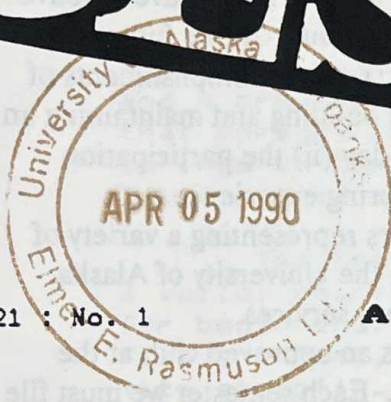




# DESCENT



Volume 21 : No. 1 **Alaska Alpine Club** March 1990

### Officers

President.....	John Keller	479-3630	Vice President.....	Joyce Restad	479-7865
Secretary/Treasurer....	Carol Hsieh	457-3093	Councilor.....	Stan Justice	479-5017
Councilor.....	Buck Wilson	479-2419	Editor.....	Stan Justice	479-5017

### Contents

	Page
Calendar of Events - - - - -	1
President's Message - - - - -	2
Coming Events - - - - -	3
Intermediate Ski Mountaineering and Climbing - Class Schedule - - - - -	4
Mount Hayes: Lost Horizon - Ed Speer - - - - -	5
Foraker Vindicated - Willy Hersman - - - - -	11
Denali National Park and Preserve - 1989 Mountaineering Summary - - - - -	12
Mount McKinley: Guides say climber cap not needed - Tim Mowry - - - - -	18

### Calendar

March 16	Tolovana Hot Springs - Joanne Groves (see article for details)	
March 22	Annual Meeting	Brooks 204 7:30 p.m.
March 31	Glacier Rendezvous (An organizer is desperately needed for this event)	
April 4	Start of Intermediate Climbing Class	Brooks 204 7:30 p.m.
May 4	Reunion and Graduation Party	Yak Estates Commons 7:30 p.m.

The **DESCENT** is published 1 to 4 times a year on a hit or miss basis. Copies are sent to members of the Alaska Alpine Club. Non-members may receive **DESCENT** for \$0.50 an issue.

Membership in the Alaska Alpine Club is open to anyone with an interest in the mountains. Meetings are open to the public and are normally the second Monday of the month, September to May, on the UAF campus. Tea and cookies are provided. The Alaska Alpine Club is a campus organization of the University of Alaska, Fairbanks.

**RASMUSON LIBRARY**  
UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA-FAIRBANKS

ALASKA  
PER  
OVR SZ  
G  
505  
DA

## President's Message

**Year-End Review.** While March is hardly the end of the year, the approach of the annual meeting suggests that we take stock of where we have been, where we are, and where we might go in the future. The past year has been good in the sense that the club is still alive with most of the club activities and services intact. However we really have not been able to start anything new. We will have to leave it to new leadership to implement some fresh ideas for the club. In the future the Alaska Alpine Club can rely on a number of strengths: (i) the accomplishments of the club in the past, such as building mountain huts and building and maintaining an annual climbing instructional program, that we enjoy today (ii) the participation over many years by climbers who have wide mountaineering experience and perspectives (iii) the participation in the club by climbers representing a variety of communities and points of view and (iv) affiliation with the University of Alaska Fairbanks that provides a club venue and other important services.

**University Relations.** The Alaska Alpine Club is an approved club at the University of Alaska Fairbanks with 208 paid members. Each semester we must file a report showing substantial student, faculty, and staff membership. We always meet this requirement but as local University-affiliated members graduate or retire, there is a natural tendency for the "non-UAF" membership to increase. This club bridges the gap between the University and the rest of the community the way very few other organizations do. Also the club has a long history of contributions to recreation at the University and it has a number of distinguished university faculty as past or present members. We expect that, whatever the month-to-month membership figures show, the club will remain welcome on campus.

**Canwell Hut Permits.** The state permits for the Canwell huts have still not been issued. The state asked us to apply for permits last fall. We sent in the applications, input from the public has been received by the state, we completely rebutted these objections, and there the matter stands. I think the Department of Natural Resources bureaucrats have been cowed by two letters from Doug Buchanan. Doug says the huts are unsafe and that we are not qualified to maintain them. We point out that we have maintained the huts very well for twenty years and have provided safe haven for many Canwell-area users during that time. To my way of thinking the argument is clinched by the ample precedents for huts on State land, such as the mountain huts in Chugach State Park.

**Annual Meeting.** The annual meeting will be THURSDAY, MARCH 22, 1990 at 7:30 pm in room 204 Brooks Building on the UAF campus. All members are encouraged to attend: you a liable to be elected newsletter editor if you forget to come! (We are looking for a replacement for Stan Justice who has done this for quite a few years now and needs a rest). Also one important issue before the membership will be a vote on changing the articles of incorporation. These were published in an issue of Descent last year as required by law.

## TOLOVANA HOT SPRINGS

Ski into Tolovana Hot Springs on March 16th!! The larger cabin has been reserved for the nights of Friday March 16 and for March 17. This allows for a day to ski in, a day of exploration and relaxation, and a day to ski out. Tolovana Hot Springs is accessible via an 11 mile trail at a point 90 miles from Fairbanks on the Minto-Manley Highway.

The larger cabin (18 x 24) which sleeps 6 in beds and who knows how many on the floor. The cabin has wood heat and a propane stove for cooking. However, I would suggest that persons come prepared to cook their own meals. The hot springs is contained in a 30 X 15 foot pool next to the cabin; it is maintained at approximately 110 °C.

The trail descends from the Minto-Manley Highway into a valley characterized by black spruce. It is not a trail for beginners. After crossing this valley one ascends Tolovana Dome, an approximately 1000 foot elevation gain (its steep!!). However, the view from the top is truly fantastic--the Alaska Range!! The trail descends steeply via a sharply twisting trail into the springs. The area around the springs is beautiful with large birch, aspen and spruce lining the creek which runs year round due to the hot springs.

A visit to Tolovana Hot Springs is a truly unique experience. The managers, Tom DeLong and Paul Hummel, deserve praise for maintaining the springs in a primitive condition suitable for that segment of the population who desire to experience the wilderness in a minimally developed setting. If you are unable to make the trip in March, you may want to arrange a trip of your own in the future. Contact Tom DeLong, PO Box 83058, Fairbanks, Alaska 99708. Phone: 455-6708, 452-0235 (radio telephone).

Persons desiring to join the trip should phone Joanne Groves, 479-3079(home), 474-7870(work). Reservation of the cabin for two nights cost \$100. This expense will be divided equally among the participants. I will also endeavor to coordinate transportation to the trail head.

### **ANNUAL MEETING**

**THURSDAY, MARCH 22**

**BROOKS 204 @ 7:30**

To maximize fun and minimize the drudgery of being an organization we consolidate all our business into one efficient meeting per year. This makes it doubly important to get a good turn-out. The important agenda items will be election of officers and approval of the new articles of incorporation. The conversation ranges over all the important issues facing the club so it is a good opportunity to find out what is going on. Tea and cookies will be served. **BE THERE!!!**

**ALASKA ALPINE CLUB REUNION AND  
CLIMBING CLASS GRADUATION PARTY**

**Yak Estates Commons**

**Saturday May 5 @ 7:30 p.m.**

Everyone is invited to cook up their favorite dish to serve 6 - 8 **HUNGRY** climbers and bring it up to the Yak Estates Commons (building @ far east end of Yak Estates). So we don't end up with 30 freezer burned salmon here is a guide;

If your last name begins with:

A - L....Bring....Main Dish

M - R....Bring....Dessert

S - Z....Bring....Salad or Vegetable

Bring your own Beverage.

