



February, 1996

Peak Climbing Section, Loma Prieta Chapter, Sierra Club

Vol. 29, No. 2

## Next Meeting

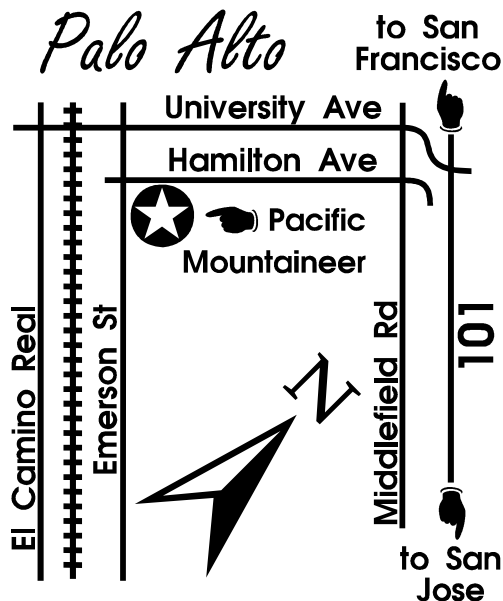
**Program:** Hult, Who Goes There?!

**Date:** Tuesday 13 Feb 1996

**Time:** 7:30 pm

**Location:** Pacific Mountaineer  
200 Hamilton Avenue, Palo Alto

Climb Killimanjaro and go on an East African Safari with Tim Hult



## Trip Planning Meeting

Another winter is upon us, which means its almost time to apply for permits for this summers climbing season. There will be a trip planning meeting one week after the next PCS meeting to get organized for summer 1996 climbing trips. Details inside!

## Memories of Mountain Mishaps

What has been your "closest shave" in the mountains? For one PCS member, it started with the muffled crack of a slab avalanche; for two others, it started with the sharp crack of a loose rock bounding down from above; for others, it's desperately arresting a fall at the brink of a cliff-using either metal or vegetable assistance. And for one it was failing to prevent such a fall-and surviving. Their first-hand accounts follow.

I'm continuing my project to quiz list members for interesting anecdotes that I can compile into good articles for the Scree newsletter. The next topic is:

*"Describe your most memorable wildlife encounter."*

These could be funny or scary stories about bears, rodents from hell, snakes-you name it. Please keep it to a paragraph or two and e-mail your account to me:

- Butch Suits <bsuits@lmsc.lockheed.com>

### MMM1: Dashing Through the Snow

Butch Suits: Despite obvious signs of instability, we ski the slope anyway. My friend Tim and I had dumped our backpacks after skiing all day through two feet of fresh powder in the Tetons. It was glorious snow, but twice I had heard the "whumpf" of a snow layer collapsing under my skis.

Tim goes first and carves the first 150 feet of the slope, then waits next to a tree. Intimidated by the steep bulge at the top, I cut one turn. As I set my skis to stop, I hear a muffled crack. Still in motion, I guess that I am caught in a sluff. Wrong. I am not stopping. I glance up and watch the snow moving away from a 2-foot crown face, the unmistakable sign of a slab avalanche. "You idiot," I thought, "you knew better than to be here." I slide on my butt, loose snow boiling around my waist. The sensation is no worse than if I were performing a sitting glissade, but I let go of my ski poles in case I have to swim. After about 200 feet, the snow slows down as it hits a lower-angled bench. I come to a stop on top of the debris. Beyond the bulge, I watch the tongue of the avalanche still pouring into the valley below. I am relieved by my good luck. But where is Tim?

(continued)

He is buried. But after a few moments, a dark figure appears as if by magic from the debris about 100 yards below me. "You maniac, you almost killed me!" the figure yells. He's right. I'm glad to hear his voice. I walk down to meet him, the debris under my feet creaking ominously as it continues to settle.

Tim is unhurt, but had been "Maytagged" by the vortex of snow. The sprung bails of his skis and his snowy clothing are the only signs of the violence he has endured. He tells me how he came to rest with his head near the snow level and, incredibly, how he had been able to reach the shovel on his backpack and dig himself out-it was definitely a "soft slab" avalanche. Neither of us have ski poles; they're buried under the snow. As we slog around the hill to our tents-and the stunned response of our companions-I feel embarrassed about the foolish thing I have done. Despite my knowledge of avalanche safety, I had been in denial about the unsafe conditions. I had wanted to ski. Next time I will pay more attention when my intuition tells me: "You shouldn't be here."

### **MMM2: When Mountains Move-Rogers Peak**

Kelly Maas: We were coming off the loose middle slopes and were getting onto the better lower slopes. The last person, descending with reasonable care, dislodged a piece of granite the size of a Maytag about 30 feet above me. There was no need to yell "ROCK!" I immediately sensed something happening and turned around to look. I had to wait until the boulder had taken a couple of bounces before I could know which way to jump. It then took me a fraction of a second to cover the 10 feet of unstable rock to get out of harms way. I even avoided being hit by any of the smaller associated rocks, but I'll never forget the distinct smell of pulverized granite. Further down the slope was Jim Ramaker who also had to make some quick moves to safety.

