

1981 MOUNTAINEERING SUMMARY

DENALI NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE

The 1981 climbing season on Mount McKinley came in like a lamb and went out like a lion. The fair weather predominating in May and most of June allowed many climbers to complete short, safe, and successful expeditions. But the latter part of the season was a different story. Beginning with a severe storm in the last week of June, the bad weather continued almost uninterrupted for over five weeks. Occasional and short breaks in the weather did allow some climbers to complete their climbs, but all who were on the mountain in July were humbled and impressed by the severity of Mount McKinley's weather.

A group camped at 17,000 feet on the West Buttress route reported that six feet of snow fell in one day. The following day winds of 100 miles per hour removed every bit of new snow from the camp. Another group at 14,000 feet on the West Buttress had nine (9) feet of snow fall on their camp in two days. Drifting snow built to incredible depths. In just a few hours, snow drifted to a depth of twelve feet and buried a camp on the South Buttress.

The storms may have contributed to the deaths of the four climbers. Three Japanese climbers planned an ascent of the difficult American Direct route on the South Face after successfully climbing the West Buttress in June. They were last seen on June 30th approaching the base of the South Face. We assume that the three climbers were buried in an avalanche.

A fourth Japanese climber died of cerebral and pulmonary edema, at the 11,800 foot-level on the West Buttress route in early August. Bad weather forced the climber and his group to stay at that camp for several days, during which time he became seriously ill. The day after the climber became ill, his group made a difficult descent in poor weather in an unsuccessful attempt to save his life.

Two other climbers died earlier in the year in separate accidents not necessarily related to the weather. An American climber attempting to solo ascent of the East Buttress route in April disappeared and was never found. In May, another American climber was killed in a tragic accident when his partner fell into a crevasse on the Peters Glacier. The first climber was apparently not injured in the fall but was wedged so tightly that his partner, suffering from a broken shoulder was unable to pull him out of the crevasse. After many hours of effort, his partner was forced to leave him in the crevasse.

This last incident serves as a tragic reminder of the need for all climbers on Mount McKinley to be as nearly self sufficient as possible when problems arise. The two were carrying a radio with them, but because of their location on the mountain, they were not able to contact anyone, until two weeks after the incident when the survivor was able to contact an aircraft overhead. They had no one else turn to for help. Travelling as a group of two on an Alaskan glacier leaves limited possibilities for self-rescue in case of a crevasse fall.

All too often in recent years, climbers have come to depend in the availability of helicopters for rescues on Mount McKinley. This should not be the case. Waiting at the higher altitudes with a climber suffering from altitude illness while a helicopter is requested may well prove fatal. Climbers should be able to recognize the symptoms of an altitude problem early enough to evacuate the sick climber by foot or by sled. Weather conditions are not always available. Whether confronted with an altitude problem, frostbite, or injury, an expedition should first consider how it can handle its own problem without any assistance.

Climbing groups should plan for this kind of self-sufficiency when they organize their expeditions. Group size (enough to effect a rescue without outside assistance), rescue training, extra rescue equipment, and extra food should all be considered in the planning stages.

This advice should not be taken lightly. Out of every 100 climbers who attempt Mount McKinley, one dies. Mount McKinley is a dangerous mountain, and those who venture on its slopes should be experienced, equipped and self-sufficient.

612 climbers attempted Mount McKinley in 1981. Barely half, or 421 successfully climbed to the top. Only 6 climbers, out of 19 who tried, climbed Mount Foraker. Four of these were French climbers who also made a successful ski descent of the Southeast Ridge.

The most notable ascents of 1981 were not made on Mount McKinley or Mount Foraker. Two climbers teamed up in the spring to do the first ascent of the East Face of the Moose's Tooth. One of the two then climbed the North Buttress of Mount Hunter with a new partner. Both were very difficult and impressive climbs.

Two British climbers completed a first ascent of the North Face of the Rooster's Comb and then a new route on Mount Huntington. A large German group climbed eleven peaks in the Sheldon Amphitheater. Many of these climbs may have been first ascents.

The High Latitude Health Research Project of the University of Alaska Anchorage began what is hoped to be a several year medical research program on Mount McKinley this summer. Activity this summer was limited to a lengthy questionnaire which was given to climbers as they returned from their climbs. The questionnaire dealt with such issues as type of equipment used, speed of ascent, weather conditions, and medical problems encountered. The medical section primarily covered high altitude sickness and frostbite.

