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Weekend Excursions: A Ski Soldier's Diary, 1943–1944

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Weekend Excursions

A ski soldier's diary, 1943-1944

Franz L. Alt

Editor's note: Annice Alt, the widow of Franz L. Alt, found and sent us these field notes her husband kept between September 1943 and June 1944. Mrs. Alt writes,

“When he was drafted in 1943, Franz Alt was assigned to the 10th Mountain Division, the ski troops, based in Camp Hale, Colorado. Each week for five and a half days, they would ski carrying pack and rifle, or march carrying pack, rifle, and skis. On the weekends when not on guard duty or KP (kitchen duty, originally from the phrase “Kitchen Police”), for recreation Alt would ski or climb the peaks around camp, alone or with a buddy or two. He wrote accounts of three of these weekend excursions in April and May of 1944. After three weeks of maneuvers, he made a circuit of Sugarloaf Mountain, Jacque Peak, and Elk Mountain without skis. The following weekend, Alt, Howard Friedman, and Kurt Krieser tackled Mount Democrat. And on May 27 and 28, again with Friedman, Mount Massive and Mount Elbert, the highest peak in Colorado.

“A native of Vienna, Franz learned to ski and climb in his teens. He came to the U.S. just after the Nazis walked into Austria. Whenever he traveled, he would climb a summit if he could—Fuji, Triglav, Ben Nevis, the Alps. With a doctorate in mathematics from the University of Vienna, he was a computer pioneer first at Aberdeen Proving Ground and then at the Bureau of Standards. After he moved to New York in 1968, he joined the Appalachian Mountain Club, hiking locally and in the White Mountains, leading hikes, climbing in the Shawangunks and canoeing. He also played violin or viola in string quartets for pleasure.”

Jacques Peak, 13,215 ft. April 23, 1944 (no skis)¹

Leave Camp Hale on Apr. 22, up Resolution Creek, Pearl Creek, North Fork Pearl Creek (?), in 4 hours to two log cabins. Extremely deep snow, a few times tempts me to turn back. — Leave cabin at 7 A.M. in heavy snowfall. Up N. Fk. Pearl Creek and slope to the left, then just below ridge betw. Pearl & Resolution Creeks to main ridge (north of Sugarloaf Mt.) in 3 hours. To top of Sugarloaf Mt. (over 12,500 ft.), to pass between it and Elk Mt. (one hour), Across northwest slope of Elk to first pass east of Elk in ridge to Jacques Peak (one hour). East along this ridge to lowest pass (½ hour), then to top (2½ hours). Bad weather, snowfall, and strong wind, until here. On way back, weather gets better. Arrive top of Jacques Peak 3:30 P.M. To Elk Mountain, 12,718 ft., in 3 hours. Down to bivouac area in (S. Fk.) Pearl Creek, along road to Camp Hale, about 2 hours.

Mount Democrat (Tenmile Range), 14,142 ft. April 30, 1944, with Howard Friedman, Kurt Krieser

From Leadville (Red Cross Canteen), 6 A.M., by Taxi to sharp road bend below Fremont Pass (6:30). Along bottom of valley southeast for about 2 miles (7:15), then up the slope on the left to the lowest pass north of Mt. Democrat (in the ridge between it and Traver Peak). Snowfall, higher up dense fog and strong wind. The slope is steep, studded with rocks. Gullies and open slope areas must be avoided because of danger of new-snow avalanches. Arrive in pass at 10:45, after one 15 min. break in slope. Leave skis, climb along ridge toward Mt. Democrat. Where the ridge drops vertically about 50 ft., descend to the right just before the drop, then cross under the rocks (at the head of a steep snow gully) into the pass below the drop, continue to cross in the right flank to next pass, about 30 yds. further, with double "Toerl" [gorge]. Climb through both openings and on along ridge. Nice rock climbing in this stretch. Otherwise the ridge is easy. Arrive at summit 1:30 P.M., after 15 min. rest shortly below top. Return at once. Arrive at pass at 3:15, road 5 P.M. (after ½ hr. rests). During the descent the weather clears up, good view on other peaks of Tenmile Range. — Follow railroad tracks to Climax (about ¾ hrs.).

¹ Franz Alt spelled Jacque Peak with an "s" on the end in his logs. We have preserved his spelling in this reprinting of his notes. —Editor.

