



Scott Koepke comin' down the mountain

Thanks, Scott !!

On behalf of the SMS Membership, the Central Committee thanks Scott Koepke for his "extended" tour of service as the previous SMS section chair. Scott stepped up to the plate to keep the section going during a period of transition and attrition. Scott volunteered to extend his service beyond the usual term and continued running the section to in-

sure that the section survived during a time of declining leader and central committee ranks. His efforts kept the section in stable condition for a smooth hand off to our new Chair Jim Garvey and the new Central committee. Scott was on many trips over the last 10 years including Onion Valley, Elderberry Canyon, Rock Creek, White Wing, San Joaquin Peak, etc. We look forward to skiing with Scott on many more SMS trips in the seasons to come.

Randy Lamm

Ski Mountaineering Oak Creek

February 2010

By Alvin Walter

Oak Creek in Southern California is an area that is known about by few and visited by even fewer making it an ideal location to explore for its skiing options following a heavy series of storms. I can't really explain what draws me to such places considering the potential difficulty except to say that it must be something like the dark matter in space that cannot be seen but its existence is known by the effective pull that it has.

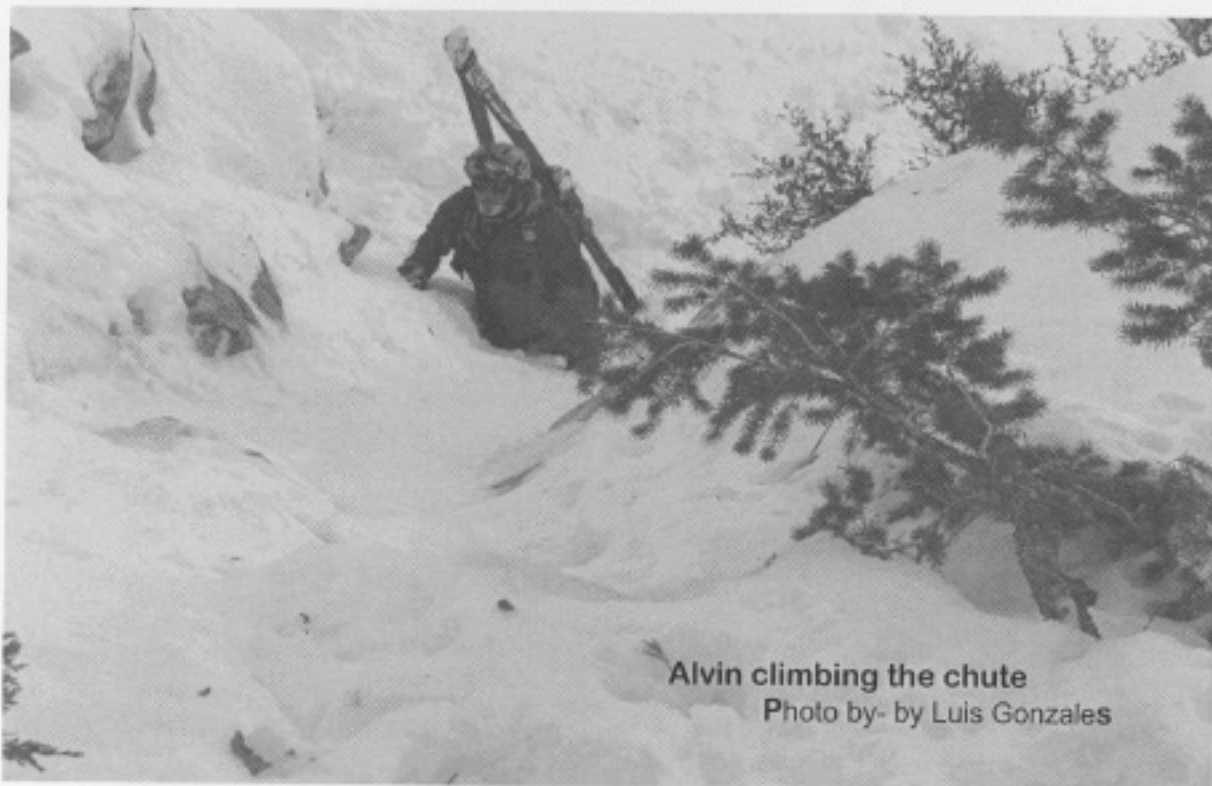
During the summer of

2009, Ellen and I had searched the valley below to establish a suitable starting point for this potential skiing destination and marked it with a waypoint in my GPS when the creek was quite dry. It was pretty apparent from the topo maps of the area with their very tightly spaced lines that the creek was also quite steep which could make for some great skiing in a big snow year. I wanted to make sure there were no impassable waterfalls or headwalls that would hamper a ski ascent and descent; so I proceeded with a solo summertime climb.

Waterfalls and headwalls blocked branches, however, I did find a way around them via a route

that maxed out my 3rd and 4th class climbing skills over an extended vertical stretch that included many loose teetering boulders and much release at the touch scree that would flow down in waves like sloughs of newly fallen dry powder, except that it created a rumble that echoed off the canyon walls thus pumping me full of adrenalin as I watched it continue far below.

At about the 7,500 foot level, I reached a north/south ridge with a much mellow slope that looked like it continued to the top of the east/west ridge and felt that I had surpassed the crux and most interesting part of what would make for a challenging winter climb and ski.



