



# Mountain Ear

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE ROCKY MOUNTAINEERS

Vol. 1 No. 4  
*Snow Avalanche*

February 1962

## SKI TOURING

To enjoy the quietness as your skis glide  
through snow blinking with the brilliance  
of sunbeams piercing  
the branches of stately pines.

To know the thrill of looking ahead,  
behind, beside and all around you  
and finding only the signature  
of your own skis...

Thin lines through the snow  
testifying that only you were there.  
These are the things that separate touring  
and downhill skiing.

Gen Turney



CLIMB OF McDONALD PEAK

On Friday, November 17th, a three-man party attempted to climb McDonald Peak in the Mission Mountains. The party consisted of Thad Lowary, Sam Braxton and Russell Betts. The climb was attempted from the west side of the mountain, by way of McDonald Reservoir and McDonald Creek. This route is difficult because of the bushwacking involved below timberline. The main purpose of this trip was to lay out likely climbing routes through the experiences of Thad Lowary. Thad is very familiar with this portion of the Missions and his knowledge in choosing possible routes proved invaluable.

Weather and snow conditions were a serious detriment to the climb and were the primary causes of failure to gain the summit.

Opening of a trail into this area is proposed for next spring and trips by this route are discouraged until that time.

Details of the trip are as follows: The party left Higgins and Broadway at 5:00 AM and travelled 48.2 miles to the first main road turning east after the Post Creek Store on Highway 93 North. Remain on the straight, gravelled road east until you dead-end at a large irrigation ditch (3.8 miles from Hwy. 93). Turn left at this time and proceed to McDonald Reservoir (1.9 miles from irrigation ditch). We left the car at 6:35 AM and used the well-marked trail along the north side of the reservoir. A large campsite can be observed on the trail at the east end (upper end) of the reservoir. (time 7:25 AM). We turned south across the creek at this point and then held a long, steep traverse eastward through timber and brush to a point at the base of West McDonald Peak (time, 12:30 PM). This was chosen as our bivouac area and proved to be the only suitable spot on the ridge, (elevation, 5,900 ft.).

An attempt for the summit was made at 12:45 PM. Deep wet snow, foul weather, and darkness, however, restricted the climb to the glacier at the head of the cirque on the south-west base of the summit. This glacier lies between West and main McDonald Peaks. We returned to the bivouac camp at 5:20 PM, travelling from the foot of the glacier in 40 minutes by snowshoes.

The following day we broke camp at 9:30 AM and reached McDonald Creek campsite and trail by 12:05 PM and reached the car by 1:10 PM.

This area has much to offer by its varied types of climbing which include both rock and ice work. Opening of this proposed route by next summer is enthusiastically anticipated by this party.

Russell M. Betts

ST. MARY'S PEAK - NO FISH LAKE ( Mission Range)

On November 28th Sam Braxton and Gardner Miller hiked into this area primarily to learn the approach route. We left Missoula at 6:50 AM and drove to the dam at St. Mary's Lake via Arlee and Twin Lakes ---- some of this road is not kept open in the winter so we had some tough going even with four-wheel drive. In the winter it would be better to go via St. Ignatius and even that road may not be open though it was on this date.

Northward from the dam a steep drainage rises very abruptly --- and the top is much farther away than it looks! The correct approach to the St. Mary's Peak - No Fish Lake area is up this drainage, staying to the left for the first few hundred vertical feet to avoid brush, then on up the drainage steeply but without much "bush-whacking".

We stayed on the ridge (really a very steep broad "nose") until we reached, after several hours, the highest point visible from the dam below. In about 1 1/4 horizontal miles we rose from 4030' elevation at the dam to about 8,200 ft. on the ridge, a rise of 4,170 ft. At this point we had a good view of the west side of Greywolf Pk. --- vertical cliffs coated with rime --- and of St. Mary's Pk., but we weren't able to see No Fish Lake which lies at the base of Greywolf on the west side.

At this time of year, snowshoeing part of the way, slipping and sliding on steep grassy slopes lower down, and plowing through deep snow on foot higher up, made a very slow and exhausting trip. We turned back at 4:30 PM and arrived back at the dam by flashlight at 7:15 PM.

