

*McKinley, Solo Winter Ascent.* Overcoming the usual high winds, extreme temperatures and blustering storms, Vern Tejas became the first man to climb Mount McKinley solo in winter and live to tell about it. He had previously climbed the mountain 13 times in summer. Trapped under the snow in makeshift shelters for 16 of his 30 days on the mountain, he climbed the West Buttress route from February 16 to March 15. He turned 35 years old the day after completing the climb, partially inspired by Japanese Naomi Uemura's near miss in 1984. Uemura was credited with reaching the summit but disappeared on the descent. Tejas left a small Japanese flag on the top in honor of Uemura when he reached the summit on March 7. "Naomi did this for me," said Tejas. "He made it a possibility." Tejas, who trained for the ascent by leading a climb of Aconcagua in Argentina in January, then climbing it twice more and descending once by mountain bike and once by paraglider, used a 16-foot aluminum ladder for protection crossing crevasse fields on McKinley's slopes. Only once, near the end of the climb, did he come close to crevasse danger, barely jumping across. He pulled 150 pounds of gear on a plastic sled. A stocky, 5-foot-9, powerfully built climber with a bushy beard and a shaven head, but for a wisp of a pony tail, Tejas brought no tent and only enough food for 16 days. At times when storms pinned him in one spot, he put himself on half rations. He also found an abandoned cache of food at a high camp and had additional supplies dropped to him by bush-pilot Lowell Thomas, Jr. "I probably had five sunny days," said Tejas. "One of them was the day I flew in and another when I flew out." During the time spent in his snow caves, Tejas amused himself by playing the harmonica and listening to Alaska Public Radio by transistor radio. Denali National Park rangers estimated that Tejas faced weather comparable to the original winter summit party's stormy climb in 1967 — temperatures as low as  $-40^{\circ}$  and winds that drove the windchill factor to colder than  $-100^{\circ}$ . "I didn't realize my climbing would go beyond the climbing community and touch so many people in Alaska," said Tejas. "This has been the greatest reward from the climb."

LEWIS FREEDMAN, *Sports Editor, Anchorage Daily News, Alaska*

*McKinley, South Buttress Alternate.* Our route may be a valuable alternative for attaining the crest of the South Buttress from the Kahiltna east fork. Our choice was based upon a desire to avoid the objective avalanche hazards to be found on the Japanese Ramp. Bill Alexander, John Chaklos, Chuck Crago, Zach Etheridge and I were landed on the strip on the southeast fork of the Kahiltna on May 1. We established a camp below Kahiltna Notch on May 10 and from that vantage point we could observe the well-known Japanese Ramp as well as a broad rib farther southeast, which appeared less threatened by séracs. Its pronounced crest, as opposed to the almost bowl-like concavity of the Ramp route, might also give us protection from slab avalanches. A band of séracs at the start of our spur was the first obstacle. Steep ice, crevasses and some route-finding resolved the problem. A camp midway up the spur at 14,500 feet was