

# The Goosedown Gazette

Spring Open House Edition

April 2001 Volume 23 Issue 2

UC Mountaineering Club



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# Welcome to the UC Mountaineering Club

Experience a lifetime of adventures with us!

We are experienced in it all!

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We are the largest student organization on campus, with a membership of over one-hundred and an average meeting attendance of over forty.

Our activities include but not limited to:

Hiking, backpacking, camping, caving, climbing, white water rafting, kayaking, cross-country skiing, snow shoeing, downhill skiing, mountain biking, trail running, skydiving, hang gliding, snorkeling, scuba diving, recycling, partying, tree planting, ice climbing, sledding, canyoneering, ice skating, bouldering, base jumping, bungee jumping, star gazing, and, of course, mountaineering.



## NEED MORE INFO?

Feel free to contact any officer.

President:	Stacey Dunn	556.7880
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Treasurer:	Peter Hogaboam	861.8459
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Cover: Yucatan trip: Bob Masters, Mike O'Herron, and Chuck Crimmel



JOIN US every **Wednesday at 7:00 pm**

**Weekly meetings:** Blegen Library, Room 308.

We mainly discuss and share our trips, do a bit of business, then enjoy a program or slide show on neat adventures from within and outside the club.

**UCMC Office:** Governance Pavilion at  
Braunstein Quad

**Call anytime:** 556-6014, or just drop by.

**Membership:** \$10/quarter, or \$30/year.

Membership entitles you to use of the club's library (books, videos, and magazines), and to check out enough equipment for yourself for one week. Gear checkout is every Wednesday after the meetings, and should be returned the following Wednesday before the meeting.

Check out the UCMC home page for almost up-to-date news, minutes, trips, and cool links:

**<http://www.ucmc.org>**

## Letter from the Editor

Thank you all that contributed to the Goosedown this quarter. Thank you especially to Belinda Bankes for her editing contributions.

The UCMC website has now been updated and will be updated on a regular basis. Meeting minutes, meeting presentations, and club trips shall be posted. Thank you to Bob Kessler for tackling this project.

Our office this year has been moved to the new Student Governance Pavilion in the Braunstein Quad. If you haven't checked out the new office, stop by and see our new home base. Officers and/or members should be in the office daily around lunch time and periodically at other times. At the office, you can sign up for new memberships, check out the calendar of events, sign up for outgoing trips, view and check out books and maps from our library, and of course, socialize. All are welcome.

Everyone welcome our new president Stacey Dunn who is playing out the leadership role within UCMC very pro-actively. We all look forward to what she has to offer to the club in the future.

# Solo

By Jim Stanley

*"There is a perverse delight in putting yourself in a potentially dangerous situation, knowing that your experience and skill makes you quite safe. To stand with a friend in eerie moonlight at the foot of a vast mountain and be certain that you can safely reach the top is a wonderful feeling of self-confidence. It might seem an absurdly pointless thing to do, but to have the nerve to go and try it, just to see if you can, is an affirmation of everything that is noble in humanity. As you step on to the first hold, or drive the first axe blow you step into a world that is absolutely and cruelly real. The power of it is indescribable, as vital on the first step as it is on the last, at the base or on the summit, and the intensity of it only gradually fades on your return to the valley."*

*Joe Simpson- This Game of Ghosts*

Jerry Bargo and I were nearly topping out on Royal Arches, a 17 pitch classic in Yosemite, when he came up from below. A guide book author from Arizona, he said his name was Randall Jet. Jerry and I had been climbing as fast as we could all day and were feeling pretty good about it, but this guy was SOLOING. Without the burden of ropes or gear or a partner to belay, he was able to climb much faster than us. How cool it must be to climb like that. I never thought I would. That was five years ago.

I walked into work last Thursday and my boss announced he needed someone to go down to North Carolina to work on Mark Martin's Winston Cup car. I work in Detroit as a noise and vibrations consultant, for Roush Anatrol. Our more famous division, Roush Racing, fields more NASCARs than any other team. The previous week, the race team had broken a part, presumably due to vibration-induced fatigue failure and were looking to us to fix the problem. Since my climbing trip to Red River Gorge that weekend had been canceled, I agreed to go. Besides, it would be interesting to work on a race car, and there is a lot of good climbing in North Carolina.

So I flew out of Detroit on Saturday night, rented a car and headed to the great slab climbing Meca of the East Coast, Stone Mountain, stopping for Guinness, Doritos, donuts, and smoked oysters along the way. At the state park, I found an inconspicuous place to park the car, drank a Guinness, and did the stealth bivy on the ground in front of the car. I awoke in the cold dawn and drove to the parking area near the climbs, looking to join an odd numbered group.

I had been to the area some 4 years earlier and really enjoyed the climbing. Unlike the steep pocketed limestone I grew up climbing in Springfield Gorge, Ohio, this was slab--low angled and no real holds. Hand and arm strength mean nothing here because there is nothing to grab and pull down on. Instead, you search for small indentations in the sea of flat gray granite where it is not quite so steep. You place a toe in the indent, trust the feet, weight it, trust the feet, and step up. Slab climbing is balance and grace. To the novice used to cranking hard on big holds, it's scary as all Hell, but once mastered, you feel like Spiderman, climbing on nothing. It's a brilliant feeling.

I had been wanting to climb the classic route, Grand Funk Railroad, which I knew would be at my limit for leading slab, but I also had the notion that I might want to SOLO a much easier classic called The Great Arch. Though the weather was beautiful that Sunday morning, I found no other climbers. Maybe I would solo the route after all. I took a brisk walk up to the top of the rock via the tourist trail, to warm up and allow more time for potential partners to arrive.

None did.

I set off for the base of the climb carrying nothing but my climbing shoes and my chalk bag. There was no ritual sorting of gear, no stacking of ropes, no partner to assure me I was On Belay. I felt naked. At the base, I did find two other climbers, starting up the same route. Mark was a schoolteacher, now teaching his friend, Luke, to climb. I explained that while I had soloed several short pieces of rock in the mountains out of necessity, this was the first time I had ever approached a long, multipitch rock route with the intention of climbing it unroped. Mark asked why I would choose to solo the route, when I could easily climb it safely with a rope to catch my fall. That was a good question, THE question, in fact, and I wished I had a good answer.

Mark led the first pitch and set a belay for his friend to follow. I climbed between them. This way, should the pressure become too great, should I lose my composure, I could always grab their rope. But I knew that if I slipped, I would be halfway to the bottom before I could start to grab hold and by that time it would be too late, but it helped, psychologically, just seeing the strand there even if it wasn't attached to me in any real way.

I started up the slab, listening to the sound of my own breathing. Several times, I asked what the Hell I was doing there and many times the thought of a fall would enter my head. I would visualize the sudden slip of the foot, the feeling of lost control like when you lean a little too far back in your chair, the sight of the rock rushing upwards, and the pain of tumbling down, pain of impact at the bottom, the lights going out for the last time.

