

ROCK CREEK SKI TOUR

LORENE SAMOSKA

On **Thursday**, April 24th, Mike and I drove up to French Camp for their first day of operation for the season, one day ahead of Fishing Opener in the eastern Sierra. We set up camp and took our skis to the end of the plowed road at the Rock Creek pack station, about 1 mile from Mosquito Flat. The previous week, a hard freeze had hit the high country, leaving shark-fin-like shapes in the snow. They were still pretty frozen on Thursday afternoon. We skied through the trees west of the road to investigate the snow and where to take the group. On Friday morning, we decided to check out conditions for a potential loop trip with the group, and skied out to Long Lake, then started climbing at the southwest end of the lake. We stopped at an 11,300' bump on the ridge, noticing winter conditions on some aspects, and heavy spring conditions on others. But, nevertheless, the snow was continuous - a big improvement over last year - and, it appeared we could take the group on a long loop the following day.

By early **Friday** evening, every fisherman from LA seemed to come to French Camp, as bonfires, loud music, cigar smoke, and lots of beer were everywhere. We got strange looks from the other campers with our skis out at the campsite to attract fellow SMSers as they trickled in throughout the evening. Newcomers Ben Phillips and Mark Bunge were the first to arrive, and we shared some happy hour treats as the others rolled in.

On **Saturday** morning, 12 participants met at the Rock

Creek trailhead: Louisa Bonnie, Greg Scarich, Mark Bunge, Ben Phillips, Jim Garvey, Ted Lenzie from Folsom, Andrew Wirkus also from the west side, Ruth Von Rotz from Truckee, Lisa Buckley from Mammoth, SPS list finisher Don Sparks, and Bill Kells and Lisette from Altadena. Lisette decided to join us for a tour on snowshoes before heading around the lakes.

We assembled at the roadhead and headed out at 9am, and toured up the meadows and road, which was heavily suncupped and terribly uneven to ski on. The mead-

ows were smooth though, and we were quickly passed by skate-skiers getting their last training sessions in after racing season. The frozen lakes above 10,000' were perfect for high speed skating, as we soon found out later in the day.

For Saturday's tour, we skinned up the prominent gully toward Ruby Lake. This year, the gully was quite frozen, but a few places were thin on snow. We skinned

up to the lake and had a quick snack break. The sun was starting to heat the snowpack but we had quite a bit of time before things got mushy. Back on skins, we ascended the drainage above Ruby Lake and Mills Lake to bump 12,039' on the ridge, finding continuous snow along the whole route. In prior years, the ski back down toward Ruby has had some of the finest smooth corn I've ever experienced - but - this year, there were very uneven wind-packed bumps and hard snow for most of the route. Having scouted a possible soft-snow return loop the previous day, we decided to try out the

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Mike Sieffert getting ready for opening day with his everpresent Goldfish.

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NEXT ISSUE

The January issue deadline is January 10, 2009. All letters, photos, slides, or articles should be sent to Mugelnoos editor, John Anderson, 21717 Evelyn Avenue, Torrance, CA 90503. Materials can be sent by IBM disc or e-mailed to jay-deay@yahoo.com. 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/>
Check out the web page for the latest SMS news



Man, this isn't what the backcountry looks like in Powder magazine.

Mt. Williamson trip-Alvin Walter photo

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Calendar of Events

All trips sponsored Ski Mountaineers unless otherwise indicated.

SMS/OTHER SECTION TRIPS

Nov 18 Tues Ski Mountaineers

Monthly Meeting Meet your ski friends, discuss trips and be entertained by slide/video program. Newcomers welcome. 7:30 pm Griffith Park Ranger Station Auditorium (4730 Crystal Springs Dr, Los Angeles).

Dec 13-14 Sat-Sun Ski Mountaineers

O: Mammoth: Early season chance to brush up skills for the upcoming season. Two days of skiing Mammoth Mountain. Leader: Andy Fried. Asst. Gerry Holleman.

Jan 16-19, 2009 Fri-Mon Ski Mountaineers

TI: Mammoth: Join us for 3 days of skiing in Mammoth Lakes area. Stay in comfortable condo, ski mountain or join local ski tour. Cost includes 3 nights condo, 2 dinners, happy hour and continental breakfast. \$35 cancel fee before 12/15. Entire fee non-refundable after 12/15 without suitable replacement. Send email/sase/phones, \$245 with SC#265 non-member (Ski Mountaineers) to Leader Tom Marsh. Co-ldr Randy Lamm.

