

Denali National Park & Preserve 1996 Mountaineering Summary

High winds, wide crevasses, and a record low snowfall set the scene for the 1996 climbing season in the Alaska Range. Mount McKinley saw a slight decline (6%) in the number of climbers attempting routes this year. The season total of 1,148 climbers was a decrease from a two-year average of 1,220 climbers. 489 climbers (43%) successfully reached the summit. Of the 235 guided climbers on Mount McKinley this season, 104 (44%) reached the summit. These lower than normal success rates are the result of severe windstorms that extended for several weeks during the height of the season.

During 1996, the National Park Service incurred \$143,943 in search and rescue costs for missions on Mount McKinley, Mount Foraker and Mount Hunter. Costs incurred by the military for their assistance with these missions was \$88,500. Total cost for search and rescue for 1996 was \$232,443.

WEATHER:

Continuous stretches of clear, blue skies during the climbing season gave a false impression of weather at higher elevations. Extreme winds during the month of May caught many climbers by surprise, inflicting severe cases of frostbite and thwarting summit bids. Lack of snowfall from the preceding winter was noticeable in larger crevasses and exposed debris piles. In addition, unconsolidated snow resulted in high avalanche danger for most of the peaks in the Alaska Range.

NEW IN TOWN:

In 1997, a new mountaineering center will greet climbers when they arrive in Talkeetna. The construction of the 5,300-square-foot facility will be ready for occupancy in January 1997, and will replace the formerly occupied log cabin. Two orientation rooms will be available to climbers for the required mountaineering briefing. A multi-purpose room will be comfortably furnished, encouraging climbers to research route related information.

The National Parks Foundation awarded a grant to Denali National Park for the production of a new mountaineering web page that will be available to interested parties via the Internet. This web site will include the annual mountaineering summary, press releases regarding the Alaska Range, current weather synopsis and climber statistics. In addition, a computerized climbing orientation program will be produced for use at the new mountaineering center. This computerized orientation will replace the mountaineering video climbers previously viewed during the check in process. It will contain information on specific routes, history of climbing in the Alaska Range, safety and medical issues and expedition information.

A number of Brad Washburn's black and white photographs will be accessible to climbers at the new mountaineering center. These 16" X 20" photographs will be an excellent resource for route information and planning expeditions. These, and many other materials, will be part of a

permanent reference collection available on a year round basis to visiting climbers.

SPECIAL USE FEE

Now in its third year, the special use fee charged to climbers on Mount McKinley and Mount Foraker has funded some noteworthy projects in the Denali mountaineering program. The fee allows for two seasonal mountaineering rangers who are stationed at 7,200-foot base camp on the Kahiltna glacier. These rangers, along with their volunteers, were instrumental this season in removing 2,000 pounds of debris from the lower elevations on Mount McKinley. They perform rescues, provide emergency medical care and assist with communications on the mountain. They also offer climbers at base camp up-to-date information on weather, glacier travel and routes.

The special use fee has also made possible the translation and publication of the Denali Mountaineering Booklet into seven foreign languages (French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Russian and Spanish). This booklet was written by the mountaineering rangers of Denali National Park and contains life-saving information on climbing in the Alaska Range. It is particularly important to foreign climbers who are unfamiliar with mountaineering in arctic conditions. This booklet sent out as part of the registration packet.

In addition to the special use fee, the 60-day pre-registration regulation enacted in 1996 has allowed mountaineering rangers to have direct contact with climbers before they arrive in Talkeetna. In doing so, rangers are able to suggest appropriate routes for different levels of expertise and offer first hand knowledge of conditions encountered in the Alaska Range. Mountaineering rangers routinely educate in areas of proper equipment and essential expedition training enabling climbers to make more informed decisions regarding their expedition.

A lenient transition was undertaken in the 1995 and 1996 to fully implement the \$150 per climber special use fee and the 60-day pre-registration regulation. The National Park Service wishes to notify climbers and mountaineers that they should expect that these regulations will be strictly enforced starting in the 1997 season. Climbers who are not pre-registered a minimum of 60 days in advance will be denied permission to climb Mount McKinley or Mount Foraker.

