



Sierra Crest Tour
(South Lake to Taboose Creek)
 May 15-19, 2004 *Tom Marsh and Reiner Stenzel*

The Sierra Crest route has got to be one of the most scenic stretches of mountain scenery in the world. The section between Bishop and Taboose passes is the crown jewel of mountain scenery along that route. From the west encampment of the Palisades, the Black Divide stands out in great contrast to the series of ranges to the west cumulating in the eerie contortions of the Devils Crags against the sheer vertical ridge of the Palisades. This is contrasted with the amphitheater feel of the Palisades Lakes Basin with its towering cathedral walls in all directions. It's hard to imagine a finer place for a spring ski tour.

The weather forecast was ideal with sunny to partly cloudy skies and temperatures in the 60s. Reiner Stenzel, Mike Rector and I met at the Taboose Creek Campground at 6am for the short car shuttle to our end point at the Taboose Creek trailhead. We left Reiner's car and made it back to Bishop by 8AM with a fuel break at Shats's bakery. We finally made our ascent towards Bishop Pass from South Lake at 10am. It was easy going on the trail for the first couple of miles as we encountered little snow. What snow we did encounter was firm. By the time we arrived at the western edge of Long Lake we had fairly continuous snow, so we donned skis. When we arrived at the Bishop Lakes, we found our fourth participant in the group, Don Ralphs. Don had arrived the night before for some acclimation. Feeling good at that point, we decided to go over

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NEXT ISSUE

Next issue deadline is Dec 15th, 2004. All letters, photos, slides, or articles should be sent to Mugelnoos editor, Heiko Knapp, 2209 W. 12th Street Apt A, Los Angeles, CA 90006. Materials can be sent on CD or emailed to heiko.knapp@web.de. Electronic photos and articles are preferred and appreciated. For files or emails >2MB, please email me for special instructions.

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!

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SMS WEB PAGE

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

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Cover photo: SMS member skiing Potluck Pass on the Sierra Crest Tour in May 2004. See related article on page 1 and 6/7.

Calendar of Events 2004-2005 Ski Season

Nov 16 Tue SMS

Monthly Meeting at Griffith Park: "Skiing the Sierra High Route". Gerry Holleman will present a slide show of this classic Sierra ski tour described as "one of the finest ski tours in the world"; a 50 mile trip over high mountain passes starting in the Owens Valley and ending in Sequoia National Park. Newcomers welcome. 7:30 pm Crystal Springs Ranger Station Auditorium.

Dec 18-19 Sat-Sun SMS

TI: Mammoth Mt: Brush up on skills after the summer and get ready for winter season. Ldr: Andy Fried. Asst: Gerry Holleman.

Jan 18 Tue SMS

Monthly Meeting at Griffith Park: "Skiing the Cascade Volcanos" by Reiner Stenzel. In two consecutive years the SMS has skied on 12 Cascade volcanoes in WA, OR, and CA. This year's highlight included the ascent of Mt Rainier. The picture and movie presentation will describe trip organization, travel, and nature. Newcomers welcome. 7:30 pm Crystal Springs Ranger Station Auditorium.

Jan 21-23 Fri-Sun SMS, OCSS, PVS

I: Ski Mountaineers at June Mtn: Practice your telemark/parallel turns on lift-served terrain. Join Andy and Owen as they practice their teaching skills, free ski with other skiers and SMS'rs, collaborate with other members to hire local PSIA professionals for group lessons or organize ski touring in local mountains. Something for everyone from advanced beginners to expert. Limited condo space available in Mammoth (must clean or pay for cleaning) send check for \$45 per person (SMS) to Keith Martin for 2 nights. Half day group lessons approx. \$60 per person through Mammoth Mtn for group of 5. Send check for \$60 (SMS) with ski level to Keith Martin for each lesson or take chances when arrive (pay any cost difference when arrive plus instructor tip). Send email or SASE to Keith if want more info. Ldr: Keith Martin. Asst: Reiner Stenzel, Andy Fried, Owen Maloy.

Feb 5 Sat SMS

TI: Thunder, Telegraph, and Timber: Ski the 3 T's in the San Gabriel Mtns. Intermediate or better skiing ability required, not for beginners. Metal-edged skis with skins required. Send experience, h/w phones, e-mail address to provisional leader. Ldr: Jonathan Meagher. Asst: Alvin Walter.