For entertainment bring 10 - 15 slides of people in compromised positions. We will provide a projector & stack loader.

**Intermediate Ski Mountaineering and Climbing - 1990 Schedule**

- Mar 31,1 Glacier Rendezvous - Not part of the climbing class, just a fun weekend trip to one of our favorite glaciers. An organizer is needed.
- Apr 4 Snow Climbing, Igloos, Fly-in climbs Chapter 15
- Apr 7,8 Silvertip Peak (9400 ft) - Strenuous steep ski up Michael Creek, cross pass to Jarvis Glacier. Climb ridge to summit
- Apr 11 Ice Climbing Chapter 17, 18
- Apr 15 Healy Ice - A Sunday trip to Fox and Dragonfly falls to practice ice climbing.
- Apr 18 Leadership, Expeditions Chapter 10,11&12
- Apr 21,22 Institute Peak (8000 ft) - Graduation climb. Ski in 6+ miles and camp. Climb steep snow to top of Institute.
- Apr 25 Rock Climbing
- Apr 29 Angel Creek Rocks - Day trip to Angel Creek Rocks out CHS road.
- May 5 Graduation Pot Luck & slide show. Yak Estates Commons - 7:30 pm

Mount Hayes: Lost Horizon  
Ed Speer

April 15, 1989

Off we went to climb the north ridge of Mount Hayes, a heavily glaciated Alaskan peak about 200 miles below the Arctic Circle and 13,832 feet high. This was the classic route pioneered by Bradford Washburn and would involve an exciting traverse along an exposed, severely corniced ridge. We weren't too worried because we heard it had been done by a 63-year-old woman. We were: Stan Justice, who looks like the Jack of Diamonds in his homemade outdoor gear; Tom Heinrichs, a transplanted Yosemite rock climber on his first snow climb; Dave Gehrke, and me. Our bush pilot flew us to a frozen lake 6 miles from the base of the mountain at about 4000' elevation. He would be back April 30; we planned on spending up to 10 days climbing Hayes.

The wrinkled landscape offered lots of variety for skiing. The north facing slopes were covered with snow, but as we rounded the top of each hill we could encounter snow, tundra or boulders. We roughlocked down steep sections like the old Eskimos who smeared mud on their sled runners for friction, only we had bits of tundra stuck to purple ski wax.

Base camp just below the ridge was comfortable, with tents and running meltwater. Dave mentioned that on a Himalayan climb he had read about, a dozen Sherpas piled on top of each other in a two-man tent and considered it luxurious because normally they just have a tarp and body heat.

Day 1

We cached our skis, tents, extra food and fuel, lightening our packs to somewhere between 70 and 90 pounds. We would rely on snow for shelter. The morning was spent in a fast scramble over shale, ice patches and snow. By midday we were in the glaciated zone with crevasses, so we roped together in two teams but still didn't place any protection to attach the ropes to the mountain.

As the day waned, Dave and Tom fell behind, held back by stomach cramps in Dave and 90 pounds on Tom. Stan and I hunted for a cave site on a little plateau 30' wide with crevasses along both edges. The snow was way too hard to dig, so we opened a quarry and began sawing out snow blocks for an igloo. An igloo must be built in a spiral for stability, and we had a lot of trouble keeping the spiral going because we were building on a hillside. With three of us working most of the time and the fourth cooking dinner, we finished in four hours. Thanks to the hillside, the entrance tunnel that enabled the igloo to trap a bubble of warm air inside went down six feet.

We tucked ourselves in for a good rest after a long day. Dave ignored the call of nature until, with a disgusted sigh, he unzipped his sleeping bag and dived headfirst down the tunnel.

Day 2

We woke up to a crystal-clear morning with a temperature of about 5 degrees and a foot of new snow. Tom began leading and picked an interesting route over the west face toward an icefall. Eventually Stan and I passed Tom and Dave on the left and brought the group back onto the ridge.

The exposure increased to the point where a falling climber might not be able to do an ice ax arrest before reaching the cliff of the west face. Although there was little danger of actually falling, we switched to a running belay for peace of mind.

We had a late lunch on top of a prominent peak at 9900', contemplating our first good view of the main part of the mountain. I was wondering how we were going to get up something so steep that the snow could barely cling to it.

Plunge-stepping down to the saddle at 9500', Stan plunged into a 12" crevasse and fell on the far side. We proceeded a bit more cautiously to the big bergschrund that separated the saddle from the mountain. Here we had to find shelter, because there was no likely place in sight higher up. Besides, we were beat. We tried a few test pits and kept finding snow too hard to dig easily. Finally we settled on a site, and while two guys were digging the cave, the other two tromped down a crevasse-free area in the afternoon sun, made dinner and hung sleeping bags out so some of the moisture would sublimate. We didn't want to have ice growing in our bags for the next two weeks. Dave made a tidy little laundry line to sort his hardware for tomorrow.

After three hours we had a cozy hobbit-hole.

### Day 3

Another beautiful, sunny day dawned. Tom started climbing at 8 a.m. by leading across a large but soft snow bridge that spanned the bergschrund. The 60 degree slope above could be called either rotten ice or hard snow, depending on whether you were trying to set a screw or a picket for protection. Tom got up 15 more feet, placed one good screw and backed down. Dave collected all the other long screws and took the lead. He got above the bergschrund onto a 43 degree snow slope that would have held pickets nicely if he had only brought more than two. Undaunted, he kicked steps to the ridge and belayed Tom up. Stan followed, then me. I left the ground at 12:30.

After a second pitch and a short traverse, I rounded a corner to see Dave hanging woefully by his arms from what appeared to be the crack below a cornice that hung 10' over the far side of the ridge. He was trying to traverse around an overhanging bulge, and he couldn't climb any higher for fear of breaking off the cornice. As I drew nearer I saw that the crack was actually a trench Dave had hacked out with his ice ax so his arms would have something to cling to.

Dave and Tom both eventually got around the bulge with hard work and knee holds. Tom moved like a rock climber, smoothly clipping into or out of the rope without disturbing his precarious stance. But by now it was already 4 p.m. and we were only three pitches from our cave, so we decided to leave the ropes fixed in place, retreat to the cave for the night and scamper back to this spot early in the morning. Unfortunately, it took so long to get Dave and Tom back around the bulge and fix a reliable rappel anchor for the bergschrund that we would probably have done better to go ahead and make a new cave.

### Day 4

This morning it was both sunny and warm. As we retraced yesterday's route the temperature climbed to 40 degrees and we sweated rivers in our glacier cream. From our viewpoint high above the horizon we saw an array of sundogs including the rarely-seen dog below the actual sun. A large rainbow ring encircled the four sundogs, and a very faint second ring encircled the first.

