

# Denali National Park Mountaineering Summary



1997

22nd Edition

"There was no pride of conquest, no trace of that exultation of victory some enjoy upon the first ascent of a lofty peak, no gloating over good fortune that had hoisted us a few hundred feet higher than others who had struggled and been discomfited ...rather was the feeling that a privileged communion with the high places of the earth had been granted..."

- Hudson Stuck, from his book entitled; *The Ascent of Denali: A Narrative of the First Complete Ascent of the Highest Peak in North America, written in 1914*

## A Glissade Through the Stats

The 1997 climbing season for Mount McKinley and most of the Alaska Range started with mountaineers making unsuccessful summit bids in the chilly month of December and concluded in mid-July. Thirty-seven different countries were represented as 1,110 mountaineers attempted routes to the top of North America's highest peak. More than half of the



mountaineers (51%) reached the summit, right in keeping with the historical average.

Mount Foraker, the second highest peak in the Alaska Range at 17,400 feet, saw 27

mountaineers attempting routes to its summit. Nine, (30%), of those mountaineers were successful in their summit bid. Less in altitude gain, but technically demanding, Mount Hunter at 14,573 feet saw approximately 43 mountaineers attempting routes to its summit. Since registration for Mount Hunter is not mandatory, summit statistics are not available.

In 1997 the average Denali climber was 34 years old. Of the 37 countries that

*(Continued on page 2)*

## Weathering Heights

Weather is one of the most critical factors for Denali's mountaineering expeditions. It's not only the present weather

conditions that affect an expedition's progress but also the weather pattern for several months prior to the season, that set the

hazards for the route.

In 1998 a new weather monitoring station will be installed at

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# Weathering Heights

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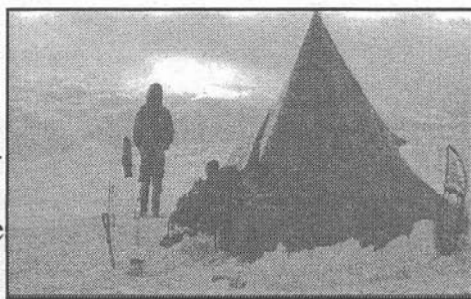
the 14,200-foot ranger camp to provide mountaineers with the most accurate and weather information available.

In 1997 the Alaska Range experienced a lower than average snowfall for the second year in a row which lead to an early breakup of the glaciers and affected route conditions for the mountaineering season.

The normal crossing of crevasses with snow bridges becomes a much different proposition with a limited amount of snow. The lack of snow exposes multiple crevasses where only a few would have been visible in normal conditions. Crossing crevasses on snow bridges is far more hazardous since the bridges

themselves are thinner and less reliable.

During the month of May weather patterns were very unstable. Mountaineers battled strong winds that proved relentless for days at a time. A sudden storm caught climbers, including a guided group, near the summit stranding them overnight. The effects of this storm were one British fatality in an independent



expedition and four guided clients requiring rescue for severe frostbite, which resulted in significant tissue loss including the loss of fingers and toes. Fantastic weather in June was a

significant factor in a greater than normal amount of mountaineers standing on the summit of Mount McKinley. Unfortunately, the mild weather did not hold over through early July when many mountaineers were stranded on the mountain due to high snowfall and rain at lower elevations.

Poor weather in early and mid-July stranded climbers on Denali. After assistance from the 14,200-foot camp with food and fuel the stranded expeditions flew off the mountain some as much as 7 days late.

## Lives saved by Lama Helicopter:

Year	#Saved
1991	7
1992	10
1993	9
1994	11
1995	7
1996	7
1997	4

# Glissading Through the Stats

(Continued from page 1)

were represented, the United States had the most climbers with 687, followed by Germany 54, Korea 44, England, 42 and Canada 29.

