DENALI NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE

1984 MOUNTAINEERING SUMMARY

The 1984 climbing season in Denali National Park and Preserve began on two notes of sorrow. At age 59, Francis Randall died from cancer. Francis was known to many as the "Kahiltna Queen" and spent the last nine summers as the 7,000' base camp radio operator on the Kahiltna Glacier. During that time Francis assisted with the coordination on dozens of rescues. She was one of the first women to climb Mt. McKinley. Francis will long be remembered by mountaineers for her charisma, warm friendship and her hospitality at the Kahiltna Base Camp.

The second note of tragedy involved the Japanese adventurer of Naomi Uemura. Uemura completed the first solo winter (February) ascent of the West Buttress route to the summit of Mt. McKinley. However, he disappeared and is presumed to have died during his descent, probably somewhere above the 14,300' level. Cold temperatures, high winds and poor visibility hindered search efforts and likely contributed to Uemura's disappearance. Uemura had completed numerous solo adventures during his life including the first summer solo ascent of the West Buttress route. He was an expert in arctic travel and survival.

The High Latitude Research Group from the University of Alaska did not receive funding to continue a third year of medical research at the 14,300' on the West Buttress. The National Park Service Mountaineering Rangers, assisted by volunteer medical doctors and volunteer mountaineers, established and operated a rescue/medical camp at the same location. The camp seems to have been very successful in reducing both the number and the cost of search and rescue incidents on Mt. McKinley. Its primary benefits were to assist mountaineers in the early detection of Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS), and when necessary, to effectively coordinate rescues with acclimatized personnel with communication capabilities. Early detection of AMS enabled many climbers to descend to lower elevations to better acclimatize before continuing their climb. This probably prevented numerous rescues. The Mountaineering Rangers encouraged parties to evacuate their own sick and injured whenever possible. This, combined with dependable on-site evaluation of potential evacuation situations, and better communications with Talkeetna, prevented many premature and/or unnecessary rescue responses. In addition, Mountaineering Rangers were unable to personally contact nearly all of the West Buttress climbers and emphasize the importance of proper sanitation and trash removal practices. This seems to have made a significant contribution toward cleaner campsites.

During 1984, the first littering citation was issued to a mountaineering party on Mount McKinley. The party was from Italy and had been contacted by one of the Mountaineering Rangers on the West Buttress route about leaving garbage and abandoning both garbage and food at a popular campsite.

Again this year, six commercial mountain guiding concessions and the National Outdoor Leadership School were authorized to operate under concession permits for the McKinley and Foraker massifs. Mountaineering Rangers began actively enforcing the regulations which prohibit other guides from operating commercially on these two mountains. Two citations were issued, one to an American, and another to a Japanese guide. Mountain guides who wish to lead commercial expeditions on either mountain must be under the employment of one of the authorized concessions. Demand to climb Mt. McKinley seems to have tapered out to approximately 700 attempts per year:

1978 = 539
1979 = 533
1980 = 659
1981 = 612
1982 = 696
1983 = 709
1984 = 695

Approximately 695 mountaineers attempted the summit of Mt. McKinley in 1984. Lower than normal temperatures and high winds created unfavorable conditions for summit attempts during April and May. June weather was excellent but it again deteriorated during nearly all of July.

Interesting Statistics:

Success Rate- 335 (48%) of those attempting the summit were successful.

Acute Mountain Sickness- 77 (12%) had symptoms, of these:
52 (67%) were mild
20 (26%) were moderate
5 (7%) were severe

Frostbite- 32 (5%) reported some degree of frostbite. Three required hospitalization.

West Buttress Route- 562 (80%) of the climbers on Mt. McKinley were on the popular West Buttress route.

Mountain Guiding- 222 (31%) of the climbers were guided by professional mountain guides. The overall success rate of these groups was 45%. Most guided trips occurred on the West Buttress, but other guided attempts on Mt. McKinley included the Muldrow Glacier, West Rib and the Northwest Buttress.

Foreign Climbers- 193 (28%) were from foreign nations. Fifteen different nations were represented:

Spain- 9	Austria- 21	Czechoslovakia- 9
W. Germany- 29	Japan- 33	Canada- 15
Italy- 7	Holland- 4	Switzerland- 32
France- 15	New Zealand- 9	England- 6
Brazil- 1	Australia- 1	Norway- 2

New Routes:

Mt. McKinley:

South Buttress- Ridge of No Return: a difficult climb soloed by Rained Casarotto (Italy). Casarotto completed his new route but did not continue to the summit.