We regained yesterday's ground in three hours. Beyond the overhanging bulge the cornice gradually disappeared and the ridge mellowed to an easy walk with occasional running belays because of the exposure. The leader had to break trail through loose snow. We traversed a long way across the west face to avoid a bergschrund, found a nice ramp to get above it, gained more altitude, traversed onto the east face to avoid another bergschrund and found ourselves dead-ended below a crack 10' wide with a thick cornice that overhung the top half. The only alternative to a long leap with flying axes was a one-foot-wide snow bridge off to one side that Stan gallantly offered to let me lead. I couldn't stomp down footholds or probe with my ice ax without further weakening the little spider-web bridge. I made sure my prussiks were in order on the rope, zipped shut all the openings in my jacket, let everyone take "before" pictures and then crept across for an anticlimactic arrival.

Lots of tedious snow slogging brought us to a good spot for a high camp at 10,300'. Flat ground was nearby, only 100' of mountain loomed directly above to start avalanches, and we had a spectacular view of the range. We spent three hours hacking out a cave big enough to cook in with the sleeping bags unrolled.

#### Day 5

We were all tired, but the weather was good again and we didn't know how long it would last, so we got up at 4:30 for a quick breakfast and a long summit day. To save weight we left the sleeping gear behind, taking only our day gear, three cold lunches apiece, the Whisperlite stove and a pint of fuel.

Stan and I took the lead rope and stayed there all day, not because we were hogs but because we moved faster over crevassed terrain than either Dave or Tom. Thin air and trailbreaking kept us at a slower pace than we would have liked for the first few hours of straightforward slogging. We did some more interesting maneuvering around snow obstacles that led to a 50 degree couloir of hard-packed snow above a deep crevasse and approachable by a reasonable snow bridge. I front-pointed the lead up the couloir, occasionally hammering in a long picket that would have stopped a fall by one of Hannibal's elephants. A little dicey dancing over smaller crevasses and lots of panting up a windblown slope brought us to a lunch stop just below the 12,700' north summit. Here we had our first view of the main summit since the ski in. The last thousand feet didn't look too hard, but to get to it we had to traverse a ridge about half a mile long where the shifting wind and weather had created every kind of snow and ice obstacle to poke up from it.

Zigzagging up more steep snow brought us to the north summit, where we paused only long enough to wave toward Fairbanks in case anyone was watching. We dropped down to the ridge and I trotted out on a wide section with a running belay only to punch one foot through the cornice crack. We changed to sitting belays and took turns leading one rope length at a time.

The ridge narrowed and the cornice grew. The cornice lay to the right above a 70 degree slope and the slope on the left dropped at about 50 degrees. Anything that got dropped would make it to one of the glaciers 5500' below. The snow had an icy crust that wouldn't quite hold a person's weight, underlain by deep sugar snow. It took a dozen stomps to make one good bucket foothold. Pickets were useless and flukes were doubtful, so we dispensed with intermediate anchors, made bombproof belay stances and prepared ourselves for a long prussik if the leader pendulumed. A little to the right, the snow was harder and the slope less severe, advantages that had to be weighed against the increased likelihood of breaking off the cornice. I noticed it was a lot easier to go second when the footsteps had already been made, but at one point while stepping in Stan's footprint I punched through the cornice crack again.

Eventually the ridge got flatter. Stan led around a 15' cornice that had built up in a dozen layers like an onion, made a belay stance and sent me up a pyramid-shaped structure that pierced the ridgeline where there was no cornice. I truncated the pyramid for a belay platform, feeling somewhat like an eagle making its nest. I brought Stan up the pyramid. He crawled toward the far side, took one look and crawled back.

"Ed, I can't lead this. It's a knife edge of rotten snow!"

I declined his offer to be the hero and we retreated to the ridgeline. We thought it might be possible to front-point around the base of the pyramid. Stan collected our ice screws and started leading. He found hard brittle ice on the high spots and rotten snow in the gullies, placed two screws and returned. It probably would have been no problem to do this just off the highway near Valdez, but with alpine axes, 40 pound packs and evacuation logistics we didn't care to think about, we chickened out.

By now Dave and Tom had arrived, so Dave tried the pyramid traverse. He got farther than Stan but stopped at more rotten snow.

Day 5  
too late  
At 9

A wind had picked up as the sun approached the horizon. After sitting in the snow for two hours while Stan and Dave tried their leads I began feeling spacey and shivering constantly even though it wasn't very cold. The strain of climbing and fearing death for much of the day had used up all my energy. I raised the question of hypothermia and pointed out that since it was already 6 p.m., the summit was 1000' above us and our sleeping bags were 2500' below, there was no way we could reach the summit and get back to camp that night.

The others were reluctant to turn back; they had assumed that if we didn't make it back to camp, we would do an emergency bivouac somewhere on the mountainside after bagging the summit. We finally decided it would be best to leave a rope fixed on the pyramid, return to the flat spot just this side of the north summit and bivouac there. The bivouac would consist of a small hole in the snow where we would pile on top of each other without sleeping bags like Sherpas, removing our boots every couple of hours to rub our toes, and survive miserably until the next day when we would quickly climb to the summit and return to the high camp. If the weather turned bad we would be in some trouble without much food or fuel, but at least we wouldn't have to traverse that ridge in bad conditions.

Dave placed a screw at his farthest point and attached the plastic water ski rope we had brought for situations like this. Stan and I started back, finding the ridge amazingly easy with a successful route already stomped through but noting the glow of daylight through the snow in the bottoms of some of our old ice ax holes. We poked around for a cave site but had second thoughts when we studied the horizon. Clouds were massing in the south and the wind was picking up, and we really didn't want to be there if it stormed. When Dave and Tom arrived we had a quick huddle and decided to return to camp for a rest day. We made good time down in spite of being tired and clumsy. Stan put two crampon holes in his windpants and I went for a couple of tumbles.

#### Day 6

We slept for 12 hours or so and finally crawled out to a day of intermittent light snow and sunshine. The weather looked clear above but a steady plume of snow from the north summit all morning indicated strong winds, which died in the afternoon. We inventoried food and fuel and found both a bit low, so we went on smaller rations for the cave day and started practicing more conservative fuel habits like starting the stove only once a day for supper and sleeping with slush in our bottles that became water in time for a cold breakfast. We slept, chatted, read books and played chess on a board Stan had thoughtfully painted on the back of his shovel.

#### Day 7

At 4:30 we poked through a 3' drift in the doorway to find it cloudy below but clear and gusty above. Since we only had 4 days of full rations left (including 2 days to get down), we decided to go for it. We also decided to expand our options by taking full packs as far as some point we knew we could get back to, like the base of the north summit. Occasional gusts blew snow into the cave as we ate breakfast. By the time we were ready to go the wind was bad. Dave sat in the lee of the cave entrance to belay Tom, who quickly vanished, and when Tom got to the end of the rope Dave hollered for him to come back. Dave was worried about us dropping into crevasses or blundering into an avalanche zone with the poor visibility.

Later, Stan took a walk and noticed fantastic swirls of snow and clouds. Our camp appeared to be right at the elevation that divided north and south weather. All the nasty stuff came pouring over the range from the southwest to engulf us and everything above, while below us the clouds quickly dissipated and the view was usually clear. By afternoon it looked calm up high, just like yesterday, and it seemed we would have been all right if we had kept going.



