



THE ALTOID CHRONICLES

“Big mountains are high, and Altoids must get to the top.”

This simple homily captures the indomitable spirit of the Altoid Climbing Club, formed in 1989 by Co-chief Altoids Bill Hoke and Terry MacDonald. ‘Two real men scaling mighty heights while a flatland world sits idly by.’

Altoids. Humble, high-altitude superhumans whose mission is to ascend the dizzying firmaments and report back to Earth.

In an attempt to capture a glimpse of this acclaimed climbing pair, we present these Altoid Chronicles.

The serious climbing world is not exactly sure what to make of the Altoids. Are they all their reputations say, or possibly even more? Are they taking the sport to a new level, or might they be, to those most completely serious about mountaineering, simply our world’s foremost mountain comedy team?

Is *Altoidism* soon to spread its special brand of zeal and wildfire fame to

the far corners of our globe even before an inadequate description of the phenomenon first appears in Webster's New World Dictionary ©?

It should be noted that the Altoids climbed together for almost five years before they knew they were Altoids, though it might be more proper to say that the Altoids always knew they were Altoids, but didn't formalize their titles for the first several years of their storied association.

There.

We, of course, could detail only the magnificent successes of the Altoid Climbing Club, never mentioning the more challenging thrills, but this piece would then be mere fluff. Further, if we spent our time talking about naught but Altoids successes, we would quickly run out of hard-disc space and/or printer paper. We will therefor save their most noble triumphs for the soon-to-be-undertaken trilogy Altoids On High, or Gloria In Excelsior Altoids.

But here, to really see the Altoid character soar, we will witness their dealings with adversity.

Their many dealings with adversity.

One warning--various Altoid adventures you are about to enjoy may seem to have been outright failures. However, storytellers have said over the centuries that 'find the failures and you find the fun.' Failure often exposes more truth than success. And the Altoids have been nothing if not seekers after truth.

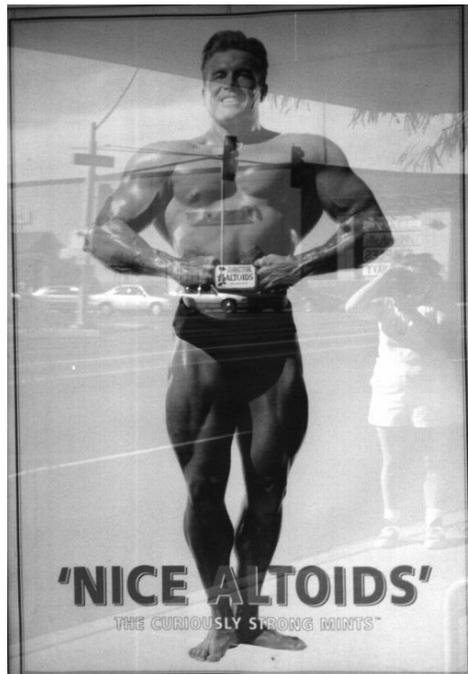
These Altoid Chronicles present some of the unvarnished results of that search.

Legal Disclaimer

The lawyers tell us that this would be good place to insert a collegial declaration that Altoids™ is indeed an internationally registered trademark of a cer-

tain candy company in England which produces a “Curiously Strong Candy”™ made, until recently, from beeves knuckles. And although they have stopped using beeves knuckles to produce their “Curiously Strong Candy”™, they have not stopped using lawyers to protect their™s. So the Altoids, the Climbing Club, would like to publicly proclaim their affection for Altoids™, the candy. We even like their advertising--especially the display boards in Washington D.C. Metro stations which read ‘Our Mints Can Beat Up Your Mints.’ We also loved the life-size bus-boards we saw in Phoenix a couple of years ago which pictured a steroid-crazed body-builder above the slogan ‘Nice Altoids!’ We do want to remind them that any law-suit against the Altoids Climbing Club to protect their™s will result in such an uproar in the climbing world and beyond over the mistreatment of the ‘Nice Altoids’ that the resultant blow to their public image will lead them to once again resort to the use of beeves knuckles to produce their “Curiously Strong Candy”™.

Thank you.



Second Legal Disclaimer. The History of Altoids, the Candy.

After an initial reading of the above disavowal, lawyers for the Altoids Climbing Club (a service they render without charge because of the inherent world-wide image-boost such an association provides their firm) strongly suggested a more sweeping tribute to Altoids, the candy.

So, here goes.

Most of the facts and legends quoted below come directly from a Los Angeles Times article dated Thursday, January 2, 1997 by Paul Dean.

The story's headline:

"200 Years Later, Altoids Remain a Breath of Fresh Air."

It is easy to track the history of Altoids the candy, says Dean.

"Historical hearsay has it that when King George III was told the Colonies were lost, he kicked his spaniel, felt a fit of fine madness coming on, yawned...and popped an Altoid.

Comedian Joan Rivers is addicted to these original, celebrated, curiously strong peppermints...Rosie O'Donnell doesn't start a monologue without one.

- *Altoids...are the nation's best selling peppermints.*
- *Altoids... made Business-Weeks list of what's hot for the '90s.*
- *Altoids even have their own page on the World-Wide Web...<http://www.altoids.com>.*

The United States has elevated Altoids into a phenomenon of chic that in five years has traveled faster than spilled latte. And, according to Mark Sugden, who manages Altoids marketing from the Elmsford, N.Y. outpost of Callard & Bowser of England & Wales, "It all started in a market where historical

accidents work well.”

That was Seattle, Washington, birthplace of Starbucks Coffee, DaVinci syrups, REI, Nordstrom, Microsoft, grunge rock, microbreweries, and vertical downpours....¹

Was it an ‘historical accident’ that the popularity of Altoids the candy coincided with the creation and skyrocketing fame of the Altoids Climbing Club in that very same Seattle?

We think not.

In fact, lawyers for the Altoids Climbing Club will soon be contacting Mark Sugden to discuss the ‘coincidence’ that sales of Altoids the candy have risen 40 percent each year to a projected 1996 high of almost \$20 million--all since the 1989 formation of the Altoids Climbing Club.

We’d like a little recognition. And, of course, a small piece of the Altoid action. We of the Altoid Climbing Club believe in the inviolate concept of fairness; we think one year’s gross sales is a fair sharing of the credit for the success of Altoids the candy. We also like the sound of ‘Callard & Bowser & Hoke & MacDonald.’ We would further request that the candy company relinquish the ‘www.altoids.com’ domain to the Altoids Climbing Club. We leave all this for the lawyers to negotiate.

Meanwhile, there can be no question that the success of the Altoids Climbing Club predated and fueled the success of Altoids the candy.

The First Chronicle

There is little doubt, as well, about the climbing literature’s first reference to the team that would become the Altoids:

HOKE AND MACDONALD CLIMBING CLUB
THE SECOND ANNUAL WINTER ASCENT OF MT. SI.
(East face gully direct.)
January 2, 1989.

(Hoke tells me I can't issue this report to Climbing Magazine, because he has an exclusive arrangement with the American Alpine Club to publish details of all his climbs, so I'll have to be satisfied telling the story here. I can't even mention his name, because of the deal with AAC--not to mention National Geographic--so I'll have to call him Mr. H.)

For the second year in a row, the American alpine climbing season has been officially opened by Terry MacDonald along with his secretive partner, the inscrutable Mr. H.

Dismal weather projections and objective dangers notwithstanding, this stalwart twosome has once again achieved what only a few dare dream--a winter ascent of the notorious Mt. Si, in the Cascade Mountains east of Seattle. Not only did their climb break the bottle on the New Year in mountaineering worldwide, it was done by the route the late Walter Bonatti would surely acclaim as the only true way to do that mountain.

"The sun rises on that route," the legendary Italian might well be saying on High.

Ah, the East face gully (direct)! Angelic voices sing hosannas to the lyrical beauty of its line, the sheer depth of Spirit its very dangers bring forth. And once again this year, MacDonald and the elusive Mr. H. finished the route in style, then returned in near record time to laugh and dine elegantly at the renowned The Chalet in nearby North Bend, regaling eager fel-

low diners with details of their annual adventure. (Because of demand, diners at the renowned The Chalet had to make reservations in March of '88 to be guaranteed seating for this most sought-after event.) And what a story these two intrepid masters of the mountains had to tell!

What was the most exciting feature of this year's feat?

Maybe it was the sheer folly of starting so late for the top from their high camp (MacDonald's 1988 Toyota SR5...black...in need of a 15,000 mile checkup and soon in need of a new clutch. Damned foreign cars!), but even this didn't stop them.

It could have been their disdain of using oxygen at 4,000 feet. Or their bullheaded determination to make this a free climb--no artificial hardware, no belays on the treacherous trails below the summit shoulder, by God no rope even! Such courage is the hallmark of the growing legend being built by MacDonald and Mr. H..

Many would make a strong case for the breathtaking crux moves in the final gully itself. Such style! Such character! The first 5.7 (±) overhanging ice/snow shelf was accomplished by MacDonald using his patented scoop 'n scoot maneuver, to the wide-eyed incredulity of his climbing partner. When it came Mr. H's turn, he unfortunately had trouble duplicating the lead, and simply went for an overhead breaststroke and layover move. But H's glory would come up higher.

The second crux move was an ice-rime-filled 6.11 (±) chimney which MacDonald negotiated with his now world-famous butt-friction and fall-away, with a final thumb-punch self-belay used to pull himself over the hazard. This feat wasn't as elegant as the previous, and MacDonald later acknowledged that he himself had to take off style points for allowing his highly-touted butt-friction hold to slip ever so slightly. Even so,

the stalwart Mr. H didn't allow a smirk to cross his face; perhaps he sensed that his moment in the sun was about to begin.

As the tireless twosome emerged from that much-feared gully, they were faced with one of the mountain's impenetrable cornices. Avoiding this by traversing leftward, the Giants of the Ranges stepped onto the summit pyramid itself, within shouting distance of their latest alpine prize. First Mt. Pilchuck (West Face direct). Then Mt. Elinor (Southwest Couloir). Now they were poised to bag the biggest of them all--Mt. Si (East face gully direct!)

The spirits of all the great climbers gone by must have been smiling on our two heroes, for just as they began their final ascent, the wind whipping the near-white-out conditions dropped from 70 miles-an-hour to a more manageable fifty.

But then, as often happens in great moments of achievement, angry devils seemed to step into the picture. Suddenly MacDonald, who had so brilliantly led the gully leading to the summit pyramid, contracted leg cramps so devastating they turned his knees around to the backs of his legs--cramps so devastating that to move back down two steps, MacDonald had to face out to kick his toes in.

Both climbers knew what must be done. MacDonald would stay where he was with his legs backwards, and Mr. H. must go on--without his trusty partner. Thus it is when two great explorers reach for the stars--if one of them gets leg cramps so bad his knees turn backwards, the other guy goes on to glory. They understand it because they understand an unforgiving Nature.

And so, after sharing a look only a few have shared through the ages, the team was temporarily split asunder. MacDonald stood rearranging his pants-legs, and Mr. H. proceeded

to the summit without him. And what a moment it was for this mysterious genius! Seconds before there was real question whether he might simply follow MacDonald's footsteps to the top; now suddenly he was all alone on the most cherished summit in the far Western Cascades—Mt. Si itself! He struggled unsuccessfully to control his emotions.

He had worked a lifetime to reach this lofty plane, and no amount of thinking bad thoughts about girlie magazines could keep the tears from his eyes. Yes, a real man can cry, and he did.

Oh, eventually he went back to his partner, and together they came back to live amongst mere mortals. They descended the steep slopes of Mt. Si, knowing full well that descent is where most great climbers die. MacDonald, in fact, did fall on the ice-encrusted trail, puncturing his right palm. Incredibly, he packed the wound with ice and walked on.

The two would live to tell the incredible tale! The Good Lord undoubtedly had some higher purpose in mind for them.

Somewhere, you see, another unsullied summit awaits MacDonald and Mr. H. It could be Mt. Jupiter, or maybe Mt. Ruth. Wherever it is, the highest birds look up to the spot. Yes, the legend of these two graceful and humble latter day heroes will grow. That much we know.

What we can't know, don't know, and must not attempt to fathom is how it might be possible that the coming ascent could be any more glorious, any more praiseworthy, than the 2nd Annual Ascent of Mt. Si (East face gully direct!)

O.K., it tended toward hyperbole, but set the proper tone for the Altoid Climbing Club's international image.



*Co-Chief MacDonald
on Mt. Si in winter.*

E-mail from Co-Chief Hoke

From: grafhoke@silverlink.net

To: tmacduck@aol.com

*It's good that you have begun to tell the true story of the Altoids.
I applaud you. One tip—focus on me. That's what the world
wants. More news about Co-chief Altoid Hoke. Carry on.*

A Sketch of Co-Chief Hoke.

As a majority of the stories contained in The Art of Misadventure focus on the dubious exploits of Co-Chief MacDonald, we might spend a while considering his eccentric longtime sidekick—Co-Chief William Hoke, who sometimes calls himself Alfred Altoid.

A product of the car advertising business—a fact which certainly casts a pall on his credibility—Bill Hoke grew up in Michigan. After a vast majority of that state’s voters passed a referendum demanding Hoke be exiled to the Upper Peninsula, he moved west and made a name for himself in his true area of expertise.

Not advertising. Not climbing.

Practical jokes.

There were the infamous *Hal Atkins Hazings* of the late ‘70s. Atkins was a venerable Seattle ad writer who worked with Hoke at the Seattle offices of McCann-Erickson. Hal loved to end his day in the men’s room down the hall from the creative department—ridding himself of the humiliation and stress of another eight hours wasted in the belly of the ad beast. There, sitting on a porcelain perch, he found peace with the latest issue of Advertising Age and dreamed the impossible—that somewhere out there was a rewarding job with a shop that valued his genius.

Hoke would have none of it. For a couple of days, he covertly followed Atkins into the men’s room to establish the pattern. Then on the third day, knowing Atkins was alone in his sanctuary, Hoke flipped off the light switch and called out: “Good night, Hal!” With a giggle and a guffaw, he disappeared down the hallway into the elevator, Atkins’ screams providing a long good-bye.

This continued for weeks. Atkins confronted Hoke to try to get him to stop interrupting his day’s-end reverie. Hoke simply changed his mode of operations—cracking open the men’s room door and calling “Good night, Hal” in a series of ridiculous cartoon voices. Off went the lights, and on came the screams.

You get the idea.

There was the *Incident with the Disgusted Deer-Hunters in 1987*; the victim here was Co-Chief MacDonald. The venue was the men's room at *O'Brien's* in Arlington—a favorite Altoid breakfast spot en route to several notable climbs in the North Cascades. *O'Brien's* was also a popular gathering place for the kind of good-old-boys who love motherhood, deer rifles, the U-S-of-A, and Redman chewing tobacco—not necessarily in that order.

One simple truth is that there have always been a lot more deer hunters than Altoids. Many of them were in the men's room at *O'Brien's* that morning when, standing at the wash-basin, Co-Chief Altoid Hoke turned to Co-Chief MacDonald, a look of concern etched on his face.

“Just one word, as your lawyer, then we'll get back to the wives,” Hoke said. “I think a deferred sentence with fifty hours of community service on something as serious as a child molestation charge is about as good as I can get you.”

With that, Co-Chief Hoke walked out of the men's room, leaving Co-Chief MacDonald alone amongst all those deer-hunters, drying his hands as fast as possible--his eyes like, well, like a deer in headlights.

You get the idea.

Co-Chief Altoid Hoke is a sick man. And he pulls a lot of practical jokes in men's rooms.

E-mail from Co-Chief Hoke

From: grafhoke@silverlink.net

To: tmacduck@aol.com

My suggestion for the Altoid Chronicles is two fold: that you always mention me first and you never fail to glorify, and consistently exaggerate my talents, good looks, total head of hair

(THOH) and overwhelming climbing prowess--so full of prow that even John (nee Jon) Roskelley quivers.

Co-Chief Altoid Hoke indeed boasts a total head of curly salt-and-pepper hair. Five-nine, one-seventy; elfish eyes, medium good looks. His talents are easily exaggerated; but he is the co-founder of the Altoid Climbing Club. That fact alone cements his place in climbing history.



As a team, these Altoids are remarkable. At the risk of being accused of authoring baseless hyperbole, it can be said that Hoke and MacDonald are the world's foremost mountaineers. OK, that's baseless hyperbole. Actually, the Altoid Climbing Club is not even recognized by the National Geographic Society, the American Alpine Club, or Outdoor Magazine; the Altoids chalk this up to conspiracy and jealousy.

There is tremendous insecurity in the adventure world. Witness the wildebeest. Sipping gently at the only watering hole within 60 kilometers, the next thing he knows, he's pulled screaming into a violent red froth by a hidden crocodile. No wait, that's the animal world—not the adventure world.

The misguided might try to ascribe supremacy to one or the other Altoid. Yet Cleopatra could never have died as she did without Mark Anthony. Tinker

needed Evers as much as Evers needed Chance. Simon needed Garfunkel--'til he didn't need him anymore. Abbott was just as important to the team as Costello. Nonetheless, some might say Bill Hoke, with his questing fascination, represents the essence of the true Altoid. Others would claim the mantle for Co-chief Altoid MacDonald, with his superior strength and force of will. Hoke says Hoke. MacDonald laughs and shakes his head.

It is a fact that for decades fame in mountaineering has been secretly bequeathed by an old-boy network based in Stamford, Connecticut and Cambridge, England. Not many people know this, but it's true. At these two locales, effete Ivy League and Oxford graduates--whose idea of a mountain is any elevation above their uplifted noses--control all media exposure to the world on high. Certainly, the feats of such contemporary mountain heroes as Chris Bonington, Doug Scott, John Roskelley, and Phil Erschler have been rightfully chronicled. But it has been the climbing establishment's incredulity at the sheer magnificence of the Altoid Climbing Club and its accomplishments that has kept the Altoids unknown until now.

Only the Altoids climbed Mt. Rainier in a day, held a giant watermelon festival and fireworks display on the summit featuring sixty juicy watermelons and a quarter ton of fireworks they toted to the top themselves in less than four hours, then returned to Paradise that evening to modestly accept the obeisance of Lou Whittaker and his chastened RMI Guide Service.

Only the Altoids left their car at the Lena Lake trailhead in the Olympic Mountains, sprinted nine miles to the summit of the Brothers in three short hours, then raced back to their car--ending their eighteen-mile circuit in five-and-a-half hours. They were immediately ticketed by National Park Service rangers for the smoke generated along the trail—smoke which, along with associated cyclonic winds, could have caused tremendous damage that baked and dry July.

Yes, only the Altoids strapped on their most technical climbing gear in the middle of the bitter Northwest winter of 1987 and climbed to the top of the forbidding Mt. Pilchuck via their signature Southwest Face-direct route—past doz-

ens of families out cutting their Christmas trees, all oblivious to the history unfolding around them. As the Altoids stepped up the ice-encrusted wooden ladder onto the summit platform (which in summer serves as a fire lookout--technical difficulty: 4.8...no, wait...that would be .48), ancient Latin phrases like "Eureka!", "Acme!", "Excelsior!", and "Asbestos!" danced in their heads.

(Some might say the Altoids nearly got themselves lost in their descent from the summit of Mt. Pilchuck that cold December's day, but Altoids are never lost, but simply forging an historic new route to their destination.)

It is this 1987 winter ascent of Mt. Pilchuck which today exposes one of the few disagreements between the Co-chief Altoids; it is an important discord. Co-chief Hoke insists it was during this climb that the Altoids chose their name. Co-chief MacDonald maintains that the Altoid Climbing Club was named during yet another epic jaunt on the flanks of Mt. Rainier in the Spring of '89.

Co-Chief Altoid MacDonald is, of course, correct--due to his extreme younger age and concomitant superior memory.

The Naming of the Altoids.

The Altoids were hiking on the Muir Snowfield, headed for Camp Muir and icy fun above 10,000 feet that April day in '89. Co-Chief Hoke had just pulled his latest practical joke on a poor high-altitude trekker barely a mile above Paradise.

The day was spectacular, stunning and serene. The blue of the sky, the white of the snow, the sun shining off Rainier like a mirror--life's best dreams are built of such days. The only thing that could possibly go wrong while MacDonald and Hoke took a break along the trail to Camp Muir was if a 'bean-sprouter' came along.

'Bean-sprouters.'

Hoke never liked 'bean-sprouters.' Much like the bad guy in Lonesome Dove who hated 'sod-busters,' Hoke feels strongly about 'bean-sprouters', a.k.a. 'dirt-food eaters,' or 'eco-looneys'; in Washington State they're also called

‘Evergreen Staters.’ These would be your outdoors people who look like they must--and do—ride around in Volkswagen buses, sport pony-tails on their men and granny-glasses on their women, wear L.L. Bean plaid shirts to the symphony, and drive the price of Birkenstocks through the roof with their sheer demand. They often long for the good old days when Michael Dukakis would have made a great President, and still believe a religion should form around the teachings of Buckminster Fuller.

‘Bean-sprouters.’ They favor phrases like ‘inner child,’ overuse the verb ‘empower,’ and don’t mean to imply a football-snap when saying ‘centered.’ They love the idea that we are all one, and upon leaving Disneyland dreamily hum ‘It’s a Small World After All’.

You know the type.

‘Bean-sprouters.’

Hoke doesn’t suffer bean sprouters well, which is weird because he is the more liberal of the Altoids. He actually voted for Michael Dukakis, thinks Ronald Reagan was probably a space alien, is proud to be a card-carrying member of the ACLU, and is 90% ‘inner child’. But put a ‘bean-sprouter’ in his face and he grows fangs, the hair on his back doubles in length, and he’s ready to join Jesse Helms in a crusade to flatten all pointy heads with the silver hammer of righteousness.

Up the trail from Paradise came this poor ‘bean-sprouter’ into the welcoming jaws of the Altoids Climbing Club.

“Man, what an awesome day, huh?” he enthused , pushing his glasses back up onto his nose.

“Yeah, awesome,” Hoke responded.

