DENALI NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE

MOUNTAINEERING SUMMARY - 1983

The two climbers successfully reached the top of a difficult first ascent in the Alaska Range, but their luck ran out on the descent. After a serious fall where injuries occurred, they were unable to continue. Only after what must have been a long an difficult five days were they discovered and evacuated by helicopter-- back to civilization and medical attention. Both climbers were very experienced climbers, with previous expedition experience in the Alaska Range, but their climb this year very nearly ended up with more tragic consequences.

The above climb would be noteworthy at any time, but what makes it even more interesting is that it happened not once, but twice, in the Alaska Range in 1983-- once on Mount Foraker and once on Mount Huntington.

A number of impressive first or second ascents were made in 1983 on Mount McKinley and nearby peaks in the Range, but it is interesting to note that of the seven climbs described below, five were marred by a serious accident and/or rescue. A string of "bad luck" perhaps? Or are first ascents just getting harder to come by? Maybe climbers-- knowing that rescue facilities are nearby-- are becoming too callous towards the hazards of the difficult routes in the Alaska Range? Whatever the reason, climbers in the future should pay heed to these incidents and learn from their mistakes. In some cases, only "good luck" may have prevented more serious incidents.

A group of four Alaskan climbers completed the first winter ascent of Mount McKinley's West Rib route in March, and became only the third group to successfully climb the mountain in winter. Two of the four climbers reached the summit, but on the descent to their high camp one of the two-- not roped to his partner-- apparently slipped and fell over 4,000 feet down the route. His body was never found.

Since the Wickersham Wall was first climbed by two separate routes in 1963, there have been no further successful ascents-- until 1983 when the Wall was again climbed twice, by American groups. In May, four climbers completed the second ascent of the Canadian route on the western edge of the Wall, but one of the four was injured in a fall and was later evacuated from the West Buttress route. When she fell, the climber was not roped to her partner and her ice axe was in her pack where it could do her no good.

A month later, a group of three made a successful climb on a new variation of the Canadian route, deviating from the original route between 15,000 and 18,000-feet.

In the first of the two noteworthy climbs on the South Face of Mount McKinley, a pair of climbers from Colorado added a new route to the Southwest Face. Their route-- possibly the most difficult route ever done on the mountain-- lies between the Cassin Ridge and the Roberts/McCartney route. One of the two suffered severely frostbitten feet as they ascended. He was able to complete the climb but was evacuated from the West Buttress route as they descended.

On the opposite side of the South Face, two Japanese climbers made an impressive, incident-free second ascent of the American Direct route, and were strong enough on their descent to help lower an injured climber partway down the mountain.

A remote north ridge of Mount Foraker (one of two ridges between the original 1934 route and the Archangel Ridge) was climbed for the first time by two American climbers. On their descent of the Southwest Ridge, one of the two-- suffering from high altitude pulmonary edema-- lost his control and tumbled off the route, falling over 1,000 feet. As with the Wickersham Wall incidents, this climber was not roped together with his partner. Luckily, he stopped his fall and was able to regain the route with his partner's help. Five days later, both were evacuated by helicopter from their 15,600-foot camp.

The last ascent-- a new route on the East Buttress of Mount Huntington was climbed by two American climbers. Nearing the end of their descent, both fell and tumbled to the bottom of the couloir they were in. They were both injured but one of the two was able to get assistance five days later by struggling up a ridge overlooking the Sheldon Amphitheater and yelling down to a climbing party below. A helicopter evacuation was arranged shortly thereafter.

The High Latitude Research Group (HLRG) of the University of Alaska, Anchorage completed its second summer of medical research at the 14,300-foot camp and at the Kahiltna Base Camp. These radios-- along with the willingness of the HLRG crew to assist whenever needed were greatly appreciated by climbers and by the National Park Service who regularly depended on the HLRG during rescues.