Climbing, especially solo climbing, is an exercise in mental control. I fought to push the negative thoughts from my head. When my mind was clear, I had the focus of a laser. Only the physical act of climbing mattered and I never wavered in my belief that I could do it. I joined Mark at the first belay and waited for Luke to come up. We three climbed the second pitch in the same manner, first Mark leading, then me soloing next to his rope, then Luke followed.

Feeling more confident now, I climbed the next two pitches ahead of Luke and Mark, completely alone. High on the route and alone--this was the stuff. The thoughts of falling tried to enter, but I kept them at bay, kept my concentration intact. I kept the thoughts out, because were they to enter, the concentration, the one thing keeping me alive, would be drilled through, and I would be made afraid, shattered.

Near the top, I found a good rest. The task nearly completed, I took a moment to look around and to breathe. It was then that I noticed an unusually large flock of buzzards circling nearby. Maybe they knew I didn't have a rope. I knew better.

# How to Pick a Tent Partner

By Julia Pilder

A solution to this necessity is easier said than done. There are many things to consider while choosing a tent partner. You must ask yourself, "Do I have a tent? How many people are going to sleep in it? How well do I know these people? What kind of obstacles should I have to deal with during the night?"

Most members in the club already have their own tents or have a significant other that they already plan on sharing a tent with. But what about us other club members who have to share tents and are just meeting new people? The possibilities are endless because we are always meeting new people and many of the following things can happen by sleeping with strangers in the UCMC.

First of all, you must have your priorities set. Never do anything that you don't want to do. Any requested sleeping arrangements can be made, as long as you speak up about it. For example, you don't want to be in a tent with people that bother you by snoring, appear to jump around a lot, or fear being asked to participate in strange rituals. (I am not saying these things never happen.)

Second, some people on UCMC trips consider themselves experts in sleeping arrangements because it seems like not a big deal for the experienced camper. But to others, everyone who is anyone might not appear to be a very happy camper. One must be able to tell if their tent-mate has been drinking, seems very tired, cranky, or even seems not to have all their appropriate gear to become adjusted to short term sleeping habits. Therefore, it is crucial for one to know how to choose a tent partner.

One does not have to be willing to share their personal gear in order to share the same tent, but one must be sympathetic with others if camping is new to them and

one must feel comfortable sharing the premises with others. If any of these things are of any concern to you, please speak with the trip leaders for alternative solutions or camping may not be for you.

In the UCMC, we want everyone to feel comfortable participating on trips and sharing camping life with each other. From my experiences, (don't fall off your chair), I felt comfortable with most sleeping arrangements, other times not. When there were plenty of room, gear, and comfort for everyone, everyone was happy and slept great.

The only way I overcame my fear and insecurity of sleeping in a tent, was by getting to know people in the club. This helped me feel more secure about choosing a tent partner. Especially, do not let mostly male/female, old/young, new/old member trips (excluding trip level and focus) influence your choice to participate on a trip for fear of sleeping arrangements.

The worst thing that could happen would be sleeping alone, even though it was probably the safest alternative if it makes you feel most secure. The most important thing to consider is that it's the mountaineering experience that counts--that keeps you going on trips and constantly meeting new people.

# Take the Upper Hand

## The Sights of Michigan's Upper Peninsula

By Jeff Hylak

Being this far south of Ohio's northern neighbor, many things are not well understood about Michigan and its inhabitants. This is a chance to clear up some misconceptions about the great lakes state. First, and foremost, not every resident of Michigan is a U of M fan. In fact, students and alumni from Michigan's largest university (who might I add, also had a much better basketball team this year than the wolverines) are not too fond of the maize and blue either. Second, the whole state is not an industrialized suburb of Motown. The east, west side of the lower peninsula and the upper peninsula each have their own differences in economies, culture, scenery, and politics. Think of it as Cincinnati's East/West differences, but on a state-wide level. Finally, the whole state is not a frozen and snow covered tundra for six months out of the year. Only the great destinations enjoy that kind of weather, which brings me to the real subject of this article: Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

Before we get to far, lets take a moment for an orienteering lesson. Michigan is probably the most user friendly state when it comes to describing where you are. Lets make a map. Take your right hand and turn it with your palm toward you, fingers pointing straight up and your thumb pointing up and to the right. Voila, you've just created your own mega portable image of the lower peninsula! Ok, lets finish your geographic masterpiece. Take your left hand, (palm facing you) and point your fingers to the right, with your thumb pointing up and right. There you have the Upper Peninsula. Finally, line up the tip of your left pinky with the tip

of your right middle finger. The gap between your two fingers is now the straits of Mackinac. Wow, it doesn't get any easier than that. Now all you have to do is point to either hand and everyone knows exactly where you are talking about. It's a typical scene on Michigan college campuses to see freshman pointing at their hometown in the middle of their palm, or saying things like "I live in the thumb." With our map in "hand", lets get back to our tour of Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

The U.P., as locals call it (and who proudly refer to themselves as Yoopers), is a beautiful land with a varied landscape and legendary weather. The U.P. is similar to Eastern Kentucky, with the obvious difference of water on three sides (and residents who all sound like extras from the movie "Fargo"). The majority of the landscape is made up of rolling hills. Some areas have cultivated farmland, but the industry is limited by the short growing seasons. Other areas are made up of densely wooded forests, exposed rock outcroppings, and inland lakes or wetlands. The shorelines vary between white sand along Lakes Michigan and Huron, to rocky cliffs rising from the waters of Lake Superior. Then there is the weather! U.P. winters are probably the reason why Michigan has such a reputation for cold and snow. This is all thanks to the Lake Superior snowmaking machine. The lake is typically a constant 45 degree year 'round and acts as a great moisture source for the cold Canadian air currents. The result: an average of 200" of snow over a six month winter season. In fact, August is the only month where snow fall has not been

recorded. Thus, the saying goes: "there are only two seasons in the U.P.: Winter and bad sledding." Realistically, though, each of the three other seasons bring their own striking character. Spring brings the thaw and numerous waterfalls of all types. Summers are mild with highs in the 70's and daylight as late as 10:00 at night (due to western edge location in the eastern time zone). Flowers are plentiful and thimbleberries are all along the hiking trails. Fall is only second to Winter when it comes to amazing landscapes. The change in colors rival any other location in the country.

So you want to get away to the northland? Here is a list of greatest hits and must-do's on any trip to the land above the bridge (THE Mackinac bridge). As a guide, use your new map located on your left hand.

**Tahquamenon Falls** (first joint from the tip of your pointing) – The falls are in two sections. The upper falls is a 200 ft wide 50 ft drop of the river, which is reminiscent of Cumberland Falls, KY and is also the third largest falls this side of the Mississippi. The lower falls runs through a series of small ledges which split around a small island. Contact: Tahquamenon Falls State Park, Box 225 HC 48, Paradise, MI 49768; (906) 492-3415 .