Feb 13 Sun SMS, MBC

TI: Mt Cerro Noroeste (Mt Abel, 8280'): Mtn bike partially snow covered paved road toward MT. Abel, 18 mi rt max, 2000' gain. When snow coverage is solid,

abandon biking and continue XC skiing. Tour the slopes of Mt Abel. Bring light XC skis, attach to daypack during bike ride. Intermediate skiing and biking abilities reqd.(B/T2/E3). Trip may be rescheduled as snow conditions permit. E-mail or call with experience, h/w phones to provisional leader. Ldr: Lorene Samoska. Asst: Reiner Stenzel.

Feb 15 Tue SMS, SPS, HPS, DPS

Annual Joint Meeting of the climbing sections at Griffith Park: .HPS is the main organizer this year. 7:30 pm Crystal Springs Ranger Station Auditorium.

Feb 19-23 Sat-Wed SMS, SPS

TI: Silliman-Tablelands-Alta Traverse: A four-day winter tour through the western Sierra Nevada. Experience in snow camping, backcountry skiing, climbing and stamina required. Short car shuttle from Lodgepole to Wolverton involved. Metal-edged skis with climbing skins, avy beacons, shovels, and snow camping gear required. Send e-mail to leader. Ldr: Reiner Stenzel. Asst: Alvin Walter.

Mar 5-6 Sat-Sun SMS

San Gorgonio and Mt Jepson: Ski the chutes and surrounding bowls from a basecamp. Intermediate or better skiing ability required, not for beginners. Metal-edged skis with climbing skins, avy beacons, shovels, and snow camping gear required. Send e-mail to leader. Ldr: Alvin Walter. Asst: Reiner Stenzel.

18-20, 2005 Fri-Sun Natural Science Section

O: Winter Ecology Workshop at June Lake. This trip fulfills the Natural Science 2-day requirement for the "I"-rating. Join us for two days of cross-country skiing, tracking, and naturalizing in the spectacular Mammoth-June Lake area. Intermediate ski touring ability required. This trip satisfies the Natural Science requirement for the "I"-rating. Cost of \$60 includes naturalist instruction, breakfasts and trail lunches, and accommodation at local Sierra Club members' houses on Friday and Saturday nights. Reserve a place by sending sase and check for \$60 payable to SC-Natural Science Section by March 10th to reservationist Ginny Heringer, 245 San Miguel Road, Pasadena, CA, 91105. Leaders Ginny and Jim Heringer. For more information, contact Ginny Heringer at ginnyh@ix.netcom.com or 626-793-4727

Apr 2-8 Sat-Fri SMS

TI C: Wapta Ski Traverse: Ski the Canadian Rockies answer to the Haute Route. Guided hut to hut ski traverse across the Wapta Icefield, staying at the following huts: Peyto Lake-Bow-Balfour-Scott Duncan. Chance to climb peaks along the way. Guiding cost around \$800 US. Fly to Calgary, pre-trip meeting in Canmore,

Calendar of Events 2004-2005 Ski Season

drive to trailhead. Advanced backcountry ski skills required. 25% deposit due by end of Nov. E-mail experience, address, and h/w phones to organizer. Prov Ldr: Jonathan Meagher. Asst: Reiner Stenzel.

Mar 11-14 Fri-Mon SMS

TI: Wheeler Mt: Exploratory out-of-state trip to ski desert peak in Eastern Nevada. Bring metal edged skis with climbing skins, avy beacon, shovel and snow camping gear. Send experience, address, H&W phone to Ldr: Reiner Stenzel. Asst: Randy Lamm

Mar 15 Tue SMS

Monthly Meeting: Entertaining slide programs featuring equipment, safety and outings. Newcomers welcome. 7:30 pm Griffith Park Ranger Station.