Jim Ramaker: I looked up and saw a boulder about the size of a washing machine tumbling down the slope straight toward me. The boulder was so big it started dislodging many other smaller rocks. I had about three seconds to save my life. I scampered a few yards to the right over the rugged, loose slope, and dove behind a huge boulder with an overhang on the downhill side. The tumbling boulder and the rocks it had dislodged thundered past a few yards away. Had that overhanging boulder not been there, I almost certainly would have been hit by something.

### **MMM3: Saved By the Scrax\* on Mt. Abbott**

\*Scrax = Scree-Ax

Steve Eckert: We missed the green wall that Aaron so well described in his more recent trip report, and went up loose rock to a headwall. After turning around, we realized the danger of climbing loose class 2-3 with a few inches of early season snow on top. It was very slick, and hard to

judge how stable a rock was without being able to see the small features around it.

I felt a foothold give way, and shifted weight to a handhold. That gave out also. Then the other handhold pulled loose. I was carrying an ice ax over my shoulder, and while sliding managed to get into arrest position ON SCREE. The pick grabbed and I stopped with my feet over the edge. No kidding. I hung there a few minutes and carefully scrambled back into the world of the living.

### **MMM4: It Pays to Hug a Tree**

Peter Maxwell: My closest call came in Australia, while climbing out of a canyon after having negotiated the river at the bottom (not in a raft, but by swimming, boulder hopping and rappelling where necessary). We were on a use trail on fairly steeply sloping ground (around 35 degrees) and I was paying too much attention to talking and not enough to where I put my feet.

My right foot stepped off the trail and the next I knew I was sliding down the slope to a vertical cliff face about 20' down the slope. Lucky for me I was able to lunge out and wrap my arms around a small tree, after having torn up my fingernails trying to dig my fingers in to slow me down. A fall down the 100' cliff onto the rocks on the floor of the canyon would probably have resulted in death, or serious injury at best. That was definitely a close call.

### **MMM5: Kids Don't Try This at Home (Faceplant off Mt. Lamarck)**

David Ress: On Sunday, we hiked up to Lamarck Col and thence to the summit. Here, an electrical storm began. Not wanting to be exposed to lightning hazard during the long flat walk back down the summit plateau, I chose to descend the north face of the peak. Approximately 600' down, we encountered steep cliffs broken by ledges. While attempting to lower myself down on a rock horn, I slipped on the slush-covered rock, falling approximately 45' and landing on my head. I sustained an open skull fracture, shattered my maxillofacial bones, and broke a small bone in my hand. My friend also fell while descending, but managed to catch himself and escaped serious harm.

Despite my injuries, I was able to descend for about half an hour, gave my friend detailed instructions on how get help, then settled down to the most uncomfortable night in the mountains I have ever endured. It snowed intermittently throughout the night and was unseasonably frosty. At first light, I descended to the highest of the unnamed lakes south of Mt. Goethe, where I was evacuated by helicopter. An exhausting 8 hour surgery was necessary reassemble my facial bones, but the skull fracture required no treatment.

I have reflected a great deal on this accident as regards its causes and lessons. As in Jack London's story, "To Build a Fire", I made no one heinous error that led to my fall, but

rather put myself, and my friend, in increasingly dangerous straits by making a sequence of small errors, including: not getting enough sleep, not getting an early enough start, not turning back when the weather deteriorated, attempting to descend wet semi-technical rock without a rope, and not wearing a helmet. Safety in the mountains is not an absolute quantity, but rather exists as a margin of prevention against errors and unpredictable hazards. When the margin is reduced too far, some kind of an accident becomes probable.

### **MMM6: Bivy on the Beach**

Eugene N. Miya: Found this wonderful description of a forced bivvy by Linus Pauling on a cliff above his ranch at Big Sur. While not a climb, technically, it shows improvising cover, [and] keeping awake. [Taken from] Linus Pauling: A Life in Science and Politics, by Ted and Ben Goertzel.

“Pauling scooped out a hollow on the narrow ledge and covered himself with a big map he carried in his pocket. He dared not sleep because of the cold. He counted in French and German and Italian to keep himself awake; he exercised as he lay in his narrow quarters. He told the unheeding ocean about the nature of the chemical bond. When the stars came out, he sighted the end of his walking stick and tried to tell time by the constellations. He recited the periodic table of the elements. He grew more and more anxious, not for himself, since he knew he would eventually be found, but for Ava Helen, whom he could not tell that he was uncomfortable, but unharmed. He was chagrined by his predicament....”

