

Leader's Weekend, December 5, 6, 1992

by Owen Maloy

The original idea for these weekends was that we would spend some time on actual leader stuff. Apres-ski activities would consist of seminars on such weighty matters as how to estimate the difficulty of a slope from the topographic map, the effects of sun exposure on the probability of a faceplant, and how to use a buckle boot as a splint. Nowadays we could expand it to topics like how to navigate to 10 meters with a GPS receiver, and how to call the Sierra Madre Search and Rescue Team with a portable phone. All sorts of useful stuff.

Unfortunately SMS members ski so hard they are not ready for such intellectual evening pursuits, and they prefer to watch ski movies anyway. A couple of years ago we were watching Downhill Racer. A past SMS chair emerged from below and asked what we were watching. Then she said (after a delay of at least a hundredth of a second) "Oh, Downhill Racer." Any woman not in the SMS would have said "Oh, Robert Redford!" She teaches trigonometry anyway, so she can figure the slope angle herself. Look, when the little brown lines are real close together, it's steep, OK? End of lesson. What shall we watch now?

This weekend was looking pretty grim. Mammoth Mountain opened Halloween weekend with a fall of wet glop which was surprisingly deep. Being aware of the difference between skiing and a geology field trip, I did not go out until I got a call one Saturday morning from another past SMS chair, wailing, "But you didn't tell me there was skiing! I'm at the Main Lodge getting my pass and I don't have my skis!" I lent her my telemark boots, two sizes too large, and three pairs of socks, and we skied the Cornice, which was pretty good, no more rocks than usual. I was on my old Alpine mountaineering (rock) skis with Ramer bindings, and I kept failing because I was trying to weight the back ski. I guess I'm a telemarker now for sure.

But in early December the Halloween snow had turned to a mixture of pumice balls and boilerplate. In November we had only a few dustings. There was no snow except on Mammoth Mountain, even the Tamarack XC area was out of business, because the USFS decided to plow their roads to work on some water wells (uproar from season pass holders). Those who called for snow conditions gave up. Only two people, Seth Clark and Keith Martin, were willing to give it a try. Saturday we practiced the Tele Sideslip at Mammoth on more kinds of, uh, hardpack than you can imagine. Continuing our evening intellectual tradition, we watched the Telemark Movie.

But Sunday it snowed. We skied in the usual rotten visibility in foot-deep powder all day, cranking tele after tele on the intermediate terrain, the only place anybody could see. Chair 3 was closed by noon, presumably because of avalanche hazard. Eat your hearts out, city-dwellers; powder is here to ski when it is here.

Don't feel guilty, Sacramento and Tahoe members; you might not have gotten home until spring, because since the weekend it has continued to snow. As I write this Tuesday night (Dec 8), we have 2 1/2 feet of the white stuff at my house (8300); it dumped Monday and was clear today but now has closed in and is blowing a true Mammoth breeze at 60 mph. My car is a white blob; with no time to dig it out, I had to get someone to take me to the Sierra Club ExComm meeting. This is supposed to continue for several days with several storms, so we should get 5 feet or more.

This is a major break in the weather pattern. The jet stream normally oscillates north and south with a 19-21 day period, bringing snow only at three-week intervals which are very reproducible year-to-year. It rarely snows on New Year's Day, for example; normally there is a Santa Ana condition in Southern California and great visibility for the Rose Bowl. The big snow weekends are Nov 1, Dec 20, Jan 5, Jan 25, Feb 15, and so on. Either we get it or we don't, but we never get it other times.

This snow is failing at another time. I can't remember when we have had severe storms in early December. If the pattern is permanently broken, possibly as an effect of global warming or ocean temperature disturbances, we can expect curious things to happen. These are weighty matters. All I can say to SMS members is, sharpen your edges and check your shovel. You may need them if we slip into another ice age. Also, stock up on ski movies.

