

# CHINA LAKE MOUNTAIN RESCUE GROUP NEWSLETTER

## THE TALUS PILE

NO. 118, APRIL 2001

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### TRAINING SCHEDULE

Apr 8 Sun Thor Myers  
Apr 9 Mon Meeting Burge/Renta/D. Burge  
Apr 10 Tue First Aid Topic A Schafhauser  
Apr 13-16 Fri-Mon Grand Canyon Traverse Roseman  
Apr 17 Tue First Aid Topic A Schafhauser  
Apr 21-23 Sat-Mon Olancha, SE Couloir Myers  
Apr 24 Tue First Aid Topic A Schafhauser  
Apr 27-29 Fri-Sun Peak 13520, The Thumb  
May 10-14 Thu-Mon Shasta Myers  
May 11 Fri Williamson Runkle  
May 14 Mon Meeting (compass- Gates) Hueber/Breitenstein/Finco  
May 16 Wed Ascending & dynamic belay TC  
May 19-20 Sat-Sun Tahquitz Hueber  
May 25-28 Fri-Mon Shepherd Pass & Kearsarge Pass Runkle  
Jun 2-3 Sat-Sun Split Doerr  
Jun 8-10 Fri-Sun Matterhorn Runkle  
Jun 11 Mon Meeting (knots & SC procedures) Schafhauser/Davis/Renta  
Jun 12 Tue Summer class Gates  
Jun 13 Wed Summer class Gates  
Jun 16 Sat Carillon Doerr  
Jun 17 Sun Jackass, Smith, & Granite Renta  
Jun 19 Tue Summer class Gates  
Jun 20 Wed Summer class Gates  
Jun 20-25 Wed-Mon Rainier Gates  
Jun 22-24 Fri-Sun Milestone Basin Schafhauser  
Jun 26 Tue Summer class Gates  
Jun 27 Wed Summer class Gates  
Jun 30-Jul 1 Sat-Sun Guyot Rockwell  
Jul 4-8 Wed-Sun Palisades Runkle  
Jul 9 Mon Meeting (GPS) Roseman/Runkle/Toler  
SUNDAY ROCK CLIMBING coordinated by Bud Gates

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**CLMRG is funded in part by United Way of Indian Wells Valley.**

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## **OPERATIONS**

### **01-01 18 Feb 01 Search Mammoth Mountain** Mike Myers

On February 18 at approximately 0030, Mike Griffin of the Office of Emergency Services (OES) called our pager to request our assistance on a search for a missing snowboarder, George Hoyt, Jr., a 32-year-old white male, in the Mammoth Mountain area. I answered the page and called Mr. Griffin, who told me that the missing man was a Bakersfield resident and that Mono County had requested our assistance by name. He believed that Hoyt had been missing since February 14. I contacted Terry Mitchell, who agreed to coordinate and began a callout for a 0500 departure.

Lt. Cole Hampton, Mono County Sheriff, who was running the search, confirmed that Hoyt had been missing since the 14th. He requested that we be in base camp, the Ski Patrol headquarters at the main lodge, at 0900. Weather on the mountain was predicted to be miserable.

Three members were able to commit to the search: Tom Sakai, who had just returned from two hard days on Telescope Peak and was already very tired; Al Green, who was supposed to leave later that morning for a week-long trip to Pear Lake Hut; and me. We met at the Hut at 0430 that morning, left at 0450, and arrived at base camp just prior to 0900. Because of the busy day planned for the mountain (estimated 21,000 skiers), they moved the base to the old gondola room. We were informed that Motel 6 had contacted the Mammoth Police on the 17th and said that Hoyt was to have checked out on the 15th but his belongings were still in the room. A further check indicated that he had not accessed his room since 0700 on the 14th. Mammoth Police discovered that Hoyt had purchased a lift ticket and was last scanned on the 14th at 1000 on Gondola 2.

Our assignment was to combine the three of us with two members of Mono into one team. We were to make our way to the southeast end of Hemlock Ridge and search the entire ridge for any sign of snowboard passage, working toward containment within the boundary markers. At the west end of the ridge, we were to cut a wide path northwest to Reds Lake Drainage, staying just north of the cliff band west of the ridge, which drops down to Sotcher Lake. Once there, we were to head north to the Minaret Summit Overlook, where we would be picked up.

We were taken by snowcat to a point just south of the top of Chair 14, which was not in use. The weather included blowing snow with the mountain in the clouds, leaving visibility limited to about 100 feet. Visual contrast in the snow's surface was zero, so

care had to be exercised to keep from stepping off ridges or into depressions that would cause us to trip or fall. Map, compass, and GPS navigation skills were essential.

