

MOUNTAIN EAR

Monthly Newsletter of the Rocky Mountaineers

March, 2006 Missoula, Montana

The Rocky Mountaineers is a non-profit club organized to promote all types of recreational use of mountainous areas.



March 8th, Wednesday: Glacier Mountaineering Society

Silver Anniversary

Stephen Smith, President of the Glacier Mountaineering Society, Inc., will present an informational session on the GMS. Based in Kalispell with over 300 members nationwide, the GMS offers weekly climbs in the summer months for climbers of all skill levels and at times organizes climbing classes for those wanting to pursue technical ascents. Celebrating its 25th year of existence, the GMS has enjoyed organized adventures into Glacier Park and beyond with an excellent safety record. Its Charter Members included the late Dr. Gordon Edwards, author of *A Climbers Guide to Glacier National Park*, the late Joe Steffen who climbed Mt. Wilbur in Many Glacier more than 40 times, Don Scharfe, proprietor of Rocky Mountain Outfitter and recipient of the GMS Individual Achievement Award for a winter ascent of Mt. Jackson, and GMS founders Denis and Shirley Twohig who hold several GMS Alpine Awards, including the Technical Peaks Award for having climbed the five technical peaks in Glacier Park. The GMS is always looking for new members and especially those who are eager to get involved in the club as climbing coordinators or Board members. We pride ourselves on safety in the outdoors while enjoying camaraderie among friends with common interests. For the Rocky Mountaineers, Stephen will be showing slides of recent GMS climbs in Glacier Park and will have membership forms on hand for sign-ups. The exciting summer schedule comes out this April, so join us now to be included on the mailing list! *Stephen Smith*

From the President: February 24, 2006

Just in case some of you have forgotten, here is a gentle reminder: the Rocky Mountaineers are still thinking about replacing the roof on their cabin this summer. The biggest part of the job will be hauling some materials up, removing the old roofing, and hauling all the trash down. We do not want to leave any old pieces of asphalt lying around up on the mountain. Installing the metal roofing shouldn't take that long. Watch for emails or other announcements about planning meetings and work days. I'd like to get it over and done with early in the summer before prime vacation time arrives.

In addition to the talk and slide show on the Glacier Mountaineering Society at our next meeting, we will have a short PowerPoint presentation about protecting and preserving roadless lands by Joel Webster. Joel is a member of the Roadless Working Group.

And, to wrap up the raffle, I counted \$306.00 worth of stubs in the jar. The winner of the book is Sharon Dill. We now have about \$745 in our account. It will be a nice sum for the next leaders to work with. *Steve Schombel*

Special Event, April 29, 2006:

There has been a change of location for Mario Locatelli's fund raising hike. It is now up the trail to the top of Ward Mountain. The \$50 fee to join Mario's Mountain Goat Club will all go toward a worthy project and support Eagle Scout candidate, Dallas Fadely. He is proposing a picnic table shelter at the Bass Creek/Charles Waters Campground to commemorate some fallen firefighters. Contact Mario at 406-363-1262.

Trip Leaders Needed: This is a reprint from the December, 2004 newsletter.

Do you ever find yourself thinking about going on a hiking, skiing, backpacking, canoeing, or whatever, trip and wish you had someone to do it with? I have. My solution is to put it out there and hope someone is interested enough to join me. Many times there is not, but sometimes there is. I have met some great new friends on these trips. After all, we must obviously have similar interests. For those who are interested in leading a trip, but don't quite know what is required, it can be really simple. At a minimum, you need only pick a location and mode of travel, no need to have been there before, in fact exploration of new areas is encouraged. You will also be the contact for arranging a meeting time and place, and make sure everyone who starts out on the trip returns. It is also important to have the navigational aids necessary, especially if the area is new to everyone on the trip. If the trip covers potentially hazardous terrain, as much information about current conditions and the necessary equipment required to stay safe should be determined. The best thing about leading a trip is you get to go where you want to go, and are not limited by other people's choices. It's also fun to share your favorite places with others. *Steve Niday*