The ‘bean sprouter’ actually made the foolish mistake of stopping to join the Altoids beside the trail, instead of doing the safe thing and giving the curly-haired werewolf with the dilating eyes a wide berth.

“Jeesh, it almost seems an invasion of sanctity for us to be here, doesn’t it?” the poor soul offered as Co-Chief Hoke’s mouth began to froth.

“Yeah, an invasion,” Hoke spit out, his saliva beginning to drip onto the snow below.

“It’s such an incredible rush to be able to see all these mountains,” the interloper smiled while Hoke visualized a target area on his pasty neck, “Adams, St. Helens, Hood...”

“...Jefferson...the Sisters...” MacDonald added, hoping to avert bloodshed.

“Shasta,” Hoke interjected dryly.

“Shasta? Where?” The visitor nearly jumped out of his cross-country skis in disbelief. Mt. Hood was one hundred and twenty miles away, Mt. Jefferson one seventy. The Sisters were barely visible on the horizon, approximately two hundred miles to the south. Mt. Shasta’s geographic location must have been at least four hundred miles distant, well beyond the earth’s curvature.

“Yeah, Shasta,” Hoke reaffirmed. “There to the right of the Sisters, just next to third cloud between that and the sight line from St. Helens. Can’t you see it?”

“Man, I don’t think so. Yeah, maybe. Wow, that’s incredible you can see that far!”

“Yeah, well, I’ve been a commercial pilot for over twenty years. Did a bunch of high-level optics development for the CIA back in the early Seventies. I’ve got twenty-aught-five vision.”

“Twenty what?”

“Twenty-aught-five. It’s twice as good as twenty-ten. There’ve only been two people in recorded history with twenty-aught-five vision. The other guy was a Nazi in the Second War. The Russians went behind German lines to assassinate him. Called him ‘The Teutonic Eagle’.”

“That’s incredible,” the ‘bean-sprouter’ whispered, stepping away from Hoke in awe. “Hey, it’s been amazing hanging with you guys.”

“Yeah, amazing,” Hoke agreed, a sneer forming on his lips as the ‘bean-sprouter’ withdrew and continued up the snow-trail toward Camp Muir.

When he was gone, MacDonald turned to Hoke and shook his head.

“You are incorrigible,” he said.

“Damned bean-sprouters,” Hoke snarled. He reached in his pack and pulled out a tin of mints made from beeve knuckles. “Altoids?”

“Curiously strong climbing team!”

Thus was the Altoids Climbing Club born.

There followed uncounted mountaineering epics to take away the breath of the most serene Sherpa.



Altoids on the summit of Mt. Rainier.

E-mail from Co-Chief Hoke

From: grafhoke@silverlink.net

To: tmacduck@aol.com

MacDonald:

Keep up the good work on the Altoid Chronicles. Remember, the better I look, the better the Altoids look, and the better place the world is to live. It is a syllogism.

Bill Hoke

Co-Chief Altoid

The Terrible Traverse.*

The Northwest has fostered some great climbing legends through the decades--Pete Shoening, Willy Unsoeld, Tom Hornbein, Dave Maher, Jim Wickwire, Jim Whittaker to name a few--but there have never been two quite like MacDonald and Hoke.

You want a mountaineering epic? How about 'The Terrible Traverse'?

Here they were in the late Spring of '89, the newly named Altoids Climbing Club, out for a Sunday jaunt in search of the Elinor/Washington traverse in the southern Olympics.

Mt. Elinor is one of the Altoids favorite early-season conditioning climbs. A simple, steep snow-hike to a summit offering views of the entire inner Olympic Mountain range, followed by a world-class glissade on your butt down a three-quarter-of-a-mile snow gully.

The Altoids had been here at least twice before. Co-Chief MacDonald got caught out all night two years earlier, trying to climb Mt. Washington with his

young stepson by consulting the very confusing Olympic Mountain Guide—which like any mountain guidebook could just as well be written in Lithuanian for all the assistance it provides.

It was quite a father-son bonding experience. When the down-climb route on Mt. Washington became too obscure in the dark, the two curled up in sleeping bags and waited for the sun. The next morning, the wind blew away their Xeroxed directions from the Olympic Mountain Guide, but it would have made no difference. They just wanted off the mountain, and forced their way down the Big Creek watershed—through raging streams and rough, biting brush to a welcome at the road-head from the Olympic Mountain Rescue team.

These were the very people who wrote the Olympic Mountain Guide with directions so confusing that they would then be kept busy as the Olympic Mountain Rescue team. It was a great circle—a self-perpetuating engine of mountain enigma come to life before the climbers' groggy eyes. They waved off the rescuers, thanked them for their concern, sneered at their literary talents, and drove home.

The next year, MacDonald brought along Bill Hoke for a first attempt at Mt. Elinor in mid-winter. They got as far as the Elinor trailhead in MacDonald's 4-wheel-drive Subaru before the car slipped on severe ice and slid into a deep ditch. Damned foreign cars!

Stuck. Like a pair of frozen bugs in a display case. Yet these weren't two helpless arachnids skewered by impersonal push-pins. They were Altoids. All-heart. In fact, 'Altoids' and 'all heart' is as good an example of redundancy as you'll find.

They turned their back on that entrapped 4-wheel wannabe and, unbowed, trekked out seven miles to Hoodsport in search of a tow-truck, or someone with a winch. On the way, they first encountered a very frightened woman from 'near Division 3'—which they took to be a housing development on nearby Lake Cushman. She was not going to be specific about where exactly she lived—just in case they came over later with hopes of bludgeoning her--and she was not going to help the Altoids. She would only slow her car to a crawl, and

roll her window down far enough to tell them she lived ‘near Division 3’, and that she could not help them. She then drove away, leaving Hoke and MacDonald to trek on. Two years later, a moose ran amok in Division 3. Karma.

Next, the Altoids were actually picked up by a National Park Service Ranger who drove them into Hoodspport. He recognized MacDonald from the aborted rescue effort the year before—a celebrity recognition that impressed Hoke greatly.

In Hoodspport, they found two available tow-trucks but no available help. The owner of the Texaco station said ‘no way I’m going up there,’ and summarily dismissed the most famous climbing team he would ever chance to meet. Across the street, the owner of the only full-time towing company in Hoodspport said, ‘no way I’m going up there.’ Oh-for-two. Some people have no sense of destiny.

The Altoids were growing concerned in the fading daylight. Then, at the nearby mini-mart, they spied two burly Native Americans drinking beers inside a black, short-bed Ford V-8 with a deer rifle in the window. This being the only remaining potential assistance, the Altoids decided to risk it—take a ‘shot in the dark’, so to speak. They didn’t like the sound of that word ‘risk’ when talking about two burly Native Americans sipping beers inside their short-bed Ford. They liked the sound of the phrase ‘shot in the dark’ even less, given the very visible deer rifle. But drastic times require drastic gambles.

MacDonald went up to the driver’s-side window and knocked. The two members of the Skokomish Nation looked at him suspiciously through blood-shot eyes as the driver rolled down the window. His shaggy black hair fell down his back; his mouth was missing just a few teeth; his face was broad and flat, displaying two scars from bar-fights gone by. He had several tattoos on both arms—the unifying theme of which seemed to be ‘Knives, Wounds, and Blood-Loss.’

His friend had more of the same—except teeth.

‘Perfect,’ thought MacDonald.

The Skokomish men listened intently to the plight of the two white men.

They laughed when they realized how dependent the two climbers were on their generosity, but sobered to hear the poor beggars only had \$14 between them. That would scarcely cover the cost of gas for their old short-bed Ford; but they were soon pummeling each other and laughing uproariously over the potential adventure; they seemed enthusiastic about taking Hoke and MacDonald deep into the wilderness.

“Hell, I haven’t been up there since two winters ago when I gut-shot that buck,” the Skokomish passenger gushed. “It was so cold, I skinned him right there.”

Hoke eyed the deer rifle nervously.

“Hop in back and hold on,” the driver crowed. “We’ll get your god-damned car out of that hole for sure.”

The Native Americans howled an ancient war cry as the short-bed Ford spun on gravel leaving the mini-mart. They drove straight to the Texaco station and drained all fourteen of the white men’s dollars into their gas tank. The owner of the Texaco station eyed the war party warily, visions of distant massacres dancing in his head. He looked from MacDonald to Hoke, hoping to be able to recreate their faces for interested detectives days later.

Gassed up, the Native Americans and their bouncing baggage of wide-eyed white climbers sped seven miles back up those same twisting mountain roads the Altoids had just trudged on foot. Hoke and MacDonald spent the entire journey wondering what exactly was going through the minds of these red-eyed red-men. Hoke focused on the phrase ‘gut-shot.’ MacDonald couldn’t get the image of the skinned buck out of his mind.

Their scalps tingled; their butts took a beating.

Once, trying to act light-hearted, Hoke mentioned that they still might salvage something from the day. The word came out ‘savage.’ MacDonald knew exactly where the slip originated—somewhere in ancient memory after the first Thanksgiving, probably closer to the twisting erosive downfall of the Little Bighorn.

The short-bed Ford finally rumbled up to the fateful ditch displaying Mac-

Donald's useless Subaru.

"Damned foreign cars," the two Native Americans laughed as they got out—grabbing not their buck knives, but their chains and ties. After they hooked the sorry import, they had it free in seconds; the Subaru was back again on the mountain road, pointed downhill toward Hoodspout.

"There you go guys. Thanks for the gas money," the driver smiled as he got back into the short-bed's cab.

"Gee, how can we ever thank you?" MacDonald asked. "You know, I do the stadium announcing for the Seattle Seahawks football team. If you guys ever want to come see a game, give me a call."

"Wow, I've never been to Seattle," the Skokomish Nation passenger replied meekly. "I'd have to ask my wife."

So much for 'free-roaming warriors.'

Now, a year later, the newly-named Altoids were back to once more confront the Olympic Mountains' simplest climb. This latest journey would turn into an epic, becoming known in Altoid lore as 'The Terrible Traverse.'*

Mt. Elinor is a great workout, a wonderful view, and only slightly more difficult than the ladder-move to the summit of Mt. Pilchuck. In fact, on the day in question, there were a dozen elderly trekkers from the *Oregon Mountaineers* awaiting the Altoids when they reached the summit of Mt. Elinor.

The elderly are normally quite respectful of history. This dozen old folks, though, had no idea they were in the presence of Altoids. Must have been the altitude. Otherwise climbing etiquette would require the elderly to show proper respect.

But the Altoids weren't there just to climb Mt. Elinor. No! They were there to attempt the Elinor/Washington Traverse, which involves finding an obscure route over to Mt. Washington (just north of Mt. Elinor), climbing Washington and descending the Big Creek watershed back to the car parked at the Elinor Trailhead.

The problem was that the Altoids had no idea where the specific route to Mt. Washington lay. There were some obscure descriptions in the aforemen-

tioned Olympic Mountain Climbing Guide, but nothing very clear. Once again, most mountain guidebooks are written just so--in a style very similar to the single sheets you get when going on a scavenger hunt. *'You walk up the snow gully, pass two large rocks on the right, throw a pinch of salt over your left shoulder, and in the shadow of the second crow that flies over, you'll find the route.'*

The Altoids expected a more precise description; they are accustomed to traveling in the mountains as if guided by a Landsat laser beam, using their superior noses. This time, however, those appendages were useless cartilage. Compasses with the arrows pointing to "Huh?" The Altoids were not lost, of course; the correct route simply went unfound.

Reduced to utilizing the Olympic Mountain guidebook, they were appreciative that it was at least written in English. Very simple. As expounded earlier, the subtitle of this and most every other mountain guide should be 'Duh is Just a Three-Letter Word.'

Confronted with such confusion, the Altoids have several simple rules to live by in the mountains. Rule number six states: "Look for an obscure route for about two and a half minutes. Then force it." After climbing Elinor, they descended around two abutments; not finding a logical route across to Mt. Washington, Hoke decided to force it.

They stood beside one of the major rock buttresses on the east face of Mt. Elinor. Five yards in front of them, the rock face dropped away 400 feet to a lightly wooded snow dome. Looking across the rock face, the summit of Mt. Washington mocked them in silence--evidently unaware of the determination of this team. They were the Altoids; they had a rope; Mt. Washington was theirs.

Normally, you wouldn't expect a climbing team ascending as simple a route as Mt. Elinor to carry a rope, but Altoids are always prepared. They carry a rope at all times--in the mountains, on the ferry boat coming in from Kingston, on the elevator heading for a meeting in the Columbia Center. You never know when you'll have to belay an associate through a power-lunch.

MacDonald set up security and sent his friend across the buttress. In less than a minute, Co-Chief Altoid Hoke was clinging to a slippery rock face

above the 400-foot abyss. He hoped to turn the corner and find another belay point, maybe a less exposed rock route, or a snow-slope they could down-climb.

Rounding the corner, Hoke found an even bigger abyss—a 600-foot drop-off just begging to tie-up the Altoids for the rest of the afternoon. He also looked uphill past the buttress into the snowy amphitheater the Olympic Climbing Guide described as the true down-climb route for the traverse. They had descended too far into the snow gully, and could probably find the correct route by abandoning this buttress and climbing back up a few hundred feet.

Here was a classic conundrum for the Altoids. Do they do the really crazy thing and down-climb the buttress, do the sane thing and retrace their steps up to the true down-climb snow route, or give it all up and slide on their butts along with the giddy old folks whose voices they could hear yelping like young antelope in the gully behind them?

Altoids don't retreat. George Custer would probably have made a good Altoid, except for that effeminate golden hair. Sitting Bull would definitely have made a great Altoid, except for that unfortunate first name. 'Climbing Bull' sounds so much more like the Altoids.

The Altoids down-climbed the buttress—a symbolic act marinated in true Altoid karma. Here they were on the easiest climb in the Olympics, rappelling down a major rock-face, laughing in the face of sensibility. Why resort to a simple act, when you can infuse a whole day with overweening silliness. So, they rappelled, and laughed until their bellies hurt; they set up three other rappel points and slid down the doubled rope like bright-colored Army Rangers with no enemy but time itself.

Of course, choosing the buttress route ate up most of what was left of the sun. They finished the down-climb and hiked over to the ridge leading to the summit of Mt. Washington, but the sunlight was beginning to fail. They would have to choose—go to their second summit of the day, or turn around and head back to their car—where an ice-cold six-pack awaited Co-Chief MacDonald and a steak dinner at the Belfair Café was only a half-hour beyond.

It should be noted here that Co-Chief Altoid William Hoke does not drink,

except in the mountains. He will enjoy a beer, if he has first slipped it into his climbing partner's pack at the trailhead, and watched with glee as his unknowing foil totes the beverage up high. Breaking his sobriety is then worth it. It is the only place he has consumed alcohol in years.

Here they were within a good eight-iron of dusting Mt. Washington. They were up close and personal with the profile of the first President. Mt. Washington looks exactly like George's head pointing to the sky with the summit at the tip of the nose. Of course, the only slightly technical moves of the day would require them to step over a massive chimney, skirt the summit pyramid, and climb a hundred feet of steep snow and rock to the pinnacle of Washington's proboscis.

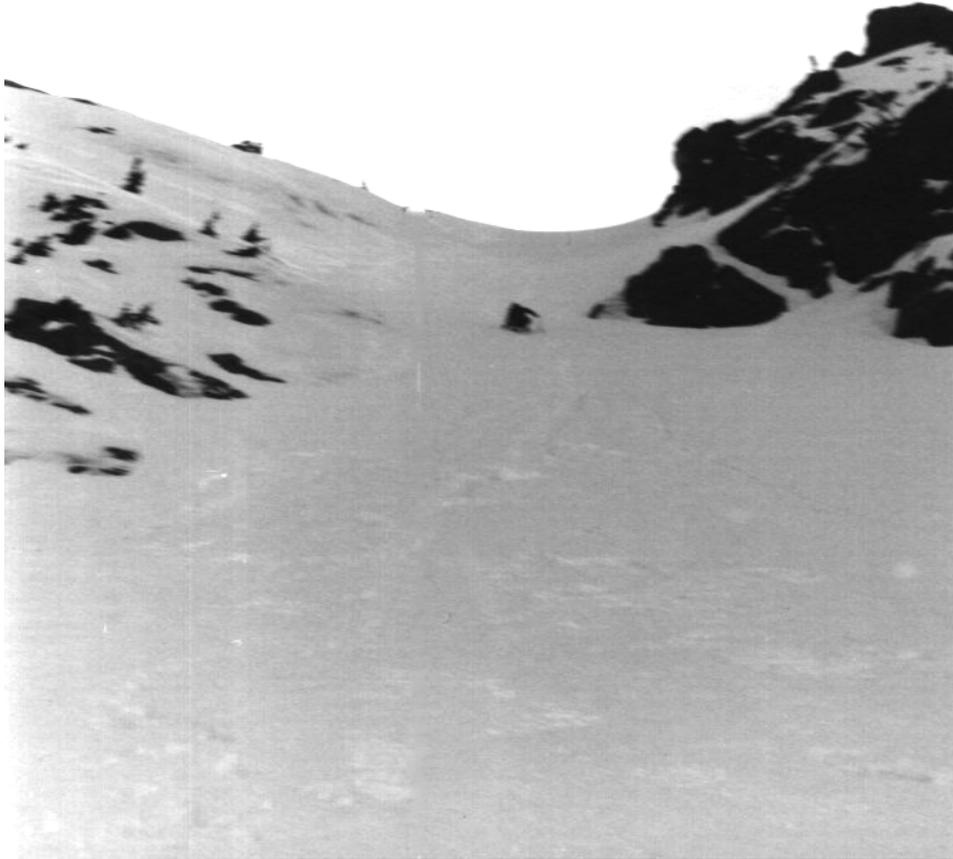
They were Altoids; summits were everything—except when beer and a steak dinner were involved. They turned around, hoping to get to the car before it was too dark to see. Of course, they had their head-lamps with them, but route finding through the Olympic forest lower down would be no fun with so little illumination. In fact, they decided they didn't have time for a straight down-climb of the Big-Creek watershed. They would traverse back to Mt. Elinor, and attempt to find the route around the buttress, through the correct notch in the gully rocks, and into the glissade path left by all those old butts earlier in the day.

Of course, nothing ever comes easily to the Altoids. Co-Chief MacDonald soon continued an Altoid tradition by losing a baseball cap in the trees, and left his tennis shoes beside a water-stop, as well. All the way out, Co-Chief Hoke did a weak imitation of tennis shoes and a baseball hat crying for the Altoids not to abandon them.

In the fading light, they missed the correct notch, and were thrown down onto the lower slopes of Elinor, fighting through brush and deep, watery mush in an attempt to escape the gloom. At last they emerged onto the forestry road leading back to their car. They slipped into their snowshoes in the impenetrable darkness and trudged down the road—sinking to their knees with every step in the fast-melting Spring snows.

Do Altoids know how to have fun, or what?

(Editor's note: The Altoids realize the more commonly recognized Terrible Traverse is on Mt. Constance, as pointed out by noted Northwest author Bob Wood. The Altoid Terrible Traverse is on the East Face of Elinor.)



The Elinor/Washington Traverse.

E-mail from Co-Chief Hoke

Subj: Chronicles

Date: 96-12-02 01:46:54 EST

From: grafhoke@silverlink.net (Graf-Hoke)

To: TMACDUCK@aol.com

A few thoughts on the Chronicles. I think you are doing quite a good job, but there have been some oversights which I know you will want to address.

First, you forgot, consistently, to mention that I consistently carry 95-132 pounds, depending on if it's an overnight.

You have not, yet, described my double zippered Outdoor Research First Aid Kit. How it has already saved your life several times; how my back-up snow goggles kept you and the sherpas from guaranteed snow blindness; how my first aid kit has everything to treat you in the event of a snow-snake bite.

In terms of trips, you have not done Altoid justice to one of the most famous exploits--the one-day conquest (can you call it anything else?) of The Brothers; how the Altoids took ice from girls on the one-day assault (and conquest) of Mt. Jupiter; how we went up to Black and White lakes in the winter (for God's sake!) ignoring the bear warnings and plunging our way back into the viscera of the Olympic National Forest.

You have not properly acknowledged or described the clock at the Belfair Cafe, how it unfolds local services, flopping over one neon and hand-glittered card after the other.

Keep on making me look good, MacDonald. It makes All Altoids look good; and looking good and being 'cool' is all-important to all Altoids.

Well, that's about it for now.

'Summa Est Pulchra Patria Altoids'

or

'Sum Quod Eris Altoids.'

Your choice.

Co-Chief Hoke

P.S. There's a lot of Rainier ore to mine. What about Tom?



Altoid out for a stroll.

'Wrong Way 'Tom' and the Phantom Nuns'

The pinnacle of mountaineering amusement was reached during the Altoids' climb of Mt. Rainier in the Summer of 1990. We'll call this adventure 'Wrong Way Tom and The Phantom Nuns.' Every mountaineer has a story like this; none, however, is any crazier.

'Tom' was the husband of Co-Chief Altoid Hoke's office manager, Greta. We'll call him 'Tom', though during the climb the Altoids called him several other names. He was young, strong, and arrogant. The kind of guy Altoids love to torment.

As the Altoids have many ways to deal with the young and the presumptuous, so are there many routes to the top of Mt. Rainier. The most used trail starts at Paradise on the mountain's south side, climbs the Muir Snowfield to Camp Muir, swings over to Ingraham Flats through Cathedral Rocks, ascends Disappointment Cleaver to the summit snowfield and onto the top.

The second most popular route is on the north side. It begins from the parking lot at White River Campground, tracks through verdant forests to Glacier Basin at tree-line, ascends Steamboat Prow to Camp Shurman at 9,500 feet, and continues to the summit via the Emmons Glacier.

Late in the summer, though, after the sun has melted the mountain back to dangerous levels, the trail from Camp Muir often curls around the mountain all the way to the Emmons Glacier, then ascends the glacier a couple of thousand feet, where it joins the trail from Camp Shurman at about 14,000.