### Day 8

At 3:30 the weather looked bad and we slept in. By 9:30 it looked good but it was too late to go for the summit. We spent another day in bed but realized later that we should have gone at least to a higher camp so we would have more time to make a decision the next day. In a long discussion it became clear that Dave and I were mainly concerned with preserving our lives and digits while Stan and Tom were summit hounds. They had a greater stake in it than we did; Stan had attempted Hayes twice before and hadn't seen the summit yet, and Tom had quit his job for the climb. We finally agreed to stay on half rations, allow a two-day window for the summit that would include getting wherever we could whenever possible, then boogie for the tents.

### Day 9

Starting at 3:30, we broke trail through deep new snow with near zero visibility. Dave led, grimly determined not to stop until the summit hounds called it quits. After an hour it was obvious that the snow wouldn't get any better even if the weather did, so we all agreed to give up. We left two ice screws, a plastic rope and about 30 wands above us to join the archeological treasures of Mount Hayes.

For the first time since Day 1, conditions didn't look good enough below us for a descent. We waited in the cave, all dressed up and nowhere to go, until cold feet forced us to unroll the sleeping bags.

Before evening the wind shifted to the northwest and began dumping tons of fresh snow on our camp. The cave entrance drifted in and the large ledge we had dug for our packs and latrine vanished.

With the entrance closed we had no clue as to what the weather was doing outside. In the cave it was warm, calm and silent as a tomb. That night we set our alarm watches so someone would get up every two hours and dig out the entrance. Even if we didn't asphyxiate we were concerned about getting so much snow over the entrance that we would have to shovel it into the living area to make a passage out. From fear of suffocating we all unconsciously switched to high-altitude breathing in our sleep: a long exhalation followed by a sudden big gasp.

### Day 10

For my 2 a.m. shift I couldn't reach the end of the drift with the shovel, so I swam through and erupted into a storm-lashed world like some Pleistocene groundhog. No shadow.

When Dave opened the entrance at 5:30 a cloud of spindrift came in and coated the sleeping bags, especially Tom's. The air had actually seemed fresh all night. We settled on blocking the hole with backpacks and letting the entrance drift in most of the time. No descent today, not much food left even at half rations.

We were tired of sleeping and playing chess. Tired of talking about mountaineering, the Air Force and Doug Buchanan. Each of us had read all the others' books, including Dave's Lost Horizon. We thought of names for this story. The rejects included "Hibernating at 10,300 Feet," "Bedsores on Hayes" and "Clan of the Cave Bore." We talked about Mexico and big meals.

I cut snow blocks and arranged them around the entrance to divert the constant sluffing from above. Our tunnel which had originally emerged at ground level became a pit 5' deep.

### Day 11

I crawled out early to look for the horizon and saw the same old stuff. Hunger will eventually drive us down if the snow never stops, but we want to wait for better visibility because we're afraid all the wands we placed to mark danger spots and route changes will be buried.

The increased insulation from all the new snow on top of the cave has made it start dripping inside.

The weather began to clear up toward evening. We might have made an hour's progress down if we started moving, but we decided on an early morning start. We spent an eighth night in the cave.

#### Day 12

At 3:30 the weather was ugly again. We should have moved last night. I was pretty sure the weather would improve with only a slight drop in altitude because the range would block the clouds that kept pouring in from the south.

At 5:30 there was intermittent visibility and we were hungry enough to chew leather, so we packed and left. I floundered out through snow that was above my waist and made slow progress by crawling on hands and knees with the shovel in one hand and the ax held flat in the other. Soon the snow improved to only crotch deep. Several of our wands still had a few inches poking above the snow because they were on the most exposed part of the ridge. The wands that had been ribboned with plastic surveyors' flagging rather than cloth were stripped clean from the wind and cold. Stan rappelled down the steep section above the first bergschrund and nearly missed the ice bridge because of all the new snow. I wanted to downclimb that section to save the picket if someone else would string anchors for good bottom-rope protection, but the others didn't want to take the chance of having to pull me out of the bergschrund, so we all rappelled and left the picket behind.

We passed the first cave, deeply buried. Dave and I took the lead rope because Stan wanted to rest from his trailbreaking and Tom was feeling hunger cramps. The new snow up to peak 9900 was so hard to push through that Dave finally got out the shovel and dug a path. Halfway up we heard a loud whumping sound of settling snow, which gave Dave a big adrenaline charge to get to the top. Suddenly the clouds above us parted and we had a beautiful, clear view all the way to the north summit.

The snow became only a little more than knee deep in most places and the visibility improved. We crossed the area where we had done our first running belay and laughed at the thought that we had been nervous there. I belly-crawled the lead over one snow-covered crevasse and Dave followed on foot with no problem, but we later learned that Tom with his heavier pack had fallen into it.

We found two feet of our igloo still poking above the snow with the marker wands on top. Dave and I dug a big pit to get down to the entrance. Inside we found a perfect stalagmite of loose snow that had drifted through the vent hole.

#### Day 13

The day dawned cloudy but with good visibility and occasional gusts. A large snow plume blew steadily from the north summit. Now that we were off the steep part of the mountain it was harder to plod through the new snow. Near the final descent the snow got soggy and we saw avalanche scars. We could see the lake we had landed on filling with meltwater, meaning we would have to ski ten extra miles across the tundra to a dirt landing strip.

The cache was intact. We erected the tents and Stan prepared a gigantic spaghetti dinner.

The next day was sunny and calm for our race to the landing strip to meet the plane. As we headed east the north and main summits of Hayes diverged and we could see that tormented ridge. Occasionally we would stop and stare at it, trying to spot our tracks and pick out memorable parts of the route. Someone would always voice the thought we all shared.

"Huh - This would've been a good summit day."

Prod  
it start

## Foraker Vindicated

Willy Hersman

It was May 1983. Friday the 13th I remember was the date. Ken Green, Peter Reed and I had just landed on the Kahiltna Glacier, stepping out into the heat of another beautiful spring day, anxious to get our climb up Foraker under way while the weather held. We hurried to set up camp and by afternoon we were on our way towards the SE Ridge, which was alive with avalanches. Stepping across the debris on our way to a wide gully we reasoned, as novices might reason, that since the slopes had already run they wouldn't run again. And up the gully we went.

It took less than an hour for the next avalanche to sweep the gully and anything in it. Since we were in it, we ended up at the bottom in a few short seconds, lucky to be alive. We decided to give the gully a few hours' rest, though we probably should have gone home. None of us would say it but knew the mountain was a dangerous place to be. As it turned out, the mountain would not defeat us.

A stove, damaged in the slide, developed an incidious crack which we did not notice until we had gotten up to Camp II, at 10,500'. All the slopes up to that point had been very avalanche-prone. Once the crack in our only stove got worse we knew the climb was over and we would have to descend the same wet snow to the glacier. Which we did. Almost off the climb, a crevasse fall left Ken in bad shape and a rescue ensued. It would be a long road to recovery for Ken after that and it seemed unlikely that he would ever come back to that dangerous mountain. But the failure and accident hadn't set well with us. Peter and I talked several times of going back again, and the following year I went back to the same route for another try. Avalanches again, and so the attempt was abandoned. And then later when Peter died in Norway I let it go.

Between the years until this one I watched the attempts that took place on Foraker. I was still hopeful that the failure could be righted. During that time I lost two friends on the SE Ridge and knew I would not ever go back to that route. I wouldn't recommend it to anyone. There's a much better way.