### **Ramaker’s Rules for Reducing Rockfall**

I think this [Rogers Peak] incident [from Butch’s Mountain Mishaps article] exemplifies the most common and most dangerous hazard on PCS trips (rockfall caused by others in the group). I’ve seen at least three other close calls (albeit with smaller rocks), and seen one person get hit on the head hard enough to draw blood. A few rules to prevent this kind of rockfall (others can probably add to or improve on these rules):

1. When climbing in a group, try if possible to either spread out horizontally on the slope, or stay very close together vertically (so falling rocks don't have time to gather speed).
2. When climbing in a group, try not to climb directly above or directly below anyone else.
3. If you see someone else knock a rock loose, yell "ROCK!!" Don't wait for the perpetrator to yell—in my case, he said nothing.
4. If you knock a rock loose yourself, don't stay silent in an attempt to protect your reputation, and hope that someone

will call it out and be blamed instead of you. We can't place our reputations above the safety of our teammates.

5. On loose terrain (or always), climb carefully and delicately. Try to climb so that you don't knock anything loose, not even pebbles. If someone in the group is a clumsy climber, ask them to ascend LAST and descend FIRST.

6. If you know the rock is going to be loose, bring a helmet.

– Jim Ramaker

## **PCS Leader List**

<b>NAME</b>	<b>CLASS</b>	<b>EXPIRATION</b>
Benham, Debbie	2	Mar 98 ?
Bulger, Debbie	3	Feb 97 ?
Caldwell, Dave	3 + winter	Nov 97
Crawley, Roger	3	Jun 96 ?
Dyall, Palmer	3 + winter	Feb 98 ?
Eckert, Steve	3 + winter	Mar 97
? Firth, Sheldon	2	Jun 97
Flinn, John	4 + winter	Jul 95 EXP
? Ford, Noreen	2	Mar 97
Gaillard, Anne	2	Oct 97
Ingvolstad, John	3	May 96
? Ingvolstad, Kate	2	Sep 95
Isherwood, Bill	4 + winter	Jun 95 EXP
Macintosh, Chris	3 + winter	Aug 96 ?
Magliocco, Cecil	3	Mar 97 ?
Maas, Kelly	3 + winter	Aug 97 ?
Maxwell, Peter	3	Dec 95 EXP
Ottenburg, Marj	2	Feb 98 ?
Ramaker, Jim	3	Apr 96
? Rau, Vreni	2	Jun 95 EXP
? Schuman, Aaron	3	Feb 97
Sefchik, Laura	2	Feb 98 ?
Simpson, Richard	2 + winter	Mar 96 ?
? Stewart, Anita	1	Feb 97
Storkman, Warren	2	Mar 97
Suits, Butch	3 + winter	Nov 97
Suzuki, Bob	3	Mar 98
? Van Gordon, George	3	Jan 96 EXP
Wallace, Bob	3	Feb 98
Wiedman, Kai	4 + winter	Mar 98 ?
Wilsey, Tawna	2	Feb 95 EXP
? Yager, Chris	4 + winter	Mar 97

The names with ? marks in front of them I have not received current applications for. The names with ? marks after the first aid card I have not received confirmation of their training. If you fall into either of these categories, please contact me.

– Tim Hult

## Trip Planning Meeting

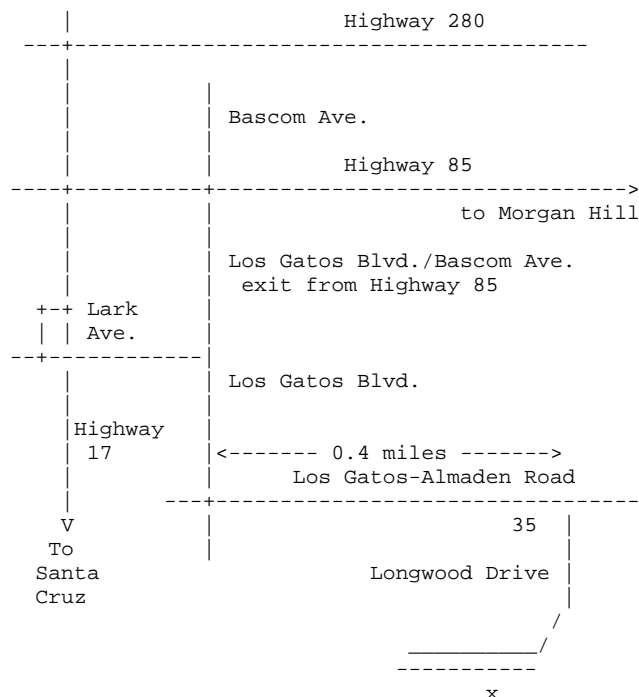
Another winter is upon us, which means its almost time to apply for permits for this summers climbing season. Permit applications must be postmarked March 1 for the best chance of obtaining them.

There will be a trip planning meeting one week after the next PCS meeting to get organized for summer 1996 climbing trips. All leaders and prospective leaders are encouraged to come equipped with trips they would like to lead. Maps and guide books are often useful to bring.

