

## DENALI NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE

### 1987 MOUNTAINEERING SUMMARY

For the second year in a row a new record was set for the number of mountaineers attempting to climb Mount McKinley. Despite the increase in attempts, extended periods of poor weather throughout the Alaska Range resulted in the lowest success rate since 1971.

Previous winter's snow falls were about average for the Alaska Range. However, extended periods of clear weather during the late winter and early spring created extensive avalanche conditions throughout the Range. At least five and possibly six persons died in avalanche related accidents this season.

An Alaskan team, Art Mannix and Chris Leibundgut, attempted a winter ascent of the South Buttress of Mount McKinley from the West Fork of the Ruth Glacier. They reached 15,000' before frostbite caused their retreat. The only other winter mountaineering activity in the park was a first winter ascent of Mount Silverthrone by a party of three Alaskans. Brian and Diane Okonek and Rick Ernst reached the summit via the Brooks Glacier and the Silverthrone Col.

The High Latitude Research Project was not funded this season, but a short research project was conducted by several medical personnel. Dr. Peter Hackett coordinated the project in which they investigated a possible link between retinal hemorrhaging and cerebral edema of climbers at altitude. Following completion of the project, the Mountaineering Rangers staffed the camp for the remainder of the season. Once again, the transportation of the camp to and from the mountain was provided by the U.S. Army, 242nd Aviation Company, Ft Wainwright, Alaska.

The National Park Service conducted two, three-week expeditions on Mount McKinley. All were on the West Buttress route. We continue to emphasize environmentally sound expeditionary climbing and sanitation practices. In addition, mountaineers are encouraged to conduct their own evacuations when ever possible. During emergencies, the 14,200' medical/rescue camp serves as a base from which most Mount McKinley rescue operations are coordinated.

All statistics in this report are for portions of the Alaska Range within the boundaries of Denali National Park and Preserve. Where specifically noted, statistics apply only for Mount McKinley.

#### **Interesting Statistics:**

In 1987, new all time records were set for the number of persons attempting to climb Mount McKinley:

1978	-	539
1979	-	533
1980	-	659
1981	-	612
1982	-	696
1983	-	709
1984	-	695
1985	-	645
1986	-	755
1987	-	817

**Success Rate:**

- \* 251 (31%) of those attempting the summit of Mount McKinley were successful. This was the lowest success rate since 1971 when 29% of the 163 climbers reached the summit.
- \* None of those attempting the summit of Mount Foraker were successful.
- \* None of those attempting the summit of Mount Hunter were successful.

**Acute Mountain Sickness:** 128 (16%) had symptoms, of these:

- \* 91 (11%) were mild
- \* 32 (4%) were moderate
- \* 5 (1%) was severe

**Frostbite:** 55 (7%) reported some degree of frostbite; two of these required hospitalization.

**West Buttress Route:** 687 (84%) of the climbers on Mount McKinley were on the popular West Buttress route.

**Mountain Guiding:** 244 (30%) of the climbers traveled with one of the authorized guiding companies. The overall success rate of these groups was 23%. The majority of these trips occurred on the West Buttress route, but other guided trips were attempted on the Muldrow, West Rib, Cassin and South Buttress. No guided expedition reached the summit of Mount McKinley by any route other than the West Buttress.

**Foreign Climbers:** 232 (28%) of the climbers were from foreign countries. 16 nationalities were represented:

Australia - 23	Netherlands - 6
Austria - 18	New Zealand - 2
Canada - 27	Romania - 1
France - 21	Mexico - 4
Great Britain - 40	Poland - 6
Israel - 2	Switzerland - 29
Italy - 4	West Germany - 14
Japan - 33	Yugoslavia - 2

**Record number of climbers on Mount McKinley during a given week:** A new all time high of 314 climbers were on the slopes of Mount McKinley for the week ending May 19th.