**Whitefish Point Maritime Museum** (slightly north of the falls) – Due to the mining industry in the U.P., freighter traffic has and continues to be a significant industry on Lake Superior. The big, cold,

waters of Lake Superior make for a tough and treacherous life for a mariner. Among this museum's exhibits is a memorial to one of the best known nautical tragedies, the Edmund Fitzgerald. The Fitz sank off the shores of Whitefish point and has been a source of mystery, and song, for many years.

**Pictured Rocks Nat'l Lakeshore** (second joint on your pointing finger) – Picture Rocks consist of 40 miles of Cliffs ranging from 50 to 300 feet in height rising out of Lake Superior. The best view of the cliffs are from charter boats, which can be found in nearby Munising. However, the inland areas boast 80 miles of backpacking or x-country ski trails (16 miles of groomed trails). Nearby waterfalls serve as some of the best ice climbing locations in the mid west and is the scene of an annual climbing festival every February. Contact: Pictured Rocks Nat'l Lakeshore, PO Box 40, Sand Point, Munising, MI 49862; (906)387-2607 or 387-3700.

**Craig Lake State Park** (between the thumb and the base of the pointing finger) – This rugged, 7,000 acre, park is for those who are either looking for a bit of adventurous off-trail backpacking or some very secluded paddling and fishing on one of the parks seven lakes. The 8 mile road into the park is only a few notches above a logging road (warning signs at the park entrance recommend using high-clearance vehicles), and twists through thick forests, past numerous basalt outcroppings and waterfalls. With luck, you may catch a glimpse of

a moose. The park has been the primary release point in a recent re-introduction of the critters to the UP. Contact: Craig Lake SP c/o Van Riper State Park, P.O. Box 88, Champion, MI 49814; (906) 339-4461.

**Keweenaw Nat'l Historic Park** (middle of the thumb joint) – Pronounced Kee wee naw, the peninsula has been home to over 400 copper mines who operated between 1840's to the mid 1920's. The park is actually a conglomeration of the area's largest mining sights. The park was recently established and work is still being done to create the necessary visitor centers and park infrastructure. However, many of the mines already have impressive museums and tours already in place. One of the parks highlights is the largest steam hoist ever used. The hoist pulled over 50 tons of ore at a time up from its 9,000 foot mining shaft. The hoist equipment is still intact and tours are available of some of the adjacent tunnel next to the mine shaft. Contact: Keweenaw Tourism Council, P.O. Box 336, Houghton, MI 49931; (906)-337-3168 or [www.keweenaw.org/](http://www.keweenaw.org/).

**Mt. Bohemia** (between the thumb joint and the tip) – This is the home of Michigan's hardcore downhill skiing terrain. Long known as a telemark skiing destination, Mt. Bohemia has recently been turned into a fully lift serviced ski resort located right on the shores of Lake Superior. 95% of the hill's 800 ft of vertical is black diamond skiing with a few double black and extreme backcountry skiing runs mixed in. One sign on the way to the chairlift states in bold red letters that "Reckless behavior on Mt. Bohemia can kill you." For those up to the challenge, the snow is wonderful due to the 250"+ annual snow fall and the views are truly spectacular. Contact: 1-888-937-2411 or [www.mtbohemia.com](http://www.mtbohemia.com).

– Isle Royale is a 210 square mile island surrounded by the cold waters of Lake Superior and is only accesable via a four hour ferry ride from Copper Harbor or a six hour ride from Houghton (a sea plane from Houghton is also an option). Motorized travel is prohibited, except to certain designated docks on the outside of the island. This is a backcountry paradise. 165 trails give access to the islands beautiful views and varied wildlife. Most visitors will have a chance to see the island's largest inhabitants, the moose, but only the lucky few with see the wolves who also call Isle Royale home. Remarkably, both species were naturally introduced to the island by crossing Lake Superior during several rare freezes. Contact: Isle Royale Nat'l Park, 800 E. Lakeshore Dr., Houghton, MI 49931; (906) 482-0984.

**Porcupine Mt'ns Wilderness State Park** (base knuckle of your thumb) – The "Porkies" contain 60,000 acres of wilderness, one of the largest areas remaining in the mid west. Visitors will find towering virgin timber, secluded lakes, miles of rivers and stream. Trail traffic is minimal, so peaceful seclusion is almost guaranteed. This is the finest hiking and backpacking location in the state of Michigan, with the exception of Isle Royale. Actually, the geology of Isle Royale and the Porkies are identical, due to the tectonic plate that makes up the floor of Lake Superior. One notable exception between the two locations, while non-existent on the island, bears are abundant in the Porcupine mountains. Contact: Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park, 412 South Boundary Rd. , Ontonagon, MI 49953; (906) 885-5275.

This is just a short list of everything the U.P. has to offer. Along the way you may see one of the dozens of light houses, or potential for new climbs, or miles of logging roads waiting to be explored. One excellent resource of additional information is "Michigan State and National Parks" by Tom Powers. Another is Pasty Central ([www.pasty.com](http://www.pasty.com)). For the uninitiated the pasty (pronounced pahstee) is a traditional pastry native to the U.P. and was originally the food of choice by miners at the turn of the century. Its a symbol of the U.P.'s heritage and is great comfort food on a cold winter day. The website is a comprehensive listing of things to see in the U.P. Oh, its also a place to order the delicacies which are made by hand by little old ladies at a nursing home in Calumet, MI.

Most of the activities I listed above are focused on non-wintertime weather, however, the U.P. probably has more miles of snowmobile trails than roads, and also is home to five or six of the best ski hills in the Midwest. Fun can be had any time of the year, depending on what suits you.



Jeff Hylak at Lake of the Clouds Overlook on the Escarpment Trail.  
Porcupine Mountains Wilderness Park.



# Mountaineering Club Activities

# 2000 April

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
1	2	3	4	5	6	7 <i>Backpacking</i> <hr/> <i>Solo Paddling Clinic</i>
8 <i>Banff Film Festival</i>	9	10	11 <i>MEETING Open House</i>	12	13	14
15	16	17	18 <i>MEETING Show TBA</i>	19 <i>IMAX movie Caving</i>	20	21
22	23	24	25 <i>MEETING Gear Auction</i>	26	27	28 <i>Paint Creek Paddling</i> <hr/> <i>Rock Climbing Course</i>
29 <i>Rock Climbing Course</i>	30	31				

# Mountaineering Club Activities

2000

# May

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		1	2 <b>MEETING</b> <i>Big Cats</i>	3	4	5 <i>Yough Kayak &amp; Raft</i>
6	7	8	9 <b>MEETING</b> <i>Kayaking Video out West</i>	10	11	12 <i>Ocoee Guide Trip( ? )</i>
13	14	15	16 <b>MEETING</b> <i>Backpacking Food</i>	17	18	19
20	21	22	23 <b>MEETING</b> <i>Elections</i>	24	25	26 <i>Ocoee WhiteWater Rafting</i>
27 <i>Ocoee WhiteWater Rafting</i>	28 Memorial No School	29	30 <b>MEETING</b> <i>Eden Park Clean-up</i>	31		