South Face- Czechoslovakian Direct: a difficult route exposed to severe ice fall. It is probably the most direct route to the summit and follows dihedrals and ice ramps to the right of the Cassin. It was completed in ten days by a Czechoslovakian team- Adam Blazej, Korl Frantisek, and Krizo Anton.

Traverse- not a new climb but of interest- a well conditioned and acclimatized French Army team completed a traverse from 7,000' base camp to Wonder Lake in five days! They reached the summit in three days.

Mt. Foraker:

East Face- Pink Panther: the route tops out at 14,000' on the S.E. Spur. It was completed during May in five days by French Canadians Vachon, Dery and Gagnon, and Australian Sanders.

Mt. Hunter:

North Buttress Couloir: completed by two members of the French Army team- Tedeschi and Grison.

Mt. Huntington:

West Face Variation- a route completed by Jim Haberl and Rob Rohn, from Canada. Unfortunately these climbers disregarded their due-out date. After receiving calls from the climber's relatives, the NPS initiated an unnecessary search. The climbers and their air taxi service covered the cost of the search.

Rooter's Comb:

North West Face- also completed by Haberl and Rohn.

Accidents:

In addition to Naomi Uemura's disappearance during his winter ascent, there was only one other fatality during 1984. In early June, a Swiss guide died when he fell into a crevasse. He was skiing unroped down the West Buttress route. The accident occurred at the 10,700' level.

In April, a British climber was rescued from 14,000' on Mt. Foraker when he became disabled by severe pulmonary edema (HAPE). This was an extremely hazardous helicopter rescue conducted by Chris Soloy in his Hughes 500 D helicopter. The victim disregarded symptoms of AMS and delayed his descent until he was incapacitated. Furthermore, this was his second time he has been stricken by HAPE.

An Alaskan climber was injured and required helicopter evacuation following a fall during a traverse of McKinley's South Buttress at 11,000'. The group of three was off their intended route and was attempting terrain that exceeded their ability. The fall occurred when the leader unroped, when his belay rope proved too short to allow him to reach his desired objective.

A German climber fell at 18,500' on the West Buttress route and sustained possible internal injuries. He and other members of his party completed the evacuation to the 14,300' medical camp where he was flown out by Lowell Thomas in his Helio Courier. The victim carried no ice axe and was probably not roped at the time of the accident. He also had made an unusually long ascent that day and was probably suffering from exhaustion and at least some degree of AMS.

A guided party on the South East Ridge of Mt. Foraker was caught in an avalanche that carried three of its members down 800' including a 30' cliff. Fortunately, none of the mountaineers were seriously injured and they were able to evacuate themselves.

We continue to see some of the same mistakes reoccur time after time, year after year. The three most common seem to be:

1) Failure to adopt a conservative ascent rate to allow for proper acclimatization. The recommended rate of ascent is 1,000' per day above 10,000'.

2) Travelling unroped on Alaska's glaciers is an invitation to disaster. Again this year an experienced mountaineer died from an unroped crevasse fall. Everyone should travel with proper protection and the knowledge to extricate themselves from a crevasse.

3) Departing for a summit attempt with damp inner boots and/or improper footwear and insulated overboots, combined with inadequate food and water intake and the failure to stop and rewarm cold extremities is a sure formula for frostbite.

This spring, Bob Gerhard, Mountaineering Ranger at Denali National Park for the past eight years, accepted a new position at Lake Clark National Park. I have replaced Bob as the new South District/Mountaineering Ranger and will live in Talkeetna year-round. For more information please contact me.

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DENALI NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE

1984 MOUNTAINEERING SUMMARY

	Expeditions	Climbers	Successful
Mount McKinley			
West Buttress	114	428	219
West Buttress (guided)	19	134	79
Muldrow Glacier	3	25	3
Muldrow Glacier (guided)	1	14	0
West Rib	3	12	2
West Rib (guided)	3	19	0
Cassin	9	22	7
South Buttress	9	32	7
NW Buttress(guided)	1	6	4
South Face	1	3	3
TOTAL	170	696	310
Mount Foraker	11	33	10
Mount Foraker(guided)	1	5	0
Mount Hunter	9	25	13
Mount Huntington	7	17	2
Moose's Tooth	2	5	3
Kitchatna Spires	1	3	3
Rooster's Comb	1	2	2
	32	90	33
Total	195	785	357