NEW ROUTES AND NOTABLE ASCENTS:

- The Gargoyle*: “New Mother Nature” West Face V 5.10+ AI by Calvin Hebert, Dave Madera, Drew Spaulding
- Kichatna Spires*: Tatina Spires, South Buttress by Calder Stratford, Kevin Thaw
- Little Switzerland*: “North Troll” northeast ridge and north face by Mercer, Pease, Walsh, Woolridge
- Little Switzerland*: “Royal Tower” 110 pitches 5.9 A2 by Mercer, Pease, Walsh, Woolridge,
- Little Switzerland*: “The Throne” southeast face 12 pitches 5.8 by Mercer, Pease, Walsh, Woolridge
- Mt. Bradley*: Southeast Buttress in 40 pitches by Gregory Crouch and Jim Donini
- Mt. Koven*: West Ridge Route by Hage, Litzow, and Waitman
- Mt. McKinley*: “Washburn Wall” by Steve House
- Mt. Wake*: Two new routes by Salle Frederic, Guy Manu, Lestienne Manu, Pellissier Manu, Desprat Nattbieu

SAFETY

Travel during marginal weather played a major role in accidents that led to injuries and deaths this season. Expeditions need to be prepared to wait out unstable weather. Schedules, deadlines and impatience are antagonists in making wrong decisions. The present day climbing style is much faster paced than the early expeditions on Mount McKinley. In 1996, the average round-trip ascent took 19 days.

STATISTICS

A total of 1,148 climbers, representing 305 expeditions, attempted 14 different routes on Mt. McKinley in 1996. 474 (41%) were international climbers representing 36 countries. The United States had the highest percentage of climbers (674), followed by Korea (74), Japan (61), England (47), Germany (40) and Spain (33).

Twenty-seven climbers attempted solo ascents on Mt. McKinley, with 11 of those successfully reaching the summit. There was one unsuccessful solo attempt made on Mount Foraker.

McKINLEY ROUTE	# OF EXPEDITIONS	# OF CLIMBERS	SUMMIT %
Cassin Ridge	11	30	47%
East Buttress	1	3	0
Messner Couloir	4	8	25
Muldrow Glacier	3	20	60
Muldrow Glacier Traverse	3	7	29
North West Buttress	1	4	100
South Buttress	5	15	13
South Face	1	7	57
West Buttress	245	943	42
West Buttress Traverse	6	33	73
West Rib	22	72	38
West Rib Buttress	1	1	100
West Rib Cut Off	1	2	100
Wickersham Wall	1	3	0
Total	305	1,148	43%

FORAKER ROUTE	# OF EXPEDITIONS	# OF CLIMBERS	SUMMIT %
Northwest Ridge	1	2	0%
Southeast Ridge	3	6	0
Sultana	8	26	35
Total	12	34	26%

MEDICAL

Frostbite was once again a serious medical issue with 71 climbers afflicted: 31 had superficial frostbite, 24 had moderate frostbite, and 16 had some tissue loss. This represents an increase over last season, which was record breaking with a 139% increase.

RESCUE

Thirteen major mountaineering search and rescue missions were performed involving 17 climbers in the Alaska Range. Nine of the 17 climbers (53%) requiring rescue were American, a change in the trend of international climbers requiring the highest percentage of rescues. Six fatalities occurred in the 1996 season.

Tragedy struck greatest on Mount Hunter which had four climbers perishing in their attempt of new routes on the mountain. (Overall, 20 expeditions attempted routes on Mount Hunter; all were unsuccessful.)

An initial review of the fee and pre-registration program indicates a 30% decrease in the amount of rescues performed in the Alaska Range over the last two climbing seasons. While it's too early to come to any definitive conclusions, we're optimistic that the increased emphasis on preventive education is having a positive effect.

The current death total for Mount McKinley is 87.

GROUND RESCUE, MT. FORAKER: On April 27, 1996, Americans Mitch Ward and Randy Adrian activated their Personal Locator Beacon (PLB) at 16,400 feet on Mount Foraker. Ward and Adrian had started their expedition on April 1, 1996, and were out of food and had two days of fuel left. NPS rescue personnel and the NPS Lama helicopter air dropped food, fuel, radios and equipment to the expedition. On May 3, 1996, Ward and Adrian contacted NPS from 15,200 feet on Mount Foraker's Sultana Ridge and stated that they were once again with minimal fuel and a shortage of food. A ground rescue was initiated by NPS rescue personnel who reached the group on May 5, 1996. Ward and Adrian were assisted with their descent into the Kahiltna Base Camp by NPS rescue personnel. The group arrived in Base Camp on May 7, 1996.