**New Routes and Interesting Ascents:**

Mount McKinley: No new routes were completed during 1987. The Northwest Buttress was climbed by a team of four, two of which reached the North summit. The South Face, Haston-Scott route, received its third ascent by a party of two Americans, Paul Cagner and Bill Crouse.

Broken Tooth: Muggs Stump and Steve Quinlin climbed a new technical route on the South Face. Tom Bauman and Jack Lewis completed a first ascent of the West Ridge.

Mount Bradley: In early July, two Austrians, Andi Orgler and Sepp Jochler completed a new line on the 5,000' East Ridge that ascends from the Ruth Glacier. They called the impressive route the East Pillar. This was not only a new route, but also a first ascent of Mount Bradley.

Huttenturm: Orgler and Jochler then crossed the Ruth Glacier and put up a short, new line on the west side of a physical feature they called the Huttenturm.

Kichatna Spires: Seth Shaw, Robert Tingle, James Garrett and Conrad Anker climbed the Southeast Face of Peak 7360' (Gurney Peak). Jack Tackle and Jim Donini climbed the South Buttress of Peak 6847'. Tackle and Donini may not have actually reached the summit.

Mount Mather area: A new route Peak 9810' was completed by an Italian team of six, led by Cosimo Zappelli.

West Tripyramid Peak: A National Park Service patrol completed the first ascent of the Northwest Ridge. Team members were Scott Gill, Randy Waitman and Cliff Beaver.

### **Accidents:**

On May 3rd a large group from the United Kingdom was descending the West Rib on Mount McKinley. At about the 14,800' level, one of the members slipped and fell 800', sustaining serious head injuries. The group's CB radios were set to broadcast on a frequency not monitored by basecamp, the air taxi operators or the National Park Service. Thus, a member of the group had to ski out to basecamp to report the accident. Word of the accident was relayed to the Talkeetna Ranger Station at 2230 hrs of the same day. Insufficient light remained to conduct a rescue that day, so plans were made to attempt a helicopter hoist evacuation early on May 4th. No private helicopters with winch capabilities were available. Assistance was requested through the Rescue Coordination Center at Elmendorf Air Force Base. The following morning, an Air Force C130 arrived to orbit the mountain to provide radio communications and the Army Chinook Helicopters lowered an Air Force "PJ", to the accident site. The injured climber was stabilized and then hoisted from the accident site. This was only the second hoist operation to ever be conducted on Mount McKinley.

Also in early May, an experienced team of two Yugoslavians arrived for a climb of the West Buttress. They had been delayed several days when their luggage was lost by their airline, and they hoped to make up their lost time by climbing rapidly. They moved to 14,200' in three days. The next day they began to ascend, but one team member felt ill and returned to 14,200' to rest while his partner continued. The following day, the ill climber's condition deteriorated and he became severely ataxic. Fortunately, he was met by a NPS patrol who sledged him down to Windy Corner where his condition improved enough for him to begin his own descent. In the mean time, oxygen was flown via helicopter from Talkeetna but clouds prevented direct delivery to the Yugoslavian. It was dropped to another party who shuttled it to the Yugoslavian who was able to ski back to basecamp without further assistance.

At the beginning of May, two Alaskans registered for a climb of the SE Ridge of Mount Foraker. The following day, two Canadians registered for the same climb. On May 15th, the American team's due out date, their air taxi operator was unable to locate any sign of anyone on that route. The National Park Service searched the route by helicopter and found tracks leading into an avalanche starting zone. Mountaineering equipment was discovered mixed with avalanche debris at the bottom of that avalanche nearly 3,000' below where the tracks were seen. A ground search/recovery was determined to be too hazardous. Although no bodies were seen or recovered, observations of the equipment seen from the hovering helicopter and the recovery of a stuff sack, positively linked the American climbers to the accident. A yellow climbing suit was also seen which matches the description of a suit worn by one of the Canadians. All evidence points to the four men having been swept to their deaths in the avalanche. In 1978 two Japanese were killed in an avalanche just above where the Americans and Canadians were hit. During the intervening years, climbing parties have regularly reported close calls near the 10,500' - 12,000' level of the SE Ridge.

