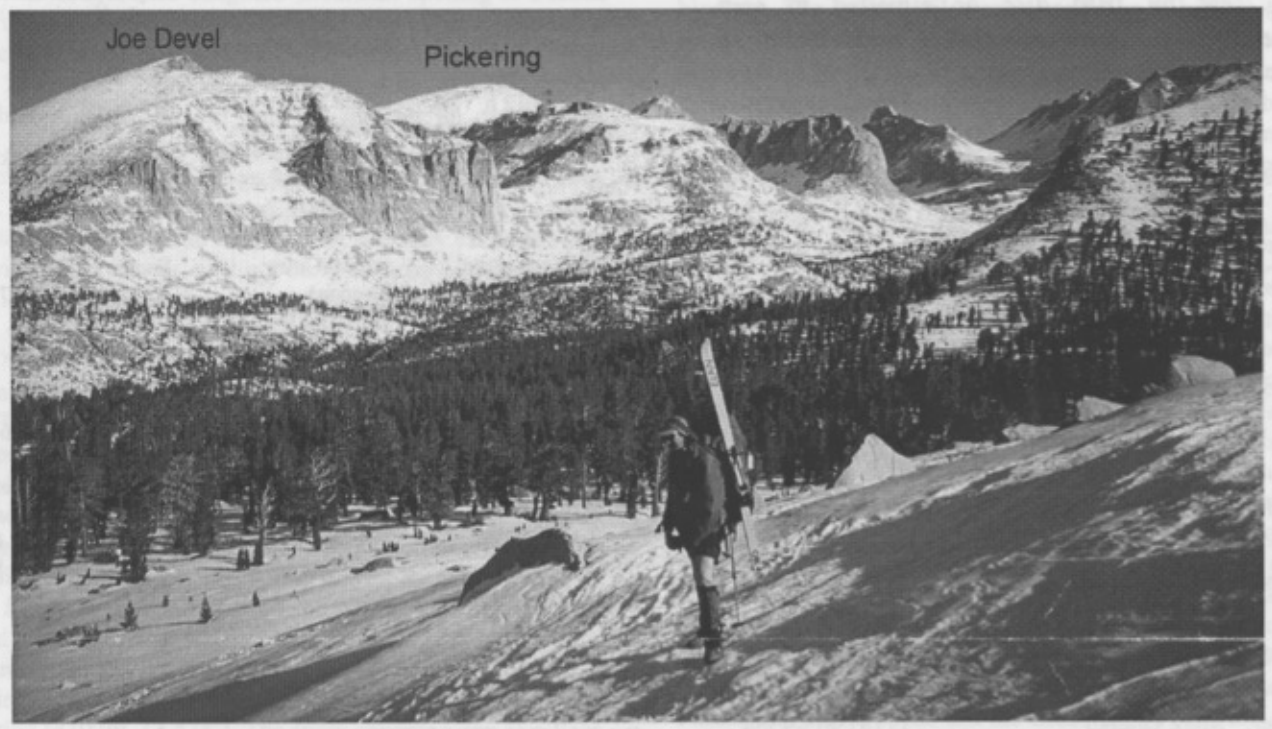


RUT 6/01

THE MUGELNOOS

May 2001

Issue # 767



Joe Devel

Pickering

Mt Pickering and Joe Devel: April 14th-18th, 2001

By Reiner Stenzel

This outing was a ski mountaineering trip where we climbed and skied two SPS peaks south of Mt Whitney. It was a joint SMS and SPS trip and most participants were either active in both sections or otherwise experienced in ski mountaineering. The participants were Mark Vogt from San Diego, Ruth von Rotz von Truckee, Jonathan Meagher, Susan Livingston, and the leaders were R.J. Secor and myself. The trip started officially on Sat, 4/14, 6am, at the "Road Closed" sign on the Horseshoe Mdw Rd above Lone Pine. But, by chance some of us had dinner together on Fri night at P.J.'s and then found the rest of the group sleeping at the designated meeting place. To sleep high I drove up as far up as possible. This year, the Cottonwood Lks area had 120% of the normal snowfall, great for skiing but a disaster for the road access. During the week prior to our trip it had snowed again. No first-hand information about the road condition was available. So we took our chances. Unfortunately, snow banks blocked the road already at the 8,000' level near the upper switchbacks. The Horseshoe Mdw Rd is looong (24mi from Lone Pine) and the trailhead is high (10,000'). Short of giving up, we had little choice but to walk many miles on a partially snowed covered road to the trailhead. No fun with packs which weighed over 50lbs with skis. By 1pm we had made it to the Horseshoe Mdw trailhead. By now we were on skis and proceeded, as planned, toward the Cottonwood Pass. The shorter route over New Army Pass was ruled out due to the steepness and the recent fresh snow on an icy base. Snowed-in Horseshoe Mdw looked beautiful. Ascending Cottonwood Pass on powder was a workout since the fresh snow was balling up on the skins. By 4pm we were on the pass (11,180') and proceeded to ski toward Chicken Spring Lke. Since it was too late to make it into Rock Creek, our original goal, we decided to stay at the lake. It was located in a big cirque, had nice trees for wind shade, but there was no open water. We cooked on dry ground of tree rings, relaxed for dinner, and spent a peaceful night out of the cold winds.

