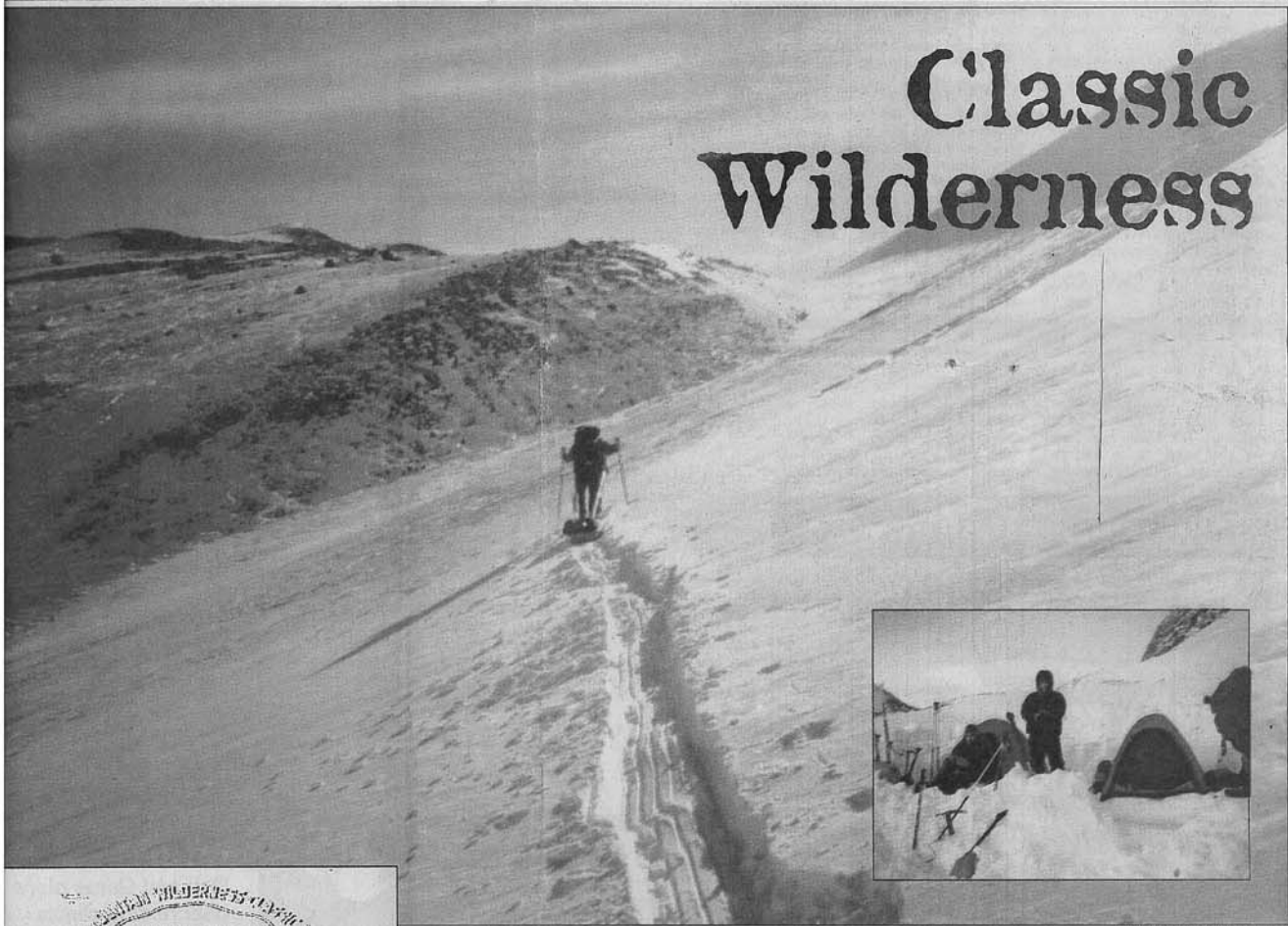


Classic Wilderness



Photos courtesy of Rourke Williams.

INTO THE WILD—The sled towed by Eric Cramer (above) leaves a distinct trail as he approaches Jumpoff Icefall in the Wrangell Mountains during last year's Alaska Wilderness Classic Ski Race from Nabesna to McCarthy. Inset, Cramer (standing) and Rourke Williams in camp on the Chisana Glacier.



Alaska Wilderness Classic Ski Race

START AND FINISH: Race starts Sunday at Devils' Mountain Lodge in Nabesna and finishes at McCarthy Lodge.

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COURSE: Takes racers through the Wrangell-St. Elias Mountain Range. Competitors travel down frozen rivers, across glacier moraine, up and down glaciers, over mountain passes and across open rivers.

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HOW FAR: Approximately 150 miles, depending which route you follow.

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TRAVEL TIME: Last year's winners, Eric Lindskoog and Gabe Lydic, completed the course in 6 days, 10 hours.

