



# MUGELNOOS

APRIL 16, 1996

Number 727



## ROCK CREEK - MOSQUITO FLATS YURT

MAR. 16-17 1996

by Reiner Stenzel

Rock Creek has it all : good access, beautiful scenery, plenty of snow, terrain for all skiing abilities, and a cozy hut for a basecamp. That is why we went back in March after our earlier trip in February. We had an interesting group of nine skiers, four from the Bay area, Tom McNicholas, Burt Rodgers, Peter Purgalis, Mike Udkow, and four from the SMS, Owen Maloy, Susan Loftus, Ken Kerner, Duncan Livingston, and myself. On Sat 7 am we met at the road end (East Fork, CA Sno-Park), and skied up the snow covered road toward Rock Creek Lodge. After a short stop-over we continued at an individual pace to Mosquito Flats (10,200') where we there was random rock and snow fall from the steep gullies on its sides. After reaching the top

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3RD TUES EACH MONTH NOV THRU MAY EXCEPT DEC. 7:30 PM GRIFFITH PARK RANGER STATION AUDITORIUM 4730 CRYSTAL SPRINGS DRIVE, LOS ANGELES, CA.

## NEXT ISSUE: APRIL 16, 1996

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## UPCOMING TRIPS:

Date	Location	Leaders / Program
April 20-21	Ski Mountaineers Peak	Gerry Holleman, Paul Harris
May 4-5	Mammoth Lakes Touring	Mark Goebel, Andy Fried
May 4-5	Elderberry CYN, Mt. Tom	Ken Deemer, Reiner Stenzel
May 11-12	Hilton Lakes Ski Camp	Keith Martin, Owen Maloy
May 18-19	Mtrs Route Gully, Mt. Whitney	Reiner Stenzel, Howard Schultz
May 25-27	Horton Lakes Ski Camp	Keith Martin, Tom Marsh
May 25-27	Mt. Lassen	Reiner Stenzel, TBA
Jun 1-2	Rock Creek Ski Camp	Pete Matulavich, Reiner Stenzel

## UPCOMING MUGELNOOS PROGRAMS

May 21 "Loco Motion" A 1995 Banff Film Festival finalist- skiing and boarding the backcountry at Rodgers Pass, B.C.; plus avalanches and much more.

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cont from page one.

settled down in the yurt and in some tents. There was far more snow than a month earlier and the yurt was covered to the top of its roof (>6'). In the afternoon we toured Little Lakes Valley, forming groups with different ambitions. Some went to Treasure Lakes to ski the chute down to Long Lake, others enjoyed the scenic trail along and over the lakes. Sat evening we fired up the wood stove and cooked our dinners in the small but cozy yurt while the outside temperatures plummeted. The night was probably more peaceful for the snowcampers since in the yurt the snoring nearly shattered glass dishes.

On Sunday morning it was time again for skiing. Since there was powder snow near Treasure Lks I had the ambition to ski Dade Couloir. Luckily, Duncan was willing to rise at 6 am. The Oaklanders prepared for their four-day snowcamp near Long Lke, Owen and Susan had to ski out before noon. Beyond the Treasure Lks there is a long chute leading up to a plateau from which one climbs Mt. Dade. This 1,000' chute was filled with soft snow such that its 30-40 degree angle was not too intimidating. We switch-backed up in the middle of the chute since there was random rock and snow fall from the steep gullies on its sides. After reaching the top (12,680') we enjoyed the spectacular view of the valley, then tightened the boots, took a deep breath, and plunged down into the chute. Turn after turn we carved two meandering tele tracks into the chute. It was an exhilarating but exhausting fun which needed occasional breaks. Above Long Lake we met our friends from Oakland, and an hour later we were at the yurt and skied out together with Ken. The snow on the road was excellent and it took only 35 min from Mosquito Flats to the cars. It was another fine weekend of backcountry skiing.

## KING'S ROAD

April 8-17, 1995 by R.J. "Wise Guy" Secor

In 1985 after Ron Milnarik and I completed the Sierra High Route, we began searching for other high-level ski traverses across the Sierra. The most prominent line that we spotted left the Sierra High Route at Milestone Bowl and headed southwest, across the Kaweahs and southern Great Western Divide and ended at Mineral King. We dubbed it "King's Road," and made plans to attempt it. All of our plans fell through, however, due to drought, Ron's commitments to the air force, and for one year his attention was diverted to a ski tour to the South Pole. This is not a joke; Ron's party was the third ever to ski to 90° South, 77 years after Amundsen and Scott. But I kept

King's Road in the back of my mind, and thought that it would be a perfect CMC trip. I opened it to both skiers and snowshoers, and at one point had as many as seven participants signed up. Four dropped at the last minute, due to concerns over avalanches and taxes (!), and randonée skiers Greg Colley and Brad Jensen joined me on what turned about to be a challenging adventure.