On Easter Sunday, 4/15, we had a leisurely 8:30am start. We ascended from the lake to the 11,600' level and contoured above the tree line roughly parallel to the PCT along the southwest slopes of Cirque Pk. The snow was wind packed and frozen, requiring careful edging to avoid a nasty fall down the long slopes. A cold wind blew from the west

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NEXT ISSUE

October, 2001. All letters, photos, slides, or articles should be sent to Mugelnoos editor, Lorene Samoska, 701 Craig Avenue, La Canada, CA 91011. Materials can be sent by IBM disc or e-mailed to samsei@earthlink.net. Electronic photos and articles are preferred and appreciated.

MEETINGS

3rd Tuesday each month – November through May (except December) 7:30 PM, Griffith Park Ranger Station Auditorium 4730 Crystal Springs Drive, Los Angeles, CA. Newcomers welcome!

SMS WEB PAGE

The link is: <http://angeles.sierraclub.org/skimt/>

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Last Trip of the Season

May 26-28 Sat-Mon Ski Mountaineers/Sierra Peaks TM: Mt Whitney, Mt Muir: Ski/climb our highest SPS emblem peak. Ski down open slopes from Trailcrest to Whitney Portal, snow conditions permitting. For advanced skiers/boarders, climbers with ice axe and crampons. Send e-mail/sase w experience to Ldr: Reiner Stenzel. Co-Ldr: R.J.Secor.

FOR SALE

For Sale: This year's Big Easy Tua telemarking skis brand new 170 cm. \$350. (retail \$475+tax). Petzel ski-alp AT binding \$150 like new. Koflach AT boots men's size 5 1/2 \$75. Tyrolia AT bindings \$75. Snowboard 147cm with Burton bindings and Sorel snowboard boots \$125. E-mail Ruth: mtngoat@gbis.com

For Sale: Heavy duty tire chains; fit tire sizes 205-14 thru 205/65R16. Class "S" for low clearance vehicles. In very good shape. Paid \$80, asking \$45. Also, have two other sets for smaller vehicles (Acco models 1122 and 1130). E-mail Dennis at dlandin@aol.com or call (818) 543-1241.

For Sale: Crampons: Grivel G10 New-Classic. Light but sturdy 10-point. Adjustable. Excellent condition. REI wants \$95; steal 'em for \$50. Craig 626-705-6099 or sprocket_toil@hotmail.com.

