

Denali National Park & Preserve Annual Mountaineering Summary-2006



More Sorrow in the Alaska Range

Our season was significantly impacted this year by the death of two friends, Karen McNeil and Sue Nott, who were lost on Mount Foraker. Karen and Sue had both befriended many of the Talkeetna staff and were well known in the climbing world as accomplished alpinists. Both of their families flew to Alaska during the search effort, as did many of their friends. It was a trying time for all. We will probably never know what happened or where they are located on Mount Foraker. We also lost Mr. Kim, a South Korean climber who sadly died of a sudden medical illness while descending the fixed lines on Denali. The Kim family also came to Talkeetna to thank the guides, mountaineering rangers, volunteers, and the Talkeetna staff for all their help.

We welcomed a new mountaineering ranger this season; Tucker Chenoweth brings great skills and experience to Denali as a former alpine guide, accomplished ski patroller, and Denali mountaineering volunteer. On the flip side, in 2007 we are losing mountaineering ranger Gordy Kito who has been with us for the past six seasons. Gordy was a former guide on Denali before joining the

National Park Service. Gordy, his wife Julianne, and his son Rowan are moving to Washington, D.C. for a new job as a Concessions Specialist at the National Mall in Washington, DC. Gordy's will be thoroughly missed as he wore many hats at the Talkeetna Ranger Station -- computer specialist, concessions expert, and maintenance guy -- in addition to being a superb mountaineering ranger. And Gordy always kept us on our toes!

Temperatures in the Alaska Range seemed closer to the norm in 2006, as the firn-line did not reach the 7,200-foot Kahiltna Basecamp. During the prior season, warm temperatures resulted in considerable snow melt at these lower elevations.

The U.S. Army High Altitude Rescue Team (HART) was able to support our camp insertions this year (and end-of-season extractions) at 7,200 feet and 14,200 feet in 2006. We hope to work with this invaluable team next season, though in the event they are re-deployed to Iraq, we wish them a safe journey.

(South District Ranger Daryl Miller)

ROUTE	<u>ATTEMPTS</u>		<u>SUMMITS</u>		SUMMIT %
	Teams	Climbers	Teams	Climbers	
MT. MCKINLEY					
Cassin Ridge	7	16	5	8	50%
Messner Couloir	1	4	1	4	100
New Route	2	5	2	5	100
Muldrow Glacier	3	16	0	0	0
North Peak Traverse	1	3	0	0	0
South Buttress Ramp	1	0	0	0	0
Thunder Ridge	1	2	0	0	0
West Buttress	255	1053	160	545	52
West Buttress Traverse	1	10	1	4	40
West Rib	4	12	1	3	25
Upper West Rib	11	31	6	13	42
TOTALS	287	1,154	176	582	50%
MT. FORAKER					
Infinite Spur	2	4	0	0	0%
South Face	2	4	0	0	0
Sultana	7	20	0	0	0
TOTALS	11	28	0	0	0%

(NPS Photo)



STATISTICS

Quick Statistics—Mt. McKinley

- Average trip length: 17.8 days
- Average trip length for groups that summited: 18.5 days
- Busiest summit day: May 29, 50 summits
- Summit breakdown by month: June (315); May (199); July (67)
- Average age: 37 years old
- Women constituted only 7.1% of the total, down from 11% in 2005

International Makeup

38 nations were represented on Mt. McKinley this season,

United States	719
Canada	67
Japan	60
United Kingdom	44
Spain	33

Most American climbers came from one of four states:

*Alaska (131)
Colorado (97)
Washington (91)
or California (85)*

Medical Breakdown—Mt. McKinley

46 patients required NPS medical assistance this season, broken down as follows:

	Patients	Evacuations
Altitude Illness	13	3
Cold Injury	13	5
Trauma	10	6
Other Medical	10	3*

**Includes one fatality*

*Denali Pass Traverse
(NPS Photo)*

FIRST ASCENTS AND NOTABLE CLIMBS

Of the new route activity accomplished in 2006, three new routes were climbed by Alaska Range veterans and two were the teams' first new routes in the Range. Overall, it was a quiet season with lower than average numbers on Denali and only five notable new routes climbed. The age old dilemma about what constitutes a new route is always an issue. Is it a new route if the climbers did not go to the summit? Mark Twight defended his position by saying a route is the path taken between two points, therefore a climbing route need not reach a summit to be valid. Michael Kennedy defended the opposing position, stating that without a summit a climbing route is only an attempt. Climbers can decide for themselves. I have attempted to report "notable" climbs, two of which (one on Broken Tooth and one on Denali) did not involve actual summits.