Chaplains' Lounge, Edgewood Arsenal, Maryland
Weekends in Camp Hale

Sept 5, 1943 - arrived
 12 Pearl Hill, w. Landaver, Campbell
 19 Hornsilver Mt. - Ptarmigan Pass
 26 Sheep Mt., Elk Mt.
 Oct. 3 Homestake Peak, w. VanHorn
 10 Training Rocks, w. Griffin, Seidelhuber, Bowman
 17 Chicago Ridge
 24 in camp
 31 " " (guard)
 Nov. 7 Skiing in Resolution Creek Area, w. Griffin, Seidelhuber, Bowman
 14 in camp (K.P.)
 20 Ptarmigan Pass, Sugarloaf PK., Elk Creek (Sat. afternoon)
 Sunday in Leadville
 28 Skiing in Pearl Creek Area, w. Swan
 Dec. 5 in camp (K.P.)
 12 Pearl Hill (afternoon only)
 19 Hill west of camp (morning only)
 26 Pass below Jacques Peak (skiing, w. Ascheffenburg)
 Jan. 2, 1944 Cooper Hill, Point below Buckeye Peak (skiing)
 9 " " " "
 16 in camp (Day Room)
 23 } Fur loough
 30 }
 Feb. 6 Hill betw. Pearl & Resolution Creek (1/2 day)
 13 Hornsilver Mt. (1/2 day)
 20 in camp (K.P.)
 27 Hill betw. Pearl & Resol. Creek (skiing; 1/2 day)
 Mar. 4-5 Elk Creek (bivouac, Sat. aft. + Sun. morn.)
 12 in camp, Leadville
 17-19 "Little Notch Mt." (Holy Cross Region, Northeast of Natch) skiing,
 w. Howard Friedman, K. Krieser, Koelo,
 maneuvers
 26-Apr. 6
 Apr. 22-23 Sugarloaf Mt., Jacques Peak, Elk Mt.
 30 Mt. Democrat (skiing) w. H. Friedman, K. Krieser
 May 7 Chicago Ridge " (afternoon)
 14 Sugarloaf Mt. " " fr. Pearl Creek bivouac area
 21 Buena Vista w. James Arensburg
 27-28 Mt. Massive Mt. Elbert (skiing) w. H. Friedman
 June 4, 11, 18 Leadville w. Alice

Alt's log sheet noting weekend pleasure hikes from Camp Hale in 1944. Near the bottom of this list is Mount Democrat on April 30, and Mounts Massive and Elbert on May 27-28. COURTESY OF ANNICE ALT

**Mount Massive (14,412 ft.) and Mount Elbert (14,437 ft.),
May 27/28, 1944, with Howard Friedman**

By car to Evergreen Lakes. Lv. 2:15. By a mistake in reading the map we first try to reach the ridge which leads to the minor peak south of the summit. After two hours of traveling, slightly upwards, through woods, we notice our mistake, switch back to the right, gain the rest of the ridge which leads from Evergreen Lakes to the summit. Then follow this ridge to a point between 12,800 and 13,000 altitude. Bivouac. — The weather was cloudy, rainy at times, snow toward nightfall. Fog at 12,000 ft. We carry skis for the first two hours, then climb on skis, much of the way through deep soft snow. Climbing time $5\frac{1}{2}$ hours, two short rests. Arrive at bivouac at 8 o'clock. Sleep uncomfortably on sloping rocks under an overhang.

Sunday morning leave at 5:20. High clouds, no rain. Fog at 14,200 ft. We follow the ridge to the summit, $1\frac{3}{4}$ hours, arr. about 7:30. Leave 7:45. Excellent skiing down to pass south of summit (to the left of the ridge). Thence west, sidestepping down a narrow snow couloir. Then skiing down the widening slopes almost to the bottom of the valley. (North shelf Half Moon Creek) Arr. 9 o'clock. Lv 9:30. Stumbling through the deep soft snow, partly on skis, to the end of the road, then on the road to the foot of Mt. Elbert. (Arr. 11 o'clock).

Weather letting up. Climb up near the first ridge east of the one which leads to the junction of Elbert (=South Half Moon) and North Half Moon Creek. Carry skis to 13,000 ft., then continue on skis, always near ridge, to top. Climbing $5\frac{1}{2}$ hours, numerous short rests, arr. 6 o'clock. Perfect view.

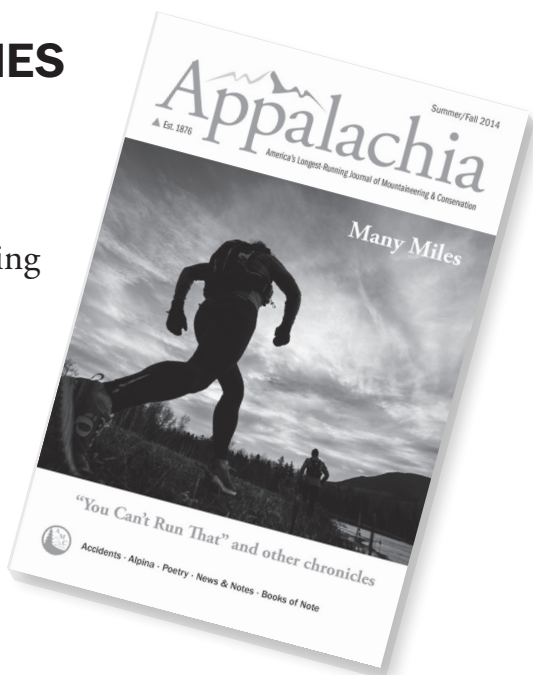
Lv. 6:10, ski down east slope to the ridge north of Hayden Creek ($\frac{3}{4}$ hours). On ridge dismounts skis for a while, then ski again in soft snow ($\frac{3}{4}$ hours). Finally walk on marked trail to fish nursery lakes. From there on a road which winds through Hayden Valley is closed in two places by wire fences, past Hallenbeck Mine, to a point near Hayden Ranch (?), but then turns left and reaches main road a distance north of the Ranch. Arr. 11:30(!) Total walking time this day, 15 hours. — There seems to be a good road from the fish nursery lakes to Hayden Ranch, which we missed.

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