YAHOO'S in WAHOO GULLY

by Craig Dostie

Copyright 1990 Le Cronicle du Coular, Reprinted with Permission

Beep-Beep. Damn, 5am already? Beep-Beep. Find the button. Beep-beep. Maybe they'll be late? Beep-bee. Found it. Sleep had been elusive anyway. Rest was adequate, but a few more minutes of cat napping wouldn't hurt.

rrrrrrrr, RRRRRRRR, RIR!R!R!R!, the distant sound of an unmuffled engine approached from the lower valley. Within minutes a snorting, mauling, gas leaking, former Toyota 4Runner was beside my little mini truck. While transferring skis and gear, Mike Brabham made introductions in the predawn darkness.

There was myself, Mike, Rob "Shralpy" Miller, and the owner of our backcountry trailhead shuttle, Corey Stern. This was no ordinary 4X4. As alluded to earlier, nothing on this mobile, short of the body, was original. Corey was a mechanical engineer who took his 4X'ing seriously. He started customizing with a beefed up suspension which in turn required a bored out engine that demanded a stronger transaxle that begot still further changes, including a few undesirable features. Amongst them was the custom back seat that Shralpy and I shared ... particle board cushioned with carpet. Spare no expense on the essentials, aye Corey? A leaking fuel line was another "feature" so Corey raced up the road to out run the fumes.

The second jolt to my senses was Shralpy.

"Pretty stoker, huh dude"?

"Uh, yea ", I agreed automatically. The accent was vaguely familiar.

"It's gonna be a full-on stoker man, like, shreiddin the nectar, DUDE, yeah!"

Surf County, that was it. I didn't quite catch the exact translation, but the basic message was clear. Shralpy's broad grin and eyes gleaming in the dark filled in the missing grammatical ingredients.

"Right On Bloood! ", I replied as we shook hands in anticipation of great backcountry skiing while bouncing up the road to the trail head.

Fortunately the sun had just risen enough to light the way as we set out from the truck. We hiked for an hour through desert chaparral, following the back bone of an old moraine before reaching the snow and a quick break. From here it was a direct line up to the top of Wahoo Gully.

Shralpy, then Mike, and myself topped out on the col around 11am. Corey's addiction to lifts cut into his uphill time a bit, but not as much as a bounding chunk of ice that hit him square in the crotch in a very unfriendly game of pocket pool. Shortness of breath took on new meaning as he struggled uphill ever slower.

While Corey toiled below, we scrambled up talus to an unnamed peak at about 12,560 feet for a good view of Mt. Humphreys. After feeding our faces and a few loungercizes the charms of the couloir we had climbed could be resisted no more. We clipped in to our skies and pointed 'em down.

Throughout the day, a thin veil of high clouds had been moving in and out, alternately heating and then maintaining the temperature like a gentle oven slowly thawing the surface of the snow. It was on simmer for most of the day, instead of the usual broil setting the

Sierra serves up. The result was corn snow cooked to perfection, aldante" at the top of the chute, slightly overcooked down low.

Wahoo Gully itself is a superb example of a classic couloir. Tilted at an average angle of 32 degrees, it is not extreme by standards of steepness, but the fun it yields is. For the upper third of its 1500 foot vertical drop the couloir is lined with Sierran granite walls. A nice touch of intimidation for the slow to turn. Lower down, the chute spreads out in an alluvial fan perfect for high speed cruising and a bit of snow snake roulette. Having all this vertical a short hike from a road made it all the more inviting. In the words of wave damaged Shralpy, it was like, sweetness y'know, like nectar, totally nectar dude! Yahooo!!! ** CD **



NEXT MONTH : SKIN CARE (CLIMBING SKINS THAT IS)
SKIING LAKE LOUISE

Gettin' there...

So now that you're enticed with the possibility of skiing Wahoo Gully you want to know how you get there. If I tell you, who else are you gonna tell? Can you keep a secret? Okay, so someone else could be reading this too. Just to keep it from being too easy, I'll tell you exactly where Wahoo Gully is located, and you figure out how to get there.