The number of serious accidents in the Alaska Range continued its three year downward trend with a total of ten major rescues. Mountaineering accidents this year claimed the lives of two mountaineers: an American on Mount Hunter and a British mountaineer

on Mount McKinley. In addition, a Russian climber drowned while crossing the McKinley River in the park's backcountry after completing his Denali climb.

Mountaineering rescues this season in Denali National Park and Preserve cost the National Park Service \$44,096. (The military's assistance totaled \$36,000.) In comparison to previous mountaineering seasons, 1997 had the third lowest NPS rescue costs in 14 years. (In 1988

costs were \$19,267 and in 1989 NPS costs were \$41,149.)

On a per climber basis, the cost of performing rescue in the Alaska Range:

- 1988 - \$31.28
- 1989 - \$40.78
- 1997 - \$63.15

The highest cost to the NPS for mountain rescue in Denali National Park occurred in 1992 at \$461.33 per climber.

## A Good Trend

The implementation of a 60-day pre-registration and special use fee requirement in 1995 has had a positive impact on the safety of the mountaineering program in Denali National Park. The charts below reflect some program statistics.

### Before:

YEAR	NUMBER OF CLIMBERS	NUMBER OF SAR MISSIONS
1992	935	22
1993	1108	14
1994	<u>1277</u>	20
TOTAL	3320	YEARLY AVERAGE 18.7

### After:

YEAR	NUMBER OF CLIMBERS	NUMBER OF SAR MISSIONS
1995	1220	12
1996	1148	13
1997	<u>1109</u>	10
TOTAL	3477	YEARLY AVERAGE 11.7

During the three years previous to the implementation of the requirements for pre-registration and the special use fee of \$150.00, Denali National Park averaged 18.7 mountaineering rescue missions per year. After the implementation of the new regulations, along with an aggressive education program, the number of total climbers on the mountain increased slightly but the average number of rescue missions decreased significantly from 18.7 per year to 11.7 per year. Fatal accidents also decreased after the regulations were implemented from an average of 5 to 3 mountaineering fatalities per year.

The special use fee of \$150.00 per climber funds two seasonal rangers to patrol the Kahiltna Glacier, three visitor use specialists who register climbers and provide general climbing information, and contributes to the salaries of the rangers who work at the 14,200-foot ranger camp on Mount McKinley. These rangers, along with their volunteers, contact climbing expeditions, maintain latrines for climber use, perform search and rescue, have treated over 50 serious medical cases, and have removed litter and feces from the popular West Buttress route.

## This Lama Has No Legs

The Lama SA-315B helicopter was involved in nine search and rescue operations in 1997. The helicopter did two landings at 17,200 feet, one landing at 18,300 feet, four landings at 14,200 feet and one landing at 8,300 feet for rescue operations. The Kahiltna Ranger staff

and volunteers were involved in 524 person hours of training, performing 238 short haul evolutions.

The Lama also was used to assist with firefighting operations for two fires in the park, removing the 14,200-foot camp, and installing three radio repeaters during the

climbing season.

The CH-47 Chinook Army helicopters again installed the 7,200-foot base camp and the 14,200-foot ranger camp. Rangers participated in winch training with the Chinook helicopters and provided training for pilots and crews.