Upcoming Trips

March 3-5: Mount Rockwell-Glacier N. P.-

Assuming the conditions are okay, will leave Missoula early Friday morning. Two nights in backcountry- hopefully near Rockwell Falls (running water?). On Saturday will attempt climb of Mt. Rockwell (9272')- if that fails, Grizzly Mountain (9067') can be a secondary option- or an addition. Roundtrip mileage will be around 25 miles- depending on where Two Medicine road is plowed. Elevation gain is 4000-4400'. Ski's, winter camping skills, a warm bag, ice axe, and crampons needed. Additional gear will possibly include: avalanche equipment, a rope and climbing gear. Alternate date will be the following weekend. Contact: Forest Dean at 240-7612, 721-6384 or e-mail

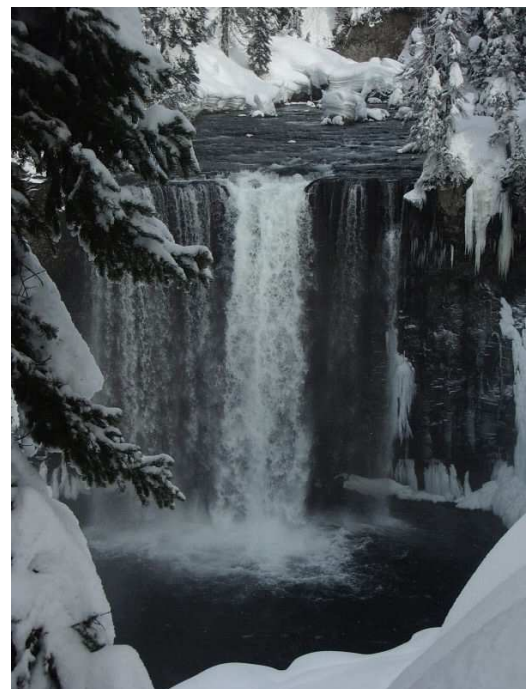
fdean@midlandimplement.com

March 15, Wednesday- Ski to Skalkaho Falls.

This is a 10 to 10 ½ mile round trip up and down a gentle, groomed road. Hopefully it will be quiet at mid-week. The scenery is great and there are a lot of Bighorns in this area. Call Steve Schombel at 721-4686 for the time and place to meet.

April 8, Saturday- I will tentatively plan to lead a trip up Trapper Peak on April 8. Trapper Peak is the highest peak in the Bitterroots at just over 10,000 feet. The road to the normal trailhead won't be open, so we will start at least 1000 vertical feet below the trailhead for a vertical climb of about 5000 feet. The skiing is intermediate in difficulty and it should be a great ski down. Contact Alden Wright at 542-1966 or trapper@wrightmontana.net. This trip was originally scheduled to be lead by Forest Dean on April 1.

June 22-25: Mount Rainier- Sunset Ridge- This is tentative right now, but if anyone has interest let me know. Disclaimer: This is my first attempt to climb this mountain- I am certainly not in position to serve as a guide. I am looking to 2-3 others willing to share glory/defeat in what looks to be a lesser used side of the mountain. Contact: Forest Dean at 240-7612, 721-6384 or e-mail fdean@midlandimplement.com



Colonnade Falls, Yellowstone National Park

Trip Reports

February 11, Saturday: Gash Point- Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness- In attendance were Bret Doucett, Steve Schombel, Dave Wright, and myself (Bill Martin). We met at the K-Mart parking lot where we decided to take two vehicles. We put chains on to get within a mile or so of the trailhead and set off on foot to begin our day. It was clear and spectacular while the conditions were icy and not exactly the best. On the climb some of us had skin problems while others just could not get the required grip on the hard pack icy trail. We did not make Gash Point, but climbed instead to a high point on the ridge and returned down some open slopes. At elevations around 6000 feet and above, the snow seemed pretty decent to do some tele-turns, but below we encountered a thick crusty surface. Back at the vehicles we enjoyed a lunch while taking in the great sunshine.” *Bill Martin*