Dinner is not provided, so please eat before the meeting: Tuesday, 2/20/96 at 7:30 PM. Map and directions follow.

See you there.

– Paul Magliocco



The Maglioccos  
15944 Longwood Drive  
Los Gatos, CA 95032  
(408) 358-1168

If heading south on Highway 17, exit at Lark Avenue and cross back over the freeway to Los Gatos Blvd. If taking Highway 85, exit at Los Gatos Blvd/Bascom Ave. After passing Lark Ave. while on Los Gatos Blvd., Los Gatos-Almaden Road is the third traffic signal. While on Los Gatos-Almaden Road, there will be a black 35 mile-per-hour sign with white numbers about 25 feet before you get to Longwood Drive. When you see the sign, slow down quickly. It is easy to drive right past the street. Go about 0.4 miles down Longwood Drive to get to the house. There is usually a silver Ford Aerostar parked on the street in front of the house.

## Request for Ice Partners

For some time I've been looking for climbing partners to start some technical (or semi-technical) snow/ice climbing in the Sierra. I am in Colfax (on your way to Tahoe), but am certainly willing to drive from Shasta to Olancho to meet partners. I'm a class 3 climber now, but am tiring of "the slog" and ready to do some rope work. If anyone who knows the score is interested in hooking up with an eager belay slave, or if anyone wants to join me on the learning curve, give me a call at (916) 346-7279, or E-mail me. Would like to do some glacier work on Shasta in the spring, and would also like to just go out for a weekend to practice boot-ax belay, pro placement, etc. I have ice screws, pickets, etc.

– Christian / firstcrow@aol.com

## Official (PCS) Trip

PCS trips must be submitted through the Scheduler (see back cover for details). Trips not submitted to the Scheduler will be listed as **PRIVATE**, without recourse.

## Another Peak Mission

Peak:	Mission Peak	Trail - 2,517'
Date:	Feb 11	Sun
Contact:	Bob Suzuki	H: 408-259-0772 (after 8:00 PM)

Start your conditioning for summer early with an enjoyable 17 mile hike along the Ohlone Wilderness trail. We'll have about 4,000' of elevation gain, with an option to climb Mission Peak twice. Heavy rain cancels. No Host carpool at Cubberly High (Middlefield & Montrose in Palo Alto) at 8:15 am, or meet at trailhead (Stanford Ave in Fremont) at 9:00 am. Co-listed with the Day Hiking Section.

## PCS Membership & EScre

Hey, you - yes, YOU! If you're receiving the Peak Climbing Section's newsletter (EScre) by email (either from the formal broadcast or because someone is forwarding you a copy.... but did you know that you can be a MEMBER of the PCS for free? Lead great trips, vote in elections, spread the word, etc!

If you get the EScre, then all you have to do for membership is send email to Jim Ramaker (the official PCS treasurer) at <ramaker@VNET.IBM.COM> saying that you want to be a PCS member. (Of course, you should be a Sierra Club member also.)

Remember, that's <ramaker@VNET.IBM.COM>, copy to <eckert@netcom.com> with the message "**I receive the EScre, and I want to be a PCS member**". It's that easy. Send it today!

*NOTE: Since this notice was sent out by email last week, we have picked up about 15 new PCS members. Spread the word, and send in suggestions for other publicity!*

– Editor

## Unofficial (Private) Trips

Private trips may be submitted directly to the Scree Editor, but are not insured, sponsored, or supervised by the Sierra Club. They are listed here because they may be of interest to PCS members, not because they are endorsed by the PCS.

### Steps of San Francisco

Trip: San Francisco Conditioning Hike  
Date: Jan 20 Sat  
Contact: Judith Dean 415-854-9288  
Judith.Dean@forsythe.Stanford.edu  
Co-Contact: Debbie Benham 415-964-0558  
DmBenham@aol.com

You won't need snow tires or diamox, just a willingness to enjoy one of the world's most beautiful cities on foot. We'll spend 4-6 hours [starting at 9AM] exploring the stairways that provide the vertical links between the streets that contour around Russian Hill, Telegraph Hill and Pacific Heights. Then we'll descend to North Beach for a pasta feed to finish the day. Bring sturdy shoes, water, and a hearty snack (if you don't want to pick something up as we go).

### Conditioning Bike

Peak: Mt Tamalpias Class 1 - 2,517'  
Date: Jan 27 Sat  
Raincheck: Feb 4 Sun  
Contact: Phyllis Olrich 415-322-0323  
phylliso@forsythe.stanford.edu  
Co-Contact: Patt Baenen 415-494-3022  
pattb27@aol.com

Join Patt and me for a killer mountain bike ride up Mt. Tam. If off-road conditions are too muddy, we'll opt for a 40-mile road ride up to Skyline from Palo Alto. Rain postpones to the Raincheck Date.