The Altoids have always preferred the Camp Shurman route, although their favorite way to the top is through the Kautz Icecliffs on the mountains southwest side. However, to enjoy the Kautz Icecliff route and many of the more complicated routes on Rainier, you need extra time the Altoids' full-time jobs seldom allowed. Of course, the Altoids could do any route on Rainier in a matter of hours, but climbing Rainier should be enjoyed like a fine bottle of wine. You don't chug Dom Perignon. Altoids don't smoke Rainier like some cheap cigar.

Co-Chiefs Hoke and MacDonald and 'Tom' reached the White River Campground parking lot that August Friday and immediately set out for an overnight bivouac above Glacier Basin three miles away.

Actually, let's take a couple of steps back before we head off in a sprint.

During the entire drive from Seattle to Mt. Rainier, 'Tom' provided the Co-Chiefs with a complete physical fitness resume. He had three percent body fat, worked out five days a week, planned to run in the next Seattle marathon, and basically let the Altoids know he would be able to more than keep up with them in the coming climb.

The Altoids had heard all this before. They smiled and nodded.

The smiles disappeared two miles from the parking lot at White River when the clutch on Co-Chief MacDonald's Subaru station wagon burned out. (Damned foreign cars! Certain nations' inability to create a clutch that wouldn't burn out at the worst possible moment probably cost them the war.)

What a great send-off for the weekend! The Altoids were immediately confronted with a choice--turn around and limp back to Tacoma with a burned-out clutch, or go ahead and climb the mountain, postponing the automotive disaster until the end of the climb, when they would be just as burned out as the clutch.

No choice there. They would climb.

They went through the time-honored tradition at a Rainier parking lot and unpacked and repacked their rucksacks. Each would carry about forty pounds. You could carry less if you didn't mind eating 'bean-sprouter'-just-add-water cardboard-dirtfood. Altoids scoff at such an idea. They favored pasta from the world-famous Il Terrazzo Carmine, complete with Carmine's special marinara sauce. Real French bread. All the candy you could want. Fresh eclairs.

To be an Altoid is to never accept the phrase 'freeze-dried'. Eat like a king and you'll die with a smile.

'Tom' hefted his pack onto his back and smirked thinly at his hosts.

"See you at Glacier Basin," he drawled cockily; winking at the Altoids; he then turned on his heel and walked quickly away.

It's not a good idea to wink at the Altoids.

"This guy evidently doesn't know who he's dealing with," Co-Chief Hoke said to his cohort as they casually hoisted their packs. "Let's grind him."

"Got it," Co-Chief MacDonald replied. "See you at Glacier Basin'. Do you think he'd carry us if we asked real nice?"

"Let's run him into the ground, then ask him," came Hoke's reply.

With that, the Altoids took off up the trail to track down young 'Tom'. He was in superb shape, but it is often true that athletes with better brains expend less muscle power to achieve a goal. This is Altoid Axiom #37—"The Dumb Muscle Law." 'Tom' was living proof of 'The Dumb Muscle Law.'

The Altoids pushed 'Tom' all the way to Glacier Basin, not really seeking to catch him—just wind him. They arrived at tree-line thirty minutes later--less than a minute after 'Tom'. The young man--gasping, dripping, self-satisfied--sat on a huge rock as the Co-Chiefs pulled into the campground, each munching a peach as they surveyed their perspiring companion.

"Three miles in thirty minutes from White River Campground to Glacier Basin," Hoke offered nonchalantly. "Nowhere near the Altoid record."

"That was nineteen and a half minutes, wasn't it?"

"We were carrying four two-man rocks for repairs at Camp Shurman, as I remember," Hoke affirmed.

'Huh? What the hell are you two talking about?' 'Tom' shook his head, sweat flying left and right. "No way you could do what we just did any faster than what we just did it!"

"Went right onto Camp Shurman," Hoke asserted. "Made it in a little over an hour from here. Did the repairs before we put up the tent and went to bed."

"Yeah, right," 'Tom' snorted.

"The Park Service renamed the route from White River Campground to here 'The Altoid Trail'," MacDonald answered. "Said we saved them several thousands in helicopter charges. We dragged out a quarter of a ton of garbage on the descent."

'Tom's' mouth dropped open. This—not a wink—is the proper gesture in

the presence of the Altoids. A proper second step would be to offer to carry a couple of two-man rocks to Camp Shurman in tribute. 'Tom' remained mute.

Lack of respect among the young is a growing problem in America.

A cold wind whistled across St. Elmo's Pass that evening as 'Tom' and his legendary companions set up their bivouac in the heather fields above the steep hog-back overlooking Glacier Basin. Later, as hundreds of shooting stars lit up the alpine night, the young man suffered severe leg cramps; 'Tom' awoke with a scream as the whip-cord knot twisted his upper leg like a vise. The Altoids tried to get him to eat Roloids--their fool-proof cure for cramps--but he wouldn't do it. He decided to 'gut it out.' The decision would have a major impact on his performance the next two days.

At sunrise, the three were awakened by rocks tumbling down from the ridgelines high above. A herd of mountain goats traversed the barren slopes, heading toward St. Elmo's Pass and the grassy grades higher up. The Altoids and their tired, sore companion lay in their mummy bags and watched the migration, while below in Glacier Basin marmot calls mixed with alpine bird-song; the crisp morning erupted in gilded light.

The goal for the day was Camp Shurman on the tip of Steamboat Prow at 9,500 feet. After breakfast, the threesome packed up and headed for the snow-fields of the InterGlacier. A few dozen feet above where the snout of the glacier spit a torrent of silty, milky meltwater, they took off their tennis shoes and hid them under a large rocky outcrop; they then put on their boots, crampons, and seat-harnesses in preparation for setting out on an icy sea. From here, they would be on glaciers and glacial moraines en route to the summit of Mt. Rainier.

From the moment they first stepped onto the InterGlacier, Co-Chief Altoid MacDonald tried to do right by young 'Tom'. There is, of course, a correct and incorrect way to walk on glaciers. 'Tom' needed to learn to do it right.

"The secret to climbing a glacier is to stay upright--as perpendicular to the slope as possible," Terry instructed as Hoke led off, pulling the rope behind

him in a loop held lightly at his side. “You force your weight onto your downhill leg; then, if you lock your knee every step, you can take the entire load onto your skeletal structure and rest your uphill leg. Every step you rest a step. It’s a very elegant way of walking, and it spares your quadriceps the agony of carrying the load all the way to the top.”

“Right,” said ‘Tom’, leaning over to stride onto the glacier; he was determined to muscle his way up this rock heap. He was twenty-five—at his physical peak. He was in tip-top shape. His quadriceps could carry his load and most of theirs as high as he wanted to go.

“Thanks for the tip,” he smiled back at Terry as he moved off to follow Hoke toward Camp Shurman. He didn’t rest at all before leaning over and throwing a second aggressive step up the slope. His left quadriceps bulged impressively. Hell, they were walking up hill, for God’s sake. Let’s do it! The rest-step technique seemed a pretty slow way to climb a mountain; he would rest in the breaks.

Soon the trio fell into the Zen-rhythms of ice pilgrims. In Glacier Basin eight-hundred feet below, echoed marmot whistles spiraled and took flight; high above, a hawk caught a lazy updraft as wispy clouds shredded and danced in the winds bouncing off Rainier’s flanks--an airy ensemble’s underscore to the crunch of the climbers’ crampons.

Here was why they were mountaineers! Not just the peaks, certainly not the conquest, but the first heady exhilaration when you realize you are free! There couldn’t possibly be a cleaner high in God’s Great Creation. You are outdoors, swimming in stunning beauty, breathing the clearest air your lungs will ever drink. If you were an Altoid down below in the flatland world, whenever your eyes beat softly shut, the dream behind them would be this place.

Right now, though, there was no need to dream. Co-Chief MacDonald opened his eyes wide and wanted to shout!

Most of all, he hoped Hoke wouldn’t break into his mind-bending rendition of ‘The Happy Wanderer.’ Nothing could bring you back to Earth quite as quickly as the curly-haired dunderhead a hundred feet ahead chanting a laugh-

ingly off-key 'Valdere--Valdera-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!'

That, of course, is exactly what happened. For the next ten minutes, Mount Rainier National Park hosted a performance to make the frantic moose migrate south in hottest summer, to drive wide-eyed deer onto a busy highway seeking escape. Dominant male bears often gave up their domain when Hoke started singing.

Two ridges off, an eagle screeched in agony.

"Please, Hoke," MacDonald yelled after his good friend. "Please climb. Don't sing."

Hoke laughed and sang, knowing he could drive his buddy crazy at any given moment in the mountains by singing "The Happy Wanderer." It was an awesome power.

At that instant, a giant serac released on the Emmons Glacier high above, collapsing with a roar into a vast frozen canyon of crevasses away from the summit trail. On Russell Cliffs, a thousand feet higher to the right of Steamboat Prow, a rockslide rained tons of boulders and dirt onto the ragged edge of the glacier. Mt. Rainier was, as always, falling to the sea--probably trying to escape Hoke's singing, as well.

Just above them, the goat herd from that morning grazed groggily on vegetation along rock-strewn precipices. In reaction to the passing caravan of two world-class climbers known as the Altoids and a red-faced, bent-over neophyte named 'Tom', they regurgitated a white, juicy cocktail of small rocks and foam as a feeble old mountain goat fell to his death over a high cliff. You want a metaphor for the rest of the climb? You got it.

Slowly the Altoids and 'Tom' ascended the InterGlacier en route to Camp Shurman. (It would be well to note that the previous sentence may be the only time in the climbing literature and in reality when the words 'slowly' and 'Altoids' are used together.) 'Tom' had come face-to-face with the simple truth that walking uphill with a good-sized pack is not as easy as one might expect. He struggled to get himself into a sustainable rhythm, especially at those points along the trail where it was necessary to change directions, or take an especially long

uphill step.

In his mind, though, he was keeping up with the Altoids. In truth, the Altoids were keeping down with 'Tom'. With him between them, they were unable to see the smirk written on each of their faces. They knew the smirk was there, though, just as they knew 'Tom' had no idea of the grand opportunity this climbed presented him.

How could such a novice understand the depth of his own breathless good fortune in making a first ascent of a major Northwest peak accompanied by the Altoids? It would be like a lowlands Nepalese rice-farmer somehow getting to rope between Tensing and Hillary on their historic quest up Everest in '53. Like a ragged French goat-herd being led by Whymper to a first summit on the Matterhorn. Like an overweight, Guinness-quaffing English milkman clinging to the smooth granite of Changabang as a third between Boardman and Tasker.

'Tom' had no time to consider climbing history, or his feeble place in it. He was more concerned with keeping oxygen in his body and cramps out of his legs. What was it Terry had said about stopping every step, or resting every other step?

Ouch! Damned cramps!

The mismatched threesome eventually emerged onto the rock-lined ridge of Steamboat Prow. A mile overhead, the summit of Rainier hid itself behind an icy shoulder. Before them across a broad glacial valley, Little Tahoma unloaded several tons of rotting rock onto the massive Emmons Glacier--a fissured current of ice extending all the way from the top of Rainier to the headwaters of the silty White River at its shattered snout another mile below them. They were less than an hour from Camp Shurman, halfway to the top of the most exhausting summit in the Lower 48 United States.

The Altoids were coolly exhilarated, sure of their success the next day. They laughed at the distance yet to travel. They were feeling strong. They were Altoids.

And he was 'Tom'.

The approach to Camp Shurman involved carrying their rope looped close between them, dropping diagonally down the rock-strewn slopes of Steamboat Prow onto the Emmons Glacier, then climbing up the glacier to the camp with their rope extended against any crevasse fall.

The descent to the glacier was across a steep, slippery scree slope. Thousand of years before, the ice-fields sprouting from the summit of Mt. Rainier were deep enough to more than cover this slope; they had chewed and ground the hillside like a million massive molars--washing the residue down the precipitous grade into White River while spitting the detritus onto the slopes as a billion jagged boulders amidst a million tons of masticated dirt.

The Altoids started down the loose slope toward the frozen river, but were stopped short by their young companion. 'Tom' tugged on the rope leading downhill to Hoke. Below, a mawing crevasse split open beside the ancient moraine.

"Wait a second," 'Tom' called to Hoke, looking wide-eyed at the hole in the ice eighty-yards below. "This hillside is pretty scary. The damned rocks are like ball-bearings. What happens if I fall?"

"Oh, come on," Hoke admonished him with his usual sincerity. "There hasn't been anybody die at this spot for a couple of years now."

"Die? What do you mean die?"

"Slipped right here and slid into that hole down there. Never found 'em. Well, their arms showed up down at the snout. Flew out like a couple of runaway skis through a snow-bank. Scared the hell out of a bunch of little kids--floated by 'em down at White River Campground."

"Come on!" Tom screamed.

"Don't listen to him, Tom," Terry advised laughing. "Just take it easy. Watch where you're putting your feet. You'll be all right."

The three inched diagonally down the hillside--Camp Shurman finally appearing before them. Their progress over the next twenty minutes was so slow that the camp didn't seem to grow any closer.

A hundred feet above the glacier, 'Tom' took a bad fall--slipping several

yards before stopping himself.

“Jesus!” he shouted.

“A lot of men find religion in the mountains,” Hoke retorted dryly, looking back uphill at his prostrate companion. “That’s good. High places have always been finding-places for great deities.”

“Go to Hell, Hoke!” ‘Tom’ yelled at his tormentor.

“Hell would be the netherworld,” Hoke responded, “where for all eternity, you try to climb a simple dirt slope down to a waiting glacier. Hot. Dry.”

“Damn!” ‘Tom’ cried to the sky as he tried to get on his feet and slipped again.

“I’ll tell you what,” Hoke offered, “I’ll down-climb to the glacier. MacDonald, you use the rope and belay him down to me. We’ll be off this thing in nothing flat. OK?”

‘Tom’ agreed, and Hoke quickly negotiated the last steep thirty yards to the edge of the glacier. MacDonald attached ‘Tom’ to Hoke’s end of the rope and began paying out line as the younger man inched his way toward the goal.

Halfway down, ‘Tom’ again slipped badly. He landed hard on his haunches, launching a half dozen igneous missiles which kicked off a dozen more in a direct line toward the shores of Bill Hoke’s homeland. As the projectiles passed the fail-safe point, Hoke saw he had no chance to escape; he was going to get hit. He tried dodging the bigger pieces, hoping to be hit by the smaller.

No such luck. He successfully dodged the smallest, but was hit on the inside of his right knee by the biggest incoming boulder--a rock almost exactly the size his knee was before being struck. Immediately, the flash-point swelled to half-again its normal proportions. The rock stayed the same size and lay gloating at the side of the glacier.

Hoke’s first painful bellow echoed across the wastes, chasing the wind like a rabid dog invading a Sunday social. It was then joined by a pack of several smaller yet just as violent curses which pursued each other across the frozen moor.

Hoke's eyes flashed laser beams of anger at 'Tom', who was still trying to get to his feet fifty feet above; unconcerned with Bill's agony, he knocked more boulders down onto the target zone which was hurriedly being vacated in a limp.

"Hey, idiot, wait just a second until I'm out from under your fire!" Hoke yelled at his slew-footed assailant.

"Idiot? Screw you!" 'Tom' responded vehemently. "I wasn't the one who put me on this slippery down-slope! Besides, you shouldn't be standing right below me."

"After witnessing your equilibrium, 'Tom', I'm certain Hoke totally agrees, don't you Hoke?" MacDonald chimed in from above without helping the situation. "And he accepts your apology. Now, let's get you down off these rocks so we can take care of our partner."

By the time Terry and 'Tom' got to Hoke, his knee was the size of--and just as orange as--a basketball.

"Ouch, Cap'n," MacDonald joked, "this bein' the Civil War 'n all, I'm gonna have to take that leg off."

"Yeah, and I'd still beat you to the top of this mountain," Hoke retorted through gritted teeth.

The rock had broken the skin; MacDonald thought more might be broken.

"No good sitting here, it'll just swell worse," Hoke groaned, getting to his feet. "Let's get to Shurman."

With a hard glance at 'Tom', Hoke reclaimed the 'figure-8' loop in the lead position, clipped the rope into his carabiner, and stepped up limping onto the glacier. His leg was killing him, but Altoids never show pain. This fact is rumored to be a recent addition to the CIA's *Field Manual FM42C-1997-3JZ*. In the chapter titled *'Belligerent Interrogation'*, it purportedly reads:

"Every man or woman has his or her breaking point--except for the aboriginal Ungunga tribe of New Guinea--which has proven to possess a ancient DNA structure impervious to pain."

This same phenomenon has been witnessed in covert field observations of the Altoid Climbing Club in Washington State.

We suggest any agent confronted with members of the above tribe or the aforementioned climbing club move quickly to the 'Turning Belligerents to Friends' modality first extrapolated by Dr. von Sisguth at M.I.T. (Use the Henderson Corollary in the case of the Ungungas.)

*Good luck."*¹

It is said that a great, mournful rain came to valley of the Ungungas very early the next morning when Hoke awoke a half-world away and was unable to go to the summit of Mt. Rainier. His green-and-orange knee was the size of the winning pumpkin at that year's King County Fair. The blood-engorged joint must have weighed a hundred pounds all by itself—roughly the weight of an Altoid day-pack. So it was with heavy heart—though not nearly as heavy as his injured limb—Hoke bade farewell as Co-Chief MacDonald and the notorious 'Tom' set out long before sunrise.

The summit day ascending any great peak is akin to religion. Early on, the pilgrims walk in darkness, tenacity and curiosity pushing them on. Somewhere along the sojourn the shroud of blind faith peels away, replaced by a great roseate light that makes them say 'So this is why I am here, this why I came. I understand now.' Renewed, they stride to their goal with zealous vigor, confirmed by the coming of the sun.

A sunrise at high altitude doesn't get you to the summit; you're carried there by determination and your legs. Inside, however, your resolve is fortified by the light. There are thousands of excruciating steps as the day lengthens, and even when you get to the top you're not finished. You still face all the miles descending to the places from where you came; then, in the next days, you try to retain the fervor you felt up high. It's hard, though, being religious in the low-

lands; yet you remember that inspiring light. It's iridescence, it's warm promise, it's bathing beneficence. That's why you always go back. And back and back and back. Your Spirit requires it.

Terry was feeling less than spiritual as the summit day dawned below him. His Co-Chief was in agony back at Camp Shurman; five miles beyond, at White River Campground, his Subaru was hobbled by a broken clutch. Damned foreign cars! And up here at 12,000 feet, he was leading a dink to a peak he probably wouldn't appreciate.

Peering through the gauzy gloom of false-dawn, he saw 'Tom' stumble around a crevasse, then push upward with an inelegant quadriceptual thrust. Terry shook his head; locking his lower knee in the classic rest-step position, he lifted his uphill boot into a side-step position. Over a hundred miles to the north, winds across the summits of Mt. Baker and Mt. Shuksan whistled in icy appreciation. Terry returned the favor—gazing in awe at the unfolding North Cascades drama.

This was an Altoid in his natural habitat—conversing with the great crests of the Northwest. Whitehorse, Three-Fingered Jack, Sloan Peak, The Twin Sisters, American Border Peak, Mt. Stuart, Chair Peak, Liberty Bell, Early Winters Spire, and, of course, the dominant pinnacle on this or any skyline—Mt Si. All stood and applauded. The Altoids were back! This was beyond momentous. This was mountainous!

'Tom' had to sit down more than a few times, despite Terry taking it easy on him. The damned mountain was gigantic! The summit always appeared to be just at the horizon, but then the stupid horizon would shift! 'Tom' was disgusted with the whole concept of 'mountain climbing'.

If he could have seen an overhead view of their progress, he would have realized that from 11,000-13,000 feet, Rainier steepens along its shoulders. Beyond thirteen thousand, the snowfields approaching the summit broaden, and you are still more than two miles from the top. The mountain truly is massive—thirty miles in diameter at its base, still fifteen miles in diameter at 10,000 feet. It is not, as has been described by many, simply a 'snow-hike'. The old volcano's

physical demands alone make it a major challenge. Add to that the depletion of oxygen above 13,000 feet, and you know why many non-professional climbers say it is the hardest thing they have ever done in their lifetimes.

Altoids would never say such a thing, of course. The hardest thing an Altoid ever does is suffer the incompetent, deflect the entreaties of Altoid wannabes, and try to understand the world's lack of clarity when assigning the Altoid Climbing Club its rightful place in the firmament.

Plus, slow down for the 'Tom's of the world.

It wasn't that young 'Tom' wasn't strong like a yearling bull, with a brainpan to match. He simply lacked elegance.

Elegance. The abiding trait of anyone who, like the Altoids, glides through life's challenges as if on a divine rope-tow to the top. (Of course, the phrase 'like the Altoids' eliminates most every mortal.)

During their many stops, Terry would simply sit down in the snow along the trail, urging 'Tom' to do the same over a hundred feet back. This kept conversations to a minimum; ergo, Terry didn't have to listen to the moaning, whining, mind-numbing syntax of the younger man's blubberings. It also saved 'Tom' from the wrath of a Co-Chief who was not sharing a rope with his fellow Altoid.

Finally, at about 13,800 feet, 'Tom' yelled ahead in exasperation.

"How much damned farther?" he screamed.

Without losing his rhythm, Terry looked over his shoulder and calmly retorted: "You'll know when you get to the top by the fact that there's nowhere to go but down."

'Tom's' reply was unprintable.

The trail from Camp Shurman soon entered a maze of vast crevasses, around which the two stepped gingerly. The mountain was severely melted back, its glacial coating cracked and broken. High above them, teetering ice-towers called seracs hung precipitously as the two left the crevasse field and entered a long, diagonal slope which disappeared out of sight.

They soon entered another mammoth agglomeration of crevasses which

carried them like broken ladders to the lower mouth of a big bergschrund just below the summit plateau. Invisible from above, this enormous maw hung open as if the upper part of the mountain was begging respite from savage gravity. Please, it seemed to scream, let me stay up here! Let go! Please don't pull me to the sea!

Gravity, however, never takes a nap. The mouth of the crevasse was ripped into a grotesque shape that seemed to say it knew its fate.

