

Antarctica

ELLSWORTH MOUNTAINS

—SENTINEL RANGE

Vinson, summary of the 2006-7 season.

There were 100 ascents of Vinson (4,892m) out of 130 attempts. This success rate of only 77% is statistically the worst on record and contrasts strongly with 2005-6, which had the most summit successes with 149 out of the 153 attempts. Failure to summit last season was mainly due to bad weather, particularly in the first few weeks, but there is also a consensus that Vinson clients are becoming progressively less competent and less experienced.

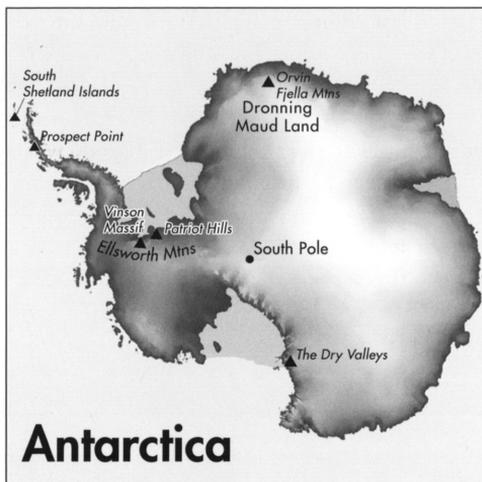
Some are now simply not up to the ascent, especially in less than ideal weather. As in previous years, several poor decisions by guided groups led to situations that really should be avoidable on this mountain. The weather was almost never really bad but was regularly quite poor. Usually one can expect several spells of very good weather lasting around five days or more. However, these never happened and good weather rarely lasted longer than two days. Two guided groups required assistance, one as a result of a crevasse fall and associated hypothermia and frostbite, and the other for a case of pulmonary edema. The seracs on the southwest face of Shinn were again active, calving onto or near the Normal route in the cwm below the Vinson headwall on at least three separate occasions. A serac at the top of the headwall itself also fell early in the season, disintegrating down the middle of the slope to the left of the ascent route.

The total number of individual ascents of the continent's highest summit is now 1090. This does not include repeat ascents: Dave Hahn, for example, has climbed it on 25 occasions, so the total number of ascents must be well over 1,100.

DAMIEN GILDEA, *Australia*, AAC

Sentinel Range, various first ascents and GPS Work.

During the season I led my fifth expedition to the Sentinel Range, and as on previous trips the aim was to climb and re-survey a number of the highest peaks, in order to increase and refine the geographical knowledge of Antarctica's highest mountains. The main objectives for this season were the first ascent of Mt. Rutford, a newly designated high peak to the south of the Vinson Massif, followed by climbing from the Embree Glacier at the very northern end of the range. After this we hoped to climb the remaining two virgin 4,000m peaks.



Eiichi Fukushima, John Evans, Sam Silverstein, and Brian Marts back at Vinson base camp in December 2006 to celebrate the 40th anniversary of their first ascent of Vinson. *Damien Gildea*