

Story of the Bashful Climbers
Bashful Peak 8005'

Mark Norquist

On September 12-14 Rich Brown and I climbed the NW couloir on Bashful Peak. We were overdue returning and were the subject of a subsequent search operation by State Parks. Later that week an article appeared in the Anchorage Times in which State Parks Director Neil Johannsen made some grossly unfair and untrue statements about us. The story was refuted in a later issue, but I thought the climbing community deserved to hear the full story.

On Saturday Sept. 12 Rich and I departed from Anchorage under somewhat gloomy skies following the old Alaskan philosophy "ya gotta go anyway, it might get nice." We biked to the end of Lake Eklutna, stashed the bikes near the East Fork bridge, and hiked back the two or so miles to the foot of Bashful. We then proceeded to bushwack our way up to 3000 ft. where we set up camp on one of the long moraine ridges on the north side of the mountain. Note: the proper approach through the vegetable level is by going just to the left of the biggest waterfall coming down. There are a couple of lightly used trails going back to this point. We unfortunately went up on the right side of the waterfall and were confronted with a typical Alaskan bush nightmare - steep slopes covered with alders and devils club and infested with gremlins that would pull you backwards.

Up at our 3000-ft. camp it snowed on us fairly hard for a couple of hours that evening. The next morning was gray and foggy, but it was light overhead and calm and we were pretty sure we'd be in some nice weather after we climbed a couple thousand feet. We filled our water bottles at a pond in the middle of the moraine and headed toward the small glacier at the bottom of the NW face of the mountain at 9 am. Having been in this bowl two summers previous we were able to walk directly to the base of the NW couloir. The glacier is at 4000 feet, the entrance to the couloir a couple hundred feet higher. The route would exit at a saddle at the base of the summit cone at about 7700 feet, so we had 3500 feet of steep couloir ahead of us.

The cone up to the neck of the couloir was covered with week-old avalanche rubble from early season snow. Enough snow had come down the gully to fill the crevasse at the entrance to the gully. Gingerly we stepped across and things rapidly got steeper. I recalled looking at photos I had taken from Bold thinking that the bottom thousand feet of the couloir looked like possibly the steepest part of the climb, and indeed many of the steeper parts were. We front-pointed our way over numerous 70-deg ice bulges. Most of the crux spots were conveniently provided with large piles of soft snow at the bottom, and we felt no real need to belay. It was a great time, free climbing steep ice using just piolet and crampons! The conditions varied from soft snow to glacial ice. At 5000 ft. we climbed out of the cloud layer and had clear blue all the way.

Somewhere between 6000 and 6500 the couloir narrowed down to nothingness and it was time for a course correction. In studying my photos I had noticed that there was a series of connecting snow fields to the left of the couloir - this was, in fact, the way the couloir was originally climbed by Art Davidson (1965) as I would later learn. however I have always had a pechant for diretissima, and as we traversed left we entered smaller gullies that seemed to continue up, so that's the way we went.

Soon came the spot where I needed my one belay. Climbing ahead of Rich, traversing over to the next gully in the chain, I opted to follow a ledge on the near side of the gully, rather than descend into the gully proper. The ledge got narrower and narrower and hey! I couldn't go forward anymore! Sure didn't want

to go backwards! The ledge I was on at this point was about ten feet above the main channel of the 55-deg ice gully. Fortunately, Rich is an understanding partner and was far enough behind me that he could retrace his tracks to a point where he could climb down into the gully, then up past me. He set a belay, threw me an end, and I tied in and sort of rolled off the side of the ledge, twisting so that I landed on my back on the far side of the gully. Enough stupidity for the day - on with the climb.

At this point we were off the glacial ice and climbing this year's frozen snow covering the rock. There were a few thin and exciting spots, with the snow/ice cover only a couple inches thick over steep crud, then the angle finally eased off a bit and the last 500 feet was mainly just a whole lot of work. It was a little after 5 pm. It had taken seven hours to climb the route, which I thought seemed a bit slow, but then again it was one of the most challenging sustained routes either of us had climbed in the Chugach.

The summit lay 300 feet above us up easy snow slopes - it would have taken only a few minutes to get there. Unfortunately the clouds, in the last half-hour, had moved back in, and visibility was deteriorating rapidly. We had climbed the route, and there wouldn't be any view at the top anyway, so we decided to be "responsible" and try and make our way down, as we were expected back that night.