On May 15th, a two-person team from Anchorage registered for an ascent of the West Ridge of Mount Hunter. On May 22nd, the two men were approaching the summit when they triggered a soft slab avalanche that swept both men about 200 yards down the slope they had just ascended. One man was

almost completely buried. After considerable effort and between 30 and 45 minutes, he was able to extricate himself. He then followed their rope to his partner who was completely buried. Another 10 to 15 minutes were required to extricate him. There was no sign of life. The weather was severe and the pair had carried no bivouac gear, so the survivor was forced to begin an immediate solo descent of the heavily crevassed and corniced West Ridge. After several close calls, he was able to reach another climbing party at the 10,600' level. Poor weather prevented their descent until May 27th and covered the body which was not recovered.

Toward the end of May, a female member of a three person Japanese expedition became ill at 17,200' on the West Buttress. Weather began to deteriorate so the group descended to the 14,200' basin. Once there her condition did not improve but members of her own expedition did not seem concerned. A member of a nearby French expedition noticed she was unable to walk and sledged her to the medical camp where she was diagnosed as having pulmonary edema. There she was treated with Diamox and continuous oxygen. The following day she was still unable to walk. Weather prevented an air evacuation, so a ground team was organized to sled her to the 11,000' level where a French and American team then continued on to basecamp. Throughout the entire evacuation the other members of her party seemed unconcerned and unwilling to assist in the evacuation. She recovered once back to sea level in Talkeetna.

At the end of May, a West German team of two made a very rapid ascent of the West Buttress. They climbed from 7,200' at basecamp to the 17,200' camp in five days. On the sixth day they began their summit push, each travelling separately. Bad weather turned one man back at the 19,200' level. That night both men were tired but seemed ok. The following morning one man was unresponsive and had a pulse of 90 and respiration rate of 56/minute. He was placed on supplemental oxygen and lowered down the Rescue Gully and reached the 14,200' medical/rescue camp at 1400 hours that same day. His condition remained serious but was stabilized. He was air evacuated the following day. The diagnosis was severe pulmonary edema and cerebral edema.

In early June, an American was descending the Messner Couloir, plunge stepping into soft snow. During one of the steps, his cramponed boot snagged on either a pack strap or some other item dangling from his harness. He lost his balance, pitched forward and took a 1500' tumbling fall. A soft patch of snow stopped the fall but the climber was battered and sustained a fractured hip. Fortunately, the fall had been seen by climbers in the 14,200' basin. A rescue team was quickly organized and the injured climber was lowered to a landing site and air evacuated by helicopter.

In early July, a Polish team of two ascended the Messner Couloir. Their final camp was placed at 18,900'. From there they went to the summit, descended back to their camp, then began to glissade diagonally toward the 17,200' camp on the West Buttress. During the glissade down the 30-40 degree slope, the lead man hit an icy patch, lost control and fell 2600'. His partner cut over to the West Buttress and made a rapid descent to the 14,200' basin. There, climbers were able to ascend and locate the lifeless victim. The team brought the body down to 14,200' where it was flown off the mountain.

In early July, an eleven member guided expedition was camped just below Windy Corner on the West Buttress at about 12,900'. It had been snowing during the past evening but the guides said the large couloir and adjacent face of the West Buttress had been sloughing off there by cleaning itself. At about 0530 hrs the following morning, the deposition zone created from the sloughing of the upper reaches of the couloir broke loose and the resulting slide tore through the camp, and buried four of the five tents including nine of the eleven expedition members. The two guides were able to extricate themselves, then with the help of the two team members who were not buried, all of the other people were located and extricated. Miraculously, no one was seriously injured. Four of the tents were destroyed. An additional piece of good fortune was excellent, rather mild weather with little or no wind. All members had been sleeping at the time of the accident, so protective clothing was at a minimum. This is the third avalanche related incident at this location.

