

## ALASKA TREK

Chic Doak

*Editor: After reading last summer's article about Chic's solo climb through the Wind River Range in Wyoming, this latest exploit on Alaska's glaciers will come as no surprise to anyone. Our intrepid classmate puts to shame those of us who think we have had a workout after 18 holes of golf. And he is a poet too (see Poet's Corner).*

We had camped the night before on a rolling Alpine meadow, at about 3500 feet, after driving up a wicked track, kept open by miners' bulldozers, from Porcupine, an abandoned town from the gold rush era, which lay in a little park near the foot of the mountain. There are still some working claims up there. At one time, Porcupine counted 1000 persons, but nobody lives there now. We stopped where the snow began, although the trail continued on beneath it.

The mountain is called Flower Mountain, a strange name for a pile of rock, ice and snow. After crossing the first snow field we saw some miles ahead an arrete stretching down from the mountain, gradually petering out as a long, curving spindle of rock threading the snow. We called it "The Tail of the Dragon". Guesses were made on the time to reach the Tail. Some said two hours, some three. As it turned out, it took nearly five, since, unseen by us, there was a deep depression on the way with loose, tumbling talus on the way down and a steep heavy snow climb up. It must be admitted that part of the five hours was my contribution, I being the oldest of the group by a factor of at least two.



Cozy campsite?

We had a snack on the Dragon, took some pictures and roped up. A little above the rocks the snow field merged into a glacier east of Flower Mountain. The plan is to get on the Boundary Glacier, so named because its terminus is where Canada and Alaska meet, and to get there we need to go about three quarters of the way around Flower Mountain, then go down the Boundary about six or seven miles to its meeting with the TSIRKU Glacier. Thereafter, up the TSIRKU some seven or eight miles to its meeting with the TKOPE, and down the TKOPE to the terminal moraine where the TKOPE RIVER gushes from beneath. There we will put together two rafts—to be flown in—and continue by water.

About six o'clock we called it a day. Larry and Scott and John Svenson cooked supper. It was a mishmash containing among other things, dehydrated beef chunks which we promptly recognized as rhinoceros hide. Quite unchewable, at least by me, and probably indigestible as well. It hadn't been a real hard day for a starter, eight or nine miles maybe, a couple of thousand feet, and I was carrying only about 45 pounds, but I was tired nonetheless, and had no trouble falling asleep in the tent I shared with Larry and John, protected from the snow by my thermorest mattress.

Woke up on the glacier July 27 well rested. It was raining. Larry and Scott worked up hot chocolate and oatmeal in the portico of their tent and brought it to the rest of us. Some luxury. Around 9 the rain let up and we packed up and left. We had to go down and up over two passes, all on snow, to get to the top of the Boundary glacier. Rain started again as we reached the top of the second pass. The snow field narrowed between two big crags. While we waited out of the wind in the lee of one of them, Larry scouted up around to the left and found what he called a good site. We climbed around the crag and down below was a sloping ridge of snow right beside it.

It was raining again and we leveled tent spots quickly. The snow field below us steepened

out of sight and 1000 feet below was the TSIRKU Glacier. Larry climbed up the rocks just behind us to find water. He disappeared over the top and soon came around the corner we had passed with the jugs full. Larry looks like a man but he must be part goat the way he scampers over the rocks. Quite a lad; 5' 10", 120 pounds, legs like pipe stems but incredible strength and endurance.

It rained until late the next morning and we did not pack up and leave until nearly noon. We could see from the map that from the top of the Boundary Glacier a snow ridge folded down along its left flank. Upon arriving there and looking things over we thought it would be more interesting to do the ridge rather than slug down the middle of the glacier. It was fun enough with little ridges and cornices to avoid, and not really dangerous. After some miles it debouched out onto the glacier which shortly thereafter became icy and crevassed where it tumbled down on the TSIRKU. We strapped on our crampons and threaded our way back and forth around the crevasses. Kind of a maze. One must look well ahead or risk getting hung up with no place to go. Back tracking with three or four on the rope can be a little tedious. We went up the TSIRKU about a half a mile to a level spot and set up for the night.

It rained in the night and the next morning. By 1:30 we still had not moved. I thought we should have, 20 miles to go and the weather could be a lot worse. Larry, the trip boss and experienced mountaineer, thought otherwise, so we stayed on another night. During the day and evening, besides reading, we played euchre and a wild uproarious six dice game whose name I forget. The gaming took place in two tents and as much as \$2 was lost, on paper. Sitting cross-legged and hunched over, four to six in a tent, proved harder on my knees than walking the glacier, and the others had to keep adjusting themselves to the demands of my legs. This they did with sympathy if not complete understanding. I find that one gets a lot of time on the horizontal on a trip with Bart Henderson. No gung-ho rush, rush, rush. He figures enough time to do what we want to do, with a bit to spare. So I drifted away from the game rather early and drifted easily into sleep despite the inaction of the day.