We found several ski tracks but no sign of any snowboard tracks. Given the wind and the blowing snow, finding any tracks more than a day old was marginal at best. Once we headed northwest off of Hemlock Ridge, we had to descend 1000 feet to the Reds Lake Drainage. This area was more protected from the wind, and older signs would have been easier to see, but the only tracks we found were from three skiers.

At an elevation of 9300 feet, we stopped to take a break and report in. Base told us to head straight to Reds Lake and make our way to Chair 13. With low visibility, a map, compass, and GPS were absolutely essential for finding our way through the snow-covered terrain. From there, we were picked up by snowmobiles and given a ride back to the lodge. One search dog team was lost during the day along with the persons who went to find them. There was a threat of a more severe storm hitting the next morning, so base personnel decided to call off the active portion of the search. We were debriefed and dismissed. We stopped for dinner in Bishop and made it back to the Hut around 2130.

Members participating were Mike Myers (leader), Tom Sakai, and Al Green.

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## **GROUP BUSINESS**

Our Stretcher Procedures Committee (Werner Hueber, Al Green, Tom Sakai, Tom Roseman, and Walter Runkle) completed Revision E of the Stretcher Procedures, and our webmistress (Janet Westbrook) placed the document on our web page at <http://www.clmrg.org>.

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## **FROM THE MEMBERSHIP**

### **Operation Etiquette**

Mike Myers (with Al Green and Debbie Breitenstein)

We tend to think of operation etiquette in terms of our performance when on or around the site of a field operation, usually based on our actions around a base camp or while in the field on an assignment. Getting right down to it, I came up with three questions: When does it start? When does it end? What does it include? This discussion is intended to generate some thought on the subject but not to cover it in its

entirety.

**At the beginning.** Coordinators or telephoners have a lot of people to call. Keep your conversation to the matter at hand. If you're not going to go, don't keep them on the phone. Be BRIEF! Get the info you need and then pack your gear. Using prepared lists is essential to ensure that you have everything you need before leaving your house.

**At the Hut.** The operations leader (OL) has a lot to consider and needs your help as soon as you arrive at the Hut. The OL needs you to show up on time and be ready to begin assisting with the gathering of Group gear immediately. Here's where a lot of time can be wasted going through personal gear instead of helping with Group gear. Don't wait for instructions, use common sense, and start gathering gear. Whether it's a technical operation or a search, you'll have some sort of idea about what kind of gear to gather.

**In transit.** Once again, being prepared saves a lot of time and keeps the efficiency of the team high. The OL has committed to a time to report to base camp, and having to stop by your house to get those gaiters or food bag just causes delays.

**In base camp.** Here's where our operation etiquette is observed by others. If at all possible, stay with the rest of our team while the OL reports our arrival. It's always a good idea to stay out of base altogether unless requested to be there by the OL. It's a very hectic place, and keeping distractions to a minimum is an absolute must. Stay at the vehicle and begin sorting and packing your gear. If approached by anyone for an interview, refer the interviewer to the OL for appropriate handling. Avoid discussing the operation if non-op persons are within hearing distance (or you may be quoted in a future news article).

**During the operation.** Missing a team relocation (movement) is a big deal. You usually have plenty of time to get ready, but there's always a chance that someone won't be ready on time. Having the rest of the team wait on you is just not cool. Get your gear packed first, then tend to the other things you may need to do. Keep in mind that the transportation of teams into the field is a complicated planning process. Be ready to go when the team is ready.

**Legal matters.** Before touching or picking up an item that could be a clue in a search, confirm whether the sheriff's office wants the item recovered and brought in or left in place in case fingerprints can be recovered from it.

**Radio use.** Keep radio traffic short and to the point. Use only enough words to state your intended message clearly. The more words you use, the more the chances are that your message will be misunderstood. If you anticipate a fatality, work out a predetermined code word with the Incident Commander before you depart base to let them know that you found a body. When in doubt, use the MRA's standard code. A 10-35 message alerts base that confidential information is coming. Then follow with MRA Code 1, 2, or 3. Code 1 means that the victim is OK, Code 2 means that a carryout is required, and Code 3 means that the victim is dead. Under no

circumstances should you ever say over the radio that you found a body. There are many people listening to your radio transmissions, and you **MUST** assume that the victim's family can hear every word you say. It is a good idea to become familiar with some of the more basic 10 codes:

10-1 Reception poor

10-2 Reception good

10-4 OK (everyone knows this)

10-5 Relay message

10-9 Repeat

10-19 Return to base

10-20 Location

**Back at base camp.** When you return to base, go directly to the pre-selected staging area or to the vehicles unless designated specifically to make a report to base personnel. When reports are given to base personnel, they should include as much fact as possible. If any information is supposition, state that fact clearly. They can deal with both, but they need to know what they have.