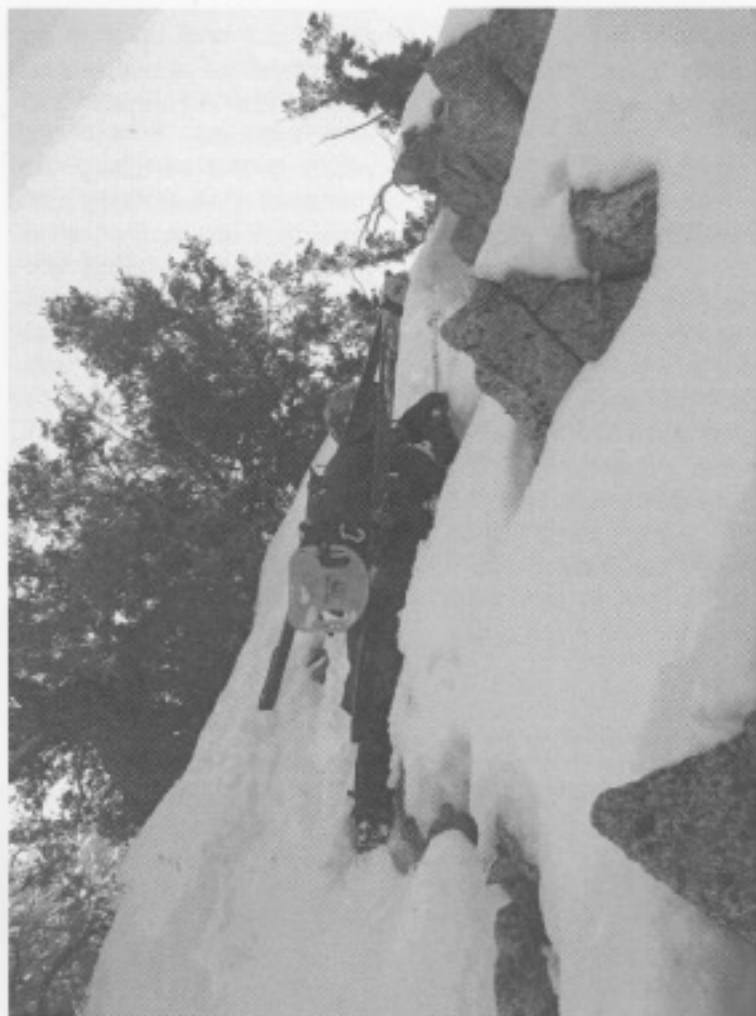
Alvin climbing the chute

Photo by- by Luis Gonzales

In January of this year, the winter storms had performed their magic by blanketing our mountains in at least 7 feet of new snow on the ridges that could amount to well over 15 feet in the canyons and couloirs; so, I invited several friends to join me for a winter exploration. Luis Gonzales agreed to join me. He was eager even after I explained to him all the possible obstacles and hazards that may prevent accomplishing our goal to climb and ski this challenging Southern California canyon for the First Time Ever!

Due to the remoteness, steepness, difficulty of access and requirement for epic snow pack conditions and the right timing, it is extremely unlikely that anyone else would ever consider this route when there are so many other, easier options – not to mention the fact that well over 30 years of skiing Southern California backcountry and a burning desire to expand future options were significant driving forces.

The lower end of the creek didn't have quite the depth of snow that I was hoping for; however, there was enough to start out skinning, albeit somewhat prudently to avoid breaking through to the creek. We proceeded up a number of steep pitches on a solid



Alvin at an impasse

Photo by- by Luis Gonzales

base with 4 to 6 inches of new snow until we reached a section that was too steep and narrow where we packed our skis and booted up to the next steeper section.

At that point, there was only a very narrow -- 3 foot wide -- steep, icy section about 50 feet in height straight in front of us. It was now crampon time and Luis opted to take the lead with his ice climbing axe that he was able to hammer in

overhead for maximum grip since we weren't tying off with protection and a fall here could have had serious consequences. I attempted to follow with my self arrest poles and had to back off as they don't have the weight or sharpness to bite in the water ice I was trying to ascend. As we approached this buttress of rock and ice, I noticed another possible snow line if I dropped down some and moved more to climbers'

left. Sure enough, it was a palatable pitch that was make-able with my less technical equipment and we continued up.

We followed the left side of the creek a little too far and got out on a ridge where we again came to an impasse that we spent a significant amount of time trying to solve in a couple possible directions. The main problem was that the snow here was deep granular that was too unstable to rely on as a step considering the huge exposure.