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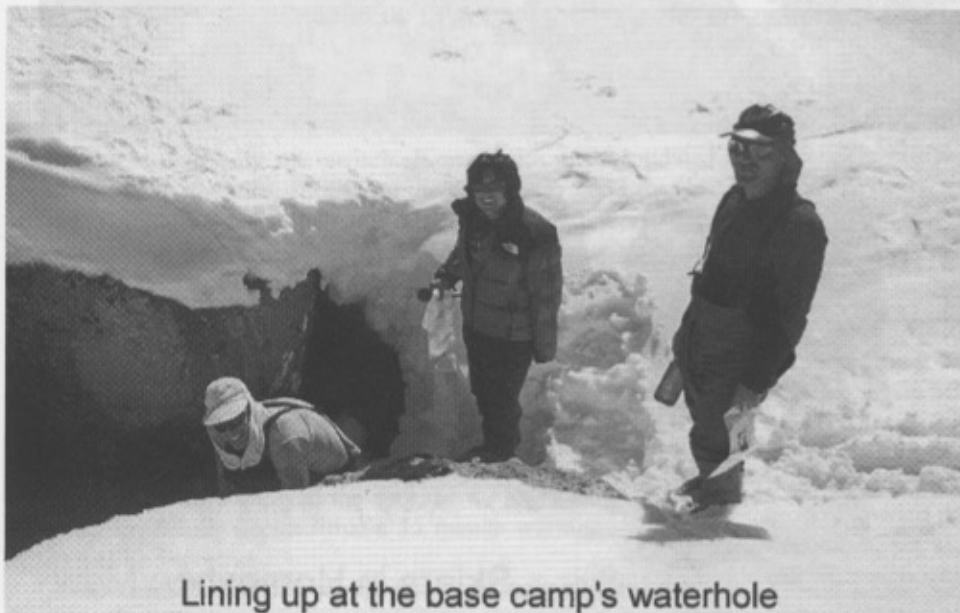
on a cloudless day. Gnarly foxtail pines are scattered along the slopes. The view over forests, meadows and distant mountains was beautiful. Big Whitney Mdw and the Siberian Outpost were completely covered by snow. The traverse was occasionally interrupted when we had to cross drainages, for example, just west of Cirque Pk and Army Pass. Our destination, the Rock Creek area near Joe Devel, was reached by early afternoon. We found a beautiful campsite in a drainage below the Soldier Lkes and were delighted to find an opening in a creek with running water. This place would become our base camp for the next three nights (UTM 40 39 312N, 11 3 86 250 E, NAD 27, elev. 3331m). Everyone was relieved and dropped their heavy packs. By the time we had set up camp, eaten lunch, enlarged the water hole, washed up in icy creek water and relaxed in the sun, it was too late for an afternoon peak climb. Nobody was in the mood for an SPS death march. Mark and I scouted the route to Erin Lke for next day's ascent of Mt Pickering. After dinner, as it got dark, we crawled into our yellow Bibler submarines for a long night's sleep.

On Mon, 4/16, I set the alarm clock at 5:15am, and we did start our climb one hour later. It was a clear chilly morning, 13deg F. Everyone had a light pack, carried skis, and was equipped with ice axe and crampons. We dropped down to and crossed Rock Creek, then ascended benches on mixed rock and snow to the drainage from Erin Lke. After cramponing up a steep slope east of Pk 3857m, we continued to climb on skis to Erin Lke, which was safe to ski on. At the north end there was a frozen waterfall. When we reached it, we were delighted to find some dripping water to fill our bottles. After shooting some nice pictures we proceeded to ski to the northwest end of the cirque where one ascends the southern slopes of Mt Pickering (4107m, 13,474'). The snow coverage was excellent, the slopes not too steep, so it was possible to ski all the way to the summit although five climbed the upper part on foot. All of us summited between noon and 1pm. We signed the peak register as the first party in 2001. The original plan was to traverse the c13 ridge to Joe Devel. What seems straightforward in