### Right on La Mark

Peak: Mt. Lamark Snow - 13,417'  
Dates: Feb 17-20 Sat-Tue  
Contact: George Van Gorden 408-779-2320  
(evenings before 9:00 PM)

Meet in Bishop Saturday morning and drive up to Apendell at about 8,500 feet. Saturday afternoon and Sunday we will move up the mountain on snowshoes to our high camp. Monday we will climb the mountain and return to camp. Back to the cars on Tuesday morning. Crampons and axes. If the road is closed to Apendell or if the weather is bad, we will explore alternatives.

### It Hasta Be Shasta

Peak: Mt. Shasta class 3 ice - 14,162'  
Dates: Feb 17-19 Sat-Mon  
Contact: Kai Wiedman 415-347-5234

This time we'll tackle Sargents Ridge, an airy and challenging route. We will attempt the complete ridge starting at Panther Meadow. Our high camp will be high in the sky at Shasta Rama, a large block of basalt. From there, mixed climbing will lead us around rock towers and steep traverses. Hideous exposure will tug at our feet.

## Just Me And Mr. Marmot

"And then a hero comes along,  
with the strength to carry on;  
and you cast your fears aside,  
and you know you can survive.  
So when you feel like hope is gone,  
look inside you and be strong,  
and you'll finally see the truth,  
that a hero lies in you."

— *Mariah Carey*

Was it by chance that this, one of my favorite pop tunes, was playing on two radio stations at the same time as I left Palo Alto on the afternoon of Friday, August 3 for my first solo adventure in the Sierras? Perhaps, but I have a penchant for the dramatic, and I preferred to see it as a sign of great things ahead.

What propelled this middle-aged woman to go off into the wilderness by herself? Most importantly, to begin to find out just what my skill level is. I'm very confident in certain areas of mountaineering (I know I'm a strong hiker for instance, and there have been times when I've lead the way), but there are other areas where I almost always defer to others - navigation or hanging the food, for example. So it was about a year ago that I got this idea into my head to go out alone - with no one to rely on but myself. This was the only way I would feel free enough to try what I wanted to try, to make mistakes and not have to worry about looking stupid or incompetent in front of anyone else.

I am not so afraid of the bears, or the dark, or the weather, or bad men out to hurt me; my greatest fear is of getting lost. I have learned how taking one wrong turn, or going off route by a few degrees can cause you to become lost, resulting in at the very least minutes or hours of extra time trying to find your way back; at worst, becoming so lost that you can never find your way out and no one finds you, until it's too late.

I can think of a couple of things that might have been obstacles to taking such a trip in the past that I have overcome in the last couple of years. First, I used to be deathly afraid of bears. But over the years I became convinced that they were not interested in hurting humans; they just want your food.

Second, was my inability to drive long distances without starting to fall asleep at the wheel. It always amazed me how men especially could drive endless distances seemingly without needing rest. Surely this must be some kind of testosterone advantage. But last year I drove to the East side and back successfully without help (my passenger did not drive a stick shift). So I knew I could do it if I had to. That was so liberating!

And so I began, full of excitement for the adventure ahead. Friday night I crashed in the back of my car at the Sunrise Lakes trailhead in Yosemite. There's a deluxe portapotty there - a big draw for me, the toilet paper queen. I got the idea to cover myself with my space blanket, not only to keep warm, but to camouflage myself from the rangers, who could ticket me if they found me.

As I lay there gazing out the back window at the stars, I flashed back on my early days in California, over 20 years ago. I had a big old hatchback Oldsmobile then, with plenty of room for sleeping when you put the back seat down. I used to go camping by myself, and have all kinds of adventures around the state. I was young, full of dreams, and lonely too. So much has happened since then - I've been to hell and back - and I've tended to dismiss that girl in her twenties as someone I don't know anymore. But I got in touch with her again. Her innocence. Her keen sense of adventure. She's still a part of me and I'm striving to love and accept all the parts of me.

At the permit booth by 7am, I endured a series of bear stories told by a rather chatty ranger who was in love with the big furry critters. Our mission was to save the bears, she assured us. To that end, we should rent the bulky nearly 3-lb. bear-proof canisters to keep our food and other smelly goods in. Not being confident in my food-hanging abilities, you remember, I consented, and after a hearty breakfast at the Tuolumne grill, I picked up my very own canister at the store. With all due respect, Ms. Ranger, my main concern is me and my food, not the welfare of the bears...

It was very refreshing to be able to pack up at the trailhead with no time pressures from anyone but myself. I could attend to all those little last-minute details to my heart's content. Still, a 9:10am departure is not too bad I think.

I had scaled down my original plan somewhat, due to the snow conditions, and not wanting to bite off more than I could chew on Sunday and not make it back to the store by 7pm to return the canister. My goal now was to hike up to Vogelsang Lake and see what the lay of the land was and how I felt. This entailed about a 7.5 mile hike with 2,000' elevation gain, a very moderate day, by PCS standards.