**Back at the Hut.** When you return to the Hut, your fatigue level can be quite extreme, so it is necessary for everyone to pitch in to reload the radios with fresh batteries and to unload and stow all the Group gear. Then stick around for a debrief by the OL. Of course, the order these things are done is up to the OL. The key is to help as much as possible so that everyone can secure.

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## **The Occasional Peaks Gang**

Bob Rockwell

Climb mountains in the Sierra Nevada and elsewhere, both popular and minor peaks, and you will soon read in a summit register that members of "The Occasional Peaks Gang" have preceded you. Some of the entries date from the 1950s while some are recent. You may be interested in how the "Gang" originated, its evolution, and where it is going.

The story starts with Carl Heller. Carl came to China Lake from New York in 1951. He brought with him a growing interest in mountaineering and soon found others who would join him on climbs in the local mountains. His partners expanded during the '50s with Ernst Bauer, Jim Bray, Russ and Doug Huse, Virgil Lewis, John Ohl, Kermith Ross, and others accompanying him frequently.

Upon summiting a peak they would of course write their names in the register. Somewhere along the way, they began to mention that they belonged to perhaps "The Dead Letter Gang" (DLG) or "The Occasional Peaks Gang" (OPG). When they signed as the DLG, they usually added "When this register is full, please mail it to Dead

Letters Department, PO Box X, New York." Perhaps they were poking fun at the still-ongoing argument of whether full summit registers ought to be sent to some library for preservation or left in place for future summiters to read. Depending on the era, other names were used, but OPG was the overwhelming favorite.

In 1957, Chester Howard, Sheriff of Inyo County, asked Carl to establish a mountain rescue organization. More and more visitors to the Sierra Nevada were getting into trouble, and Sheriff Howard needed the help of some capable volunteers to perform mountain SAR.

From here, the story is familiar. Carl and his climbing friends created the **China Lake Mountain Rescue Group** and were its first members. Now they could sign peak registers as belonging to a real organization-CLMRG-and they usually left it at that. Of course, the same friends continued to climb together with new ones coming in and old ones drifting away, but the OPG was scarcely being mentioned anymore. Then, in the mid-'80s, Tom Sakai and I noticed that we, along with a few other CLMRG members, were getting out more and more often on trips that were not listed in our official training schedules. Our objectives were usually mountains we had not climbed or routes we had not done. Obscure, insignificant peaks were targeted in addition to the better-known ones.

On these summits, we started adding "OPG-II" after our names. This was partly an attempt at humor and partly to perpetuate something about Carl Heller, who had recently died. Especially where mountaineering is concerned, Carl's influence on many people was profound, and Tom and I were among the grateful recipients. We knew Carl would approve of us scrambling up peaks hither and yon, paying little attention to whether or not they were on some "list" or some schedule. We imagined that Carl's original Gang selected their objectives in much the same manner as we were doing.

Soon, we signed simply as "OPG." Of course, the Gang did not exist in a formal sense-never did-so had no rules (we liked that!). But somewhere along the way we decided to add one rule-that of how others would join. It was simple: If you summited a peak with a member, you became one. You were then "infected" and would "infect" anyone else who summited a peak with you in the future. The OPG is growing fast indeed!

The OPG has quite a few graybeards by now, and Tom Sakai thought they should be recognized with their own subcategory: "GS" (Geriatric Section). His idea seems to be catching on, but it would mean a second rule. Suppose, for example, you see a register entry with the notation "OPG GS." That means no one was under age 65. "GS+2" means two were under 65.

You may have decided that all this is silly, and some of it may be. However, the Occasional Peaks Gang-at least the CLMRG core of it-cannot be entirely fictional

because it is mentioned in two of the most important guidebooks on Sierra Nevada mountaineering , .

Furthermore, take away from a "real" mountaineering club its bylaws, rules, dues, meetings, record keeping, newsletters, officers, committees, etc., and what do you have left? *The mountaineering*. In this context, the OPG, while hardly "real," could be considered the most focused of them all!

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## OUTINGS

So where are the mountains anyway?