Mountaineering Club Activities

2000 **June**

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	<b><i>e</i></b>	<b><i>x</i></b>	<b><i>a</i></b>	<b><i>m</i></b>	<b><i>s</i></b>	
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

# Surviving the Yucatan – Gringos in Paradise

By Bob Masters

Input from Chuck Crimmel & Mike O'Herron

Cancun on a shoestring? Impossible. But there is more to the Yucatan Peninsula than overpriced resorts and drunk college students. Three UCMC alumni, Chuck Crimmel, Bob Masters, and Mike O'Herron decide to forego the annual ski trip for some sunshine, culture, and adventure. Chuck had been suggesting a "warm" trip for some time, and after looking into a few options, we decide to explore the beaches, Mayan ruins, and culture of the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico. Having put together itineraries for past trips to Costa Rica, Venezuela, and Europe, I took it upon myself to get an initial plan going. I used the Lonely Planet: Yucatan and Bruce Conord's Adventure Guide to the Yucatan to figure out a good 10-12 day outline. Rather than going for one specific activity such as scuba diving or hiking, we were going to make it more of a feeler trip to see what the Yucatan had to offer. We would stay in Cancun no more than 2 nights, check out the colonial city of Merida, the famous Mayan ruins of Chichen Itza during the Equinox, and then explore the Playa del Carmen - Tulum coastal areas south of Cancun for some diving, snorkeling, and beach-bumming. We reserve hotels up through Chichen Itza and then wing it the rest of the way, with plans to get a rental car for the winging it part of the trip.

Cancun: Is this why we came to Mexico?

We arrive in Cancun fairly late on Thursday, March 15th and catch a shuttle to our hotel after getting the green light (literally) at customs. It is somewhat comical how they do customs there... you press a button and if you get a green light you are in. The light will randomly flash red every so often and they

get their bags searched. We get to the Holiday Inn Express near Pok-ta-Pok Golf Course on the lagoon side of the hotel zone to find it has a nice pool and adequate rooms for less than half of what you'd pay to stay on the beach. The Cancun hotel zone is actually an island shaped like the number "7" with beaches to the north and east, and a lagoon on the west. All the beachfront property has been built up with huge resorts and hotels, with some nearly equally huge bars and entertainment complexes across the street in one main stretch of road. The top of the "7" is wider and has some slightly cheaper hotels on the lagoon side but not much in the way of entertainment. There is nothing open late near our hotel except a small carryout so we just buy a couple of quarts of cerveza and sit by the pool until about 2AM on our first night.

On Friday we take the free shuttle provided by our hotel to the beach. It takes us way down to the southern tip of the hotel zone to the Westin Regina.



We get to use their pool and beach area through some deal with our hotel. Actually all beaches are public in Mexico, and they would probably let anyone use their pool as long as you are buying drinks. The surf is dangerous today due to strong currents and rocks near shore, indicated by the red flags, so we hang by the pool most of the time. Happy hour is 12-1 and 3-4, when you get 2 for 1 beers. Mike has a problem waiting 5 minutes for his beer so he tells another waiter to look for his cervezas. The first waiter comes back with his 2 beers a minute later. Then the 2nd waiter returns with 2 more. Oh well, communication can be tough when you don't know any Spanish.

Back near the hotel we catch one of the many overcrowded buses that run between the hotel zone and downtown Cancun on the mainland. We find it much more appealing and authentic than what we have seen so far, and enjoy some good Mexican food and tropical drinks. We also stop at the bus station and purchase our express tickets to Merida for the next day, before heading back to the hotel zone to check out the infamous bars of Cancun. Since it is Spring Break for many colleges, we have to deal with the crowds of students, some obnoxious and/or drunk, but generally just too crowded and not exactly what we came to Mexico for. We check out Señor Frog's and walk around to see if anything else is worth looking into. One bar had a bungee crane set up out back so we watch some kids take the plunge before we head to a beachside bar next to the Hard Rock Café for a night cap.

Saturday we walk up to the northern beach of Playa Tortuga, a small public beach that some locals seem to enjoy, next to Fat Tuesday's. Fat Tuesday's had an MTV Spring Break thing going on, and we were all very unimpressed with its lameness and contrived nature. One thing that reminded us we were in Mexico despite all the gringos, was the fact that one could drink beer on the beach or even in the water if they wanted. The

waters on this side of Cancun are much calmer than the East Side, so we do just that for an hour before heading back to check out of the Holiday Inn.

Merida: Colonial architecture, Mayan street vendors, a bullfight, and steam baths.

The bus to Merida was a 4-hour express for about \$17 a person, not bad compared to Greyhound, although you do need earplugs because of the bad movies they play with Spanish soundtracks at full volume. We arrive in Merida about 7PM Saturday and check in to the Hotel Colon. For about \$20/person "including breakfast and a steambath for three" it wasn't bad. We booked through the Internet in advance, but in hindsight you can easily find rooms here without a reservation and there are cheaper places to stay if you're on a college budget. We check out some of the other hotels while walking around and note that the Hotel Trinidad, owned by a Mexican artist is very eclectic. Like most hotels and other buildings in the Yucatan, it has an open interior courtyard (no roof) and tropical plants. Unlike most other hotels, it is





decked out in some very original artwork and the plantlife is so thick inside it almost takes over. We decide if we ever come back this would be a cool place to stay.

For dinner we try the Yucatan special at the Santa Lucia restaurant where a local guitarist entertains quite well for tips with a mixture of Spanish, Mexican, and American tunes. The food is not exactly what one thinks of when they think of "Mexican," but is surprisingly good. Away from the commercialism of Cancun, we finally feel like we're in another country.

Sunday we explore the main square of Merida, where you are approached every so often to look at some Mayan hammocks and other goods. "Come see my brother's store - real Mayan hammocks" and so forth. After running into the same guy three times and telling him we'll do it later, we finally give in and check out another store. We were all planning on buying hammocks here anyway, as Merida is the place to do it. We let them go through their usual sales pitches and haggle them down to what we feel are fair prices based on our previous research. It takes a while, but eventually we all agree on colors, sizes, and prices and depart with our Mayan hammocks. Luckily

when we see the original guy again later, it doesn't upset him too much that we bought our hammocks, since it turned out to be the same store he was pushing.

Back at the hotel we demand our free steam bath, although the desk clerk wanted to insist we do it "Mañana." When we finally convince him we have to leave early tomorrow and their sign says the steam baths are open until 9, he agrees and gets the maintenance man to start the boiler. The steam baths are a fixture from the past, a number of private steam rooms that can also be rented by non-hotel guests. After 30 minutes without any sign of steam, I venture back to look at the boiler room and notice the pressure gauge reads zero. "Where is Tim Doyle when you need him?" I wonder. We find the maintenance man and he goes back and closes the valve so the steam can build up, and in a matter of 10 minutes we have our steam. Our room fills up quickly with the thickest steam we've ever seen, and we can't help cracking up at the whole scene. After you have enough steam, you can shower off under the largest shower head you'll ever see - at least 10" in diameter and like standing under a waterfall. Well worth the extra effort of starting the boiler... if you're ever in Merida check it out.



