

## DENALI NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE

### 1982 MOUNTAINEERING SUMMARY

During the 1982 climbing season, more climbers were on Mount McKinley than ever before, but surprisingly, the summit saw fewer climbers than in several previous years. Of the record 696 climbers who attempted the mountain in 1982, only 310 (44%) successfully reached the summit. In 1981, 321 climbers (52%) made it to the top; in 1979, 351 (66%) were successful; and in 1976, 339 (57%).

Why were so few climbers successful this year? There were no long periods of consistently bad weather. Were the climbers of 1982 attempting more difficult routes, or were more inexperienced? Or were they simply less summit oriented and more concerned with enjoying their climb? Another possible reason may be that every year more climbers choose to begin their climbs in April, an extremely cold and bitterly windy time for a climb. Presumably most of the climbers choose April in order to avoid the "hordes" of climbers that are on the mountain in May, June, and July. But as April becomes more popular, these climbers may find that, instead of avoiding the hordes, they may in fact be part of the hordes in April.

Despite the lower success rate, some impressive climbs were made in 1982. A party of three completed the first winter ascent of the Cassin Ridge route (and only the second winter ascent of the mountain) in February and March. This climb was extremely difficult and dangerous, and the three climbers were lucky that the weather was basically stable the entire time they were on the mountain.

Other significant ascents were marred to some degree. An American climber made an impressive solo ascent of the Scott-Hasten route on the South Face of Mount McKinley, but suffered badly frostbitten hands and ended his climb being evacuated back to Kahiltna Base Camp by dog team. Two other climbers completed a new route on the Southeast Face of the South Buttress-- a route that they named the Isis Face. Though they completed their intended route, they stopped their climb on the South Buttress and did not continue to the summit of the mountain. And finally, a party of six completed the second ascent of the Northwest Buttress (first ascent in 1954) by making the questionable decision of sending two members to the summit while another member was suffering from cerebral edema.

Whatever the reasons for the lower success rate on the mountain, they were not responsible for a corresponding increase in the number of accidents on the mountain. For only the fourth time in the last fourteen years, there were no deaths on Mount McKinley.

Helicopters flew to Mount McKinley for rescues only four times, compared to fifteen times in 1976.

However, there were some serious incidents. Two Japanese climbers nearly perished when they fell an unknown distance down the West Rib route. The two owe their lives to the High Latitude Research Project, a team of doctors doing medical research on the mountain; who spotted the two climbers, evacuated them to their camp and cared for them for several days until the weather improved and helicopters could reach the camp.

A large German expedition faced a near tragedy when they climbed from 17,000 feet to the summit in very poor weather. Other climbers at the same camp refused to go to the summit in such weather. The bad weather got worse and the party was forced to bivouac on their descent. The next day they struggled back into the camp, several with frostbite and one with a back injury. Had there not been other climbers at the 17,000-foot camp to care for the German climbers, it is probable that some would have perished.

The same severe storm compounded another climber's problems. A young English climber, out for a day's solo ice climb on the West Buttress, fell when a cornice collapsed beneath him. He lost most of his equipment and was forced to spend a night out in a shallow snow cave. During the bivouac, both hands were badly frost-bitten and he eventually lost most of his fingers.

Many other climbers suffered frostbite in 1982. From our after-climb reports, it appears that at least 15% of all the climbers on the mountain received some degree of frostbite. Many of these were those who chose to climb in April or early May, although frostbite injury is possible at any time.

Even though many of these frostbite cases were minor, the figure is far too high. Even a relatively minor case of frostbite can result in impaired circulation and a greater risk of subsequent injury. Virtually all frostbite injuries should be preventable. Wearing the proper clothing is, in itself, not enough to prevent frostbite. Proper nutrition, proper hydration, and mental attitude are all equally important.

In addition to the two Japanese climbers on the West Rib route, the High Latitude Research Project may have saved other lives, or at least prevented some accidents. Teams of doctors spent most of May and June at two camps on the West Buttress route - one at the 7,000-foot Kahiltna Base Camp and one at 14,300 feet. Though their primary mission was to conduct medical research, the doctors also assisted numerous climbers with minor to major medical problems. Some climbers with minor altitude problems were cautioned to remain at the 14,300-foot camp for a day or so before continuing their climb, perhaps preventing more serious

altitude illness higher on the mountain. The High Latitude Research Project plans at this time to return to Mount McKinley for the 1983 climbing season.

A few other statistics about the 1982 climbing season on Mount McKinley may be of interest: 42% of the climbers came to the mountain from outside the United States. In addition to the United States, 23 separate countries were represented. It is truly an international mountain.

498 of the 696 climbers who attempted Mount McKinley did so via the popular West Buttress route. Thus nearly three out of every four climbers on the mountain can be found on one route.

183 (26%) of the 696 climbers were guided on their climbs by professional mountain guides. Most of these climbs were on the West Buttress route, but guided climbs were also made on the Muldrow Glacier, South Buttress, and Northwest Buttress routes.

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1982 MOUNTAINEERING SUMMARY

	Expeditions	Climbers	Successful
Mount McKinley			
West Buttress	97	352	129
West Buttress(guided)	17	146	82
Muldrow Glacier	4	19	13
Muldrow Glacier(guided)	1	20	13
West Rib	20	64	33
Cassin	17	43	28
South Buttress(guided)	1	11	0
NW Buttress(guided)	1	6	2-N Pk.
Wickersham Wall	3	14	0
East Buttress	2	5	3
Messner Couloir	2	4	4
SE Face (Isis Face)	1	2	0
South Face	2	6	1
Reality Ridge	1	2	2
SW Face	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>
	170	696	310
Mount Foraker	5	14	4
Mount Foraker(guided)	1	2	0
Mount Hunter	6	16	0
Mount Huntington	6	15	0
Moose's Tooth	4	8	6-W Pk.
Kitchatna Spires	3	8	5
Mount Russell	1	3	0
Little Switzerland	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>
	27	68	17
Total	197	764	327