March 19-20 Sat-Sun

South Lake Base Camp. Stay tuned: Details to follow in a later issue of the Mugelnoos. Provisional Leader: Jim Couch Evaluating Leader: to be determined

April 2-8 Sat-Fri SMS

TI/C: Wapta Ski Traverse: Ski the Canadian Rockies answer to the Haute Route. Guided hut to hut ski traverse across the Wapta Icefield, staying at the following huts: Peyto Lake-Bow-Balfour-Scott Duncan. Chance to climb peaks along the way. Guiding cost \$800 US. Fly to Calgary, pre-trip meeting in Canmore, drive to trailhead. Advanced backcountry ski skills required. 25% deposit due by end of Nov. Send experience, address, H&W phone to Ldr: Jonathan Meagher. Asst: Reiner Stenzel

April 16-17 Sat-Sun SMS

Lamarck Col: Stay tuned: Details to follow in a later issue of the Mugelnoos. rovisional Leader: Mike Samoska Evaluating Leader: Tom Marsh

Apr 19 Tue SMS

Monthly Meeting: Entertaining slide programs featuring equipment, safety and outings. Newcomers welcome. 7:30 pm Griffith Park Ranger Station.

Apr 23-24 Sat-Sun SMS

TI: Ski Mountaineers Peak (13,323): Our goal is to ski from the high point of Thompson Ridge down its long east slope. Sat hike and ski from below South Lake to Treasure Lakes snow camp, 1200 gain, 3 mi. Sat afternoon ski near by slopes below the Sierra Crest. Sun tour to Ski Mtneers Peak, 2900 gain, 4 mi rt, and then pack out. Requires intermediate or better bc skiing and snow camping experience. Send email/sase, past experience, phone, ride share info to Ldr: Leslie Hofherr.

Asst: Mark Goebel

Apr 30-May 6 Sat - Fri SMS/SPS

TI: Onion-Boose Trip: Join this Sierra Crest ski tour from Onion Valley to Taboose Pass. Ski and climb by

day, followed by happy hour in camp. Hi route goes via Kearsarge Pass, Dragon/Rae Lks, Baxter Lks, Twin Lks, Pinchot Pass, Lke Marjorie and Taboose Pass for a short car shuttle back to Onion. On the way there are optional ski ascents of such class 2 peaks as Gould, Baxter, Acrodetes, Cedric Wright, Crater, Wynne, Pinchot, Striped. Need advanced backcountry skiing skills, proper ski and snow camping experience, bring good food and the right spirits. Must have skied/climbed with the SMS/Ldrs before the trip. Extended ski pack touring experience req. Trip subject to modifications depending on snow and weather. Send experience, address, H&W phone to Ldr: Tom Marsh. Asst: Reiner Stenzel

May 7-8 Sat-Sun SMS

TI: Mt Gibbs and Gaylor/False White. Ski Mt Gibbs and Gaylor/False White with car camping or snow camping in the Dana meadows. Send experience, address, H&W phone to Ldr: Jonathan Meagher. Asst: Leslie Hofherr

May 14 Sat SPS/SMS

MR: Bloody Mtn. (3826m): A day climb and ski tour of this peak near Mammoth Lks. Hike up the Laurel Creek Rd to snow line and climb frozen snow in the am. Climbers will curse the soft snow in the pm and skiers will enjoy a wonderful ski run before returning to the cars. 12 mi rt, 5,196 ft of gain. Restricted trip, ice axe and crampon exp required for climbers and skiers must have advanced skiing skills, metal edged skis, climbing skins, avy beacon, and shovel. Can be combined with the Mt. Morrison climb and ski tour on Sun, May 15. Send experience, address, H&W phone to Ldr: RJ Secor. Asst: TBA

May 15 Sun SPS/SMS

MR: Mt. Morrison (3748m): A day climb and ski tour of this peak near Mammoth Lks. Hike x-c to the hanging valley east of Mt. Morrison and climb frozen snow slopes in the am. Return by glissading or skiing soft pm snow before returning to cars. 6 mi rt, 4,580 ft gain. Restricted trip, ice axe and crampon exp required for limbers and skiers must have advanced skiing skills, metal edged skis, climbing skins, avy beacon, and shovel. Can be combined with the Bloody Mtn. climb and ski tour on Sat, May 14 Send experience, address, H&W phone to Ldr: RJ Secor. Asst: TBA

May 17 Tue SMS

Monthly Meeting: Entertaining slide programs featuring equipment, safety and outings. Newcomers welcome. 7:30 pm Griffith Park Ranger Station.

