

UNITED STATES

Alaska

Denali National Park and Preserve Mountaineering Summary, 1989. For the fourth consecutive year, a new record was set for the number of mountaineers attempting to climb Mount McKinley. In 1989, 1009 persons registered to climb the mountain. It was the first time that more than 1000 people had done so in a single year. There were winter attempts by three separate expeditions, including one soloist. One of the groups, three Austrian guides, succeeded on the West Buttress route on February 20. The second winter attempt, a few days later on the West Buttress, was unsuccessful and resulted in the death of three experienced Japanese climbers who were apparently caught above a high camp in a severe storm. The soloist, Alaskan resident and McKinley guide Dave Staeheli, completed the first solo winter ascent of the West Rib. (See his article.) Temperatures were relatively mild during the mountaineering season, but April through mid June was consistently stormy. Exceptionally good weather from mid June through mid July salvaged what would otherwise have been a dismal year for success-rate statistics. Beyond mid July, summer storms dumped heavy snowfalls at all elevations, making travel both difficult and hazardous.

The Denali Medical Research Project received funding and was in full operation this season. The team continued research into the causes and treatment of high-altitude illnesses. The staff designed and had constructed an aluminum pressure chamber which was capable of sleeping two persons. They continued studies comparing oxygen breathing in association with pressurization as a treatment for High-Altitude Pulmonary Edema (HAPE). They also extended 1988 studies of pulmonary vasodilation drugs for the treatment of HAPE. Results from the 1989 investigations suggest limitations to the usefulness of pulmonary vasodilation drugs in the field treatment of HAPE. At the end of the season, Dr. Peter Hackett announced that the Denali Medical Research Project would not operate during the 1990 season, but that they planned to return to continue in 1991. Despite the record number of climbers on the mountain, there were only five search and rescue incidents in which the National Park Service was involved, including one rescue in the Ruth Glacier area. This is the lowest number since 1975 when 362 persons registered to climb McKinley. The National Park Service conducted three three-week patrols on McKinley, as well as numerous patrols in other parts of the Alaska Range. We continue to staff a ranger station in the town of Takleetna where mountaineers register for their expeditions. A strong emphasis is placed on the importance of environmentally sound expeditionary climbing and sanitation techniques. Additionally, climbers are encouraged to remain self-sufficient and to conduct their own evacuations whenever possible.

Interesting Statistics: *Record Number of Climbers on Mount McKinley:* In 1989, new all-time records were set for the number of persons attempting to

