

World Wide Web Address: <http://www.climber.org/pcs/>

Next General Meeting

Date: Tuesday, January 12

Time: 8:00 PM

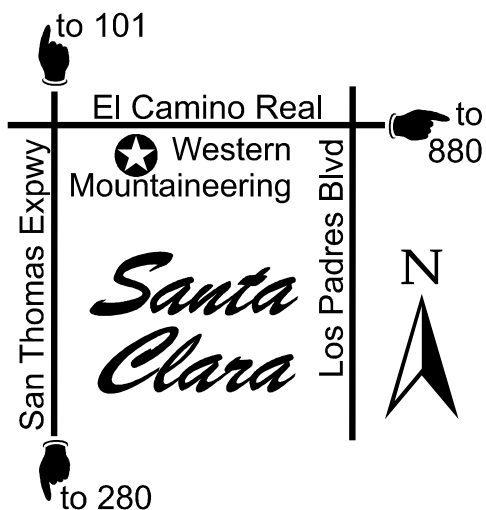
Program: Ski Mountaineering

Eugene Miya will share his expertise on ski mountaineering with us.

Location: Western Mountaineering, Santa Clara

2344 El Camino Real, Santa Clara (between San Thomas and Los Padres), parking in the rear.

From 101: Exit at San Thomas Expressway, Go South to El Camino Real. Turn left and the Western Mountaineering will be immediately to your right.



Deadline for submissions to the next Scree is Sunday 1/24/99 Meetings are the second Tuesday of each month.

Internet users take note: The PCS email list and website have moved to Climber.Org, where there are now 22 climbing-related email lists if you also count the ones for the Colorado Mountain Club. Check out the new service by sending any email to "info@climber.org" or visiting <http://www.climber.org>

Trip Planning Meeting

Date: Tuesday, January 5, 1999

Time: 8:00 PM

Place: Home of Arun Mahajan,
arun@tollbridgetech.com

The backcountry permits for Inyo NF are now available 6 months in advance. This means that permits for trips in June are already available, and permits for trips in July can be issued in January. As a result, I like to hold the summer's trip planning meeting in January.

Directions From 101:

1. Take the Oregon Expressway exit in Palo Alto.
2. Go west, through a few lights. After Bryant is the Alma exit. It is a sharp right. If you miss it, you will know because you go under an overpass.
3. After taking the exit, follow the exit road till it meets Alma.
4. Go north (right turn) on Alma for a few blocks passing roads like California, Santa Rita, Rinconada, Seale. These roads are on the right. The CalTrain tracks are on the left of Alma.
5. After Seale is Tennyson. My townhouse is in a 4-plex, 1745 Alma, the second unit from the road. It is north of Tennyson but south of the next road, Lowell. Off street parking on Tennyson or Lowell, there is none in the complex for guests, I am afraid.

From 280:

1. Take the Page Mill Road exit in Palo Alto.
2. Drive east on Page Mill, go through El Camino.
3. Alma (north) is a sharp right turn within half a mile of the El Camino junction.
4. Follow the directions mentioned in 4 above.

Bring your calendars and trip ideas. And if you can think ahead for fall trips, bring those too. This meeting is primarily for trip leaders and would be leaders.

Toiyabe NF is sticking to its March date for permits. If anybody has information about other areas permit schedule, please post to the list.

• Ron Karpel

Your Information

Superhighway At Work

Greetings from Auburn, Alabama! This is the information superhighway at work. Although The Scree is published for members of Peak Climbing Section of the Loma Prieta Chapter in California, this issue is being assembled and edited 2500 miles away. I am in Alabama visiting my mother during Christmas. Using my dated, but reliable Macintosh Powerbook 170, I am receiving e-mailed trip write-ups and reports just like at home and then putting the Scree together with Word. The file is then e-mailed to Steve Eckert for distribution.

• *Bob Bynum, Scree Editor*

New Members for the Mountaineering Committee

With the appointment of new officers for the club last November, we also have new members for the mountaineering committee.

George Van Gorden, the new PCS Chair, asked me to serve as the chair of the mountaineering committee in addition to my position as Vice Chair/Scheduler. Last year Arun Mahajan served as both Vice Chair/Scheduler and chair of the mountaineering committee. This proved an efficient arrangement as both functions have a lot in common.

As the bylaw specifies, the Mountaineering Committee Chair appoints the members with the approval of the PCS Chair. After some searching, I got the following distinguished members of the PCS to come aboard as members of the committee for the new year Debbie Benham, Bob Suzuki, and Kelly Mass.

I like to thank the members of last year's committee Arun Mahajan, Kelly Mass, and Peter Maxwell. They have done an excellent job. They work for maintaining the club's operation and safety. I hope we can live up to their standard.

• *Ron Karpel*

Official (PCS) Trips

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

Annual Beginners Snow Camping Seminar

Dates: Eves: Tues., Jan. 12th, Thur. Jan. 14th, Tue. Jan. 19th; Weekend of Jan. 23/24 or Jan. 30/31.
Leaders: Chris MacIntosh, 650-325-7841
<chrism@clbooks.com>
Tom Wolf, 650-961-2682

A planned winter overnight trip in the Sierra can be wonderful or cold and miserable. A forced overnight due to storm, injury or equipment failure presents far more hazards in winter than in summer. For the 26th winter, PCS (and STS) leaders present a snow camping seminar to help

backpackers, climbers, and others enjoy winter sports safely and comfortably. Participants learn do's and don'ts of winter planning, clothing, food etc. as well as making emergency and non-emergency shelters in the snow, then put these skills into practice on a weekend trip to the Sierra (traveling by skis or snowshoes. \$40 cost includes 3 books and equipment maintenance).

Treasure of the Serra Padre

Peak: Junipero Serra Peak, 5862 ft, Class 1
Date: Sunday, January 10 1999.
Maps: Junipero Serra 7.5'
Leaders: Arun V. Mahajan <arun@tollbridgetech.com>, (h) 650-327-8598
Ron Karpel <ronny@luxsonor.com> (w)510771-3231, (h)650-594-0211

The native Americans called it Pimkolam Peak, it has also been called Santa Lucia Peak, and now goes by the name Junipero Serra after the venerable padre. At 5862 ft, it is the highest peak in the Santa Lucia Coast Range. It is also the high point of Monterey County and the highest peak that you can get to in the Bay Area.