The first five days of the trip were leisurely. The first night we bivvied at a convenient wind protected alcove near the first water beyond Symmes Creek Saddle along the Shepherd Pass Trail. The second night found us at Tyndall Creek; there were no cornices atop Shepherd Pass, but we lost too much elevation traversing west from the pass because the skiing was too good. Third night at a campsite along Milestone Creek with outstanding views of the Kings-Kern Divide and Whitney Massif; and, again, we lost too much elevation traversing to the Kern River due to excellent skiing. The fourth and fifth nights found us at the bottom of Milestone Bowl and above the Kern-Kaweah River. On the fifth day we climbed up and skied down remote Kern Point, our only peak on the entire trip. There were rings around the sun and moon on the fourth and fifth nights and we wondered what weather may be ahead.

Our sixth day of the trip was on Thursday, April 13, and the sky had a thin layer of clouds with some light snow falling. We packed up camp and proceeded up the Kern-Kaweah River, bound for Kaweah Basin that night. The clouds thickened, the snowfall intensified, and the wind picked up. Somewhere near Pants Pass the visibility dropped severely, and the three of us became more concerned with the increasing grim conditions. Around noon I called for a retreat, and we needed a map and compass to find our way down the distressingly flat, featureless floor of the Kern-Kaweah River basin. We found a tent site at 1:00 p.m. among some trees and near some running water. We dug a pit for my ten-year old Chouinard Pyramid tent, and while it was being erected a rip formed in one of the panels. And the snow continued



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to fall; I estimated that there was almost two feet of new snow at the site the next morning. The tent was in danger of collapsing, and Greg's ski poles arched dramatically under the weight. I added my poles for increased support, and finally Greg "Smart Guy" Colley had the brilliant idea of using our skis for more strength. We substituted squaw wood for tent stakes, and placed the skis tail first along the inside edge and up along the roof as rafters. This is what saved the tent from imminent failure, and for the rest of the day and evening we discussed our options. Kaweah Basin was now out of the question due to my fragile tent, and we decided to head for Mineral King as expeditiously as possible.

There were high clouds on Friday morning, and we followed a long, zigzagging route up to Pants Pass, due to avalanche danger. There was no avalanche activity however, not even any rolling snowballs. The top of the pass was thankfully not corniced at all, but the west side of the pass featured a layer of new snow over ice, and we were obligated to kick steps down it, facing in, for 800 feet. We then skied down Nine Lake Basin to the head of the Big Arroyo and made camp at 6:00 p.m. during a long white-out with more falling, blowing snow.

We were grateful to see the sun on Saturday morning, and the skiing down to the Big Arroyo was delightful. We stopped at some open, running water and drank our fill. We then made a shallow, ascending traverse up to Little Five Lakes, with outstanding views of the Kaweah Peaks. The clouds, snow, and white-out conditions gradually returned in the afternoon, and at 3:00 p.m. we stopped and made camp above Little Five Lakes, as determined by compass bearings off of the Kaweahs made during breaks in the fog.

Easter Sunday was supposed to be the last day of the trip, and we finished our supply of white gasoline that morning, and this gave us a powerful incentive to get out of the mountains on that day. The new snow stuck to our skis and skins to such a great degree that we took them off, strapped them to our packs, and postholed our way up towards Black Rock Pass. We avoided this pass, however, and headed for the lower saddle to the southeast. The west side of this pass consisted of ice, and I envied Greg and Brad as they put on their ski crampons and descended. I followed their route as best I could, when a crack marking a slab avalanche formed along their route. I quickly retreated while Brad and Greg rushed across the potential path. I began to descend another line, which was difficult with my pack, short ice axe, kicking steps into the slope while descending. Brad "Nice Guy" Jensen saved me by climbing 1,500' back up to me without his pack, kicking huge buckets the whole way, loaning me his long ice axe, and improving the steps while we both descended. We were in a white-out again at the bottom of the pass, and we followed our compass to Spring Lake, and then continued to follow the compass west and then southwest

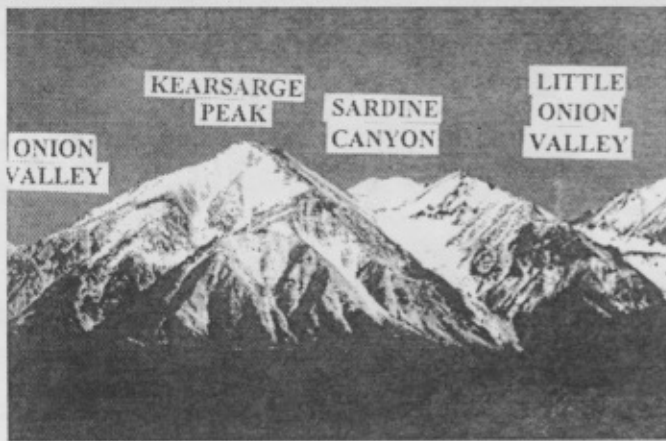
to the base of Glacier Pass. Somewhere along this stretch I somehow earned the nickname "Wise Guy."