climb Mount McKinley: 1979=533, 1980=659, 1981=612, 1982=696, 1983=709, 1984=695, 1985=645, 1986=755, 1987=817, 1988=916, 1989=1009. *Success Rate*: 524 (52%) of those attempting the summit of McKinley were successful. This figure includes 14 who successfully climbed to the north summit. For the first time in three years, climbing teams reached the summit of Mount Foraker. Five out of 13 climbers (38%) attempting Foraker got to the summit. Eight out of 24 climbers (33%) attempting Mount Hunter reached the summit. *Record Number of Climbers on McKinley in a Given Week*: A new all-time high of 367 climbers were on the slopes of McKinley for the week ending May 13. *New Altitude for Mount McKinley?* Also establishing four stations at lower altitude, on June 21 and 24 a team of researchers and support climbers reached the summit of Mount McKinley. They carried a Global Positioning System receiver that when used in conjunction with Global Positioning Satellites can measure heights. Preliminary indications show the elevation of Mount McKinley to be 14 feet lower than the height previously measured by more traditional survey methods. The newly computed height of 20,306 feet is not yet official. For the time being, the previous height of 20,320 feet remains the official height. *Acute Mountain Sickness*: 95 (9%) had symptoms, of which 39 (4%) were mild, 33 (3%) moderate and 23 (2%) severe. *Frostbite*: 54 (5%) reported some degree of frostbite. Of these, three (0.3) required hospitalization. *West Buttress Route*: 854 (85%) of the climbers on McKinley were on the popular West Buttress route. This is exactly the same percentage as during 1988. *Soloists*: 19 persons registered for solo climbs this year, two more than in 1988. A number of these were able to team up with other groups once they got to the mountain, at least to traverse the heavily crevassed portions of the lower glaciers. *Mountain Guiding*: 265 (26%) of the climbers on McKinley traveled with one of the authorized guiding companies. The overall success rate of the guided groups was 43%. Most were on the West Buttress, but other guided trips attempted the Muldrow Glacier, West Rib and South Buttress. *Foreign Climbers*: 360 (36%) of the McKinley climbers were from foreign countries. 27 nationalities were represented: Austria 27, Australia 3, Belgium 2, Canada 5, Chile 8, Czechoslovakia 6, France 29, Germany 47, Great Britain 41, Iceland 6, Kenya 1, Indonesia 4, Italy 26, Japan 39, Korea 24, Luxembourg 1, Mexico 8, New Zealand 6, Northern Ireland 4, Poland 17, Romania 1, Russia 1, South Africa 2, Spain 7, Sweden 1, Switzerland 42, Taiwan 2. *New Low Temperature Reading*: The National Park Service maintains a minimum recording thermometer, supplied by the National Weather Service, at 17,200 feet on the West Buttress. The winter of 1988-9's coldest temperature was -77° F (61.5° C). **Accidents**: The following are the more significant accidents or incidents that occurred in 1989. *Winter attempt, multiple hypothermia fatalities, ground and helicopter evacuation by own support group*: On February 16, a very experienced, four-person Japanese team flew to the southeast fork of the Kahiltna Glacier to attempt a winter ascent of the West Buttress. The leader, Noboru Yamada, was on a quest to become the first person to climb to the summit of the highest mountain on each of the seven continents in the winter. Teruo Saegusa,

**DENALI NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE
1988 MOUNTAINEERING SUMMARY**

	<i>Expeditions</i>	<i>Climbers</i>	<i>Successful Climbers</i>
<i>Mount McKinley</i>			
West Buttress	176	625	329
West Buttress (guided)	28	229	115
Muldrow	10	34	20
Muldrow (guided)	1	15	11
West Rib	15	38	9
West Rib (guided)	3	13	6
Messner Couloir	1	2	2
Cassin	10	28	22
Cassin (guided)	0	0	0
South Buttress	2	6	0
South Buttress (guided)	1	8	4
American Direct	1	3	0
Reality Ridge	1	2	0
Northwest Buttress	1	6	6
Pioneer Ridge	0	0	0
Wickersham Wall	0	0	0
	<u>(250)</u>	<u>(1,009)</u>	<u>(524)</u>
<i>Mount Foraker</i>	5	13	5
<i>Mount Hunter</i>	11	24	8
<i>Mount Huntington</i>	2	4	2
<i>Kahiltna Dome</i>	1	8	0
<i>Kahiltna Dome (guided)</i>	1	6	6
<i>E. Kahiltna Peak</i>	0	0	0
<i>Mount Russell</i>	1	2	2
<i>Mount Russell (guided)</i>	1	6	0
<i>Mount Brooks</i>	3	9	2
<i>Mount Brooks (guided)</i>	2	24	10
<i>Mount Silverthrone</i>	0	0	0
<i>Little Switzerland</i>	4	12	N/A
<i>Little Switzerland (guided)</i>	1	14	N/A
<i>Gorge Peaks</i>	7	15	2
<i>Mount Dickey (guided)</i>	1	5	0
<i>Mount Barrille</i>	1	2	0
<i>Mooses Tooth</i>	5	10	2
<i>Mooses Tooth (guided)</i>	1	3	0
<i>Mount Dan Beard</i>	1	1	0
<i>Mount Francis</i>	1	3	3
<i>Rooster Comb</i>	1	2	0
	<u>50</u>	<u>163</u>	<u>N/A</u>

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 Ruth Glacier area, are likely to have occurred.