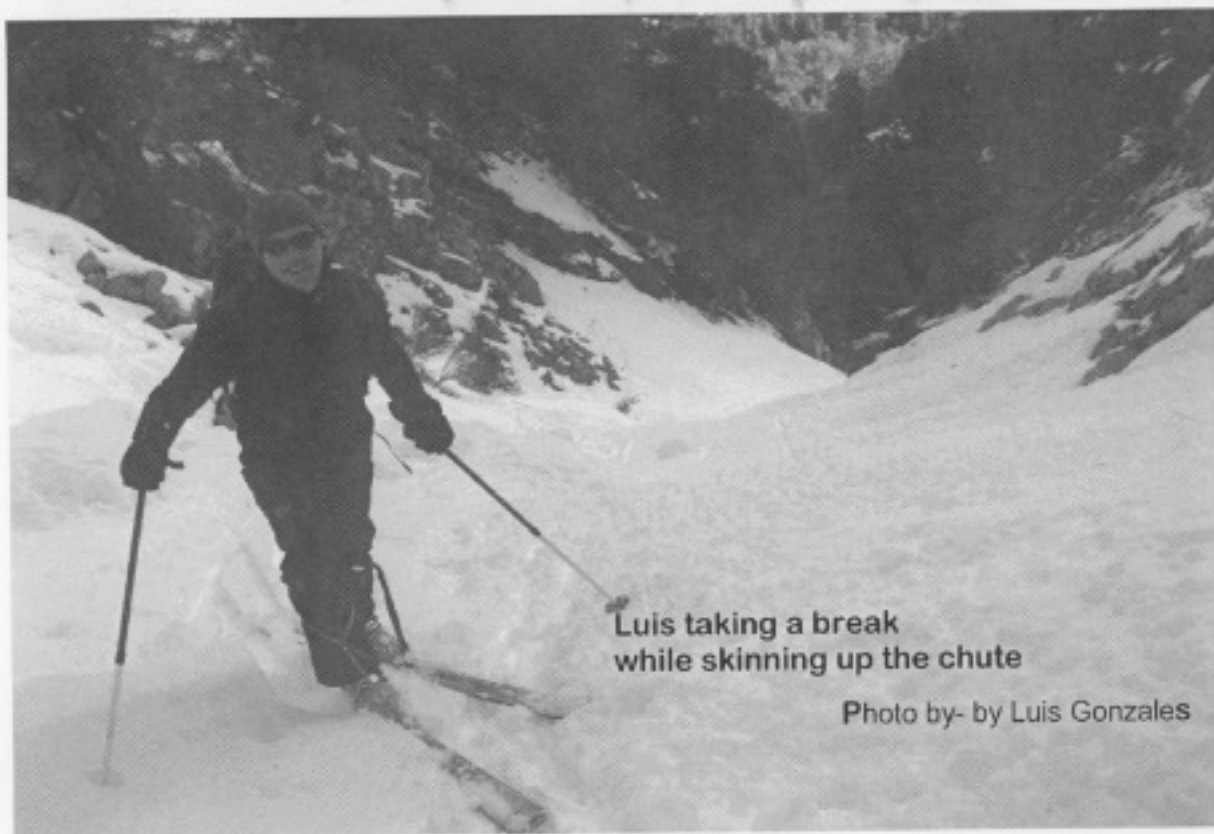
Down climbing to another approach wasn't too appealing just yet, so I dug right in -- literally -- and bur-

rowed a tunnel up through a cornice-like structure and a large bush to surpass this one impasse. Not too much further vertically, we came up against more barriers that we pushed to a point where we found access to a small chute where we could drop back into the main gully with minimum elevation loss.

Things went much better now that we were able to kick steps straight up. Granted it was still a steep 40 plus degrees -- but we were beginning to figuratively see light at the end of the proverbial tunnel and it wasn't too long before we made the north/south ridgeline that was skiable to the top. The only problem now

is that it was getting late and the discussion we had about making it to the top and skiing down another chute that I knew was good to avoid dealing with the very steep icy sections below became a moot point -- we didn't have the time.

We were really motivated to ski this chute we just came up as the snow conditions were for the most part excellent -- it was powder that was a bit heavy on icy sections underneath and quite steep but very doable even though it likely would slough where the sun softened it. We took a break while admiring the scenery, then peeled the skins, tightened the buckles and stepped into the bind-



Luis taking a break while skinning up the chute

Photo by- by Luis Gonzales

ings. It was time to head down!

The mellow powder ridge-line eased us right into the top of the steep chute – it was a great start! The skiable section was narrow but turning in these powder conditions just felt really good. We were taking our time and enjoying every moment of the ski. There was a very steep icy runnel that we cramponed up that was less than a ski length wide that funneled debris from above. Fortunately we were able to stay high on the canyon wall to ski around it and savor many more turns before we came back to that ice wall where we had to down climb with

crampons.

That was a small price to pay for the fun we were having in a unique First Ever descent past globular clusters of snowballs that were natural avy debris in places and our own creation in others.