**-See the box on page 2  
Lama rescue stats**



# Denali Pro: Mt. McKinley Climber Recognition Program

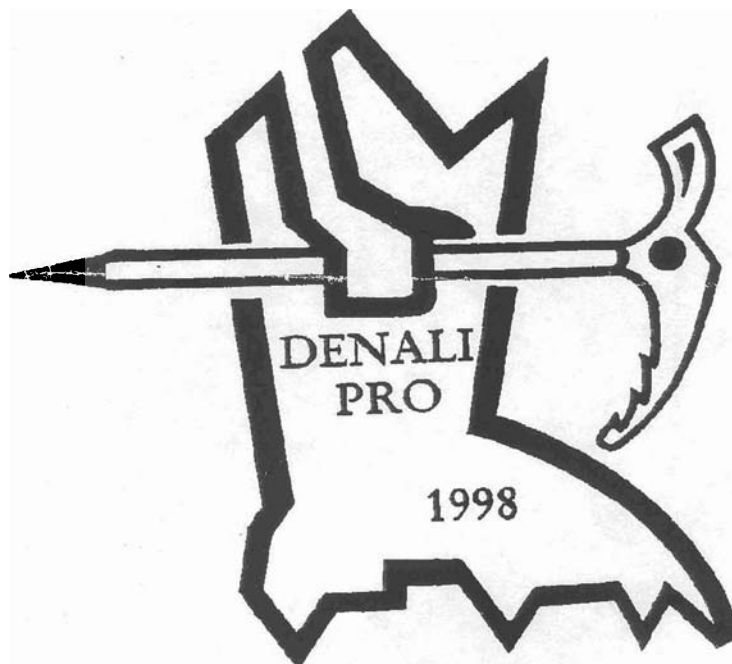
**PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:** Denali National Park and Preserve, Talkeetna Ranger Station, in partnership with PIGEON MOUNTAIN INDUSTRIES (PMI) of Lafayette, Ga. will implement a climber recognition program for Denali National Park and Preserve starting in 1998. The program is designed to recognize and reward mountaineers who reflect the highest standards in the sport for safety, self sufficiency, assisting other mountaineers, and no impact expeditions. Individual awards will be given contemporaneously in the form of a yearly designed lapel pin. Of those awarded the pins, one person or expedition will be selected as the "Denali Pro, Mountaineer of the Year."

This selection will be publicly recognized and awarded a small specially designed trophy at the end of the climbing season. Their name will be displayed on a plaque in the Talkeetna Ranger Station .

## **THE NAME "DENALI PRO"**

The Denali Pro name comes from a combination of sources. "Pro" is often used as a short-

ened version of professional, defined as one who possesses great skill or experience in the field. "Pro" is often used by climbers as a shortened version of protection. Protection can be defined in two ways: climbers who often put equipment in place to shorten or eliminate a fall or those who



keep the environment from harm. The climber who protects the mountain environment, protects his fellow climbers, uses protection to limit or eliminate injury, and the person who makes decisions based on skill and expertise and needs no assistance from other climbers or rescuers will be recognized by this program.

**THE RECOGNITION PROGRAM** PMI will produce 200 lapel pins based on designs given to them by the NPS. The pins will be different each year, attempting to make them of greater value to the mountaineers. The pins will be carried by NPS rangers on the mountain to reward climbers as

soon as professional actions are noticed. Pins are to be awarded for things such as assisting NPS rangers with mountain clean-up, assisting fellow mountaineers in rescue situations, volunteering at the 14,000 foot ranger camp, and showing good judgment in decisions to avoid situations that might otherwise require a rescue. At the end of the mountaineering season, a list will be

printed showing the names and accomplishments of pin recipients. One person or expedition from this list will be selected as the climber who best exemplifies the "Denali Pro." They will be presented a trophy and be publicly recognized. The list of yearly award winners will be distributed to the media and published in prominent moun-

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# The Alaska Range: New Routes and

- **Mt. McKinley:** Wickersham Wall continuous and complete ski descent; 7,000 vertical feet of new terrain that joins the Canadian route by Adrian Nature
- **Kirsten's Ridge:** from Traleika 35 pitches 5.10 A1 WI4 by Jim Blow and Jim Wilson
- **Traleika Spur Ridge:** "Moscow Route," Otto Chkhetiani, Fedor Lounev, Mikhalev IIIa, and Dmitril Oborotov
- **Mascioli's Pillar:** by Steve House and Steve Swenson
- **Mt. Hunter:** South West Face "The Sound of Freedom" by Doug Chabot and Jack Tackle
- **Middle Triple Peak:** West Face by Kitty Calhoun, Steve Gerbeding, Dan Osman, and Jay Smith
- **Mt. Foraker:** North Face "Full Circle" Grade 4 By Rod Hancock and Stuart Parks
- **Mt. Koven:** North West Face by Stephen Leary, Ned Norton, Peter Way, Paul Weber
- **Mooses Tooth:** North Face 35 pitches by Seth Shaw and Scott Simper
- **Mooses Tooth:** South Face ice couloir "Shaken not Stirred" by Greg Crouch and Jim Donini



## In the News

The new Talkeetna Ranger Station quickly became a favorite place for climbers and other Talkeetna visitors. It contains an extensive climbing library and an exhibit showcasing Bradford Washburn's photographs of Denali's major peaks.