In mid-June an American soloist registered to climb the SE Ridge of Mount Foraker and the Cassin Ridge of Mount McKinley. Other climbers were able to persuade him to change his plans to the West Buttress. Once at the 14,200' camp he switched to the upper West Rib and successfully reached the summit. He descended to the NE Fork of the Kahiltna Glacier and announced his plans to another party to travel up to "take a look" at the Cassin. He was never seen again. During the search, which took place after his due-out-date of July 20, tracks were seen proceeding up the NE Fork but then turning into a cirque below and to the west of the start of the West Rib. The tracks ended in avalanche debris.

**Trends and items of special concern:**

Fatalities: Seven people lost their lives in mountaineering related accidents in Denali National Park and Preserve during 1987. This is a significant increase over the past five years and the greatest number of fatalities since 1980 when eight people died. The quadruple avalanche fatalities on Mount Foraker were a major contributor to the increase. In addition, this was the first year since 1979 that a fatality occurred on a mountain other than McKinley (four on Mount Foraker and one on Mount Hunter). The number of fatalities on Mount McKinley was two. Below is a representation of fatalities over the past 10 years:

YEAR	MT. MCKINLEY	ALASKA RANGE EXCEPT MCKINLEY
1978	2	0
1979	2	1
1980	8	0
1981	6	0
1982	0	0
1983	2	0
1984	2	0
1985	2	0
1986	4	0
1987	2	5

For 1987, we expanded the slide/tape mountaineering orientation to include French and Spanish in addition to the German, Japanese and English versions which were available previously. We also constructed a storage box to house rescue equipment at the 17,200' level on the West Buttress. That cache is now in place. The information brochure Mountaineering was revised and we hope to expand it to Spanish and French for 1988. It is currently available in English, German and Japanese.

For more information, or to request mountaineering information or registration forms, please contact me.

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<u>MOUNT McKINLEY</u>	<u>EXPEDITIONS</u>	<u>CLIMBERS</u>	<u>SUCCESSFUL CLIMBERS</u>
West Buttress	154	483	165
West Buttress (Guided)	27	204	56
Muldrow	1	3	0
Muldrow (Guided)	1	14	0
West Rib	6	44	12
West Rib (Guided)	2	13	0
Cassin	8	17	9
Cassin (Guided)	1	4	0
South Buttress	4	11	2
South Buttress (Guided)	1	9	0
East Buttress	1	3	0
Messner Couloir	3	6	3
South Face	1	2	2
Northwest Buttress	1	4	2 (N. PEAK)
East Buttress	1	3	0
	<b>211</b>	<b>817</b>	<b>251</b>
MOUNT FORAKER	4	8	0
MOUNT FORAKER (Guided)	2	11	0
MOUNT HUNTER	6	17	0
MOUNT HUNTINGTON	2	4	2
MOUNT HUNTINGTON (Guided)	1	4	0
KAHILTNA DOME (Guided)	1	4	4
MOUNT BRADLEY	1	2	2
MOUNT BARRILLE	1	2	2
MOUNT DAN BEARD	1	2	0
MOUNT DICKEY	1	2	0
PEAK 11,300	4	12	6
PEAK 11,300 (Guided)	1	4	4
MOOSES TOOTH	11	34	14
MOOSES TOOTH (Guided)	1	3	3
BROKEN TOOTH	3	6	4
MOUNT SILVERTHRONE	1	3	3
WEST TRIPYRAMID	1	3	3
KICHATNA SPIRES	2	6	4
MOUNT RUSSELL	1	2	0
LITTLE SWITZERLAND	3	3	N/A
MISCELLANEOUS SKI TRIPS	23	116	N/A

NOTE: Since registration is required only for Mount McKinley and Mount Foraker climbs, statistics for other climbs represent those climbers who voluntarily checked in with the Mountaineering Rangers. Other climbs, especially in the area of the Ruth Glacier, are likely to have occurred.