At the far eastern corner of this immense bergschrund, the route from Camp Shurman swung down and joined the winding trail from Camp Muir on the mountain's south side.

Mt. Rainier's late-season jumble dictated that at 12,000 feet, climbers from the south forgo the standard ascent of Disappointment Cleaver due to rockfall danger, and go almost two miles around to the Emmons Glacier before ascending. The trick on descent for those going back to Camp Shurman was not to miss the nearly invisible junction where the two trails diverged.

The summit plateau of Mt. Rainier is dominated by two massive volcanic craters. The more predominant eastern crater is split from its older sibling to the west by Columbia Crest—along which lies the highest point on the mountain.

The climbing trail that summer of 1990 swung to the far eastern lip of the eastward crater. Rainier Mountaineering, the professional concessionaires who take the unwashed and inexperienced rabble out of Paradise to the summit for beaucoup bucks, allowed their charges to rest there on the very edge of the volcano. The RMI guides instructed their clients that anyone who made it to the crater's edge at 13,990 feet, could claim to have reached the summit. (For this alone, no RMI guide will ever be considered for membership in the Altoid Climbing Club.) Those with remaining energy and impetus could walk unroped three-quarters of a mile across the eastern crater to the true summit at 14,411 feet on Columbia Crest.

The Altoids would like to state unequivocally that there is only one summit on a mountain, and if you are going to claim to have reached that summit,

you should go there. Granted, a summit is just one point—and often not the most important point--on a journey. Often, the far greater achievement is to survive the down-climb. Altoids simply cover all the points, and then go home.

In many parts of the world climbers cannot go to the exact summit of numerous sacred mountains because the indigenous population believe their gods live there. They show proper respect for the native religion by approaching no closer to the summit than twenty feet. But absent these considerations, Altoids say go to the top if you're going to say you went.

There. Yet another point in The Altoid Creed.

Terry saw the RMI mob lounging in the sun on the lip of the eastern crater from almost a mile away. They were eating trail-mix and granola bars, as RMI clients are wont to do. 'Tom' finally caught sight of them, too, and began to make a frightful ruckus.

"Is that the top?" he screamed near delirium. "Is that the top?"

"That's the edge of the summit crater," Terry answered over his shoulder. "The true summit is about three-quarters of a mile west of there."

"Yeah, it's the top," 'Tom' screamed at the top of his lungs, jumping off the ice into the crystalline air. "It's the top!"

"Take it easy, 'Tom'," Terry advised. "We aren't there yet."

"God, I didn't think we'd ever get here. But I knew I could do it! And now we're here. Jesus, I'm just about fagged out! I don't think I can go much farther. I'm just totally blown. I can't get my breath. My muscles are cramping. I'm having trouble focusing my eyes. Man, I'm glad that's the top!"

'Tom' was babbling to himself like the mentally disturbed. Terry caught about every third word from his spot in the lead; the tone of the blathering worried him. As they pulled up into the rocks where the RMI retinue was reclining, Terry took a serious look into 'Tom's' eyes. What he saw was shocking.

'Tom' was beyond delirium. Totally spent, he moved from sheer nervous energy. His face had the look of the long-marooned derelict straight out of the pages of Treasure Island--chin glistening with salty spittle, thighs twitching with fatigue. The coloring in his face said he was probably going hypothermic.

Terry quickly bundled his young companion in all the clothes 'Tom' was carrying, and began feeding him their extra food and water. Ten minutes later, Terry thought the younger man had stabilized.

"Stay right here," the Co-Chief recommended, "I'm gonna wander over to the summit. Be right back"

"You don't have to go all the way over there," one of the RMI herd advised, granola spilling out of his mouth. "Our guide told us this counted as the summit, too."

The Co-Chief Altoid fixed the poor, lazy sheep with a look of total contempt, then set off for the true summit of the great volcano. Dropping down into the crater, he saw vapors rising from a half-dozen fumaroles--steam caves where over the years many climbers had survived summit blizzards. He knew that down inside at least one of these ice-caves was a small warm lake where the hardy and insane could swim in the nude.

Golden rays of the sun flooded the cerulean sky. Overhead, angel-hair clouds flew lightly by as the sweet, lucid air sang of victory and freedom from the rope.

The heavens acclaimed the Altoids!

Terry was sorry that Hoke wasn't with him up here on top; this was indeed an Altoid day. As he approached Columbia Crest, Terry passed the rocks where the summit register is stored. He thought of all the bizarre filings Hoke had recorded atop mountains all over the Northwest.

Inside the same nearby metal box where generations of successful Rainier climbers registered their triumphs, Hoke once wrote:

*"Two hours up from Paradise. Would have been quicker
but for the broken leg. Bill Hoke, Poulsbo."*

At the top of Mt. Washington in the Olympics—at least a two hour journey from the car-park--the summit register was stored inside a half-dozen large cement blocks. There, Hoke inscribed the following:

“Damn. Carried twice as many bricks up here as I needed. Still, forty-five minutes from the car isn’t too bad a time. Bill Hoke, Poulsbo.”

The ultimate summit registry was written in the tablets atop Mt. Pilchuck, where it resided inside the small fire-lookout. On page 161 of the Mt. Pilchuck registry, Hoke wrote:

“What a struggle! All the way to the top this morning with a Craftsman radial-arm saw strapped to my back. Toro gas-powered generator under left arm. Duct-taped a complete aircraft-mechanic’s tool cabinet to my chest, came up here and built this enclosure. Have to go now. Want to make it back to Arlington for lunch. Bill Hoke, Poulsbo.”

Laughing raucously, Terry walked past the Rainier summit registry. Other climbers enjoying the summit looked at him as if he were crazy, but he was merely reflecting on a friend who was certifiably nuts.

MacDonald thought himself a lot more stable than Hoke, and unlike his Co-Chief, wasn’t one for hyperbole. He didn’t head for the registry. This zenith would simply register in his memory, he thought; he had no idea how much the subsequent down-climb would engrave itself. Like dental surgery gone bad; an appendectomy where they remove a kidney by mistake; plastic surgery in Paraguay where they lop off your nose and try to convince you it will be easier to breathe.

Terry didn’t stay long on Columbia Crest. The ascent had been woefully slow; it was already late in the morning. He and ‘Tom’ faced a long journey back to get Hoke, and then to the car. After only five minutes, he retraced his steps across the eastern crater. He found ‘Tom’ where he left him, passed out and snoring. Terry shook him awake.

“Let’s get moving,” the Co-Chief advised. “Miles to go before we sleep.”

“Come on, just a few more minutes,” ‘Tom’ protested. “I’m wiped out.”

“It would be nice if we had it,” Terry answered, “but I want to get to the car before dark. I’m not sure about Hoke’s condition, so we better use every bit of sunlight just in case.”

‘Tom’s’ response was unrepeatable. He spent the next several minutes throwing things into his pack, tossing his temper into the air, and kicking rocks. Co-Chief MacDonald let him vent, then reattached both of them to the rope and pointed the way toward Camp Shurman.

“You lead down,” he told ‘Tom’.

“Why?” was the reply.

“It’s best to put more experience and body-weight on top in the descent. That way if you fall, I can hold you. You won’t fall, though. Just stay on your feet and follow the trail.”

Terry was optimistic. ‘Tom’ stumbled continually down the trail, sometimes spiking himself with a crampon, often bellowing into the wind.

Anger is a condition of man and youth. Scientists have concluded it resides on strand thirty-nine of the DNA molecule—right next to self-righteousness and two strands away from early feelings of immortality.

Terry attempted to inure himself from the display. In his mind, he wandered off to other, more enjoyable Rainier summits. His memory conjured sunrises and laughter at altitude, awakening to songbirds, whistling duets with friendly marmots, running effortlessly the final three miles to the car carrying a full pack, bathing in the icy cold waters of White River before driving home.

He realized he was fantasizing when ‘Tom’ took a bad fall face-first into a snow-bank on the right side of the trail; in anger he sprinted off in a scream. Terry laughed and hustled to keep up, but ‘Tom’ didn’t slow down for almost a quarter-mile.

Too bad. Right at the site where ‘Tom’ tumbled, they missed the turn to

Camp Shurman.

It's another of life's allegories abounding in the mountains. Ill-fortune awaits, hidden in the snow beside the trail like a big white bug ready to bite you in the butt. All you have to do is falter at a propitious spot and...chomp! You're the chump with the snow-bug dangling off your rear, invisible except to the radar of a God with a great sense of humor.

The mistaken trail gave Terry no clue of their error. He could actually see Camp Shurman far off to the left and below them. The track even swung toward Shurman several times while they glissaded and descended two-thousand feet down the Emmons Glacier.

The first clue hit Terry like a sledge hammer. He needed no other. At 12,000 feet, the trail took a sharp turn to the right. Coming around a large snow ridge, 'Tom' had no idea what confronted him. Emerging into reality a hundred feet behind him, Terry immediately let loose an expletive.

What he saw was the bottom of Disappointment Cleaver and all of Cathedral Rocks. Far off to the left, the east side of Moon Rocks and Paradise Glacier descended in mirth toward the Visitor's Center parking lot. Across the massive valley south of Rainier, the teeth of the Tatoosh Range laughed hysterically.

The message was clear. 'Tom' and Terry were on the trail to Camp Muir on the south side of the mountain, and Nature was amused. The two unfortunates had missed the turn to Shurman.

They were screwed.

Instinctively, Terry swung around to look behind him. A pair of climbers approached at a trot, their summit victory still displayed on their faces.

"Hey, are you guys going to Muir?" Terry asked hopelessly.

"We sure are, aren't you?" was the ill-starred reply.

Terry didn't answer; he cursed.

'Tom' was still unaware of their predicament. He didn't understand why Terry was letting the two climbers pass. They were making great time going down; he felt almost spent, but at this rate, they'd be at Shurman in no time.

Wrong.

Terry called to 'Tom' and directed him to come back up the trail. The Co-Chief dropped his head as the younger man impatiently approached.

"Tom', I have some bad news," Terry began. "We missed the turn to Shurman back up there; we're headed the wrong way."

"What?" 'Tom' asked, his eyes widening.

"Somehow, we missed the turn to Camp Shurman. We're on the trail to Muir—on the south side of the mountain. We can't go on. We have to go back."

"Go back? Go back?!" 'Tom' screamed. Terry backed away slightly.

"Just start back up that trail," the Co-Chief responded pointing back the way they had come. "When we get to a point where we can see Camp Shurman again, we'll check out whether we can go cross-country instead of climbing all the way back up to 14,000."

Maybe this was the beginning of the nightmare.

Less than five minutes after turning around, they were back in position to see Camp Shurman four miles away and three-thousand feet below them across a hazardous maze of crevasses, ice-canyons, and most dangerously—fields of razor-sharp sun-cups. These melted depressions threatened to slash any leg stepping into them.

There was no way they were going cross-country to Shurman.

"Tom', old boy, we climb," Terry announced.

"Climb? How far?"

"Back up to where the trails meet. I figure that's about a 2,000-foot elevation gain."

"Oh, my God!" 'Tom' screamed. "You can't be serious. I can't make it! I'm almost gone. Jesus!"

"Save your prayers for later, 'Tom'," Terry cautioned. "Now, climb."

For a second time that day, the two started for the summit. A ghostly veil fell across Terry's face; a glaze washed over his eyes. On the other side of the mountain, the sun began its darkening drop to the sea.

The experience took on icy echoes of The Trail of Tears and the Bataan

Death March. The only elements lacking were enemy soldiers shoving them along, prodding them with burnished blades, shouting in unknown tongues. Such specters would appear later in the day.

Ask anyone who has been in such a situation and they will tell you that what you best do is turn off your mind and leave everything to the central nervous system. The unconscious mantra traveling Terry's synapses became 'Lock your knee, step up. Lock your knee, step up.' A hundred feet downhill, 'Tom's nervous instructions must have read 'Push up with that leg, now push up with this leg. Push up with that leg, now push up with this leg.'

Two-thousand feet directly uphill. No traverses. No switchbacks. The climbers from the south side of the mountain who cut this trail were tired of traversing by the time they got to the Emmons Glacier. They wanted to get to the summit by the most straightforward route--an icy staircase to the sky.

The trail was so melted back the two climbers could barely peer over the frozen walls to track their plodding progress. They seemed frozen in time and space.

Terry could only go as fast as his rope-mate down below; he didn't want to push him too hard. If he could get 'Tom' back up to the junction, it was all downhill to Camp Shurman. Then he and Hoke could split a lot of the younger man's pack between them and help him get all the way out.

They might make it home before sunrise the next day.

Halfway back to the overhanging crevasse, Terry heard 'Tom' sobbing as he kicked in his climbing boots with legs blown out at the thigh muscles. It was a strange wail—a mixture of tears and rage.

"C'mon, Tom," Terry urged, turning. "Just a little bit more and we can start down."

"Go to Hell, Terry!" 'Tom' cried. "Just get up there, and shut up. It's your fault we missed that damned turn! Now get us out of here!"

"Does this mean we won't be sipping beers and watching basketball games on the tube at your apartment Friday nights?" Terry thought to himself. Good. You pissed off at me. That means you still have some energy left.

You'll need it, you sorry bastard. It's a good thing I'm a peace-loving man, or when I get you off this mountain, I might beat you senseless with a muddy gaiter.

By the time 'Tom' got off the mountain, it would take very little to beat him senseless. A short journey with a soft glove.

When they finally reached the split in the track where a right turn led to Shurman, Terry saw the reason for their mistake—someone had moved the bamboo wands which marked the trails' junction around the corner and up the path toward the north-side high camp. The conjunction itself was a sharp-angled incline difficult to see for anyone headed downhill.

It was an easily explained human error—as much of a double redundancy as that is.

'Tom' sat down underneath the overhanging crevasse lip and cried like a baby.

"Oh, God, I want this to be over," he blubbered. "I want to be home with Greta. She's so wonderful! My God, her body! Terry! Let me tell you, her body is so magnificent! So warm and tight! My God!"

"Listen, 'Tom'," Terry responded with real urgency, "if you want to get home tonight and enjoy that warm, tight body, get on your feet and let's get off this mountain. It's late in the afternoon, and there are hundreds of seracs along this trail—you can see many of them from here—teetering and ready to topple. The sun has worked on them all day, and between now and sunset, tens of thousands of pounds of serac-ice will fall on this mountain. We need to make sure it doesn't fall on us. That means we have to move! Now! And not stop until we get to Shurman! Come on, 'Tom', for the sake of Greta, get up and do it!"

Sex is such a powerful stimulant. 'Tom' stopped crying and led off down the trail. The two flew as fast as their aching legs could take them. His rope-partner really was an amazingly strong young man, but Terry had more than enough reserve energy to keep up with him.

'Tom' was suddenly like an old rental horse headed for the barn. He trotted and stumbled down and down toward Camp Shurman; the image in his mind

must have been naked and well-loved, because he didn't stop for the next two-and-a-half hours.

Let's hear it for Greta!

Approaching Camp Shurman at 5 PM, they were met by Ranger Gene Mankiewicz, who'd come up to greet them. Gene was your quintessential park ranger—a dedicated federal employee devoted to trees and solar-powered toilets. As is true with most park rangers, Gene spent his college years studying trigonometry and animal husbandry—the closest he would get to sex until he was well into his '20s.

Gene passed both the major tests administered to all young ranger-wannabes eager for Smokey's hat. The first was a drug test; Gene passed with flying colors. He had yet to begin drinking coffee. The second test was the more finite, and the more critical. It screened for granola consumption. If you hadn't eaten any in the past two days, you failed.

Gene passed with a blood-granola content of .025984—still the highest Granola Index (G.I.) in the history of the Park Service Test Center. Thus, he began his career as a Ranger with a special commendation emblazoning his personnel file like a newly-named comet. He had a great future.

Gene was a good kid—enthusiastic in a bean-sprouter way. Quiet, efficient. Legs like a moose from hiking America's trails from Appalachia to the North Cascades since long before he was an Eagle Scout. His parents were very proud—even though they, as Hollywood script writers addicted to a hard-edged life of insomnia and insecurity, still wondered if there had been a mix-up at the hospital. Perhaps somewhere in the foothills of the High Sierra, there were two bewildered farming parents trying to figure out how many more body-piercings their strange, green-haired son could desire.

"We were getting worried; you're back pretty late," Gene remarked as 'Tom' stumbled by, a gasping heap of muscle cramps with sweat caked like bad makeup around his balaclava.

"Yeah," 'Tom' snarled, lurching toward Shurman, "the guy I'm with made a wrong turn up there. Idiot!"

Terry was 'the guy' Gene had come up to see, bringing bad news. After a hello, he unwrapped it like adverse tuna.

"The third member of your party—Hoke, isn't it?--had to leave while he could still bend his knee. He told me to apologize to you; he left a note in your tent."

"Great," Terry exhaled as they came into camp. 'Tom' was already unroped and passed out on the stone platform by the rangers' Quonset. "Did he take anything with him?"

"It looked like he couldn't bear very much, I'm afraid," Gene Mankiewicz answered. "He told me to tell you to leave the stuff if you have to, and you guys can come back up in a couple of weeks and get it down. It would be o.k. for you to leave it all in the rangers' hut."

Terry dropped his pack near their tent, unzipped the entrance and ducked inside as Gene walked away. His eyes did a quick inventory of all Hoke had left, which seemed to be everything the three had hauled up from White River Campground.

Folded on his sleeping bag was a note from Hoke.

'Sorry, MacDonald,' the message read, 'I couldn't lift anything beyond my pack and two water bottles. My knee is stiff and ugly. See you at the car, if I can make it. Kill 'Tom' for me and get your ass off this mountain.'

"Great," Terry murmured, taking a long look at his sleeping bag. Maybe if he rested a couple of hours, this wouldn't seem so daunting. But no, he wanted to get the nightmare over with, and be done with 'Tom'.

Struggling out of the tent, Terry did a slow computation. He didn't want to leave anything on the mountain; the idea of a return to Shurman for detritus was ugly.

He would load 'Tom' up with all the younger man could carry—which wasn't much—and put the rest on his own back.

Gazing at the prostrate form of his tattered companion sprawled in the wind like a collapsed string of prayer flags, Terry estimated 'Tom' could carry fifteen pounds--maximum. Terry would have to tote the remaining eighty-five-

or-so.

The wind echoed again with the triplet: 'The Trail of Tears, The Bataan Death March, The Walk Off Rainier with 'Tom'.'

This was the spot when the experience began to suffer from a time-space warp. Everything became stretched and opaque, like film of a bad '60's acid trip.

Terry longed for a bad '60s acid trip. His body cried for rest, but his mind became maniacal with the need to put an end to the saga. For the one-hundred fifteenth time in his climbing career, what was left of MacDonald's brain whispered, 'Just get me off of here, and I'll never come back.'

It was the ultimate lie. He was an Altoid. He was compelled to come back, would always come back, couldn't help but come back--like a swallow to Capistrano, a buzzard to Hinkley, Ohio, a tornado to a trailer park.

The thought threw Terry into a frenzy of activity. From somewhere deep in his subconscious came a manic pioneer drive to load up the wagons and head off into Indian Territory. He didn't care if there was no food and no ammunition, he and the little woman were going to Oregon, dammit, and that fool trail boss wasn't gonna scare him off with tales of scalpin's!

Terry lifted his head in the middle of jamming his sleeping bag into its stuff sack, and noticed 'Tom' walking toward him in a zombie-trance.

Ah, his trusty companion, 'Whiskers'! When things got especially harried along the Oregon Trail, he'd always be able to count on 'Whiskers' to sing him a song about old Virginie, whip up a batch of griddle cakes, or play him a tune on the spoons. Everything was going to be fine! If they got too hungry, why hell--they'd just eat the mules!

Terry cackled like a happy inmate in the asylum. Psychosis was never so fine!

"What's going on?" 'Tom' asked dumbly by his side.

Oh, he snuck up on me! And I thought I could trust 'Whiskers'. I'd best talk to him in code.

"We're going down," Terry responded as he continued to load his pack.

“Take all your stuff. I’ll get mine and Hoke’s and all the common loads.”

“Do you think you can get down with all that weight?” ‘Tom’ asked.

Terry fixed ‘Tom’ with a look of utter derision. What had gotten into ‘Whiskers’? He’d come with such good references from that horse farm on the Shenandoah. Terry would have to keep an eye on him once they left St. Joe.

Gads! Frightened trail-bosses, a pregnant wife, mule-eared mules and now ‘Whiskers’ going sideways on him. None of this boded well for their journey.

Throwing his massive pack onto his left knee, then spinning it around onto his back, Terry was suddenly Atlas, carrying the globe on his shoulders; this made Hoke Hercules taking back the golden apples. Those seemed proper deities, reappeared as Altoids in the modern world.

Or maybe Terry was his own mule. It wasn’t clear to him which was the more inelegant. A sweaty Greek myth or a furry burro with a brain to match.

Tough choice.

But God, walking to the Willamette was going to be no fun at all! And ‘Whiskers’ was going to be no help--the lame bastard! If it wasn’t for his talent with those spoons, he would have left him in Missouri!

Terry and ‘Tom’ bade farewell to Gene Mankiewicz, roped up, and headed down the Emmons toward home. As their boots sank ankle-deep in the softening snow, Terry’s mind continued to play an internal game of badminton.

Over the net...poing! Over the net...poing!

Reality was an elusive shuttlecock.

At least inside Terry’s mind you could find a game. One look at the inner-workings of ‘Tom’s cranium divulged the following:

“---ZZZZZ-----ZZZZZ-----ZZZZZ-----ZZZZZ-----ZZZZZ-----ZZZZZ-----ZZZZZ-----ZZZZZ-----“

They stumbled on.

Coming up off the glacier onto Steamboat Prow, they again ascended the scree slope where the day before ‘Tom’ bombarded Hoke’s knee into submission. As they began to climb the steep track, Terry mouthed the words that

evermore were lore among Altoids. The expression could well be the rallying cry of the Altoid Climbing Club.

“What the Hell is this uphill shit?” Terry asked in exasperation. Hell it was, but the uphill part lasted only until they topped the crest at Camp Curtis, where they unroped.