February 11-16: Bechler River- Yellowstone Park- The Park, established in 1872 by President Ulysses S. Grant, is the world’s first national park. It is 2.2 million acres in size, and if you include National Forests, National Refuges, Wilderness Areas, BLM land, and tribal lands surrounding the Park, the size goes to something like 15 million acres. It is truly a unique area, with geothermal activity, wildlife, interesting topography, and a wonderful place for a ski tour. Away from the main roads in the winter, the wilderness aspect of the area is very strong.

The use of snowmobiles in the Park is an ongoing saga. In 2005, the National Park Service began a new winter planning process with the goal of producing a new long-term winter use plan and EIS. The NPS expects to release a draft EIS for public comment in late 2006. Currently, use of oversnow vehicles off designated routes is prohibited. Recreational oversnow vehicle travel is allowed only by guided snowmobile tours or by commercial snowcoaches, and is restricted to between the hours of 7:00 AM and 9:00 PM. The daily limit is 720 snowmobiles that use the best available technology, 4-cycle not 2-cycle engines. For more information go to:

<http://www.nps.gov/yell/planvisit/winteruse/index.htm>

In 1984, my good friend Paul Cates and I did a 50+ mile ski tour from Tower Junction, past Canyon Junction, Norris Junction, and on to Mammoth. We used the trip as preparation for a climb of Mount McKinley the following spring and skied with sleds. Snowmobiles were infrequent and welcome for the well-packed trails they provided. We spent an unforgettable full-moon night wandering through the Norris Geyser Basin. Bison and elk appearing and disappearing in the steam from the thermal features, the sounds and smells of the bubbling mud and water, the feel of the bitter cold immediately next to currents of warm moist air, and a fine freeze dried dinner. Well, not so much the dinner, but I had to include all the senses.

This year I was able to do a different sort of trip in Yellowstone, one that had been on my list for nearly 20 years. This trip, with friend Jack Kuehn, was equally memorable, but very different in character. We spent 5 days skiing from the trailhead to Lone Star Geyser, just above Old Faithful, up the Firehole River, over the Continental Divide, and down the Bechler River to the extreme southwest corner of the Park. We had intended to go last year, but the day we were supposed to leave, they shut down due to lack of snow. This year there is no lack of snow, with 3 or 4 feet in West Yellowstone to around 12+ feet in the Bechler Canyon.

Since there were only two of us to break trail, and being very cognizant of the potential for deep unconsolidated snow, I tried to gather as much information about the snow conditions as I could. My first call to Alpen Guides confirmed our snowcoach reservations. I next called Jerry Funke, our shuttle driver, and his comment went something like, “Don’t go now, there’s 17 feet of snow, and you would be thigh deep.”

Discouraged, but not convinced, I needed confirmation about the snow conditions, so I talked to several people at the Park Service. They painted a much more encouraging picture about the snow, though they were in West Yellowstone and Jerry was in Ashton, Idaho. When I found out 5 Park Rangers would be skiing in before our

Bechler River Trip Continued

arrival to shovel the snow off the roof of a backcountry ranger station midway along our route, we decided to try it. We both knew it was entirely possible to hit the end of their trail and have to turn around, so we had Jerry wait 5 days before moving our car to the exit point. We hoped that would not be too early if we had to turn around or too late if we made good time. Cell phone coverage was very questionable.

Besides the snow and weather conditions, the other main things to consider for this trip are navigation and the river crossings. We could not rely on any seeing any trail markers, and finding the Bechler Ranger Station could be difficult in a large expanse of nearly flat forested terrain. The Ranger Station is unmanned in the winter and is at the end of the road coming in from the west. From there we assumed we would have to ski 12 miles of snowmobile tracked, we hoped, road to get to our vehicle. Pre-loading waypoints into my GPS receiver helped immensely. That, along with 7-1/2 min. quad maps and periodic compass checks, allowed us to stay on target.