Join us as we take an enjoyable and mildly strenuous (6 miles and 3900 ft gain, one way) tramp to this peak. There is trail all the way to the top. Carpool suggestions from Bay Area: Meet at the Carl's Jr. that is at the Dunne Avenue exit on 101 in Morgan Hill at 7 am on Sunday, January 10. We will carpool from there. Non Bay Area People: Contact the leader for directions to the trailhead.

Tam Times Two

Peak: Mt. Tam (east peak and west peak), class 2
Date: Saturday, January 30
Leader: Steve Eckert <eckert@netcom.com> 650-508-0500
Co-Leader: Jeff Fisher <han1cannae@aol.com>

This has become a classic hike for the leader... including redwood groves, lunch on the beach, and a loop route that includes both East and West peak of Mt Tamalpais (that big lump north of the Golden Gate). You might not think there is class 2 on this well-trailed peak, but we guarantee you'll use your hands without leaving named trails. Short days require a fast pace. Send email or call for meeting time and lace, and be prepared to convince us you can do 20+ miles and 5000+ feet of gain/loss "in good style".

Pyramid Peak

Peak: Pyramid Peak, Class 2 - 9,983'
Date: February 13/14/15 Saturday-Monday
Leader: Palmer Dyal, H: 650-941-5321
pdyal@msn.com
Co-Leader: Wanted
Topo: Pyramid Peak 7.5'

This will be a moderately-paced 3 mile snowshoe trip to climb a relatively easy peak in the Desolation Wilderness area southwest of Lake Tahoe. The elevation gain is about 1000' per mile and we plan to camp at tree line.

We will have time to build snow caves on the first day and view the marvelous glaciated scenery of the whole Tahoe basin from the peak on the second day.

There will be a choice of returning on Sunday or Monday depending on the weather, etc. This will be a good trip for beginning climbers.

Riding El Nino's Tail (Matterhorn)

May 23-25, 1998)

Ten miles north of Bridgeport, Pat Callery and I awoke after a restful night in the sagebrush to gray skies from horizon to horizon. Throwing our wet sleeping bags in the car, we drove down to the familiar trailhead at Twin Lakes, where we were soon joined by Jim Curl, Dot Reilly, Milushe Kudrnovska, and trip leader Kai Wiedman. It was early Saturday morning on Memorial Day weekend and time for another one of Kai's assaults on the Sawtooth Ridge.

After breakfast by the lake and the usual sorting of gear, we headed up the trail into Horse Creek Canyon about 8:30. We hit snow at the top of the first long, forested hill. Jim, Kai, and Pat put on skis, while Dot, Milushe, and I donned snowshoes, and we continued up the rugged canyon. The plan was to climb Matterhorn that afternoon, head west across the ridge to tackle Blacksmith Peak on Sunday, and hike out on Monday. El Nino had other plans

Around 1 o'clock, we stopped for lunch at the top of a huge hill in the canyon and had lunch at about 10,000 feet. The weather turned cloudy and a bit windy, with the jagged peaks of the Sawtooth Ridge socked in above us. We turned right (north), climbed up out of the canyon, and set up camp in a large open snow bowl next to snow-covered Matterhorn Lake. The mountains were still shrouded in dark clouds, so we decided to postpone our climb. Jim, Kai, and Pat took off on skis to yo-yo the slopes above our camp, while Milushe and I played on some class-3 ledges and hiked to the base of the spectacular Horse Creek Tower above our camp. Dot was suffering with a recently broken hand that was still quite painful, and had to restrict her activities all weekend.

Around 5 we gathered at camp to melt snow and cook. The cold wind picked up and sent most of us to our tents by 7:30. After an 11-hour sleep (close to the PCS record), we threw open the tent flaps and gazed into cloudless, crystal clear skies, with every ledge on the neighboring peaks etched by fresh snow. Because we hadn't been able to climb the day before, we agreed to forget about Blacksmith Peak and just do Matterhorn, so Kai told us there was no need to do anything radical like leave camp early.

After lengthy cooking and relaxing, we finally left camp at 9:45, with Jim, Kai, and Pat on skis, and Dot, Milushe, and I on crampons. We ran into several other parties returning from Matterhorn or skiing up in the high snow bowls, including a large group of experts from the Southern California Ski Mountaineering Section, who were carving turns and crossing icy slopes with apparent ease on their wide random skis. We wandered upward in the warm sun while occasional snow and rock slides clattered down the huge wide face of the Dragtooth to our right.

At 11 we started up the east couloir, the snow a bit soft as the sun had been hitting it for about five hours already. This couloir is not real steep, with an average angle of about 30 degrees. Part way up it, the skiers stashed their skis and donned crampons. At 11:45 I reached the notch and talked to a couple of guys with alpine ski gear, then headed up the last 300 or so feet to the top. In summer, you head left, then double back to the right along the ridge -- easy class 2 all the way. Or you can climb straight up the class-3 rock at the top of the southeast slope. In search of some sportier climbing, I decided to try that, though the class-3 rock was buried by the El Nino snow.

Things went fine until the last 20 feet, where the slope steepened to about 60 degrees, topped by a 8-foot high vertical cornice of soft unconsolidated snow. Yikes. I climbed up to the vertical step and hacked away at the cornice with my ice axe, looking for something solid enough for a secure foothold. I probably should've downclimbed 200 feet or so to the standard route -- if I fell, an arrest was unlikely until I tumbled down to the lower angled slope, and even there, sharp rocks poked through the snow like sharks' teeth. Deep snow had made easy class-3 rock into something quite different.

Finally I carved out a stable foothold at waist level, shoved my cramponed boot into it, reached up over my head and over the lip of the cornice, and planted my ice axe shaft all the way to the hilt. Now all I had to do was make the move and hope the whole shebang didn't come down on top of me. With a thrash I flopped over the top, and a couple minutes later I was on the summit, letting my breathing slowly return to normal.