Tom Roseman

Sometime last spring, I received a call from a close friend and former member of CLMRG, Mike Dorey. Mike had hatched a plan to go somewhere way up north and do a long canoe trip on a river sometime NEXT summer [year 2001]. I have been on several river trips with Mike and enjoyed them, so I was intrigued. I started looking at rivers on the web and thought I would have plenty of time to start saving up leave and money for the adventure. Several weeks later, I received an e-mail from Mike with a change in plans; the trip would be this summer [year 2000] rather than the next, and the objective would be the Horton River in the Northwest Territories (N.W.T.) of Canada. I balanced the fact that I didn't have enough money or leave to do the month-long trip against the opportunity to go someplace I had never been and, with my usual good sense, decided to go on the trip. I then looked at a map and found the Horton River-all 400 miles of the river above the Arctic Circle and running into the Arctic Ocean! The plan unfolded as taking several commercial airline flights to get to Inuvik, N.W.T., Canada, spending a day sorting and packing gear, and then flying by float plane 300 miles to Horton Lake. I left Ridgecrest on the 5th of July and, after the usual problems with cancelled flights and lost baggage, was in Inuvik late on the 6th of July, although late didn't mean much as the sun was wandering around in a circle!

Inuvik is a town developed by the Canadian government in the early '60s to aid in the development of the N.W.T. and has a population of a little over 3,000. We packed and then dined on musk ox, Arctic char, and caribou, and the mosquitoes dined on us. The four of us (Mike, Tom Reese, Alex Weaver, and I) broke out our Canadian-designed Bug Jackets and braced ourselves for 25 days of bugs. I had been warned about the bugs, both mosquitoes and the even worse black flies. I have been around mosquitoes before and don't like them one bit, but black flies would be a new experience for me. We met several groups of people who had driven all the way to Inuvik on the Dempster Highway, which is open year round except when the rivers it crosses are

freezing or breaking up. When I have more time, I would like to go back and drive all the way rather than fly.

On the 8th of July, we packed all our gear and ourselves into the de Haviland Turbo Beaver equipped with floats, roared down the small lake that sufficed as a runway, and headed out the 300 miles to Horton Lake. After a bumpy three-hour flight, we landed on Horton Lake, somewhat larger than Lake Isabella but much smaller than the Great Slave Lake and the Great Bear Lake that we flew over on the commercial flight to Inuvik. I often looked at those lakes on maps at various points in my life and dreamed about seeing them someday.

As the float plane went out of sight, I had a feeling that we were now truly in the middle of nowhere. After a brief panic triggered by the knowledge that we were committed now, I relaxed and was ready for the adventure to get going.

We spent the rest of the afternoon setting up camp, fighting mosquitoes, and paddling out on the lake. I had my first experience listening to the haunting cry of the loon. I was ready for 25 days of no news, TV, radio, work, and all of the other distractions of modern life. I practiced with my "custom made" bent shaft canoe paddle that I had acquired for the trip. Mike informed me that I was in fact using the paddle backwards, something I had expertly figured out all on my own on a practice canoe trip to Lake Isabella with Paul DeRuiter before the trip. I had even convinced Paul to use his paddle the wrong way as well! Good thing Mike knew a little something about canoe paddles. I did call Paul when I returned to Ridgecrest and owned up to my ignorance.

We cooked our first meal in the "bug house," a large screened-in tent with no floor that Mike had brought along that took a lot of the misery out of fighting bugs while cooking meals or showering. We then escaped into our tents for our first night only to be reminded that the trip would be one long day. You can leave your headlamps at home in this part of the world in the summer. I dozed off only to be awakened to a light rain. However, there were no clouds and no water drops on the tent—only the noise created by several hundred mosquitoes drumming away on the outside of the tent and between the tent and the fly. Earplugs did the trick, and I soon fell asleep. As the trip progressed, Mike and I became masters at getting in and out of the tent without letting in any bugs. The next day was sunny and warm in the high 60s or low 70s with a breeze to help keep down the bugs, a pattern that persisted for most of the trip. We quickly learned to like any kind of weather that kept the bugs away.

We found the outlet from Horton Lake, canoed to the next smaller lake, and found the outlet that led from there to the Horton River. The water was clear, cold, deep, and running fast. At the smaller lake, we were treated to the sight of a tundra swan swimming through some reeds.

We spent the next 10 days working our way down the river, loading and unloading the canoes, setting up and breaking down camp, and cooking meals and cleaning up.

Although it seems like a lot of work, we soon worked into the daily routine of river life, and the concerns of the outside world slowly melted away.