(NPS Photo)

Climbing alpine style, Canadians Maxime Turgeon and L.P. Menard completed their climb in three days from the base of the south face to high camp on the West Buttress following several weeks acclimating in the range. Though they came within roughly 200 feet of it, Turgeon and Menard reportedly bypassed the true summit due to stormy conditions. After a rest back at the 7,200-foot Kahiltna Base-camp, the duo returned to the base of the South Face to retrieve gear cached there prior to the climb.

For more information visit:

<http://www.climbing.com/news/hotflashes/forakerdenalifas06/>
<http://www.neice.com/Content2006/June2006/CanadianDirect.htm>

The Ruth Glacier area saw all of the April activity. Yearly visitors Mark Westman and Eamonn Walsh climbed "The Warrior's Way" on April 14 in a 19.5-hour push. Their route on the east face of Mt. Grosvenor marks the 4th ascent of the peak (this team also made the 2nd and 3rd ascents in 2005). A couple of weeks later the duo found good conditions on the East Couloir of Broken Tooth. Starting on the Coffee Glacier on May 10, they climbed 12 mixed pitches and turned around after reaching the ridge, but not the summit. Earlier on Broken Tooth, Fumitaka Ichimura and Katsutaka Yokoyama climbed "Before the Dawn" on April 26 and 27. Their route climbs a weakness on the north face for 23 pitches to the summit. For more information visit: <http://www.climbing.com/news/hotflashes/ruthgorge06/> <http://www.alpinist.com/doc/ALP17/climbing-notes-yokoyama>

In May, the team of Jen Olson and Katherine Fraser visited the remote Kichatna Spires. During a 3-week period from May 24 to June 15 they made several climbs, the most noteworthy being a 14-pitch route on Sunrise Spire that rises from the Cul-de-Sac Glacier to the summit ridge. They coined their route "Wholesome Razor". For more information visit: http://www.bdel.com/mugs_stump/2006_fo.html

The coup d'etat for the year was a route climbed on the South Face of Denali. Dubbed the "Canadian Direct" the route joins the American Direct between 16,000-feet and 17,000-feet.

In another noteworthy expedition, a three-member Russian party replicated the circuitous route Dr. Frederick Cook claimed to have taken to the top of Denali back in 1906. Commencing May 19 at the Don Sheldon Amphitheater on the east side of Denali, Oleg Banar, Victor Afanasiev, and Valery Bagov ascended Traleika Col, descended the Traleika Glacier to the West Fork, moved up the West Fork, then ascended a line on the South Face of Mt. Carpe'. The threesome then traversed the ridge crest from Mt. Carpe' to Mt. Koven, and on to Karstens Ridge. Continuing to the summit via the Harper Glacier, the Russian Team reached the top on June 2, 14 days later.

- Compiled by Joe Reichert



(Photo: Russian Research Expedition)

RESCUE SUMMARY - 2006

Detailed below are seventeen search and rescue missions performed by Denali National Park and Preserve rangers in 2006. For more detailed information on the missions listed below and information on the other missions performed in 2006 refer to [Accidents in North American Mountaineering-2007](#), published by the American Alpine Club.

On April 26, a climber with a history of cardiac problems experienced a **cardiac event** approximately two hours after departing basecamp for an attempt on the West Rib and Cassin Routes of Mt. McKinley. The expedition was able to return to the Kahiltna Basecamp without assistance and promptly contacted an NPS ranger patrol. The patient was subsequently evacuated via the NPS-contracted Lama helicopter and transferred to an air ambulance.

A climber contacted the ranger camp at 14,200-feet on May 12 with blebs (blisters) from second degree **frostbite** on the thumb and first two fingers on the right hand and darkened toes on both feet. The patient evacuated by helicopter the following day. The frostbite on the toes resulted in the amputation of eight tips to the first knuckle.

Despite following a gradual ascent to the 14,200-foot camp, a climber became ill and sought NPS assistance on May 17. Following a medical examination he was diagnosed with **High Altitude Pulmonary Edema (HAPE)** and a possible **upper respiratory infection**. The individual was placed on oxygen, administered medications, and continuously monitored and treated. He was evacuated to the Kahiltna Basecamp via the Lama helicopter on May 19, and transferred to an Anchorage hospital via an Alaska Air National Guard helicopter.

In a similar situation, a lead guide on a guided expedition became ill (again, despite a gradual ascent to the 14,200-foot camp) and sought assistance from the NPS on May 22. He was diagnosed with **Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS)**, **High Altitude Cerebral Edema (HACE)**, and an **upper respiratory infection** and placed on oxygen and monitored overnight. His symptoms did not improve, and he was evacuated via the Lama helicopter and transferred to an air ambulance for advanced medical care.