During the snow season there does not appear to be any way into this area which is not exposed to severe avalanche dangers. The writer urges that people stay out of here entirely whenever the snow is more than about two feet deep. If, despite the avalanche situation, you do make this trip by all means stay alert to these dangers --- test the snow's stability periodically, keep your party spread apart horizontally, trail avalanche cords, and each person carry a lightweight aluminum snow shovel and a sectionalized avalanche probe. I cannot emphasize too strongly, however, that this is risky --- these are major avalanche slopes! Even the ridge which we followed is very dangerous as it is so steep and broad.

Gardner B. Miller

### SNOW AVALANCHES

For many mountaineers winter is the finest time of year -- with proper knowledge, equipment, and precautions, ski touring and winter climbing and camping are thrilling and unforgettable experiences.

However, there are TWO unique dangers connected with winter mountaineering with which you should be thoroughly familiar in order to successfully avoid them -- cold weather and snow avalanches.

FOUR facts about snow avalanches can not be emphasized too strongly --

1. Steep slopes (30-45 degree slopes are the most dangerous), partially or non-timbered, with sufficient snow to cover the ground obstructions will avalanche if snow conditions are favorable.
2. The higher mountain areas of WESTERN MONTANA produce thousands of deadly avalanches each winter -- this fact is not widely recognized simply because so few people get into these areas.
3. Most victims are caught by avalanches they or their party release!
4. In the mountains, far from organized rescue groups, your chances of survival, if you're buried by an avalanche, are very poor -- even with such groups nearby your chances probably aren't better than 50-50.

With these four facts firmly in mind, observe the following travel rules in avalanche terrain --

1. Never travel alone.
2. Only one person at a time should be exposed to avalanche danger.
3. Stay off of avalanche paths by following the ridges or by staying in dense timber -- avoid steep slopes, especially lee slopes -- and use especial care during and shortly after snow storms.
4. Don't camp or stop under or on avalanche paths.
5. The most dangerous times are:
  - a. During and right after heavy snowfall or prolonged periods of strong winds.
  - b. Prolonged cold spells.
  - c. Deep thawing.
  - d. Rapid changes of temperature, including cooling after sun sets.
  - e. Unusually deep snowpack.
6. Don't assume a slope is safe just because it didn't slide with the first man to cross it-- in a number of cases many people have crossed a dangerous slope before the avalanche released, in one case catching the 39th man to cross!!
7. Ask Missoula Ski Patrolmen for advice. Gardner Miller is Avalanche Advisor for the Ski Patrol in this division, Tom Choate is the Avalanche Instructor for the Missoula Patrol, and Tom Collins is a registered avalanche instructor

SNOW AVALANCHES - Cont.

If you must cross an avalanche slope (steep, partly or non-timbered, deep snow) observe these precautions:

1. Remove wrist straps from skis and loosen bindings. Loosen pack.
2. Close up your clothing, put on hat and mittens, raise your parka hood, and tie scarf over your mouth and nose.
3. Trail an avalanche cord -- 30-60' of brightly colored cord tied around your waist.
4. Cross slope one person at a time as rapidly as possible, others observing from a safe place.

If you are caught by an avalanche, try to do the following things:

1. Call out to party members.
2. Try to get to side edge of avalanche.
3. If you can't escape, get rid of poles, ice axe, skis, snowshoes, and pack -- grab hold of a tree.
4. If you can't hold on to an 'anchor' (tree, rock, etc.), try to 'swim' to stay on the surface, keeping head uphill.
5. If buried, cover mouth and nose, and make a supreme effort to get some space around face and chest as the avalanche slows to a stop.
6. Don't panic -- try to dig out (saliva will drool down, so dig up) -- relax -- don't waste much energy shouting.

If you are a survivor of an avalanche accident, do the following things:

1. Don't panic.
2. Check for further slide danger--think what to do.
3. Mark the 'last seen' point of the victim and the stopping point of the snow from this point--the victim is near the fall line between these two points.
4. Make a quick search of the slide surface from the last seen point down the fall line.
5. If it will take more than several hours to get help, the survivors should make as thorough a search as possible, probing with poles around likely areas.
6. Send for help--only one or two go for help, others continue searching. Travel safely and avoid exhaustion as you'll be expected to return with the rescue group--give exact and detailed information to the rescue leader. In Missoula call any individual Ski Patrol member or the Sheriff.
7. First Aid -- treat the victim immediately for suffocation, use closed-chest heart massage if heart has stopped, treat for shock and get victim warm, and then treat other injuries.