Although the Project was only approved late in the spring and the questionnaires were put together under a tight deadline, over 300 questionnaires were completed and returned. The information from these questionnaires is being entered into a computer now and should contribute greatly to our understanding of medical problems on the mountain. Mount McKinley's combination of high altitude and extreme cold weather is found virtually nowhere else in the world. Considering the large number of climbers on Mount McKinley each year, the mountain is an excellent site for the study of altitude and cold related problems. Although funding and logistical problems are not yet solved, the Project hopes to place teams of physicians on the mountain next year and in succeeding years. These teams will staff camps at the Kahiltna base camp and also at the 14,200 feet on the West Buttress during at least a major portion of the climbing season. They will be doing actual field research and may also be available to help climbers with serious medical problems. We hope that more information regarding this project, as well as a preliminary summary of the 300 questionnaires completed this summer, will be available later this winter.

This year, for the first time, the number of guide services operating on Mount McKinley was limited by the National Park Service. Six guide services were selected as concessionaires late in 1980 to provide mountaineering guide services on Mount McKinley and other mountains within the boundaries of the old Mount McKinley National Park as it existed before the expansion of the park on December 2, 1980 (which also changed the name of the park to Denali National Park and Preserve). The six guide services selected were:

Aerie Northwest
Seattle, Washington

Fantasy Ridge Alpinism
Estes Park, Colorado

Genet Expeditions
Talkeetna, Alaska

Mountain Trip
Kasilof, Alaska

North Cascades Alpine School
Bellingham, Washington

Rainier Mountaineering, Inc.
Tacoma, Washington

Anyone interested in climbing Mount McKinley with a guide service should contact one of the six operators listed above. Only Concessioner guide services are approved to operate on Mount McKinley. Other guide services may take clients on the lands added to Denali National Park in 1980, although they must contact the National Park Service to obtain a commercial business license.

National Park Service regulations for the last decade or so have required that all groups on Mount McKinley carry a two-way radio and that all climbers on the two peaks submit a physicians statement certifying proper health and physician condition. In November 1980, these regulations were dropped-- a move which received the support of most of the climbing community. We, of course, still recommend that all climbers be in good health and in excellent physical condition. Also, we very strongly recommend that all groups on the two high peaks carry radios. Even though the radios commonly carried by climbers have many limitations (especially at lower altitudes), a radio may prove to be the only source of assistance in the event of an accident or severe illness. While it may not be necessary for every party on the crowded West Buttress route to carry a radio, any party may have the need to use one in an emergency. All parties climbing the less popular routes, or climbing early or late in the season, should have a radio.

The Talkeekna Ranger Station will again be staffed during the 1982 climbing season. For further information, stop in there or at the Denali Park headquarters, or write to:

Mountaineering Ranger
Denali National Park and Preserve
P.O. Box 9
McKinley Park, Alaska 99755

Robert A. Gerhard
Mountaineering Ranger

DENALI NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE
MOUNTAINEERING SUMMARY 1981

| | Expeditions | Climbers | Successful |
|-------------------------|-------------|------------|------------|
| Mount McKinley | | | |
| West Buttress | 93 | 321 | 164 |
| West Buttress(guided) | 14 | 104 | 75 |
| West Rib | 18 | 63 | 27 |
| West Rib (guided) | 1 | 6 | 6 |
| Muldrow Glacier | 5 | 23 | 2 |
| Muldrow Glacier(guided) | 1 | 17 | 7 |
| Cassin Ridge | 16 | 35 | 20 |
| South Face | 2 | 5 | 0 |
| South Buttress | 2 | 8 | 5 |
| South Buttress(guided) | 1 | 10 | 10 |
| East Buttress | 3 | 13 | 4 |
| East Face(guided) | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| Wickersham Wall | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| Messner Couloir | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| | <u>170</u> | <u>612</u> | <u>321</u> |
| Mount Foraker | 7 | 19 | 6 |
| Mount Foraker(guided) | 1 | 5 | 0 |
| Mount Hunter | 5 | 11 | 2 |
| Mount Huntington | 5 | 15 | 9 |
| Moose's Tooth | 3 | 14 | 14 |
| Mount Silverthrone | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| Rooster's Comb | 2 | 6 | 6 |
| Mount Dan Beard | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| Kahiltna Dome | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| Broken Tooth | 3 | 6 | 0 |
| Peak 12,380' | 2 | 4 | 4 |
| Mount Russell | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| Kahiltna Glacier Peaks | 3 | 15 | ? |
| Ruth Glacier Peaks | 19 | 74 | ? |
| Mount Brooks | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| | | | |
| Total | 207 | 861 | 352 |

MAJOR ASCENTS 1981

Mt. McKinley:

1. Solo Ascents of Cassin Ridge:

| | |
|-----------------|----------------|
| Mike Kennedy | Dave Cheesmond |
| c/o Climbing | 6 Sanwood |
| Box E | Grove Avenue |
| Aspen, CO 81611 | Claremont 7700 |
| | South Africa |

See Climbing #67: July/Aug 1981

2. Solo Ascents of West Rib:

| | |
|-----------------|----------------|
| Chris Landry | Dave Cheesmond |
| Box 2385 | 6 Sanwood |
| Aspen, CO 81611 | Grove Avenue |
| | Claremont 7700 |
| | South Africa |