On May 25, one of three climbers attempting a ski descent of the Orient Express lost his balance at the 18,300-foot level, somersaulting out of the sight of his two partners before coming to a stop at 15,700 feet. His partners notified rangers at the 14,200-foot camp of the **fall**. The fallen climber got up and began stumbling down the remaining slope towards the 14,200-foot camp. Halfway down the descent, he fell into a crevasse, but was able to extricate himself. The hasty team made contact with him at approximately 14,700-feet, conducted an initial medical assessment, and transported him the remaining distance to the ranger camp via cascade litter and backboard. The patient was monitored throughout the night, and evacuated the following morning via the Lama helicopter to the Kahiltna Basecamp, where he was transferred to an Anchorage air ambulance for further evaluation and treatment.

On May 26, the NPS rangers at Kahiltna Basecamp were notified that two climbers had become separated and were in distress near the top of Mt. Hunter (14,573 feet). One was unable to move due to **frostbite injuries**, and he had no means of radio communication. His non-frostbitten teammate was stuck and could not move, but did have FRS radio communication with other teammates at the Kahiltna Basecamp. Owing to their exposed location near the top of Mt. Hunter, as well as the time and risk required to get a ground team to them, the best alternative was to rescue them using the high altitude Lama helicopter. Throughout the day of May 27, winds remained extremely high throughout the Alaska Range. In the evening, winds subsided and the Lama helicopter was able to fly in and land by each of the victims and evacuate them to the Kahiltna Glacier. The climbers were medically assessed and released to the care of their teammates at Basecamp.

On May 28, a solo climber came to the 14,200-foot camp suffering from signs and symptoms of **HAPE**. He was treated with oxygen and altitude medications and remained under NPS care until he was evacuated to the Kahiltna Basecamp by the Lama helicopter and later transferred to an air ambulance for transport to Anchorage.

A team attempting Mt. McKinley's West Buttress-to-Muldrow Glacier Traverse contacted NPS staff on May 28 and asked for assistance in handling a **panic**-stricken member. After several phone conversations, an agreement was reached for the team to retrace their route and descend the West Buttress without assistance from the NPS. On May 29, the team called park staff once more for route-finding assistance, otherwise they descended with no further incident.

A guide brought a client to the 14,200-foot ranger camp for medical evaluation, and it was determined that she suffered from **HAPE**. After three days of treatment, she was walked down to the Kahiltna Basecamp under the care of her guides.

During the period of May 28 to June 1, NPS rangers and volunteers working out of the 14,200-foot camp responded to multiple incidents, including a **broken leg, a mental breakdown, and other injuries**. Two of the more seriously injured climbers were evacuated from the 14,200-foot camp by the U.S. Army Chinook helicopters on June 1.

An intensive **search** for two women missing on Mt. Foraker in early June was unsuccessful. The two climbers departed the Kahiltna Basecamp on May 12 with fourteen days of food and eight to ten fuel canisters for an ascent of the technically difficult Infinite Spur route. Two weeks passed during which time

RESCUE SUMMARY, continued

interest in the women's progress prompted at least four fixed wing overflights of the south face of Foraker by air taxi pilots and climbers on their way to or from Basecamp. Due to mounting concern for their welfare, the NPS began formal search operations using the Lama helicopter when weather cleared on the evening of June 1. On June 2, a pack (later confirmed to be carried by one of the women) and several other items of gear were found in an avalanche debris cone approximately 300 feet to the east of the start of the route. The only other evidence of the climbing team were intermittent tracks at 16,600-feet on the slopes leading to the south summit. Twenty-seven hours of low level aerial searching of the Infinite Spur route, possible fall lines, and likely descent routes was accomplished as weather permitted throughout the first week. However in the following week, prolonged poor weather severely limited search operations with only one high level fixed wing flight possible from June 7 to June 15. Based on survivability assessments, search activities were scaled back; prolonged stretches of poor weather and wind conditions at higher elevations made search opportunities in the remainder of June and beginning of July minimal. On July 9 the Lama helicopter made a final search of the debris cone for any new evidence that might have appeared due to snow melt but found nothing. The search was officially suspended on July 10.

On June 3, two members of a guided expedition were evacuated by the Lama helicopter after receiving treatment for **frostbite** from NPS personnel at both the 17,200-foot and 14,200-foot camps the previous evening.

On June 5, a climber reported to NPS staff at the 14,200 foot camp that she had **frostbite** on her fingers. NPS staff treated her injuries and over the next few days she was assisted down to the Kahiltna Basecamp and released.