TWO FATALITIES, MT. HUNTER: On May 13, 1996, Germans Marcus von Zitzewitz and Olaf Hecklinger were killed when an avalanche swept them off their climbing route at 10,000 feet on Mount Hunter. Dangerous snow conditions were prevalent below the 12,000-foot level and seracs and cornices were objective hazards in the area of their route. NPS rescue personnel and the NPS Lama helicopter were shortly on scene and confirmed the death of both climbers. The bodies of von Zitzewitz and Hecklinger were recovered from the mountain by NPS personnel.

INJURY, MT. MCKINLEY: On May 11, 1996, American Robert Gray twisted his back at the 17,200-foot camp on Mount McKinley. Gray's condition deteriorated over the next several days and by May 13, he could no longer walk. NPS rescue personnel from the 14,200-foot ranger camp supplied food, fuel and assistance for the next couple of days. On May 15, Gray was able to descend without further assistance from the NPS.

INJURY, SOUTH BUTTRESS: On May 27, 1996, American Nancy Bluhm sustained injuries after surviving a 75 foot roped fall on the South Buttress of Mount McKinley. Members of her expedition were able to stabilize her and contacted NPS for assistance. NPS rescue personnel and the NPS Lama helicopter evacuated Bluhm to the 7,200-foot Kahiltna Base Camp where park rangers provided medical assistance. Bluhm was later transported to the nearest hospital

FATAL FALL, ORIENT EXPRESS: On May 28, 1996, unroped Croatian climber Milan Dolovski fell approximately 4,000 feet unroped to his death on the Orient Express on Mount McKinley. His body was discovered at 15,600 feet. Dolovski's climbing partner, Bojan Ungar, descended the Orient Express to the 16,200-foot level where NPS rescue personnel assisted him down to the ranger camp at 14,200 feet. Ungar was treated for mild shock and dehydration. Dolovski's body was recovered by the NPS Lama helicopter.

INJURY, DENALI PASS: On June 1, 1996, Spaniard Juanjo Garra fell at the 18,000-foot level at Denali Pass on Mount McKinley. The loss of a crampon during his ascent was the primary factor in Garra's fall and resulting leg fracture. Expedition members were able to assist Garra to 17,000 feet where NPS rescue personnel initiated a lowering to bring Garra to the 14,000-foot ranger camp. On June 3, a CH-47 helicopter evacuated Garra to the nearest hospital.

MISSING, DENALI PASS: On June 2, 1996, German Karl Jendryschik was reported missing near the 18,000-foot level of Denali Pass. Jendryschik's climbing partner, Jurgen Bruhm, contacted a NPS ranger at 17,000 feet and reported that Jendryschik had not made it down from Denali Pass. The two, who were unroped, had become separated during deteriorating weather conditions. Due to extreme weather conditions for the several days following Bruhm's report, a ground search could not be initiated until June 5. On June 6, an aerial search was combined with ground search efforts. Search efforts continued when weather permitted through June 14, but no sign of Jendryschik was found.

ILLNESS, WEST BUTTRESS: On June 12, 1996, Korean Ka Eui-Ryong showed symptoms of High Altitude Cerebral Edema at 17,200 feet on Mount McKinley. Eui-Ryong was not able to stand without assistance. NPS rescue personnel at the 14,200 ranger camp ascended to Eui-Ryong's camp and lowered him to the 14,200 foot camp where he was treated for High Altitude Cerebral Edema. On June 13, the NPS Lama helicopter evacuated Eui-Ryong to the Kahiltna Base Camp at 7,200 feet where he was transported to an Anchorage hospital by the Air National Guard Pavehawk helicopter.