If you want to LEARN MORE about avalanches, contact Gardner Miller for material. The Ski Patrol Avalanche School is held annually with class sessions in Missoula and field sessions at Bridger Bowl, Bozeman.

Gardner Miller

## A SHELTER IN THE RATTLESNAKE LAKE AREA:

During the weekend of November 18-19, a party of three, Ron and Don Berg and Bill Denton, snowshoed into a log cabin in the Rattlesnake Lake area. This cabin, owned by the Montana Power Company, is about 9' high and 30' long and is in very good condition except for a broken window which was boarded up. It accommodates four in that there are four bunks but there is plenty of floor space. Also, there is a kitchen stove, plates, and eating utensils. Underneath one of the bunks is a cross cut saw for replenishing the wood supply.

The snow depth was about 2½' but markers around the cabin indicate the snow fall to average around 10' as the winter advances. The temperature was about 20 degrees.

To get to this cabin, drive up the main Rattlesnake Road about one mile past gate. Turn left at the Spring Gulch Road. Follow this road to its end three miles farther where the trail to Rattlesnake Lakes and Stuart Peak starts. Proceed up this trail for about four miles to the Snow Course junction (on ridge).

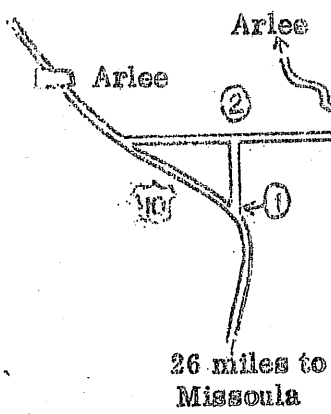
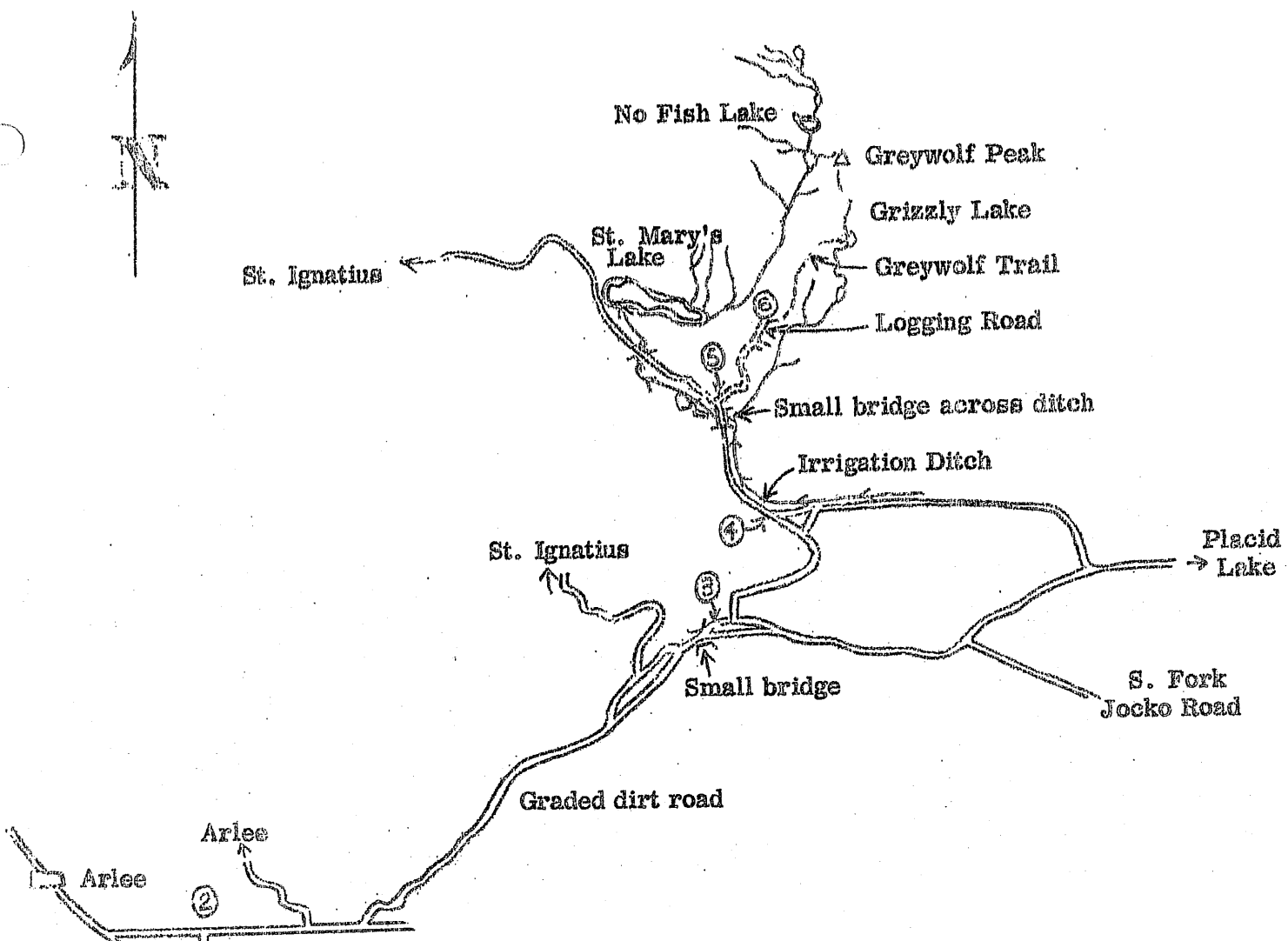
As the sign points out, keep going straight ahead, skirting Stuart Peak on the left or west side of the ridge. When finally at the extreme left (north facing) side of Stuart Peak the trail then heads N by NW along the ridge, climbs a small knoll and then goes down to a level portion on the other side of that knoll. Here there is a major and well-marked junction. (The trail just described is #517. This trail keeps following the ridge, skirts Mosquito Peak, and terminates at the Rattlesnake Divide.) Trail #509 is the one which goes to the cabin.

