

February, 2005

Peak Climbing Section, Loma Prieta Chapter, Sierra Club

Vol. 39 No. 2

World Wide Web Address: <http://lomaprieta.sierraclub.org/pcs/>

## General Meeting

**Date:** Tuesday, February 8th  
**Time:** 7:30 PM  
**Where:** Peninsula Conservation Center  
3921 E Bayshore Rd  
Palo Alto, CA  
(see below for directions)

**Program:** *Paths Less Traveled In the Andes: High Deserts of the Salta Province*

*Presented by Paul Wilms*

PCS mountaineer, Paul Wilms, recently returned from a peak climbing trip in the Salta region of Argentina. Salta is the most northwestern province of Argentina, bordering Chile and Bolivia. This area hosts several majestic peaks over 20,000 feet. These peaks have seen very few visitors due to their extreme remoteness, and very desert conditions. Nonetheless, these peaks already fascinated the Incas, and mummies have been found near the top of some of these sacred mountains. More than a climb, this was an amazing journey. Come and enjoy landscapes of Nevado de Cachi and Volcan Lulllaillaco.

**Directions:** From 101: Exit at San Antonio Road, go east to the first traffic light, turn left and follow Bayshore Rd to the PCC on the corner of Corporation Way. A sign marking the PCC is out front. Park behind.



## Trip Planning Meeting

**Attention! PCS LEADERS!**

As announced at the last meeting, it's time for us to plan our peak climbing trips for the summer season. The PCS trip planning meeting is scheduled for **6:30pm, Tuesday, February 8<sup>th</sup>**, just before the regularly scheduled meeting at the PCC. Please bring your planned trips and be ready to schedule them to work with other trips. Food and refreshments will be provided as an incentive for leaders to participate.

I look forward to seeing you all at the meeting and working together to create a full, comprehensive and exciting schedule for the coming season! Potential new leaders are encouraged to attend this meeting. **EVERYONE IS WELCOME!**

--Chris Prendergast, PCS Scheduler

## Wilderness First Aid Classes

These are great classes for learning and practicing wilderness first aid skills in an outdoor setting. In addition to a half day of outdoor scenarios practice of first aid and leadership skills, there is a focus on wilderness first aid topics, such as: patient assessment, shock and bleeding, head and spinal injuries wounds, musculoskeletal injuries, heat and cold illnesses and much more. A three-year Wilderness First Aid certificate is available upon successful completion of this course and passing a written wilderness exam. There are pre-class reading assignments. For further information on Foster Calm, go to [www.fostercalm.com](http://www.fostercalm.com), or contact Bobbie Foster, 530-265-0997.

Dates and Places: March 5-6<sup>th</sup>, Sacramento  
March 19-20<sup>th</sup>, San Jose

# PCS Trips

PCS trips must be submitted through the Scheduler (see back cover for details).

## Mt Diller

Date: Feb 19-20, 2005  
Peak: Mt Diller, 9057'  
Map: USGS 7.5 min, Lassen Peak  
Leader: Stephane Mouradian, h: 650-329-1984  
[smouradian@hotmail.com](mailto:smouradian@hotmail.com)

CoLeader: TBD

*Same as last year with good weather.* This trip rides the 2 mile ridge between Diller and Eagle Peak, going over Diller, Pilot Pinnacle, Ski Heil and finishing at the saddle between Eagle and Lassen. First day, we will start at the Lassen Chalet and head from Sulphur Works toward Diller, summit Diller and Pilot Pinnacle, and snow camp. The second day, we will continue on the ridge toward Pilot Pinnacle, Ski Heil Peak and Eagle Peak. Return will be via the snow on Lassen Park road and some shortcuts. You can bring skis or snowshoes. Skiers will need metal edges and skins and be comfortable skiing slopes with an overnight pack. Advanced Intermediate level. This trip is colisted with the Ski Touring Section (STS).

## Freel Peak

Date: April 2-3<sup>rd</sup> (Sat-Sun)  
Peak: Freel Peak, 10881', Class 2, Winter Conditions  
Map: USGS 15 min, Freel Peak  
Leader(s): Charles Schafer, and  
Tom Driscoll, h: 650-938-2106  
[tdriscoll@eooinc.com](mailto:tdriscoll@eooinc.com)

An easy, late-winter backpack on showshoes, to the high point of the Tahoe Basin. On Saturday, we'll cover 5 or 6 miles and camp below the summit ridge. On Sunday, we'll grab the summit and descend. Total distance is about 14 miles with 5000' of climbing/descending. Meeting point will be in the town of Meyers, 7AM on Saturday morning. Call leaders if interested.