Other Merida highlights were the Anthropology Museum, a bullfight, Pancho's restaurant -- where we stopped in for a drink and watched them make flaming Spanish coffee drinks, and a club with a Cuban band and dancers Sunday night. Getting to the bullfight was an adventure in itself. Everyone kept telling us that we had to buy our tickets in advance at some store or another downtown. We kept getting the run around and finally just had a cab driver take us to the arena and bought our tickets at the box office. I was going to pass on the bullfight at first, but in the end was glad I saw it, and would recommend everyone check one out at least once.

Chichen Itza: El Castillo and the Sun Serpent, the Piramide Inn, a hip crowd, and drums.

We leave for Piste, the town nearest the Chichen Itza ruins, Monday morning after a slight ordeal with the cab driver. He takes us to the wrong bus station and by the time we get where we need to go, we think we have missed our bus. As it turns out, 10AM was the time they suggested we get to the station, not the time the bus was leaving so we're OK. Piste is a small village 1 km west of the

ruins that exists mainly for the tourists that come to Chichen Itza. We have reservations at the Piramide Inn ([www.chichen.com](http://www.chichen.com)) which is the closest you can get to the ruins in Piste. You can stay closer to the ruins at some more expensive places just east of the ruins, but then you don't have the conveniences of Piste (ie. a liquor store and restaurants) and you don't have the Piramide Inn! The Piramide, originally owned by the founder of the Mexican Explorers' Club, is still run by his widow and daughter. In the spirit of the Explorers' Club, they'll let you camp out back in your tent or hammock for about \$5, but we opt for the comfort of a room for \$15/person. Highly recommended at the price, they have a nice pool and good food, although we ventured out a few times to find other places to eat. The whole time in Mexico we were careful to drink purified water, but ate just about anything they put in front of us, with no real ill effects.

Due to the popularity of Chichen Itza during the Spring equinox, there were many people camping out at the Piramide Inn -- Dutch, German, Mexican, you name it -- and little sign of the Spring Break Americans. We met some interesting characters enjoying some Mexican rum and Cokes that night. Tuesday we would explore the ruins early, take a pool and lunch break in the afternoon, and then head back for the Sun Serpent at El Castillo before sunset. The ancient Mayans built El Castillo (the Castle), the largest pyramid at Chichen Itza, in such a way that during the equinoxes the sun and shadow create an effect on one of the stairs that ends in a serpent's head -- representing their god Quetzalcoatl. Watch for the slide show for more details. In addition to the tourist factor, it is somewhat of an event for New-Age and other "spiritual" groups, as indicated by the Indian guru surrounded by four blond women, all sitting cross-legged holding various crystals and chanting. To each his own.

Tuesday night we are lucky to have the World Beat Music and Dance Ensemble, "a multi-cultural art troupe, utilizing music, dance, theatre, slide shows and storytelling to entertain, involve and educate people about cultural diversity and the importance of global cooperation." Actually they could only afford to fly part of their group down – a good mix of drums, percussion, and digeridoos that manages to get everyone dancing around the pool.

As it turns out Wednesday is not only the true Equinox, but also March 21 - a Mexican national holiday for the birthday of Benito Juarez (1806), the first president of indigenous descent and leader of the reform movement. The buses from Mexico City, Merida, and all over start pouring in early. We can't decide whether to stay a third night for the party atmosphere or head to Tulum on schedule. Chuck and I decide to secure tickets to Tulum on the afternoon bus, but when Mike tries to get his they are sold out. He enjoys another night at the Piramide, this time in his hammock, and gets a ticket for the 8am bus to Tulum.

Tulum: rustic cabañas, topless beaches, snorkeling, diving, and more ruins.



Chuck, Maria from Holland, and I get to the Papaya Playa cabañas after dark and are able to haggle down the price for a small, cramped hut with one bed and barely enough room for two hammocks. It was OK, what with the pet Toucan and all, but Chuck and Maria venture off first thing in the morning to see what else is available. By the time Mike arrives around noon, Chuck has arranged for us to rent a bigger place up the road for a similar price. The manager of Papaya Playa wasn't too happy but we move up to "Villa de Victor's" anyway. We split the entire place – a small house with two bedrooms and kitchen, plus a small cabaña – for \$450 pesos (about \$50) with a couple of students (Dave and Erin) from the Parsons School of Design in New York. They took the cabaña and had use of the kitchen and we took the main house, while Maria moved to the Diamante K next door to our new place.

We realized right away we made the right choice, as Victor was happy to drive us up to town for supplies each day, and provided purified water and ice for free, unlike some of the other places. He even invited us up to town to watch the La Hoya fight at his favorite taco bar on our last night. We were also closer to the Tulum ruins and a bigger, more popular beach. By buying some supplies and making our own breakfast and lunch, we saved considerably on meal costs. And last but not least, Victor taught us how to flag down the beer truck in the morning so we could buy cheap cases of cerveza right outside our gate.

Each day at Tulum was great – incredible beaches without the Spring Break crowds, good snorkeling and diving opportunities, and great "off-beat" restaurants and entertainment at night. Just up the beach from us was an Italian-owned place that we tried the first night. They were very friendly and informed us of a Brazilian drum/dance thing the next night so we did return for that. In the other direction was a good place for fresh seafood that

we enjoyed the following two nights. We did get one dive in while in Tulum, and while not as impressive as Cozumel would have been, it was cheap and we had the boat and dive master to ourselves. The snorkeling was also great once you got to the reef. For about \$10 they'll take you out to the reef and supply the snorkeling gear. Since the reef is really only reachable by boat (unless you want to drag along your own dive flag and swim out about \_ mile) then its probably worth just going with them on the boat. Or, like Chuck, you can convince them to take you for free since you already paid for diving.

I would be remiss without mentioning "topless Tulum." As many of the tourists in Tulum are European, it is not uncommon to see many women lying around topless on the beach. Being from Cincinnati, this really bothered us, and we almost left because of the immorality of it all! But in the end we decided we would stay and just ignore all the topless women. Well, OK, maybe that's why we stayed.

For future reference, we noted that the Diamante K was very good: eclectic and unique, with a private beach but within walking distance to the main beach area. Apparently they have some dorm rooms you can share if traveling solo for about \$10 US. Don Armando's Cabañas, up closer to the ruins on the main beach, would be the place to stay if you want to meet more travelers. They have 30+ cabañas and a dive shop on site. If you are looking for more secluded beaches and/or you have a car, your best bet is to go south towards Punta Allen, but since we cancelled our rental car we did not get to investigate that area.