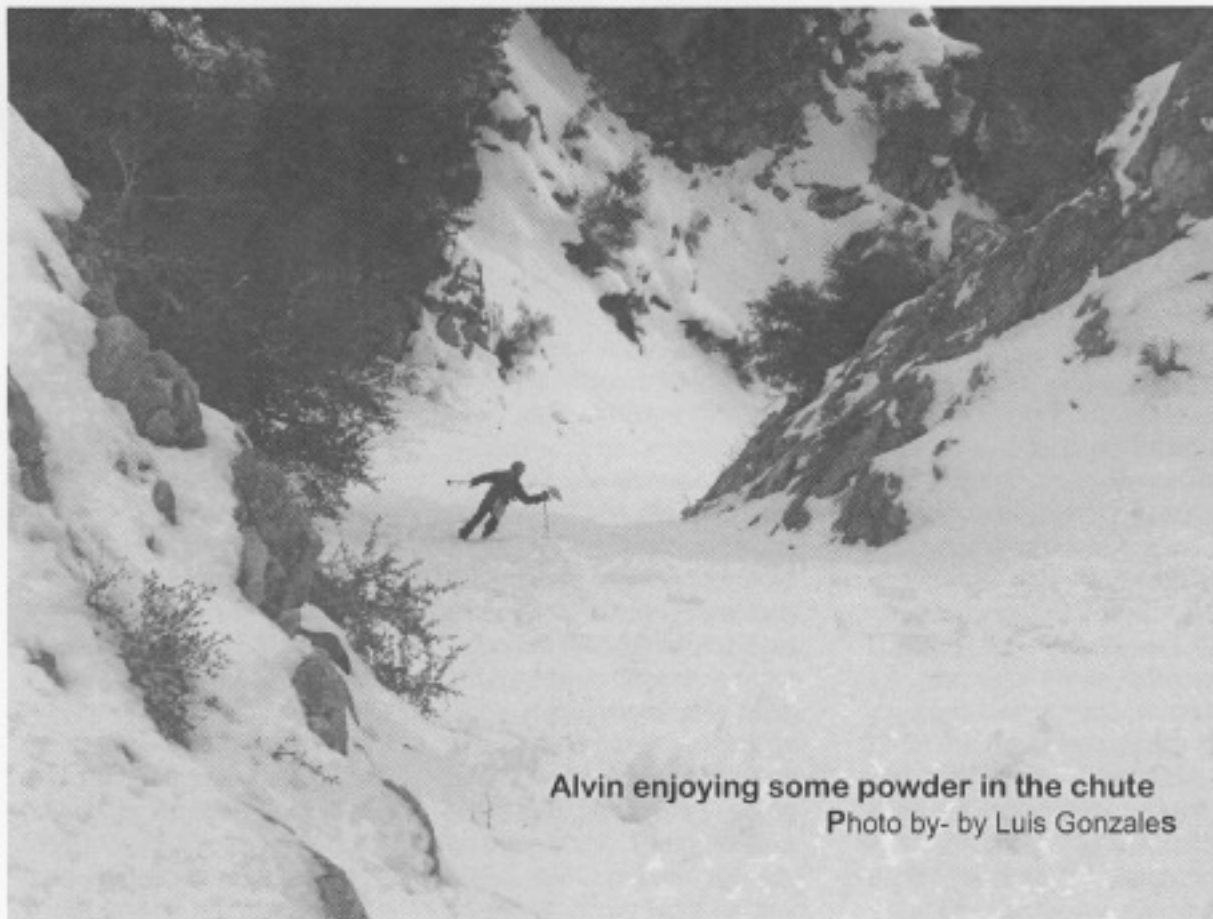
We conservatively down climbed about another couple hundred vertical feet past another icy exposed section until we came to the last of our uphill skin tracks where we removed the crampons and laid down some more powder tracks until we reached a large bouldering section that we down climbed and

booted the rest of the way back to where Ellen met us with

Congratulations to Luis for accomplishing our goal of doing a First Ski Descent!

To celebrate, we went to a local Mexican Eatery with local live music and toasted to the Spirit of Adventure that can make one feel so fully *Alive*!

May we all have these kinds of experiences over and over!



Alvin enjoying some powder in the chute
Photo by- by Luis Gonzales

Ski Mountaineering In Washington

October 2009

By Alvin Walter

At the end of September there is very little snow or ice in California and one has to head north and to the highest elevations in Washington near the Canadian border to encounter such pleasantries. Mount Baker was my choice and I was ready to give it another try. Weather in Washington is fickle; however, the forecast for the first two days was looking good.

I flew to Seattle and rented a car to drive to the Coleman Glacier trailhead. Conditions indicated it would be a significant hike to the glacier where skiing would be very marginal at best. So, I left my skis in the car as my prime objective now was to make the summit.

On the ice, my crampons and self-arrest poles were immediately mandatory as the ice was hard and the crevasses started right at the edge. I proceeded through a small crevasse field and across many small streams on the surface of the ice to a smoother ice ridge, where I had a great view of the summit and the route I would have to take through the glaciated terrain.

After dropping down a few hundred feet to circumvent some crevasses, I proceeded up to an area below some black cliffs at