summer time is a different story in winter. The ridge was covered with menacing cornices. My estimate was 3hrs for the traverse, another 3hrs to base camp. We would ski down J.D. on breakable crust, which few could handle. Thus, we shelved this plan and opted for fun skiing. By early afternoon the snow on Pickering had softened and it was great skiing down its southern slopes. Of course, one had to watch ones turns on a long 30+deg slope. Mark and I had a great time with jump tele turns until Murphy's law struck: In the soft wet spring snow one more strong steering of his skis cracked Marks bindings. The entire Voile base plate broke in half which was impossible to repair. There was no alternative than to hike down which he did ahead of us. The rest of us waited for R.J., then proceeded down on skis. By 6pm we were all back at base camp. Except for the ski damage it was a fine afternoon, and we all agreed that climbing J.D. would have been too much.

On Tue, 4/17, we got up at the usual hour, 5:30am, except for two who wanted to have a rest day. Our plan was to climb and ski Joe Devel. Since the snow coverage along its southern slopes looked spotty, R.J. decided to leave his skis behind and hike with Mark. We dropped down into a meadow in Rock Creek, then gained the southern ridge and ascended the long SE slopes to the summit (4062m, 13,327'). Impressive cornices hung over parts of the ridge. At 11:30am Mark and I signed in as first visitors in 2001, followed later by Susan and R.J. We talked by radio to Ruth and Jonathan at base camp. Mark's 2m amateur radio had a longer range than my sports radio and he could also make contact with a station in Trona. In emergencies, a ham radio seems more valuable than a cell phone, which was out of range in the backcountry. On a clear, winter-like day we enjoyed some of the best views from the summit. We could see San Gorgonio, Mt Pinos, the Panamints, the Kaweahs and the Great Western Divide, and of course the house on Mt Whitney. Mt Guyot, which we also wanted to ski, appeared tantalizingly close but judging from the GPS reading and the terrain it would be at least a 10mi round trip which was out of question for the afternoon. After taking many pictures and finishing an early lunch it was time to descend. Mark went ahead to avoid the soft snow, while I

was looking forward to it for a fun ski run down. Near the summit the cold wind kept the snow crusty but further below it turned into nice spring snow. The main difficulty was to find a continuous ski route through the rocks on the south-facing slope. It required many tight turns and, of course, no falls into the rocks. But it was infinitely more fun than post holing or walking on scree as in summer time. Further below, I found a pair of skis hanging in a tree, obviously Susan's. I sat down, took a nap, and waited till she and R.J. came down. Then we skied/hiked together back to base camp, arriving there by 3 pm. It was warm enough to take a full body wash in the icy creek and to make laundry. We had a relaxed afternoon, an early supper, but watched with concern the increasing cirrus clouds and the ring around the sun. A



Lining up at the base camp's waterhole

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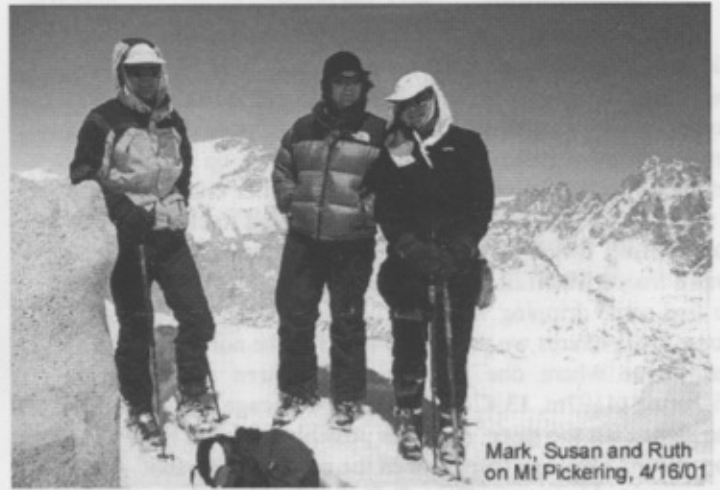
spectacular red sunset concluded the fourth day.