This June I teamed up with Todd Miner and Gordy Vernon to climb the Sultana Ridge. It was first climbed in 1979 by Dave Johnston, Brian Okonek and Roger Cowles on a winter trip. It isn't a quick way to the top, but it's safer than the SE Ridge. The route involves 8 1/2 miles of ridge, 14000 feet of elevation gained and lost and a long summit day. None of it is technically difficult, requiring only one tool each and occasional pickets. It begins with a climb of Mt. Crosson and then continues up and down, up and down until you finally reach the NE Ridge of the mountain. We took 18 days to complete the climb, topping it off with a 6000-foot summit day. It was very elating to stand up there in the chill wind, even for the few short minutes that it lasted. Mostly I thought of Ken and Peter, wishing I could share it with them.

DENALI NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE

1989 MOUNTAINEERING SUMMARY \*

For the fourth consecutive year, a new record was set for the number of mountaineers attempting to climb Mount McKinley. In 1989, 1,009 persons registered to climb the mountain. It was also the first time more than 1000 people registered to climb the mountain during a single year.

There were winter attempts by three separate expeditions on Mount McKinley, including one soloist. One of the group attempts, by three Austrian guides, was successful on 2/20, by the West Buttress route. The second winter attempt, a few days later on the West Buttress, was unsuccessful and resulted in the death of three experienced Japanese mountaineers who were apparently caught above high camp by a severe storm. The soloist, Alaskan resident and Mount McKinley guide Dave Stahaeli, completed the first winter solo ascent of the West Rib.

Temperatures were relatively mild during the mountaineering season but April through midJune was consistently stormy. Exceptionally good weather from midJune through midJuly salvaged what would have otherwise been a dismal year for success rate statistics. Beyond midJuly, summer storms dumped heavy snowfalls at all elevations making travel both difficult and hazardous.

The Denali Medical Research Project received funding and was in full operation this season. The team continued research into the causes and treatments of high altitude illnesses. The staff designed and had an aluminum pressure chamber constructed which was capable of sleeping two persons. They continued studies comparing oxygen breathing in association with pressurization as a treatment for High Altitude Pulmonary Edema (HAPE). They also extended 1988 studies of pulmonary vasodilation drugs for the treatment of HAPE. Results from 1989 investigations suggest limitations to the usefulness of pulmonary vasodilation drugs in the field treatment of HAPE. At the end of the season, Dr. Peter Hackett announced that the Denali Medical Research Project would not operate during the 1990 season, but that they planned to return to continue studies in 1991.

\* All statistics in this report are for portions of the Alaska Range within the boundaries of Denali National Park and Preserve. Where specifically noted, statistics apply only for Mount McKinley.

Despite the record number of climbers on the mountain, there were only five search and rescue incidents (including one rescue in the Ruth Glacier area) in which the National Park Service was involved. This is the lowest number of search and rescue incidents since 1975 when 362 persons registered to climb Mount McKinley.

The National Park Service conducted three, three week patrols on Mount McKinley, as well as numerous patrols into other areas of the Alaska Range. We continue to staff a ranger station in the town of Talkeetna where mountaineers register for their expeditions. A strong emphasis is placed upon the importance of environmentally sound expeditionary climbing and sanitation techniques. Additionally, mountaineers are encouraged to remain self-sufficient and conduct their own evacuations whenever possible.

INTERESTING STATISTICS:

Record Number Of Climbers On Mount McKinley: In 1989, new all-time records were set for the number of persons attempting to climb Mount McKinley:

1979 =	533
1980 =	659
1981 =	612
1982 =	696
1983 =	709
1984 =	695
1985 =	645
1986 =	755
1987 =	817
1988 =	916
1989 =	1,009

Success Rate:

\* 524 (52%) of those attempting the summit of Mount McKinley were successful. This figure includes 14 people who successfully reached the North summit.

\* For the first time in three years, climbing teams reached the summit of Mount Foraker. Five out of 13 climbers (38%) attempting Mount Foraker reached the summit.

\* Eight out of the 24 climbers (33%) attempting Mount Hunter reached the summit.

Record Number Of Climbers On Mount McKinley During A Given Week:  
A new all time high of 367 climbers were on the slopes of Mount McKinley for the week ending May 13, 1989.

**New Altitude For Mount McKinley?:** On June 21, a team of researchers and support climbers reached the summit of Mount McKinley. They carried a Global Positioning System receiver that when used in conjunction with a Global Positioning Satellite, can measure geographical heights. Preliminary indications show the elevation of Mount McKinley to be 14' lower than the height previously measured by more traditional survey methods. The newly computed height of 20,306' is not yet official, so, at least for the time being, the previous height of 20,320' remains the official height of Mount McKinley.

**Acute Mountain Sickness:** 95 (9%) had symptoms, of these:

- \* 39 (4%) were mild
- \* 33 (3%) were moderate
- \* 23 (2%) were severe

**Frostbite:** 54 (5%) reported some degree of frostbite. Of these, 3 (0.3%) required hospitalization.

**West Buttress Route:** 854 (85%) of the climbers on Mount McKinley were on the popular West Buttress route. This is exactly the same percentage as during 1988.

**Soloists:** 17 persons registered for solo climbs this year. A number of these were able to team up with other groups once they got to the mountain. The body of the Spanish soloist who disappeared late in the 1988 climbing season was discovered just north of Denali Pass. It appears he died of hypothermia.

**Mountain Guiding:** 265 (26%) of the climbers on Mount McKinley traveled with one of the authorized guiding companies. The overall success rate of the guided groups was 43%. The majority of these trips occurred on the West Buttress route, but other guided trips attempted the Muldrow Glacier, West Rib and South Buttress.

**Foreign Climbers:** 360 (36%) of the climbers on Mount McKinley were from foreign countries. 27 nationalities were represented:

Austria- 27	Australia- 3	Canada- 5
Chile- 8	France- 29	Germany- 47
Iceland- 6	Kenya- 1	Indonesia- 4
Italy- 26	Japan- 39	Korea- 24
Mexico- 8	Czechoslovakia- 6	New Zealand- 6
Poland- 17	Russia- 1	Spain- 7
Sweden- 1	Switzerland- 42	Great Britain- 41
Belgium- 2	South Africa- 2	Romania- 1
Luxembourg- 1	Taiwan- 2	Northern Ireland- 4

**New low temperature reading:** The National Park Service maintains a minimum recording thermometer, supplied by the National Weather Service, at the 17,200' level on the West Buttress Route. The winter of 1988-89's coldest recorded temperature was -77 degrees F. It is likely this temperature was associated with an extremely cold arctic front which dominated Alaskan weather for two weeks and later moved south to bring very cold temperatures to Canada and much of the United States.

#### New Routes and Interesting Activities:

##### Mount McKinley:

On March 12, Dave Staeheli reached the summit of Mount McKinley via the West Rib, thus completing the first solo winter ascent of this route. This was the route's second winter ascent. On the lower glaciers, Dave carried an aluminum ladder suspended from his sit harness to help protect himself from crevasse falls. He experienced relatively mild temperatures....(-20 degrees F. was the lowest). During his climb, a violent storm raked the upper mountain, but the West Rib remained relatively protected from the extreme winds that took the lives of three Japanese climbers on the West Buttress.

