

## Alaska

### ALASKA RANGE

*Geographical note:* While the well-known peaks in Denali National Park are often called “The Alaska Range,” these peaks form just one part of the immense Alaska Range, which contains many significant subranges, including the Hayes and Delta ranges, and the Revelation, Kichatna, and Tordrillo Mountains.

### HAYES RANGE

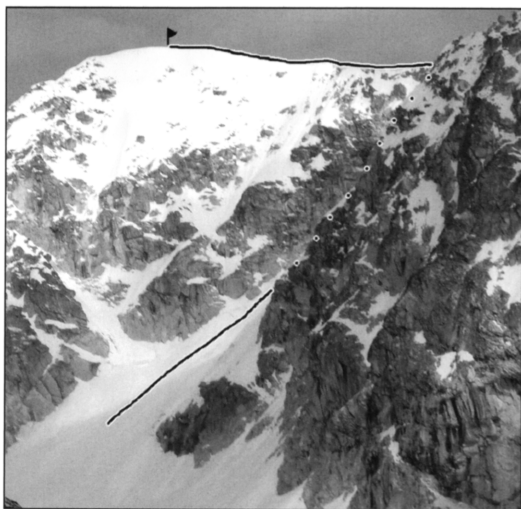
*Special Olympics, south ridge.* My wife Anna Liljedahl, Andy Stern, and I flew into the Hayes Range from the Denali Highway with Gracious Air on June 8. The short, relatively inexpensive flight landed us on a fish-filled pristine lake a day’s hike from the Nenana Glacier. We made a barefoot base camp on lush tundra on the north bench of the Nenana Glacier. Our objectives were three: collect rocks for my Ph.D. dissertation on the tectonic history of the Alaska Range, climb as many untouched granite peaks as time and food allowed, and avoid the permit hassle and buzz that Denali Park offers to the west. The granite was a tad shattered, but Andy and I climbed peak 8,060' (the glacier is at 4,000') via the south ridge (4th-class mixed, 75° slush, knife-edge straddling). We egotistically assume the peak hadn’t been climbed before and named it Special Olympics (SO) in reference to both Andy and I having suffered life-changing injuries. Though an occasional tourist helicopter ruined one nap, I recommend the area for those looking for an alternative to the flash and dash of the central Alaska Range. The geology we did has actually caused a paradigm shift in Alaska geology, but, like climbing, the doing is more interesting than the telling.

JEFF APPLE BENOWITZ

### DENALI NATIONAL PARK

*Denali National Park and Preserve, summary.* The 2007 climbing season began with the first solo winter ascent of Mt. Foraker, by the renowned Japanese climber Masatoshi Kuriaki. This “Wind Warrior” of the Alaska Range posted the only successful ascent of Foraker out of 21 attempts this season [reported in the 2007 AAJ—Ed.].

We conducted 19 search and rescue missions, involving five fatalities, reminding us again how fragile life is in



Special Olympics peak, showing the south ridge route.  
Jeff Apple Benowitz

the Alaska Range. These incidents involved climbing falls, crevasse falls, rappel failure, snow blindness, an avalanche, altitude sickness, and other medical problems. Along with numerous medical transports of patients from the 14,200' camp on Denali, the NPS-contracted Lama Helicopter, flown by pilot Jim Hood, performed two operational short-haul rescues this season in terrain outside our typical focus area, including a day-hiker on Mt. Healy near park headquarters and a distressed hiker in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park.

Congratulations go to Denali Pro Award winners Heidi Kloos and Robert Durnell, guides for Mountain Trip International, for their selfless assistance to other climbers during a particularly grueling rescue mission.

The South District staff continued to investigate and penalize businesses offering unauthorized commercial services within the park, both in the aviation and mountain-guiding realms. This year, working with the United States Attorney's Office, we conducted two undercover investigations. One of these investigations led to the execution of a search warrant, and charges are pending in the case. The other investigation resulted in the cancellation of climbing permits for illegally guided clients. This past season the National Park Service cancelled over one hundred registrations for climbers involved—knowingly or unknowingly—with illegal businesses.

Quick Statistics—Mt. McKinley and Mt. Foraker:

*Mt. McKinley: Average trip length: 16.8 days. Average trip length for groups that summited: 17.6 days. Busiest summit day: June 12, with 77 summits. Summit breakdown by month: June (379), May (177), July (15). Average age: 37. Women constituted 12% of all climbers.*

*Forty-five nations were represented on Mt. McKinley and Mt. Foraker, including U.S. (729 climbers), U.K. (64), Canada (50), Germany (39), and Spain (36).*

*McKinley was attempted by 1,218 climbers, with 47% reaching the summit; 1,099 attempted the West Buttress, with 47% summiting. Twenty-one climbers attempted Mt. Foraker, with only Masatoshi Kuriaki summiting.*

The complete Mountaineering Summary can be found at  
[www.nps.gov/dena/planyourvisit/summaryreports.htm](http://www.nps.gov/dena/planyourvisit/summaryreports.htm)

*Summarized from the DENALI NATIONAL PARK & PRESERVE ANNUAL MOUNTAINEERING SUMMARY*

*Other notable ascents (in addition to individual reports below).* British climbers Jon Bracey and Andy Houseman made the long-awaited second ascent of the French Route on Mt. Hunter's North Buttress in early May. Since the 1984 first ascent, the sustained and intimidating route had shut down many strong parties. Bracey and Houseman climbed the 6,000' vertical to the summit and descended the West Ridge, taking four days total.

On June 9 Pierre Darbellay and Raphael Slawinski climbed a new line to the summit ridge of Kahiltna Queen. Their *Le Voyage au Bout de La Nuit* (Journey to the End of the Night, 450m, WI4+ R) climbs a prominent gully immediately right of the West Face route.

In mid-June Colin Haley and Mark Westman made an impressively fast ascent (less than two days to the summit) of the difficult 7,800-vertical-foot Denali Diamond on Denali's steep southwest face. This was the route's fifth ascent.

On Denali in June the three south-facing couloirs in the black rock, which are obvious from the 17,200' camp on the West Buttress, descending from the North Peak, were skied for the first time, by a group that included Adam Clark, Greg Collins, Chris Davenport, Nick Davore, Clark Fines, and Kirsten Kremer.