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## PCS: How I Started

A lot of new people interested in going on PCS trips have asked me how they should get started. So I thought it might be useful to share my own experience. I started very slowly. You can just sign up for a trip and go for the ride, but I like to be more prepared. I took the backpacking section backpacking course offered each spring, which taught me how to stay and move comfortable in the backcountry. I bought all the equipment that's very durable and can probably last 15 years. But now you can buy all the light-weight stuff. I've since replaced almost everything over the years to cut weight. Then I started regular hiking with the day hikers. It's a lot more enjoyable if you have good fitness.

My very first PCS trip was with George van Gorden and Nancy Fitzsimmons to climb Whitney, which is all on trail. I learn a lot about altitude on that trip. We drove from the bay area to the

trailhead, and hiked out to camp at 10'000 feet the same day, I have to say I'm a bit subject to altitude, so that's not the way for me to do it. Now I usually drive and camp somewhere high the night before, and take diamox if I need it (please consult your doctor about the prescription).

Over the next few years, I took about one to two trips a year. I bought California topo maps, and after a trip is announced, I usually check the topo about how much distance and how much elevation is required. I also read past trip reports. At this point I was only joining the easy trips and to make sure I can do it. I did Clouddripper led by Debbie Benham, Florence led by Aaron Schuman and Stephane Mouradian, Sawtooth and Needham led by Dee Booth and Stephane Mouradian. I instantly fell in love with the rock scrambling and travelling off-trail. I decided I wanted to do more. Starting easy also means I did relatively well on these trips, and the leaders will give a good reference when asked, a pass much needed when I wanted to sign up for harder trips.

I became a regular at the planet granite gym, learning how to be more comfortable with moving over rocks. Even though it's all plastic and mock rock, I found it helped me tremendously in the backcountry, since I'm more aware of where to place my feet, and how to do stemming, mantle, push down with palms instead of pulling with fingers, etc. Last spring I took rock climbing clinic in the Pinnacles, led by Rick Booth, Ron Karpel and others, surely a good way to get more comfortable on rocks. They got me more into rock climbing, but that's another story.

I took a harder look at my schedule, and I found my season is only from August to September. That's because I'm hindered by the early season snow and ice. I took an ice axe/crampon class taught by Sierra Wilderness Seminar, and we did glissades and self-arrests the whole day, until that was drilled into us. Then I asked Bob Suzuki nicely to be included in his trips and I did Banner, Lyell and McClure with him. Now my season is more like from May to October. I'm still more challenged on ice/snow than on rock, but hopefully that'll improve in the future.

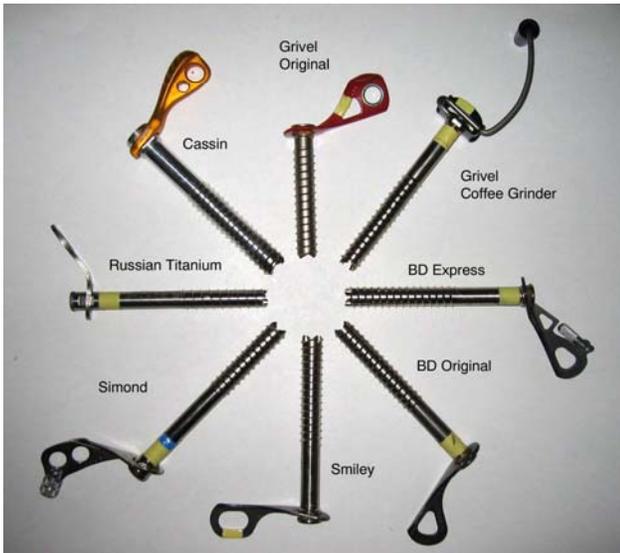
As you can tell by now, I'm indebted infinitely to these wonderful leaders, and I so much want to give something back. I took the wilderness first aid class and started leading day hikes. I'm a PCS class 1 leader. But to be a backcountry PCS leader is a lot more challenging job. I expressed my desire to help in some way, and I'm honoured to be elected the vice chair/scheduler last year. This position allowed me to work closely with the leaders, learn more about trip planning, coordination, etc. I volunteered to co-lead a few trips under the guidance of the more experienced leaders, which gained me so much experience. My plan is to co-lead a few more trips, then apply to be qualified to lead class 2, class 3 peaks.