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1987 SEARCH AND RESCUE INCIDENTS\*

<u>NAME</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>CIR#</u>	<u>NATURE OF INCIDENT</u>	<u>METHOD OF EVACUATION</u>	<u>COMPANY INVOLVED</u>	<u>GOVERNMENT COST</u>
DARKE	5/3	870023	Fall w/ Injuries	Heli-winch/ Helicopter	US ARMY & others	\$33,754**
JANMIK	5/7	870025	CE/PE	Sled/self	Soloy	\$ 1,568
DAUGHERTY PRATT BULT GUTHERIE	5/14	870029	Avalanche & fall w/ fatalities	None	AK Heli Geeting Hudson	\$13,836
BENSON	5/21	870039	Avalanche Fatality	None	None	0
WOODLAND REGGARA	5/28	870045	Search (Unfounded)	Self	Hudson	\$ 1,139
WATANABE	5/28	870047	PE	Ground	None	0
EGGERT	6/2	870056	PE/CE	Ground/ Air	Soloy	\$ 3,435
BOHANNON	6/7	870067	Fall w/ Injuries	Ground/ Air	ERA	\$ 6,594
SHARP JEWELL	6/	870086	Search (Unfounded)	Self	Geeting Hudson, ERA	\$10,184
JANKOWIAK	7/3	870134	Fall w/ Fatality	Ground/ Air	TAT	\$ 655
HOOVER	7/20	870184	Search - Never found (Fatality)	None	Soloy, K2, AK Heli, Geeting, Hudson	<u>\$14,584</u>
<b>TOTAL</b>						<b>\$86,336</b>
<b>NPS TOTAL</b>						<b>\$59,205</b>

\*Includes mountaineering associated incidents only. Does not include incidents where no rescue effort was organized such as frostbite injuries where the evacuation was completed under the victim's own power.

\*\* Includes estimate of all military costs.

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1987 MOUNTAIN GUIDE CONCESSION SUMMARY

<u>GUIDE SERVICE</u>	<u>ROUTE</u>	<u>EXPEDITIONS</u>	<u>CLIMBERS</u>	<u>SUCCESSFUL CLIMBERS</u>
AMERICAN ALPINE INSTITUTE	WEST BUTTRESS	2	16	0
	RUTH GLACIER	2	9	N/A
ALASKA-DENALI GUIDING	WEST BUTTRESS	1	12	0
	TRAVERSE (WB-MULDROW)	1	10	10
	RUTH GLACIER	4	26	N/A
	BROOKS	1	6	6
	KAHILTNA DOME	1	4	4
	KAHILTNA GLACIER	2	6	N/A
	CHELATNA LAKE	1	8	N/A
FANTASY RIDGE	WEST BUTTRESS	3	16	6
	SOUTH BUTTRESS	1	9	0
	WEST RIB	1	6	0
	WEST BUTTRESS SKI	1	6	N/A
	HUNTINGTON	1	4	0
	PEAK 11,300	1	4	4
	MOOSES TOOTH	1	3	3
	FORAKER (SE RIDGE)	1	6	0
GENET EXPEDITIONS	WEST BUTTRESS	11	86	30
	TRAVERSE (WB-MULDROW)	1	7	7
	WEST RIB	1	7	0
	RUTH GLACIER			
MOUNTAIN TRIP	WEST BUTTRESS	4	26	0
	CASSIN	1	4	0
	FORAKER (SE RIDGE)	1	5	0
	KAHILTNA GLACIER	1	9	N/A
NATIONAL OUTDOOR LEADERSHIP SCHOOL	MULDROW GLACIER	1	14	0
	WEST BUTTRESS	1	6	3
RAINIER MOUNTAINEERING INC.	WEST BUTTRESS	2	25	0
	RUTH GLACIER	1	5	N/A