On Wed, 4/18, we all packed up and began our return. We counted on skiing out in two days. If it were not for the long trek on the road we would have stayed another day to do Mt Guyot. But in retrospect, the decision to head out saved us from a rapidly approaching winter storm. As we retraced our route along the slopes below Cirque Pk a cold wind was blowing, the sky became overcast, and low clouds approached from the south. Although it was tricky side hilling along the frozen slopes we made good progress and arrived by noon at Cottonwood Pass. Good spring snow made the 1,000' ski run down from the pass a real pleasure, although tiring with full packs. We lunched in Horseshoe Mdw, skied to the trailhead, and then enjoyed a wonderful ski run down the snow-covered road to near Little Cottonwood Creek where the snow petered out. A short ascent got us to the high point near the heliport. There the road makes a narrow passage in the ridge forming a wind tunnel where 60mph gusts nearly blew us off the road. After this last obstacle we cruised down to the cars. By 4 pm

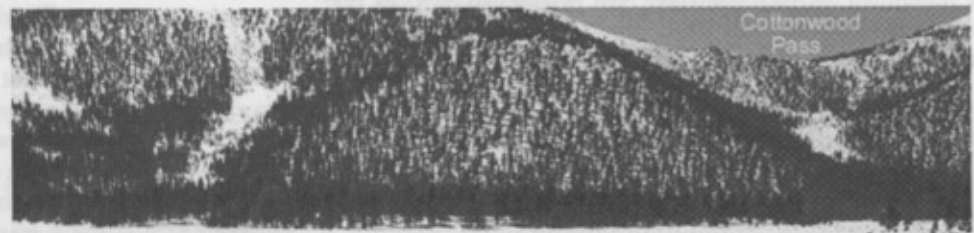
we had concluded our 15 mi ski/hike out from Rock Creek. We were glad since the weather report predicted snowfall on Thurs down to 5,500'. Near our cars a crew was filming a TV commercial showing a luxury car driving on a curvy mountain road. After unloading our gear and changing into fresh clothes we headed down to Lone Pine for dinner. An extra large pizza vanished in no time since we had burnt many calories on this trip. At 6 pm we all scattered into different directions, some even staying in town. Although the bodies felt various aches and pains nobody got hurt and we felt good about our ski mountaineering adventure. We had hoped to ski more peaks but road and weather conditions are unpredictable in mid April and it is not so easy to knock off two peaks a day in winter. Instead of many peaks we had lots of fun. Just remember the discussion of frying the grouse, Susan's dream talks interpreted by R.J., the story of her "missing" gloves, the many "mutinies" on the rocks, and gossips about all our somewhat eccentric SMS leaders. Thanks to everyone for five enjoyable days.



Cornice on Joe Devel's ridge



Mark, Susan and Ruth on Mt Pickering, 4/16/01



Cottonwood Pass



Skiers in Horseshoe Mdw

Mammoth Lakes via Onion Valley Ski Tour: April 28-29th

By Tom Marsh

Onion Valley is certainly a great place to ski. Last year's trip to Onion Valley with Mark Goebel was great fun. It was warm, sunny and spring like. It was with that thought in mind that Gerry Holleman and I signed up to do another trip at about the same time. About a week before the trip, the forecast called for windy cold and snowy conditions. Certainly not enough to deter any SMS member. After all, what would mountaineering be like without some adversity? Well, flashback to the last trip you did in the Sierras under windy, cold and snowy conditions. It did provide a certain fascination with nature's fury. In John Muir words "When the storm began to sound, I lost no time in pushing out into the woods to enjoy it. For on such occasions nature has always something rare to show us, and the danger of life and limb is hardly greater than one would experience crouching deprecatingly beneath a roof." I do share John Muir's sentiments. Of course, he had much more unlimited time to spend in the Sierra's. For most of us, a weekend away from family and work is limited. My hats off to the true mountaineers that are willing to spend endless hours in a tent waiting out a storm.