--Linda Sun (new Publicity Committee Chair)

## Ice Screw Shoot Out

Ice climbing is one of those arcane activities that only a few people ever develop an interest in, especially here in California where there really isn't a lot of ice. Nonetheless, because of a bad knee that makes skiing difficult I somehow have adopted this activity for the winter months. While rock climbing is (usually) done on solid rock and the equipment used to protect hard moves can be very solid, the only protection tool available to the ice climber is the now ubiquitous ice screw. For reasons related mostly to "engineering curiosity", I happen to have a selection of ice screws from various manufacturers. This note discusses the various aspects of these screws.

The ice screws to be compared are the Black Diamond Express, the older Black Diamond, the Grivel Coffee Grinder, an older Grivel, a Cassin all aluminum screw, a Russian titanium screw, a Simond speed screw, and a Smiley ice screw. These are pictured in the photo here. The characteristics of interest are first ease of placement, racking convenience, durability, and cost.



Perhaps the most unusual ice screw is the new Grivel screw with the integral handle. Cranking an ice screw into ice is very often a desperate procedure and anything to improve the speed at which the screw is placed is helpful. Most manufacturers have added integral speed handles to their ice screws but the Grivel handle provides good leverage and makes placing this screw easy and fast. Oddly enough, these screws don't go in quite as easily as the Black Diamond Express. It appears that the angle of the threads, the sharpness of the threads, and the smoothness of the finish are also very important and this is where the Black Diamond screws shine. The Grivel Coffee Grinder ice screw is expensive and is approximately \$55 per ice screw depending on where you buy one. The only serious downside to the coffee grinder ice screw is it racks poorly. A stack of three or more end up sticking out in various directions and catch on whatever happens to be around. Annoying. I included an older Grivel ice screw just to get a picture of how many changes Grivel has made. The older ice screw is a shorty. This screw is harder to place compared to the newer one and appears to be related to the thread design and finish which are very different from the newer

ice screw. These are good screws, however, and the carabiner hole is smooth and large making them easy to clip.

Next on the list is the Cassin all aluminum ice screw. This was purchased from Sierra Trading Post at a steep discount. The tube wall on this screw is considerably fatter than the steel screws but it places very easily in Sierra ice. This screw is light and seems to work quite well. The handle is smooth and handles well and the carabiner hole is large and easily clipped. I don't have any pricing information since this is a discontinued European version but DMM appears to be making a newer version that is available here in the US.

An interesting ice screw is the Russian titanium ice screw. These appear on the market from time to time and are quite inexpensive. They are also a lousy ice screw. The tube is thin and even thinner (and scary) in the region where the handle/carabiner hole is located. The threads are small and shallow and there are only three teeth on the end. This screw is extremely hard to place. I usually carry one or two of these on alpine climbs to use as "poot" screws when bailing off routes. They are relatively inexpensive, on the order of \$15 to \$20 at one time, and extremely light which makes them ideal for emergency descents.

Next up is the Simond Speed screw. This should have been a good ice screw but it is essentially terrible. The tube is heavy and hopefully strong but the threads and teeth are rounded off and don't cut into the ice very well at all. This is an extremely difficult ice screw to place. Maybe French guys are stronger, I don't know. These screws are fairly expensive but not quite as expensive as the Grivel or Black Diamond. Fortunately, these screws are hard to find in the US.

The next ice screw is the Smiley. These are usually about \$15 cheaper than the Black Diamond ice screw. They look like an exact copy of the BD screw, however, they don't work as well in hard ice. In fact, they don't seem to place at all in hard ice and just seem to grind a pile of powder out of the hole and not go in at all. These screws seem to work acceptably well in the softer and warmer Sierra ice. These screws are really manufactured by Omega Pacific and can be obtained from an Omega Pacific dealer. The newer ones may be improved.