Jim Curl, Kai, and Pat also decided to avoid the tourist route off to the left. They went even farther to the right than I did -- Kai and Pat climbing an exposed class-4 rock step that scared even Kai, and Jim tackling a short vertical squeeze chimney with ice in the back of it. Oh those fun-loving PCSers, doing stuff like this with dangerous fall potential, while a well-trodden footpath to the summit lay just a couple of hundred feet away.

We all relaxed on the summit for a bit, and then Jim Curl and I went down to check on Milushe. As I feared, she was following our somewhat fool-hardy path to the top. We advised her to go down to the tourist route, and after trying a couple of different routes and after a stern warning from Kai, she finally agreed to do so. But then she found she couldn't downclimb the class-3 rock and snow she'd just come up. As he's done for others in the past, Jim Curl went down, climbed up next to her, and coached her down.

Finally, around 2 p.m., Milushe, Kai, Jim, Pat, and I were all back at the notch (Dot had stopped farther down because of her hand). Milushe really wanted to summit, and Kai and I agreed to go back up with her as we'd kind of left her stranded on the way up. Undaunted by her trials, Milushe quickly led Kai and I up the normal tourist route. Someone from another party had told us that it had "a class-5 move" -- ludicrous of course, but it did have some awkward class-3 moves up snow-covered blocks.

The three of us soon topped out and started heading down -- a good thing, because the wind was picking up, thin clouds were racing over the summit, and a thick cloud bank was moving in from the west. We quickly descended the east couloir, while Jim tried skiing the lower half of it. He made one nice turn, slipped, slid down a couple hundred feet, then got up and continued. Below that, the three skiers had a great run back to camp, while Milushe and I got in some great sitting glissades.

Back in camp we dried gear, melted snow, and played with the shovels to enlarge our kitchen and improve our snow walls. A long leisurely supper ensued, as we all watched Kai go through his ritual of wine, soup, chicken curry, tea, and gourmet cookies. The clouds moved in over the peaks and the wind picked up as night came on, and strong gusty winds to about 40 MPH knocked the tents around all night. Just before dawn it started snowing, and at first light we looked out of our tents into a full-on spring blizzard.

We ate breakfast in the tents, then packed up quickly as blowing snow stung our faces. It was about 30 degrees though, and the snow wasn't accumulating enough to cause avalanche problems, so there was no real storm hazard. Still, it was quite something for Memorial Day. As we descended the first steep hill below camp, I looked back at the others a few hundred feet above me, barely

visible in swirling whirlwinds of snow. Descending on crampons was effortless, but the skiers were having a hard time on the crusty, frozen snow. It sure wasn't doing any melting this day.

By 9 we were down out of the wind, and the snow slowly turned to sleet and then rain. We reached the cars at 10:30 a.m., washed up, then gathered in Bridgeport for brunch. The excellent Hayes Street cafe had a long line, so we made do with the dark, gloomy Sportsman's cafe. Our drive home was enlivened by more snow flurries while driving over just-opened Sonora Pass, where we marveled at the 12-foot vertical walls of snow cut by the snowplows on both sides of the road. May 25, and the El Nino winter was not in any hurry to loosen its grip on the mountains.

• *Jim Ramaker*

Seven Gables I

Heat And Dust

August 7-9, 1998

Charles Schafer led this trip into the central Sierras from the west. Climbers included Landa Robilliard, Kelly Maas, Roger Crawley, Andy Skumanich, and your scribe, Jim Ramaker. We assembled at the boat dock at Huntington Lake on Friday morning, and boarded the boat ferry that takes you to the trailhead at the south end of the lake. The boat is an old scow like the one in the Humphrey Bogart movie "African Queen," and it held over 20 tightly packed climbers and backpackers. Fare is \$15 round-trip.

After fiddling at the trailhead (7300'), we started toiling uphill in the hot sun about 9:30 a.m. Sorry, but this trailhead gets my nomination as one of the worst in the Sierras. The ferry runs on bankers' hours, so on the first day you can't start hiking before 9 a.m., and on the last day you can't really do any climbing because you have to complete the long hike out to the ferry landing before the last boat at 5 p.m. In addition, the first ten miles of the hike up to Seven Gables meanders through low elevation woods and meadows -- on this day, hot, buggy, and polluted by horses from the huge pack station.

In the late morning we toiled up some hot, unshaded switchbacks, then worked our way up past Sally Keys Lakes. Finally around 4 p.m. after more than 10 miles of hiking, we broke above timberline into the alpine scenery around Heart Lake, then popped over Selden Pass (10,800') to the incredibly beautiful basin of Marie Lake. This mile-long lake has many grassy peninsulas and was surrounded by gorgeous meadows and cliffs still streaked with snow. The plan was to continue across another ridge and camp at Sandpiper Lake below Seven Gables, but right at 6 p.m. we passed a gorgeous campsite on a bench above Marie Lake and the tired team rebelled. After mild resistance, Charles gave in and we camped there for the night. The clouds that had been building all day dissipated at sunset, and weather for the rest of the trip remained clear and mild. Bugs were moderately bad, and we got to watch Charles eat supper through his bug headnet.

Saturday we crossed the ridge to Sandpiper Lake and headed up Seven Gables, an easy climb up brushy class-2 cliffs and a huge scree terrace above. Near the summit we had to cross a frozen snowfield and some people wished they'd brought crampons to go with their ice axes, but the runout below wasn't bad and it was safe as long as you went carefully. Above that came 100 feet of nice class-3 blocks, and we stepped onto the airy summit (13,080') with its tremendous drop-off to the east about 11:30.

The view was so good and the weather so pleasant that a profound lethargy overtook the team, and no one except Charles could get up any enthusiasm for the long complex traverse over to Gemini

(12,880 and 1.5 miles away). Secor says that the route goes down the cliff just 20 feet below the summit, and after much exploration by Charles and Kelly, they finally found the elusive slot. But looking at a potential return to camp of around 8 p.m., the team slowly decided that it would be okay for once to have a relatively easy day on a PCS trip, with no route finding struggles up and down loose gullies and no late return to camp.

About 1:30 we headed for our home away from home, glissading down the now-softened snow. Around 4 we stopped for a long rest on the shoulder of the ridge above our camp, reclining on a nice sofa-like ledge with a spectacular view to the north. We talked and dozed in the sun, and soaked up the relaxing alpine antidote to hard days in front of the computer in Silicon Valley. In ones and twos, we departed and wandered back to camp.