For Gerry and I, the thought of sunny warm spring like skiing was more compelling, especially when we had future dates on the calendar. So, we postponed the trip until late April.

As the eleven of us gathered at the North End of Twin Lakes in Mammoth Lakes at 6:30AM, it looked like we were going to have a John Muir experience. A gale force cold wind was blowing from the West and clouds shrouded the tops of the mountains we were about to travel amongst. The eleven brave souls were Gerry Holleman, Pat Holleman, Joy Goebel, Jan St. Amand, Wally Drake, Jay Friedman, Reed Moore, Fred Reed, Bill Lingle, Alvin Walter and myself. The road had not yet been plowed, so we had a long walk to our trailhead in the Coldwater Canyon Parking area. The wind died down considerably as we skinned up on the hard snow pack to Emerald Lake en route to Blue Couloir. Gerry, Reed and Alvin knew the way well. We skied through narrow drainages until reaching the approach of Blue Couloir. Reed wanted to ski up and down before the rest of the group got up, so he broke the trail to the top. Reed did a fabulous job of getting the right climbing angle with only one switch. It was quite unconsolidated most of the way. Good for climbing, but not so good for skiing. The top proved to be more exciting, as it was very difficult getting on edge into the hard pack. Jay must have felt some relief in obtaining the top, since he was in light touring gear.

After obtaining the crest, we skied on a wide basin, as big and flat as several football fields. The scenery was fantastic with Blue Crest behind us and the group of mountains above Duck Lake in front of us. The sun was out and the wind was minimal as we skied down to a comfortable lunch spot. The group must have enjoyed the spot, as we lunched for almost an hour. Joy finally decided that a 15 minute warning should be more like 5 minutes.

After lunch we had a wonderful descent on soft snow down

Duck Pass to the upper end of the Coldwater Canyon. The rest of the way down to the road was filled with turns on heavier snow and tree dodging on a single track. The variety was refreshing. The rest of the way out was a kick and glide down the road to the cars. After a short debate, the group decided to dinner together at Giovanni's for Pizza. Most of us were pretty tired after such a long day of skiing (8 hours, 12 miles).

The next day we gathered at the far end of Convict Lake at 6:30AM on Sunday morning. It was the first weekend of fishing season and the caravan of tailgates were behind us searching for the last remaining parking spots in all of Convict Lake. Luckily we all got in right before the parking area filled up. Well, almost all. If it were not for the heroics of Fred Reed, one of the cars would have not been able to park. Fred stared down a iron jawed fisherman with a shotgun in the rack and a double wide Ford truck with a bumper sticker saying "Don't Mess with My Old Lady's Truck". Must have counted 12 beer cans and the same number of spent shotgun shells on the front dash.

We all (except Bill) made the long ascent in the brush to the snow line of Morrison Canyon. Bill had driven the dirt road all the way to the snowline in his high clearance vehicle. Most of us walked on the hard pack up the canyon. Several remnants of avalanche debris littered the route. The avalanche debris was quite impressive and must have occurred in the last few weeks. Finally we arrived at the final ascent into the south-facing bowl just North of Mt. Morrison. It proved to be a much longer ascent than it seemed from the bottom. Gerry and Wally made it up first, with Jan and myself soon behind. Eventually the rest of the group made their way up to the top. The views of Crowley Lake, the Whites and the desert were breathtaking on this calm, warm and sunny day. Enough to persuade most to stay up there for quite some time. Finally we made our way down on fabulous spring snow in a wide forgiving bowl. After all, the SMS don't climb peaks and the SPS don't ski. So it was appropriate that our small SMS group should enjoy the ski.