I began hiking up the trail, full of expectation, attending to every sign and trail junction, knowing that I alone was responsible for my journey this day. I traveled up the John Muir "Highway" for awhile, then took the Rafferty Creek turnoff, where, after a long uphill section you finally spill out into a beautiful meadow below Tuolumne Pass, and you catch your first glimpse of Fletcher and Vogelsang peaks. I checked my maps often, not because of any navigational challenge (the trail was clear, at least to the Vogelsang High Sierra Camp), but to compare the map to the features around me, to see if I could tell where I was and if I could pick out various landmarks.

To my delight, I felt that it all came together for me. Yes, that must be Rafferty Peak over there! I can tell by the long gradual slope to the summit. And that's obviously Fletcher. Look at the steep broad base and the vast flat top. I was able to match the features I was seeing in nature with what was drawn on the map. I've been frustrated so many times by my seeming inability to know where I was or what was what in the mountains. So I just follow along, enjoying the scenery but not participating much in the route finding. Thinking everyone knows more than me. But I underestimate myself! Out here all alone, I have permission to stop, examine, and guess. This makes me very happy.

One interesting thing that happens when you travel alone is that you tend to be much more outgoing and friendly to strangers. Does this stem from man's inborn need to connect to other human beings? So that when you don't have a traveling companion, you naturally reach out more to others? Whatever it is, I enjoyed that aspect of the trip very much. Stopping to talk to other hikers and backpackers, even the cowboys and girls leading packtrains and their clients, God forbid. On the way out as a matter of fact, I met a very nice family from Massachusetts, my home state. We exchanged names and I hope to call them next time I'm on the East Coast to ask them how the rest of their trip went.

Another time, I stopped to talk to a couple that was out dayhiking. The guy looked at my map and we discussed possible peaks they could do that afternoon. I looked over at his girlfriend, sitting passively, waiting. Gosh, that has been me so many times, I thought. It felt strange and wonderful to be playing the male role this time. Indeed a great part of this trip was about releasing my male energy - the part of us that makes decisions, takes risks, and takes action.

On the way up to Vogelsang Lake (10,324'), you pass right by the High Sierra Camp. It's a real ghost town this year, as are all the High Sierra Camps. I thought about how disappointed all those people must be who had reservations only to find that the camps would never open in 1995.

It was here that the trail started fading badly under the snow. But it's just a short way up to the lake from there and the way is pretty obvious. It was early afternoon when I reached the lake, a welcome sight. It was partially frozen with snow covering much of the landscape, but there were plenty of sandy rocky places for campsites. I decided to camp there and found a spot away from the lake facing west, hidden from view. The snow makes for a rather desolate ambiance, but it was blessing because it helped to keep the people away - I was the lone camper there that night.

The old battle raged within - should I go for the gusto and try for a peak this afternoon or take a completely different tack and rest, write, and reflect. I couldn't do both. Not wanting to be too compulsive, I made a decision to go for the latter. After lunch I really wanted to nap, so that's just what I did. When I awoke, however, a wave of nausea hit me so bad I thought I must be coming down with the flu or food poisoning. What would I do? Ask for help from a passerby? Hike out as soon as I was strong enough? Stay put until I recovered (I didn't have that much food). But it must have just been a touch of altitude sickness, because it passed quickly. Then I was glad that I had stayed in camp after all.

I spent a beautiful quiet afternoon. I studied the map and read over the route descriptions I had copied from Roper and Secor. I had already decided that to atone for my slothful wimpy behavior of Saturday, I would climb both Vogelsang (11,493') and Fletcher (11,410') Sunday morning before hiking out. I wrote in my journal. I took time to observe the colors of the fish, the birds, the clarity of the lake. This is something I don't do enough. People are always telling me to stop and smell the flowers. I became quite friendly with one particular marmot. He (she?) would have taken the food right from under me if I had let him. He became my buddy.

I decided I had better cook my dinner, even though I wasn't very hungry. I ate one serving of my gourmet freeze-dried honey lemon chicken, but buried the rest. I always have trouble with my appetite at altitude. At 7:30pm, I got ready for bed and crawled

into my bivy bag for the night. I had planted my canister about 20' away from my camp on level ground as instructed. My camera was ready to catch the bear if he came to bat the canister around. I thought for sure he'd come kiss me goodnight since I was so lathered up with various lotions and sprays. But he stood me up.

The constant sound of a waterfall was my lullaby. Watching the sunset I finally dozed off. I lost count of the number of times I had to get up to go in the middle of the night. Each time I would bang a pot, or call out "I'm getting up Mr. Bear" just case he was lurking nearby. I didn't want to surprise him. But I think if there were any bears around, they saw the canister and left, knowing they couldn't get in. When I couldn't sleep, I'd watch the universe, one advantage of sleeping in a bivy bag and not a tent. I was not afraid or lonely or cold. I was in the "gentle wilderness" after all, and if you respect its power, it will treat you to all its delights.