May 21-22 Sat-Sun SMS

TI: Basin Couloir: Base Camp in the Buttermilks. Day tours to ski Basin Couloir and the slopes of the Bishop

Calendar of Events 2004-2005 Ski Season

Bowl. For strong, well conditioned skiers with metal edged skis, skins, beacons and shovels. Send experience, address, H&W phone to Ldr: Randy Lamm. Asst: Reiner Stenzel

May 28-31 Sat-Mon SMS/SPS

TI: Mineral King Base Camp: Depending on road opening, drive/ski from Silver City to basecamp near Mineral King. Then do day tours to nearby peaks and passes. Experience in backcountry skiing and climbing required. Bring metal edged skis with climbing skins,

ski crampons, avy beacon, shovel, and snow camping gear. Experienced SPS snowshoers welcome. Send experience, address, H&W phone to Ldr: Reiner Stenzel. Asst: Randy Lamm

Cathedral Range Loop Ski Tour April 01-04, 2004 *by Rich Henke*

When Harlan Suits invited me to join a 4-day ski tour in the Cathedral Range in Yosemite, I jumped at the chance. This would be an opportunity to explore the area south of Cathedral Peak where I had never been before. The loop would start and end at an elevation of 4000 feet in Yosemite Valley. We would climb out via the Snow Creek Trail, ski a clockwise loop through Tuolumne Meadows, and return via Nevada and Vernal Falls. Other participants in our group were Karen Davis, John Langbein, and Steve Cochran. Most of the route was on the 15 min Tuolumne Meadows topo map, but 3 others are required to see the entire loop.

Day 1 – Yosemite Valley (4000 ft) to below Olmstead Point (8100 ft). After leaving LA in rush hour traffic and sleeping just outside El Porto, I met the group at the Curry Village parking lot. After packing and dividing up community gear, we left around 10 am. It was a long hike from the valley floor up the switchbacks of the Snow Creek Trail, which began near Mirror Lake at the NE part of the Valley. We didn't reach snow until about 6700 feet. The trail was marked with old license plates attached to the trees. At a junction, the trail to the left went directly to the Tioga Pass Road. Unfortunately, we took the shortcut to the right and ended up descending a steep hillside with difficult breakable crust into a valley still below the road. It was getting dark so we opted to camp at a protected spot in the trees next to a stream. The wind had blown hard

all day and continued all night. Our total gain today had exceeded 4500 feet.

Day 2 – Below Olmstead Point (8100 ft) to Elizabeth Lake (9500 ft). It was still windy in the morning. We started at 8 am and quickly reached Olmstead Point. A long downhill run got us to Tenaya Lake. We left the Tioga road here and skied up the valley just south of Pywiack Dome, which led to the Cathedral Lakes. We crossed a pass south of Cathedral Peak, descended to Budd Lake, and then climbed a very steep pass just south of Unicorn Peak. Our anticipation of great skiing down to Elizabeth Lake was crushed. Instead, we had to descend very difficult breakable crust to reach a camp on the shore of the lake where we spent our 2nd night, after a 10-hour day.

Day 3 – Elizabeth Lake (9500 ft) to below Sunrise Lakes (8800 ft). Our net loss for the day was 700 feet but that doesn't begin to tell the story. We left camp at 8 am and skied to our high point of the trip, a pass at 10,800 feet just south of Johnson Peak. The view to the East encompassed the Sierra Crest including Mt. Gibbs. We contoured down and around making a U-turn back to the west to cross another pass just north of Rafferty Peak. In front of us was a great panorama including Mathes Crest. For the rest of the day we skied west over a very convoluted route with lots of ups and downs. Steve used his pattern skis to an advantage while the rest of us were putting on and taking off skins constantly. The downhill ski-

ing was enjoyable and only one of the passes (the one just south of Mathes Crest) was difficult. We had to carry our skis up the last 150 feet. It was almost 6 pm by the time we reached our camp along a stream about 2 miles southwest of Sunrise Lakes.

Day 4 – Below Sunrise Lakes (8800 feet) to Yosemite Valley (4000 ft). We had a touch of freezing rain during the night, just enough to cover the tents with ice. We skied gradually up to the ridge (about 9000 ft), which separated the Tenaya Creek drainage from the Merced River drainage. The view before us included the Clark Range and the deep Merced River Valley. We were all set for some good downhill. But the southwest-facing slope was almost completely bare below us. Luckily we were able to traverse left into a canyon and managed to ski in the trees and in shaded areas for several hours down to about 7500 feet. But then it was walking along the trail that led back down to Nevada Falls, Vernal Falls and the Valley. We stopped to enjoy the view above Nevada Falls and continued down, reaching the valley around 5.30

pm. It was a 12-mile day, 8 of them spent carrying our skis.