The two began a descent through multiple levels of madness leading to the car and beyond. Was it an extended hallucination—a mere tapestry painted by derangement? If so, why did the ghost of Dante Alighieri later appear to lead them through the trek?

Their first challenge was to get off the InterGlacier before darkness overcame them. Down they plunged through a surface turning quickly to ice. The lower they went, the more precarious the footing. Crossing the InterGlacier to avoid the jumbled, shallow crevasses to their right, the pair lost all coordinate rhythm—each stumbled every few steps.

Achieving the left-hand margin of the small glacier, they entered a well-worn groove in the ice where hundreds had passed before them.

Straight down they went, their heads bobbing like exhausted camels on a crystalline, dirty white desert.

The wind increased in the face of a tumbling sun as ‘Tom’ stumbled on a sharp-edged rut and flew down the track straight into Terry’s legs—knocking him off his feet. The two skidded out of control for several yards before the more experienced man was able to reach over with his ice-axe and arrest them.

Terry was too tired for anger, too anxious to be off the ice. There was nothing he could say; a curse would simply be unacknowledged. He rose onto his crampons and resumed the descent.

The track took them back toward the center of the glacier, avoiding the buttress two-thirds of the way down where earlier in their climb, they had seen the fallen mountain goat. When they swung to their left and emerged from the shadow of the protuberance, they once again saw the ill-fated creature. He lay as if asleep, his fellows all around him enjoying their late afternoon forage.

The exanimate sheep gazed with a cold, deathful eye while the herd be-

gan a derisive bellow.

“You idiots,” they laughed, “you can’t keep your feet, you miss important turns, you look worse than our dead compatriot here, and smell fouler by far. Yech!”

Terry and ‘Tom’ had no time to enjoy the chorus; darkness fell faster than their descent as the moon climbed over Columbia Crest. Finally, they came to the rocky outcrop where two days before they left their tennis shoes. Relieving themselves of the extra weight off their feet, they packed their boots and picked their way down the boulder-slope toward the steep hog-back above Glacier Basin.

They reached the dirt track just as last twilight began its turn to cold darkness. Immediately, their ravaged nervous systems were confronted with a dusty slickness much worse than the rime-ice they just left. The hogback, with its coating of fine, grimy ball-bearings worn smooth by the teeth of ancient ice, had been hard enough to ascend. Now, with a fall to the right offering death in the muddy white ribbon three hundred feet below, and a fall to the left promising to break any brittle bone, Terry and ‘Tom’ each took two to three serious falls straight onto their butts—the blow partially absorbed by hands and wrists waiting to shatter.

Their spines shook with the concussions—their brains screaming like creatures out of a Picasso.

‘Stop the bombing! Save my baby! Let me out of here!’

Terry’s butt told him he had never fallen so hard, but his mind reminded him of a sixty-five-mile-an-hour descent of Gibraltar Chute on the other side of Rainier over a decade before.

His butt was wrong again.

The thought that he’d survived a much harder fall didn’t ease the pain. This, in its way, was a greater agony.

They slipped down the steep dirt-track--robots with batteries failing--and emerged from the bottom of the hog-back, moving through Glacier Basin as rapidly as their limits allowed. By now, ‘Tom’s lighter load allowed him to lead Terry

by more than two hundred yards.

“In the middle of the journey of our life, I came to myself within a dark wood, where the straight way was lost. Ah, how hard a thing it is to tell of that wood—savage and harsh and dense—the thought of which renews my fear! So bitter is it that death is hardly more.”²

*Dante Alighieri
(1265-1321)
The Divine Comedy*

Sensibility dictated Terry and ‘Tom’ stop for water at Glacier Basin. This would clear their heads, rejuvenate their nervous systems, and replenish their reserves for the tree-bound trek to White River Campground.

Unfortunately, no one was there to accept the dictation. The two plodded on.

The full-moon hung quietly judgmental. Winds swirling through the basin took on a banshee-wail inside Terry’s head; his frayed nervous system began to resonate with a high, watery, metallic ring. This is the sound you hear anytime you stay awake for seventy-two hours. The sound captured so fully in the film 2001—A Space Odyssey, when Dave starts through the maelstrom. It is the sound of the universe expanding--the sound of the Big Bang echoing back on itself. In the gathering gloom, they dipped into the trees and descended.

*‘Now let us go down into this blind world,’
Began the poet, and his face was pale:
‘I will go first, you follow after me.’²*

Beyond the last wildflower meadow, where sleeping marmots escaped the raven-night, Terry looked up and was joined by the ghost of Dante Alighieri. He knew it was the ancient Italian poet because the specter broke into an eerie grin and clearly said to him:

“Hello, my friend, I am Dante. Let me walk with you.”

Terry had no energy to resist an insistent ghost, so the apparition fell into stride with him, and together they fell slowly through the trees.

It didn't seem at all strange to Terry that the shade of a 14th century Florentine exile should be walking with him on the down-climb from Rainier. In fact, Terry would have been surprised if a ghost hadn't shown up at the end of this particular journey.

And what better ghost than Dante Alighieri? He'd walked through the depths of Hell with Virgil, seen all the levels of existence while he was still alive, and now had six centuries of real-death experience on which to draw. He was the perfect tour guide for the final push of an epic farce.

*“I began: “Poet, you who are to be my guide,
Consider whether my strength is adequate
Before you trust me to make this terrible passage.”³*

Terry turned his head to the left and stared at his companion, expecting the revenant to fade with closer inspection. Dante stared back at him intently and smiled. The climber's dilated eyes tracked the height of his incandescent guest--gold-buckled shoes showed great wear; purple leggings stretched over bulging calves; earth-green pantaloons were topped with a ribbed vest and flowing, multi-colored coat; a strange ancient hat adorned with plumage perched over a strong Mediterranean face; the apparition's walking stick featured a

gilded falcon-head at the adze.

“You know, I have been waiting for you for quite awhile; you two are slow,” Dante remarked. “I’m glad you finally came. I love to walk such a forest at just this time of night. There is inexplicable magic in these woods. It is exceptional that mortals don’t spend time looking deeper into the trees.”

Terry was so absorbed in what the ghost said that he stumbled on an exposed root system and nearly fell in the broad path. He righted himself, shifted the massive weight on his back, and trudged downward.

*We did not stop walking while he spoke,
But went on through the forest none the less,
That forest, I say, of spirits crowded together.³*

Glancing to his right, Terry sensed movement in a small clearing visible through the timber. He shook his head as a single Minotaur chased several Greek warriors under the moon. One of the hostiles stopped and kneeled, grabbed an arrow from his quiver, and shot the Minotaur at close-range. The missile penetrated the monster’s skin where his bull-head transitioned to manhood.

The Minotaur screamed and bit at the barb, which broke off in his teeth. Enraged, the man-beast glared through the trees.

The climber stopped in shock, and spun slowly toward his companion. The ghost winked. Over Dante’s left shoulder, Terry caught sight of more movement through the forest. A dozen humming wood-nymphs were spreading wild-

flower petals in the luminescence. Suddenly, several lusty woodsmen leaped out from hiding and pulled the sensual spirits into their arms. Together, they laughed and danced off into the darkness.

*When I had rested my weary body a little,
I took up my journey again on that stretch of desert,
Walking so that my firm foot was always the lower.⁴*

The moon was a nosy giant's eye peaking through the trees—the stars tiny windows for the universal voyeur, a billion glimpses of life going on behind them. Terry and his lyrist companion passed through a tapestry of glistening minstrels who strummed ancient instruments; extinct bony birds swooped down on unsuspecting prey in antediluvian dances of death; cars sped by on freeways in the wilderness.

Everywhere in the forest, strange lights blinked on and off. The background hum of frogs and bugs chorused with a thousand benign sprites.

Rounding a cut-back leading down to White River, Terry was confronted by a strange half-guilt from his past. His high school mathematics teacher, Mr. Quarles, stood beside the trail. When he was alive, the dead mathematician had blown out his larynx screaming at Terry for sticking a leg out and faking as if to trip two classmates carrying an overhead projector. For the remainder of his years, Quarles wore a tiny microphone and amplifier which made him sound like a warning-buzzer.

Mr. Quarles tried to admonish his old nemesis, but no sound came from his mouth. He reached to adjust the microphone at his throat, but Terry was already past him. His angry buzz chased the two down the track.

*So we took our way down on that discharge
Of stones, which frequently began to move
Under my feet because of the unusual burden.⁴*

Terry nearly fell again as his feet slipped from under him; he barely harnessed the falling weight that threatened to roll him into the trees. Slowly regaining control of his burden, he stood semi-erect and blew waste-air from between parched lips. Dante sidled over, bent down, and looked him in the eye.

“I would help you with your encumbrance, my friend, or have one of my strong associates in the afterworld lend a shoulder, but we don’t do such things,” he stated. “Load-bearing is for the living, not the dead—except for those poor, tortured souls in the underworld cursed with burdens for eternity. They were mostly sahibs upon the earth—‘adventurers’ who curried fame sipping servant-steeped tea in immaculate tents--not a sherpa in the lot.”

Terry probably should have felt some relief under the strain—at least it wouldn’t be this route to Hell for him. Yet his mind immediately flew to a thought and a curse—damn, what he would give to have a sherpa right then!

He moved under the shifting weight like a feeble elephant or bedraggled yak—exhaling exhaust fumes through struggling horse-nostrils. It was a toll-road he traversed with his ghost-guide, paying some aged debt for inhumanity to the beasts.

Terry gazed left and right of the broad path, expecting to see legions of the carrying-kind lined up to enjoy his suffering, but they were absent in the moaning wind.

*The water was more nearly black than blue;
And we, in company with that dark stream,
Went further down, following a difficult path.⁵*

Two miles below Glacier Basin, the caravan came to a cross-path leading upward to Sunrise. Here the main trail skirted the edge of the cascading White River—its waves shining; glacial-silt gave the waters an ivory silkiness in the moonlight. Runoff, finally free from under the Emmons, mixed with the sweat of a hundred years' mountaineers and fell with a roar toward the sea.

A light breeze blew through the rocks bounding the riverbank and gave the climbers a short refreshment before they re-entered the overhanging weald. Instantly, the peace beside the river was replaced by a cacophony of night birds, spirits and visions. Increasingly, Terry sensed cars speeding through the trees—cars he couldn't clearly see, yet their abrasive horns and bright lights fading into the boughs promised an approaching return to civilization.

Though an Altoid, Terry was ready for this wilderness experience to end. He felt a strange longing for seat belts, gear-shifts, and French fries. It was near heresy, but behind his eyes he dreamed of leaving this veil of hallucination and pain to return to the world of Muppets™ and migraines.

His blasphemous thoughts were interrupted by a strange, discordant singing in a tongue he didn't know. He looked over toward Dante, but the ghost was frowning as he crossed in front of Terry to take to the left margin of the trail. Beyond Dante's right shoulder, Terry spied the approaching source of the off-key melody.

*I think he thought that I thought that those voices,
And many there were, came from among the tree-stumps,
From people who were hiding themselves from us.⁵*

There in the moonbeams to the right of the trail, entangled in an overturned tree, was a sextet of phantom nuns singing in boisterous disharmony. They screeched, they wailed, they reached to send impossible high notes from grotesquely guttural throats. With each sour tone, realizing how far off-key they were, the Sisters would studiously return to their music sheets, as if there they would find their missing chord. They were industrious, committed, and horrible.

Unfortunately, their singing seemed to slow down the time-space continuum. Terry's steps took on a more pronounced slow-motion quality. The detail in each nun's pale face stretched out like reflections in an amusement park house-of-mirrors. The struggling tempo of the off-time chorale slowed as if controlled by a modern vari-speed potentiometer. The blink of an eye slowly became a ponderous, languid, indeterminate passage of time. The nuns were seemingly saying "Not so fast, maties. We'll get it right before we let you pass."

Terry wanted Dante to strap him to a log and throw him in the river. Anything to get them away from these anti-sirens. The old ghost did finally save him, coming back to grab him by the pack and drag him away.

"The poor wretches," Dante intoned. *"Everyone creates their own Hell, and theirs is to sing in a way that makes the angels curse. If they could just be convinced that the answer to their plight is a vow of silence! But, no, to them 'making a joyful noise unto the Lord' is a religion. St. Cecilia!"*

With that, Dante picked up his pace and left behind the nun-chorus, raising his hands to his ears to hasten the escape.

Terry, meanwhile, couldn't get their music out of his mind. It was like being imprinted with a really bad commercial jingle. The next thing you know, you're standing in the shower shampooing your hair and 'doing the nun thing.' Terry even started to sing off-key. Gradually, falling back into the time-warp brought on by the singing Sisters, his feet moved to dirge-like rhythms while his mind danced away.

He thought of the bizarre things he'd seen since Glacier Basin--Dante

Alighieri, the mythical creatures and wood-sprites, the heavy traffic in the trees and the phantom nuns. Was he losing his mind--or just his pancreatic functions?

Looking far down the path, Terry saw what appeared to be car lights. Great, more car lights! He plunged on, and saw yet more illumination at the end of the tunnel of trees. The lights didn't appear to be any closer, but he did come to the Park Service's trail kiosk--which he knew was only several dozen yards up the trail from White River Campground. He was close.

This didn't excite him--he was far too low on adrenaline for that. He would simply put his head down and keep on walking.

It seemed like several minutes later when this thought reoccurred to him. He would simply put his head down and keep on walking.

He looked to his right and saw the Park Service's trail kiosk. He hadn't moved! Had he stopped, fallen asleep on his feet? He hadn't moved!

There was nothing else to do. He would simply put his head down and keep on walking.

Terry rubbed his eyes wearily, picked his chin up off his chest and looked to his right. The damned Park Service trail kiosk! Damn those nuns! They had him totally stuck! He put his head down and kept on walking.

Several shafts of brilliant light shot down the trail, causing Terry to shake his head clear. The campground! The parking lot! Or more phantom cars! And here he was leaning against the Park Service trail kiosk! He'd fallen asleep!

He put his head down and ran toward the parking lot. Ran to be sure he didn't fall asleep. Ran to escape the forest's hypnosis. Ran to be out of the fog and the mire. Ran...and fell into the White River Campground.

He was out. Picking himself up, he gazed back at the trailhead, and saw the ghost of Dante Alighieri standing at the tree-line--his left arm raised in farewell.

*“But you, why do you come back to such disturbance?
Why do you not climb the delightful mountain
Which is the beginning and reason of all joy?”⁶*

Terry stumbled through the campground and found Hoke, who climbed off a picnic table and limped out to meet him. His co-Chief Altoid had suffered through his own epic egress.

“I left Shurman this morning; it took me eight hours to walk out,” Hoke said. “My knee is killing me. I found another climber—totally fried—who spent two hours with me trying to reconnect the clutch cable. No luck. I’ve been sleeping on this picnic table for the last hour and a half.”

The clutch cable! The nightmare came full-circle. Terry dropped his pack behind the Subaru and, following Hoke’s example, attempted to pass out on the picnic table fifteen feet away.

“Come on, MacDonald,” Hoke urged his co-Chief. “You don’t want to sleep here.”

“You are so wrong, Hoke,” MacDonald replied. “I want to sleep right here.”

“Let’s get out of here you guys,” ‘Tom’ whined, leaning against the car. “My wife’s going to kill me. I want to get the Hell home.”

Getting ‘Tom’ home—being rid of ‘Tom’—a reason to rally. The Altoids and their young charge loaded up the Subaru.

The trip home was its own special Hell. They drove all the way--four hours--in second gear. The sun was coming up as they pulled into Terry’s driveway.

By mutual non-verbal agreement, the trio never again climbed together.

The three parted company in an air of blurry anger. Hoke drove into the sunrise with a knee too stiff to shift gears; he wasn’t about to give his office manager’s husband a ride home. ‘Tom’s wife appeared in a huff to retrieve her cramping young warrior. Terry disappeared into his house, too exhausted to dream of the next Altoid adventure.

Two days later, the service manager at the Subaru dealership gave the whole event a theme.

“Sorry, Terry, but your transmission’s in the oil-pan.”

Damned foreign cars!



Altoid in the Clouds.

E-mail from Co-Chief Hoke

Subj: Chronicles

Date: 97-04-13 23:52:48 EDT

From: grafhoke@silverlink.net (Graf-Hoke)

To: TMACDUCK@aol.com (TMac)

I think the Chronicles will not be complete without mention of the assault on Mt. Hood, New Year's Day, 1986.

We drove to Uncle Hugh Smith's cabin near Timberline. I beat you repeatedly in table tennis (nee ping pong). We played until 2 AM, got up at 5, drove to Timberline. Got out of car in a blizzard. Snow blowing horizontally. Lost contact lens. High point of climb—parking lot at Timberline.

Drove to Arby's in Centralia. Got terrible heart burn. Went home.

PS: I let my offspring wannabe read (part of) the Chronicles. He wept, thinking how funny it was. Then I told him it was all serious. He then wept in fear, realizing he was in the presence of an Altoid.

So it goes.

BILL HOKE



A Rope on the Summit of Shuksan

Probably the prettiest mountain ever climbed by the Altoids is Mt. Shuksan in the North Cascades.

The Altoids encourage you to go to this magnificent summit, as well. When you do, please look for their rope.

If you've ever seen a cigarette ad with a beautiful mountain reflected in a pristine lake, or if you purchased the 1995 Rand-McNally Road Atlas, you have seen Mt. Shuksan. There is even a '1997 German Shepherds Calendar' featuring Mt. Shuksan behind January's German-Shepherd-of-the-Month. It may be the most commercially photographed mountain in America, because it is perhaps the most visually stunning mountain in the continental US

Its beauty is all a mountain's majesty can do to the eye. Flying buttresses, hanging glaciers, soaring aeries where only eagles and Altoids play. Long, tree-dotted arms raising steep snow-slopes to an azure sky. A perfect summit pyramid pointing ruggedly to the heavens. To gaze upon Mt. Shuksan is to let your spirit fly.

The Altoids journeyed to Shuksan in the summer of 1992. The heat was stifling in the flatlands; it was the one-month time of year when sales of electric

fans in Seattle outstripped the sale of sunglasses. People walked around the Pike Place Market showing way too much skin, and three days into the heat-wave, the sale of sunburn treatments topped the charts.

Normal people, when faced with these conditions, head for the beaches and other low-altitude watering holes. The Altoids head for the heights like mountain goats moving up to rutting pastures. It could be considered an inbred phenomenon, except that the mountain-man traits exhibited by the Altoids only jump out of the gene pool once in a thousand years. Like a thirty-pound rainbow trout. The oh-so-rare Great White Whale. The mind of an Einstein. The heart of St. Francis. The Altoids.

Thus is your historical context regarding the Altoid Climbing Club once more clarified.

Yes, it was hot in the valley, and the Altoids chose Mt. Shuksan as a worthy escape. Co-Chief Altoid MacDonald even went to the North Face and bought a shiny new 165-foot rope for the occasion.

It was beautiful. Hi-tech purlon. Black with green striping. A rope worthy of safe-guarding the Altoids. Co-Chief Hoke also went to the North Face and purchased a new pair of climbing boots. Size seven. (True, he has dainty-feet, but for your own good don't use the word 'dainty' in his presence.)

The Altoids drove to Mt. Shuksan, stopping at O'Brien's for breakfast; fortunately, Co-Chief Hoke did not pull another of his famous O'Brien's practical jokes, and the pair drove on--up Highway 9 through Acme, past the Twin Sisters Range and the former hippie home of their climbing associate--make that their climbing subordinate--Rob Newsom.

The Sisters called out to the Altoids like Odysseus' ancient Sirens. They were unavailed; the Altoids were headed for higher places. The spurned Twin Sisters suffered their rejection, and slaked their craving with a distant wave.

The climbing of Shuksan unfolded as so many previous Altoid adventures. They came, they saw, they climbed, they looked over their broad domain, they left their rope.

A few features stand out climbing the standard-route of Shuksan. At the

trail-head you immediately start downhill to an initial watershed. This is the very worst way to begin any climb; it means on the return, you have to climb up the last stretch to get to your car. On Shuksan, this stretch measures nearly a mile.

Beyond the beginning descent is a gradual two-mile incline to the Lake Anne high camp, where you find enjoyable boulders on which to prepare for the next day's challenge.

Very early on summit day, you scale a thousand feet of superb rock. There are open-books and lay-backs, mantel-shelves and jam-cracks. There is a very narrow trail called 'Fat-Man's Misery' running along a steep rock wall; on the other side of the foot-wide trail is a seven-hundred-foot drop-off into a canyon hungry to gobble any fat man falling.

At the top of that first rock buttresses is a famed hundred-foot snow slope called 'Winnie's Slide'. This leads to a hanging glacier, which winds up through 'Hell's Highway' to the backside of the mountain. Your vista is now down the massive Sulfide Glacier into a watershed soon to be named after the Altoids. (Some have suggested 'Altoid Valley'. Those two concepts, however, are mutually exclusive.

This is probably a good place to point out that there is as yet no mountain named after the Altoids. We are sure the map-makers of the world are clamoring to right this oversight and name some appropriate pinnacle for our time's premier climbing team.

'Mt. Altoid'. Has a certain ring to it, doesn't it?

The Co-Chief Altoids would remind everyone that Mt. Everest is named for an obscure English cartographer, while K-2—for Heaven's sake—is simply numbered. Either of these will do. Thank you.

Now, back to our story.)

Sitting atop the Sulfide Glacier is as pretty a summit pyramid as you'll ever see. Three-hundred fifty feet of simple yet enjoyable rock climbing brings you to the top. Near the summit is a giant slab resting on a pinnacle like some elevated tribute to Stonehenge. That is where you should find the Altoids brand-new rope. Or, you can leave yours there in tribute. That way, you can

follow precisely in the footsteps of the Altoid down-climb.

You won't notice that you left your rope on the summit until you are at the bottom of Hell's Highway—a good three-quarters of a mile from the top. By then, you will be so dehydrated from the day's exertion that you will decide to leave the damn rope and get down to some water.