Kozo Komatsu and Shunzo Sato were the other team members. Sato became ill early in the climb and returned to Base Camp to wait for the others. The remaining three reached the 17,200-foot high camp on February 20, the same day that a team of three Austrians returned to the high camp from a successful summit climb. On February 21, neither team could move because of severe weather. On the 22nd, there was a short break in the weather and the Austrians began their descent. The Japanese team was still in their camp. They were not seen alive or heard from again. Weather soon deteriorated and an extremely severe wind storm enveloped the upper mountain. Wind speeds were estimated to be 200 mph and they continued through February 26. Winds then decreased somewhat through March 9 to from 60 to 90 mph. On March 10, search flights located three bodies below Denali Pass. Search efforts were terminated on March 11. It is believed that the three climbers tried for the summit during the brief lull and were caught near Denali Pass as the winds again increased. The bodies were recovered later in March by a 17-person team of Japanese climbers who came to Alaska for that purpose. *Fall with injuries, survival epic, helicopter evacuation:* On March 14, Anchorage climbers Jim Sweeney and David Nyman flew to the Ruth Glacier. They did not take a radio. They eventually decided to climb a couloir known as the Elevator Shaft on the north face of Mount Johnson. On March 19, the first day of their climb, Sweeney began leading the fourth pitch. He placed an anchor and climbed 40 feet above it, where he encountered an ice window. He grabbed under the window and leaned out for a better look at his options. Suddenly, the entire formation on which he was climbing collapsed. Sweeney and the 15-foot-wide, 35-foot-high and 6-foot-thick ice formation fell down the couloir. His anchor held, but his hip was fractured by the resulting 80-foot fall and avalanche. The events of the next seven days are too involved to be recorded here but proved to be a test of endurance and of their will to survive. During this time, either one or both of the men were hit by eight different avalanches. Weather deteriorated and prevented all access to the mountains by rescue teams. The two men were eventually rescued on March 26 by military helicopter. *Fall, triple fatalities, ground and helicopter recovery:* On May 15, three British climbers, Chris Massey, John Lang and Julian Dixon, began their summit attempt of McKinley from a 16,500-foot camp on the West Rib. As the day progressed, the weather began to deteriorate. The three men were seen by other parties who turned back but the British team indicated that they planned to continue on. Early the next day, a National Park Mountaineering Ranger camped at the 14,200-foot basin on the West Buttress noticed what appeared to be bodies at the base of the Orient Express, a couloir which cuts across the upper West Rib. The rescue team discovered that all three Britons had died in a fall. It appears that the men were probably descending the West Rib, roped together, in extremely poor weather when one of them slipped and pulled the others down the couloir. Tent with occupants blown from ridge, injuries, *helicopter evacuation:* On May 27, a guided group from Genet Expeditions was camped at 16,400 feet on the West Buttress. For the previous three days, the weather had been intermittently windy. Winds increased during the evening. One especially

violent gust tore one of the tents, with three occupants, from its anchors. The tent and occupants began a tumbling fall toward the Peters Glacier. One occupant, John Richards, the assistant guide, was ejected early in the fall and came to rest 300 feet below the ridge campsite. The other two occupants, Jim Johnson and Howard Tuthill, fell 1000 feet and came to rest on a small ledge, dressed only in polypro underwear. All clothing and equipment was lost in the fall. The assistant guide was able to ascend to the camp and alert the others of the accident. The chief guide, Dave Staeheli, was able to descend and provide survival equipment to Johnson and Tuthill. Others on the mountain, including the Denali Medical Project personnel and private mountaineers, organized a difficult and dangerous rescue effort, eventually stabilizing the two men, who were flown off the mountain the following day via helicopter. Johnson suffered a compression fracture of lumbar vertebrae and Tuthill frostbit his fingers. Both suffered from hypothermia. The lives of these two men were saved by the rescue efforts. *Tent and occupant blown from ridge, equipment lost, no injuries:* In a very similar incident to the one previously described, a Rainier Mountaineering Inc. guided expedition was camped at 16,100 feet on the West Buttress during an extended storm. Chief guide Curt Hewitt was alone in the tent when a severe gust ripped the tent from its anchors and lifted it and Hewitt over three-foot snow walls. The tent began a tumbling fall. Hewitt was able to escape through the entry tunnel and climb back to the campsite, but the tent and equipment were lost. No rescue was needed or injuries sustained, but the expedition had to retreat. *High-altitude pulmonary edema, ground evacuation:* A Genet Expedition trip led by Dave Staeheli reached the 17,200-foot camp on June 21. They waited there for three days for the weather to improve. One of the clients, John Michel, had been feeling poorly earlier on the trip. At High Camp, he lacked energy and spent most of the three days sleeping. It was decided he was not to attempt the summit. On June 24, all but Michel left for a summit attempt. No other parties were at High Camp. Late that afternoon, another Genet team arrived and discovered Michel to be suffering from HAPE. They evacuated him to the 14,200-foot camp where Michel received treatment and recovered. There were other incidents of altitude illness and frostbite. Most were treated at the Denali Medical Project camp at 14,200 feet on the West Buttress. *Perforated ulcer, peritonitis, ground evacuation to Base Camp:* On May 25, Japanese climber Tetsumi Inoue developed severe abdominal pain while at 9800 feet on the West Buttress. He was evacuated to Base Camp, was flown to Talkeetna and then transported by ambulance to Valley Hospital. There he underwent surgery for a perforated ulcer and peritonitis resulting from gastric emptying.

