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THE MUGELNOOS

February 2004

Issue # 785



Spring skiing in the Eastern Sierra at its finest—Tom carving turns from Royce Lakes Basin

North Lake to Pine Creek Ski, May 17th -21st, 2003 by Tom Marsh

As with most Ski Mountaineering trips, plans change due to weather, conditions, work and health reasons. This trip was no exception. The original plan for this trip was to start on the 10th of May from North Lake and ski to Rock Creek. My friends Mike Rector, Joseph McGuire, Bill Lutz and myself, along with, a host of other folks from the Bay area had planned to go. Unfortunately, a nasty cold spotted me in my tracks right before our scheduled start. Joseph and his Bay area friends were able to do the entire trip as scheduled. Mike graciously agreed to hold back with me until I could recover. As it turned out, 100% health was not in the picture for me, but a year without a long ski tour is too hard to imagine. Therefore, the trip went forward on May 17th with a less ambitious plan. In retrospect, a descent down Pine Creek Canyon should be avoided given the steepness of the trail and potential for snow slides. In any case, the trip had all the elements of a classic Sierra Spring tour with some very good memories.

Mike and I arrived at the trailhead on Friday night, May 16th. Coincidentally, we got right behind Bill Lutz as we neared the North Lake turn-off on the road to Sabrina Lake. After catching up from our last adventure, we crashed for the night at the North Lake turn off. The next morning Mike Rector and I got a fairly late start (9:45) on account of the shuttle to Rock Creek. Unfortunately, Bill opted not to join us after hearing a report from a German couple reporting bottomless sugar conditions near Piute Pass. Bill did shuttle the truck to the Rock Creek trailhead for us and gave us each a CD of favorite tunes. Mike and I made fair time on the dry trail. The weight of the skis on the back was trying. The worst of it was the transitional zone where we broke thru the snow with our

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MUGELNOOS STAFF

EDITOR Lorene Samoska
EDITOR'S ASSISTANT Michael Seiffert
PRINTING Keith Martin
MUGELMAILER Pat Holleman

NEXT ISSUE

Next issue deadline is March 10th, 2004. 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!

OFFICERS

Chair: Reiner Stenzel (310) 454-9787
Email: stenzel@physics.ucla.edu
Vice Chair/Leader Records: Randy Lamm (310) 319-1947
Email: randy_lamm@yahoo.com
Secretary: Wally Drake
Email: Wdrake@altrionet.com
Treasurer: Tom Marsh (805) 498-9580
Email: qrtmoon@aol.com
Webmaster: Owen Maloy (760)-934-9511
Email: owen.maloy@verizon.net
Outings: Leslie Hofherr (310) 206-3929
Email: Leslie@admin.ucla.edu
Editor: Lorene Samoska (818) 952-3665
Email: samsei@earthlink.net
Programs: Michael Seiffert (818) 952-3665
Email: samsei@earthlink.net
Cons: Kathy Crandall (661) 255-9661
Email: kcranal@hartdistrict.org
Mugelmailer: Pat Holleman (310) 374-4654
Email: Patngerry@earthlink.net

SMS WEB PAGE

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

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SMS LEADERS for March Trips

Jim Crouch (I) San Diego, CA 92110 619-223-9084 jim@saraitlim.com	Tom Marsh (I) Newbury Park, CA (805) 498-9580 qrtmoon@aol.com
Leslie Hofherr (Prov I) Manhattan Beach 310-206-3929 Leslie@admin.ucla.edu	Reiner Stenzel Pacific Palisades H (310) 454-9787 stenzel@physics.ucla.edu
Randy Lamm (I) Santa Monica, CA H (310) 319-1947 randy_lamm@yahoo.com	Jan St Amand (Prov I) Santa Clarita, CA 661-263-7827 janstamand@earthlink.net

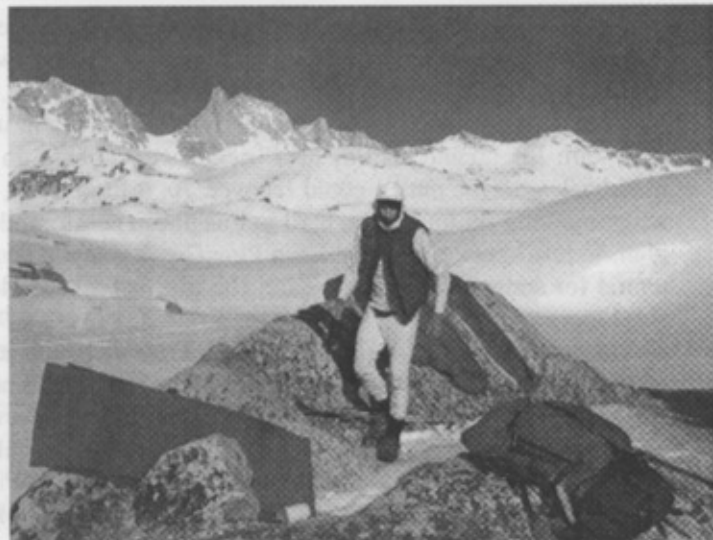
FOR SALE

Backcountry Gear For Sale

2003 Black Diamond 179cm Crossbow skies (115-82-105). Drilled for Fritschi Freeride AT bindings. Used once. \$240.00. Also 2003 Atomic 160cm TM:22 skies (106-72-98). Drilled for Fritschi Diamir Titanal 3 AT bindings. Used once. \$220.00. Email: peninsulatug@earthlink.net