See Climbing #67: July/Aug 1981

3. North Peak Denali

| | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| WASH McKinley Expedition | Bayrisch-Salzbürger North America 8 |
| 1. Wolfgang Stefan (ldr) | 1. Wolfgang Herzog (ldr) |
| 2. Harald Nave' | 2. Thomas Strobl |
| 3. Dr. Sebastian Holzl | 3. Gerhard Fiedelius |
| | 4. Peter Gerscher |
| | (skied from N. Peak to Denali Pass) |

Mt. Foraker

| | |
|-------------------------|---------------|
| James Merel (Ldr) | Marion Pocard |
| Rochefort | Jean-Luc Ruby |
| 73700 Bourg St. Maurice | Pierre Beguin |
| France | |

Successful ski descents of SE Ridge of Mt. Foraker and Mt. Crosson

The only other successful ascent of Mt. Foraker was by
Elan and Shari Kearney. SE Ridge.

Kearney
1212 24th Street
Bellingham, WA

Peak 12,380': Successful Ascents

1. Tom Bouman
38784 Camp Creek Rd.
Springfield, OR 97477
H. Hilbert
Box 8583
Pocatello, ID 83209
2. Rich Page
P.O. Box 2163
Estes Park, CO 80517
Possibly with Mark Frevert

Moose's Tooth:

East Face (FA)
Mugs Stump
c/o General Delivery
Snowbird, UT
Jim Bridwell

Excellent write-up and photograph in Climbing #67, July/Aug 1981

Mount Hunter:

North Buttress (FA)
Mugs Stump
c/o General Delivery
Snowbird, UT
Paul Aubrey
6 Bradford Ave.
Beckenham
Christchurch, New Zealand

Stump led all but the first two pitches of the climb.
Possibly the hardest route climbed in Alaska.

See Climbing #67, July/Aug 1981

Mount Huntington:

1. Lance Leslie (Ldr)
Keith Nyitray
Brian McCollough
Talkeetna, AK 99676
Alpine style ascent if the French
Ridge over five days. Descent via
the East Ridge over two days.
April 1981.

Other Expeditions on Huntington:

2. Reid Dowdle
General Delivery
Ketchem, ID 93340
Dave Hough
General Delivery
Ketchem, ID 83340
Jack Lewis
P.O. Box ???
Olympia, WA 98507
Mark Meshinelli
South Rd.
Plattsburgh, NY
3. Mike Trotter
4384 Harlan Dr. NE
Salem, OR 97303
Blair Barklow
795 Garden Way
Ashland, OR 97520

Rooster's Comb:

North Face (FA)

| | |
|------------------|---------------------|
| Timothy Leach | Nick Colton |
| 8 Cavendish Road | 62 Spathfield Court |
| Guiseley | Heaton Norris |
| Leeds LS20 8DW | Stockport SK4 2RP |
| England, UK | England, UK |

These two climbers reportedly made an ascent of the West Face of Mt. Huntington (possible First Ascent) and then climbed the West Buttress of Denali. Details are lacking.

- | | |
|--------------------|------------------|
| 1. Jay Kerr | 2. Keith Royster |
| Box 14694 | 3. Scott Shuey |
| Portland, OR 97214 | 4. Jim Moehl |

Jay and one other or two other climbers repeated the route on the North Face of Rooster's Comb after British. They also made an ascent of Mt. Huntington. Details are lacking.

Sheldon Amphitheater Area:

| | |
|------------------------|------------------|
| Heinz Strobach (Ldr) | 11 members total |
| c/o DAV | May 1981 |
| Memmingen WEST GERMANY | |

| | | | |
|--------------------------|-----------|------------|----------------------------|
| Mt. Silverthrone | 5/27 | 3 members | No ??? |
| Peak 12,585' | 5/29 | 4 members | No ???? |
| Peak 11,670' | 5/30 | 4 members | Ski descent Possible FA |
| Peak 12,290' | 5/30 | 4 members | Ski descent Possible FA |
| Peak 10,860' | 5/23 | 3 members | Ski descent Possible FA |
| Mt. Dickey | 5/26, 6/2 | 11 members | Ski descent |
| Explorers Peak | 5/30 | 6 members | Ski descent |
| Moose's Tooth (W) | 6/4 | 6 members | West Summit- No ??? |
| Mt. Barille | 6/6 | 2 members | Ski descent by |
| Pk 8'245 (near DanBeard) | 6/1 | 6 members | Ski descent Possible FA |

Alaska Range Ski Traverse

Mentasta Lake - Rainy Pass - 7 weeks

Scott Woolums (Leader ???? + 3 others)
10 Lakeshore Drive
Skamania, WA 98648