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RECOMMENDED GEAR: Racers are encouraged to bring the following: Food and fuel for at least 10 days, stove, cook pot, skis, tent, repair kit, sunglasses, sun screen, extra skis and poles, arctic sleeping bag, sled and/or pack, compass and maps, flares and saw.

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RISK FACTOR: No one in the history of the race has been hurt or had to be rescued. Racers are responsible for any expenses incurred for rescues or attempted rescues. Competitors are advised to take out insurance through the Alaskan Alpine Club Mountain Rescue Expense Fund. In the event of an emergency, race organizers will contact an emergency number supplied by each racer, the Alaska State Troopers and the Alaska Alpine Rescue Group.

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FOR SAFETY PURPOSES: Racers usually travel in groups of two or more and those racers traveling a glacier route are required to travel in pairs and must carry specific mountaineering equipment—ice axe, crampons, 60 feet of 9-11 mm climbing rope, rescue pulley, ascenders, end shovel, carabiner, ice, screw and two-foot picket.

By **TIM MOWRY**
Outdoors Editor

While it may not seem like standard race equipment for most skiers, Gabe Lydic is going to make sure he has a Leatherman with him in this year's Alaska Wilderness Classic Ski Race.

"I've got that on my list this year," said Lydic earlier this week.

In a race like the Wilderness Classic, a 150-mile trek through some of the most remote, pristine wilderness in Alaska, a Leatherman is a necessity.

Lydic and his partner, Eric Lindskoog, found that out the hard way last year when a binding on one of Lindskoog's skis ripped out three days into the race.

"We didn't bring a Leatherman or anything, not even a screwdriver," said Lydic.

They tried to jerry-rig the binding but without tools, they had no luck screwing the binding back onto the ski. The duo ended up skiing 5-10 miles to a sheep hunting camp near Solo Mountain, where they had spotted planes landing earlier in the day. Luckily for Lydic and Lindskoog, the camp owners were hauling in supplies for the fall hunting season.

"They were real nice and gave us a screwdriver to fix the binding," said Lydic, "but we had to ski half a day out of our way to get there."

Such is life on the Alaska Wilderness Classic Ski Race, perhaps the longest, wildest, self-contained ski race in the world. No feed and watering stations, no checkpoints, no re-supply points, no repair shops.

Or as veteran backcountry racer Bob Groseclose put it, "Dominoes doesn't deliver out there."

As a Fairbanks attorney, Groseclose sits in an office or courtroom most days. Which is why he makes a practice of doing something like the Wilderness Classic every year.

"It gets me out into Alaska," said Groseclose, who will be doing his third winter Wilderness Classic after skipping last year's race to ski in the 320-mile Iditasport Extreme. "We live here in all this wilderness and need to take stock of what's out there and appreciate it."

"Otherwise we might as well live in Los Angeles," he said.

The 12th annual winter Wilderness Classic begins Sunday at Devil's Mountain Lodge in Nabesna and depending on the weather, the winners are expected to reach the finish at McCarthy Lodge in about five days.

Racers must carry any and all supplies with them, either by towing a sled or carrying a backpack. Organizers recommend enough food, fuel (to melt snow and cook) and cold weather gear to last a minimum of 10 days.

The race course changes every three years. Prior to the Nabesna to McCarthy route the last two years, the race was held on a 160-mile loop in the Brooks Range (1994-96). The three years before that, racers went from Tok to Summit Lake through the Alaska Range (1991-93).

From 1988-90, the race was held in the Alaska Range from Black Rapids Glacier to McKinley Park. The inaugural race in 1987 went through the Chugiak Mountains from Eureka to Valdez.

The only course race organizer Dave Cramer hasn't covered is the Eureka to Valdez route. He said he likes this year's route better than those through Brooks Range and Alaska Range.

"This is the one I think is best," said the 50-year-old Cramer, who will be traveling in a foursome with his 23-year-old son, Eric, along with Groseclose and Rourke Williams. "There are several viable routes you can take and all of them are challenging in their own way."

See CLASSIC, Page C-2

Race tests endurance, resolve

"You see some great country. The Wrangell Mountains are awesome."

Gabe Lydic

CLASSIC: 150-mile ski race

Continued from Page C-1
 "You see great country on all of them," he said.

This year's race takes skiers through the Wrangell-St. Elias Range, some of Alaska's most remote, pristine country. Racers spend much of their time skiing up and down glaciers, surrounded by towering, snow-capped mountains.

"You see some great country," said Lydic. "The Wrangell Mountains are awesome."

Racers have their choice of three basic routes, all of which converge at the Nizina Glacier and Nizina River, about 60 miles from the finish. Each route requires a different level of mountaineering skill, depending how much is on glaciers.

Cramer said it hasn't been as warm around Tok as it has in Fairbanks and there should be plenty of snow to race on. "It's not going as fast down here," he said. "I think we're going to have decent conditions. It doesn't much different than last year."

Even with the detour to fix Lindskoog's ski, Lydic and Lindskoog still went on to win the race in 6 days, 10 hours last year.