Finally, there are the Black Diamond ice screws. The newer version is the Express with the little speed knob built into the handle. These screws are without a doubt the best of the lot. Black Diamond clearly did their homework on these screws and the combination of the teeth angles and thread design combined with impeccable manufacturing and plating has resulted in a screw that is the easiest of the bunch to place in either soft or hard ice. At about \$52 these screws are usually a few dollars cheaper than the Grivel Coffee Grinder screw. The BD screw racks easily and smoothly and tends to stay lined up and out of the way when climbing. The older Black Diamond ice screw is essentially the Express screw without the knob. These were available at close out prices for a while but may no longer be available. Placing one of these screws is far more difficult, however, since it has to be twisted into the ice turn by turn. Placing one of these in a desperate situation will have you headed for the climbing store maxing out your credit card on the Express version!

There are other ice screw manufacturers and the list here is not inclusive of all of the available ice screws. Be careful of used screws. The ease of use is very dependant on the condition of

the teeth and threads. Most knowledgeable ice climbers will have cleaned the screws by tapping the end of the screw with the handle on an ice tool or whatever but tapping the screw directly on the threads is not the way to do it. This tends to nick the threads, knock off the plating, and the result is a surprisingly difficult screw to place. *—by Rick Booth.*

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## Nick Clinch: The Real Deal

*Nick Clinch organized the expeditions which made the highest two first ascents ever made by Americans, Gasherbrum I (Hidden Peak) at 26,240 ft in 1958, and, Masherbrum, at 25,660 ft in 1960. He was also the leader of the 1966-67 American Antarctic Mountaineering expedition with an ascent of Mt Vinson. He served as president of the American Alpine Club from 1968 through 1970. The following is an excerpt from a phone interview with Nick Clinch on January 24, 2005.*

**Q:** In your book [A Walk In The Sky](#), it's been said you didn't use large scale siege tactics for Gasherbrum I while other expeditions, at the time, were. Why was that?

**A:** Going into the Karakoram Range, you were about a week away from any village. We had to 'run tight', or to put it another way, we could have nothing surplus – no luxuries. For each man that carried food, there were two men to carry equipment. We wanted to hit the peak at the optimum time, first week in July, because of weather conditions. So, we did and we made good time.

“You know, a Swiss guide at the time of our Gasherbrum I summit made a comment about American run expeditions. He said they were very different from any other country's expedition. I asked why and he said because the Americans all sit down beforehand and talk and decide and then climb the peak. With other cultures, there is a leader and you do what the leader says, no questions asked. Well, yes, we'd sit down in the tent beforehand and argue and eventually come to some sort of consensus about our route and what we were going to do. We weren't dictating. We picked our team based on a certain level of confidence and competency of each member.”

**Q.**In one interview I read, you mentioned that your pack made it to the summit of Mt Everest, but you didn't. What's that about?

**A.**I had just gotten a job down in Los Angeles as an attorney and I wasn't sure about taking time off. One of the men going on the Everest expedition, it turns out, was treasurer of Hughes Aircraft. So, when the guys at the office found out the treasurer of Hughes Aircraft was going on the trip, they allowed that I could go. I decided at the time that I wasn't acclimatized for the West Ridge of Everest so went for basecamp. I was helicoptered in and something happened with the helicopter's engine as it

was departing, it quit I think, so I had to wait for a later ride out. Now, I had just bought a new Kelty pack. Tom Hornbein asked me if I wanted to trade my pack for his vastly inferior one and I said, “Sure.” So, Tom and my Kelty pack made it to the top of Mt Everest.

*[Suffice it to say Nick had quite a bit more to say about liability issues and the Sierra Club; The Wilderness Act and bolted routes; and the rise and fall of civilizations and organizations... but we'll leave it right here for now. ☺ ...your editor]*

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## UNCLIMBED (?) PEAKS OF THE HIGH SIERRA

Submitted by R.J.Secor

“Are there any unclimbed peaks left in the High Sierra? In 1938 Richard Leonard published a list of peaks for which no records then existed, as an appendix to *Mountain Records of the Sierra Nevada* [MRSN]. There are now records of ascent for all of these peaks, *except for one*. I will not climb this mountain, nor will I reveal its location, living with the idea that there will always be one last unclimbed peak in the High Sierra.”

I wrote those words in the second edition of *The High Sierra: Peaks, Passes, and Trails* [PP&T], and, as it turns out, I spoke too soon. Since then, I acquired a set of Sierra Club Bulletins (SCB) from 1900 to 1964 and a set of the 30-minute maps of the High Sierra, published by the USGS in the first half of the 20th century. These were the two primary sources for the creation of “Mountain Records of the Sierra Nevada,” a mimeographed paper listing all known ascents of some 900 peaks from the northern boundary of Yosemite National Park to Olancho Peak.