Wahoo Gully is located along a line running approximately North East beginning at a point nearly due east and 400 vertical feet below the 12560' foot peak located at approximately exactly 37:15:59 degrees Latitude North and 118:41:04 degrees Longitude West. Got that? Whaddya mean where's that? Know how to read a map? Even if I give you a few more hints you're gonna need to know how to read a topo map.

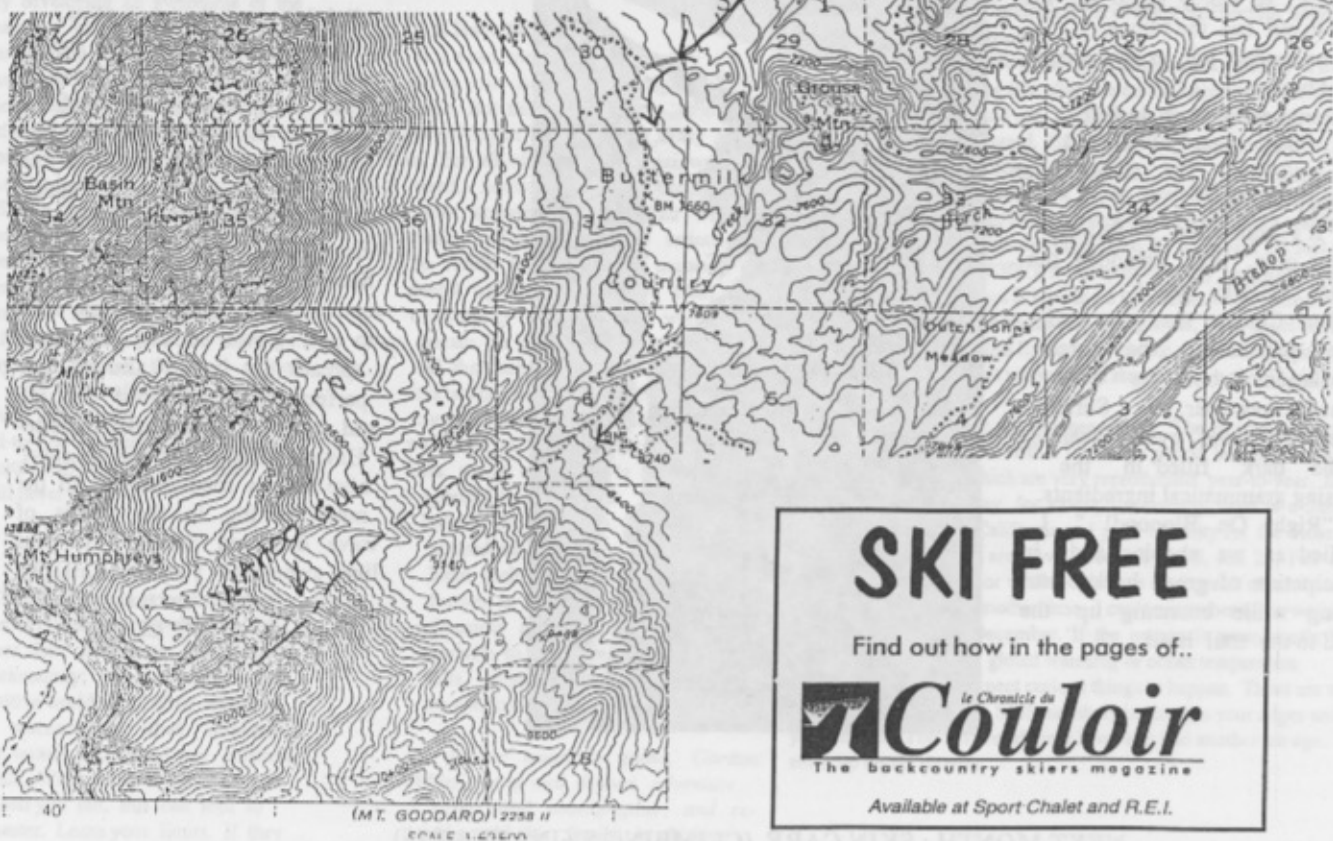
Before you take off, make sure the map you carry with you as one of your "ten essentials" is the USGS 15" minute topographic map entitled MT. TOM, CALIF. The USGS BISHOP topo will provide a more complete picture of where to start from but isn't necessary. Topographic maps are available from most "real" backpacking stores.