This is Lydic's third race. In addition to last year's win with Lindskoog, Lydic teamed up with Art Ward of Salcha to win the race from Tok to Summit Lake five years ago.

"This is way better than racing," said Lydic, who five years ago was one of the top junior ski racers in the U.S. "This is what I've been looking forward to all year."

The 22-year-old Lydic will be traveling with his wife, La-ona, this year but don't expect that to slow them down. She was a member of the University of Alaska Fairbanks cross country ski team this year.

"She'll speed me up," predicted Lydic, who's hoping for a five-day finish. "We're just going to travel as far as we can every day."

Lydic plans to take the same route as he and Lindskoog did last year—through Cooper Pass, up Russell Glacier, over Skolai Pass and down the Nizina Glacier and Nizina River.

"We keep on the lower part of the glaciers so we don't have to take sleds or crampons or ice screws or anything like that,"

said Lydic, who will carry only a backpack.

Lindskoog will be back to contend for the title, too. Though he has been teaching school in Hooper Bay in southwest Alaska all winter, Lydic expects him to be in good shape. "He said he's been skiing from Hooper Bay to Chevak and back—about 20 miles—all winter," said Lydic. "He says it's great skiing out there."

Lydic said the nature of the race—unbroken trails over sometimes steep and rough terrain—requires skiers to use classical technique rather than freestyle.

It's on glare ice and frozen overflow that racers make their best time. "You just double pole and you can cruise," said Lydic.

Groseclose and his partner, Rourke Williams, another Wilderness Classic regular, are planning to take the most technical route. They will climb up the crevasse-strewn Nabesna Glacier, skirt around the side of Regal Mountain and turn down either the Rohi or Regal glacier, depending where they come out. They will cross one pass at about 9,800 feet.

"I'm hoping it's not too technical; I've only got one snow picket and one ice screw," he said, referring to equipment used to in crevasse rescues and steep climbing.

Groseclose, a veteran of several summer Wilderness Classic races, said he studied aerial photos of Nabesna Glacier this summer. "It looks like there are a lot cracks," he said.

Taking the weather into consideration, Groseclose budgeted a week for the race. "I'd like to do it within five days," he said. "That gives me a couple weather days just in case."

"Conditions are everything," he said.

Last year, for example, racers ran into deep snow in the high country and had to slog through the fresh snow for about 60 miles.

"We plowed through a lot of snow last year," said Williams, who has done the race often enough he has lost count. "I hope we don't get any this year."

Shawn Harper, who was also on the UAF ski team, will be one of a half dozen rookies in the race. His travel partners—Crane Johnson, Brian Pekar and Andy Monaghan—are all rookies and UAF students, as well.

"We heard about it last year and we've wanted to do it ever since then," said Harper, a 21-year-old junior who has no illusions of victory for the foursome. "We're just trying to do it."

The team will head up the Chisana Glacier and come down the Rohn and Nizina glaciers, he said. They plan to tow three sleds between the four of them and Johnson and Pekar are experienced mountaineers, said Harper.

While Harper and his team are rookies, Williams, Groseclose and Cramer represent the "old guard" of the race, having finished more than a dozen races between the three of them. It's as if a magnet draws them to the starting line each year.

"It's part of life," Williams said. "Once you do it you're hooked."

Cramer feels the same way about the event.

"I think you kind of get hooked on it," said Cramer, who owns his own construction engineering consulting company. "Every year you look forward to it and at end of race never want to do it again."

"But that dissipates and all you remember is the good parts," said Cramer.

TRAIL RE

Continued from Page C-1
 crossing is still solid about 1 miles in. There is a little bit of tundra showing in spots along the trail. It won't be long. Check on conditions with the folks at Earthsong Lodge (683-2863).

Jeff Studdert Racegrounds

Trails are still mushable by they are icy and fast in the morning when it's cold, especially in shaded areas. There is 6 inches of water/ice before the pole line. There are some bare spots where the sun has melted the trail. The 30-mile extension was put in but not used for the Open North American Championship last weekend so that's a option for distance teams. Expect all the trails to be a little rough.

Moose Mountain

The downhill ski area at Murphy Dome Road announced on Monday it has shut down for the season unless a half foot of snow falls. There are lots of bare spots on the hill. There is a bar/luck/barbecue at the base lodge on Saturday at 1 p.m. for ski patrol, ski school, junior racer season passholders, bus drivers and staff.

Mt. Aurora Skiland

Not much melting on the north-facing slope this week so it's still good skiing. There are no bare spots on the mountain. Open 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday. If we get little snow and it stays cool should be open another week. Tickets are \$3 off after 1 p.m. Open Saturday and Sunday. Call the ski report at 456-SNOW.

OUTDOORS

IN BRIEF

Staff report

Fish and Game plans bear baiting clinics

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game will be holding three black bear baiting clinics in April for hunters who do not have their black bear baiting certification card.

Clinics are scheduled for Thursday at Brigade Theater or Fort Wainwright from 7-9:30 p.m., April 7 in the Cop Thunder Building on Eielson Air Force Base from 6:30-9 p.m. on

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