We saw lots of eagles, hawks, falcons, and the distinctive arctic tern and many and various flowers but were beginning to wonder where all the big animals were. Perhaps it was merely a tourist trap, and there were no big animals? We greeted each new day in anticipation that this would be "big animal day" and saw wonderful tracks of grizzly bear, wolf, and caribou but no animals. Then one afternoon, we rounded a bend in the river to see a small tree waving back and forth, caused by a large brown object that turned out to be a musk ox, our first big animal. After that, the hex was lifted, and we were to see a herd of musk ox, lots of caribou, a white wolf, and three grizzly bears.

Mike fished as well and caught arctic grayling and northern pike, a nice change to our store-bought food. We did eat very well on the trip as a canoe can carry about 700 pounds of gear, and we weren't interested in running out of calories. Things that I never eat at home, like Spam and Dinty Moore stew, were favorites.

Although we didn't meet any people for the first 10 days of the trip, we eventually met folks from Germany, Norway, Idaho, Vancouver, and Alaska and a large group of eight from various parts of Canada. The first group we meet were the Canucks, and when we lamented that we had not brought along any beer or wine, they quickly offered up a three-liter mylar bag from a box wine and even wanted to know if we desired red or white. Everyone we met was fun and very interesting, and most had a lot of experience in doing the various rivers of northern Canada.

Toward the end of the trip, the sun actually began to set and rise, but it never got dark, and the long sunsets and sunrises, often accompanied by rainbows, were quite a treat. The river was clear and cold until the last 70 miles or so, when silt started to appear. We went through several beautiful canyons, replete with rapids that we portaged, lined, or ran as deemed appropriate by Tom and Mike, the river experts of the trip. Alex and I learned a lot about such things on the trip but have a way to go in learning what is sane and insane 3 or 4 hundred miles from any help or resupply!

After 25 days and nearly 400 miles, we finally reached the Arctic Ocean at the mouth of the Horton River. The current mouth is a fairly recent geographic feature formed about 50 years ago when the river broke through to the ocean on the east side of the peninsula that it follows. The earlier course went another 50 miles and entered the ocean on the west side of the peninsula.

We found the ocean loaded with ice. What a treat. Of course, I had to go for a dip when enticed by Alex, who had already swum in the Antarctic Ocean. Yes, it was

cold, but the day was warm and sunny, so the experience was fun. The float plane arrived two days later right there at the mouth of the river, just as we had scheduled when we left a month ago. Needless to say, we had incentive to be at the departure point on time because if we were late, we would pay for an extra flight! With regret, we embarked and flew back to civilization. Go if you ever get a chance!

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## **DONATIONS**

Gina Najera-Niesen

*Editor: The donation from Mario and Yolanda Gonzalez that we acknowledged in the last issue of The Talus Pile was to honor the memory of Dave Dykeman.*

***CLMRG gratefully acknowledges recent gifts from the following friends:***

James Wilson Inyokern, California

John Olley Dunsmuir, California

Dorothy Gould Solana Beach, California "In memory of Leo Nowak"

Dorothy Gould Solana Beach, California "In memory of Rosalie Proper"

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## SCREE

Carl Sparks, Kern County Sheriff, hosted his fourth annual appreciation banquet at Hodel's Restaurant in Bakersfield on 16 March 2001 for his search and rescue volunteers. CLMRG was well represented by 21 members and guests who enjoyed a fine buffet dinner.

Ellen Schafhauser received recognition and a special award as our Volunteer of the Year.

The federal government has a web site for many kinds of outdoor recreation:

<http://www.recreation.gov/>

Bob Rockwell presented a slide show on his climb in Kazakhstan at the Maturango Museum on 8 Feb 01. He entertained an audience of about 75 for a little more than an hour.

New officers for Indian Wells Valley Search and Rescue (IWVSAR) are Captain Sean Halpin and Co-Captain Dave Sanders

To all recipients of *The Talus Pile*: We can save printing and postage costs by e-mailing *The Talus Pile* instead using snail mail. If you have an e-mail account and would like to receive electronic copies, please let me, Loren Castro, know. My e-mail address is [lfc32@earthlink.net](mailto:lfc32@earthlink.net). Bear in mind that electronic copies can be big because of scanned-in cartoons. For example, this issue runs somewhere between 2.5 and 3.5 megabytes.

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All telephone numbers in *The Talus Pile* are area code 760 unless noted otherwise.

*He who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe is as good as dead.*  
--Albert Einstein