You'll immediately wish you had your rope as soon as you once again step onto the hanging glacier and notice the many crevasses just waiting to waste you. Very carefully, you will negotiate the striated ice-field, holding your breath as you cross the fragile snow-bridges, finally exiting to be faced by the overly steep 'Winnie's Slide'. Here you will wish you could drape your missing rope around a snow-bollard and descend sensibly. But no, your thirst will drive you to attempt the descent in a seated-glissade. You will, of course, lose control of the glissade and tumble a couple of hundred feet down the glacier beyond 'Winnie's Slide'—thus reliving 'Winnie's Slide'.

After cussing the heavens for your own silly stunt, you will follow another group of climbers to a hidden pool of water, then nearly drown yourself slaking your thirst. Your stomach will then perform gymnastic moves because you drank way too much way too fast.

Back on the trail to home, you'll enter the hard-rock down-climb section of the day. You'll want to take off your climbing boots here. Be sure to put them away in your pack; don't tie them to the outside of the rucksack like Co-Chief Altoid Hoke.

Now, despite your utter fatigue, you need to focus all your energies on where you put your feet--don't jump, don't lunge. Be nice and smooth, never moving more than one of your extremities at any time.

You'll eventually come to 'Fat Man's Misery'. When you get there, don't stop in the middle of the foot-wide path to get a drink of water out of your pack, like Co-Chief Altoid Hoke. If you do, you may inadvertently untie your climbing boots, and one of them will tumble a thousand feet into the hungry canyon beyond. After the brand-new size-seven disappears into the gorge, you may even think you hear a burp, and a craggy voice say 'Thank you', like Co-Chief Mac-

Donald swears he heard.

The Altoids were finally off the mountain, but their day was not done. A steak dinner in the town of Glacier was a strong enough call to make them hurriedly pack their camp.

(‘Hurriedly’ is a relative term, used here to contrast their movements with what they really needed to do, which was sleep for several hours.)

The Altoids put aside all thoughts but ‘food’, and moved onto the trail home; each immediately began pleading in a desperate character-voice for the other to return.

“Terry, come back, you left me,” Bill said in the voice of an abandoned rope.

“Bill, come back, you dropped me,” Terry answered in the voice of a badly bruised size-seven boot.

The two quickly ceased the comedy when they truly felt the load they would carry for the next three miles. Stops would be frequent, they thought—at least until ‘three women named Fred’ came up behind them.

The ‘strong women’ must have camped overnight at Lake Anne, and after a leisurely day making forays into the broad countryside beyond, were headed out to the trailhead on the tails of two weary Altoids.

They each wore a Pendleton shirt spread across broad shoulders. All three had a certain masculine air to their carriage, a perceptible growth of face-hair, and a look that said, ‘Get in my way buster, and I’ll separate your nose from your head.’

Testosterone—God’s little joke.

They made their first stop on the far-side of a stream where the Altoids were ending their third. Hoke was nearest the three, getting ready to put on his pack; MacDonald was sitting on a rock fifty yards up the trail.

“Hey, why don’t you guys move over and let us through,” one of the women said in a strong, burly voice. Hoke detected a condescending sneer on her upper lip. That, of course, is like waving a red-cape in front of a mad bull.

The woman undoubtedly was only making a request; Hoke, being an Altoid, read it as a challenge.

“Hey, MacDonald,” the Co-Chief reported as his partner packed up, “these three ladies back here want us to move over and let them through. I don’t think they were very nice in their phrasing. What do you think we should do?”

“Did they say please?” MacDonald asked innocently.

“No.”

“Did they say, ‘excuse me, Mr. Altoid, but could we have the honor of carrying your loads and breaking the trail out for you’?” MacDonald queried.

“No.”

“Did they say, ‘oh, Altoids, let us go back up and get your rope and boot’?”

“No.”

“Then I say there’s no way we let ‘em pass.

“Damn straight!”

Testosterone—God’s little joke.

So began yet another epic death march. The thoroughly exhausted Altoids tapped the fumes of their adrenal glands while the ‘three women named Fred’ pushed them hard, smirking all the way. It might not have been so bad if the last next two miles of the path had been your standard downhill walk-out, but soon after the initial confrontation, the race on the trail started hard up toward the car park.

The Altoids were panting, quadriceps cramping; ‘three women named Fred’ strode strongly in their wake, their eyes dancing in glee.

MacDonald led the way out, finding new reserves of energy lurking like Neanderthal-echoes in the canyons behind his heavy brow-ridge. He was not going to be passed by a trio who failed to offer the Altoids a rope-rescue or a boot-coupon on the toll-road of life.

The Altoids seemed to be audibly groaning at every cut-back, their fists reaching to their knees like basketball players taking a blow. Yet they gave

themselves only moments to rest before resuming the race. The women were right on their tails, their controlled exhalations contrasting with the Altoids' gasping bull-snorts.

Finally—after interminable cut-backs and steep, wrenching up-grades, after stubbing their toes on uncounted tree-roots and unavoidable, exposed granite, after struggling uphill to finish the two-mile race without stopping for water or to sensibly let their pursuers pass, the Altoids broke out of the overhang to the bright heat of the trail-head parking lot.

MacDonald and Hoke were victorious again! They drunkenly stumbled to their car, and fell in two sweaty heaps on a grassy slope nearby. Not a word was spoken. None was necessary; in fact, neither could have talked if they had wanted to. They were, quite simply, completely spent.

The Altoids' heads flopped wearily to the side; they espied their husky banes emerging from the trees. The 'three women named Fred' appeared unruffled, barely sweating, each sipping lazily from her water bottle. The three walked purposefully to their car, threw their packs in the trunk, and drove off—laughing and pointing at the bedraggled Altoids.

MacDonald closed his eyes and blew out the bad air from his overworked lungs.

"Why did we do that?" he asked rhetorically.

The answer hung in the air like a harsh verdict over the two somnambulant Co-Chiefs.

Testosterone—God's little joke.

So remember, if you ever climb Mt. Shuksan, be sure to look for the Altoids' rope. And on the down-climb, let the strong ladies past.



E-mail to Co-Chief Hoke

Subj: Chronicle Thoughts

Date: 97-04-16 10:15:47 EDT

From: TMACDUCK@AOL.COM

To: grafhoke@silverlink.net (Graf-Hoke)

"E-mail from Co-Chief Hoke" is becoming a wonderful addition to the Chronicles. It gives a neat, rough edge to the literature. Any more memories which you can generate would be great.

On a more serious subject--Altoid money--I think it is time we begin to seriously consider how we are going to get this story to the climbing world. My initial thought is that since, for the most part, I wrote the Chronicles, you--Co-Chief Hoke--should be responsible for marketing the Chronicles.

If the publication of the Chronicles leads to interest in the publishing world for the Art of Misadventure, we should come to some agreement about what percentage of the Art of Misadventure funds should go into the Altoid coffers. I'm thinking 25%, split between the chiefs. Of course, all Altoid moneys should probably support Altoid adventures to far-away places, but if we are suddenly awash in millions in capital, maybe we should come to some agreement which says all Altoid moneys are the co-property of the co-Chiefs and any moneys beyond adventure moneys should be split. (However, the purchase of an Altoid cabin near Mt. Rainier might be a possibility to consider.)

This all fits under a heading not of "Greed", but "Realistic Expectations".

Anyway, I know that the Chronicles is not yet to first-draft-completion, but we should begin to plot a strategy to sell them to the highest bidder--then sit back and wait for the world to beg us for more.

Co-Chief MacDonald

E-mail from Co-Chief Hoke

Subj: Chronicles

Date: 97-04-15 14:45:47 EDT

From: grafhoke@silverlink.net (Graf-Hoke)

To: TMACDUCK@AOL.COM

Let's not forget Mt. St. Helens, 1988:

We drove to Cougar and took over two motel rooms to sort gear. The manager came in to see why the building was listing. It was my extra ices axes. The room was kept to 45 degrees to toughen up the Altoids.

We left this base camp and spent hours finding the trail-head shared by a crud of snowmobilers operating machines without mufflers. We nearly killed them. Spent most of the day on snowshoes dodging cross-country skiers who did not have the courage to carry BIG PACKS. Altoid Hoke fell off a steep slope into a tree-melt hole. He was upside down. Many people laughed. Photographs were taken.

Undaunted, the duo headed up into fog and rain. They wisely pitched their tent facing the wrong direction. They then punctured each other's sleeping pads with crampons. At 4 PM, they watched the rain. They never did see the mountain

By 6 PM, the bags were awash. Hoke ate a Baby Ruth for dinner. At 11, TMac brewed spaghetti. Hoke would have none of it.

At 6 AM, slept out, they packed and left the mountain they never saw. Hoke hit himself in the face and chipped a tooth with a snow shoe. No explanation possible.

By 10 they were at the Cougar Inn. Hoke, still drinking in those days, had several Rainiers for breakfast.

They drove home. It took seven hours.

It was, in all, a miserable, expensive, unsatisfying, very unglamorous and unpleasant time.

Another typically fun outing for the Altoids.

Hoke



*Co-Chief Hoke's
8th Ascent of
Mt. Elinor*

The Religious Climb

Lift ye up a banner upon the high mountain, exalt the voice unto them, shake the hand, that they may go into the gates of the nobles.

Isaiah 13:2

All climbing is by nature religious.
(Once again, we place the Altoids in context.)

Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense.

Song-of-Solomon 4:6

The ascent to high places often leads to a return with basic truths through spiritual renewal. The high and the sacred bestow tolerance of the low and temporal.

Many religions, in fact, are based on climbing incidents.

O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!

Isaiah 40:9

It started, of course, with Noah and the original down-climb. Moses and the scramble up Sinai. Jesus on the mount with the Devil, looking out over the offer. Mohammed moved a mountain, and ascended to Heaven from the Rock of the Mount.

Religious climbs.

And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD.

Genesis 12:8

The Altoids hosted their own religious climb after Co-Chief MacDonald--at the Spring, 1992 Seattle Lutheran High School Auction--offered a weekend

expedition with the team.

The description in the auction brochure read:

An Expedition with the Altoids!

The Altoid Climbing Club offers a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for adventure in the High Cascades! Two Lucky Lutherans will experience the excitement of a weekend in the back-country with the world-famous Altoids.

You will be driven deep into the scenic Twin Sisters Range, hike to a high camp on the lofty col between the North and South Twin Sisters, be treated to a sumptuous, catered meal from Seattle's Il Terrazzo Carmine, sleep under a million stars, then ascend the South Twin Sunday morning. Finally, you'll descend to universal acclaim, confident in the knowledge you've been to the top with the Altoids!

Perfect for a father-son weekend! Comes with the Altoid satisfaction guarantee!

Much to the surprise of the auction's organizers, the package sold for \$450. Darryl Davis and his thirteen-year-old son Josh were the lucky high-bidders, and were quite excited as the auction's master-of-ceremonies, Co-Chief MacDonald, handed them their voucher.

Two months later, the Altoids prepared to take the novice father-son team into the hills. Much of the pre-climb groundwork involved the Altoids discussing 'unseemly back-country language'. Co-Chief MacDonald spent major moments reminding Co-Chief Hoke that these were Christians on a pilgrimage of sorts. Certain Altoid proclivities would need to be suppressed during the

coming climb.

“No cussing, no overt blasphemy, and no smoking wacky tobacky.”

This from a couple of guys in the advertising business.

And the vale of Siddim was full of slimepits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and fell there; and they that remained fled to the mountain.

Genesis 14:10

Co-Chief MacDonald would serve as point-man in the Altoid attempt on the ground rules. He had just completed a Lutheran adult-indoctrination course, loved the Lutheran liturgy, thought Martin Luther would have made a fine Altoid, and felt in his heart that “Jesus Christ Has Risen Today. Hallelujah!” is one of the finest hymns in all of Christendom.

In the mountains, however, MacDonald cussed as much as Hoke. He also felt God exhibited a much greater sense of humor than most ‘good Christians’ might admit. As proof, he felt you need go no further than the people with which He populated His Creation—especially the ‘good Christians’. Yes, only a Heavenly Humorist could have created Man; this thought, of course, would be taboo on the ‘Religious Climb’, as Hoke had dubbed it.

Bill Hoke, for his part, is a very spiritual man, but this certainly doesn’t translate into devoted church attendance. He thinks tithing is what babies do chewing on frozen rings. Co-Chief Hoke would probably wish for the opportunity to pull a good practical joke on the Almighty, just to watch Him laugh. Or write the great new Negro spiritual “Let’s Tweak the Cheeks of Jesus Bye and Bye”.

And they rose up early in the morning, and gat them up into the top of the mountain, saying, Lo, we be here, and will go up unto the place which the LORD hath promised: for we have sinned.

Numbers 14:40

MacDonald thought 'The Religious Climb' would do Hoke good.

What Darryl Davis was thinking when he bought the climb for himself and his son one can only surmise. It certainly wasn't a chance to expand his well-developed athleticism. Darryl was nice but slight, pigeon-toed, bespectacled, and a little goofy. His son, Josh, was a good kid; though he was stronger than his father, neither was much of an athlete.

The Pilgrims figured they were in good hands with Altoids.

And rightly so.

When the Altoids and the Pilgrims arrived at the jumping-off point on the Georgia-Pacific forestry road deep in the Twin Sisters Range, Darryl changed into hiking shorts and quickly exhibited a set of legs to make the starving look strong. At the lumber yard, these would be your two-by-twos. Forget his small pack--Terry and Bill wondered if Darryl would be able to carry himself to high camp.

Their concerns increased as the foursome began weaving their way toward the trailhead. Darryl required frequent stops, and drank prodigiously from his small water bottle; it ran dry before they reached the trees.

Along the forest road, they passed Dailey Prairie. Sitting at the far edge of the sun-bathed meadow was the abandoned hermit's cabin which Terry always thought a great aesthetic retreat.

He tried to imagine what the hermit had been like—stuck in the mountains for months at a time, with only the wildlife, wind and snow for company. Did he learn to talk in the tongue of foxes? Did the wild birds serve as his protectors? Would a hermit eventually develop the sense to pay a courtesy call at the sleeping bear's den? Was that how his life ended—clawed senseless by a groggy, grumpy, ill-mannered host?

Or did Georgia Pacific run him out after they bought the forestry rights to

the Twin Sisters Range? Terry tried to imagine a dark-suited, wing-tipped underling trooping through the muck of Dailey Prairie to deliver an eviction notice.

Was it better back then, when there were hermits in the hills instead of the locked gates with which Georgia Pacific often blocked the Altoids' access to the Twin Sisters Range?

You bet.

The Altoids and the Pilgrims marched onward through the evergreen crop. Darryl exhibited an uncanny ability to trip on any impediment, but took it with a friendly smile and a shrug. He wanted this weekend to be fun for him and his son; so far, he loved where they were.

The Altoids told jokes (clean ones) and tried to make Darryl and Josh comfortable with the task ahead; in the distance, the North and South Twins threw glorious abutments to the sun.

The Twin Sisters Range is one of the North American continent's greatest exposures of olivine—a gritty igneous rock which is fun to climb and pleasing to see. Olivine can be gray, green, or golden brown—the color of the Twin Sisters. Years ago, olivine was mined from the range and used in a soap much like Borax. The rock, it seems, had commercial potential just like the trees.

The Altoids, however, hope a higher purpose awaits the Range.

They are convinced the Twin Sisters would be a great place for a world-class destination resort—Altoidland. They hope to convince Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen to drop his ill-advised foray into professional football and purchase the Twin Sisters Range from Georgia Pacific. Then, adventurers from around the world (by invitation only, of course) could journey to the globe's one true outdoor-adventure amusement park.

Since the Altoids would be involved, there would be heavy emphasis on 'amusement'.

Co-Chief Altoid Bill Hoke is currently designing "*A Modest Proposal for Paul Allen*". The central theme of the overture is that lots of folks own football teams. How many own their own mountain range?

We trust Mr. Allen will see the efficacy of our vision. We strongly feel that someday, at the end of Super Bowl XLVI, the star of the game will turn to the camera and say: "To heck with Mickey, I'm going to Altoidland!"

Consider the possibilities: a climb of 'Virtual Rainier' with animatronic Altoids; high mountain cuisine catered by Seattle's Il Terrazzo Carmine served in the rustic yet opulent 'Altoid Lodge'; creative writing seminars focused on topping Co-Chief Hoke's most outrageous summit registries; an adventure ride called 'The Hermit and the Bear' which chronicles the innocence and misfortune of a long-ago time; even Sunday morning chapel services in the 'Darryl and Josh Davis Memorial Sanctuary' featuring a chorus of ghostly robot-nuns struggling to stay in tune.

Altoidland. You can't keep a good idea down.

But enough High Commerce. Back to the Religious Climb.

The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD.

Isaiah 65:25

In the trees, Darryl and Josh fell behind the Altoids by more than a quarter mile, then somehow got themselves off the trail and out into an unstable gully jumbled by ten thousand teetering boulders. Hoke and MacDonald's first clue that their charges had wandered off the path was a loud expletive from Darryl echoing up the ravine.

"Damn!" he screamed, twisting his ankle between two wobbly rocks.

"Did Darryl cuss?" Hoke asked MacDonald.

"Sure sounds like it."

"But I thought there was no cussing this weekend."

"Well, there's no cussing for the Altoids. The Pilgrims, of course, are the forgiven, so evidently they can cuss."

“Especially when the flesh is weak but the spirit is willing, is that it?”

“Precisely.”

Another curse rebounded up the rockbed in a much younger-voiced echo.

“Shit!”

“Did Josh just cuss?” Hoke asked again.

“I think so, although that exact word isn’t covered by Mosaic Convention.”

“Well, hell, if they’re gonna cuss, I’m gonna cuss.”

“No, Hoke, we made a deal. It’s the Religious Climb. No cussing for the Altoids.”

“Doesn’t seem fair.”

“It’s not, but it’ll do us good. The rewards will come down the road.”

“A very Christian concept, MacDonald.”

“Thanks.”

Darryl and Josh extricated themselves from the gully and returned to the path along the steep, flowery slopes leading to a climbers’ lean-to in the trees beneath the Northwestern Cwm. Together, the four climbers ascended slowly past ‘Steamer Gulch’---a signal location in Altoid History (A.H.).

Here, years before, during their first climb in the Sisters Range, MacDonald and Hoke got off the trail in the deep snow and took a high line to the climbers’ lean-to. Before lunch, Hoke went off to relieve himself of one of life’s great burdens. Thinking he was deep into the privacy of the trees, the Co-Chief proceeded to leave a big brown welcome mat right on the standard, snow-buried trail. Fifteen minutes later, while the Altoids enjoyed lunch at the lean-to, two unfortunate cross-country skiers got a special welcome to ‘Steamer Gulch’.

Now the Altoids and their charges were aimed for the col between the North and South Twin. They didn’t stop at the lean-to, but kicked steps up into the Northwestern Cwm—the small glaciated valley between the Twins.

They were travelling incredibly slowly in the snow. Darryl’s pace had dropped from ‘Crawling’ to ‘Imperceptible’. Terry was concerned that the glacier was melting faster than they were climbing, and that they might never reach the

one-hundred-fifty foot wall leading to the col.

Unfortunately for Darryl, the foursome finally came to the first stretch of true climbing on the route. The wall was a forty-five degree, left-leaning open-book; one pitch of healthy rock-climbing not technically difficult for the Altoids, but intimidating to any gasping Pilgrim novice.

“We’re going to climb up there?” Darryl asked, his fearful eyes flying to Terry.

“That’s the idea,” Terry responded with a smile. “No big deal, I’ll have you roped the whole way. This is what you came for, daddy. This is climbing!”

Darryl wasn’t convinced. He thought it looked an awful lot like insanity.

Terry didn’t give the father, or the son, any time to reconsider their commitment. He put on his seat harness, grabbed one end of the purlon rope, and in a flash was setting up a belay at the top of the col.

Darryl and Josh’s mouths hung open in awe--the proper tribute following a lightning-quick Altoid lead.

“Okay, Darryl, your turn,” MacDonald called to the father.

“Me?”

“Yeah,” Hoke answered dryly standing beside him. “And you better pray this rope isn’t too frayed from holding the last guy who fell while climbing with us.”

Darryl searched Hoke’s eyes hoping they would give way to humor; the Co-Chief returned his gaze coldly.

“Now get your butt up there.”

Tough love. Altoids excel at it.

Darryl, unfortunately, did not surpass in rock-climbing. One of the Ten Commandments in the sport is ‘stay off your knees’. Darryl broke the rule continually up the pitch. Maybe he was praying for deliverance from his fear; possibly he was confirming his climber’s infancy by crawling before he walked. His progress could be measured by calipers.

MacDonald began to despair the loss of a fast-fading sun.

“C’mon, Darryl, get up here before it gets dark!” Terry called to him.

“Lean back on the rope and walk up here if you have to.”

And that’s what happened. Hoke free-climbed up to Darryl and convinced him that MacDonald held him on such a strong belay that he could lean back on the rope and effectively do a reverse-rappel.



It wasn’t pretty, it wasn’t quick, but in another five minutes, it was done.

Now it was Josh’s turn, and he was even more of a knee-bender than his dad had been. The young man barely got twenty-five feet up the wall before he froze. He leaned into the crack along the right side of the wall and tried to grab any unseen holds he could find.

Hoke was fed up. He free-climbed the lay-back until he stood beside Josh, leaning his weight against the inside wall.

“I can’t do this,” Josh breathed.

“Nonsense,” was Hoke’s response. “This is simple. The scary stuff comes tomorrow. Now get up there.”

Josh easily visualized fighting off strange, biting cliff-creatures defending impossible overhanging fortresses; he asked Hoke if he couldn’t go back and wait for them at the lean-to.

“Ridiculous,” Hoke responded. “We’re going to drag your butt to that summit up there first thing in the morning. It’ll be a religious experience. Now get off your knees and get the....get your butt up there!”

Hoke did a semi-marvelous job of keeping the ‘no-cussing’ dictum intact. But he verbally kicked the kid’s butt all the way up the wall to where MacDonald

kept his lonely belay. Nearby, Darryl sat clinging to a large boulder near where they would camp that night.