Both of these sources used the elevations from the 30-minute maps. It was not a problem determining the records for named peaks, but for unnamed, numbered peaks, guidebook authors started with the 30-minute elevations, then the 15-minute elevations, and now we have the 7.5 minute elevations. Inevitably, some of these unnamed peaks fell through the cracks. So, armed with the historic MRSN and the SCBs, the modern TOPO! software and the manuscript of the third edition of PP&T, I reexamined Richard Leonard's list of “Unclimbed (?) Peaks of the High Sierra” (an appendix to MRSN) and came up with the following peaks for which no records exist. In other words, from my perspective, they are unclimbed. I used a modified version of the UIAA standards for the 4000m peaks of the Alps, namely elevation, morphology, and alpinistic characteristics. For example, I ignored those 8-

9,000-foot bumps on the sides of Kings Canyon and instead selected high peaks with distinctive summits that are beautifully contoured on the map. I even found two named peaks with no records!

*But this list does not include that one unclimbed peak that I discovered years ago. I want to believe that there will always be one unclimbed peak in the High Sierra.*

**These altitudes are from the TOPO! California State Series.**

Peak 11,400+ (0.5 mi S of Glacier Lake, Sawtooth Ridge)

Peak 10,827 (1.4 mi NE of Matterhorn Peak)

Peak 11,371 (0.9 mi SE of Gray Peak)

Peak 12,113 (1.8 mi SW of Mount Lyell)

Peak 12,767 (0.7 mi SW of Mount Lyell)

Peak 10,840+ (0.7 mi NNW of Olive Lake, Silver Divide)

Peak 3744 (1.4 mi WNW of Mount Morgan (north))

Peak 11,520+ (2.2 mi N of Round Valley Peak)

Peak 11,688 (1.6 W of Red and White Mountain)

Castle Peak (10,677; SE of Woodchuck Country) Dead Pine Ridge (11,051)

Peak 10,782 (1.3 mi NNW of Granite Pass)

Peak 10,960+ (3.4 mi SSW of Blackcap Mountain)

Peak 11,572 (1.5 mi ESE of Kennedy Pass)

Peak 11,485 (1.8 mi W of Tunemah Peak)

Peak 12,120+ (2.1 mi ENE of Blackcap Mountain)

Peak 12,222 (1.4 mi SSE of Mount Reinstein)

Peak 12,212 (0.9 mi NW of Mount Reinstein)

Peak 12,320+ (1.8 mi S of Observation Peak)

Peak 12,323 (1.8 mi S of Mount Reinstein)

Peak 12,434 (1.7 mi NW of Mount Reinstein)

Peak 12,480+ 0.7 mi SSE of Mount Reinstein)

Peak 11,480+ 2.2 mi SW of Finger Peak (KettleRidge)

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## **Aconcagua (22,841 ft): The Normal Route**

### *Argentina*

**December 28, 2004 – January 17, 2005**

**Participants:** Lisa Barboza, Yehuda Ben David, this author Dee Booth, Dima Nachayev, Warren and Dixie Storkman, and John Wilkinson.

After about 20 hours of flying and waiting in airports, we arrived in Mendoza, Argentina, on December 29<sup>th</sup>. Two days in this lovely town allowed us enough time to get our permits and white gas. We also paid a visit to Aymara, the tour company with whom we had contracted to take our gear up to base camp. They were very helpful and reliable. [info@aymara.com.ar] To get the climbing permits for Aconcagua, we took a long walk to

General San Martin Park at the CUBA Building. The permit fee was three hundred in US dollars. The cashier scrutinized each bill using a black light to read the watermark. US dollars will be taken in most places in Mendoza, but they must be intact. Worn or torn bills will not be accepted.

On December 31<sup>st</sup>, a van from Aymara came to our hotel and picked us up for the drive to Punta del Inca. Once there, we got our duffel bags and backpacks packed, then took the duffels over to the Aymara staging area to be weighed. Thirty kilograms is the limit and most of us were well within this. After a fun New Year's eve dinner (Dixie Storkman provided horns, noisemakers and streamers), we trooped off to bed at 10pm and let the climbers *not beginning their climb in the morning* party all night!