ILLNESS, MULDROW GLACIER: On June 19, 1996, American Peter Tilney requested evacuation due to an acute appendicitis. Tilney was evacuated from the Muldrow Glacier with the NPS Lama helicopter and taken to an Anchorage hospital via Life Flight

ALTITUDE ILLNESS, WEST BUTTRESS: On June 21, 1996, American Debbie Sherman was evacuated from the 14,200 ranger camp with acute symptoms of high altitude sickness. On June 19, in a summit bid attempt, Sherman had reached the 19,000-foot level when she began to experience a severe headache and other symptoms of high altitude illness. With assistance, she descended to the ranger camp at 14,200 feet. Sherman was treated by medical personnel at the camp, but her condition continued to worsen with increasing periods of unconsciousness.

Sherman was evacuated to an Anchorage hospital with the assistance of the NPS Lama helicopter, fixed wing aircraft and Life Flight.

INJURY, WEST BUTTRESS: On June 20, 1996, Japanese soloist Chihiro Sakaniaki fell 1,000 feet during his descent at the 18,500 foot level on the West Buttress. Sakamaki sustained injuries to his thoracic area, but was able to continue to his 17,200-foot camp where he requested assistance. On June 21, Sakamaki was evacuated from the 17,200-foot level with broken ribs to an Anchorage hospital with the assistance of the NPS Lama helicopter, fixed wing aircraft and Life Flight.

INJURY, WEST BUTTRESS: On June 21, 1996, Japanese Takeshi Nagao was descending from the summit when his crampon caught on his overboot causing him to fall and break his leg at the 17,400 foot level of Mt. McKinley. Nagao requested assistance from NPS. On June 22, Nagao was evacuated from 17,200 feet by the NPS Lama helicopter.

TWO FATALITIES, MT. HUNTER: On June 27, 1996, Americans Chuck Drake and Joshua Hane were reported overdue. On June 21, the two began an alpine ascent of a new route on Mt. Hunter. Weather conditions were favorable for the first two days, but deteriorated significantly on the following days. Aerial search and ground observation were initiated by NPS on June 27. Weather conditions severely limited flying and search activities until July 1, 1996. The bodies of Drake and Hane were sighted but recovery was too hazardous. It appeared that the two had been hit and killed by avalanche debris. On July 12, Drake's body was swept approximately 1,000 feet to the bottom of the avalanche cone and a body recovery was conducted using the NPS Lama helicopter. Hane's body remains on the mountain.

FALL, KAHILTNA GLACIER: On July 6, 1996, Dennis Gum fell into a crevasse on the Kahiltna Glacier. Gum had been crossing a snow bridge when it gave way, causing him to fall 45 feet into a crevasse where he landed in water. Gum's climbing guide was unable to raise him out of the crevasse but did supply him with hot liquids and continually radioed for assistance. A NPS ranger at the 7,200-foot base camp overheard the distress call and initiated a rescue. Gum was extricated from the crevasse by NPS rescue personnel using the Lama in a shorthaul configuration. He was taken to the ranger camp at 7,200 feet by the NPS Lama helicopter where he was treated for hypothermia.

J.D. Swed
South District Ranger, Denali National Park and Preserve

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
Stan Bridges
Punky Moore
Grete Perkins
Elaine Sutton
Andrew Ackerman

Helicopter Manager:
Helicopter Pilots:

Helicopter Mechanic:
Fee Collectors:

SCA

Volunteers in the Park:

Scott Burch
Jim Cancroft
Yvona Crone
Dr. Tim Duncan
Dr. Mark Elstad
Carol English
Jeff Evans
Denny Gignoux
Colin Grissom
Dr. Dale Wang

Birgit Hansen
Craig Hess
Mark Hess
Bruce Hunter
John Jacobs
Vince Langman
Mark Pearson
Jim Quirk
Anthony Ralph

Matt Rembaum
Lois Remington
John Sherman
Michael Silitch
Doug Sinor
Buck Tilton
Mike Vanderbeck
Randy Waitman
Doug Abromeit

Alaska Air National Guard:

sgt Mark Glatt
tsgt Brent Whidenhouse

tsgt Eric Sacks
msgt Mike Wayt

Canadian PJ ssgt Darrell Cronan

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
[HTTP://www.nps.gov/dena/](http://www.nps.gov/dena/)