In June, Alaskan Vern Tejas completed the first launch with a parasail from the South Summit to the 19,500' plateau on the West Buttress. This was to be a test flight for a longer flight to Denali Pass later in the day, however, the weather deteriorated and forced cancellation of further flights. The following day Tejas sailed from the 17,200' high camp on the West Buttress to the 14,200' basin.

On June 16, Frenchmen Bertrand Doligez and Serge Tauz completed the first parasail descent from the North Summit to the 14,200' basin on the West Buttress.

The National Science Foundation sponsored an expedition which collected, where accessible, rock samples from the summit to the foothills to the south.

Mount Foraker: In June, Americans Jim Nelson and Mark Bebie completed the second ascent of the Infinite Spur route.

Mount Hunter: On July 1st, Americans Seth Shaw and Conrad Anker completed a new route on the West Face.

On May 28, British climbers Jonathan Preston and Roy Ruddle climbed a new line ("Eroica" route) on the South

Face which joined the SW Ridge at the plateau. They did not continue to the summit because of a storm.

Mount Huntington: In late May, Americans James Quirk and David Nettle climbed the West Face via the 1978 variation to the Harvard Route, then on to the summit.

Mooses Tooth: After their Mount Huntington climb, Quirk and Nettle moved to the Mooses Tooth and completed the second complete ascent of the German Route.

Peak 7,400', Ruth Gorge: In late June, Americans Todd Bibler and Doug Klewin completed the first ascent of the West Face leading to the Southwest Ridge.

Mount Russell: After two years of attempting Mount Russell climbs, Americans David Auble and Charlie Townsend completed the first ascent of the East Face. After enduring a multi-day storm near the summit, the men parasailed from the mountain. Their full packs made for an "interesting" descent flight.

Accidents/Incidents: The following incidents are the more significant accidents or incidents that occurred in 1989:

Winter attempt, multiple hypothermia fatalities, ground and helicopter evacuation by own support group: On 2/16/89 a very experienced, four person Japanese team flew into the SE Fork of the Kahiltna Glacier to attempt a winter ascent of the West Buttress. The leader, Noboru Yamada, was on a quest to become the first person to climb to the summit of the highest mountain on each of the seven continents in the winter. Teruo Saegusa, Kozo Komatsu and Shunzo Sato were the other team members. Sato became ill early in the climb and returned to base camp to wait for the others. The remaining three reached the 17,200' high camp on 2/20....the same day a team of three Austrians returned to high camp from a successful summit bid. On 2/21, neither team could move because of severe weather. On 2/22 there was a short break in the weather and the Austrians began their descent. The Japanese team was still in their camp. They were not seen alive or heard from again. Weather soon deteriorated and an extremely severe wind storm enveloped the upper mountain. Wind speeds were estimated to be 200 mph and continued through 2/26. Winds then decreased somewhat to 60 - 90 mph through 3/9. On 3/10, search flights located what appeared to be three bodies below Denali Pass. Search efforts were terminated on 3/11. It is believed the climbers tried for the summit during a brief lull in the severe wind storm and were caught near Denali Pass as the winds again increased. The bodies were recovered later in March by a 17 person team of Japanese climbers who came to

Alaska for that purpose. The three men died from hypothermia.

Fall with injuries, survival epic, helicopter evacuation: On 4/14/89 Anchorage climbers Jim Sweeney and David Nyman flew into the Ruth Glacier. They did not take a radio. They eventually decided to climb a couloir known as the Elevator Shaft located on the North Face of Mount Johnson. On 4/19, the first day of their climb, Sweeney began leading the fourth pitch. He placed an anchor, climbed about 40' above it, then encountered an ice window. He grabbed under the window and leaned out for a better look at his options. Suddenly, the entire formation upon which he was climbing collapsed. Sweeney, and the 15' wide, 35' high and 6' thick ice formation fell down the couloir. His anchor held, but his hip was fractured in the resulting 100' fall and avalanche. The events of the next seven days are too involved to detail here (CIR# 890016) but proved to be a test of endurance and of their will to survive. During this time, either one or both of the men were hit by eight different avalanches. Weather deteriorated and prevented all access to the mountains by rescue teams. The two men were eventually rescued by military helicopter on 4/26.

Fall, triple fatalities, ground and helicopter recovery: On 5/17/89, three British climbers, Chris Massey, John Lang and Julian Dixon, began their summit attempt from the 16,500' camp on the West Rib. As the day progressed, weather began to deteriorate. The three men were seen by other parties who had turned back due to the weather, but the British team indicated they planned to continue on. Early the next day, a National Park Service Mountaineering Ranger camped at the 14,200' basin on the West Buttress, noticed what appeared to be bodies at the base of the Orient Express, a couloir which cuts across the upper West Rib. The rescue team discovered all three of the Brits died in a fall. It appeared the men were probably descending the West Rib, roped together, in extremely poor weather, when one of them slipped and pulled the others down the couloir.

Tent with occupants blown from ridge, injuries, helicopter evacuation: On 5/27/89, a guided expedition from Genet Expeditions was camped at the 16,400' level on the West Buttress. For the previous three days, the weather had been intermittently windy. Winds increased during the evening. One especially violent gust tore one of the tents, with three occupants, from its anchors. The tent and occupants began a tumbling fall toward the Peter's Glacier. One occupant, John Richards the assistant guide, was ejected early in the fall and came to rest 300' below the ridge campsite. The other two occupants, Jim Johnson and Howard

Tuthill, fell 1000' and came to rest on a small ledge dressed only in polypro underwear. All equipment and clothing were lost in the fall. The assistant guide was able to ascend to the camp and alert others of the accident. The chief guide, Dave Staeheli, was able to descend to and provide some survival equipment to Johnson and Tuthill. Others on the mountain, including the Denali Medical Project personnel and private mountaineers, organized a difficult and dangerous rescue effort, eventually stabilizing the two men who were flown off the mountain the following day via helicopter. Johnson suffered a compression fracture of a lumbar vertebrae and Tuthill frostbit his fingers. Both suffered from hypothermia. The lives of these two men were saved by the rescue efforts.

Tent and occupant blown from ridge, equipment lost, no injuries: In a very similar incident to the one previously described, a Rainier Mountaineering Inc. guided expedition was camped at the 16,100' camp on the West Buttress during an extended storm. Chief guide Curt Hewitt was alone in the tent when a severe wind gust ripped the tent from the anchors and lifted it and Hewitt over 3-4' snow walls. The tent began a tumbling fall. Hewitt was able to escape through an entry tunnel and climb back to the campsite, however, the tent and equipment were lost. Fortunately, no rescue or significant injuries were involved, but the expedition was forced to retreat.

High altitude pulmonary edema, ground evacuation: A Genet Expedition trip led by Dave Staeheli reached the 17,200' high camp on 6/21/89. There they waited three days for weather to improve. One of the clients, John Michel, had been feeling poorly earlier in the trip. At high camp, he lacked energy and spent most of the three days sleeping. It was decided he would not attempt the summit. On 6/24 all expedition members left for a summit attempt except for Michel who remained in camp. No other parties were at high camp. Late that afternoon, another Genet team arrived at high camp and discovered Michel to be suffering from HAPE. They evacuated him to the 14,200' camp where Michel received treatment and recovered.

There were other incidents of altitude illness and frostbite this season. Most of these were treated at the Denali Medical Project camp at the 14,200' basin on the West Buttress.