Trends and Items of Special Concern: *Percentage of foreigners requiring rescues:* Foreigners accounted for 36% of the total number of climbers on Mount McKinley. Fourteen persons required some sort of organized rescue or recovery effort this year. Seven (50%) were from foreign nations. All six of the fatalities during 1989 were foreigners. *Sanitation:* With increasing use, it is more important than ever for climbers properly to dispose of their human waste to prevent the contamination of snow that might be melted and used for drinking or cooking

water by future expeditions. We suggest the use of plastic bags as latrines. When moving camp, tie the bags off and toss them into a deep crevasse. The use of biodegradable plastic bags is recommended. This season, a new latrine was installed at the 17,200-foot camp on the West Buttress. It seemed to be successful in concentrating human waste in the pits below the latrine. Unfortunately, the latrine had to be moved four times as the pit filled. The snow-and-ice pack at the High Camp moves slowly. This causes concern for the eventual proliferation of waste-filled pits. For 1990, the latrine will be moved further out in the 17,000-foot basin, where there is greater movement of the glacier. *Trash:* Many expeditions are hauling their trash to Base Camp where it is flown off the mountain. Still others continue to crevasse their trash. Trash accumulation on other popular mountains of the world has recently received considerable publicity. Mountaineers from all nations must take the responsibility for, and the initiative in, preserving the quality of the world's mountain environments. A combination of education, leading by example and peer pressure is probably the most effective way that can be brought to bear against less considerate climbers. *Looking ahead to 1990:* Since the Denali Medical Research Project will not operate during 1990, the National Park Service will staff a small weather port at the 14,200-foot basin on the West Buttress. The camp will serve primarily as a communication and coordination base for rescue incidents. A new German translation of the Mountaineering Brochure is now available for distribution. For more information or to request mountaineering information and/or registration forms, please contact me: Robert Seibert, South District Mountaineering Ranger, Talkeetna Ranger Station, PO Box 588, Talkeetna, Alaska 99676. Telephone: 907-733-2231.

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Mount McKinley Winter Attempt and Tragedy. Japanese Noburo Yamada, Teruo Saegusa and Kozo Komatsu attempted to make a winter ascent of McKinley. They were last seen on February 22 by Austrians when they were pitching camp at 17,000 feet. An aerial search in mid March revealed their bodies below Denali Pass. Yamada had climbed nine 8000-meter peaks. He had ascended Everest three times. He was also trying to make the winter ascent of the highest point of each of the continents. He had already done Everest, Aconcagua, Kilimanjaro and Mont Blanc in winter. Saegusa had ascended four 8000ers, including Everest twice. Komatsu had climbed Dhaulagiri I, II, III, IV and V between 1975 and 1982.

Alaskan Climbs Appearing as Full Articles. Aside from the climbs reported here, the following are covered in complete articles: the east face of Mount