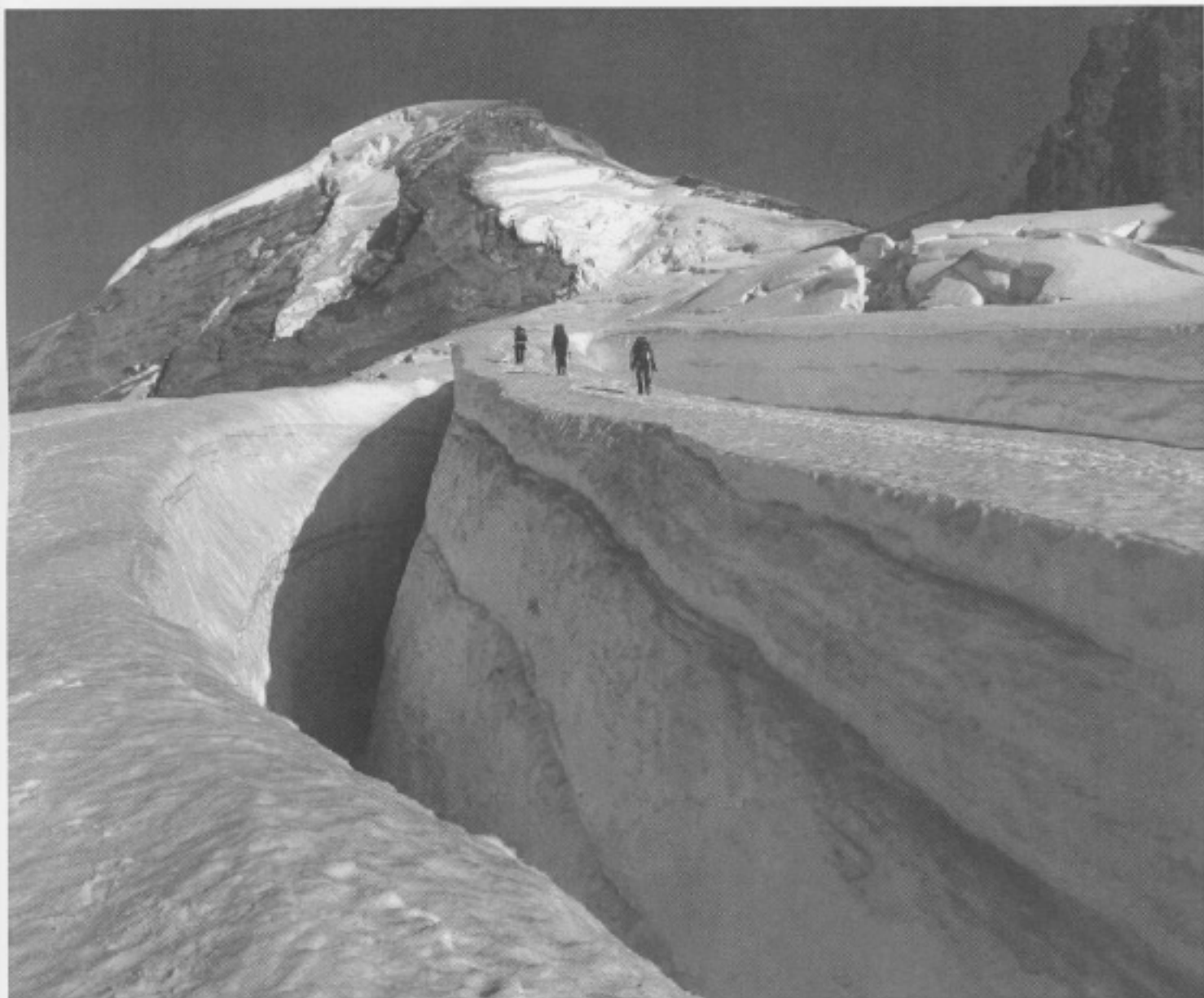
about 7,000 feet, looking for a campsite. The strewn rock debris on the ice made me decide to move toward the middle of the glacier. The crevasses I went around next were huge to say the least, like 30 +/- feet wide, hundreds of feet deep, parallel to each other, and with narrow connecting bridges between them that I had to negotiate. I saw a guide with two roped-up clients checking this area out for training purposes and during a brief conversation as they were headed down found that I was the only person at this elevation or above.

About a few hundred vertical feet later at the end of an old filled-in crevasse with a small 30 foot looking serac above it at about 7,600 feet, I found a flat spot just big enough for my tent and set up camp after placing an ice screw to anchor everything just in case some wind picked up.

The view in the evening and at night with the brilliant starlit sky while looking out over the glacier was awesome. A very satisfying dinner and a good night's rest put me in a very good mental state. The morning was clear and calm with reasonable prospects for making the summit since I was feeling strong, had less than 3,000 vertical feet to go, and was

past what I believed to be the worst glacial obstacles. The only drawback was the forecast for a significant weather system to move in that afternoon or evening. As I gained elevation, I kept looking to the west for signs that the weather system was approaching and didn't see much change right away even though I was starting to feel some strong wind gusts. I also had monitored my altimeter from the evening before and noted I gained 300 vertical feet without going anywhere indicating a significant barometric pressure drop that is the forerunner of a weather system.

Now, I was in a tough dilemma and had to make some mental calculations about how long it would take me to summit and get back down before more wind and clouds could overtake me. I also had to consider that I didn't have much experience with the weather in this area and didn't know if it would come in very quickly or from what direction. The other thought bearing heavily on my mind was the fact that I didn't want to get caught in that last major crevasse field in a white-out as it was risky enough in perfect conditions. The fact that no one else was above me or even approaching my elevation on such a reputable and popu-



lar mountain definitely factored in. So, I stopped for an early break at about the 8,900 foot level to put it all together and realized that pushing for the summit was not the right thing to do at this time. Granted – there was a lot of time, effort, travel, and expense to get here; but if I went down, I still had a great adventure and may get to try this mountain again. I didn't have to think of any alternatives as this mountain is known to have the world's

record for the most snowfall ever measured and it essentially creates its own weather due to its size, elevation and latitude.