Our planned descent route was the SW ridge. I had been on the ridge before a couple of years earlier up to about the 6500-foot level in a winter attempt, and I thought I had a fair idea of what the upper part of the ridge was like. However, in the midst of the "pea soup", things were not as simple as planned. We muddled our way down, following, then loosing, then finding what we thought was the ridge for a couple of hours. At around 8 pm we knew we were definitely off route. We knew we were somewhere on the south flank of the mountain, and occasional holes in the clouds below us made it look as though there was a good possibility of descending straight down that side of the mountain to the valley below. We decided to try for a rapid descent, as we had no desire to spend the night up high.

We quickly descended a thousand feet down a promising snow gully, but came to an abrupt halt when it narrowed down and turned into a waterfall. It was obvious to us at this point that we would be spending the night on Bashful. We filled our water bottles at the waterfall and started to retrace our route, looking for any possible shelter. After about 500 feet we came to a small snow moat by the rock at the side of the gully, and decided that this was going to be it. It was about 9:30. By 10:00 we had excavated a small cave (a tube actually), thrown rope, runners and whatever into the bottom, put on all available clothes and wriggled in.

We lay face to face with no room to move except for small arm and leg motions. Never did sleep, maybe a few minutes here and there. Never was cold in any specific part of the body, just chilled all over. Shivered a lot. Out of nine hours spent in our hole, I think I probably shivered four and a half.

Finally the light returned and our long cold night was over. At 7:00 am we crawled out to be greeted by clear blue sky. It took about an hour to repack gear, work out stiffness and get our balance back. Felt good to get moving, though we definitely wouldn't be setting any speed records this day. Forty-five minutes later we had climbed out of the shadows of the gully into bright sunshine.

We retraced our steps from the previous evening back up to the ridge, indeed, almost to the place where we had exited the couloir. It was a relief to be

heading down in the right direction at last. The ridge is mildly challenging and we enjoyed ourselves on the way down, for it was a grand day to be high in the Chugach.

About 1:00 pm we heard the pulsating sound of a nearby helicopter. Figuring that it was a State Trooper helicopter looking for us, we stood on the ridge waving a space blanket and waiting to be "found." Finally, after about twenty minutes of circling the mountain, they spotted us. We communicated to them that we were OK and would be back to civilization that night.

The rest of the descent was uneventful, just lots of plodding along in low gear. At about 5000 feet we left the ridge and descended a gully on the north side that took us back down to the glacial bench. We ravenously devoured a couple of freeze-dried stroganoff dinners at our tent, packed up the tent and such and headed for the land of flush-toilets and hot water...

If anyone wants to see the related newspaper articles, they were in the Anchorage Times Sept 15 and 17th in Section B, and on Sept 24th in letters to the editor. In communicating with State Parks and the newspaper, I indicated to both that Rich and I considered ourselves responsible for any search costs and fully expected to pay for such.



Pedaling (Paddling?) Bird Creek

Kathy Burke

It was one of those dark cloudy days in Anchorage, so we loaded everybody and their bikes into the van and headed south to bike the old logging roads in Bird Valley. Turning the corner to the valley a sunny day opened up to us and we were glad we weren't wasting it. We got wet right off when the bridge across Penguin Creek ended 10 feet short of the other side of the creek. A quick ride, or push, up a rocky hill got us to the flat stretch of road that turned this mountain bike trip into "Aqua Bike Adventure" - Yee-Haa! Sometimes we go quietly into the woods and see wildlife, and then there are those times when we are the wildlife howling and yipping at the top of our lungs. What should I expect from a bunch of whacky wheelers! Actually our noise was nothing compared to the three-wheelers around there.

Along these logging roads are a bunch of Alaskan sized mud puddles; you know, 20-30 footers. It was always a gamble where the solid bottoms were and where the quicksand was. In the middle of one of those 25-foot long puddles, while I'm yipping and yee-, it occurs to me that this is the same group that thought up and carried out the Great Railroad Track Biking Adventure, and now there's one more among us. Oh my gosh, could it be true? The membership of the Banana Bikers Bunch is actually growing! I had warned the others to wear their high rubber