

## Antarctica

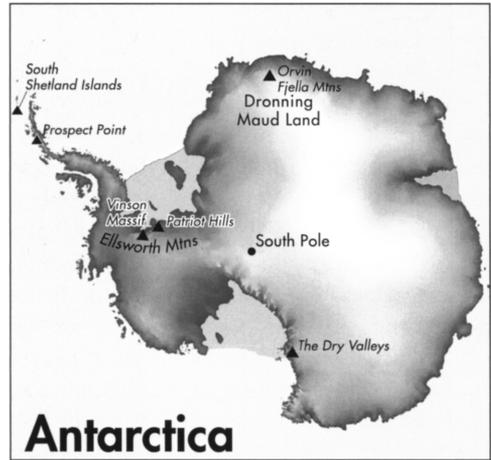
### ELLSWORTH MOUNTAINS— SENTINEL RANGE

*Vinson Massif, summary and new normal route.* A new record total of 157 people reached the summit of Vinson during the 2007-08 season, including at least 19 women. Most of the Vinson ascents were by a new variant to the normal route, detailed below. The most significant action on Vinson this season was by women. Maria Paz (“Pachi”) Ibarra of Chile with Slovakian/Australian Jarmila Tyrril climbed a new route on the west face. Norwegians Ine-Lill Gabrielsen and Rita Glenne climbed Vinson then skied straight to the South Pole from the mountain by a new route in fast time, and unsupported. A separate group, Randi Skaug and Kristin Moe Khron of Norway, with Anne Mette of Denmark, approached Vinson by skiing the 200km from Patriot Hills (as did one other group). Three women were working as guides—Patricia Soto of Chile, and Molly Loomis and Winslow Passey of the USA, with both Soto and Passey each summiting twice with clients. Dave Hahn bagged his 25th summit of Vinson. Two Vinson parties also climbed the normal southwest face route on Mt. Shinn (4,660m).

The climbing season started late, due to bad weather at Patriot Hills, but then kicked off with a week of brilliant, sunny blue skies. However after that it was all downhill, with only very short patches of good weather for the rest of the season—often only half a day—and none of the good multi-day spells traditional for the range. A severe storm hit around December 13, destroying or blowing away a number of tents at both high and low camps on Vinson, causing

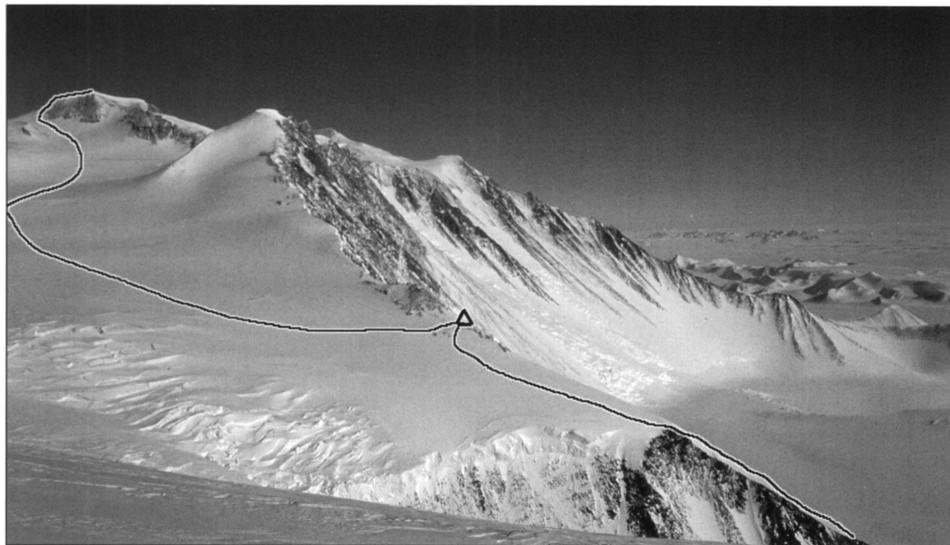


The “new” Normal Route above the Low Camp on Mt. Vinson.  
Damien Gildea



more than a few desperate situations and several minor frostbite problems. (Tent sites at Low Camp should have high walls on all four sides to counter the changing direction of winds in such storms.) Though the major force of the storm came over the mountain from the east and down onto the tents, some subsequent blasts turned up-valley and hit Low Camp from the south, catching a number of teams unawares.

*The “New” Normal Route:* At the start of the season ALE staff fixed around 1,200m of rope up the slope just north of Low Camp, as an



The upper section of Mt. Vinson's "new" Normal Route, as seen from Mt. Shinn. *Damien Gildea*

alternative to the traditional route going around the corner and up the "headwall" to Goodge Col. This was done as there has been increasing serac fall into the cwm below the headwall in recent years, most of it coming from Mt. Shinn, but also some from the cliffs on Vinson. This new alternative, first suggested in the early 1990s by Roger Mear, then later proposed by Conrad Anker and Dave Hahn, proved very popular this season, though a few teams did use the old route. Using the new route puts one at the northern end of the crest of the west face, at the western edge of the high, broad valley normally followed by climbers on summit day. The presence of an ALE radio repeater with antenna at this point on the crest led to the nearby tent site being referred to as "Repeater Camp." Repeater Camp will likely become the new "High Camp," while the older high camp on Goodge Col will be known as "Shinn Camp"—partially to prevent confusion over the radio. Though the slope of the new variant is not at all difficult, it is quite sustained at the angle, more so than the old route up the headwall. At approximately 3,900m the new camp is slightly higher than the old 3,700m camp (now Shinn Camp) on Goodge Col, meaning that summit day is slightly shorter and also that teams can see summit weather conditions sooner.

The ropes may not be absolutely necessary for the ascent, but they add an element of safety to the descent, particularly for tired climbers with a heavy load, even more so in bad weather. Currently, the ropes do not go right to the top of the face, nor all the way to the camp. They finish at a small flat area slightly off to the left, requiring a rising traverse right to reach Repeater/High Camp. There are some crevasses on this section, as there are lower down on the roped section of the slope. There are also crevasses on the section from Repeater/High Camp across to the line of the normal route in the upper cwm. Route finding on these two sections could be troublesome in bad weather.

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