Sunday we check out the Tulum ruins, a good day to go as there is no admission charge. Tulum, while not very historically important to archaeologists, is quite impressive as it was built on cliffs overlooking the turquoise sea. We head up early to beat the busloads that pour in from Cancun,



explore the ruins briefly and end the excursion with a swim in the lagoon. If you're ever in the Tulum area you have to stop there, even if you believe, "if you've seen one set of ruins you've seen them all." (sorry, inside joke)

Playa del Carmen: the European Cancun, with Thai food and more flaming coffee.

The last night in Mexico was spent in Playa del Carmen, a small but growing resort town about 30 minutes south of Cancun and directly across from the island of Cozumel. Apparently "Playa" used to be more like Tulum but has gotten bigger over the past 10 years. Nevertheless we still found it more enjoyable than the Cancun hotel zone, and after all the Yucatan food we decided to try the Thai restaurant. Although not spicy enough, the food was good and the guitar duo excellent. After dinner we found a place offering "2 for 1" Spanish coffees. Two for one beer is very common here, but the Spanish coffee looked good in Merida so we gave it a shot. As it turned out, it was another Pancho's, the same place we saw them making Spanish coffee in Merida. If you're ever in Mexico and you see a Pancho's, you have to get the Spanish coffee.

The morning was spent checking out the beach in Playa – forget it just go to Tulum – and doing some final shopping for cheap Kahlua and whatever else we could use our remaining pesos on. The beach looked like your average tourist beach and the people were not as friendly as in Tulum. Our take was that it would be a good place to stay a day or two if you were diving in Cozumel, or as a stop over from the airport instead of Cancun. I also obtained some information from a few places

offering Spanish language instruction, as it wouldn't be a bad place to hang out while taking Spanish for a few days.

In summary it was a great trip, and we plan on going back to do some more diving (Cozumel next time) and exploring more of the Tulum - Punta Allen area (Coba ruins, cenotés, etc.). We also decided we would pack less, but include some warm clothes as it can get cool at night. If anyone is planning a first trip to the Yucatan, talk to Bob, Chuck, or Mike for more insight, or watch for our next trip (2002?).



## UCMC Alumni Trip Plans

By William Strachan

Preliminary details of the 1st UCMC Alumni Reunion Trip have been worked out. A proposed itinerary has been worked out to provide activities to accommodate various activities and levels of commitment. The proposed hiking and backpacking activities are all featured in the book, "100 Hikes In Colorado". There are four proposed tracks for the trip, the Kiddy Track, the Mellow Backpacking Track, the Hardcore Backpacking Track, and the Do It All Track. The itinerary is predicated upon everyone meeting up in Ouray, Colorado on Friday, August 3, 2001. Our initial base will be the USFS Amphitheater Campground where we plan to make a group reservation. Club alums Jeff & Mary Cousins have camped at Amphitheater with their family before and give the campground high marks. For those who don't want to start out "roughing it" initially, there is reasonable lodging available in Ouray.

On Day One of the nine day itinerary, everyone is invited to take a day hike into the Wetterhorn basin north of Ouray to begin to acclimatize. This trail climbs through spruce and subalpine fir, then through alpine meadows, eventually reaching a 12,500' pass overlooking the spectacular Wetterhorn Basin in the Uncompahgre Wilderness Area. We will then return to Ouray where we will have our official Alumni Reunion Dinner and will again stay at Amphitheater.

On Day Two, the Kiddy and Mellow Track participants will drive to Molas Divide, just south of Silverton and will set up a base camp at the Little Molas Lake USFS campground. The Mellow backpackers will then take a three day loop excursion from Molas Divide to Coal Bank Pass along the Colorado Trail. The Kiddies can then take a day hike or overnight to beautiful Crater Lake located in the Weminuche Wilderness Area.

In the mean time, the Hardcore backpackers will have set off for their trailhead east of Durango on Day 2. They will be doing the five day 38.5 mile Vallecito-Pine River Loop in the Weminuche Wilderness Area. This loop travels through both forested and alpine terrain and follows the continental divide at the far end of the loop. There is also a climbing opportunity presented by the high 13'er Mt. Oso.

The Do It All group will star on Day 2 by hiking into the Blue Lakes Area of the Mt. Sneffels Wilderness Area. Day Three will present the opportunity for climbing Mt. Sneffels, a 14'er or just hiking up to Blue Lakes Pass for a spectacular view. The Do It All Group will then travel south to Cortez for a desert canyon day hike and will set up base at Mancos Lake State Recreation Area. From there, they will do a two day excursion to Mesa Verde. On Day 7 the Kiddy track will rendezvous with the Do It All group at Mesa Verde and then both will take a trip on the Durango-Silverton Railroad on Day 8. Meanwhile, on Day 7, the Mellow Backpackers will have secured a base at one of several USFS campgrounds, Bridge, Williams Creek, Teal, or Cimarrona, near Pagosa Springs. On the evening of Day 8, all tracks will regroup there. Then on Day 9, Saturday, August 11, 2001, we will all soak and frolic in the Pagosa Springs, and have a farewell dinner.

So make your plans now and arrange your vacation time for this trip if you can. Cindy Driehaus and Jeanne Vennemeyer are preparing a flyer which will be mailed out to all UCMC alums of known whereabouts.

## Denali

By Mark Guttadauro

To reach the backcountry in Denali National Park, you have to jump through a complicated series of hoops. You must pick out a quadrant in which you will camp for each night. While these quadrants are many square miles, only 8-12 people are permitted to camp within them every night. Thus begins a series of compromises. Many groups are trying to piece together multiple day trips in the backcountry. And that is to say nothing of the groups already in the park, midway through the trip. Managing to successfully set up, and have your itinerary approved, is the first and luckily the most difficult step. After buying topos (you didn't know where you were hiking ten minutes ago) and then watching an orientation on hiking in the backcountry, you can know buy your bus

tickets. Since access into the park is severely curtailed, most persons see the park from within a bus. These same buses provide a taxi service, for a small fee, to all of the backpackers and day-hikers. Getting desirable early morning tickets can be difficult given the large numbers of tourists seeking to "see" the park in a single day. We did come here to get away from it all... Eventually, you are on your way, and the realization that it's well worth all the trouble hits you as the bus rolls on deeper into the park.

It's wide open country, you cannot comprehend the vastness until you get off the bus and hike away from the road. On the bus, appearances are such that the land looks so flat, so easy and inviting. Completely deceiving, Denali in actuality is a frac-

tal landscape. What I mean to say is that, at first glance the terrain appears almost two-dimensional, comprised of only ground and sky. As you look closer and closer, each level splits into finer and finer detail.

You see the first level jump out at you. The vast mountains and wide open plains which transform from one to the other through the undulating realm of the taiga. It literally means "land of the little sticks". It is a transition zone between the tundra and forests. The trees are small and stunted and are quite far apart.

The second level becomes obvious as you study the land more carefully. Suddenly, you realize that the land isn't quite as smooth as it appeared when you first set your eyes on it. There are folds and creases that are blurred in the distance. The willow thickets grow tall in the creeks making it seem like the drainage is nonexistent or not very deep at all. The land fools you so easily, it sucks you in. By the time you realize it, you are deep in it and learning how complex the land actually is.