The rescue cache and storage area in the new facility have proved to be an asset to the staff during camp set-up and rescues. For the first time, NPS staff in Denali's south district are all under one roof. The building design has greatly improved the efficiency of the operations. Many favorable comments have been received from visitors.

The Oregon section of the American Alpine club awarded National Park Service Ranger Roger Robinson the

"Washburn Award" This award recognizes his outstanding leadership abilities, professional dedication and mountaineering expertise. On June 14, the distinguished award was presented by Bradford Washburn in Talkeetna in a ceremony attended by family, professionals from the mountaineering community and many friends who have known and worked with Roger during the past 20 years.

Ranger Joe Reichert became the first Denali National Park ranger to summit Mt. Foraker. Joe and volunteer climber, Chris Turiano, made the successful summit bid on June 23.

For the first time, two seasonal ranger naturalists were assigned to the south district. Interpretive programs were presented for visitors on moun-

taineering at the Talkeetna Ranger Station and at the Talkeetna Historical Museum. In addition, natural history programs were given at the new Mt. McKinley Princess Lodge located 45 minutes north of Talkeetna. These programs were well received by the large number of visitors who attended.

In an effort to reduce the amount of trash illegally left on the mountain, a program was initiated in 1997 to track the fuel cans that are used by the mountaineers. Now when an expedition leaves base camp, rangers have labeled the fuel cans that are used to hold the suggested gallon per person/per expedition amount of fuel used for cooking. These cans are brought back to the ranger staff when the expedition returns to basecamp.

(Continued on page 14)



# 1997 Rescue Summary

**During the 1997 season there were 10 significant search and rescue missions in the Alaska Range of Denali National Park. The following is a brief summary of the those missions:**

**FALL, NORTHWEST BUTTRESS, DENALI:** At 1400 hrs, on 5/19, a climber was injured during a fall at approximately 13,000 feet. The climber fell approximately 150 feet before two ice screws arrested his fall. The rescue was delayed until 6/22 because poor weather conditions prevented an air recovery. The injured climber was rescued using helicopter short haul technique by an NPS ranger as no landing zone suitable for the helicopter was available. He was flown to the 7,200-foot base camp then transported via National Guard helicopter to Alaska Regional Hospital.

**ALTITUDE ILLNESS, WEST BUTTRESS:** At 2115 hrs, on 5/24, a client on a guided expedition collapsed outside of the medical tent at 14,200 feet. The climber was diagnosed and treated for a severe case of HACE (high altitude cerebral edema) by the volunteer physician and it was recommended that he be evacuated immediately. The NPS rescue helicopter was dispatched with a park medic aboard. The HACE stricken climber was flown directly to Talkeetna and transported to the Valley Hospital in Palmer and needed 10 days to fully regain his memory and coordination.

**ALTITUDE ILLNESS, WEST BUTTRESS:** At 0600hrs, on 5/28, two members of a Korean expedition began their ascent of the Messner Couloir. One climber was overcome with acute mountain sickness after climbing past the half way point. The expedition reached the top of the Messner at midnight after 18 hours of climbing. At 0105 hrs, on 5/29, another member of the expedition requested a helicopter evacuation from the 19,400-foot level. Two other members in the Korean party climbed from 17,200 feet on the West Buttress to provide assistance. Once they reached the sick climber, they were able to determine that he could descend with their assistance. At 0340 hrs, they radioed information to the 14,200-foot ranger camp that no rescue was needed. The expedition descended safely without support.