Thus far we had been lucky with cornices; we hadn't encountered any! But as we approached Glacier Pass the fog lifted and there they were, white, menacing, overhanging monsters. The hour was late and we didn't discuss our options. Greg proceeded directly up towards a gap between two cornices. At first he post-holed, then swam vertically up the seemingly bottomless snow, and finally kicked steps up the hard ice and he was on top. Brad and I were hit by a small slide during this process, but hung on. Brad was up next, and he dropped me our 30' rope. It just barely reached, but I tied in and gratefully accepted the upper belay, and was soon on top.

We put on our skis and descended to Mineral King. We were still in a white-out, and at times we weren't sure if we were moving through the fresh snow. In my mind, this was the most memorable ski run of the trip. We traversed and kick-turned our way down to Monarch Creek in lightly falling snow, and then on to Mineral King itself in the waning light. We hit the road (figuratively, not literally) around 7:00 p.m. and skied cross-country towards the road's end, where my father was waiting. We reached Silver City at 9:30 p.m., too tired to continue. We used a pay phone to call Greg's girlfriend, my mother, and the delightful young lady who was handling Sequoia & Kings Canyon Park dispatch. And we bivvied on someone's front porch that night.

Monday morning had a slow start. My feet were painfully cold in my sleeping bag, and I needed to stoke my furnace with real food to get going. I finished my gorp and I started to eat some generic SPF 25 sunscreen when a man showed up in a snowmobile to work on another cabin's plumbing, and I tried to get him to tow us out with our rope. He wouldn't go for it, but he did graciously offer to take our packs out for us. We didn't go for this, and instead waited for the sun to hit us (figuratively; that is). The man mentioned that my father was waiting for us at the end of the road, two miles distant. We gradually got up, packed our bags, and followed the snowmobile track for an hour and a half through some extraordinarily sticky snow to my patient father.

I was disappointed that we only climbed one peak, of course, but in all other respects, the trip was an astounding success. The pack weights ranged from 36 to 38 lbs at the trailhead, and every piece of equipment was used at least once. Brad and Greg are expert skiers and highly skilled mountaineers. I hope that week-long ski tours become an annual feature of the California Mountaineering Club's schedule.



## ONION VALLEY- SARDINE CANYON

Mar. 30-31, 1996

by Reiner Stenzel

The plan called for a one-day ski tour around Kearsarge Peak near Independence. Six SMS'ers met on Sat 7 am at Grays Meadow Cpgd on the Onion Valley road. These were Howard Schultz, Mark Goebel, Lisa Freundlich, Mike McDermitt and myself. We drove up the Onion Valley road to an old mining road (7,250') leading to Sardine Cyn and Little Onion Valley, left three cars and continued in my bus up to about 8,250' where a snowbank blocked the road. After a 15 min hike we could cross the Onion Valley Creek and ski up on its South side all the way to the parking lot which was also snow covered. After a break we ascended some steeper slopes along the Golden Trout Lake trail and headed toward the unnamed lower lake East of Dragon Pk. The steep chute to the East leading to Lilley's Pass (11,920') became obvious. All along the way the sun

had softened the firm snow on the South-facing slopes and turned it into perfect conditions. We had an early lunch below the pass. Facing another 600' climb and perfect corn below, Mike, Mark and Lisa decided to enjoy the ski run down while the leaders, Howard and I, decided to continue. We switch-backed up to about 200' below the pass, climbed the rest, and anticipated to find the promised land of corn snow. Instead, we found ourselves in a Siberian landscape: Sastrugi, nothing but horrible windslabs, and plenty of barren stretches without snow bridges. To maneuver over these 5-10" tall frozen slabs required a combination of side slipping and stair climbing. We could not help to think "that's what leaders get for leaving their group" or "Mark knew this!". For a change we found some carvable snow above Sardine Lke, but most of the descent was on wind packed snow which further down gave way to breakable crust. After

2 pm most of the canyon was already in the shade. It should be skied before noon and later in the year. After two hours and nearly 5,000' of humiliating crust skiing we arrived at 4:30pm at the mining road where Mark was waiting with a smile. Amazingly, we are still friends.

We carcamped at the County campground above Independence. It was a warm spring evening, and after dinner and sunset we enjoyed to watch the comet Hyakutake. On Sunday four of us went back to Onion Valley in search of good snow. We skied up to Gilbert Lke. and climbed a SE facing slope to about 11,000'. By 10:30am it had developed perfect spring snow. What took us 2.5 hours to climb became a 30 min exhilarating run down. Backcountry skiing could not have been any better. It was a pleasure to share this fun with good friends.





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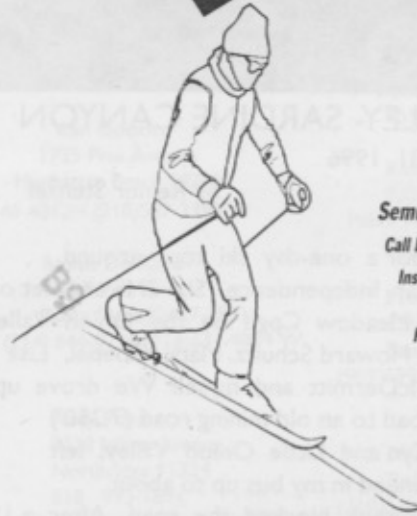
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