I arose about 6:30 to a very warm morning. Whereas Saturday had been a day to rest, observe, write, and acclimatize, Sunday was a day to KICK ASS. I cooked my cup of gruel that masquerades as oatmeal and put together my summit pack. I packed a space blanket JUST IN CASE. When you're out alone you have to be a bit more prepared than normally.

Going for the peak is what I love. That backpacking stuff is just a necessary evil to get in to your basecamp as far as I'm concerned. I decided to climb Vogelsang first, my main objective. I hiked around the lake toward Vogelsang Pass to get a head on view of the peak. I saw that there were 3 or 4 parallel ramps on the east face that run gradually along to the ridge to the left of the peak. This looked like a good way to go to me so I started up the rock to reach one of the ramps. At one point I used my ice ax to cross a short steep snow patch. As I made my way up the ramp, I became impatient and got a little too aggressive. I thought I'd take a short cut by heading straight up the face to the summit, rather than go all the way around to the ridge. But when I ran into some 3rd class climbing, I got scared and thought "this is not a smart thing to be doing alone." So I backed off (VERY carefully) and continued up the ramp till I hit that ridge. Once there, I could see it was a very easy walk up to the summit! And when I got to the top, there was a marmot stretched out on one of the summit boulders!

I was so happy to see the register box. I got a lump in my throat. Vogelsang is not a particularly difficult peak or anything like that, but I had found it, I had picked the route, I had made it all alone. Still no other people around. After a snack, a hero shot by remote control, more map reading and guessing about the other peaks around, I started my descent. Turns out there were some moves that I had done on the way up that I was not comfortable with on the way down, so I came down a different way, ending up on some steep snow. I was glad I had lugged up my ice ax and crampons because I really needed them now.

I had already scouted out the route up Fletcher from the top of Vogelsang. It was a "classic Sierra ramble" as someone wrote in the peak register. Secor notes you encounter "brush, scree, and talus...before reaching the summit." Starting from a point just below Vogelsang Pass, I followed my route, making sure to stop and look back several times along the way (a wise practice - you'd be surprised how different things look from the opposite direction).

The summit of Fletcher consists of a very large sandy plateau with several rock outcroppings sprouting up. I headed for the most prominent outcropping, thinking that must surely be the summit. But there was no register there and it looked like the next outcropping over was a just a little bit higher. So I climbed down, trudged over more sandy scree to the next rock outcropping. I repeated this SEVERAL times, almost giving up. I let out a cry of relief when I spied a glass jar shoved into a crack. No one had signed that register in A YEAR! Judging by all the footprints however, I suspect that was due more to the isolated location of the jar and the numerous false summits, than to the difficulty or unpopularity of the peak.

Happy at last, I took another remote control hero shot, and looked over to the east to identify the nearby lakes and other features. A successful descent had me back in camp by 2pm. Two gals passed by as I was packing up - the first human beings I had seen in about 24 hours.

Ready to leave camp by 3pm I knew I had to make it out to my car in time to get to the Tuolumne store by 7pm closing time to return the rented canister. Boy, was I glad I was coming out rather than going in because I encountered several groups of backpackers and one packtrain on their way in. Stopping to be so friendly and all delayed me awhile, and I had to hustle to make sure I made it out in good time. Exhausted along the last mile of the trail, almost delirious, I kept hoarsely crying out "parking lot, parking lot," in hopes of seeing my car soon (I talk and mumble to myself a lot, actually).

It felt SO good to get my pack and boots off. Back at the store, I fulfilled a fantasy I'd been having all the way down the trail - I consumed a pint of Ben & Jerry's Coffee Almond Fudge frozen yogurt. God, did that taste good!

One of the most gratifying parts of the trip was calling some friends back in the Bay Area to let them know I had made it out alive. Knowing that there are people back home who love me and care about me makes it okay to choose to be alone.

The B&J's held me all the way to Oakdale where I stopped for late dinner at "Crap in the Box" (actually the Teriyaki Chicken Bowl is quite decent). And guess what song played over the loudspeaker in the restaurant, folks...

I had been worried that I wouldn't be able to make it all the way home without stopping to nap, but I had no problem. I don't know if it was the caffeine in the yogurt or the adrenaline pumping through my body. All scrubbed and snug, I lay in bed a long time that night before I could get to sleep.

I hope to do this again next year - maybe I'll make it an annual event. The weather was perfect all weekend, I conquered some fears, and spent some quality time with myself, with nature, and with God.

– *Phyllis Olrich*

#### FOOTNOTE:

In reporting my solo Sierra backback/peakclimbing trip this summer, I wrote that I was "not...afraid of bad men out to hurt me." It was inconceivable to me that a dangerous weirdo would be in the backcountry.

The news that a recently-paroled rapist attacked a female Yosemite Park ranger, then escaped into the wilderness carrying

a backpack and sleeping bag, has forced me to examine my perhaps ridiculously naive notions about people who backpack.