**FALL, WEST BUTTRESS:** At 1900 hrs, on 5/29, the expedition leader from the British Army, was fatally injured in a climbing fall on Denali. The surviving rope partner stated that they became disoriented and started the descent of the West Rib instead of the West Buttress route. After following several wands on the steep slope of the West Rib they realized they were off route and attempted to traverse when the fall occurred. Roped together, the two British climbers fell approximately 3,000 feet down the Orient Express. The survivor sustained only minor injuries and was found by another climber and led back to the 14,200-foot ranger camp.

**FROSTBITE, WEST BUTTRESS:** On 5/29, a guided expedition of five clients, and two experienced guides were forced to spend the night out in a storm at 19,000 feet on Mount McKinley. During their descent from the summit, the wind and snow had increased while visibility decreased. The guides used a map and compass to determine their route as the wands were covered with snow and ice. The guides feared that attempting to negotiate Denali pass at 18,200 feet and descend to the 17,200-foot camp would be disastrous and decided to dig in. At 0600 hrs, on 5/30, the wind decreased and the seven person expedition descended to the 17,200-foot camp. Another guided party assisted with food, shelter and patient treatment. At 0910 hrs, the NPS rescue helicopter landed in high winds and flew two patients to the 7,200-foot base

# Safety First

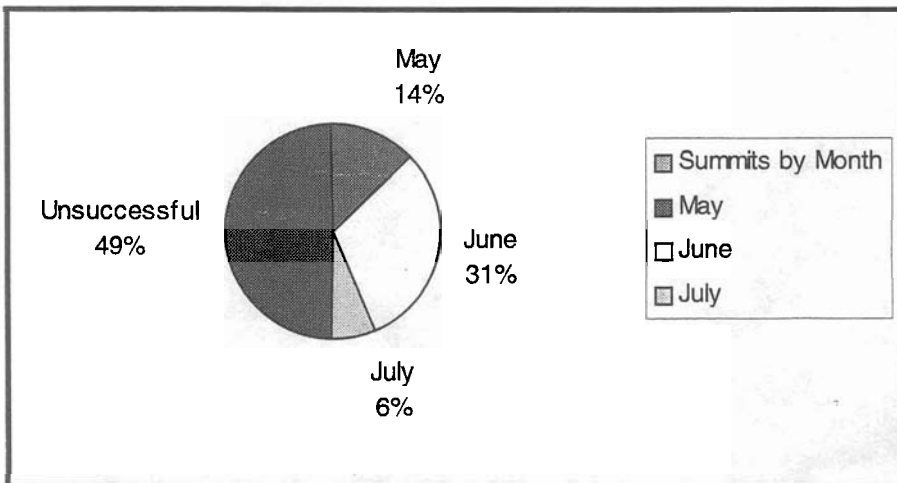
Weather on Denali invariably effects most accidents, being either the direct cause or compounding the incident after it happens. After reviewing approximately 109 accidents beginning in 1932 and involving climbers on Mt. Hunter, Mt. Foraker, and Mt. McKinley, it was determined that weather contributed to 95 of the 109 incidents (87%).

The warm weather and low snow year resulted in the crevasses opening up earlier this year. Many climbers fell into crevasses along the West Buttress route. Only one injury was reported in relation to these falls. Late in the season, a special permit was requested by the air taxis to land within the wilderness boundary to evacuate stranded climbers due to

deteriorating glacier conditions. The base camp landing strip had become too hazardous for landings, and this combined with the crevasse problems for climbers on the trail, prompted the park service to grant the permit.