At camp, I repacked and headed back close to the route I came in on, except that I was higher along a ridge and did a couple of little peaklets along the way. The wind was ripping at 60+ MPH since I had to go prone during the gusts to keep from being blown down. When I looked back up to where I had been,

there were spectacular ever-moving and changing lenticular clouds over the summit that came from the opposite side of the mountain compared to what I expected and eventually dropped down below my camp level. I can reasonably estimate those summit winds to be in the 80 to 100 MPH range that vertically no one could overcome. The lower part of the mountain remained decent weather wise for the rest of the day compared to the

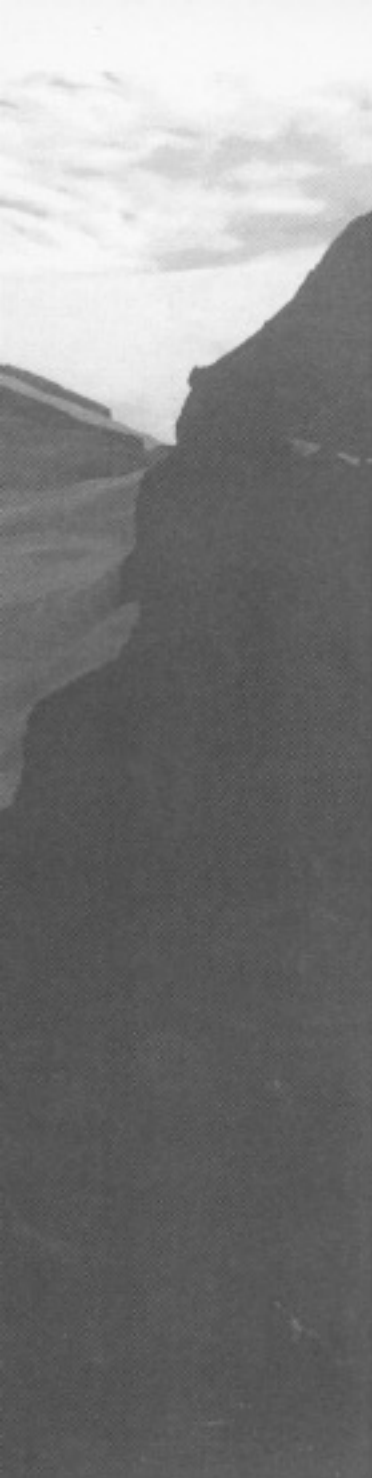


top.

That night things changed drastically as the snow level came down to 3,000 feet and the accumulation grew to at least 6 inches at 5,000 feet. For the next 3 days it continued to snow and I was set for powder ski mountaineering

including summiting Winchester Peak very near Mount Baker in over a foot of new powder that enabled me to set a new personal record number of ski mountaineering days in one season that went into September and the first day of October.

A willingness to be flexible and travel long distances can make for some really great and extended climbing and ski mountaineering seasons. Hope yours was as long and as fun as mine.



Mountain photo
by Alvin Waller



Alvin Waller on Mount Baldy after adventuring up the North Fork of Lytle Creek and then up the backside of Harwood on an SMS outing that he led on April 25, 2009.

Photo by Kevin

Congratulations, Alvin, on your Outings Service Award !!

The Angeles Chapter of the Sierra Club honored a number of its members at the Annual Awards Banquet on May 2, 2010. At that event, an Outings Service Award was bestowed on Alvin Waller in special recognition for the noteworthy service he has rendered leading intrepid ski mountaineers into the winter wilds.

Prior to the event, one of the Club's publications stated:

"This is not the event you want to miss out on!"

Later, a ski mountaineer wrote in an email:

I think the dinner was May 2nd. That day, I'd gone to try to ski San Geronio with friends. It was too windy & icy to ski, though. But we did run into Ellen & Alvin. The awards thing was that nite. No one had informed Alvin that he'd gotten the award, so of course he didn't go. It was just a usual camp & ski Geronio wknd. for him. I learned from Jim about the award dinner a couple days later.

Another ski mountaineer, emailed:

I learned about it the day of the awards dinner, which was announced in the Sierra Club newspaper, The Southern Sierran.

Unfortunately, many ski mountaineers including Alvin and his wife, Ellen, missed the banquet. Many of us probably prefer mountains to banquets, but an event to honor Alvin for his service is something many of us would have participated in — had we only known.

In a later email, Alvin wrote:

To all who nominated me to receive an Outings Award Certificate, I am truly honored. Thank You!

To that, *The Noos* would like to respond:

Thank you, Alvin!!

You truly deserve the Outings Service Award.

You also deserve an award for the many trip reports and photos you've contributed to *The Noos*.