“Isn’t it great up here?” MacDonald enthused as he dismantled the belay.

The scene truly was spectacular. Off to the northeast, Mt. Baker bathed in the golden gloam. To the west, Puget Sound took in a flood-tide from the Strait of Juan de Fuca, the Olympic Mountains shining high beyond. Just above them, the peak of the North Twin was hidden by a ridge, while they could see their next day’s goal glistening barely eight-hundred feet above them.

It looked like they could reach out and touch the summit of the South Twin.

“We’re going up there?” Josh mumbled unenthusiastically.

“All the way to the top,” Hoke replied. “But don’t worry. Tomorrow will be easier than today. Technically harder, but somehow easier. It’s a faith thing.”

“And by faith alone shall ye reach the summit,” MacDonald intoned.

“We’ll never make it,” Darryl whispered.

“Oh ye of little faith,” Hoke rejoined.

Pilgrims can sometimes be such pessimists.

The climbers settled in to prepare supper; here the Christians became lions. In his pack, Darryl had the original voucher from the Seattle Lutheran High School Auction. It clearly said:

*You will ...be treated to a sumptuous, catered meal from Seattle’s
Il Terrazzo Carmine...*

And though Terry had eaten at Il Terrazzo the day before, it had completely slipped his mind that he promised the Pilgrims a catered meal from the exquisite Pioneer Square eatery. His pack’s food bag contained the usual non-Rainier Altoid variety-pak: garlic humus and pita bread, common commercial pasta with red sauce and Power bars, fruit salad and Snickers. But most of all,

a see-through locking-box of four cream-filled éclairs. Substandard fare for a usual Altoid weekend-getaway, to be sure, but nutritionally excusable. And the éclairs tipped the scales in MacDonald's favor.

But not a catered Il Terrazzo treat was to be found.

There was little argument--the Co-Chief had dropped the ball. Darryl and Josh were bonded on that point. And Christians do the guilt thing so well.

"You mean you don't have the 'sumptuous catered meal from Seattle's Il Terrazzo Carmine.?' " Darryl probed, his recovery from the afternoon's difficulties now nearly complete. He'd gotten his butt up here, paid his fatherly and Christian admissions. Now he wanted the reward; common pasta wasn't it.

"Let me put it this way," Terry began, "the idea was you would reap the benefits of eating at Il Terrazzo Carmine. I had lunch there yesterday. Now I plan to feed you a really hearty Altoid meal, then regale you with stories powered by the energy of eating at Il Terrazzo Carmine. The spirit of the contract stands."

"Amen," Hoke smiled, trying to keep the coming moments on a higher plane. "Plus, I've got my checkbook and credit cards with me. When we finish the climb tomorrow, we'll take you to dinner at the exquisite Acme Café. What d'ya say?"

"I can see the headlines now," Josh interjected, "Altoids break their promise!"

"You know, to settle this, I'm prepared to pull out my Altoid First Aid Kit so we can eat the contents," Hoke offered with a straight face. "There's nothing like a good number-two butterfly bandage on an empty stomach."

"Bullpucky!" said Darryl, struggling to hide a smile.

"If you're going to cuss and blaspheme," MacDonald responded, "we're going to turn into normal Altoids in the hills. You'll hear cussin' and blaspheming like they were meant to be."

All the stars in the universe came out that night and watched the Altoids fix their guests a tasty feast. Much to everyone's great pleasure, Hoke found

several surprises in his pack, including a fine cheese, French bread and fresh salami. He had also carried four Thomas Kemper Creme Sodas up from the car. The foursome had just finished off the sodas and were turning to the cream-filled éclairs when MacDonald began to tell them about his most unexplainable UFO sighting.

Just the story for the moment.

“It was 1968. A good friend of mine was driving with me to Phoenix to see the premier of 2001-A Space Odyssey.”

Any story from the sixties which begins with the above words must immediately be considered with all possible skepticism.

“We were totally sober.”

Coming from the Nixon era, this might well mean they were stoned out of their ever-loving minds.

“No, seriously, we were completely straight. The bag of pot had blown out of my Triumph Spitfire convertible forty miles back.”

Oh, we're feeling a lot more secure in the story now.

“Just before Picacho Peak, headed northwest on I-10, I looked to the southwest and saw a shooting star burn through the atmosphere. It fell from 60-degrees above the horizon to well below 40-degrees in approximately three seconds.

“I turned to my buddy and told him he had just missed the most amazing shooting star.

“He pointed back to the southwest, where my shooting star burned all the way until it reached ten degrees above the horizon...and stopped...and hovered...and glowed--in the shape of a white pyramid.

“It then streaked right at us, covering the seventy mile gulf in a little over a second. It stopped again, hovering not more than two miles from the Triumph.

“We weren't the only two seeing this. Dozens of cars were pulled off I-10 peering up at the object as it hovered and hummed and appeared to peer back. Then, in less than two seconds, it streaked out of sight toward the Sea of Cortez.”

“Whoa,” Josh breathed groggily. In the skies beyond his shoulder, the covert CNN/ESPN satellite focused on Co-Chief MacDonald. The Altoids knew their mission had been compromised; Ted Turner wanted this story bad.

Terry continued his tale.

“We exhaled real heavily, and drove on past Picacho Peak toward Phoenix. We still hadn’t said a word to each other when the object came back from the other side of the peak to a position not more than three miles away. It stopped again, hovering--glowing like a fiery pyramid.

“Soundlessly, at a slowly building speed, it moved toward the Sea of Cortez; without creating a sonic boom, it seamlessly built to an astonishing speed and once again disappeared to the southwest.”

“There’s nothing in Genesis that rules out life on other planets,” Darryl stated firmly.

“I think Genesis probably works on every planet,” Hoke replied.

“But the real clincher came the next day,” Terry said with a nod. “Halfway back from Phoenix, we picked up the signal of KIKX--the Tucson radio station where I was working as a night jock—and Roger Galloway, the news director at ‘Kicks 58’ reported that the previous afternoon, a glowing, white, pyramid-shaped object had stopped traffic in downtown Madrid, Spain for almost ten minutes. When the Spanish Air Force scrambled to pursue it, the white pyramid disappeared over North Africa in less than an eye-blink.

“I called Project Bluebook—the U.S. Air Force investigation into UFOs which at the time was based at Davis Monthan Air Force Base in Tucson. They wouldn’t tell me if they had received any report from the many motorists who pulled over while we drove up Interstate 10. They simply said they would file my report, and that no one would probably ever get back to me.”

Damn good story. The Pilgrims were placated. Nonetheless, they planned to hold the Altoids to their promise of dinner the next night at the ‘exquisite’ Acme Café.

The four put down their inflatable sleeping pads, crawled into their down

bags, and slept under the stars, as overhead the moon began its long journey west.

In the middle of the night, Hoke woke MacDonald to show him the South Face of the North Twin. The now-waning moon made the mountain look like ‘a ghostly galleon swept on an endless sea’.

It was one of those special moments that sing to the souls of the Altoids. MacDonald couldn’t control his excitement. He awakened Darryl and Josh.

“You woke us up to show us the moonlight?” Darryl asked incredulously.

“Damned straight,” Terry answered.

“MacDonald...” Hoke began.

“Wow, that is incredible, Dad!” Josh said, shaking his head clear. He rubbed his eyes and smiled at what was already an indelible sight.

The North Twin looked like an ancient phantom captured in a Japanese print. The illumination of the moonlight was nearly equaled by the stars. It was other-worldly--Mother Nature as the greatest Impressionist of all.

It was the most beautiful night in the history of the Altoids.

“Yeah,” Darryl agreed as Hoke nodded toward him. “Incredible.”

“We knew you’d like it,” MacDonald responded. “Now, get to sleep. You have a mountain to climb in the morning.”

Upon a lofty and high mountain hast thou set thy bed: even thither wentest thou up to offer sacrifice.

Isaiah 57:7

By 8 AM, the foursome were out onto the East Face snowfield. Slowly, they reset the previous day’s pace.

Most climbers set a rhythm something like this: ‘set the axe, step and step...set the axe...step and step’.

Darryl's rhythm—if there was one—approximated this: 'slowly set the axe.....anxiously looked around.....tentatively step.....look down and breathe three times.....slowly set the axe.....try and swallow your fear.....tentatively step.....'

His son kept right up with him.

Two hours later, the climbers had ascended only to the bergschrund three hundred feet below the summit. After watching Darryl and Josh struggle to that point, the Altoids decided to attempt the summit from the North Ridge. The father and son would never negotiate the bergschrund—a wide crevasse where the headwall changed angle and joined the snowfield. To get across the gap while climbing steeply up the slope would require more than the Pilgrims had to give.

The Altoids swung their charges perpendicularly to the right and soon stepped onto a dirty rock outcrop two hundred feet away.

Here is where the climb got really scary for the Pilgrims. From the landing where they stood, they would go up the snowfield-side of a small indent and climb a serious fifty-foot crack of vertical rock to gain the ridge. They would then face two-hundred fifty feet of heavy scrambling on somewhat loose rock along a knife-edge ridge topped by another forty-foot summit rock-face.

The Altoids could have been on top in fifteen minutes, but the Altoids could have climbed through the bergschrund without leaving the snowfield. The Christians were the question here.

Hoke unroped and passed below the Pilgrims on his way to a confab with his Co-Chief. He was disgusted with their progress, and was especially fed up with Darryl's timidity.

MacDonald and Hoke spoke in low tones as they watched the father and son traverse the slope facing in, never letting go of the two-handed grip on their axes.

"Damned wimps!" Hoke exhaled through tight lips. "You'd think Christians would be a lot braver. What happens if they fall to their deaths? They go straight to Jesus, right?"

“Remember the Golden Rule, Hoke,” MacDonald admonished.

“Yeah, well if I were these guys, I’d want somebody to push me over the side. Jesus!”

“Watch the name of the Lord stuff, too,” his Co-Chief advised.

“This adult-indoctrination thing you’re going through is making you a pain in the ass, MacDonald. I can’t wait to see their eyes when they figure out we’re going straight up that crack there.”

Terry didn’t give them a chance to consider what they were facing. He carefully ascended to the ridge, climbing the Class 4 rock without incident. Hoke set the rope into Darryl’s offset carabiners and sent him up the same route. But whereas Terry’s time to the belay point was two minutes, Darryl took fifteen. Josh took twelve. Hoke was up in two.

When he arrived at the high point, he almost laughed at the sight.

Terry had Darryl and Josh daisy-chained to a belay point set in a boulder-crack on the ridgeline. Their faces were white surrender flags.

Four hundred feet straight down to their right, the Northwestern Cwm was shining in the midday sun. Staring them in the face was the massive Northwest Face of the South Twin. A hundred fifty feet down to their left was the East Face bergschrund which had detoured them to this windy exposure.

It really was an eagle’s aerie, and they were Pilgrims--not eagles. The father and son lay clinging to the rock in sheer fright; both shivered, not from the cold.

MacDonald wanted to urge them to act like the Saved.

Co-Chief Hoke look at them in total Altoid disgust (T.A.D.). Catching MacDonald’s eye, he tapped his wristwatch.

Superior Altoid Judgement (S.A.J.) was about to take over.

“Guys, I’m starting to get concerned about the time,” MacDonald spoke down to the Pilgrims. “We’re moving real slow. Hoke’s going to climb up the ridge and tells us if he thinks we can make it and get down before sunset.”

Hoke scrambled up over a hog-back and returned shaking his head.

“We’re still two hundred fifty feet from the summit--with one more big rock-face to get over. We’ll have you guys on belay the whole time, and I don’t think you can make it there in less than an hour. Then we’re four hours to high camp and three more hours to the car. It’ll be dark before we get down, and I don’t think you want any part of that.”

Father and son shook their heads vigorously.

“So, what do you think guys? Had enough?” MacDonald asked.

“Yes,” the Davises cried in unison.

“Good, you’ve chosen wisely,” Hoke saluted them. “I’ll get us headed down. Mr. MacDonald, set up a classic Altoid rappel point, if you would, please.”

MacDonald instantly had the rappel established, and Hoke was down even faster. The Co-Chief kicked steps far out onto the snowfield to get out of the range of rock-fall.

Next, MacDonald rigged Josh for rappelling and sent him down.

“Josh, if you lean into the rock-face, you’ll lose your footing and get banged up. Stay perpendicular to the face and walk right down that baby.”

Josh actually did very well in his first rappel. He kept away from the face, and didn’t slip on the way down. Both Altoids applauded him.

“Josh,” Hoke directed, “sit down deep into that indent while your Dad comes down, and you’ll be safe from rock-fall. Don’t get out beyond the line of the overhang, though, or you might get brained.”

Josh followed Hoke’s advice; it was good he did. With his first step, his dad knocked loose a two-man rock and sent it crashing down the crack. The big stone plunged off the overhang onto the landing, eight feet from his son. Josh watched wide-eyed as the rock exploded into three large pieces; they chased each other down the snowfield toward the campsite.

The rocks got down a lot faster than the foursome.

And he said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the

people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain.

Exodus 3:12

The trip out seemed to last as long as Moses and the Hebrews' desert wanderings. Darryl insisted on facing-in while he down-climbed any snow-slope, including the shallow inclines at the bottom of the open-book. Hoke was apoplectic. He and MacDonald still agree that Darryl's performance was no testimony to Christian assurance.

The two Co-Chiefs drove Darryl and Josh Davis out of the Twin Sisters Range and into Acme. As might have been expected, the Acme Café was closed, so the Altoids were unable to provide the promised 'exquisite' dinner which would have made up for their not providing the catered meal from Il Terrazzo Carmine twenty-four hours earlier.

The Altoids did what they could. They drove to Everett and treated their guests to a chicken fried steak and tossed brown salad at Denny's.

It was maybe the worst post-climb meal in the history of the Altoid Climbing Club.

All this, however, did not alter the increasing excitement the father and son felt about their weekend's adventure. Just as it's easy to find God in the mountains, it was easy for the Pilgrims to forget the negative, scary parts of their aborted climb. The further they were from the Twin Sisters Range, the more colorful the events of the past two days became.

They remembered the exhilaration of being up high, the feel of air so clean you wanted to sing, their pounding hearts while climbing the open-book, the magic of the full-moon on the South Face of the North Sister, their increasingly stunning views of the valleys and islands below them, the thrill of ascending and descending a technical rock-wall, even the amazing taste of common pasta at altitude.

Most of all, though, they remembered the Altoids--the ease with which the Co-Chiefs ascended even the most difficult obstacle, the security they, as beginners, felt while roped to Hoke and MacDonald, the stories, the spirits, the

camaraderie.

For the entire next week, both Darryl at work and Josh at school could talk about nothing but their adventures up high with the Altoids.

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

Isaiah 2:2

Given the Christians' response to the experience, the Altoids prime concern was that suddenly, somehow, Altoidism might itself evolve into a religion. God forbid.



Newsom and the Altoid Wannabes

The impact of the Altoid Climbing Club grew over the years like the magma-buildup under Mt. Pinatubo. In the first five years of Altoid Existence (A.E.), rumors of their achievements rumbled in the subterranean caverns of mountaineering. Sure, Doug Scott, Reinhold Messner, John Roskelley, and Sir Christopher Bonington were doing interesting things, but climbers began to hear

of stunning achievements by two publicity-shy Northwesterners.

Breathtaking things!

There is a parallel in the surfing world. Most of the puffery and subsequent tanning-oil contracts go to beach-boys from Southern California. But real surfers know there's a hermit living along the southeast coast of Australia who would blow them all away if it weren't for his reclusion. Money isn't important to him. It's the search for the perfect wave. That's all that counts. Union with the highest form in your art's cosmology.

This strange, bearded apparition might someday be accepted as an honorary Altoid--if he ever rides that perfect wave, of course.

To extend the Pinatubo imagery as it relates to Altoidism, early steam and ash clouds were caused by this word-of-mouth notoriety. Soon, CNN and ESPN, those detached chroniclers of earthly displacement, became real problems with the constant intrusion of their satellite surveillance on numerous Altoid Adventures (A.A.s).

It was only a matter of time until sunsets worldwide were a lot more spectacular because of the residual material hanging in the very air.

The call of the Altoids echoed down alpine valleys across seven continents, intoxicating all who heard it with the dream to one day be an Altoid. It didn't seem to matter that the chances of this happening were as remote as getting a date with a debutante on Regulus. Thousands of starry-eyed outdoorsmen were suddenly infected with one burning drive in their otherwise fruitless lives.

If only they, too, could join the anointed.

Altoid Wannabes. (A.W.s). It's a problem.

It was more than the inconvenience of avoiding public places for Hoke and MacDonald, or the pushiness of overzealous *paparazzi*. Altoid Climbs (A.C.s) began to be interrupted by those who would presume to be on the same face as the Co-Chiefs. Several times, Hoke and MacDonald heard weak imitators cry from on high:

"I am an Altoid!"

Death-by-lightning-strike went up alarmingly.

The Altoids began to notice a change in their many friends. They would stand closer in grocery lines, hold onto signed checks without cashing them, take the Altoids to lunch and act surprised when a photographer would show up to record the event.

The most disturbing story of all is Rob Newsom.

The ultimate Altoid Wannabe.



Rob Newsom was born in Louisiana. This makes him the only known climber to ascend from the swamps. He talks with the easy twang of the bayou in a voice pitched just above a rusty gate. When he takes off his boots, it's evident that more than just his accent remains true to the Deep South--thus, his nickname "Swampfoot".

A tall, gangly drink of water--good looking in a goofy sort of way, Rob Newsom learned to play guitar at the knee of his daddy--the talented Jimmy Newsom, who for years appeared with his band on the nationally renowned *Louisiana Hayride* out of Shreveport. His mother, Fern, is maybe the sweetest soul to ever wear a flowered dress.

Yes, Rob Newsom came from good stock. This, of course, will never get him into the Altoid Climbing Club. In fact, nothing will.

There are good reasons.

Perhaps it was the many times he took Co-Chief MacDonald to the foot of Liberty Ridge on the North Face of Mt. Rainier with designs on ascending one of America's fifty classic climbs. Each episode ended with Newsom allowing a little inclement weather to turn the twosome back before they had even set foot upon the Ridge. Co-Chief MacDonald paid thousands of dollars over those early Pre-Altoid years to sit in a small tent at the base of Liberty Ridge and attempt to disregard the odor of his professional mountain guide's feet.

There was Bill Hoke's 'On Top at Fifty' climb of Rainier in the summer of '89. Only months after the naming of the Altoid Climbing Club, our heroes paid Newsom hundreds and hundreds of dollars (he is, after all, a 'professional') for the right to sit in a tent with him on Wapowety Cleaver and, for almost a week, listen to his squeaky Southern drawl mix with the sound of interminable rain.

When the weather finally cleared, and the Altoids dropped their goal of putting up a drastic new route on the southwest side of the mountain, Newsom led them to the foot of Fuhrer's Finger--the simplest route on Rainier--but flinched after looking up the route and seeing one small rock tumble down onto the snow.

"You guys can go up there and get bombed if you want, but not me," were the discouraging words the Altoids heard. Expensive, discouraging words.

Probably the biggest reason Rob Newsom will never be an Altoid, however, is his near-decade-long failure to provide the Altoids with brand-new, one-piece, Gore-Tex® action-suits. This even though the Altoids were responsible, in large part, for getting Newsom a cushy job with *W.L. Gore & Associates*.

It's the first job Rob Newsom's ever had. Until he was in his mid-thirties, he subsisted on earnings from mountain-guiding and driving nails. Granted, he made a lot of money as a finish-carpenter. He even built one of the most beautiful mountain lodges in the western United States—the cabin on Icicle Creek where he lives with his beautiful wife and daughter.

(Even this, though, was accomplished in large part because Co-Chief MacDonald drove to Icicle Creek one day in the mid-'80s and put up the roof on

the place.)

But none of Rob Newsom's high-quality, rustic lifestyle might have occurred had the Altoids not misled the *W.L. Gore & Associates* personnel department when *Gore* did a background check on Newsom before they hired him. The Altoids told the company that Newsom was a responsible adult, a gregarious and driven mountain guide focused on professional perfection, and, in fact, had the stuff to not only be a big-time vice-president with *Gore* down the road, but might well be accepted into the Altoid Climbing Club before the year was out.

All lies.

The Altoids will concede Rob Newsom is a world-class carpenter. Their problem with him continues to be that he is not a world-class provider of action-suits for the Altoids.

This is more than not taking care of long-time friends. This, for Newsom, is a glaring breach of professional potential. Because of Newsom's bull-headedness, his company has lost out on several years of Altoids endorsements (A.E.s) and a windfall of worldwide sales.

W.L. Gore & Associates would probably be thrilled to be the official outfitters of the Altoids. But can you imagine the negative impact on their stock when the world realizes that one of their senior-vice-presidents-to-be and world-traveling executives has failed repeatedly to bring the Altoids into the *Gore* orbit?

It's as if Phil Knight decided he could sell his very ordinary golf apparel without the help of Tiger Woods.

As if Bill Gates, presented with the idea for Windows '95, had said, "What do we need that for? We've got Windows 3.1!"

If Steve Largent dropped the ball this bad during his many years with the Seattle Seahawks, do you think he'd have ever gotten to Congress? We think not.

Though his failures have compounded, Rob Newsom's attitude about the Altoids has evolved over the years. At first, like the majority of 'serious moun-

taineers', he treated them derisively. But as their accomplishments multiplied and their fame began its inexorable rise into the stratosphere, Newsom would suddenly appear on their doorsteps. Moments later, photographers from Outdoor Magazine would happen along. All a coincidence, of course.

His Rolodex file at *W.L. Gore & Associates* features an oversized tab labeled '*My Good Friends the Altoids*'. At parties amongst the outdoor elite around the world, the phrase 'as I was telling the Altoids just the other day' increasingly crept into his conversations.

Rob Newsom became the world's premier Altoid Wannabe.

He's not alone.

Altoid Wannabes are appearing everywhere. Do you think it simply happenstance that the explosive expansion of the Worldwide Web has occurred during the ascendancy of the Altoids?