In a meadow on the way back, a ptarmigan confronted me in a frightening display, extending her wings and running right up to my feet, where she stood and puffed up her chest and hissed at me. Stunned by this assault, I withdrew, and her motive soon became clear as two chicks scurried up a nearby snow bank. After much excited peeping and calling, mother and chicks were reunited. For those who don't know, a ptarmigan is a rare, ground-dwelling, alpine bird known for its lack of fear of people and for changing color from mottled brown in summer to pure white in winter.

Back at camp, the team spent a pleasant dinner hour, with bottled beer appearing from a nearby snow bank and the bugs nearly non-existent compared to the night before. On Sunday, with 13 miles to go before the 5 p.m. ferry, we didn't have time to climb a major peak like Hooper or Senger. But Kelly and I wanted to get a little more climbing in, so we got up at 5:30 a.m. and tackled the beautiful 1000-foot, class-3 cliff above our camp. Except for a couple of brushy spots, this gave us super climbing up smooth rounded slabs and ledges. We almost got stopped by cliffs a couple times, but there was always a ramp or ledge that gave safe passage. About 6:40 we arrived on the ridge top and traversed it for a few hundred feet to a small summit at 11,600'. The view down to our lake and down the other side into the Seven Gables-Gemini basin was spectacular at this early hour, and reminded us why we love the mountains.

Back at camp we had breakfast, packed up, and departed at 9. The first hour of hiking, up to and over Selden Pass in the morning light was incredibly beautiful and the cameras were really clicking away. Then the fun was over, and about six hours of hiking in the warm sun finally brought us to Huntington Lake at 4. After our hot dusty hike, washing up and swimming in the lake felt like heaven, and as we cruised across the lake on the cool, breezy ferry ride, we realized that the pleasure of climbing must sometimes be purchased with an equal measure of discomfort and pain.

• *Jim Ramaker*

The best backpacks are named for national parks or mountain ranges. Steer clear of those named for landfills.

Seven Gables II

Rainy Day, Climb Away

Hooper, Senger, Gemini, Seven Gables

September 4-7, 1998

This ambitious four-day trip over Labor Day weekend was led by Bob Suzuki and included Rich Leiker, Maggie Hudson, Eddie Sudol, Eddie's friend Skip, and myself (Jim Ramaker). After spending Thursday night at the Badger Flat campground on the road to Florence Lake, we caught the 8:30 a.m. ferry across the lake under dark threatening skies.

The 3500-foot gain, 13-mile hike up to Marie Lake has three parts -- a long, relatively flat stretch through forest and meadow past the large pack station, a steep uphill stretch on manzanita slopes, and a long up and down ramble through woods and past some alpine lakes. With the cool cloudy weather, the hike in was infinitely more pleasant than when I'd done it four weeks earlier on a hot August day. In this El Nino year, the woods were carpeted with wildflowers and the meadows were still lush and green -- more like mid-July than Labor Day weekend.

About 4 p.m. we arrived at Marie Lake and set up camp in a light drizzle. Most of us then took naps and fell sound asleep for awhile. I find this helps my acclimatization greatly on the first day of a climbing trip. Around 6 the drizzle let up and we cooked and ate supper, and then it returned to soothe us to sleep. Counting the nap, we got about 11 hours of sleep that night.

Saturday we got up before dawn at 5:30, and when we left camp at 6:30, the weather was sparkling with just a few tiny clouds. We headed west toward our first objective, Mt. Hooper (12,349), and climbed up class-3 blocks on the east slope, foregoing easier ground around on the southeast slope. By 9 a.m. we were at the interesting summit block -- a 20-foot tall monolith split by a single narrow crack. Secor rates it class 4, which raises the perennial issue of just what class 4 means. The crack is too narrow for good jamming, and the actual climbing difficulty is probably around 5.6. However, there's no big exposure, so the class-4 rating is a good compromise I guess. Bob and Skip soloed the crack after a little thrashing. Eddie and I did it on belay, and Maggie and Rich traversed around the west side of the block to an exposed class-3 crack on the north side. If you're going to Hooper, I'd say you won't need a rope as long as everyone in the party is a strong class-3 climber or better. But if anyone is less experienced than that, bring a short rope and a couple of slings.

Our next objective was Senger (12,286), 2.5 miles to the southwest. We hiked across some beautiful slabs and meadows to Selden Pass, taking a lunch break at noon under increasingly cloudy skies. From Selden Pass we headed up the valley northwest of Senger, and climbed a snow slope and some easy class-2 rock to Senger's huge summit plateau. As we took a break on the summit, the clouds rolled in and it started hailing, and we headed down in visibility of about 50 feet. Descending to the west, we soon found ourselves on an unfamiliar, low-angle slope, and couldn't agree on the direction to our descent route. Changing direction, we were soon utterly lost in the impenetrable mist. Consulting maps and compasses, we made an educated guess about where we were and changed direction again.

Then the clouds below parted a bit, revealing the first corner of a lake, then slowly the entire lake, which I recognized as Heart Lake. Finally getting our bearings, we found the saddle leading to our snow slope, descended it, and hiked back to camp in steady soaking rain.

By the time we got back to camp at 5, most of us were pretty wet -- even Gore-Tex seems to soak through after hours of steady rain with pack straps pressing on it. The experience showed us the wisdom of not wearing a couple items of clothing on a cold, wet day -- even a very thin layer of dry polypro can do wonders for your warmth when you strip off your wet clothes, put on a dry layer, and climb into your sleeping bag. And that's what we all did. After a short nap, we got up to cook and eat, then returned to our tents for another long sleep.

