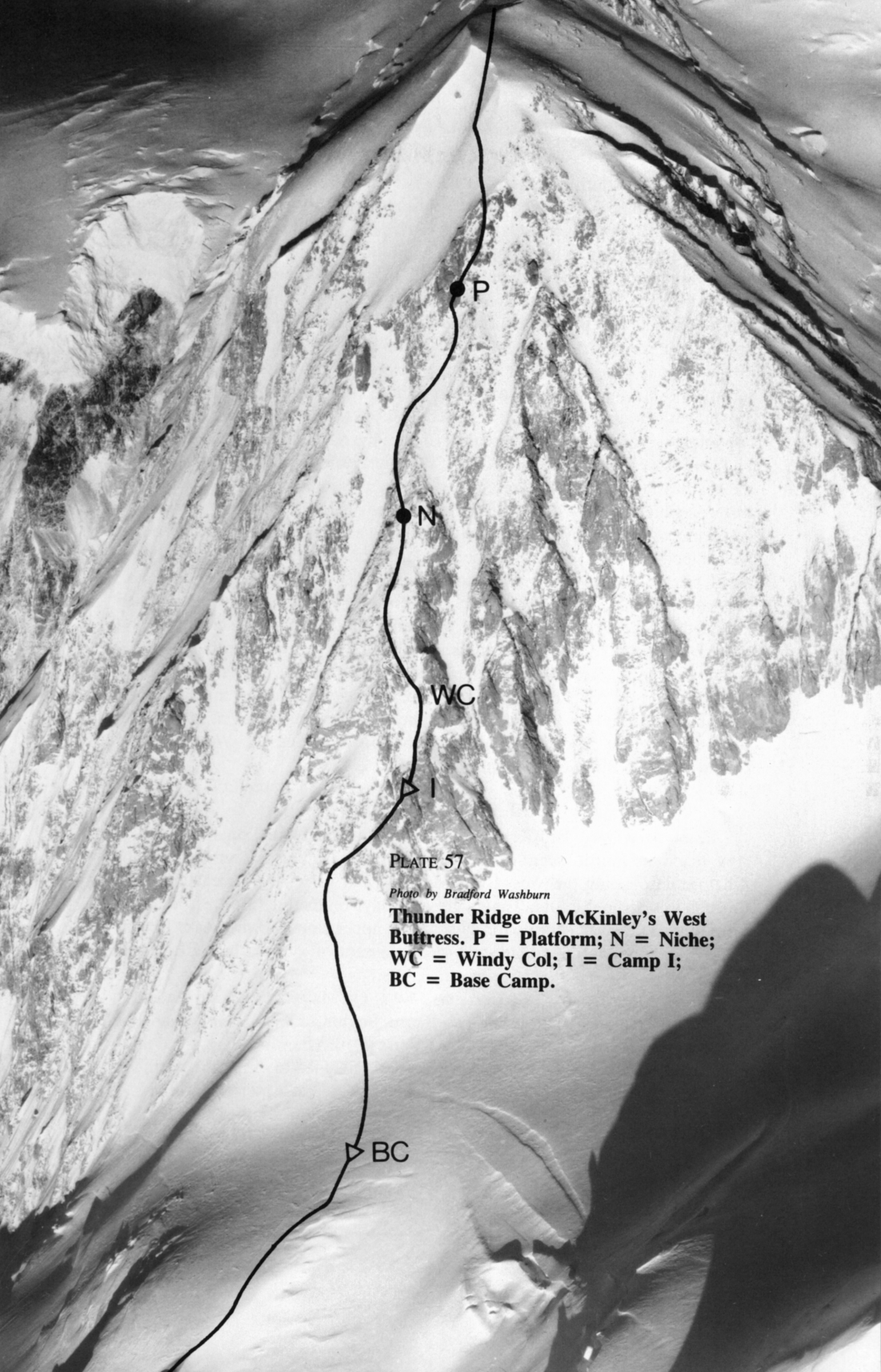


mission was to conduct medical research, the doctors also assisted numerous climbers with minor to major medical problems. Some climbers with minor altitude problems were cautioned to remain at the 14,300-foot camp for a day or so before continuing their climb, perhaps preventing more serious altitude illness higher on the mountain. The High Latitude Research Project plans at this time to return to Mount McKinley for the 1983 climbing season. A few other statistics about the 1982 climbing season on Mount McKinley may be of interest: 42% of the climbers came to the mountain from outside the United States. In addition to the United States, 23 separate countries were represented. It is truly an international mountain. 498 of the 696 climbers who attempted Mount McKinley did so via the popular West Buttress route. Thus nearly three out of every four climbers on the mountain can be found on one route. 183 (26%) of the 696 climbers were guided on their climbs by professional mountain guides. Most of these climbs were on the West Buttress route, but guided climbs were also made on the Muldrow Glacier, South Buttress, and Northwest Buttress routes. For more information, please contact: Mountaineering Ranger, Denali National Park and Preserve, P.O. Box 9, Denali National Park, Alaska 99755.