We knew of the river crossings, but reports were a bit conflicting about how many and how deep. We decided we should be prepared to cross waist deep water, with 15-foot vertical snow walls on both sides of the river. We figured getting down into the river would be fairly easy, but standing in the water and shoveling a way out would be hard. Jack and I had considered several options to handle the crossings, and he even built some ultra-light waders out of an aluminized mylar emergency bivy bag. Multiple bathtub tests and refinements left him a bit less than confident. My garbage bag plan seemed even more shaky, so we settled on the security of chest waders with neoprene feet. They weigh only 1 lb. 13 oz. with stuff sack, and were well worth the weight.

Day 1: the weather was excellent, and the Ranger's tracks made traveling very easy, other than the heavy packs. On the first day we lucked out and watched Lone Star Geyser erupt a few minutes after arriving. We met the Rangers on their way out later that day and got some tips on the route. The first night was spent near the

junction with the trail to Shoshone Geyser Basin, in a nice meadow with running water nearby. A long cord attached to the water bottle allowed us to access the water nearly 8 feet down from the snow surface.

Day 2: was a bit more difficult, climbing over the Continental Divide, but still following the Ranger's tracks right into the Ferris Fork Hot Springs, AKA Mr. Bubble, and Camp 2. This is quite an amazing place, with pools of water which are the perfect temperature for soaking, 104-108 degrees Fahrenheit. Since the water is so warm, the shores of the stream are barren of snow and we were able to cook our dinner while soaking. The nearly full moon was a treat and contributed to an extremely enjoyable winter camping experience.

Day 3: we started off with another soak and then hit our first river ford, which due to the lukewarm water and low snow depths near the shore, was quite easy. Towards the end of the day we encountered our first serious crossing. It was intimidating at first, but we lucked out and found a good place to cross. The near snow bank was vertical and probably around 10 feet deep, but there was a large tree on the opposite shore, which created a sizable tree well to aid our exit out of the river. We shoveled big steps down to the water and once in the water found the whole experience quite exciting. We climbed out easily and made camp, celebrating with a few good belts of whiskey, congratulating ourselves on the decision to go with the waders and not the garbage bags.

Day 4: took us by several beautiful waterfalls and into the Bechler Meadows. These are huge meadows, at least 3 miles across, with small patches of timber and lots of water, especially in the spring and summer. This is not the place to be during mosquito and fly season. For a non-winter trip into this area, one must wait until after mid-August. So far the entire trip had been under nearly clear skies, with intense sun during the day, and we both fried our faces. We made camp along the edge of some timber and almost immediately after crawling into the tent the wind

started blowing. It was the beginning of a significant change in the weather, but we figured we were done with the river crossings and could get to the Bechler Ranger Station the next day.

Day 5: we skipped cooking breakfast because of the wind. Shortly after leaving camp we faced an unexpected river crossing, and this time it was windy and cold. By now, we had the process down, and it went quickly. A few more miles and we had the Ranger Station within sight. Without the GPS receiver, it could have been very difficult to find. As we approached the multi-building complex, we saw four snowmobiles. Park Service Rangers had snowmobiled the 12 miles from the end of the plowed road to shovel the snow off the buildings. We found them in a workshop hanging out by a wood stove and they were a bit surprised to see us. At first, they were not willing to haul us the 12 miles to the end of the road due to Park Service regulations. After chatting awhile, everyone realized we needed to be “rescued”, and they ended up taking us out. Because we were early, our vehicle was not yet there, so they loaded up the snowmobiles and us, and drove into Ashton, Idaho. Had we arrived at the Ranger Station a few minutes later, they would have been gone. They dropped us off at the Trails End Restaurant. We had a nice meal and left word with Jerry the shuttle driver to meet us there and not take the vehicle to the end of the road. He showed up around 6:15 PM and we drove back to West Yellowstone for some beers and a good nights sleep in a motel.