Jan 20 Tues Ski Mountaineers

Monthly Meeting Meet your ski friends, discuss trips and be entertained by slide/video program. Newcomers welcome. 7:30 pm Griffith Park Ranger Station Auditorium (4730 Crystal Springs Dr, Los Angeles).

Feb 17 Tues Ski Mountaineers

Monthly Meeting Meet your ski friends, discuss trips and be entertained by slide/video program. Newcomers welcome. 7:30 pm Griffith Park Ranger Station Auditorium (4730 Crystal Springs Dr, Los Angeles).

Mar 7, 2009 Sat Orange Country Sierra Singles, Ski Mountaineers, Wilderness Adventures

TI: Mt. Pinos Backcountry Ski Tour: Moderately strenuous 4+mi, 500' gain to panoramic vista. Ski from end of Mt. Pinos Hwy to summit at Condor Point. Possible side trip to Inspiration Point. Intermediate xc skills required, metal-edged backcountry skis, backcountry boots highly recommended. Send phones/email/experience/conditioning to Leader: Mark Fleming. Co-ldr. Mark Mitchell.

Mar 17 Tues Ski Mountaineers

Monthly Meeting Meet your ski friends, discuss trips and be entertained by slide/video program. Newcomers welcome. 7:30 pm Griffith Park Ranger Station Auditorium (4730 Crystal Springs Dr, Los Angeles).

Apr 21 Tues Monthly Meeting Meet your ski friends, discuss trips and be entertained by slide/video program. Newcomers

welcome. 7:30 pm Griffith Park Ranger Station Auditorium (4730 Crystal Springs Dr, Los Angeles).

Apr 25-27 Fri-Sun Ski Mountaineers

TI: Rock Creek Introductory Ski Tour: Car camp, ski slopes of beautiful Little Lakes Valley and surrounding area. Intro SMS day tours aimed at intermediate or better skiers with some backcountry experience. Metal-edged skis & skins required. Send experience, contact, rid share info to Ldr: Mike Seiffert. Co-Ldr: Lorene Samoska

May 19 Tues Monthly Meeting Meet your ski friends, discuss trips and be entertained by slide/video program. Newcomers welcome. 7:30 pm Griffith Park Ranger Station Auditorium (4730 Crystal Springs Dr, Los Angeles). **Trip Date:** Dec 2008 - Apr 2009

PRIVATE TRIPS

Trip Date: Dec 2008 - Apr 2009

Trip Location: Mount Shasta volcano trip

Trip description: Let's climb Mount Shasta on a weekend (Fri-Mon) this spring, and ski it one or more times. Let's do the North or East sides rather than the overcrowded gully. At least one more participant needs crevasse rescue skills. Please email me your preferred weekend!

Meeting place: Los Angeles, CA

Contact person initiating the trip: Heiko Knapp (heiko.knapp@web.de or 310 999 9538)

Trip Date: Dec 12-14, 2008 Fri - Sun

Trip Location: Mammoth Crest, Blue Couloir, Red Cones, Tamarack crosscountry area, or Sherwins

Trip description: Let's test the new powder on some small ski tours around Mammoth. Average duration: 5 hours, average elevation gain: 800 m (2500 feet). Also good for BC skiing beginners. Stay overnight at hostel outside Mammoth, and let's have a good breakfast at Schat's bakery before starting the tour.

Meeting place: Los Angeles

Contact person initiating the trip: Heiko Knapp (heiko.knapp@web.de 310 999 9538)

Trip Date: Dec 19, 2008 - Jan 1, 2009 Fri - Thur

Trip Location: Mammoth and Tahoe

Trip description: I'll be going to Mammoth on Sat Dec 20 and return on Jan 1st. I plan to go to the Tahoe area for 3 days, Tue-Thu 23-25. I like to do an overnight trip to Bradley Hut, weather/condition permitting. I am flexible on dates and plan. When in Mammoth I like to ski the lift in the mornings and cross-country in the afternoons with the exception of powder days. Let me know if you like to join me or have any other idea/suggestion. I have my cell phone with me, but leave a message if no answer. I have access to my e-mail up to Friday afternoon Dec 19. Looking forward to skiing with you.

