

Antarctica

ELLSWORTH MOUNTAINS

Sentinel Range, overview. The 2003-04 season saw a record number of people reach the summit of Vinson Massif (4,897m). A total of 75 people attempted the mountain and 74 were successful. This surpasses the previously most successful season, 2000-01, when 73 people summited out of 78 attempts.

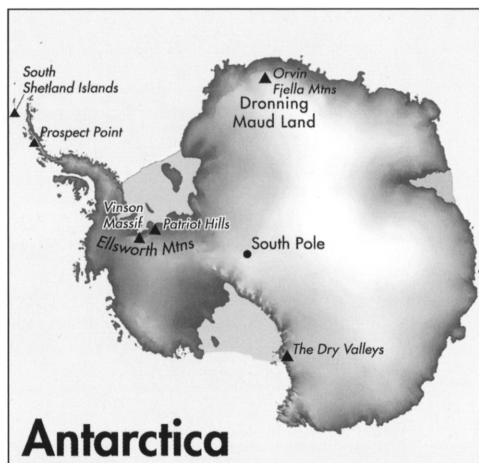
Last season also saw the first Sherpa reach the summit. Lhakpa Rita summited twice while guiding clients, as did two other guides. At least 10 women reached the top, the most ever in one season, and one of them was one of two summiteers over 70 years old.

However, at one stage in late 2003, it looked like a Vinson season might not happen at all. Adventure Network International (ANI) had been the only operator of flights to inland Antarctica and had operated successfully every year since 1986. Around mid-year they decided to suspend operations this season for various reasons. Shortly after, the company, including the camp at Patriot Hills, was bought by a consortium that consisted mainly of ex-staff and owners. The new company—Antarctic Logistics & Expeditions (AL&E)—made their first flight in late November, and the experience and competence of their personnel resulted in a very successful and safe season.

The only new route last season was a variation on the long summit-day plod. Alain Hubert, of Belgium, guiding Christine Joris and Joao Garcia traversed east from the usual Camp 3 site on the col between Vinson and Shinn, then angled up to the eastern edge of the Vinson summit plateau. They followed this south over some minor ridge points before reaching the main summit pyramid from the east. This gave a very scenic outing, though slightly longer than the normal route.

Luis Fraga, Ramon Portilla, and Miguel Angel Vidal of Spain made an ascent of the right-hand side of the West Face Ice Stream, a moderate but sustained snow and ice route that is one of the faster ways to the summit of Vinson. The route had been climbed twice by Conrad Anker in 1999, the second time up to and over the summit. On his first ascent Anker skied the route from the top of the ice stream.

Three groups also reached the summit of Mt. Shinn (4,661m), the third-highest mountain in Antarctica.



DAMIEN GILDEA, AAC, Australia

Vinson Massif, West Face Ice Stream, repeat ascent. As reported above, on December 23 Luis Fraga, Miguel Angel Vidal, and I made a rare ascent of the 2,000-meter high West Face of Vinson (4,897m). We repeated the line first climbed in 1999 by Conrad Anker. Starting out at around 4:30 a.m., we unroped above the rimaye and progressed about 60 meters apart, worried