This was a fantastic trip that I would highly recommend. We lucked out in many different ways and the trip was much easier than it could have been. The next couple of days after we got out, the temperatures dropped to around -30 degrees. Going with two people is risky due to the potential for very difficult trailbreaking. One guy I talked to from the Idaho Alpine Club, who had done the trip a few years ago, told me the key to a good trip was to do it with a large group or on the heels of another group. I quite agree, unless the snow is well consolidated, which means usually waiting until March. For a great source of visual information about many aspects of the Park, visit:

<http://mapserver.giac.montana.edu/maps/arcims/website/ynpstudy1/viewer.htm?Title=Study%20Area%20-%20Yellowstone%20National%20Park>

This is a compilation of various imagery, including topographic map, orthophoto, thermal activity, wildlife info, snow and weather data, and much more. *Steve Niday*

February 19, Sunday: Glacier Park- No one called, so just my family, Michael Bolwes, Cathy Burleson and Steve Schombel headed up to Glacier this weekend. We called the Apgar Visitor's Center and were told that the trail was well worn and no snowshoes necessary for the nature hike. We joined a group of about 12. The Ranger explained how plants and animal adapt to the winter, and where they can be found. We had great scenery on a sunny day, and looked down on a snow covered beaver lodge. We only saw a few ducks, but the Ranger talked about other animal sightings in the area and about the many tracks we saw. It was an enjoyable and informative way to spend the afternoon. *Steve Schombel*

February 22, Wednesday: Lolo Pass- Fred Schwanemann, Steve Schombel, and Nancy Shrader took on Moose Ridge Loop at Lolo Pass. We took turns breaking trail, ten inches of new snow, for eight miles. Looking back, it was an accomplishment, but at the time it was tough. Snowmobile tracks on Elk Meadows Road for the remaining six miles were appreciated. All returned safe and sound. *Fred Schwanemann*

February 24, Friday: Ward Mtn.-Bitterroots- didn't happen.



Jack Kuehn crossing the Bechler River one last time.

ROCKY MOUNTAINEER'S CLASSIC SERIES

Below is a schedule of the next seven outings. For more information, or to offer to lead one of these outings, please contact Steve Schombel (721-4686) or Forest Dean (721-6384) or the listed trip leader.

MARCH: Wisherd Ridge- Rattlesnake National Recreation Area- Leader: TBA
Date: Saturday, 11th; Category: Ski or snowshoe

APRIL: Trapper Peak- Selway- Bitterroot Wilderness- Leader: Alden Wright;
Date: Saturday, 8th; Category: Ski or snowshoe

MAY: Stuart Peak- Rattlesnake Wilderness- Leader: TBA;
Date: Saturday, 20th; Category: Hike

JUNE: Squaw Peak- Nine Mile/Reservation Divide area- Leader: TBA;
Date: Saturday, 24th; Category: Scramble

JULY: Lolo Peak- Selway- Bitterroot Wilderness- Leader: TBA;
Date: Saturday, 22nd; Category: Scramble

AUGUST: Glacier Classic- Glacier National Park- Several trip offerings will be available.
Dates: 18-20.

We received a very generous donation to our cabin fund from Jerry Kogan. Let's give him a hearty thank you.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION AND LIABILITY WAIVER

Family Yearly Membership: \$20.00 - paper newsletter
Family Yearly Membership: \$10.00 - electronic newsletter
Make checks payable to: "Rocky Mountaineers" and send to:

Rocky Mountaineers, P.O. Box 4262, Missoula, MT 59806

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

I have read this release and indemnity agreement and have fully informed myself of its contents before I have signed it.

Print Name

Signature/Date

Signature of Parent or Legal Guardian if Participant is Under 18 Years of Age .

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