Meeting place: TBA

Contact person initiating the trip: Bahram Manahedgi (Cell 310 991-0551)

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Trip Date: Jan 9-11, 2009 Fri - Sun

Trip Location: Mammoth Crest, Blue Couloir, Red Cones, Tamarack crosscountry area, or Sherwins

Trip description: Let's test the new powder on some small ski tours around Mammoth. Average duration: 5 hours, average elevation gain: 800 m (2500 feet). Also good for BC skiing beginners. Stay overnight at hostel outside Mammoth, and let's have a good breakfast at Schat's bakery before starting the tour.

Meeting place: Los Angeles

Contact person initiating the trip: Heiko Knapp
(heiko.knapp@web.de 310 999 9538)

Trip Date: Jan 16-18, 2009 Fri - Sun

Trip Location: Mammoth Crest, Blue Couloir, Red Cones, Tamarack crosscountry area, Sherwins, or June Lake area

Trip description: Let's test the new powder on some small ski tours around Mammoth. Average duration: 5 hours, average elevation gain: 800 m (2500 feet). (Please consider joining the official SMS trip this same weekend, which I intend to join for the ski touring part. I only put in this ad for those who do not want to buy expensive lift tickets, or would like to do more ski tours. Can also join me for a single day.)

Meeting place: Los Angeles or Mammoth

Contact person initiating the trip: Heiko Knapp
(heiko.knapp@web.de 310 999 9538)

Trip Date: Jan 23-25, 2009 Fri - Sun

Trip Location: Es-Scha Peak (McGee Creek), Mt. McGee, Rock Creek cirque

Trip description: I'm going with a friend and you are welcome to join. Join us for two days of medium-long day tours in the Eastern Sierra. Estimated elevation gain: 1500 m (5000 feet). Peaks indicated are just examples. Climb some high peaks around Little Lakes Valley, and ski out to the car on the snow-covered road in the evening. Probably stay in a budget lodge or motel for two nights.

Meeting place: Los Angeles, CA

Contact person initiating the trip: Heiko Knapp
(heiko.knapp@web.de 310 999 9538)

**More private trips to be listed in the
next issue**

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treat. The choice we took tested our log-balancing skills while high above the creek in brush dense enough to make Brier Rabbit have second thoughts about being there. I vividly remember looking back as Cedric was trying to push through the thicket with his skis hung up in branches too thick to bend and thinking that the exposed rock section we avoided may not have been that bad after all.

With coaching tips between us and hard fought individual struggles, we broke into an opening and tried to find that ill-defined traverse back up to the right notch several hundred feet above us. Pro-



*Alvin (or Cedric or Scott) skiing
Mt. Williamson*

gress was slow as we had many false leads that we had to double back around then inch forward. After about 2 ½ hours since leaving the snow, we reached the notch and for the most part knew that it was essentially downhill from there. The temptation on the east side of the notch is to follow the fall line straight down which must be resisted at all costs to avoid the steep sidewalls and impenetrable bush of lower Bairs Creek. After negotiating our way northeast to our undulating ridgeline, we knew we were on a home-run stretch back to our cars and that we would make it before the tall shadows were about to end another day. There was no big hurrah at our return, only a deep, personal satisfaction of having lived our dreams and knowing that in the company of kindred souls, much fun and great goals can be accomplished. Thanks to Scott, Cedric and Andy for sharing the fun.

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eastern aspects above and between Treasure Lakes and Long Lake.

After lunch on the rocks and many picture taking opportunities, we peeled skins and made our way down the ridge. I fell on my first turn in snow that was heavier than it looked! But, a little more cautiously now, and after Ted and Andrew tested the snow with a few turns, we all got a taste of some good spring conditions as we



found the sweet aspects to link our turns. Louisa whooped with every telemark turn. The terrain was magnificent and the scenery unsurpassed in its beauty.