A climber reported to NPS staff at the 14,200 foot camp that he had **injured his hamstring** while running in camp on June 7. After seven days of rest, the patient was still unable to bear weight. On June 15, the patient was evacuated from the mountain via helicopter.

14,200-foot ranger camp
(NPS Photo)



Two mountaineering guides awaiting a flight out of Basecamp had just completed cooking dinner for their clients when one of the two stoves they were using experienced an O-ring failure, causing the pressurized fuel bottle to explode. The two received **second degree burns** to their extremities and faces. Poor flying conditions prevented two attempts that evening (one by the Lama helicopter and the other via fixed wing by a local air taxi) to extract them. They were evacuated the following morning via fixed wing aircraft and taken to the local health clinic for definitive medical treatment.

On June 26 the rangers at the 14,200-foot camp were notified via FRS radio of a problem with the assistant guide from a guided group just above the High Camp (17,200 feet). The assistant guide was exhibiting severe signs of **AMS** and breathing difficulties indicative of the onset of **HAPE**. Via the radio, rangers advised the team to descend to High Camp, place the patient on oxygen located in the camp's rescue cache. Once on oxygen, the patient was able to descend to the 14,200-foot camp with assistance from his team. In camp, he was assessed as showing signs of AMS and HAPE – which had significantly diminished due to treatment and descent - and was admitted to the medical tent overnight for monitoring. The following day the patient showed significant signs of improvement. However, during the following night he deteriorated and re-presented signs of HAPE and AMS. After treatment and consultation with the park's physician sponsor, it was decided to evacuate him due to a likely underlying problem or illness. The next day the Lama helicopter was able to evacuate him from the 14,200-foot camp. Subsequent hospital evaluation indicated that the patient had **pneumonia**.

On June 29, the rangers at the 14,200-foot camp were notified via FRS radio of the collapse of a client from a guided group at approximately 15,500-feet on the fixed lines. After assessing the client, the guide initiated Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) and following wilderness medicine guidelines continued for 30 minutes before ceasing efforts as he could detect no signs of life. Meanwhile the NPS had dispatched a hasty team to the scene. Once they reached the victim, the hasty team detected faint signs of life and initiated a technical lower of the patient. During the lowering effort, the patient again exhibited no signs of life and CPR was initiated. The patient again exhibited weak signs of life. The patient arrived at the ranger camp where a careful assessment was conducted and telephone contact and consultation was made with the park's physician sponsor. No signs of life were present and the patient was pronounced dead. Due to bad weather, the body was not recovered from the mountain until July 1 using the Lama helicopter. An autopsy was performed by the State of Alaska Medical Examiner; the cause of death was determined to be natural and consistent with **sudden death of cardiac origin**.

Personnel



NPS Photo

Denali National Park—South District Staff

South District Ranger
Lead Mountaineering Ranger
Mountaineering Rangers

Daryl Miller
Roger Robinson
Tucker Chenoweth
John Evans
Gordy Kito
John Leonard
John Loomis
Meg Perdue
Joe Reichert
Mik Shain
Maureen McLaughlin
Missy Smothers
Al Gallo
Pam Robinson
Miriam Valentine
Charlie Loeb
Jenni Burr
Frannie Christiansen
Jack Fickel

Administrative Assistant
Lead Visitor Use Assistant
Visitor Use Assistants

Park Planner, South Side
Park Planner, BCMP
Education Specialist
Interpretive Ranger
Janitor

Helicopter Manager
Helicopter Pilots

Helicopter Mechanic

Medical Directors

Dave Kreutzer
Jim Hood
Francisco Orlaineta
Mike Barstat

Jennifer Dow, M.D.
Peter Hackett, M.D.

Mountaineering Volunteers

Erica Bennett
Ross Bennett
James Brooks
Chuck Carter
Tom Clausing
Doug Demerest
Michael Dong
Jennifer Dow
Matthew Ehmt
Leighan Falley
Gordon Fletcher
Wayne Fuller
Mike Gibbs
Rod Hancock
Peter Harvey
Jeff Hirschi
Chris Infante
Peggy Jones

Roger Kempel
Craig Knoche
Troy Leahey
Paul Marcolini
Todd Mason
Jay Mathers
Brian Napier
Brian Newman
Brian Noonan
Alan Oram
Craig Patterson
Adonia Ripple
Kelsey Ripple
Simon Steer
Dan Vandermuellen
Doug Wewer
Kevin Wright



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Military

*Alaska Air National Guard
212th Pararescuemen*

U.S. Marine Corps

Ricardo Montana
Paul Nelson
John Romspert
Dave Shuman
Tom Stephans
Robert Taylor

Shane Hargis
Scott Stephan

U.S. Navy

Richard Hubbard