

Antarctica

SENTINEL RANGE

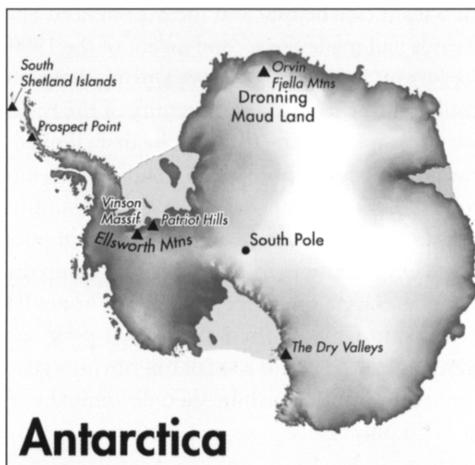
VINSON MASSIF

Vinson, summary, record numbers and new route. Over 120 people attempted Vinson Massif this season, far surpassing the previous record of 78 attempts set in 2000-01. This year only two people failed to summit, giving a success rate of nearly 99%. Though the weather this season was not always good, it was never terrible, with no major

storms at any time. The Vinson expeditions supported by Antarctic Logistics & Expeditions (ALE) are now around 15 days total in duration, longer than in previous seasons, which gives people more time to acclimatize, rest and wait out bad weather.

The extra time also allows teams to attempt other objectives, if they are up to it and the weather complies. This season several teams took short day-trips out from various camps and four teams attempted Mt. Shinn (4,661m) from Camp 3. Three of the four were successful—a Spanish soloist, the two ALE guides Heather Morning and Neil Stephenson and a guided team from Alpine Ascents International led by Todd Passey. AAI Guide Vern Tejas spent most of the season on the mountain, leading four separate ascents. One of these ascents included Johnny Strange, at 13 years old the youngest person to summit Vinson. New Zealander Guy Cotter, owner and head guide of Adventure Consultants, doubled as marriage celebrant on December 8 to two of his group who tied the knot on the summit. On a more serious note, at least two climbers had roped crevasse falls on the section leading up to Camp 3 and one climber had a minor fall on Mt. Shinn. The Vinson route between Camp 2 and Camp 3, beneath the head-wall, passed through significant avalanche debris this year, emanating from the seracs up to the right on Vinson. The opposing seracs on Shinn also calved several times, on one occasion strafing the route below the headwall shortly after climbers had passed through. The objective danger of this route is not insignificant and is not improving.

Only two expeditions attempted anything new in the Massif this season: the Omega



Remember this picture next time you hear how "safe" it is on Vinson. The leading edge of the avalanche is 30m from the track of the normal route at this point; 30 minutes earlier about eight people had walked right through here (7 p.m., Jan. 4, 2005). *Damien Gildea*

GPS team (see below) and the experienced Spanish climber Miguel Angel Vidal. Miguel and friends had made the second ascent of the 1999 Anker route on the right side of the West Face Ice Stream in December 2003. During that time they had scouted and attempted the obvious couloir at the right-most extremity of the rocky section of the main West Face, just left of the Ice Stream. Returning this year, he first climbed a minor route with Maria Jesus "Chus" Lago at the far left end of the West Face, up a short, moderate snow slope to reach the Vinson normal route. Maria descended, having already summited via the normal route some days earlier, so Miguel then went to the summit from that point on December 28.

On December 31 Miguel left his camp down on the Branscomb Glacier and approached the main face alone. Eight and a half hours later he reached the top via the 1,800m Banana Friendship Gully, overcoming much poor snow and several rock sections. His route took him up to and behind a small but obvious gendarme high on the face and over to the normal route on Vinson, which he then descended without going to the summit, arriving in Camp 3 at 11:30 pm.

DAMIEN GILDEA, *Australia, AAC*

Jaca Peak (3,372m), southeast face; Vinson West, Galfrío Route; Mt. Vinson (4,897m), Friendship Banana Gully to Branscomb ridge. On December 23 Chus (Maria Jesús) Lago and I attempted a new route on Vinson West face, but our backpacks were too heavy and our progress too slow. After climbing 600 meters, we decided to change our strategy. Chus Lago summited Vinson on her 40th birthday (Christmas), while I had to turn back due to the -30°C cold, accompanied by strong winds. On December 26, I moved to the southwest ridge of Mt. Shinn to explore a possible route there. Afterward I traversed to Jaca Peak (3,372m) and climbed it following a straight line up to the summit through the southeast face. Jaca Peak was first climbed in 1995 by a Spanish team, consisting of a group of the Military High Mountain patrol and the "Al Filo de lo Imposible" TV documentary team.



The main section of the west face of Mt. Vinson. (1) Linear Accelerator (Jay Smith, 1994). (2) Banana Friendship Gully (Miguel Angel Vidal, 2004). (3) Rudi's Runway (Rudiger Lang, 1991). *Damien Gildea*

On December 27 Chus and I climbed together a new route on the southern edge of Vinson West's rocky wall. It took us eight hours to climb 1,000 vertical meters on a rock spur. We named the new route "Galfrío" as a tribute to the expedition sponsor. The route includes some difficulties on ice and mixed terrain up to UIAA IV and 45° to 55° ice. The last 200 meters offered the most difficult section, as the climb progressed