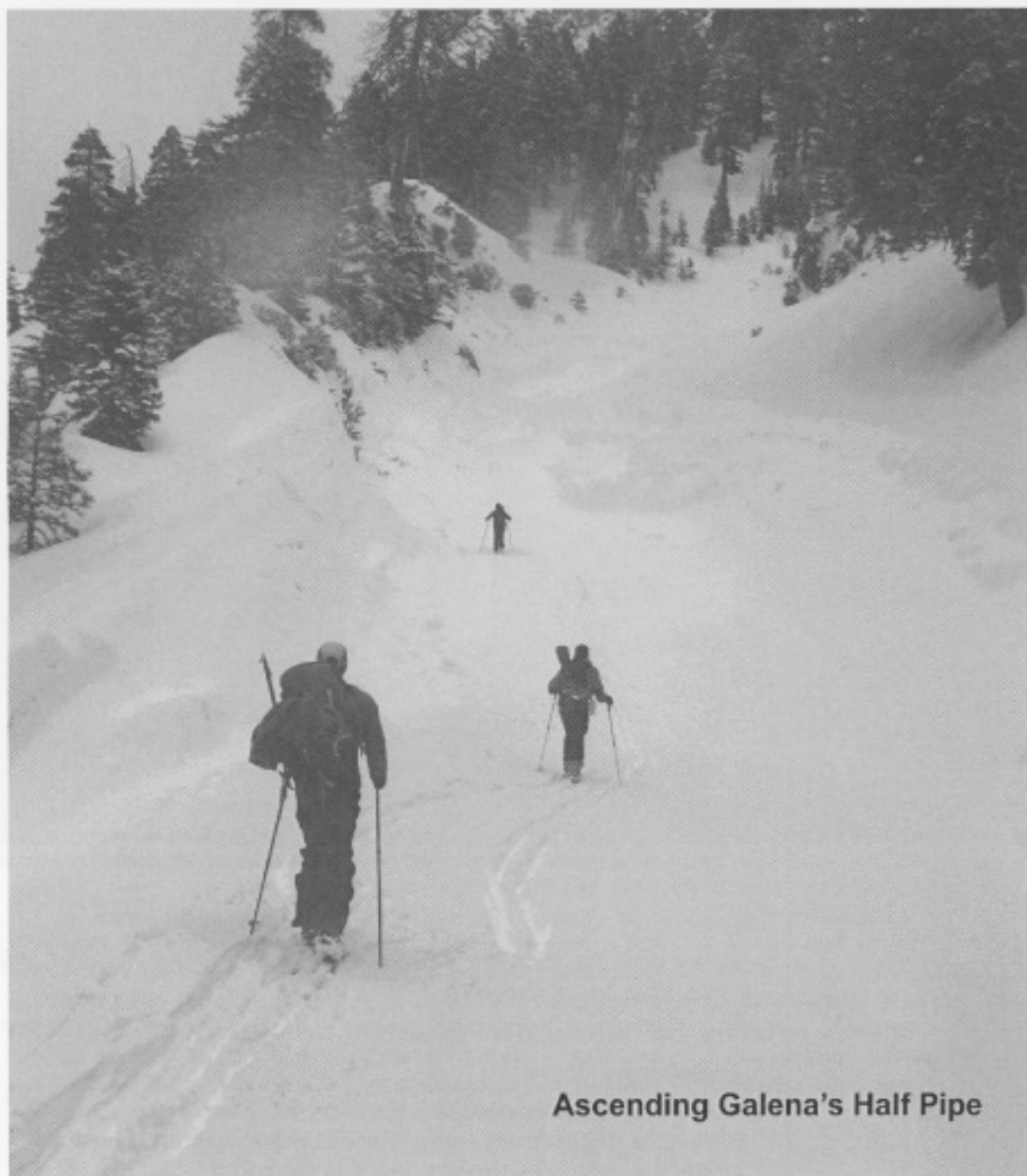
On behalf of all the Ski Mountaineers, thank you again for your service, dedication and friendship.

Galena Chute — March 2010

by Alvin Walter

Living near the ocean at a latitude of about 33 degrees North that represents San Diego in Southern California, it is very hard for most people to imagine epic, long, steep,

snow-filled couloirs just a little over a hundred miles away. However, in an El Nino year, when the snow pack reaches record levels and the temperature remains cool, it is time to explore those chutes that have been on the radar waiting for just the right time. Galena was one of many that deserved to be checked out and I am one who



Ascending Galena's Half Pipe

is more than happy to be the first on our high point prior to the white-out ready for the descent

The approach is via a gently sloped, mogully, snow-filled creek that starts right from the end of the road. After approximately three miles of skiing up this valley past a Sierra-quality forest of mature cedar, pine and fir trees that are naturally spaced for excellent tree skiing, the goal destination continues off to the south where the route conspicuously heads up. Switchbacks and raised heel-lifters were quickly the way to continue ascending once the slope got over 30 degrees. Snow conditions were superb with about 6 inches of new, untouched powder on a reasonably solid base with only small amounts of avalanche debris from some of the steep connecting branch chutes. On this particular explore, I found several branches that headed higher and warranted further exploring when more time would permit seeking the ridges and peaks.

In the meantime, I was standing high on a steep powder chute and was looking forward to some fun. There were various ridges in the middle and sides of my new couloir that collected deeper

pockets of powder that I floated, blasted and flew through for a very exhilarating non-stop powder run while attempting to film with a helmet-mounted video camera. At the bottom, I paused to look up and admire what I came down and where I was standing and just feel a special kind of joy that only places and times like these can produce.

I had a glorious, mogully three mile run back to my car while I contemplated the next explore up Galena Chute to the ridges and ultimately the top, which partially came to be two weeks later. Cory and Luis joined me to give it a go and the chute was different this time. When we came up the gentle creek, we found a huge change in the terrain at the base of the chute. We climbed up about 30 feet to the top of this new 'formation' to see that the lower end of the chute looked like a snowboarder's freshly carved half-pipe with walls about 10 feet tall. What happened is that the snow I skied on two weeks before had spontaneously released from further up during warm, mid-week weather and carved this deep half-pipe leaving a large new glacier-looking bench that we were now standing on. It was a very impressive change.