Then, get yourself to Bishop, CA along Hwy. 395. Once in Bishop, turn onto Hwy 168 heading West towards Lake Sabrina. About 5 miles out of town, past Ed Powers Rd, turn Right on Buttermilk Rd. Within a few miles of this washboard dirt road you will be traveling in the region covered by the MT. TOM topo. Follow this road past McGee Meadow, Wells Upper Meadow, through Buttermilk Country towards the upper reaches of McGee Creek. The road tops out around 8600' feet elevation. A vehicle with good ground clearance is only necessary for the final half mile or so if the road is dry and clear. Hedge your bets and find a friend with a 4X anyway.

After shouldering your pack & skis, follow the un-named creek south of McGee Creek that leads to the eastern face of Mt. Humphreys. According to the topo, there will be some vegetation marked around 10,000' feet. The 12,560' foot peak alluded to earlier is on your left at this

point, or approximately SW. The highest, steepest looking chute from this vantage point is Wahoo Gully. Set your course accordingly, use the rest step, and keep on chuggin' til you get to the top of the mountain. Relax and prepare for the nectar.

A few words of warning for the inexperienced. This is a great day trip. Don't let the proximity to civilization lure you into a false sense of security. This is a mountaineering trip and the mountains don't care if you live or die. Prepare accordingly. Bring the ten essentials at least, and I recommend that skiers also bring avalanche beacons (& knowledge of their use), 2 shovels per party (minimum), climbing skins, and crampons. Drink plenty of water, take two runs and call me in the morning.



SKI FREE

Find out how in the pages of..

Couloir
le Chroniqueur du
 The backcountry skiers magazine

Available at Sport Chalet and R.E.I.

Camping in the Snow..... on Purpose?

by Rose Lynch

Properly prepared for, backcountry snow camping can be the ultimate pristine experience of one's life. There is something so primal in being witness to the sun's set and rise from deep within the winter mountains. Exciting too is the realization that you can do it with utmost security and comfort. Crucial to the enjoyment of this sport is staying warm; ie. keeping that internal fire stoked and burning day and night. This requires an ample supply of fuel in the form of carbohydrates and fats. Oh joy! Pecan chocolate chip cookies, brie cheese, M&Ms, hot chocolate and peanut butter become your friends, not your enemies, as they bypass the hips and go right for the Krebs cycle, in a valiant attempt to keep the body warm. In other words, nibble constantly.

Choose your tent site with keen consideration for the morning sun, because in winter the sun abandons you all too early in the afternoon. Be certain to set up your abode before that waning sun dips behind the peaks, because once it does, the snow turns to ice, and you will not be able to secure your tent with stakes. Once the sun has set, next on the agenda is getting ready for bed. The rarefied air of the backcountry reaches freezing and below without much effort, and the longer you wait, the colder that sleeping bag is gonna get. What you're interested in is the most heat efficient way of stripping naked, putting on dry long underwear, getting in the (by now) 18 degree bag, and keeping your damp clothing and boots from freezing solid during the night. After finishing in the "lavatory", run around your tent ten or twenty times, until you generate a little excess heat. You are now ready.

Sit down inside your tent, using care not to sit on your sleeping bag and depress any "loft" it has managed to achieve. Loft is insulation which translates literally into warmth. Working from bottom to top, first to be bared are your feet and legs. Go for the dry socks, two pairs, along with dry long underwear bottoms, and in to the bag you go. Sitting up, you have much to tend to before the final zipper is zipped. You really should keep that down jacket on until the last minute when you snuggle in for the night. Tooth brushing, flossing, nose blowing, contact lensing is all done now. The degree of time spent "puttering" is dependant upon the ambient air temperature and/or your gloved hand dexterity.