New Contour 3 or 4 Internal Frame pack 5000+cubic torso adjustable \$150., almost new Osprey Internal Frame pack with Shove-it pocket 3900 cubic small frame \$150, new wmn's 7 Alpina 2002 skate boot \$95, 170cm-200cm Skate and x-country wax and waxless skis good shape \$5-\$15., Asolo snowfield teleboots wmn 8.5 \$20., merril xtreme teleboots wmn 7 \$20., AT Dynafit 180 cm skis w Dynafit bindings and Dynafit boots wmn's size 7-8.5(will sell only if U have your heart set on Dynafit) Talk to me before buying Avy probes \$20. E-mail mtngoat@gbis.com

Scarpa T2, Mens Size 7 (Women's 8.5/9) used, \$50 OBO. Women's 9 Alico leather backcountry/telemark boots - fits 3-pin or cable binding, \$30 OBO. Email samsei@earthlink.net



Mike Rector at base camp in Granite Basin

Upcoming Events March 2004

Mar 6 Sat SMS

TI: Kratka Ridge/Mt. Waterman: Ski the slopes of Kratka Ridge/Mt. Waterman or possibly Islip to Burnham or lacking Snow move north to White Wing/Negatives in the Obsidian Dome area. Ski Lifts one day at June and backcountry the other day. Experienced skiers. Metal edged skis with climbing skins, avy beacon, and shovel required. E-mail experience, address, and h/w phone to Ldr: Randy Lamm. Co-Leader: Tom Marsh.

Mar 6-7 Sat-Sun SMS/SPS

TI: Olancha Peak: Ski/snowshoe an SPS emblem peak. Sat from Sageflat via Olancha Pass to basecamp on PCT; Sun summit peak and pack out, snow conditions permitting; 22 mi rt, 6000 ft gain. Backcountry skiing or snow shoeing and snowcamping experience req'd. Skiers need metal edged skis with climbing skins, avy beacons & shovel. E-mail experience, address, and h/w phone to Prov. Ldr: Jan Stamand. Asst: Reiner Stenzel.

Mar 12-15 Fri-Mon SMS

TI: Mt Charlston and Wheeler: Exploratory out-of-state trip to ski near Las Vegas, NV. Car camp and day tours.

Backcountry and lift-served skiing by daytime; city adventures by night. Bring metal edged skis with climbing skins, avy beacon, shovel, and some nuggets. E-mail experience, address, and h/w phones to Prov Ldr: Leslie Hofherr. Assts: Reiner Stenzel, Randy Lamm.

Mar 16 Tues SMS Monthly Meeting at Griffith Park

Mar 27-28 Sat-Sun SMS

TI: Onion Valley Car Camp: Join us for a weekend of skiing in the Onion Valley area on the slopes of the Eastern Sierra. Bring metal edged skis with climbing skins, avy beacon and shovel. Email experience, address, and h/w phones to Ldr: Tom Marsh. Co-Ldr: Randy Lamm.

Apr 2-4 Fri-Sun SMS/SPS

TI: Mt Mary Austin: Ski one of the few Sierra peaks named after a lady. Basecamp in Bighorn Sheep territory, Little Onion Valley. Experience in backcountry skiing and climbing required. Bring metal edged skis with climbing skins, ski crampons, avy beacon, shovel, and snow camping gear. E-mail experience, address, and h/w phones to Ldr: Jim Crouch. Assts: Reiner Stenzel, Tom Marsh.

Please see the January issue and next month's calendar for the full schedule

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boots. We finally got continuous snow near the outlet of Loch Lake. The going was fast and easy as we took advantage of the lakes. We made it to the top at 4:00pm. Sure enough, the snow on the north side of Piute Pass was bottomless sugar. It took another two hours to get to camp deep into Humphrey's Basin. Eight hours of skiing was more than I bargained for. Still feeling the effects of this cold. Felt symptoms of altitude. No appetite. Had a good night sleep.

On the second day, Mike and I woke up to clear sunny weather. After a late start on firm pack we picked our way down the canyon toward French Canyon. It was quite trying skiing on the undulating terrain. Dry spots had to be maneuvered around as we approached the confluence of Piute and Pine creeks. A wonderful summer backpack meadow with an open grassy area made for a great midday siesta for us. After a well-needed two hour break we made our way up to French Canyon. We camped at a delightful dry spot under Pine trees. I had a trying time getting to our camp after lunch due to this lingering cold. Tried to talk Mike into camping at our lunch spot. Mike made tracks through the slope most of the way. Felt much better after dinner.