No.

Do you think it simply coincidental that at the time Altoidism has been on the rise, the apparent number of alien abductions and extra-terrestrial visitations has skyrocketed?

No.

It's gotten to be almost too much for the Co-Chiefs.

Dealing with Altoid Wannabes began to take up way too much of their time. The Co-Chiefs could have simply told the world to buzz off, but they were too big for that. No, something had to be done to funnel Altoid Wannabeism into constructive channels.

So, after years of pressure from literally thousands of interested climbers worldwide—all Altoid Wannabes (A.W.s)--Co-Chief Hoke decided what the club needed was an official application form. Only by codifying the multiple daily inquiries could the club's executive directors hope to deal with the hysteria over Altoidism. The result is the official Altoid Climbing Club Application Form--designed by Co-Chief Altoid Bill Hoke.

The Official Altoid Climbing Club Application



ALTOID CLIMBING CLUB

APPLICATION FOR PROVISIONAL MEMBERSHIP



This form must be filled out completely and must be accompanied by a nominal non-refundable **Application Fee** of \$250. The Membership Committee meets in the first week of each quarter, and your application will be considered at the next regularly scheduled meeting. You will be notified in writing of the Committee's decision. The decision of the Membership Committee is final but applicants may reapply after six months. Applicants may make written inquiry regarding their status or rejection by mailing a **Letter of Inquiry** to the Membership Director with a \$500 non-refundable Inquiry Fee. Include a SASE (#10 size).



Provisional Altoid Ratings

| | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| WEIGHT CAPABILITY PACK SIZE | NECK SIZE FOOD AND TEA | MT. ELLINOR SHARED GEAR-ATTITUDE |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|

PLEASE DO NOT WRITE IN THIS BOX



**IMPORTANT INFORMATION
USE ATTACHMENTS* AS REQUIRED**

Number of cubic inches in your backpack: (in thousands) _____ Neck size: _____
Describe specific capacity of external backpack pockets, special straps, carrying accessories, in cubic inches:

Do you have: Working travois Travois harness Sled (check all that apply.)

Favorite amount of weight to carry: _____ 100# _____ 150# _____ more # _____

Personal best weight to carry 14,408' _____ #

Do you prefer to carry: 160' 13MM rope 320' 13MM rope

Brand and model of air pump to inflate 6' air mattress: _____

Best personal time to inflate two full length air mattresses: _____

Stove size _____ BTU output _____ Number of burners _____

Size of fuel container most closely matching your own:

2 gallons 4 gallons 5 gallons _____ gallons

Tent size _____ x _____ Height _____ Square yards of floor _____

Size of water bottles: 1 gallon 2 gallons 3 gallons _____ gallons

Favorite dinner wine: _____ Year _____

Best time to erect tent: _____ minutes. Length of cot _____

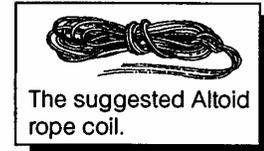
Will this tent accommodate at least four Altoids, not including yourself? Yes No

Will this tent accommodate at least four Altoids standing up? Yes No

Will this tent fit completely in your pack and stay dry? Yes No

Number of BTU's of tent heater: 50,000 100,000 500,000

Describe make and model of camp chairs _____



MISCELLANEOUS BACKGROUND

Name _____ Date of Application _____

Account Number and Expiration Dates of your Charge Accounts:

North Face _____ Bibler _____ REI _____

OTHER INCREMENTAL, MANDATORY DATA (OIMD)

Your age _____ Date of birth _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____

Zip _____ Home Telephone () _____ Occupation _____

Amount of Unused Annual Vacation _____ weeks Marital Status _____

Altoids require applicant to provide a minimum of \$5,000,000 in life insurance,¹ payable to "Chief Altoids." Do you have this insurance? Yes No If Yes, Name of carrier _____

*Attachments always include photographs, computer disks, narratives, airline tickets (first class) to visit destinations, bribes, etc.

¹Accidental Coverage (Double Indemnity) will make benefits \$10,000,00, payable to Chief Altoid.



CLIMBING EXPERIENCE

If married, does spouse *ever comment* when you *even hint* that you might be considering a ("wilderness experience") climbing trip? Yes No Other _____

Number of ascents of Mt. Ellinor _____ Weight carried _____ Winter ascents of Mt. Si _____ Route _____
Weight _____ Average number of tins of Peppermint Altoids carried: _____ gross.

Please list six climbs which you believe demonstrate your qualifications to become a Provisional member of the Altoids. Use attachments, as required. Go into detail.

| Mountain & Altitude (in feet) | Weight of Personal Kit | Weight of Shared Gear* |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 2. _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 3. _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 4. _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 5. _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 6. _____ | _____ | _____ |

Mt. Pilchuck counts as two climbs, regardless of route

Please list six items which you can cook under any mountain conditions. (*Note that real Altoids never, ever eat freeze-dried foods.*) Menus that include fresh foods in multiple courses draw favorable attention. Attach actual menus.

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____
4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____

Your personal best time to make tea at 3 a.m. at 11,000' in a white out. _____ Minutes _____ Seconds

Check to indicate you have included an actual DAT cassette recording of your voice saying, over and over, "Tea, s'haib." Do you sound extremely servile? Yes No Do you use one lump of sugar _____ or more _____

Can you make a 180° latte (with foam) at 12,000'? Yes No



Shared Gear - this includes such items as the tent(s), air mattresses, cots, sleeping bags, all food, water, gummy bears (cinnamon) in 5 bag, Good & Plenties (jumbo size), Gorp, trail mixes, tea, Starbucks coffee (Vienna Blend); climbing "hardware" such as 'deadmen', snargs, 'biners, ice screws; protection, such as belay plates, belaying gloves, ascenders (right and left for each Altoid), slings, harnesses; first aid kit, including assortment of drugs, moleskins, sun and glacier creme, 'lip balm', Charmin, team crampons, extra ice tools, snowshoes, 'hiking shoes' for approaches (Altoids prefer Nike Air), camp chairs, books, magazines with pictures, Walkmen/Watchmen, etc.



ALTOID RESOURCES INVENTORY (ARI)

Altoid climbs are invariably well-organized, tightly structured activities requiring training, precision in thinking and a willingness to share. The word "selfish" is never used to describe a true Altoid. In that spirit, please complete this ARI. Your communication skills are important to us and you are encouraged to share and pledge your total commitment to carry heavy loads. **Provisional Altoid Candidates will use the word "share" whenever possible.**

Indicate your personal charge account numbers and expiration date:

| | |
|--------------------|---------------|
| Belfair Cafe _____ | Expires _____ |
| Baker Inn _____ | Expires _____ |
| Gateway Inn _____ | Expires _____ |
| O'Brien's _____ | Expires _____ |
| The Met* _____ | Expires _____ |

Altoids Chiefs love to ride at night after a day climbing. Altoid candidates love to drive anytime, anywhere. Please list your longest drive: ___ days. Can you drive non-stop to: (you must check at least six)

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jackson Hole | <input type="checkbox"/> Belfair Cafe (Glo-Room Entrance) | <input type="checkbox"/> The Selkirks |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mt. Si | <input type="checkbox"/> Denali National Park | <input type="checkbox"/> Mt. Ellinor Trailhead (#2) |

Have you ever driven to:

- Mexico Yosemite Valley Peru Mt. Erie Alaska Other

Number of seats in your **Ford Explorer SE with Eddie Bauer Package** ____ I certify this vehicle is able to reach the second trailhead on Mt. Ellinor in any weather. ____ (please initial). Vehicle Information:

Four wheel drive More than 4-wheel drive Roof rack for your gear

Number of fuel tanks ____ Range of vehicle ____ Color ____ Range with towing package ____ (see next page). Personal best time to install chains on all four tires: ____ seconds.

Number of watts in the stereo system: 500 1000 More than 1000

The Altoids dig rock and roll music. Please describe your CD Library. Use Schwann listings and attach as many pages as it takes.

*To be used at Altoids' discretion to plan "outings" and discuss applicants.



ALL ABOUT THE ALTOID CLIMBING CLUB (ACC)

Club Purpose and Philosophy

The Altoid Climbing Club was founded after the historic, first 1989 winter ascent of the east face gully - direct - of Mt. Si, Washington. That climb engendered that true comradeship of mountaineering, ennobled by the finest traditions of the sport and a testament to the skill, will, and guts of the founders. In a word, Altoids are purists. Electric drills and wire brushes are anathema to Altoids.

Altoid candidates welcome the challenge to reach full membership as a pursuit of the highest order. Successful candidates will be obsessively driven, will make any compromise, carry any amount of weight, understand that while reaching the summit is expected, sycophancy is every bit as important.

Membership Information

Membership Degrees: Provisional, one year minimum; Associate, one additional year and participation (food and equipment preparation and driving) in three Altoid Climbs; Advanced Altoid Associate, two years and driving to and from climb, providing food and three actual on-mountain wilderness experiences with the Altoids themselves; General, three years, selected Altoid climbs (including a mandatory Ellinor-Washington traverse - summit to summit), and, by special invitation only, the annual Mt. Si winter ascent (east face gully direct). Following that climb (and the quality of the lunch), the Co-chief Altoids themselves will have a candidate-hosted Membership Evaluation Dinner (MED) on Maui where final full membership will be considered. Of special interest will be the still photographs and the candidate's video of "Altoids In Action" glorifying and unabashedly exaggerating the Altoid Alpine exploits, 90 minutes minimum, religious background music required.

Curiously Strong Member Services

A completely copyrighted and often autographed printed copy of the official narrative of the Founders' Climb of Mt. Si (east face gully - direct) will be provided free with each completed Provisional Membership Application. This special Altoid Climbing Report (publication #ACC 34.87R22B) is not available at your local bookstore. All other Official Altoid publications, White Papers, Reminiscences, T-shirts and Altoid Accouterments (AA's) are available exclusively through the Altoid Climbing Club Home Office.



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Words from Co-Chief Altoid Bill Hoke

We would have liked to have included more contributions to these Chronicles from Co-Chief Hoke, because he is a wonderful writer. However, when it comes to the Altoids, he tends to exaggerate. *The Altoid Chronicles* are too important for that.

Nonetheless, these words were received from the Co-Chief over the Holidays, 1996.

Altoid Christmas Entry

It is the day after Christmas, coming up on the eighth annual anniversary of the Altoids' first assault on Mt. Si.

Freezing rain here, but that will pass and the Altoids will paw at the ground impatiently--a touch of Chinook now in the winter convergent zone, the trail to Elinor beckoning--a homing beacon for Altoids in Mercator harmony with Mt. Si, site of the

east face gully direct and the Altoids' various victories there.

Those mountains curl up in the winter in a blanket of snow, tree tops poking through the luminescent powder--winter sentinels shining, while beneath covered shoulders, mountains relate long Altoid legends to one another.

They speak reverently of the Altoids, always preceding the climbing team's title with the word 'Intrepid' (the word for this in Douglas Fir is 'whisponso'eche'—similar to vulgate coastal Makaw); they warm themselves awaiting the summer calls soon to come up their flank.

The calling, always the calling, like the Sirens beseeching Odysseus; you can hear them calling "Altoids", and the sound, even in the winter-muffled snow, comes down the valleys, down Commonwealth Basin, off the flanks of Rainier, The Brothers, Mt. Elinor, the Terrible Traverse.

The sound comes, always louder until it reaches the highest summits. The sound of "Altoids" reigns over all creation, and the mountains are glad. So glad.

By the way, this freezing rain here today reminds me of coming out of \$&+#@\$\$%& in the Sanctuary, the peak we climbed without a permit.*

It was -35 when we came up (always up) to the col; except for the altitude, the snow, the direction of the wind and the latitude, it was much like the famous Altoid ascent of the col on The South Twin's West Face; this was almost as bad a spot.

I'll always remember the freezing rain, coming like stilettos from a Scotch-broom limb with needles flying off, and I will remember the lost and confused metaphors there on the ridge above. The moves were easy at first, mid-five's, and then it steepened and Co-Chief MacDonald led that 5.13a, one pitch, two, then found the shelf, untying and free climbing the ice-chute until he found a belay point; minutes later we were carving out a platform for the tent.

Below, on the glacier, we could see our Base Camp and the liaison officer and moribund high altitude sherpas sitting in chairs looking up into our stormy world. All but one were out in awe. One 'climber' lay in his sleeping bag crying and whimpering about the number of crevasses he had to be carried across.

Yes, in the camp below the Altoid's perch on the side of \$\$\$%^#@#\$\$\$ only one man whined. It was, of course, the lowly Newsom sweating in stolen Gore-Tex he had inadvertently turned inside out. There was every reason to expect he might be the first person ever to drown at 10,000 feet.

Our lofty camp that night, an eagle's aerie to be sure, was at 21,956'. The next morning, after heating up a warm brew or two, the Altoids, unroped in the blackness of pre-dawn, began to kick steps up a vertical ice wall looming 6,000' in front of them.

The last day on the mountain would be a long one. They would probably have to wear crampons with front points today. But no matter. They each had two ice tools, just like the days when they cut their teeth ascending Mt. Si.

"This is nothing," Alfred Altoid said as he began climbing. He went at the ice like a well-oiled Zamboni Machine, polishing as he went--a symphony on ice, fluid like a waterfall. Hot liquid streamed down, generating tiny rivulets of steam like a sulfur spring in Yellowstone; below, the other Altoid held his wide-mouthed water bottle and let it fill to make a piping tea. It was perfect--except for the weather and the 180 mph wind, just another day in the mountains for the gallant Altoids. (Editor's note: We realize 'gallant Altoids' is very redundant.)

Below, Newsom awoke. Peeking out to peer at the Altoid's progress, he lost bladder function when he saw how quickly they were climbing.

"Damn, they're running up that ice," Newsom thought as he fell to his knees, holding his hands together as if praying to the Gods to protect him from the Wrath of the Altoids.

Of course, Newsom never thinks in these poetic terms. Not ever. He's not an Altoid. Never was. Never will be. All he will ever be is a guy who lost his nerve on Fuhrer Finger July 18, 1989--a day which will live in infamy.

May we remind him of that often.

Every day, in fact.

As you can see, Co-Chief Altoid Hoke feels strongly about Altoid Wannabes. They rank just above 'bean-sprouters' on the Co-Chief's Derision List. Co-Chief MacDonald has a more magnanimous attitude toward Rob

Newsom, feeling that he is a very talented climber, a gifted musician, and a character of the first order. None of this makes him eligible for membership in the Altoid Climbing Club, of course; but MacDonald think he's a good man. He does, however, wish Newsom would come through with the *Gore-Tex*® one-piece action-suits.

Concerning Co-Chief Altoid Bill Hoke and their intrepid climbing club, though, Co-Chief MacDonald feels unabashed sentiment. If he were not an Altoid, he might possibly get overtly emotional. Altoids, however, never lose control of their feelings; such control is necessary when you face a 6,000-foot vertical ice-wall climbing unroped 3,000 feet above an ocean of hard snow.

The closest an Altoid has come to uncontrolled sentiment occurred at Christmas, 1996 when Co-Chief MacDonald gave his cohort a copy of The History of Mountain Climbing©⁶--complete with an inscribed tribute to a friend:

“Hoke—This History of Mountain Climbing© doesn't mention the Altoids. Professional jealousy is such a petty thing. But it can't diminish the years, the laughter, or the joy I've seen with you at altitude. Here's to you and me together at Concordia. Your friend forever. Terry Mac.”

It was indeed an incomplete edition of The History of Mountain Climbing ©. Unfortunate. The publisher would soon have to recall all unsold copies to abridge the edition and cover the exploits of the Co-Chiefs.

After reading the inscription from his cohort, Hoke e-mailed his friend the following:

“Beautiful book, my friend. Your message made my wife cry; but, because I am an Altoid, I held my hand over the wood burning stove until it glowed red. Then the tears that came

were real man-tears, not that soft gooey stuff.”

The closest Co-Chief Altoid Hoke ever came to the soft gooey stuff was when his ex-brother-in-law and fellow climber Dennis Burke died.

All climbers die. Some perish in the mountains; some die in their beds. Dennis Burke died of pancreatic cancer less than two years after summiting Mt. McKinley.

It's one of life's great cruelties--one day you're tanned and exultant coming down from the top of the continent's highest peak. The next day your doctor finds cancer in your pancreas, and in less than six months they lay you in your grave, or spread your ashes in the Shawangunks. Such reality reinforces the little voice in the ear of every mountaineer, which urgently whispers: "Climb, I'm coming."

Bill Hoke took the approaching death of Dennis Burke especially hard. Late in the winter of '96-'97, he flew to the East Coast to see Dennis one last time. Terry MacDonald and his fiancée, Caroline Clark, met him at Baltimore/Washington International Airport, and drove him to Connecticut. They left him in a commuter parking lot outside Danbury and went on to visit a friend in Vermont. Evidently Hoke didn't want them to see his emotional reunion with a dying brother-in-law.

Dennis came down from Brookfield and took Hoke home with him.

A week later, Terry received a letter from Bill detailing how difficult that last visit had been. Inside the envelope was a poem from the pen of the Co-Chief:



Connecticut Solstice

March 1, 2, 3, 1997

*What face is this, what gnaws at the insides,
equanimity the word of the day, another
useless word in a weekend of failed definitions?*

*Don't ask me to explain it, not from the top
of Cross Highway, nor over a plate of
half-eaten fried noodles and tofu in New Milford.*

*The climbing pitches are silent, vacant, winter lichen
and early spring rain, a misted mix while they
remember the moves, an eleven, foreboding, layback.*

*Ten, nine, eights, a seven, an easy five-five
two summers ago, last fall, talk of later this year
when lichen, dry, can be brushed off the route.*

*Then we are on the macadam, winding back, past the
graffiti at the reservoir; we are together, three returning*

from Olympus, leaning into that last uphill.

*We did this once before, coming out of the woods,
burning trail at the end; it is like it almost never happened,
the belay, solid, moves clean, graceful, top-roped.*

*It is windy at the cars and then we are deciding on dinner's
disparate orderings; it is after climbing-like here, but then
it is not. Free radicals have taken over.*

*The take-home dishes are in the bottom of the refrigerator
and we are watching re-runs of Denali and Aconcagua
victories shared over non-alcoholic beers and pain-killers.*

*Now we stand in the doorway, avoiding the entry mirror,
parts of speech dangling in a fast good-bye.
We're purposefully emotionless, I guess. They predict snow.*

*In the countryside, winding roads, a country cemetery
where I wander, pointlessly looking for the oldest date; a headstone is
newly wired together, with chrome angles on the edges.*

*Birds are everywhere, turkey buzzards, a red hawk, a cardinal, blue
birds, a pair of woodpeckers, working together. Then it is snowing
and the gear grinds up and we bump into the clouds.*

*I know that face, its growing lines and hurt eyes, it commits itself
to the past tense, hanging on to life's paragraphs, an essay now nearly
complete.*

Excerpts - Epilogue

How perfect, our idea of antiquity, a stone fence dividing land into sections and lots , some as high as a man, parallel the road. No one is outside, digging out and stacking fieldstones. Not that I can see.

Possum litter the road, deer and crows fight for our attention from the lunch table and I am miles away from the morning mirror, wondering, wondering, eating meatloaf and sweet potatoes.

For once the directions all make sense, at least I am to my other destinations on time, but I can't escape the morning on the porch. The airplane shudders into the wind, ice glistens on the wings.

The miles, the words and sentences lie at roadsides and the Ides of March really are upon us in this, the last snow of winter waging its last battle and we sit, struggling with our ABC's.

Bill Hoke

March 7, 1997

Poulsbo, Washington

Dennis Burke died in middle March.

Co-Chief Altoid Bill Hoke represents all that is right with the Altoid Climbing Club. He is the essence of Altoid verity.

His fellow Co-Chief could write several deeply moving praises of his friend if it weren't for the fact that real men sometimes shy from such things—

ever fearful that by exposing a soft inner light, their beards might stop growing. Otherwise, you might read a revelatory description of an ascent at sunrise, the early wind promising an exquisite summit day. Two friends come up over a ridge and share the exhilaration of energy and life, and say no words. They look one to the other and thank a Higher Spirit that their days in the outdoors have been so well enriched by the life of this silly, smelly companion.

Would they ever verbalize such thoughts?

Nah! Not Hoke or MacDonald!

They are Altoids, after all. There is a better chance that each is wondering what the other secretly slipped into his pack at the car park.

Would either quietly hope that he is carrying a little beer for his good friend?

Nah!

So, what worthy challenge is left for these Altoids? A trek across a high pass in Pakistan--above Concordia and beyond K-2 base camp into a Shangri-La on the outskirts of fantasy? Climbing virgin peaks in the Fairweather Range of southwestern Canada? An epic voyage on rivers of ice in Alaska—a crystalline dream-world where the name 'Altoids' resonates like jet-stream wind off stratospheric rock-faces?

All this and more.

Altoids. A state of mind. A state of grace. With room for only two—although they will accept your application for membership, along with a non-refundable check for \$250. Remember, if you don't hear from them in six months, you can file an 'Application Status Inquiry (A.S.I.)', along with a non-refundable check for \$500.

It's a very exclusive club, the Altoids. If you could ever hope for membership, you would want it that way.

Gloria in excelsior Altoids!





THE ALTOID CHRONICLES

Footnotes

¹ 200 Years Later, Altoids Remain a Breath of Fresh Air. Paul Dean. Los Angeles Times News Service. Copyright 1996-97.

² Central Intelligence Agency. Langley, VA. Field Manual FM42C-1997-3JZ. Existence unconfirmed.

³ Dante Alighieri, The Divine Comedy, Translated by C.H. Sisson © 1980. Oxford University Press.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² A History of Mountain Climbing by Roger Frison-Roche and Sylvain Jouty. 1996, Flammarion Press, Paris, New York. 335 pages.



**“Altoids on High”
By Terry MacDonald
Oils with palette knife.
A gift to his friend and
Co-Chief Altoid, William E. Hoke
07/18/2004**