The weather pattern continued on Saturday -- sparkling and clear in the morning, then increasing clouds leading to rain and hail as the day wore on. Our objectives this day were Gemini (12,880) and Seven Gables (13,080), and we again left camp about 6:30. (Eddie wasn't feeling well and stayed in camp.) We headed east this time, over a ridge and down into the spectacularly beautiful, rarely visited lake basin just west of Seven Gables. Small lakes and fjords, pocket meadows, clean granite slabs, small trees and bushes -- this lake basin is a backpacker's dream. We climbed up past a waterfall, and around 9:30 we emerged onto the more austere terrain near Seven Gables Pass and got our first close-up view of Gemini. It looks pretty steep from the pass, but it's not once you get on it -- just pleasant class-2 slabs. Ignore Secor's confusing reference to the "West Spur," and just climb straight up the wide chute that makes up the north face.

After a break on the summit, with its tremendous views over toward Mt. Humphreys and the Abbot group, we descended and crossed over to the bottom of the 1500' south face of Seven Gables. We clambered over and around some car-sized granite blocks, and then Rich led us up smooth, class-3 slabs and ledges just as the first raindrops started to fall. Higher up, the angle eased off and we slogged up a long scree slope as the rain turned to hail and then snow. At 1 p.m. thunder boomed a couple times and we all gathered under an overhanging rock to discuss what to do. At the back of the overhang, snow trickled through a crack and piled up in a melancholy fashion. Prudence said to descend, but prudence was not leading this trip. We knew that going back down those smooth, somewhat exposed slabs would be no picnic in snow, and that if we could somehow get over to the northwest face, the descent was easy scree almost all the way. Trouble is, on Seven Gables, the only reasonable way from the south face to the northwest face is straight over the summit.

Standing under the overhang, we hadn't heard any thunder for awhile, so Bob made a leadership decision -- go for it.

A half hour later we reached the top of the south face and surveyed a dismal, somewhat frightening scene. An very exposed, snow-plastered, knife-edge ridge led over to the summit about 100' away. While we had another discussion in the blowing snow, Bob scampered across the ridge and summited. In search of the "100-foot, class-3 crack" described in Secor, I descended about 50 feet and started traversing northward. I found the crack (it's about 50 feet high, not 100), and climbed most of the way up it with Skip. But right at the top was an exposed move on downsloping, snow-covered holds. Damn -- I could talk to Bob 10 feet above me, but we'd left the rope in camp, and he said it didn't look safe from his vantage point. But he said the ridge he'd done wasn't too bad, so we decided to try that.

I descended, climbed back up, and traversed the ridge. At two spots it felt like class-4 -- a move on the knife edge with 1500 feet of air on the right, and an awkward step around a bulging corner on a wet, downsloping ledge, with one mediocre hold around the corner and a death fall below. With a little coaching, everyone made these moves without complaint, and at 2:15 we were all celebrating on the snowy summit. Bob hopped out onto the actual high point, which juts out over the 1500-foot east face like a

diving board. Skip crawled out there, and the rest of us decided to forego this additional excitement.

I led down a short class-3 section and a snow slope to the broad scree terrace northwest of Seven Gables. Then it was down down down the brushy cliff to Sandpiper Lake and a long break, and then up and over the ridge back to Marie Lake. Sun broke through the clouds as we arrived in camp at 5:30, and it was actually hot for a few minutes. But then clouds and rain returned. We ate in the tents, then gathered outside for a bull session in the dark as the rain let up around 7 p.m.

On Monday we departed at 8, hoping to make the 3 o'clock boat. After a snack break at 11, Bob, Rich, and Maggie left early and around 11:30 I realized they might be trying to make the 1 o'clock boat. So I raced along the trail, finally catching up to them at 1:05 just as they descended the last hill to the boat landing and just as the boat was just pulling in -- a fitting end to a highly successful trip.

We'd done the 13 miles in five hours. As afternoon storm clouds gathered over the peaks again, we relaxed in the cool breeze of the boat ride with smiles on our faces.

• *Jim Ramaker*

Yosemite From Another Perspective

October 31, 1998

On many occasions I've seen Yosemite from the marmot's perspective, up high, but waddling slowly, glued to the granite by my own weight. I've seen golden eagles cruising thermals above me, but to see what the eagles see, I might as well sprout wings on my back.

Yesterday David Harris, Jon Richards and I flew to Yosemite in the Cessna that David shares with the Stanford Flying Club.

We left Palo Alto, crossed the Bay, the Diablos, and the valley of the San Joaquin. We soared up Yosemite Valley, with El Capitan just below us to the left and Glacier Point on our right, close enough to touch. We turned south, passing Mt Clark, and circling the three smooth domes of Mt Starr King. I reflected on climbs I've made of those peaks, and how differently the mountains appeared while I was on them. We made another turn up the valley, covering the distance of multi-day hikes in minutes. Half Dome stood by. David noted that he had never hiked the Grand Canyon of the Tuolumne, and neither had I, so we turned north, and explored its ice scoured precipices and waterfalls. With a few minutes left in our flight plan, we crossed over the Merced almost out to the headwaters of the San Joaquin for an unobstructed close up view of Mts Ritter and Banner, and the ghostly Minarets. We passed around the Clark Range to the east, climbing to 12000 feet to make the pass, then swooped down Yosemite Valley one last time. A mist had begun to fill the valley, enshrouding Cathedral Spires.

David handed me the controls of the plane. My job was an easy one; drop down to 6500 feet, and hold that elevation, while maintaining a compass bearing to Livermore. I learned that my intuitive sense of where the horizon lies is different from the reality of it. To fly level, I had to monitor the instruments, not just the sky, and to point the nose of the plane downward took real concentration.

I was surprised to discover how broad the Central Valley is. Driving, we always rocket across those flatlands at approximately the same speed as a Cessna can fly, but then slow down for the windy uphill grades. The plane, which flies as straight and fast in

Yosemite as it does over Modesto, reveals how narrow the Sierra Nevada is compared to the whole width of California.

David took back the controls to land us in a light rain for our brief stopover in Livermore, then flew us back home through the controlled air space of the lower San Francisco Bay. I drove home from the Palo Alto airport with my Honda hovering eight feet above the pavement. This morning, still thrilled about my visit to a Yosemite in a new dimension, the vertical dimension, I am still flying.

"People wonder why I don't express more interest in traveling around the world. The fact is, I really haven't completed exploration of my own backyard! Two dimensionally, I am jealous as Hell over your flying over the Himalayas! JEZUZ!!! But - after all - the other day I walked by some fresh green moss in my garden; this is a terrible confession for an old grizzled mountaineer to say - but that moss looked mighty impressive to me!"

