

GINO WATKINS MEMORIAL FUND AND EDWARD WILSON FUND *PRELIMINARY REPORT FORM*

EXPEDITION LEADER: Susie Amann & Jack Waters

EXPEDITION NAME: An Exploration of the High Chugach Mountains of Alaska by Ski

EXPEDITION DATES: 5-27 April 2013

The Chugach Mountains of Alaska form a 300 mile crescent east of Anchorage, stretching to Valdez providing a wealth of opportunities for skiers and mountaineers. The objectives of this trip were to explore the ski potential of the range by visiting 3 areas and attempting Mt Marcus Baker (13,176 ft). The first day of poor weather was spent on organisation & logistics and on Day 2 we travelled to Turnagain Pass (1hr S of Anchorage) for a warm up day where we enjoyed fresh powder on Central Ridge. We then flew into the Scandinavian Peaks Hut, a basic bivi hut above the Matanuska Glacier owned by the Mountaineering Club of Alaska. The weather was good and with extremely low morning temperatures (between -15 and -20C) and daylight until 10pm, later starts became normal.

Our first foray was False Norway Peak (8960ft) which gave a great overview of the area and an entertaining descent. Over the next few days various exploratory sorties were carried out. The route up the Matanuska Glacier towards our primary objective – Mt Marcus Baker – was assessed. Notwithstanding the long distances, the glacier seemed relatively straightforward. Another team investigated the potential from the Iceland Glacier, assessed the routes onto the SW face of Denmark Pk and Harvard Glacier (neither of which were currently feasible) and summited Iceland Pk (8870ft).

A team of 5 then set up an advanced camp at the head of the Matanuska glacier below the NE ridge of Mt Marcus Baker at an altitude of 7000ft. An attempt was made on Mt Marcus Baker but we were forced to retreat from a high point of ~11000ft. In this low snow year the ridge had become an ice climb for which we were not equipped. The team returned to camp and the following day climbed an unnamed ski-peak between the Matanuska and Harvard Glaciers. Meanwhile, the other 3 team members made a successful ascent (and marvellous descent) of Greenland Pk (8000ft).

Reluctantly leaving the Scandinavian Peaks area, we flew out and drove to Valdez. On the first day one team found great snow in Gully Two in Thompson Pass and the others enjoyed some steep lines on Larsens Notch and Matts Slope at Port Valdez. We then all headed up Snow Dome (3780ft) from Port Valdez. The NE ridge presented an airy crest giving excellent situations en route to the summit. The following day an attempt was made on Sapphire Peak (6300ft), a significant ski-mountaineering objective above the 27mile Glacier in Thompson Pass but unconsolidated snow on the summit ridge forced an early retreat. Returning to Turnagain Pass, three of the team summited Tincan (3800ft) whilst the rest investigated the opportunities on the edge of Anchorage. On the final day, the whole team tackled the N & E chutes on Mt. Gordon-Lyon. Our exploration showed that there is enough ski mountaineering potential in the Chugach Mountains of Alaska for several lifetimes!

Susie Amann

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