Luis on our high point prior to the white-out



Cory ready for the descent

The advantage to the new situation was that we felt the snow had now stabilized itself even with the foot of new powder and we proceeded above and beyond my last high point on a much steeper slope to a bump on a north-south ridge where we stopped to admire the view and take a break. It was a breathtaking spot that looked straight down a couple thousand feet to the gentle creek and also looked up to another chute that likely would continue to the high, east-west ridge and the peak. We were there for only minutes when the clouds came in and obstructed our view, then totally engulfed us in a virtual white-out that made us decide to head lower rather than continue to the top as planned.

The snow conditions were very good with new powder reasonably well bonded to the steep, icy layer underneath.

We took turns making turns so that only one skier was in an exposed position at any one time. The very poor, whited-out visibility that eliminated contrast made for some challenging skiing simply because we couldn't see. There were points further down where we each bounced off the half-pipe walls we couldn't see and one point where I dropped off at least a 3 foot plus fracture crown from the previous release.

All in all, we did have fun in the steeps and visibility did clear up by the time we got down to the gentle creek where we had a blast skiing those moguls back to the trailhead where we all had contagious smiles from another day well-lived in the mountains.





The Serpent and Cienaga 4-24-10

More Variations and Firsts!

On this day a couple other skiers went with me up Cienaga Creek and then down the west side of the Serpent in very good conditions. After they had enough, I climbed and skied Cienaga's straight line – solo – that was undoubtedly a First Ski Descent!

— Alvin Walter



Remembering Lloyd Balsam

1925-2010

by Bob Cates

Chair, Angeles Chapter History Committee

(Reprinted from the "Southern Sierran")

Lloyd Balsam, a valued, long-term member of the Sierra Club, passed away on May 6 of this year at the age of eighty-five. He led his first Sierra Club outing, a climb of Telescope Peak, sponsored by the Desert Peaks Section, in May of 1948. Over the years that followed, besides the Desert Peaks Section, he went on to lead outings for the Local Hikes Committee, the Camping Committee, and the Ski Mountaineers Section. Lloyd also served the Angeles Chapter in many administrative functions: his name appeared on no less than eleven chapter entities. These included the Schedule Committee, Southern Sierran Committee, San Antonio Hut, Membership Committee, Conservation Committee, Education Committee, the West Los Angeles Group, Chapter Nominating Committee, and of course his favorites, the Desert Peaks Section (which he chaired in 1953) and the Ski Mountaineers Section (which he chaired in 1953-54). The Desert Peaks Section (DPS) was launched as a concept by Chester Versteeg in 1941, but languished in the hiatus of World War II until formalized as a Section in 1946. Only a year later we find Lloyd obtaining Emblem Status by virtue of climbing all seven of the new Section's Emblem Peaks.

In addition to chairing the DPS, Lloyd served the Section in other important capacities: Treasurer, Secretary, Vice Chair, and in arranging banquets, revising by-laws, and of course as a leader extraordinaire. In 1952 he led one of the initial DPS forays into the Sierra Nevada, a climb of The Thumb, thus participating as a 'midwife' in the delivery of a newborn climbing entity, the Sierra Peaks Section just three years later in 1955.

Lloyd also 'discovered' 11,160-foot Glass Mountain in northern Inyo County, being the first Desert Peaker to schedule a climb of this beautiful mountain of volcanic obsidian glass. So popular had Lloyd's outings become that he attracted 55 participants on his exploratory climb of that peak over Labor Day Weekend of 1954.



Lloyd Balsam

"racing" at the age of 59 at the SMS Ski Race (part of the SMS 50th Anniversary celebration) held at Snow Summit on March 3, 1984.

Photo by Mark Goebel

Another life-long passion of Lloyd's was skiing, as evidenced by his participation in the Angeles Chapter's Ski Mountaineers Section (SMS), an organization he chaired in 1953-54. He further assisted the SMS by serving on the San Antonio Ski Hut Committee from 1948 through 1954, acting as Ski Hut Manager for five of those seven years.

Lloyd's Sierra Club career, at least on paper, became subsumed in the mid-1950s by the responsibilities of raising a family and by his demanding vocation as a systems engineer for Northrop, however he never lost interest in his Sierra Club roots. According to Mark Goebel, "During 1979 and 1980, a period of difficult transition and change for the SMS, Lloyd stepped briefly back into active service for the Section. He stood up for proposed changes to the way Section elections were held, and outings planned. He served on an elections committee, and greatly assisted in re-writing of the Section's bylaws and obtaining approval from the Chapter. For that period of time he was a guiding light that enabled the SMS to continue forward with new energy."

In his later years Lloyd reflected back on his glory days as a pioneering Desert Peaker, recalling that, "We developed and honed our desert competence and, better yet, firmed lasting friendships which are active and rewarding to this day."

Skin and ski the web (or surf it, if you're waiting for some snow), but make your way to the adventure of the SMS webpage:

<http://angeles.sierraclub.org/skim/>

The Ski Mountaineers' link to upcoming trips and the latest "noos."

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