While the mules go directly up to Plaza de Mulas in one day, we took two days to get to our first camp. We were given a ride to the trailhead, showed our permits, then were issued trash bags with our permit number written on them. On checking out after the climb, we had to produce the trash bag or our permit with a signature proving we had left our trash bag with our tour company at base camp (to then be carried back down on the mules). The walk to our first camp, Confluencia (approximately 11,000 ft), is only about 3-4 miles and less than 2,000 ft of elevation gain. It is an established camp with each tour company providing toilet facilities, drinking water and a spot for your tent. When we checked in at the ranger station, I was surprised to have my oxygen saturation and heart rate measured. If you are over normal tolerances, they will recommend you stay an extra day to acclimatize. While this may seem controlling, if you are overexerted at Confluencia, it is possible you will get into trouble higher up. Most of the people in our group were fine, so we decided to stick with our plan to hike up to Plaza de Mulas the next day. From Confluencia, Lisa, Dima and I walked part of the way up to Plaza de Francia, a pleasant excursion. We got a good look at the dirty glacier that feeds the Horcones River.

The next day, at 8am, we said goodbye to Warren Storkman and began our walk to Plaza de Mulas. Some sources say the mileage from the trailhead to Plaza de Mulas is 25 miles and some only 15. It was hard to tell, but I think it is more on the order of 15 miles. However, they are hard miles. Once across the Horcones River, just outside of Confluencia, you follow the river valley for many miles gaining elevation almost imperceptibly. The riverbed is rocky and tedious with several use trails snaking through it. After a few river crossings, the trail begins to go up more steeply, and at about 13,000 ft all traces of plant life disappear. Once across a moraine, you reach a slippery, steep hill. At the top of this hill, you can finally see some of the structures making up Plaza de Mulas. After a short distance, you arrive. Most of us had run out of water and some were suffering from it. I had brought a filter, but the silty water clogged it immediately. There are people and tents everywhere in base camp. You can get beer, wine, meals, Internet use, and, even a massage. If you want a shower, you can walk 20 minutes over to the hotel and pay \$10 for a quick, moderately hot shower. One caveat here is that there are no public toilets, so you must contract with a tour company to use their toilet facilities. We stayed at Plaza de Mulas three nights to acclimatize. On our last day, we made our first carry to Camp Canada, some 2,000 ft higher. Arriving around late afternoon, we cached our gear in existing tent sites and rested for about an hour, returning to Plaza de Mulas well before dark. The next day, we left some items in our duffels with Aymara and moved up to Camp Canada.

This camp is on a promontory behind some pinnacles at about 16,000 ft. The flat part of this area is not very large and the first night, two, big, guided-groups were our neighbors. From here on up, there are no toilet facilities and you are encouraged to pack out your poop. It was clear to me that few actually do. Also, privacy is at a premium. At Camp Canada, I realized how windy this mountain is and how important it would be to guy our tent securely. Not being able to drive stakes into the hard ground, and there being an abundance of rocks, we used them as anchors for the tent. The next day, we made a carry up to Nido de Condores at around 18,000 ft, and, the following day, we moved camp. That day was the only day we had less than clear skies. Clouds rolled across the sky all day with a few snow flurries. Nido de Condores is a spacious camp, but is also exposed. The wind blows perpetually. We did not move up to the next camp, Berlin. It is a much smaller camp, appears to be very overused, and we had been told that the snow is contaminated. For these reasons, we decided to stay at Nido and summit from there.

Dima and I felt strong enough to make a summit attempt. The next day, at 6am, we started up the trail to Berlin Camp. It was very cold and windy, and we both began walking with out down jackets on. Our time to Berlin was about two hours, and after a short rest, we continued past Plaza Colera, crossing over the ridge. At Piedras Blancas, about 20,000 ft, we took another rest. At 11am, we were just below Plaza de Independencia at 21,000 ft. Here, Dima told me his head felt funny and that he was going to go back down. I continued up to the Independencia refuge, and up the hill to the traverse into the Canaleta. Here, I met up with a few other groups.