1997 Summit Success Rate for Denali



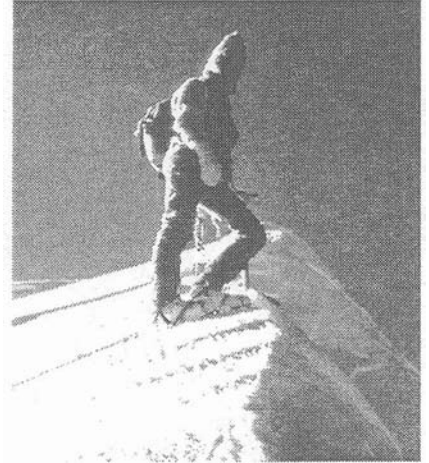
**Did you know that in 1997 65% of all the frostbite cases reported on Denali occurred in May?**

# Denali Pro: Mt. McKinley Climber Recognition Program

(Continued from page 4)

mountaineering publications. A commemorative plaque will be on display at the Talkeetna Ranger Station to honor all award recipients.

**RESPONSIBILITIES:** The NPS will produce the artwork for the lapel pins on a yearly basis, award the pins, record the recipient, and publicize the program and the winners. On an annual basis, PMI will produce the pins, "Denali Pro" trophies, plaques and nameplates. PMI and the NPS will jointly select the "Denali Pro" trophy winner.



## What's New For 1998?

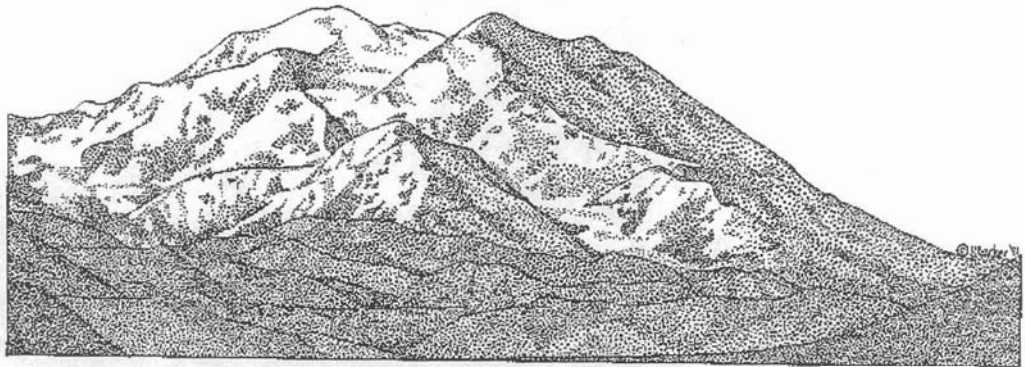
A new weather monitoring station will be placed at Denali's 14,200 foot ranger camp this season. The station will measure air temperature and relative humidity, wind speed and wind direction. A cellular modem powered by solar panels will allow researchers and rangers to have immediate weather information throughout the day.

For rangers in the south district this information is vital to search and rescue activities. Weather information

from the station will be made available to the National Weather Service to assist them in forecasting weather patterns in the Alaska Range.

A weather station will also be placed at the 7,200 foot base camp on the

Kahiltna Glacier. The monitoring equipment at that station will measure changes in snow depth and consistency, and glacier movement.



©Heidi Barker



## Barbara Washburn: Fifty Years of Summits

In 1947, Barbara Washburn notched her place in climbing history when she became the first woman ever to set foot on the 20,320 foot high summit of Mt. McKinley. Barbara and her husband, Bradford Washburn, were part of a 17-member expedition which was attempting to summit McKinley as well as perform numerous studies.