Everything you have just removed has a place if it is to be functional in the morning. Into the bag with you goes damp boot insoles, daytime shirt and undies, socks and mittens, contact lenses, water bottle and, yes, whatever you brought for breakfast if you don't want it frozen solid. Sacre bleu! Don't lose your sense of humor ... Time for some brandy and another brownie. Wet boots are put in the sleeping bag stuff sack (turned inside out) and placed under your knees where they will keep from freezing stiff and may even dry out some. If you haven't convinced yourself of another trip to the outhouse, you're probably ready for the final move. Your outer top layers become your pillow, along with wind pants, and any extra clothing you have. If your hat won't stay on your head while you sleep, invest in a balaklava long enough to cover your neck. While rolling side to side for the next twelve hours, you will appreciate the added warm protection.

There is a profound excitement in not only surviving, but actually enjoying this soft silence that only Nature's winter sleep can create.

MARTIN LUTHER KING WEEKEND JAN 15-18
3 DAY HOLIDAY SIERRA CLUB BUS TRIP
EVERYONE WELCOME YOSEMITE
Long Beach Group

Stand in awe in the spectacular wonder of Yosemite Valley, Lots of fun things to do in "The Yosemite" of John Muir.

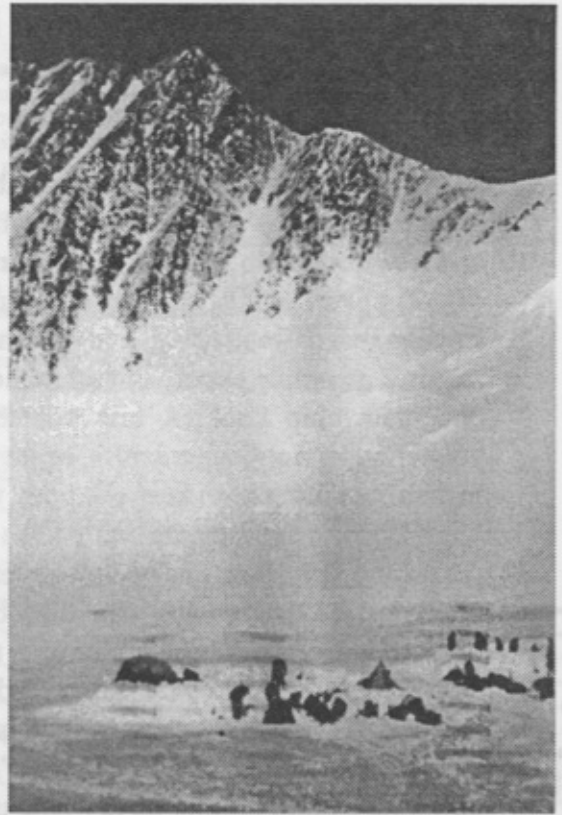
One can leisurely, free Shuttle, sight-seeing from place to place, in the valley. Or free shuttle up to Badger Pass Ski Area for a day or two of downhill.. or cross country skiing, with lessons available. There are bikes to rent. hikes to be taken, museums. and shows to see. OK, to bring Kids.

Our quad cabins w/bath at Yosemite Lodge are right "under" incredible Yosemite Falls.

BUS Pickup Friday eve at 6 pm Westchester., 7 pm Mission Hills. Home about 10 pm Monday.

Earliest reservations get best bus, and Lodge accomodations. Send 3 sase (4x9 envelopes), a note with H & W phones. SC# if member. and a \$164 check, payable to Sierra Club (non mem, add 10%) to cover bus, bus munchies, lodge, and Monday lunch, to Coordinator: Tina Winters 425 Gould Avenue Herimsa Beach, CA 90254 (310)372-2862

Note: This year you can Ski Badger Pass for Free if you are exactly 40 years old.



Snow camping Mt. Mckinley

THE MUGELNOOS

Pat Holleman
 1638 6th St.
 Manhattan Beach, Ca 90266



Time to RENEW for1993!!

Richard L. Henke
 652 Marine Ave.
 Manhattan Beach, CA 90266
 1992 SMS RCS-R