• Ansel Adams, in a letter to Dorothea Lange, 2/22/1959

• *Aaron Schuman*

Telescope Peak 11049

November 14th, 1998

The web page for this report including pictures is at <http://home.earthlink.net/~karpel/Telescope98.html>

After many plan changes and participants dropping in and out, the seven of us finally gather at the Mahogany Flat trailhead in Death Valley for our hike up to Telescope Peak. The ranger's warning of a significant snowfall the Wednesday before were proven wrong. There was some snow visible on the higher peaks, but no more than an inch or 2. Wildrose's southern slopes were completely free of the white stuff. Snowshoes ice axes and crampons were left in the car. Bob insisted on carrying his ice axe, but it stayed in its holster the entire trip. I carried my ski polls, but I used them only on the way down to help absorb some of the impact of the hard trail on my ankles.

A couple hundred feet into the hike, we all stopped to get rid of extra clothing. This was a tee shirt and sunscreen weather; not what one would have expected in mid November. There were a few patches of snow on the shady side of the mountain, but never more than a couple of inches deep, and always well stamped out.

Three and a half hours including 2 lengthy brakes got us to the summit. The weather was as close to perfect as could be expected. Temperatures were around 60 degree, perfect visibility, and warm sun. The only negative was the lively wind that blew at around 10-20 mile an hour. We spent about 1 1/2 hours basking in the sun, eating summit chocolate, taking pictures, and identifying the summits of the high Sierras which were clearly visible to the west.

On the way down, Bob, David, Joan, and I made a detour to summit Mt Rogers. We got back to the cars by 3:40.

Participants: Bob Suzuki, David Hough, Jeff West, Joan Marshall, Milus Kudrnovska, Nancy Fitzsimmons, and scribe: Ron Karpel.

Special thanks to Bill Kirkpatrick for scheduling this trip for such a beautiful day.

• *Ron Karpel*

Unofficial 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.

Mt Baldy

Peaks: Mt. Baldy/Gorgonio
Dates: Jan. 22, 23, 24
Contact: Tony Cruz

Pinnacles Hike

December 13, 1998

Ten of us showed up for this day hike in Pinnacles National Monument: Bill Fitzpatrick and his wife, Ann, Tony Stegman, Andy Macia (spelling?), Joan ?, George Van Gorden, Arun Mahajan, Ron Perkins, Bill Hauser, and Roger Crawley. The pancakes at the Hyatt Coffee Shop were splendid with lots of butter and maple syrup; but, of course, it's surpassed by the Bishop Grill's biscuits and country gravy plate.

So, we drove down to the east entrance station and walked up to North Chalone Peak and ate our lunch there. The weather was fine and the sky was clear. We enjoyed views of Junipero Sierra Peak in the Coast Range and San Benito Peak to the southeast. At this time of year the sunlight is at a low angle and produces shadows in the rock formations that make them dramatic to look at. We encountered a few groups of rock climbers in the Bear Gulch area, but almost no one on the trails. In the afternoon we got over to the Balconies Trail which is a little spectacular with steps gouged into the rock and railings to hang on to. When we left the Monument and drove north it started to rain; our timing was lucky. Most of us stopped in Hollister at the San Andreas Micro Brewing place for delicious beer and burgers and stuff. Everyone comported themselves in a suitable civil manner.

• Roger Crawley

Zeal for Freel

December 12, 1998

In summertime, Freel Peak is a stroll in the park, a lark, a day hike from the edge of town in South Lake Tahoe to a nearby high point. How ordinary! On December 12, 1998, we set out to make Freel Peak an adventure.

We parked our cars at the corner of Oneidas and Chibcha, in Myers, a suburb of South Lake Tahoe. I looked over the crew for the outing: Scott Kreider, Noriko Sekikawa, Jim Curl, Tom Curl, Rich Leiker, David Harris, Stephane Mouradian, Patricia Kroeni, Jonathan Claman, and Tim Kutscha. Kelly Maas was the leader, and I was his assistant.

We picked up a thirteenth trip mate, an eager golden retriever who apparently lived in one of the nearby houses. She started up the trail with us, stayed with us for two days, attaining the summit and returning home. (Who can imagine what pets do while their people aren't paying attention? I think my cats spend their private time on the phone with their stockbroker, trading securities and amassing a boundless fortune.)

The 1940s era topo map showed a confusing tangle of unpaved forest service roads, but the reality was that there was one obvious main route and a number of conspicuously smaller spurs.

We followed the road for five miles to a location named Fountain Place. The snow on the road was firmly packed by snowmobiles, and we crossed it quickly and easily. Fountain Place is shown on

my street atlas as a town, but we didn't see any buildings there, not even the ruins of a hunter's cabin.

Tom's old leg injury was hurting him, and so he and his brother Jim spent the night in Fountain Place while the rest of us pushed on ahead.

We left the road and headed north, up an unnamed drainage. David, a geyser of energy, walked out in front, trampling down a path with his snowshoes that the rest of us could follow more easily. About halfway up to the summit ridge, we found a flat spot, and set up our tents on the snow.

The sun set early, and by five o'clock, we were sitting by our small campfire under a dazzling blanket of stars. It was December, and the night seemed to last forever. When dawn finally melted away the last of the shooting stars, we arose, and discovered that a wind had come up and some clouds were moving in. I hoped we could still get to the mountain top, but I resolved to watch the weather closely to make sure we didn't get trapped in a storm.

Leaving camp set up, we hustled up to the ridge. As we ascended, familiar sights hove into view: Round Top and Pyramid Peak were first, followed by Lake Tahoe, Heavenly, Tallac, Dick's and Jack's Peaks, and Mount Rose. But then, as the clouds gathered, the scenery began to disappear. Jim overtook us, having skied up alone from his lower camp. After we passed timberline, the wind howled. Spindrifts the size of skyscrapers towered over the north flank of Freel. The wind-stripped upper slopes were about half bare of snow. We kept our snowshoes on anyway, because where there was snow, we wanted the snowshoe cleats to grip the shallow, polished, wind hardened crust.