Summary — This was a very strenuous trip. We covered about 45 miles and the gain was close to 10,000 feet. Harlan, Steve, and I shared my Sierra Designs Stretch Dome and used a hanging Camping Gaz stove to cook. Karen and John used an Integral Designs I-tent and cooked with a Whisperlite. Harlan and Steve had plastic boots, which did not fare as well as leather for a trip with so many miles. The avalanche danger was zero. We did not really have good corn snow conditions, but we were able to ski almost all of the downhill sections. The only really difficult area was from Unicorn Pass down to Elizabeth Lake. Harlan and John used 7.5 min topos plus a GPS to navigate the maze of canyons and ridges we passed through on day 3. This area receives very little visitation on skis!

Sierra Crest Tour (continued from Page 1)

Bishop Pass. Reiner cut an excellent route up to the top. We then traversed as best we could on the intermittent snow and rock to our campsite near the western edge of Mt. Agassiz. It was with great pleasure to see the light show that occurred at sunset on our perch high above the western basin. Changing colors of pink and red graced the mountains to the east.

Sunday started out with a 9am start from our campsite on hard pack from the late sun hitting this western edge of the Palisades. We decided to add ski crampons to our skis for the ascent to Thunderbolt Col. Reiner, Mike and I all had trouble with our Rainey ski bindings. One of Reiner's crampons broke on one side rendering it useless. Mike and I struggled with the bindings. It's somewhat unnerving to have to take your skis off on a steep icy slope to adjust your binding. We made good time getting summiting Thunderbolt Col by 10:30am. A bold marmot made it down to Mike's pack for a hoped for snack as we soaked up the first glimpses of the magnificent views to the west. The snow was still hard as we scooted down the south side of the pass onto the wide bench at the base of the Palisades. This is an incredibly scenic place. We hugged the sheer vertical mountains to the east on our high traverse below North Palisade to Potluck Pass. The north side of Potluck Pass was skiable, the south side mixed rock and snow. After lunch, Don had the honorable task of tracking a route up to the top of Cirque Pass. The following descent down to Palisades Lakes was another truly epic experience. The snow was wonderfully soft on a firm base as we wound our way about 1,500 feet down the canyon before running out of snow. Luckily Reiner was

able to find a route down towards the outlet of Lower Palisades Lakes thereby avoiding a difficult cliff band. We found a wonderful campsite at the outlet of the Lower Palisades Lake complete with waterfalls, flat rocks, and impressive scenery.

Monday we had to only get over one pass. However, it was the biggest pass of the trip, Mather Pass. We had to pack our skis for the traverse around lower Palisades Lake as Reiner had found holes in the ice making it too treacherous to cross the lake. The John Muir Trail sweeps up about 300 feet from the lake, providing a good highway through the rocks. Upon reaching the south side of the lake, Reiner was able to find a solid snow bridge in which to cross the creek between the Upper and



Tom ascending Thunderbolt Pass



Lower Palisade Lakes. We were then on continuous snow for the rest of the day. It was fine ski touring to the base of Mather. The climb up Mather Pass was not without effort. Reiner led the way with multiple traverses on a soft one inch on firm base. It was with great relief that the pass was reached. We had concern about a possible rock scramble on the south side of Mather Pass similar to Potluck Pass the day before. However, the map showed that Mather Pass had a much longer decent through steep terrain. So it was with great joy that the south side of Mather was still covered with soft snow. The ski down the southeast facing slope was classic. It had a smooth surface on a couple inches of snow on a firm base. Just perfect for what seemed like endless telemark turns down to the flat Upper Basin. By that time, it was only around 2pm and the 7-8 mile death march that Reiner had promised never materialized. We made quick work gliding down the gradual slopes of the Upper Basin to our camp below the Vennacher Needle. The sky was partly cloudy reflecting contracting images of shade on the immense white landscape.

That evening, we were treated with one of the best light shows ever experienced in the Sierra Nevada. A lenticular cloud had formed over the Sierra Crest from beyond Taboose in the south to beyond the Palisade range in the north. It was unusually continuous but it changed shapes around the edges with the changing evening light.