On the third day, the morning was delightfully warm after the sun hit the tent. Mike and I decided to venture out after the sun was on us. We picked a good spot for early sun. Upper French Canyon was inspiring under sunny skies and firm snow pack. We made quick work to Pine Creek pass. The snow was a perfect ripeness for spring skiing. We opted to continue our climb up the moderate slopes to Royce Lakes vs. play on the perfect corn slopes. Awe-inspiring vistas greeted us as we took in the starkly inspiring peaks of Merium, Feather and Royce. We made our way around to the first pass out of Royce to the North East. It was our first descent of the

trip that was skiable. Mike and I made over a dozen heavenly turns on good corn. We were surprised to get such good skiing on this exposure. Just two days early in Humphrey's basin we were in bottomless sugar. We traversed a more eastern exposure and found ourselves breaking thru to the knees. The traverse up to Granite Park was on very mushy snow. Our camp for the night was in the incredibly beautiful Granite Park. Felt much better today. Good thing after the effort required. Much more technical skiing.

On day four, the sun was a real wake-up call. The heat of the day was apparent as we ate breakfast under the blazing sun. We got our typical 8:30 start on our way up to Italy Pass. A thankful cooling breeze was the savior from the heat. Following a prior track, we arrived at the upper bowl. The snow was of hero texture. Soft top two inches on a firm base. The top was quite cold from the steady breeze. It is amazing the temperature swings that are experienced in mere minutes. One minute you are praising the sun or breeze, the next you're cursing it. From the pass, views are all around from the always-visible Mount Humphrey's to the SE to Julius Caesar to the North. After obligatory photos, we jumped into the first few turns off the SE facing pass. It was wonderfully consistent and firm. The best snow of the season. It was hero snow all the way to camp. After lunch and not wanting to waste any of this glorious snow, Mike and I did another 4-5 runs on the west facing slopes of Lake whatyoumacallit? Eventually we had to find shelter from the intense sun, so we made it back to camp to seek shade and relaxation under the shade of my ThermaRest pad. What a glorious place to spend an afternoon under a warm sun on a rock in Granite Park. This makes an ideal base camp for the avid skier. If only it were easier to get into Granite Park. More on that

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SMS MEETINGS— are not listed in the Angeles Chapter Schedule. The meetings will still be held on the following Tuesdays at 7:30 PM: **Mar 16th, April 20th, & May 18th.**

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later. Felt well today. Finally got acclimated. Still have this persistent cough. Seems more in my chest. One more thing, Mike inadvertently stepped on his bed on return from Italy Pass (ha ha).

On our final day, we woke up to another blazing sun. It was time to leave this beautiful environment. The half moon was in the waning phase of its cycle in contrast to the snow framed jagged peaks. Even with the incredible beauty, feelings of relief to be going back out were apparent. We still had the uncertainty of the trail out. Previous recollections of this route were a steep high trail. Surely there would not be any snow on this section. We were warned about the avalanche danger, as well. The first 500 ft descent was heavenly on the SE facing slopes on a soft 1-inch layer over a firm base. After that it was variable through the trees down to the 1st lake. The best descent was on the right north facing slopes. The lakes were still solid even with the string of warm weather days. Good thing, since the slopes above the lake were too steep to ski. Navigating without a map was disconcerting as the path leaves the lakes and descends sharply down the canyon. The snow was sloughing off in

sheets as we turned the corner on the canyon. The slope got extremely steep. Skis would sink below the knees requiring digging to free the boards. A sinking feeling came over me as the slope got steeper and steeper and snowballs rolled down the slope. Finally the slope eased off a bit as we came close to a rise. Our first inclination was to descend down the narrow canyon. Lucky for us, we decided to look over the next bend first. The trail was 200 feet above us and skirted the high end of the canyon wall. And yes, it had snow all along the steep exposed section. Once we gained composure after this revelation, we climbed our way back up the slopes. We then made the gradual descending traverse around the canyon walls. The snow improved as we came around to the north facing slopes. Luckily it was not hard pack; otherwise it would have made a fatal fall too real. Finally we made it to a snowless trail at 8600 feet. We got a full 3,000 feet of skiing from our camp at 11,600. We had only to walk 30 minutes to get to the Pine Creek trailhead. Luckily, we meet a man and his dog on the trail that agreed to give me a lift to my truck at Rock Creek. Otherwise there were no other cars to be seen.

Thanks to Bill for the car shuttle and music CD that we listened to the rest of the trip and special thanks to Mike for accommodating my illness delay and getting me through the trip.

Mugelnoos

Pat Holleman
1638 6th Street
Manhattan Beach, CA
90266



Richard L. Henke
409 South Lucia
Redondo Beach, CA 90277
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Mike Henke at base camp in Granite Basin