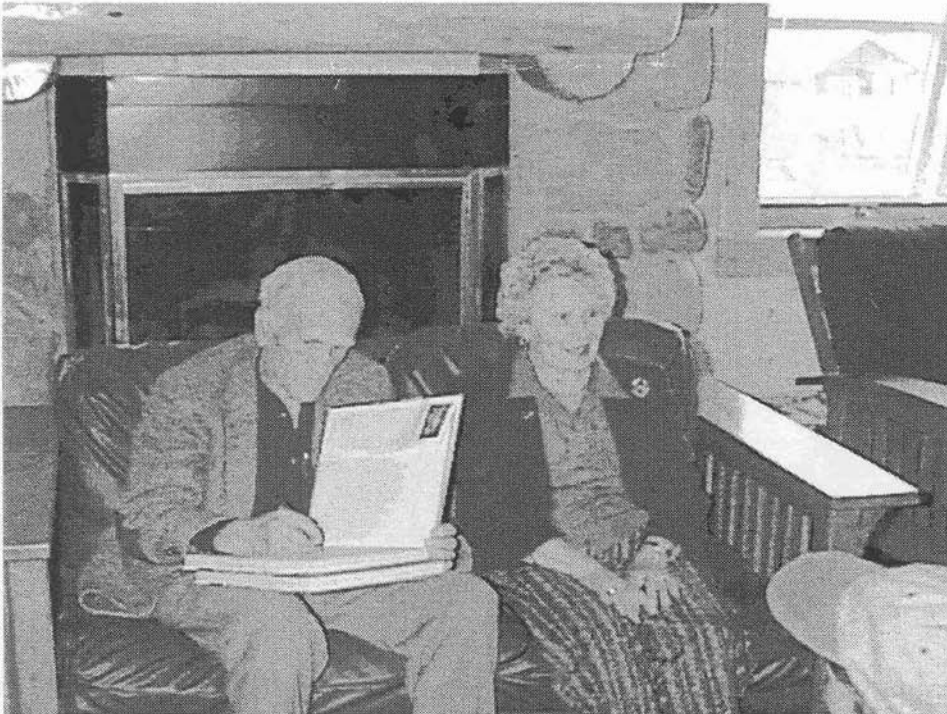
On June 6, 1997, the National Park Service invited Barbara and Brad to Alaska to honor the 50th Anniversary of her achievement. Bar-

bara showed a film from this historic climb, shared recollections of her expedition, and graciously answered questions and signed autographs until late in the evening.

Barbara and Brad also ventured north to Denali Park on June 9th for a repeat performance at the Denali Park Hotel Auditorium. Visitors were enthralled with their tales from on high. Barbara probably had a good idea what adventures lay before her when she accepted Brad's marriage proposal, and they

spent their honeymoon making the first ascent of Mt. Bertha! Brad Washburn was the only husband among his peers who took his wife with him on both climbing and business trips. In fact, Brad has often said that "Barbara is the most important event in my life."

Many thanks to all who turned out for the celebration in Talkeetna and at Denali Park.



-NPS Photo

Barbara and Bradford Washburn answer questions and autograph Washburn's book The Conquest of Denali during the June 6, 1997 Open House in Talkeetna.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Bruce MacDonald, from Nashua, New Hampshire became the 10,000th person to successfully summit Mt. McKinley on June 3, 1997.

# Volunteers On High: Mountaineering VIP Program

## Life on High

The volunteer mountaineering patrols on Denali attract some of the best climbers and mountain guides in the world. These patrols are physically and mentally demanding and require extensive mountaineering experience to participate.

Volunteers are given training involving helicopter operations, high angle lowering, crevasse rescue, and high altitude emergencies. Qualifications for volunteer patrol members include:

- ⇒ previous climbs on Denali or the equivalent glacier and altitude experience
- ⇒ medical training as a wilderness first responder or wilderness emergency medical technician

other beneficial skills include search and rescue, crevasse rescue, litter lowering and raising, mapping, compass and radio knowledge.

Volunteers receive a flight into the range, food while on the patrol, and the experience of a lifetime. Interested climbers should contact the Talkeetna Ranger Station. Over 123 people volunteered

23,600 hours to assist their fellow climbers on Denali since 1991.

## What's It Like on Patrol?

The 14,200-foot mountaineering patrols consists of one park ranger, 4 volunteer mountaineers and usually a volunteer doctor. Similar patrols operate out of the 7,200 foot base camp. The volunteers arrive in Talkeetna three days prior to departing for Mount McKinley to

receive training in helicopter rescue operations, gear preparation, route safety and NPS protocol.