After many whoops and hollers and ski photos, we were back at the southern edge of Long Lake. For the telemark skiers, the smooth frozen lakes proved an advantage as skating with the freeheel was a breeze. Too bad we had a headwind coming out of the north!! At least it cooled us off! Within a few minutes, we sailed to the other end of the lake for a short ski down to Box Lake, another skate across, then Heart Lake, another skate, then Mack Lake, another skate, and finally back to Mosquito Flat campground. Then it was one final slog up and down the bumpy road back to the cars at about 4PM - a 7 hour tour with about 10 miles round trip. Well, this was supposed to be an "Introductory" tour!

Back at camp, we lounged, replenished beer & supplies at Tom's Place where everyone was hanging out, and then started happy hour proceedings around 6:30PM. Everyone brought goodies, wine, and delicious food, and exchanged stories about exotic travel, people's backgrounds, where they lived, and general good camaraderie. The campground strangely became very quiet around 7:30 PM or so - with only the SMS group still out having a good time. All of the fishermen had passed out and gone to sleep early. No more big bonfires or wild parties.

Sunday morning, we decided to pack up early and do a shorter ski trip. Ted and Mike checked out the maps the night before, and thought that we might find continuous

snow west of the parking area and below Half-Moon Pass, as it's known locally. We started skinning through the trees before 9am and did find continuous snow to our sought-after bowls. By about 10:30 am, Ted and Mike started digging snow-pits to test the snow stability. Mike's pit around 11,200' seemed pretty stable, and we had little boot penetration of the snow. Ted's pit, about 200' higher, had some rotten snow next to it so we decided not to ski higher, despite the pretty ski tracks that someone had many a few days earlier.

Everyone yo-yo'd the slopes from about 10:30-noon multiple times, and Greg was able to take a few movies. The snow was gradually getting mushier. We packed up by 12:15 from our lunch-rock spot, and skied through heavy mashed potatoes (with only minor carnage) for a few hundred feet until we hit smooth corn. Then it was a fast ski down through the trees and meadows in perfect conditions where the skis just went where you imagined them to go. Back at the cars, we could admire our tracks in the bowl as we were changing into shorts and t-shirts and exchanging cold drinks. At about 1:15, we looked back up at our tracks and noticed that a small wet slide had come down from a steep slope above our highest skin track, and slid through the first couple of turns that we'd made! We were glad we got off the steep snow when we had. The small avalanche was surprising to see.

When we got home, we reported the small slide to Sue Burak of the Eastern Sierra Avalanche Center. Greg Scarich had some great close-up photos taken from the cars of our ski tracks with the slide, which we sent to Sue. Here is her comment, from the May 1st avalanche report: "Another group had a different take on the snowpack earlier this week, and enjoyed good skiing in the northeast facing bowl to the south of Half Moon Pass up Rock Creek. They noticed "wetter, mushier conditions as the morning went on. When they returned to their car, they noticed a wet sluff avalanche had occurred, sometime between 1-1:15PM that obliterated the upper section of the area they had been skiing." A few days later, in frozen conditions, Sue skied up to our tracks to check things out. She wrote, "I skied up there today to check out the slide. It certainly was big enough to knock someone down." We were glad that we got off the snow early enough to avoid the excitement, although it felt like we'd cut things a little close, despite leaving around 12:15 from a northeast aspect at 11,000.' It just goes to show that avalanche conditions can change rapidly with a melting snowpack on a warm afternoon, even for northerly aspects. On this late April weekend, the snow was still transitioning from winter conditions in some locations to heavy spring conditions on others. Welcome to wild snow!

We had a great, fun and safe spring weekend in the Sierras, and want to thank all the participants - especially

MT. WILLIAMSON

ALVIN WALTER AND CREW

Among the classier Sierra Peaks, Mount Williamson ranks near the top for many. It is the 2nd highest mountain in the Sierra, and it is a unique, solo mass that stands out from the east escarpment, making it appear especially huge and challenging. From Highway 395, there are several distinct drainages and the one that leads most directly to the top is Bairs Creek.