The next level is the ground itself. Little hillocks or tussocks everywhere conceal the foot-deep crevices between them, and they teeter precariously when you step on them. The willow and low brush hide the unevenness of the ground beneath you. If you survive all that and reach the tundra (either wet or dry), you get yet another surprise.

This is the fourth level, the tundra mosses can look completely flat, like a green carpeted floor. By and large, this is a deception that can cause you some embarrassment or, at worst, a sprained or broken ankle. Each step is an adventure. Will you step on a moss-covered rock? Will your foot sink 18 inches into the moss or worse find yourself standing in a puddle of water? And your boot full of water!

Denali has the capacity to evoke strong feelings, it can make you love it one minute and hate it a few minutes later. These feelings can change as fast as the weather changes here. You can stand in awe of the view of Mt. McKinley in the distance, glacier covered mountains all around with tundra and glacial streams below. The wildflowers are very abundant and the diversity is staggering. The wildlife is everywhere, and never leaves you waiting long for the next sighting. A chance encounter with a brown bear at close range is a memorable event.

On the other hand, the weather can make you despair of ever seeing the sun again. The rain and cold can try your patience and test your mettle. The bushwhacking through dense willow thicket can be a herculean struggle. Constant wet boots and socks from wet tundra, stream crossings, or wet brush make you wonder if your feet will ever be dry and unwrinkled again. How did those soldiers treat trenchfoot? A glacial river crossing of several braids, including one or more deep channels, leave your feet icy cold and your heart gripped with an icy chill when one of the crossings was quite a bit harder and deeper than you expected.

The one thing that Denali does best is to make you feel more alive. You learn to appreciate the wonders and the sights, because Denali makes you earn them. The rewards can be stunning, a sudden break in the weather and you look up to find Mt. McKinley towering over the rest of the park in the distance. Fighting through the willow, you break into a small marshy meadow and find it carpeted in bright pink Fireweed, the deep purples of Larkspur and Monkshood, the crimson red of Arctic Dock, and the sharp yellows of Lessing's and Frigid Arnica. Cowering on the fringes of the meadow are bunches of bright light blue Chiming Bells cascading into the meadow.

## Bears

Standing exposed on the open gravel plain, we watched as the large honey colored bear shambled downstream along river bar. Luckily, it hadn't seen or smelled us yet. While it was stopping at every clump of soapberry bushes to devour some of the berries, it was still making steady progress towards us. We had recently emerged from the willow thicket, climbed down a steep gravel slope and stopped for lunch in a sunny, dry spot that actually had flat ground. Our first choice was to simply fade back into the willow and allow the bear to continue on its merry (hopefully) way. Of course, imagine four people carrying full backpacks moving quietly up a steep gravel slope. Right, the bear would immediately change direction to investigate the noise. Sounds that probably sounded like caribou walking on gravel. That's like a dinner bell, right? We stopped and held our ground, while the bear ambled closer taking deep whiffs of the air as it wandered back and forth, approaching us slowly. The moment it sighted us was obvious to all of us, the bear froze and stared directly at us. We stood our ground and yelled the ubiquitous "Hey Bear!" The moment of truth so to speak. Luckily, the large brown turned and raced up the gravel bar and then darted into the thicket around the bend. We abandoned our detour and descended back to the river bar. We had no desire to meet the bear in the thicket, probably at a distance that would enable me to pat it on the head.

As the four of us hiked up the river bar, we were discussing how our first bear encounter in the back-country of Denali wasn't bad at all. It had taken all of two hours of hiking to have our first run-in. One of our group members summed up the experience, "It was a close bear encounter, but it wasn't close enough to make you pee your pants!" The next day, at the start of another brown bear encounter, which we had again sighted at a dis-

tance of several hundred yards, we were treated to this interesting exchange:

C: "Come over here, there's a bear!"

D: "I can't, I'm peeing!"

C: "Just stick that thing back in your pants!"

All in all, we would have a total of three bear encounters in four days. The closest was at a distance of fifty feet, close enough to see it drool! In no instance did any of the bears act aggressively. They were curious enough to find out what we were, but that was the limit to their interest in us. As a group of four, we stood in a line facing the bear and talked to it softly.

## Navigation

What makes many hiking areas in Alaska so appealing, yet so challenging is the lack of trails in many hiking areas. Such is Denali N. P. The easiest route of travel is along the river bars formed by the glacial rivers. The other terrain that makes cross-country travel a pleasure is the dry, or alpine tundra. It's the area between the two that makes life a chore. Wet tundra or willow thicket. Preference is usually for whichever you are not in at that moment. The thicket is the worst for route-finding, you lose all sense of direction as you twist and turn through a maze of willow. Line of sight is only five to ten feet and often you cannot see any landmark to help with orientation.

We sat in a small group on the open river bar, eating dinner after a long dayhike up a tributary of the Upper Teklanika River. Our tents were about 150 yards up the river and upwind of us. Looking upstream just beyond the tents, we watched as a moose popped out of the brush, crossed the river, and then disappeared into the willow on our side of the river. Shortly thereafter, Dave sighted move-

ment far upstream on our side of the river. After watching closely, we realized that it was two hikers moving towards us. Realizing how late it was, dusk in Alaska in July is like midnight or something, we figured they were coming down to camp with us. A guy and a girl. As they walked up to our cooking spot the guy announced, "Yeah, we're the dorks that forgot to buy the topo!" Our looks of disbelief were frozen on our faces when he next said, "This isn't the Upper East Fork of the Toklat River is it?" As we looked at each other, we realized that someone had to deliver the news that yes, indeed, you are in the wrong river valley. They had come in over Sable Pass, skirting the closure area, as we were planning to do at the end of our hike. Unfortunately, they dropped off the pass to the east rather than to the southwest, because they simply headed for the first river drainage that they saw. They decided to backtrack some that night since they had already eaten. We recommended that they cross the river here and hike up the far bank, thus avoiding all other crossings and the horrendous encounter with the willow thicket that they had on the trip downstream. We watched as the guy, who was rather short, carried first his pack across and then his girlfriend's pack. The stream was at least mid-thigh deep on most of our group and he was much shorter. Definitely a tough crossing for him and he had already done it four times to ferry the packs across. We watched in complete shock as he picked up his girlfriend on his shoulders and tromped across the creek a fifth time. We silently wished them luck as they slowly moved out of our sight.

## Glacial River Crossings

Unlike bears, people have actually died from glacial river crossings in Denali. Many people would scoff and say that how could crossing a small stream be more dangerous than a close encounter

with a hungry bear? Surprisingly, the challenge of a glacier river crossing can often be the crux move of an entire trip. While many river crossings can be quickly and safely accomplished, some of the rivers can be very difficult to cross, especially if terrain forces you to cross at a somewhat unfavorable spot.