The Canaleta was not as hard or as daunting as I had imagined. I stayed to the right at Warren's direction and followed the trail which was intermittently snow-covered. The summit appeared to be a long way off and the going was slow with the other groups ahead of me. Finally, at 4:30pm, I reached the summit. It was a clear, sold day and the views from the top were stunning. I stayed only a half hour making sure I asked someone to take a photo of me on the summit; then, I made my way back down. There are "express" trails down the Canaleta which are a bit treacherous, but definitely fast. I quickly got back to the hill above the Independencia refuge. I stopped to put on my crampons wanting to be very careful, since I was getting tired. Here I met Aron Ralston, the guy who amputated his arm after having it pinned by a boulder. He and a partner had just climbed the Polish Glacier. Amazing.

Just before 9pm, I was back at Nido de Condores. I found that Dima had gone all the way back down to Plaza de Mulas and was fine. The others had decided not to make a summit attempt. We packed up the next day, and, with very heavy packs, walked back down to join Dima. The following day, we walked the distance back to the trailhead. I think we were very lucky to have eleven days of good weather. The day we left Punta del Inca, the skies were clouding over ominously.

-Dee Booth

**Notes:** The Horcones Valley is hot and exposed. There is a lot of water around, but it is barely drinkable. I treated all my water, but others did not without ill effects. Taking a filter was more trouble than it was worth. You can find water at Plaza de Mulas. If you contract with a tour company, they may even provide it for you. At Camp Canada, there was a tongue of snow that would melt enough by afternoon that we could get water from it. At Nido De Condores, there was no water and we had to melt snow. Lisa and I took a brand of dehydrated instant

food called "Mary Jane's Farm" organic food. I thought it was very good, and even at 18,000', I was looking forward to meals.

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## Breaking Trail: A Climber's Life

### Introduction

*The following is an excerpt from Arlene Blum's soon-to-be published memoirs. She is best known for organizing the successful, 1978 American Women's Himalayan Expedition climb and summit of Annapurna in Nepal. Dana Isherwood and Margaret Young, mentioned in this passage of Denali, were also members of the Loma Prieta RCS at the time.*

"The top! We made it!" Exhilarated, the six of us cheered and hugged. We were the first team of women to reach the arctic summit of Denali, the highest mountain in North America. All around us, the high peaks of the Alaska Range extended to the horizon like frozen waves on a turbulent sea. Looking 8,000 feet straight down the vertical south face, we saw a thickening blanket of dark clouds. Although a storm very likely raged below, it was warm and windless up here at 20,320 feet.

We shared a quick lunch and congratulations, but there was little time for celebration. Grace, our leader, was ill and getting worse by the moment. Moving slowly all day, she had insisted on continuing up and barely made it to the top. Now she lay slumped in the snow, pallid and still. We needed to get her to a lower elevation and fast.

Margaret and Faye led her down the summit ridge on a short rope. Then Dana and I each took one of Grace's arms and supported her across a down-sloping plateau the length of several football fields. She staggered between us in a stupor, her weight dragging us into the sun-softened snow.

"One step at a time," I encouraged her. "You've got to keep moving." We managed to get her across the plateau and back up an easy rise to a ridge at 19,600 feet, and then she fell onto the snow, retching.

"Try to drink a little." Faye held her water bottle to Grace's chapped lips.

"Stop bothering me," Grace moaned. "I'm finished."

I clasped her hand and tried to pull her up. "We've got to keep moving, Grace."

"Go away." She jerked her hand away and sank back, groaning. "I'm going to die. Leave me here in peace." Her eyes closed and she drifted into unconsciousness.

I was terrified. As the deputy leader, it was up to me to take charge. Our camp was 3,000 vertical feet below, we had little emergency gear, and it was seven in the evening. Exhausted from our long ascent, we had to get Grace down the mountain or stay up here with her. Both options seemed impossible.

Our team needed a strong leader and a solid plan of action. And so, at age 25, on the frigid apex of North America, with storm clouds massed below and the specter of disaster in Grace's inert body, I reluctantly became an expedition leader.

Since that fateful day on Denali I frequently ask myself why I spend my time and money to sentence

myself to lack of oxygen, fierce weather, hard physical labor, and possible death. And I resolve that on my next vacation, I'm going to the beach. But invariably, I find myself once again breaking trail through deep snow or trying to sleep on a narrow icy ledge. To try to understand why I love climbing distant mountains, I decided to look close to home, specifically at my upbringing. As a child who was not allowed to cross the street, literally or figuratively, I learned how to find my path through or around most barriers. Like a compressed spring, I was catapulted by my narrow, over-protected early years into the heights. Reliving those times while writing this book, I discovered surprising solutions to some family mysteries as well as unexpected roots of my ability to lead mountaineering expeditions, do scientific research, and turn far-fetched visions into reality.