Someone standing beside me shouted over the roar of the gale, asking how fast I thought it was blowing. I had no idea, but I had to lean hard on my poles just to stay upright. A gust knocked me down. As I was laying on my side on the scree, with my back to the wind and snowshoe edges dug in to keep me from sliding, I glanced up the slope and saw Stephane and David laying in the same exact pose. When the gust abated, we got up and climbed higher. Another gust lifted me off my feet. I hit the ground running so I wouldn't fall down. Running in place while sailing like a human box kite, wearing snowshoes, is harder than it sounds! We gathered on the summit, at 10881 feet, the highest point in the Tahoe Basin. We didn't linger.

Descending, the raging wind was in our faces, laden with pinhead sized ice crystals. I buried my cheeks in the crook of my elbow. Tim wore a neoprene face mask, with only tiny holes over the nostrils and mouth. That was a piece of gear we all needed for this climb.

Noriko was still struggling up the slope with Kelly as we hustled down. She accepted some good advice, and retreated back to the timber while Kelly sprinted for the top. Even though Noriko didn't go to the summit, she deserves credit for the toughness, confidence and determination she displayed on the mountain.

Back at camp, I saw that my tent had lifted off its stakes and blown a short way before catching on a tree. Stephane showed me how he had dug small holes for each stake, and then turned the stakes at oblique angles and buried them. Extracting the stakes was a chore, but his tent stayed put.

Down below, the weather was milder, and we hiked out easily. Tom was waiting for us by his car. He had passed the day pleasantly in town, nursing his sore leg, sipping a beer and watching televised football at a cafe. Scott knocked on a few doors until he found where the retriever lived. We savored the moment, an exciting finish to a great year of mountaineering.

• Aaron Schuman

Gear Comments

Occasionally we see discussions about gear on the PCS e-mail broadcast list. Since winter is coming up, I feel that it is beneficial to publish this discussion on snow shoes.

Snow Shoes

I'm in the market for some snowshoes and I'm especially interested in comments about **Atlas** and **MSR**.

• *Kelly Maas*

There is nothing to discuss. The **MSR** are hands down better than the rest and they far cheaper.

Why better: They have more crampons underneath to grab into icy snow. Being solid and having side edges they are better on traverse. The tails can be extended to provide more flotation, or shortened for better control and going downhill. They also have better friction for going downhill facing forward.

• *Ron Karpel*

I tend to disagree: The "crampons" suck and need to have a file taken to them to make them useful. The side rails are useful only when the flex of the shoe itself doesn't impair their ability. Often these shoes flex on a steep sidehill and don't quite provide good lateral support. As someone else stated, the long-term durability is also very questionable.

I do like the "modular" style of these shoes. On moderate powder w/ a daypack, the shorter length allows you to travel a bit faster without the annoying heel slap of longer shoes. That the **MSR's** are plastic is good and bad: Snow doesn't tend to adhere to and add weight to the shoe. The down side is that they have not so great traction on steep downhill's, but this also means they become great skis.

The December issue of Rock & Ice has gives the Sherpas the highest score, as I have heard previously. They are also pretty expensive next to the **MSR's**.

• *Michael Gordon*

It seems there are conditions where the **MSRs** are great (crust over solid corn) and conditions where they are not (powder). Same with most gear.

Think about how much you will use them. My **Sherpas** are 15+ years old and going strong. They came with a LIFETIME warranty, and I've had the bindings repaired for free but the footbed is not damaged at all yet. I use them often. The new ones may not come with as good a warranty or materials: caveat emptor.

The "laced" footbed (a tough sheet with actual lacing to connect it to the tubular frame) is remarkably effective in conditions where the snow can push up between the lacing. Traction is much greater than with the Atlas style where the smooth footbed fabric wraps around the frame with no lacing.

You don't need crampons on the bottom unless you are on ice! If you are in soft corn (e.g. 90% of Sierra use) the bottom crampons are just an excuse for snow to collect. If you NEED crampons, WEAR crampons! It's very rare to be on ice hard enough to need good snowshoe crampons without also being on ice hard enough to support your weight. Kicking steps or wearing REAL crampons may be a safer solution. You can't arrest in snowshoes.

The guides on Denali all provide **Sherpa**. There are no choices I'm aware of. (They are expensive, but "cost per use" is lower and field failures can kill.)

• *Steve Eckert*

I have the **Tubbs Kathadin**. I have rented **Atlas** and also **Red Feather** and **Sherpas** before I bought the **Tubbs**. I have seen a couple of friends use the **Polar Paws** of Bob Wallace fame and seen quite a few friends use the new **MSRs**.

If I had to buy something now, I would buy the **MSR** because:

1. Light weight
2. Modular, you can get an attachment if you want more flotation
3. Pack very well
4. Have edges instead of tubes, so you can traverse
5. Also have serrated tracks on the inside for traction, maybe they borrowed this concept from the Polar Paws?
6. Cheaper than the Kathadins, though I have seen the Atlas'es and other Tubbs brands

I bought the **Tubbs** just before the **MSR's** came out and they were also twice the amount. The bindings swivel nicely and have a good claw for uphill traction. I like them very much and I thought they were the best of all the snowshoes that were available, as far as I knew. The problem is while traversing hills.

The **Atlas** and **Sherpas** are also good, but a little lower in my personal scale than Tubbs Kathadin.

The **Red Feather** would be good for snow plodding on flat terrain but not PCS trips.

Polar Paws were all metal, is that a good thing to have in the snow? They conduct the cold and all that, so at least on that count it may not be a good thing.

The negative against the **MSR's** (this was told to me by Steve Eckert) is that a few years down the road, after a period of use, if they break while in the back country, then you may well have no snowshoe, since they appear to be of some kind of uniform material. Now, the **Atlas** and the **Tubbs** and the **Sherpas** have webbing. So, if the webbing breaks you can still lash it together and be mobile. So, only time will tell if the **MSR's** are good in the long run or not. But, at that price, they are hard to beat.

Another advantage of the webbing being the added amount of traction you get with the snow catching in the webbing as you climb up.

I have also heard (unverified) that there are folding snowshoes with shock-corded tubes, like tent poles almost. I have not seen those.