The last remaining snow lines allowed us to ski right to Bill's vehicle. Everyone was most grateful to Bill for his offer to drive the skis down. The descent on a use trial back to the cars was quite uneventful without the burden of skis on the back. Special thanks to Gerry for co-leading with me. Also thanks to the group for accepting such an early start both days.

June Mt. /White Wing (April 21-22th) by Randy Lamm

This trip originally was scheduled as Tour de Peaklet (near Basin Mt.), but due to lack of interest from participants it was changed to an Onion Valley Car Camp. As the date drew closer, the reports from Dr. Howard (Dweeb Report) were getting more certain that a significant storm was heading toward the Southern Sierra. Since I headed up early to do some lift skiing at June Mt. the plan was that I would call Tom who would communicate any change of plan to the

others. Driving up the Owens Valley early on Thurs am the weather was pleasant and balmy and it seemed like OV would be a possibility. However, as I took the Mammoth turn off light snow flakes appeared, and as I drove thru town up to the main lodge they got stronger. Getting a late start I decided to skin up the road to the Minaret Vista. When I got there it was full on blizzard conditions. I met Owen for dinner and by the time we left Matsu's the storm was getting stronger. I headed for June Lk before it was too late, anticipating deep powder skiing at June the next am, and set up base camp in the villager hotel. With more information from the Weather Channel I called Tom and told him to forget OV.

This trip was officially now Villager base camp, and the participants were: Wally Drake, Mike Rector, Tom Marsh assisting and me as an additional provisional lead. While Wally, Mike and Tom drove up, I had a good powder day at June skiing the top lift while the storm developed. After a pretty good fish taco dinner at the Tiger Bar, I got a call back at the base camp from Tom and crew who were at BBQ Bill's in Bishop. They said should be there in an hour. A few hours later they showed up -- the blizzard at the top of Sherwin Grade slowed them down even in Wally's Subaru. It snowed pretty hard that night and the next day we skied June Mt - 2nd to the last day before closing and there was a foot and a half of new pow - and not the heavy stuff either. We worked the top and then as it started to clear we cut up the bottom. Pretty good powder skiing for the end of April. As we finished up another dinner and a couple of pitchers of beer at the Tiger Bar, we thought it might be a good idea to



Tom Marsh on the north facing gully of White Wing

get a little exercise on Sunday to work off the fish taco's, beer and all the sitting around on the chair lifts. So we decided to do some XC skiing (or in Wally's case XC snowboarding) up Glass Flow Creek Road. Behind the Obsidian Dome is White Wing - a small volcano that I heard has good powder some times. I guess this was one of those times because even though it was a warm spring - shirt sleeve kind of day, we were able to find some real fine snow. Wally put his architectural training and experience to use and built us a perfectly symmetrical Z shaped skin track up to the top of White Wing where we stopped and had lunch on the rock band separating the east face from a north facing gully. While we munched our jerky and power bars, Mike pulled out his monocular to get a better look at what looked like tracks going up a major peak in front of San Joaquin Pk and behind June Mt. With monocular we could see tracks of 3 or 4 skiers descending an impressively steep looking bowl/couloirs facing east.