Perforated ulcer, peritonitis, ground evacuation to base camp: On 5/24/89 Japanese climber Tetumi Inoue developed severe abdominal pain while at the 9,800' level on the West Buttress. He was evacuated, with assistance from the American "Poko Denali III" expedition, to base camp and was

flown to Talkeetna and then transported by ambulance to Valley Hospital. There he underwent surgery for a perforated peptic ulcer and peritonitis resulting from gastric emptying.

#### Trends and items of special concern:

**Percentage of foreigners requiring rescues:** Foreigners accounted for 36% of the total number of climbers on Mount McKinley. Fourteen persons required some sort of organized rescue/recovery effort this year. Seven (50%) were from foreign nations. All six of the fatalities during 1989 were foreigners.

**Solo ascents:** Each year we see more people register for solo climbs on Mount McKinley. This year 19 persons registered solo...two more than in 1988. Some of these were able to team with other expeditions at least to traverse the heavily crevassed portions of the lower glaciers.

**Increasing use:** For the last four years we have had new records set for the number of climbers attempting to climb Mount McKinley. In 1989, climbers spent a total of more than 19,000 user days on Mount McKinley alone! Over 16,000 of them were on the West Buttress. This is approximately the same, or somewhat more, mountaineering use which occurs annually on Mount Rainier.

**Sanitation:** With the increasing use, it is more important than ever for mountaineers to properly dispose of their human waste to prevent the contamination of snow that might be melted and used for drinking or cooking water by future expeditions. We are still suggesting the use of plastic bags as latrines. When moving camp, tie the bags off and toss into a deep crevasse. The use of biodegradable plastic bags is recommended. Use the latrines in the camps where they are provided. This season, a new latrine was installed at the 17,200' high camp on the West Buttress. It seemed to be successful in concentrating human waste in the pits beneath the latrine. Unfortunately, the latrine had to be moved four times as the pit filled. The snow/ice pack at the high camp moves very slowly. This causes concern for the eventual proliferation of waste filled pits. For 1990, the latrine will be relocated farther out in the 17,000' basin where there is greater movement of the glacier.

**Trash:** Many expeditions are hauling their trash to base camp where it is flown off the mountain. Still others continue to crevasse their trash. Trash accumulation on other popular mountains of the world has recently received

considerable publicity. Trash dumps and appalling sanitation conditions at the more popular campsites in the Himalayas, Europe, South America and elsewhere threaten human health, degrade the mountaineering experience and threaten the mountain environment. Mountaineers from all nationalities must take the responsibility for, and the initiative in, preserving the quality of the world's mountain environments. A combination of education, leading by example, and peer pressure are probably the most effective tools that can be brought to bear against less considerate mountaineers.

Administrative notes for 1989:

The 1989 South District staff consisted of:

South District Ranger: Bob Seibert  
Mountaineering Rangers: Roger Robinson  
Ralph Moore  
Jim Litch

Student Conservation Aid: Peter Fielding

A new German translation of the Mountaineering Brochure was completed during the fall and is now available for distribution.

A portable radio repeater was installed in the Yenlo Mountains, south of the Alaska Range, in an effort to improve communications between the Talkeetna Ranger Station and the mountaineering patrols. This location proved generally unsuccessful in accomplishing this objective. The repeater was removed later during the summer.

Looking ahead to 1990:

The National Park Service plans to coordinate a pilot study to survey users' perceptions of sanitation, trash and crowding issues on Mount McKinley.

Mountaineering registrations will be entered into a data base to allow better investigation of trends and more efficient daily management of the registration process.

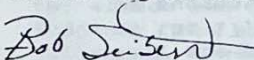
Construction is scheduled to begin at the end of the 1990 mountaineering season to build a seasonal housing unit to replace the old surplus trailer which has served as seasonal housing for the Talkeetna mountaineering staff.

Monies have been appropriated and the process begun to acquire property in Talkeetna upon which a mountaineering contact center will eventually be constructed.

Since the Denali Medical Research Project will not operate during 1990, the National Park Service will staff a small Weather Port at the 14,200' basin on the West Buttress. This camp will primarily serve as a communication and coordination base for rescue incidents.

A radio repeater will be installed on top of the Alaska Regional Office in Anchorage in an effort to improve communications between the mountaineering patrols and the Talkeetna Ranger Station.

For more information or to request mountaineering information and/or registration forms, please contact me.



Bob Seibert  
South District/ Mountaineering Ranger  
Talkeetna Ranger Station  
P.O. Box 588  
Talkeetna, Alaska 99676  
Phone: (907) 733-2231



Alaska Women of the Wilderness - We received a copy of this active Eagle River based clubs newsletter. They sponsor classes in cross country skiing, avalanche awareness, map reading, canoeing, glacier travel and adventurous trips to exotic locations. The fall newsletter advertised a sea kayak trip to Baja. Women who would like more information should write to them at P.O. Box 775226, Eagle River, AK 99577. The phone is 688-2226

FOR SALE: Chouinard "X" tool, 60 centimeters, classic curve pick. Good for steep ice or as general purpose axe for someone who's shorter. \$60.00. Contact Dave Gehrke, 479-5017.

DENALI NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE  
1989 MOUNTAINEERING SUMMARY

<u>MOUNT MCKINLEY</u>	<u>EXPEDITIONS</u>	<u>CLIMBERS</u>	<u>SUCCESSFUL CLIMBERS</u>
West Buttrass	176	625	329
West Buttrass (guided)	28	229	115
Muldrow	10	34	20
Muldrow (guided)	1	15	11
West Rib	15	38	9
West Rib (guided)	3	13	6
Messner Couloir	1	2	2
Cassin	10	28	22
Cassin (guided)	0	0	0
South Buttrass	2	6	0
South Buttrass (guided)	1	8	4
American Direct	1	3	0
Reality Ridge	1	2	0
Northwest Buttrass	1	6	0
Pioneer Ridge	0	0	0
Wickersham Wall	0	0	0
	(250)	(1,009)	(524)
<u>MOUNT FORAKER</u>	5	13	5
<u>MOUNT HUNTER</u>	11	24	8
<u>MOUNT HUNTINGTON</u>	2	4	2
<u>KAHILTNA DOME</u>	1	8	0
<u>KAHILTNA DOME (guided)</u>	1	6	6
<u>E. KAHILTNA PEAK</u>	0	0	0
<u>MOUNT RUSSELL</u>	1	2	2
<u>MOUNT RUSSELL (guided)</u>	1	6	0
<u>MOUNT BROOKS</u>	3	9	2
<u>MOUNT BROOKS (guided)</u>	2	24	10
<u>MOUNT SILVERTHRONE</u>	0	0	0
<u>LITTLE SWITZERLAND</u>	4	12	NA
<u>LITTLE SWITZERLAND (guided)</u>	1	14	NA
<u>GORGE PEAKS</u>	7	15	2
<u>MOUNT DICKEY (guided)</u>	1	5	0
<u>MOUNT BARILLE</u>	1	2	0
<u>MOOSES TOOTH</u>	5	10	2
<u>MOOSES TOOTH (guided)</u>	1	3	0
<u>MOUNT DAN BEARD</u>	1	1	0
<u>MOUNT FRANCIS</u>	1	3	3
<u>ROOSTER COMB</u>	1	2	0
	50	163	N/A

NOTE: Since registration is required only for Mount McKinley and Mount Foraker climbs, statistics for other climbs represent those climbers who voluntarily checked in with the Mountaineering Rangers. Other climbs, especially in the Ruth Glacier area, are likely to have occurred.