Unfortunately, such a good thing will not last forever. At the present time, funding constraints and other considerations make it seem unlikely that the HLRG will be back up on the mountain in 1984. If this is the case, climbers will again be on their own on the upper parts of the mountain. Without excellent

communications and a team of well-acclimatized climbing doctors at the 14,300-foot camp, it is likely that there may be more accidents, and minor incidents may well become more serious. The HLRG doctors, noting minor and sometimes major signs of altitude problems in climbers at this camp, have had to caution the climbers to slow down their rate of ascent or to cancel their climb. Without the HLRG camp, climbers will have to again take the responsibility to caution themselves.

The handling of trash and human waste on Mount McKinley has been the subject of debate for many years, but in the past years the discussion has focused primarily on the issue of trash. In the early 70's it became evident that, with hundreds climbing the mountain every year instead of the relatively few who had done so previously, climbers could no longer simply leave trash or discarded food and equipment on the mountain. Before this time, it was considered "proper" to leave food and equipment caches for succeeding groups to use in an emergency. Most of these caches simply became lost or destroyed by wind, weather or ravens. But over the last ten years, organizations and individuals in the climbing community along with the National Park Service have waged an intensive campaign to reduce the amount of litter on Mount McKinley. Although we certainly have not reached 100% of our goal, we are satisfied that the mountaineers of today are climbing Mount McKinley with a much more sensitive ethic regarding litter and abandoned gear.

But for the most part, the question of human waste has not been dealt with. Most climbers, at least until this summer, continued to defecate and urinate in shallow latrines dug into the snow. This worked reasonably well in areas where snowfall exceeds snow melt, but not nearly so well in areas where snow melt regularly exposes old, abandoned latrines, or in areas high on the mountain where high winds blow away any new snow.

A number of times in recent years climbers suffering from gastro-intestinal complaints have blamed the "yellow snow" near the popular camping locations. As the number of climbers keeps increasing, it becomes harder and harder to find clean snow for cooking and drinking. So this year, the climbing rangers at the Talkeetna Ranger Station made a special point of urging all climbers to bag their human wastes and to dump the bags into deep crevasses. Plastic bags were provided by the National Park Service for those who needed them.

We by no means believe that this is the final solution to the handling of human wastes on Mount McKinley, but we do feel that it is a reasonably realistic intermediate step, and it should help solve the immediate health hazard. We were satisfied with the compliance in our first year of this effort, and are confident that climbers in future years will be even more sensitive to the proper handling of human wastes. At the same

time, we intend to continue our efforts to find the best way--that is reasonable, practical and effective-- to do so.

As is most years, a large number of climbers from the foreign countries travelled to Alaska to attempt Mount McKinley. This year, 161 climbers from fourteen different nations were on the mountain. The largest numbers came from Great Britain, Germany, and Japan, but there were also climbers from Austria, France, Canada, Switzerland, Denmark, New Zealand, Taiwan, Italy, Spain, Sweden, and Norway. To assist at least the majority of these climbers, the National Park Service has recently had its mountaineering brochure translated into two languages. In addition to English, we now have German and Japanese editions available. Anyone desiring any of these brochures or any other information can write to:

Mountaineering Ranger
Denali National Park and Preserve
P.O. Box 9
Denali National Park, Alaska 99755

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1983 MOUNTAINEERING SUMMARY

	Expeditions	Climbers	Successful
Mount McKinley			
West Buttress	99	351	222
West Buttress(guided)	20	177	130
Muldrow Glacier	7	41	28
Muldrow Glacier(guided)	2	33	32
West Rib entire	8	21	19
West Rib entire (guided)	1	9	0
West Rib via W. Buttress	8	27	24
W.Rib/W.Buttress(guided)	1	5	0
Cassin Ridge	6	13	8
South Buttress	5	13	0
Northwest Buttress	2	8	2
Wickersham Wall	2	7	5
Southwest Face	1	2	2
American Direct	1	2	2
TOTAL	170	696	310
Mount Foraker	12	37	15
Mount Foraker(guided)	1	6	0
Mount Hunter	12	34	16
Mount Huntington	6	14	4
Mount Huntington(guided)	1	6	0
Moose's Tooth	5	13	13
Kitchatna Spires	1	4	4
Mount Crosson	4	8	8
Ruth Peaks	5	24	14
Little Switzerland	5	33	27
Mount Brooks	4	9	2
	56	188	103
Total	219	897	577