Three days later the six-person patrol flies to base camp on the Kahiltna Glacier to participate in a day of crevasse rescue training. The patrol then spends the next six to seven days climbing to the 14,200-foot camp, taking several days to acclimate at this elevation.

For the next two weeks the patrol camps move higher up the mountain. In good weather, patrolling the high camps includes changing the latrines out and collecting litter. Also, several patrol members stay in camp to maintain radio coverage and treat climbers suffering from cold and/or other related altitude injuries. The patrol descends after the new incoming patrol finishes acclimating. The team is flown back to Talkeetna and debriefed after spending about 30 days on Mount McKinley.



-NPS Photo

Ranger Joe Reichert takes a break and soaks up some rays at the 7,200 foot base camp.

## Want to Know More?

*If you are interested in applying for a volunteer position at Denali National Park and Preserve, give us a call at (907)-733-2231.*

# Who's Who?



## The South District Staff

**South District Ranger:**  
**Administrative Tech:**  
**Mountaineering Rangers:**

J. D. Swed  
 Miriam Valentine  
 Daryl R. Miller  
 Kevin Moore  
 Roger Robinson  
 Billy Shott  
 Eric Martin  
 Joe Reichert  
 Dave Kreutzer  
 Doug Drury  
 Jim Hood  
 Steve Goodman  
 Ray Touzeau  
 Punky Moore  
 Elaine Sutton  
 Maureen Swed  
 Grete Perkins  
 Doug Demarest

**Helicopter Manager:**  
**Helicopter Pilots:**

**Helicopter Mechanic:**  
**Fee Collectors:**

**Interpretive Rangers:**

**SCA**

**Volunteers in the Park:**

Ike Nichols  
 Lannie Hamilton  
 Jon Gibans  
 Joel Giesendorfer  
 Christian Bingelli  
 Chris Turiano  
 Jon Heshka  
 Tim Stageberg

Stewart Habel  
 Randy Waitman  
 Sam Levy  
 Denny Gignoux  
 David Morris  
 Trisha Lee  
 Colin Grissom  
 Susan Reed

Brent Bishop  
 Carl Coy  
 Ralph Tingey  
 Ross Toelcke  
 Jeff Evans  
 Caroline Paul  
 Ken Zafren

**Alaska Air National Guard:**

Skip Kula    Mario Romera    John Loomis    John Paff    Dave Thompson    tsgt Eric Sachs

***TO REQUEST MOUNTAINEERING INFORMATION AND REGISTRATION PACKETS, PLEASE CONTACT:***

**TALKEETNA RANGER STATION  
 P.O. BOX 588  
 TALKEETNA, ALASKA 99676  
 PHONE: (907)733-2231 FAX: (907)733-1465**

**VISIT US ONLINE AT - [WWW.NPS.GOV/DENA](http://WWW.NPS.GOV/DENA)**

Talkeetna Ranger Station  
P.O. Box 588  
Talkeetna, AK 99676



## National Park Service

1997 Denali National Park Mountaineering Summary

### *In the News*

*(Continued from page 5)*

Limited snow coverage allowed mountaineers to get a good look at the amount of garbage left behind on the mountain by inconsiderate expeditions. This year alone, several thousand pounds of garbage were collected by NPS personnel and volunteers. The 14,200-foot ranger camp collected over 700 lb. of trash which included abandoned gear caches, trash and human waste.

Human waste management on Mount McKinley continued to be a difficult problem. It is estimated that between 6 and 10 tons of human waste were left on Denali in 1997. An economical and efficient way to manage the volume is being sought by the NPS. A partial solution will be a new latrine for the 17,200-foot camp on the popular West Buttress Route.

In an effort to en-

force litter management regulations a number of citations were issued to those caught trashing the mountains. Most citations were the result of other climbers witnessing the violations and bringing them to the attention of a park ranger. This is an important example of how we need each climber to assist in keeping the mountains in Denali National Park the cleanest in the world.