I used to imagine that it would be a boon if someone invented snowshoes with snap-on bindings, much like the step-in crampons, and I have also heard that someone already has.

• *Arun Mahajan*

Having been behind Ron, slipping and not being able to get a grip on the snow and ice with my **Tubbs** as Ron was effortlessly climbing on his **MSR's**. I would concur with him completely. However, there is some discussion.

I am 188 lbs, and at the time 215 and could not get enough flotation on the **Ms's** even with the back panels attached. Something to consider for the heavier among us-- then add 40-50 lbs of gear. The **Tubbs** and the **Atlas's** I used to own were far superior (being wider and longer).. so if the **MSR's** matched your weight I would evaluate all specifications mentioned earlier (i.e., in previous email) as:

- 1) **MSR** with longer tails
- 2) **Atlas**
- 3) **Feathers**: similar to Atlas almost a clone in the model I saw.
- 4) **Tubbs** a distant last

• *Rich Calliger*

I have a pair of **MSRs** (I forgot the model name something with Denali in it???) that I love. They perform extremely well IMO and I have done about 20 climbs in them so far. This weekend in great basin NP we encountered a fair amount of steep climbing. My **MSRs** worked beautifully, while the people with traditional snow shoes seemed to have some trouble in those spots.

Sadly, what they have in performance, they lack in craftsmanship. On my first climb ever using them (Quartzite Peak, Great Basin NP, Jan 1998) one of the bolts holding the crampon to the floatation deck was severed and I had to travel through neck deep powder with only one snow shoe on. Also, they are pretty small but you can buy extension decks for them. I bought the ones recommended for my weight (210 lbs without pack) and used them this jan. Halfway to the peak, one of the decks disappeared into the powder never to be seen again.

Needless to say, I was pretty ticked. I went to the hardware store and purchased some bolts and lock nuts and after fixing them, they have worked very well. I lost my other deck a few months later in Kings Canyon.

If you are heavy enough that you need the extension decks, I would be very careful about attaching them. Tony Cruz almost lost his this weekend in GBNP.

Even though they aren't the best made snowshoes, they certainly outperform any of the others I have looked at and would recommend them, feeling that what they lack in craftsmanship is made up for by superior performance in adverse situations. In many situations where you would need crampons versus normal snow shoes, the **MSRs** will perform admirably. Just keep in mind they are a little flimsy...

• *Pat Ibbitson*

SNOWSHOE OPINIONS, My \$00.02 worth = Buy the **MSR'S**!! Ron Karpel is right. I've had (and still do have somewhere I'm my closest) other kinds of snowshoes, like **Tubbs - Atlas** and I have also rented a few differing brands, but the MSR'S are really my favorite. I like the way they feel when walking, it seems they slide forward in a more natural manner, and I don't seem to step on one snowshoe with the other a soften. but their most outstanding feature is their ability to traverse, they have full length cleats which really seem to grip. the little detachable tails (which were on sale at REI for \$12.00, but I missed the sale) Are perfect for peak bagging, where you might have a heavy load one day and a light load the next.

Also-snowshoe oddities: I have a pair of **RAMER "ASSAULTS"** snowshoes. These are really strange little gizmos that are actually just an anti-postholing device. They look like a pair of oval fry pans strapped to your feet. They are designed for ascents of steep slopes with deep snow. under the right conditions they can really work well -step-in bindings like a crampon.

Bottom Line: Don't spend 300 bucks on snowshoes, get these **MSR'S** you won't regret it.

• *John Zazzara*

See the December issue of Rock & Ice for a discussion on snowshoes. This is not a formal review of snowshoes but a discussion of factors to consider. Their is a comparison chart though of the various brands. With regards to the MSR's the comment is "1/2 the price for 2/3 the performance."

• *Greg Johnson*

Least Climbed Sierra Peaks

Over the past few weeks, people on the broadcast list have been discussing seldom climbed peaks. I thought it would be useful to list these in one place.

Check out **Excelsior**. It is about 12,700 and is a simple peak to bag. A few years ago when I climbed it with my Uncle, there were only about 50 names signed in since 1980, the earliest entry. It has great views, and the face looks like it would be a great technical climb rock climber s.

• *Eric Beck*

I can think of peaks like **Cartago** and **Lamont** that seem to be staggeringly unpopular.

• *Arun Mahajan*

Try the "true" **Mt. Powell**, not what the SPS thinks is Mt. Powell. Doug Mantle climbed the "real" Mt. Powell. He wrote to tell me there is a 1997 register there with only four entries including Doug's. So, that's my vote for a "least climbed, but named, Sierra peak".

• *Mark Adrian*

I climbed **Trojan Peak** (13,947') in September. I was the second person to sign in this year. A direct assault from the Williamson bowl is +3 on crappy rock but there are easier routes. There's a fun traverse over to **Mt Barnard** (13,990'). Barnard is climbed a lot more but it did have the original 1936 summit register on it.

• *Neal Robbins*

I climbed **Mt Stanford** in 1992. The summit register had been placed in 1940 and was still only about half full. What's more, the first two pages were photocopies of entries dating from the first ascent. In one small book we had the entire history of everyone who had climbed the peak.

• *Peter Maxwell*

I vote for **Tunemah Peak**. Yes, I know it's on the list, but it's a very remote peak. Wren Peak is dayhikable via the Deer Cove trail near Cedar Grove, but I've never seen any reports from anybody who's climbed it. Maybe that's another candidate.

• *Gary Craig*

The least visited peaks will be those nobody has climbed or knows about, certainly not any on the SPS list. On a 40-year old map of Kings Cyn and Sequoia Parks on my wall I see peaks I never hear anybody talk about, and submit a few of them here as examples. **Palmer Mtn, Sentinel Ridge, Ball dome, Cross Mtn, Stag Dome, Slide Peak, Burnt Mtn**. Some of these are in Secor's book.

• *Ron Hudson*

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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, rope may be used.
- Class 4: Requires rope belays.
- Class 5: Technical rock climbing.

Deadline for submissions to the next Scree is Sunday 1/24/99. Meetings are the second Tuesday of each month.



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"Vy can't ve chust climb?" - John Salathe

First Class Mail - Dated Material