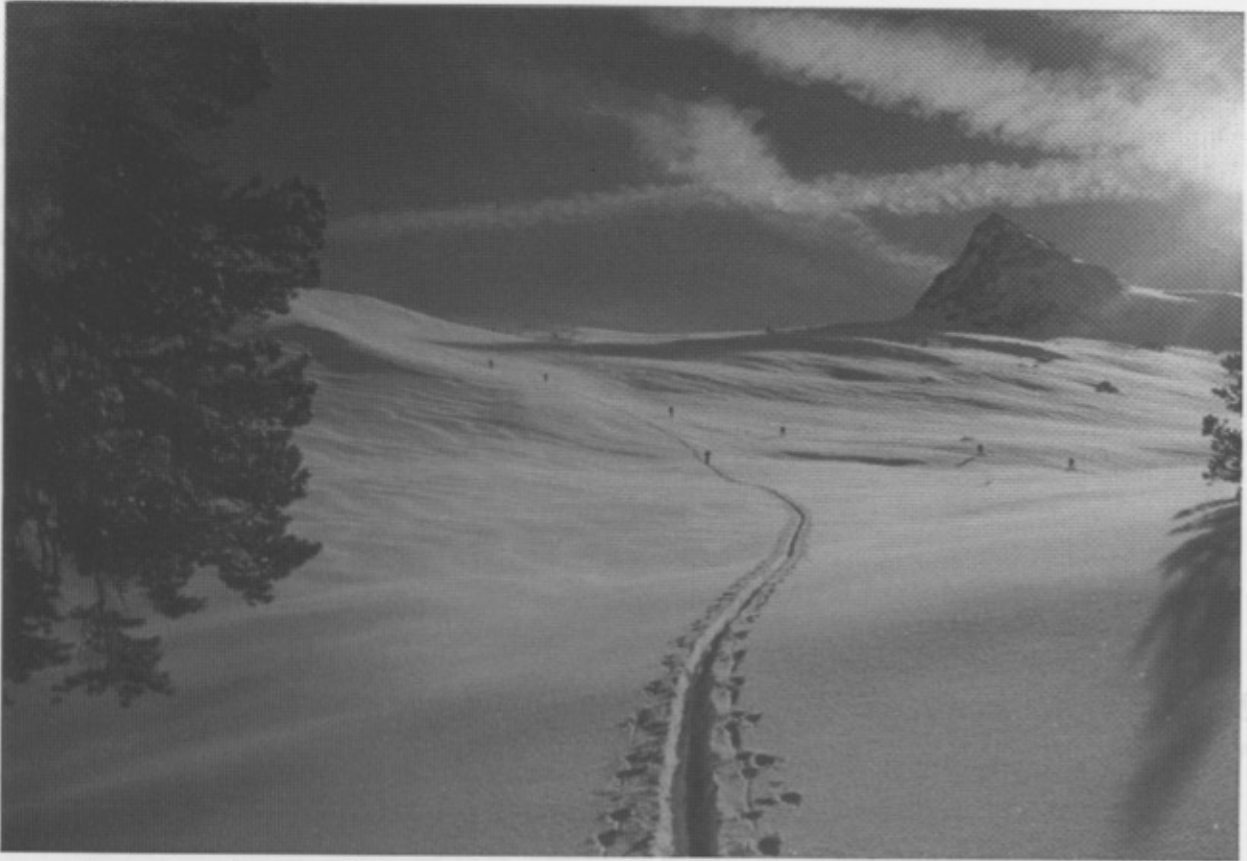
The hike up (about 2k of vertical) the east face of White-wing was not all that easy - we encountered hard snow and sstrugi and it was steep enough that doing kick turns was becoming intimidating. We were worried that our descent would be down the same stuff. Wally volunteered to go first on his snowboard. What he found instead was not crust, mank or sstrugi, but fairly lite easy-to-ski powder. We all dove in. For me skiing good powder on a sunny day with no wind amounted to the best run of the weekend.

We got back to the trailhead and Wally decided to stay an extra day, while Mike, Tom and I headed back home. Tom had a pair of skis to pick up at Wilsons, and we decided to eat at the Taqueria (next to Vons). After an order of chicken flautas and their home made salsa, I rank the Taqueria as the best eats in the Owens Valley (frosty freeze in lone pine is number 2.) This turned out to be a good alternate trip. Thanks to Tom, Wally and Mike for joining me.



Wally carving a piece out of the Wing

Photo Gallery



Above: Ascending Matterhorn Peak, Pear Lake Trip, February, 2001 (see April, 2001 issue for story).



Descent of Skier's Alta, Pear Lake Trip, Feb., 2001.