After all, isn't there a special camaraderie among backpackers—we are a peace-loving, nature-loving, spiritually aware band, aren't we? How could someone hell-bent on sadistic violent acts at the same commune with nature, be willing to put in the difficult physical effort that backpacking requires, and appreciate God's great outdoors?

Questions loom: Is this man an experienced backpacker or just a homeless person? Did he go to Yosemite specifically to prey on women there? Was he planning to head up the trail looking for vulnerable women? What if he had found me that night I was camped at Vogelsang Lake ALL ALONE. I scoffed at friends who were concerned for my safety. Must I now concede that they were right?

And what of the future? Should I abandon any plans of ever soloing again? Should I get certified to carry mace and bring that with me? Is this even legal in the parks and forests? Better yet, conceal a knife or a...GUN. I picture myself hiking along, checking my surroundings constantly, looking and listening for strangers. And if I spy a man coming down the trail, straightening my posture, throwing him a steely gaze as if to say, "Don't mess with me Mister," instead of the usual smile and greeting "Hi, how's it going?" Then huddling in my sleeping bag at night, clutching my weapon. Doesn't sound like too much fun, does it?

Still, how can I complain, you say. I can still venture out relatively safely with other people. But it seems so unfair, so horrible. Of course I'm not free—not one of us is really free from the dangers that exist in this crazy world.

– Phyllis Olrich

## An Avalanche of Info

**1. AVALANCHE VIDEO** I have the video "Avalanche Awareness," which I am willing to loan out to interested people. This is a good primer on avalanche safety for backcountry travelers. I can bring it to the Christmas Party. Contact me if you'd like to see it: Butch Suits, bsuits@lmsc.lockheed.com 415-325-4116

**2. AVALANCHE LECTURE REPORT** I attended the avalanche lecture at Pacific Mountaineer. It was by a man who trains the ski patrollers at Alpine Meadows. It was a good presentation, including a screening of the video mentioned above.

**3. STATISTICS** from the winter of 94-95 covering the mountains of the Western U.S.:

- ◆ People caught in avalanches: 162 (mostly ski patrollers)
- ◆ Buried: 88
- ◆ Injured: 28
- ◆ Killed: 22 (mostly backcountry travelers)

The lecturer said the killed number is mostly backcountry because most backcountry folks are far removed from rescue by others and are not trained or equipped adequately to rescue themselves.

Ski resorts recorded over 14,000 avalanches last year, 1717 was the highest, at Squaw Valley. (Many of these were set off by explosives).

**4. AVALANCHE SAFETY** This is a smattering of tips that I've recorded as reminders and to stimulate interest in this topic. This is not an exhaustive prescription for avalanche safety. There's a lot more you need to learn to be safe. Contact me if you have further questions.

- ◆ Most (80%) avalanches occur during or immediately after storms.
- ◆ Essential touring equipment for steep terrain: avalanche transceivers, shovels, probe poles.
- ◆ Buried victims usually survive if located and dug out in under 15 minutes (90% according to some European stats); at 30 minutes, survival drops to 30% (asphyxiation)

Assessing avalanche hazards: Three factors to consider:

- ◆ terrain
- ◆ weather
- ◆ stability and structure of the existing snowpack.

Some destabilizing factors:

- ◆ Heavy loading of snowpack (due to heavy snowfall or wind deposition of snow)
- ◆ Rain (lubricates sliding surfaces)
- ◆ Thawing of snowpack (lubricates), especially when snow does not refreeze at night.
- ◆ Poorly bonded layers. Some causes are surface hoar, depth hoar, ice layers from rain or thawing.

Some signs of instability:

- ◆ Debris from other recent avalanches
- ◆ Hollow sounds in the snow, especially a "whoompf" sound
- ◆ Cracks propagating out from skis

Route selection:

- ◆ Choose broad valleys
- ◆ Choose ridgetops, especially on windward side; stay away from skiinf on top of or under cornices.
- ◆ Prime slab avalanche angle is 30-45%
- ◆ Tracks already crossing the slope do not mean it's safe

If you suspect a slope is unsafe:

- ◆ Ask "What's the worst thing that can happen to me?"
- ◆ Ask "Is there a safer route?"
- ◆ If you decide to cross the slope, go one at a time and try to plot an escape route/strategy.

– Butch Suits



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## Rock Climbing Classifications

The following trip classifications are to assist you in choosing trips for which you are qualified. No simple rating system can anticipate all possible conditions.

Class 1: Walking on a trail.

Class 2: Walking cross-country, using hands for balance.

Class 3: Requires use of hands for climbing. A rope may be used.

Class 4: Requires rope belays.

Class 5: Technical rock climbing.

## In Upcoming Issues:

Mt Pilatus trip report

North Peak trip report

Mt Muir trip report

Searching for Small Worlds to Conquer

**Deadline for submissions to the next Scree is 2/26/96. Meetings are the second Tuesday of each month.**

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