# Mount McKinley:

## Guides say climber cap not needed

### Education, not population, is the problem

By TIM MOWRY  
Frontiersman staff

Guides on Mount McKinley say crowding is not the big problem on North America's biggest mountain and limiting the number of mountaineers is not the answer.

The problem, according to guides who work on the mountain, is simply a matter of manners.

"I don't think we're close to a climber capacity if we could somehow get climbers to take care of their own wastes," said Chris Mannix of Talkeetna, a guide for Alaska-Denali Guiding. "It's a sanitation problem. I don't think limiting the number of people will solve that problem."

The West Buttress of Mount McKinley has become a human highway during the climbing season over the past decade, with human waste littering the popular route to the 20,320-foot summit. Last year, 1,007 men and women from around the world tried to reach the summit, the first time in history the number of climbers surpassed 1,000. National Park Service rangers are contemplating putting a limit on the number of climbers on the mountain.

In a recent Associated Press story, chief ranger Bob Seibert said rangers plan to perform a population and impact study next spring to determine if a climber cap should be placed on the number of mountaineers allowed to scale Denali.

"It's not clear what the environmental damage is in an environment of rock and ice," said Seibert, who himself stood on the summit this summer along with 516 other climbers. "It's hard to assess. But at what point is it unreasonable to allow more people on the mountain? I think we're sure reaching a point where we have to start taking a look at the upper levels.

*"It's the damn Europeans. They bring their sloppy European attitudes over to American mountains. They're slob. It really shows."*

*-Nick Parker, head guide for Alaska Mountain Trip, talking about the European problem on Mount McKinley.*

"In my opinion, it's hard to consider it a true wilderness experience," he said.

But guides who work on the mountain said the NPS could be asking for trouble by restricting people from climbing Mount McKinley.

"I think if you tried to regulate the number of climbers (on McKinley) there would be court battles," speculated Mike Howerton, a guide and general manager of Genet Expeditions. "People want to climb the mountain and they should have every right to.

"Sure, it's not the aesthetic, pristine mountain climb it was 20

years ago but no mountain of that magnitude is," he said.

"What are you going to do?" argued Nick Parker, head guide for Alaska Mountain Trip in Anchorage. "This is America. You can't tell people they can't climb a mountain."

Besides, guides say, it's not the population which presents a problem on Denali. Rather, it is the attitude of the people who

duce the number of foreign climbers on the mountain, Howerton said.

"If something were to be done," he said, "it would be to limit some of the European teams, quite honestly.

"They're the ones that leave a lot of the trash up there," he said. "They just bury it. If people would look at things a little more closely, they would see some European labels on the stuff they unburied."

Parker agreed. "It's the damn Europeans," he said, angrily. "They're slob."

"They bring their sloppy European attitude over to American mountains," said Parker. "It really shows."

"A lot of the worst trash dumps are left by foreigners," echoed Mannix. "They don't have a developed wilderness ethic. Leaving trash behind is nothing to them."

Another problem, according to Howerton, is an increasing number of illegal or "bootleg" guides on Denali.

"If you cut down on illegal guiding that would help," said Howerton, who last guided on Denali in 1985. "There's a lot of illegal guiding going on up there."

There are six guiding companies — Genet Expeditions, Alaska-Denali Guiding, Alaska Mountain Trip, Fantasy Ridge of

(Continued on Page 13)

# Guides: Europeans are big part of problem

(Continued from Page 12)  
Telluride, Colo., American Alpine Institute in New York and Ranier Mountaineering Inc. of Seattle — with permits to guide climbers up Mount McKinley.

Guiding companies are currently restricted by the NPS in the number of clients they may take on the mountain at one time on a given route. Last year, that number was raised from 15 to 16 clients per route every two weeks.

This year, Genet Expeditions, the biggest of the concessionaires, guided 65-70 people up Denali, Howerton said, in comparison to 90 clients in 1988. The company raised its prices this year to make up the difference.

"Maybe we can do stuff like that and cut numbers without cutting our business throats," said

Howerton. "It would be nice to see the numbers stabilize or go down somewhat, but on the same hand I'd hate to see our numbers drop because that's our livelihood."

The allure of standing on top of North America is what attracts the bulk of the climbers, said Parker, even though there are much more pristine and equally challenging peaks scattered throughout the Alaska Range. It's the number — 20,320 feet — that is the magnet.

"That's the only attraction," said Parker, who has stood on Denali's summit 14 times in 19 trips. "There are a million mountains in the Alaska Range that are prettier than McKinley."

"I'm trying to de-emphasize the importance of Mount McKinley

by taking my clients into more and more parts of the Alaska Range," he said. "It's only important because it's high."

As far as the safety factor is concerned, guides say rescues are inevitable, no matter what the number of climbers on the mountain. But having 200-300 people on the mountain at one time can have its advantages.

"You're going to have rescues whether you have 900 people up there or 500 people up there," said Howerton. "It's going to happen."

"Things get caught before they happen" with that many people up there, he said.

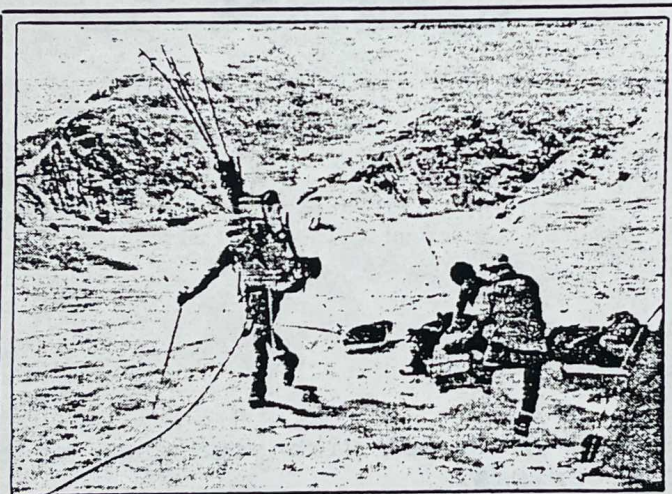
Guides agree, though, that NPS rangers are in a difficult jam when it comes to the situation on

Denali.

"I wish Park Service would write more tickets (for littering), but that's hard to do," sympathized Mannix. "It's going to be difficult finding a workable solution."

According to Howerton, who was last on McKinley in 1985 and guides parties up mountains all over the world, Denali still represents a pristine wilderness experience compared to some other highly used — and abused — peaks.

"Mount McKinley is pristine wilderness compared to base camp at Aconcogua," he said, referring to South America's tallest (22,834 feet) and most popular peak. "It looks great compared to some of the places I've seen that are a lot more heavily used."



The number of climbers going in and out of base camp at Kahiltna Glacier keeps going up on North America's tallest peak.

## A decade on Denali

YEAR	CLIMBERS	DEATHS
1980	659	8
1981	612	6
1982	696	0
1983	709	2
1984	695	2
1985	645	2
1986	755	4
1987	817	2
1988	916	2
1989	1,007	6