Luckily, many of the glacial rivers become nicely braided on the wide river bars and allow a group to cross many, shallow braids rather than a couple deep, fast-moving ones. Unfortunately, sometimes there is still one deep, fast-moving braid to cross or the river doesn't braid out very much at your desired crossing. The best solution is to simply refrain from crossing until the river is braided out enough that all the crossings are easy. Of course, after crossing six or eight braids and traversing two hundred yards across the gravel bar, you often realize that it's the last braid that you couldn't quite see that was the hard one.

The technique for determining a good crossing is strait forward. Look for the widest spot, throw rocks in the air that land in the water along the projected path and assess the quality of the impact. A loud "glug" probably indicates deep water, while the sound of rock on rock means really shallow water. Once a feasible route is agreed upon, everyone has changed to their river crossing clothing (shorts, Texas, and gaiters), and the group is arranged in a Vee or diamond formation with everyone supporting each other-the adventure begins.

The water has that slate grey color only seen in overcast winter skies. It is slightly above freezing and carrying tons of glacial silt. The scary part is when you can hear the rocks and boulders banging into each other underwater. That's when you wonder if sandals are such a good idea. Inching sideways into the current with the center person leaning upstream on his walking stick and support-

ed from the sides and behind, the group moves across the current following the planned route. In the best case, everyone quickly reaches the other side and thaws out icy toes that are so cold that they burn. Sometimes, things can get a little more exciting! The person on the leading edge finds a deeper trench that was missed during the aerial rock bombardment. Life suddenly turns into a rather skillful imitation of a Monty Python skit, like something from the Holy Grail. The person in the suddenly too deep water is yelling, "Stop! Stop! Go back! Too deep! Stop!" At the other end of the group someone is always yelling, "Keep Going! It's too cold, don't stop! Keep going!" At this point, both ends of the group are pushing towards the middle and all progress has stopped and any semblance of order has disintegrated. Logic prevails, often very quickly because the water is really damn cold, and the group returns to the gravel bar to re-scout that particular crossing site.

### Wildflowers

For anyone who has an interest in wildflowers, Denali can be a paradise if you are willing to spend the time looking beneath your feet. The river bars are spotted with plentiful clumps of dwarf fireweed, for this reason also known as river beauty. Occasional sightings of bright yellow alpine poppy are a pleasant surprise.

Mucking through wet tundra and intermittent brush, any number of surprises can often be found. Beautiful blue chiming bells and Jacob's ladder. Small pink wintergreens that hide under cover of deep shade. Often, small tarns seem to be ringed with snow, which turns out to be cotton grass growing around the entire shore. Finding the smaller and less common species, such as a Shy Maiden, requires careful steps and a keen observation for detail. A rare find can make an arduous fight through the muskeg rewarding. At least that's

what you tell yourself!

The areas high on the ridges are the hardest to reach, being far from the gravel bars which are the equivalent of paved roads. However, the alpine tundra is filled with fields of wildflowers of every color. Yellow arnicas compete with lavender harebells. Clumps of saxifrages and sandworts appear as small mounds of white from a distance. The bright pinks of louseworts, also known as elephant's head, makes you shake your head in wonder. I seemed to find something new every few minutes or so, much to the impatience of my fellow hikers. I ended up imitating the drag and drop style of hiking since I was always so far behind. For me it was run (in full pack through muskeg) to catch up, only to be waylaid by yet another unique and yet unseen wildflower that was screaming to be photographed and identified. Well, on the bright side, it is hard to get in to camp too late when the sun never goes down...

### Time to Plan; A Place to Visit

All in all, Denali is a paradise that can only be experienced up close. In some ways, it doesn't matter where you go in the backcountry, a bounty of surprises and experiences await. The views are expansive, and will really be appreciated because the price to achieve them is to suffer through days of the more typical weather in Denali National Park. You cannot help but en up face to face with wildlife, well at least hopefully not quite that close! It's a magical place that's enjoyed all the more because you feel that you have earned all the rewards.

# Backpacking Gear Check List

List provided by Belinda Bankes, UCMC member and avid mountaineer.

Notify a reliable person of where you are going, when you are leaving and returning, and whom you will be with. Always be prepared and have fun!

## CLOTHING:

- Short-sleeved shirt and shorts  
i.e., nylon, polyester, Capeline
- Light-weight long sleeved shirt and pants  
i.e., silk, polypropylene, Capilene
- Insulation / Mid-weight long sleeved shirt or vest and pants  
i.e., nylon, wool, fleece, polypropylene, Capilene
- Outer-layer jacket and pants  
i.e., quick drying , water-resistant, water-proof, Gore-Tex
- Gloves, glove liners and hat— quick drying or water-resistant  
i.e., wool, polyester, fleece
- Socks—one or two pair to hike in, one cozy pair to sleep in  
\*sock liners may help keep your feet dryer (optional)
- Boots—water-proof, not too tight, sturdy support
- Camp shoes—comfy shoes to wear around the camp sight  
i.e., sandals, gym shoes, down booties, etc.
- Gaiters—to keep water out of boots and off pant legs

## FUNDAMENTALS:

- Tent or other shelter (cave)
- Backpack—internal or external (internal is better when bushwhacking)
- Sleeping bag, temperature appropriate
- Compression sack
- Foam pad
- Tarp or footprint—place under tent (or under sleeping bags in cave)
- Trekking poles—ski poles work well, too
- Rain cover for backpack
- Strong synthetic cord with which to hang food bag(s)
- Extra lash strap(s)
- Whistle
- Head lamp / flashlight and extra batteries
- First-Aid kit
- Map of the area
- ID with photo (in case you are hurt, you can be identified)
- Cash for overnight or camping pass and for emergencies

## **KITCHEN:**

- Insulated mug for warm drinks
- Two water bottles—24 or more ounces each, for drinking (Nalgene are ideal)
- Water for dehydrated food, if necessary
- Plastic bowl with lid for meals
- Spoon
- Pocket-knife
- Lighter
- Several large zip-lock bags
- Multi-purpose soap—i.e., Camp Suds
- Camp stove (per three people)
- Cook kit (per three people)
- Fuel bottle—full (per three people)

## **FOOD:**

- Water, water, water!
- Warm beverage mix, tea, hot chocolate, Kool-Aid
- Snacks
- Meals—breakfast, lunch, dinner

## **PERSONAL :**

- Bandanna
- Ibuprofen
- Required medicine, i.e., allergy, asthma, etc.
- Tooth brush and paste (biodegradable is ideal)
- Sunglasses
- Lotion—moisturizing and SPF
- Bug Repellant (DEET free)

## **OTHER STUFF:**

- Crazy Creek chair
- Candle Lantern
- Stuff sack for clothes
- Ear-plugs
- Wet-wipes
- Iodine tablets
- Story, poem, game, etc. to share
- Book
- Journal and pencil/pen
- Wildlife Guidebooks—plants, birds, animal tracks, etc.
- Camera
- Compass