Thunder Ridge, West Buttress, Mount McKinley. Bill Holton, Stan Olsen and I left Kahiltna Base with plans to climb a new direct variation between 12,000 and 16,000 feet on the West Buttress proper, a steep section of ice and rock. We set up camp at 12,300 feet and prepared equipment and supplies for ten days. Directly above us was a broken ridge of rock and ice leading to the final knife-edged ridge nearly 4000 feet higher. Early on the afternoon of June 24 and in beautiful weather, we hiked across the base of the basin to where it drops off onto the Peters Glacier. We roped at 12,700 feet to climb in a prominent narrow ice gully on the right side of the ridge. We climbed six pitches of excellent ice and occasional snow and rock to where the gully merged with a large ice-and-snow ramp. These first pitches were among the steepest on the climb and averaged from 50° to 60°. At the end of the sixth pitch we found enough snow to level a tent platform for Camp I at 13,300 feet. In flawless weather on the 25th, we continued for four pitches on the ramp to a narrow col separating us from a large couloir on the right, "Windy Col." From there we climbed mostly on snow with some rock for 300 feet to the base of a snowfield visible from the base of the climb. We climbed for 200 feet up this and then 300 feet along the ridge to a perfect niche between two rocks just big enough for our three-man dome tent. We placed Camp II at 14,400 feet and remained there the following day as the weather appeared to be deteriorating. On the 27th we were above the clouds and so we resumed climbing. Just above camp the ridge merged with the couloir we had seen from Windy Col and soon we found ourselves traversing to the right across the top of it to gain the base of a large rock band leading to the summit ridge. The winds picked up and blowing snow driven by violent winds made progress slow. At six P.M., as things were starting to look grim, we found a small shelf somewhat sheltered



P

N

WC

I

PLATE 57

Photo by Bradford Washburn

**Thunder Ridge on McKinley's West
Buttress. P = Platform; N = Niche;
WC = Windy Col; I = Camp I;
BC = Base Camp.**

BC

from the wind. After three hours of nerve-racking work carrying snow blocks across a 40° slope, still roped up, we finished the platform. We could barely erect the tent, which we lashed to the cliff before climbing inside. We were astonished to be able to have our brews and to awaken in the morning with the tent still intact. The winds began to subside later in the morning, but we stayed put for the day. July 29 brought a brief window in the storm, and we hurriedly packed up. The tent poles resembled cork screws; what had saved us was tying up the tent with our ropes which prevented the poles from bending to the breaking point. We continued along the base of the rock band on 50° ice for four pitches to round a corner and enter a large couloir which we followed for 400 feet to gain the ridge where it turned to snow and became knife-edged. We continued on for another four pitches to where the climb suddenly ended on top of the buttress at just over 16,000 feet. We hoped to camp at 16,300 feet above the headwall on the regular West-Buttress route. We marveled at how the wind had completely removed the snow from the ridge, leaving sparkling blue ice. Just short of the top of the headwall, Holton was unable to go further and so we camped in a small hollow on the ridge. In increasing wind Olsen and I built a wall around the tent. This effort took us until 1:30 A.M. when we could relax, brew up and eat. The second storm kept on until July 2 when we descended the headwall because Holton could not carry on. *Statistics*: 4 short climbing days, 3 camps and 34 pitches of interesting but never difficult climbing, mostly on snow and ice. Recommended hardware: 4 ice tubes, 5 pitons up to 1" and 5 chocks up to a N° 8 Hex. Two snow stakes were helpful for anchoring the tent and were used on the final four pitches. I recommend this as a technical route without the objective danger involved in reaching the West Rib, the Cassin Ridge or the South Buttress.

MICHAEL COVINGTON

Mount McKinley. Bill Krause, Ted Waltman and Mike Danaher in alpine style made the fourth ascent of the East Buttress, reaching the summit on June 8 before descending the West Buttress. They had very severe weather conditions on this difficult route. They were nine days on the East Buttress and then were pinned down by storms for days on the upper slopes of the peak. In May Gary Bocarde and others made the second ascent of the Northwest Buttress.

Foraker and Crosson, Ski Descents, 1981. On May 22, 1981 we landed on the Kahiltna Glacier. The team was Pierre Beghin, James Merel, Jean-Luc Ruby and I. We left for Base Camp four hours later. After three days of looking for a suitable route on the east ridge, we finally decided to climb the southeast ridge. Before leaving Anchorage, we had asked several American climbers if they thought it was possible to make a ski descent of the southeast ridge; they just looked at us and laughed. We left for the climb with ten days' food and one pair of skis. To reach Camp I was not without danger. It was steep and we had to cross an avalanche area. I was nearly caught in a big ice avalanche. The good weather was so warm that we were obliged to climb after sunset. The