Using my diaries, articles written following my trips, and my imperfect memory, I have tried to describe my experiences honestly and accurately. Whenever possible, I verified the information with teammates, colleagues, and friends. However, our recollections are colored by our personal perspectives and I recognize that others might have different memories of some of these events.

This memoir consists of short childhood vignettes, longer stories of my mountain adventures, and snapshots of my career as a scientist. Intertwined, these three strands provide insights into how and why I left the flatlands of the Midwest for the steep slopes of mountains around the world.

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### Private Trips

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

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**Date:** February 20, 2005

**Dewey Point from Badger Pass, Yosemite**

**Contact:** Arun Mahajan, h: 650-327-8598 after 9pm, [arun.mahajan@att.net](mailto:arun.mahajan@att.net)

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**Date:** March 19, 2005

**Sugar Bowl to Squaw, cross-country ski traverse**

**Contact:** Tim Hult, 408-970-0760, [timdhult@sbcglobal.net](mailto:timdhult@sbcglobal.net)

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### Talk of the Town...

So, I hear many things about our Sierra bears (I won't even go into detail about 'plugs' during hibernation...!) but now I understand they're not

always snoozing during those winter, snow-blanketed months. Tom Banks, **Sequoia National Park** Ranger (Visitor Center phone number: 559-565-3134), and the rest of his clan are recommending bear canisters during winter travel: "They're not always sleeping and if there's adequate tree coverage, fine. But, more and more, we're recommending use of bear canisters." Enjoy that pristine, winter panorama of freshly-laid snow and the celestial quiet of the winter solstice? Well, think again! In one of the Sierra wilderness areas, **Hoover Wilderness**, snowmobiles have reared their ugly engines and may be welcomed by the Forest Service after years of an unenforced snowmobile ban. To answer questions, contact Marcus Libkind at [snowlands@earthlink.net](mailto:snowlands@earthlink.net) or visit [www.snowlands.org](http://www.snowlands.org). Don't miss the opportunity to view the **Banff Mountain Film Festival** as it moves through Northern California – February 24<sup>th</sup> in Sunnyvale and February 28<sup>th</sup> in San Rafael. Tickets available at REI. *What's this??!* Building a road in the White Mountains – that desert oasis of cottonwoods, willows, and wildlife? Inyo N.F. and the BLM have given their approval to build a road up **Furnace Creek** to accommodate motorcycles and ATV's. For more information, please contact Paul McFarland, [www.friendsoftheinyo.org](http://www.friendsoftheinyo.org). **Chicks with Picks** is an all woman's ice climbing clinic that promotes women climbers. It's a unique opportunity to learn from the world's top female climbers. For more info, contact Kim Reynolds at [info@chickswithpicks.net](mailto:info@chickswithpicks.net) or visit [www.chickswithpicks.net](http://www.chickswithpicks.net). Do you enjoy **Clair Tapaan Lodge**, St. Patrick's Day, and the wearin' of the green? Go to the Lodge on March 19<sup>th</sup> for a fabulous dinner to help save CTL. For more info, go to [www.SaveCTL.org](http://www.SaveCTL.org).

-- Deborah Benham



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## Subscriptions and Email List Info

Hard copy subscriptions are \$13. Subscription applications and checks payable to "PCS" should be mailed to the Treasurer so they arrive before the last Tuesday of the expiration month. If you are on the official email list ([lomap-pcs-announce@lists.sierraclub.org](mailto:lomap-pcs-announce@lists.sierraclub.org)) or the email list the PCS feeds ([pcs-issues@climber.org](mailto:pcs-issues@climber.org)), you have a free EScree subscription. For email list details, send "info lomap-pcs-announce" to "[listserv@lists.sierraclub.org](mailto:listserv@lists.sierraclub.org)", or send anything to "[info@climber.org](mailto:info@climber.org)". EScree subscribers should send a subscription form to the Treasurer to become voting PCS members at no charge. The Scree is on the web as both plain text and fully formatted Adobe Acrobat/PDF.

## 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 Friday, February 25th. Meetings are the second Tuesday of each month.**



Peak Climbing Section, 789 Daffodil Way, San Jose CA 95117

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

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