Scott Sigriest, Cedric Ma and Andy Lewicky planned to join me at 6:00 a.m. at the starting point for a 2 day round trip assault on the summit. As things turned out, Andy had commitments on Sunday and he went up a day early to do the 'horns' close by the main peak. Fortunately, he provided me with some very valuable trip report information prior to his departure since there is no trail and the route is not obvious. Scott and Cedric were right on time and we began our ascent high on the north ridge of Bairs Creek with hopes of finding "the notch" without too much difficulty since it was essentially the gateway to our goal. It is very easy to overshoot or undershoot that key passageway and waste valuable time and energy as we had to gain over 8,000 vertical feet through miles of rugged, bushy, undulating, steep and unmarked terrain. Fortunately, there were 3 of us and we spread out enough to increase our odds of hitting the mark. The cliff bands that we had to get through didn't make things easy, as there were several locations that had the famous "notch" look. After closer inspection, we found it without losing too much hard-gained elevation.

At the notch, our location was presently hundreds of feet above Bairs Creek and we had to set a traversing course across a steep scree slope to the bottom of Bairs without losing any more elevation than we absolutely had to. That wasn't easy as trees, bushes, loose rock, more scree and at least one challenging 3rd to 4th class rock section stood in the way. With a substantial expenditure of time and energy, we gained the log jam crossing at the creek and began our ascent again, only to realize that in the last 2 ½ hours we had covered a little over a mile and were now just getting back up to the elevation we were at, at the notch!

Just ahead of us was a fork in the drainage with that patch of evergreens in the right fork that Andy

wrote about that survived the many avalanches that cleared all the surrounding area. Our direction was the left fork where we had seen snow from a perspective further back. A short way up that drainage, we were happy to find firm snow where we were able to put on the crampons and begin to make good vertical progress. Within half an hour, we came to a short waterfall – about 10 feet- and had to climb rocks again to get around it.

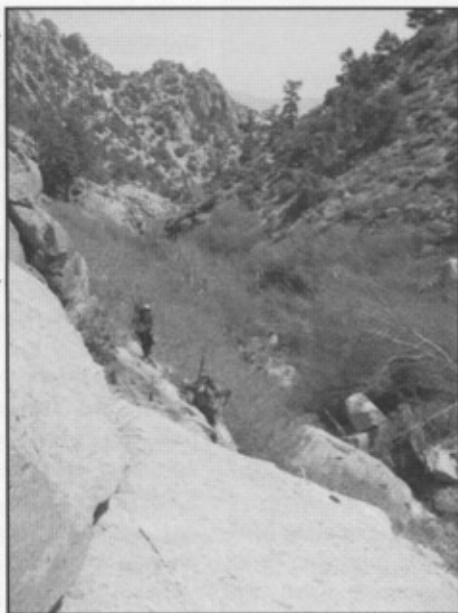
As soon as I got to the continuous ribbon of snow above the waterfall, there was Andy, skiing right toward me. We all enjoyed crossing paths right at that point, as we were able to exchange relevant information about conditions from both directions. Andy informed us that he summited one of the 'horns' and had decent skiing in the steep, upper chute with variable conditions below that. We informed Andy about the precipitous course we just took, then made constructive salutations to each other and were off in our respective directions. Crampons continued to work well for the next 45 minutes, then we were able to break out the skis and skins and slightly pick up the pace. I wanted to make it to 11,000 feet to put us in a good position for the summit attempt.

There were shallow sun-cups to begin with that progressed into 1 to 3 foot soft 'shark fins' as we headed toward a water source to top off all our water bottles. We had seen water pouring down a cliff from some distance off and figured that would be our easiest and best source since it was also

at the elevation we were planning for camp and the remaining daylight was getting short. What we didn't foresee was that the water spilling down the cliff was hitting rocks near the bottom and splashing several feet out causing the immediate access snow to be frozen water-ice – very hard to move or stand on-- and it was going to mean an ice-cold shower to get within reach of the flow that could be used to get the bottles filled. There was no alternative at this point and I had to don my rain parka and stand in the shower as Cedric and I exchanged empty, then full, bottles.

After the water gathering ordeal, we attempted to

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Backcountry bushwacking
Alvin Walter

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head back across the deep shark fins that had now frozen due to shadows we were in for the last hour and had to proceed with extreme caution toward the flatter-looking area where we planned to make camp. We were hoping to find some exposed gravel to camp on but wound up making due with a snow camp in an area of shallower sun cups. Cedric broke out his very efficient Jet Boil stove and we were able to have some hot drinks with dinner before retiring for the night.