The next day, Reiner and Mike decided to make the ski ascent of Vennacher Needle, while Don and I stay back in camp to enjoy the luxury of the warm sun, calm winds and fine scenery. Climbing and skiing the Vennacher Needle was not as easy as it looked. After passing the initially gentle southeast slopes around a series of lakes one has to ascend some steep slopes before reaching the summit

plateau. In spite of the sunshine the cold wind kept the snow hard packed. Edging was critical and kickturns without ski crampons kept the adrenaline flowing. The summit plateau had another surprise: Frozen suncups, we called Vennacher needles. We summited around 11:00am on this 12,997' peak. No peak register was found since the peak is not on a "List". But after turning many rocks around a plastic bag with a sheet and signatures from last July was located. By noon the snow was still hard. Mike decided to boot down the frozen suncups while I tried to ski them. No problem when crossing the grooves but it was a balancing act when skiing along them. A few tele turns were possible but much of the Needle was a pain, until we reached the lower slopes.

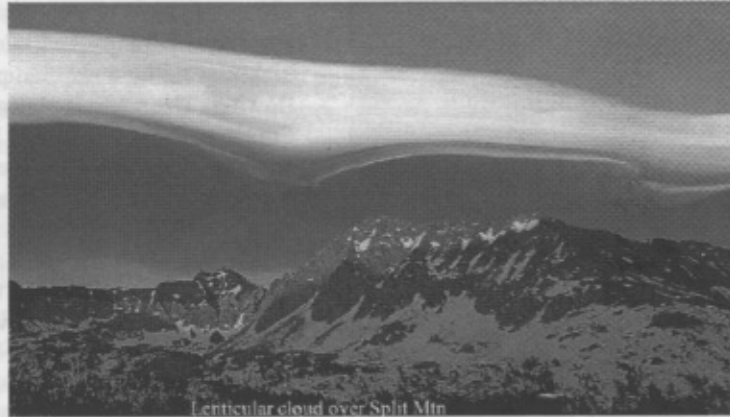
Reiner and Mike made it down to camp by 1:30pm. After that, we packed up and made our way down on intermittent snow to a crossing of the South Fork of the King's River. After much searching Reiner had spotted a log across the river that we all took turns crossing with ski poles in one hand, skis in the other and a heavy pack on the back. It was not without great excitement that we crossed the creek. One slip on the log with our wet ski boots into the gushing river would have been quite serious. Luckily, we all made it across safely, with a couple seconds of high concern as Don wavered back on forth in the middle of the creek. Reiner than picked a straight steep routout of the creek area through the forest up into the Taboose drainage. By the time the terrain had leveled out, we were on continuous snow once more. The trek to Taboose Pass was very gradual. As it got past 5pm we decided to camp on a snow-free meadow just below the Pass where there was less wind and running water. It proved to be not as cold as we thought with a gentle breeze grazing our camp as the sun dipped below the horizon. Don's tent was



Mike crossing the Kings River

experimental as he hunkered down under the thin airy single-wall Mountain Gear version of a one-man, three-season tent.

The next morning, we luxuriated in the early sun at our camp until 9:30am. This allowed the snow to soften up a bit for our decent. It was perfect timing as we hit the southeast facing slopes right as the top layer had ripened up. It was wonderful skiing for about 1200 feet down before we resigned to following the trail down. Don got another 300-400 feet with a couple short rock scrambles and bushwhacking. We made excellent time on our decent to Reiner's car at the



Lenticular cloud over Split Mtn

Taboose Creek trailhead. The day was cool, so the relative arid nature of the lower trail was quite pleasant. We packed all four of us with gear into Reiner's Subaru and he drove up to South Lake to complete the car shuttle and tour by 3pm.

Some trips just meet expectations in terms of weather, scenery, friendship and conditions. This trip certainly surpassed it in my mind. Special thanks to Reiner for leading the way and to Mike for being such a good sport about carrying the tent, doing most of the cooking, fixing my ski crampon, and to Don for being always positive and entertaining.

Mugelnoos subscription renewals due now — To renew, send a \$15 check made payable to "Ski Mountaineers Section" to the Mugelmailer: Pat Holleman, 1638 6th Street, Manhattan Beach, CA 90266-6347. Please include address and email changes.

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Like-new backcountry skis, 188 cm, with Silvretta 404 backcountry bindings (new), directly imported from Europe, \$235 (a \$400-\$800 value here in the U.S.). Email heiko.knapp@web.de.

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