We left camp at about 8:45 into a gray haze. The TSIRKU was a mile or so wide and occasionally we

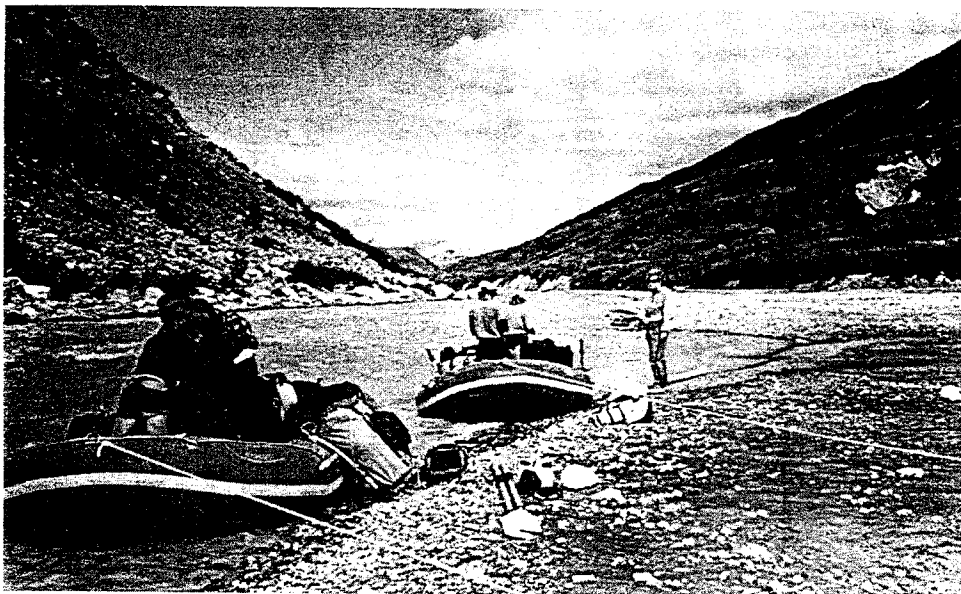


*Just a nice walk on a glacier*

could see the mountain on each side and something like the horizon up ahead. Very soon after starting a helicopter flew over, going up the glacier. They had flown over the day before also. They were going to some mining claims in the mountains to the north—gold, silver and perhaps cobalt. Every morning some people flew in and every evening they flew out to their base camp on the Haines cut-off in Canada. They were the people in fact Bart had engaged to fly in our rafts and food to the foot of the TKOPE glacier and they were keeping track of our progress.

I held up the parade considerably as we slugged up the glacier. Towards the top a narrow, flat band of loose stone curved up the glacier for more than a mile. We found walking along the edge of the stones much easier than anklng through the snow. Near the top we had the usual granola type stuff with sausage and cheese. Shortly thereafter the TSIRKU and the TKOPE came together in a broad plateau and we gradually started going down hill. About four rain came on again and we put down on a fairly level spot right near a big depression in the snow beside the right hand cliff. Somewhere up there the prospectors flew in in about half an hour. It took us longer. I hit the sack early—as usual—and was all zippered up when the helicopter put down. Three or four loquacious Canadians stepped out with a case of beer. They visited for a while, but, though tempted, I stayed in my bag and was falling asleep as the helicopter took off.

Today, July 31, we finished the glacier part of the trip and started down to the river. Got going about 9; gradually down hill for about six miles on snow, then a couple of miles on ice, ending in a steep talus field,



*Embarking on unknown waters*

typical terminal moraine. Balance is everything on talus and the others got well ahead of me. Scott Fisher stayed behind to make sure I didn't get into trouble.

There were two rafts for the eleven of us. It took about an hour to put them together, pack everything in waterproof boxes and sacks, and lash them securely to the raft. The rafts are propelled and steered principally by an oarsman sitting on a high seat in the middle. In our case there were also four paddlers, two up front and two in the stern. There was a five gallon bailing bucket both places.

The banks were low and flat and the river fairly wide where we put in, just where the water cushed out of the snout of the glacier. Nobody had ever rafted the TKOPE before so we didn't know exactly what to expect. Almost immediately the swift water swept us around a sharp bend, the banks reared up, the stream narrowed by two-thirds and we were in a maelstrom of haystacks, six feet high, bumper to bumper. Water poured in. Bart yelled "Bail, bail". Bail we did while holding the ropes and wedging our feet so we wouldn't bounce out. I was in the stern and looked back at the other raft. It was standing on end, first one end, and then the other, and Larry was really working.

I can't say whether we spent two minutes or ten but shot out of the gorge greatly stimulated. Shortly we came to a good camp site where a good eddy made for easy landing and a broad level spread of silt and shale, with adequate wood close by, made for pleasant accommodations. The map said we had come eight miles and the official time-keeper said it took forty minutes.

Supper that night was more sumptuous. Huge mountains of spaghetti with a cheese, tomato, black olive, onion, etc. sauce, followed by brownies cooked in a Dutch oven.

Next morning we left that fine camping place and rafted down the TKOPE about 15 miles to its junction with the TATSHENSHIM, a much larger stream flowing out of the Yukon. Then down the TAT about 20 miles to the ALSEK coming in from the north. The river became very broad here for many miles, lots of water feeding from the glaciers on both sides. Shortly thereafter we crossed the border into Alaska. In a few miles, after spending half the day climbing a little knob with a view of the glaciers and mountains across the now broad river, we crossed to the left side and camped on the broad terminal moraine of a middling glacier.

We stayed there two nights, climbed a spikey 4,400 foot mountain and slept well. The following day we went on down to where the ALSEK glacier abuts on a four mile front. The river turns into a lake. An island on the right side, Gateway Knob, had a brush covered hill behind a flat plain, sand, rock and driftwood covered. We spent the night there. (On a previous trip we had made a sauna with a large tarp, alternating sweating and dipping in the ice berg-floating waters. That was stimulating in more ways than one.)

After Gateway, the river narrowed again and moved fast. A few miles from the Pacific, at Dry Bay, is a landing strip and a salmon-processing plant, a favorite rendezvous for grizzlies. We camped there for the night and next day flew around to Haines. It was a good trip.

---

*An old man wandered into a house of ill-repute. The Madam asked him how old he was. "Ninety-two," he replied. "Well," she said, "you've had it." Reply: "Oh! I have? So how much do I owe?"*