Sunday morning we were up at 4 a.m. and, after some quick munchies, Scott and I were starting our crampon ascent up the hourglass couloir. Cedric's prime objective on this adventure was to ski the couloir that wasn't going to ripen until mid to late morning; so, he opted to catch some more sleep and head out later. The snow condition in the couloir was smooth and firm that would make for some great skiing later in the day. At the top of the couloir was a large snowfield that we were able to skin up to a distinct change in aspect where the continuous snow ended and we left our skis. Time was moving on rapidly for us, knowing what we would have to do to return, and yet we had come this far and an hour rock scramble to the summit was just too close not to do.

We found a relatively new register at the summit and made our entries expressing the exhilaration we were experiencing and the views we were enjoying. After taking numerous summit view photos, it was time to head down. Back at our skis after noon, I was concerned about the daylight time we had left to make it all the way back to our cars.

Finally, we were anticipating some of the fun skiing we came here for as we stepped into our bindings and buckled our boots. The gentle south-facing snowfield we started down had substantial sun cups that had softened in the sun, making linked turns challenging but very doable until we hit a flatter stretch at the bottom and made a straight run for the top of the couloir. This is where our huge climbing efforts paid off most as the 1 to 2 inches of corn on this smooth, steep base in the partially shaded east-facing couloir was what we were pumped for. To begin, I initiated 15 to 20 silky smooth turns right off the ridge to a point where I was able to stop and photo Scott carving a new track as he headed in my direction. Cedric was a short way below and caught both Scott and me on film as we swished by him. Some

minor aspect changes, including entering and exiting the shaded area, made for quickened turns and accelerating speed. Scott and I headed to skier's left of the huge monolith that split the couloir into two and waited for Cedric as he worked a smooth line down next to the cliff band.

We regrouped at the significant change in snow texture from smooth and flat to mildly sun cupped. At this point, we enjoyed many more turns working small terrain features to make the best of the softened sun cups and in some cases runnels that were best avoided until we got back to our camp. I was very pleasantly surprised



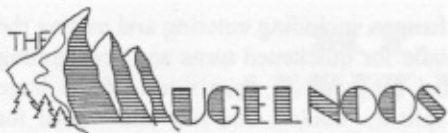
After two days of climbing: this is more like it!

at the good time we were making. After repacking all our gear, we headed to the south side of the great cirque to take advantage of a slight northeast aspect that had smoother and more ski-able snow that had been partially sheltered by the long shadows cast by the substantial height of the nearby terrain.

As we descended, the hard features sticking through the snow along with some of the ones just inches below the snow made for an intuitive approach to connecting the quilted areas of snow into one continuous line until we got down to about the 8,500 foot level where the snow was smooth and nicely consolidated into a narrow and moderately pitched ribbon. Skiing at this point was reduced to side-slipping to control the speed until we reached the point just above a small waterfall where we had crossed path with Andy on the way in. A short hike around the waterfall brought us to three more separate snowfield bands that had some nice terrain features permitting the last of our skiing down to about the 7,200 foot level to include numerous peddle hop and jump turns – a nice way to finish off the skiing section.

The creek crossing, bushes, loose rocks, exposed steep rocks, scree, and return route-finding through the sections that should most appropriately be named the Devil's Navel now confronted us. We were determined to find an alternate way around the steep rock section by staying above Bairs Creek on the south side for at least a few hundred yards beyond the obvious log jam crossing and paid a substantial price for doing so. Several aborted attempts to cross put the pressure on us to make the next attempt go to prevent getting too far down stream in terrain so steep and brush so thick that we would have been forced to spend valuable time and energy in a re-

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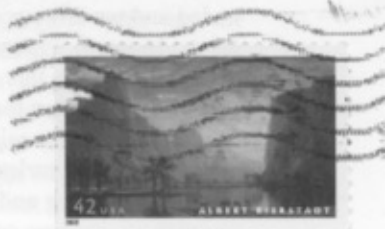
**PRIVATE TRIP REPORTS:
SEND 'EM IN**

"Back in the day" SMS group trips were the norm and massively well attended. Today, with inexpensive and extensive transportation and probably tighter time schedules, a lot of our backcountry skiing is done on private trips. If you take an interesting private trip, let Mugelnoos know about it. It's not much of an effort these days to type it up on the computer and email it and some digital pictures to me. We all need the beta.



LOS ANGELES CA 900

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