From the junction go NE for about 30 yds. then cut left and downwards for some 100 yds. as the trail angles down the side of the ridge. On both sides of the trail the trees grow thickly, making the trail easy to find. We were unable to find the trail when we came out of those trees. We went NE downwards across a small bench for another 100 yds., picking parts of the trail up here and there. Finally we reached the north shore of McKinley Lake which was about a half mile from the top of the ridge. It is possible to see this lake from on top of the ridge, looking straight down.

Upon reaching this lake, go NE, staying on the left of the lake's outlet for 75 yds. If the hiker gets off the trail, he may arrive at the top of a 30' drop-off. If so, turn to the right. Quickly the drop-off decreases to nothing. Here the trail goes down beneath the drop-off. There are enough blazes on the trees at this point to follow about 200 yds. past a small pond and then a small creek which is about 50 yds. from the cabin.

The approximate time going one way is 6 hours at moderate speed.

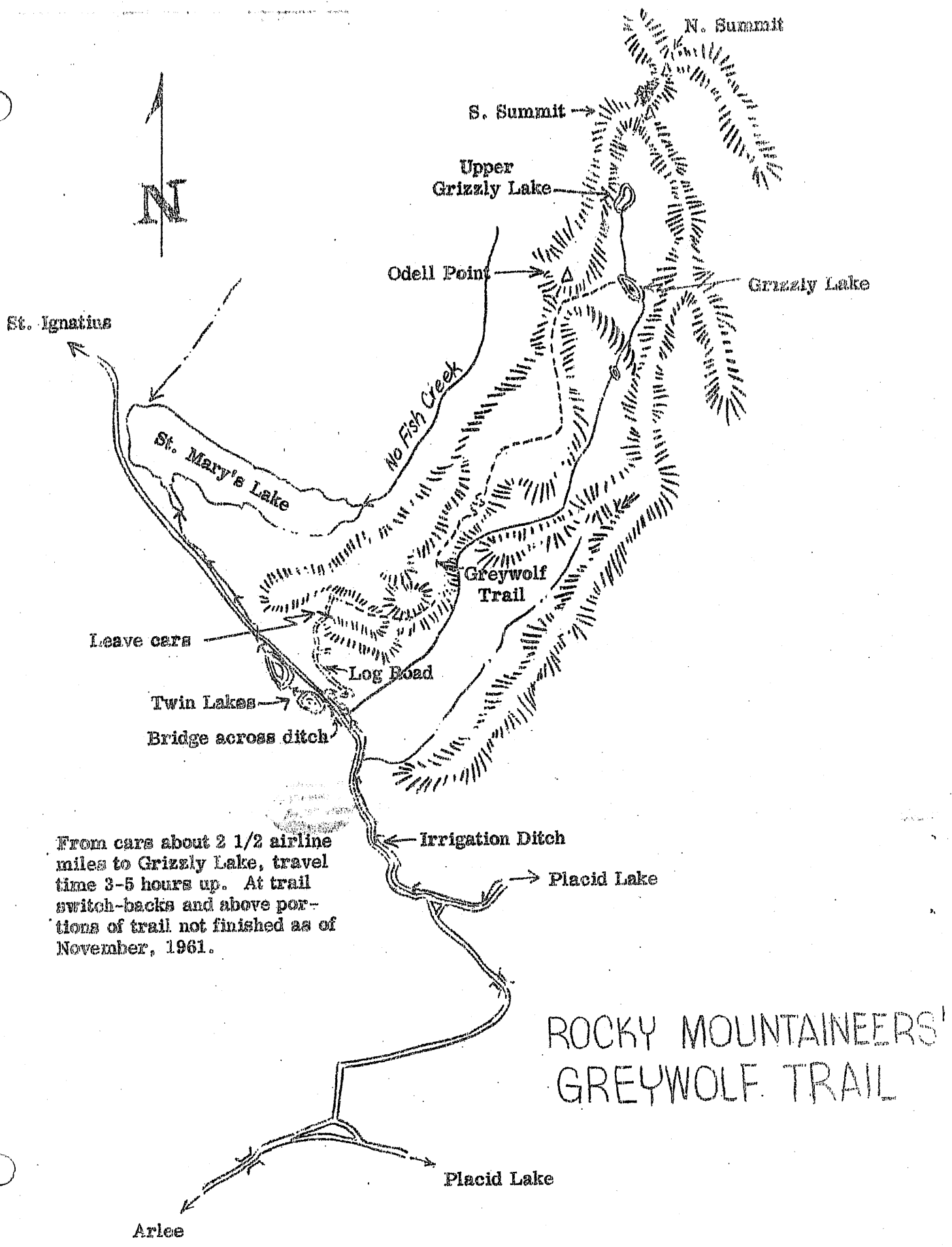
Ron Berg



- ① to ② = 0.8 miles
- ② to ③ = 7.7 mi. (few yards east of small bridge)
- ③ to ④ = 3.1 miles
- ④ to ⑤ = 1.8 mi. (cross bridge over ditch, about 25 yards, turnoff onto faint logging road)
- ⑤ to ⑥ = 1.0 mi. for cars, 1.1 mi. for 4-wheel drive

Note: In winter, road from ③ to ④ may not be passable

# APPROACH to ROCKY MOUNTAINEERS' GREYWOLF TRAIL



From cars about 2 1/2 airline miles to Grizzly Lake, travel time 3-5 hours up. At trail switch-backs and above portions of trail not finished as of November, 1961.

# ROCKY MOUNTAINEERS' GREYWOLF TRAIL

Arlee

Placid Lake

Placid Lake

Irrigation Ditch

Bridge across ditch

Twin Lakes

Leave cars

Greywolf Trail

Log Road

St. Mary's Lake

No Fish Creek

Odell Point

Upper Grizzly Lake

S. Summit

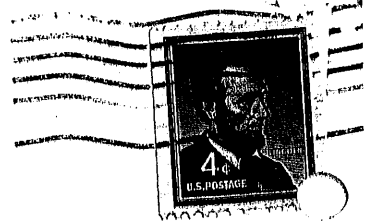
N. Summit

Grizzly Lake

St. Ignatius

N





David C. Line  
Whitaker Rd.  
Route #3  
City

