

Annual Mountaineering Summary: 2013

Celebrating a Century of Mountaineering on Denali

Greetings from the recently re-named Walter Harper Talkeetna Ranger Station.

With the September 2013 passage of the “Denali National Park Improvement Act”, S. 157, a multi-faceted piece of legislation sponsored by Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski, Denali’s mountaineering contact station is now designated the Walter Harper Talkeetna Ranger Station, honoring the achievements of Athabaskan native who was the first to set foot on the summit of Denali on June 7, 1913. Harper, a 20-year-old guide, dog musher, trapper/hunter raised in the Koyukuk region of Alaska, was an instrumental member of the first ascent team which also included Hudson Stuck, Harry Karstens, and Robert Tatum.

Tragically, Harper died in 1918 along with his bride during a honeymoon voyage to Seattle; their steamer SS Princess Sophia struck a reef and sank off the coast of Juneau in dangerous seas, killing all 343 passengers and crew.

A century after his history-making achievement, Harper is immortalized in Denali National Park by the Harper Glacier that bears his name, and now at the park building that all mountaineers must visit before embarking on their Denali expeditions. The ranger station’s new sign was installed in December 2013, and a small celebration is planned for spring 2014 to recognize the new designation. Stay tuned ...

- South District Ranger John Leonard

2013 Quick Facts

Denali recorded its most individual summits (783) in any one season. The summit success rate of 68% is the highest percentage since 1977.

- US residents accounted for 60% of climbers (693).
- Of the 40% foreign visitors, 59 came from the United Kingdom, 53 from Canada, and 38 from Russia. Denali also welcomed climbers from some less commonly represented nations like Bangladesh, Kenya, Malta, South Africa, and the United Arab Emirates.
- Of the US climbers, Alaska residents continued to lead the pack with 135, followed by Washington (101), Colorado (80), and California (62).
- Total average trip length was 16.9 days. The average trip length for those who summited was 16.6 days.
- Average age of a Denali climber was 38 years.
- Women (121) comprised 10.5% of climbers.
- The 2013 season was characterized by unseasonably mild temperatures and sunny skies. According to weather observations, between May 18 and June 23, Denali recorded only a trace of new snow.

On June 28, 2013 Anchorage climber Tom Choate, age 78, became the oldest man to reach the summit of Denali. Tom has reached the summit of Denali about once a decade since 1960.

2013 Rescue Summary

The six search and rescue missions performed by Denali rangers in 2013 are summarized below. For more detailed information on mountaineering missions performed in 2013, refer to *Accidents in North American Mountaineering-2014*, published by the American Alpine Club.

Fatal cardiac arrest

The evening of May 19, a guided client collapsed near the cache spot above Windy Corner at 13,600-feet on Denali's West Buttress route. The expedition guides alerted the Kahiltna Basecamp Manager, and then initiated CPR on the unconscious patient. An NPS ranger patrol responded from the 14,200-foot camp. Upon their arrival at the scene, the volunteer physician pronounced the patient deceased.

Spontaneous pneumothorax

On May 26, climbers approached NPS rangers at the 14,200-foot camp on Denali's West Buttress route to report that one of their teammates was suffering from abdominal pain and nausea. An NPS ranger and volunteer medical staff responded to the patient's tent and performed a physical examination. The patient was non-ambulatory with a chief complaint of sharp and persistent abdominal pain. The patient was placed on oxygen and monitored for the rest of the day. The patient's condition did not improve, so a helicopter evacuation ensued. Follow-up with the hospital revealed that the patient had suffered a spontaneous pneumothorax.

Injured knee, arm

A team of five climbers fell while descending from above Denali Pass. They descended on their own power to the 17,200-foot camp where they contacted an NPS ranger patrol. One climber reported a lower leg injury with difficulty walking and another reported an arm injury. Concerned about a safe descent, the injured climbers were assisted between 17,200-feet and 14,200-feet by an NPS ranger patrol.

HAPE

Guides contacted rangers on June 2 with a report that one of their clients was experiencing respiratory difficulty. Rangers evaluated the patient and confirmed he was exhibiting signs of high altitude pulmonary edema (HAPE). The patient was left in the care of his team who claimed they had the knowledge and supplies to treat him accordingly. Later in the day, while conducting a status check, the ranger patrol found the patient unconscious, unresponsive, and frothing from the mouth. The ranger patrol immediately put the patient on oxygen and administered altitude medications. The patient eventually regained consciousness and mobility and was evacuated from the 14,200-foot camp via the NPS helicopter.

Broken wrist

On June 23, a client on a guided expedition fell while negotiating the bergschrund at the base of the fixed lines at 15,400-feet on the West Buttress. At the time of the fall, the patient's left arm was wrapped around the fixed line, resulting in the injury. The team descended to the 14,200-foot camp under their own power, and reported to the NPS medical tent for further medical assessment. Due to diminished sensation and motor function in the hand, the patient was evacuated to Talkeetna via helicopter. An evaluation at an Anchorage hospital confirmed a fractured radius and ulna at the wrist joint.

Twisted knee

On July 7, a guided expedition was descending below the fixed lines at 15,000 feet on the West Buttress when one client was pulled off their feet by the rope team, twisting the left knee. The following day, NPS personnel at the 14,200-foot camp were notified. They assessed the knee and confirmed the injury was non-weight bearing. A helicopter evacuation was initiated, although poor weather delayed the flight until July 11.

Non-Mountaineering Incidents

Aerial search

By request from the Rescue Coordination Center (RCC), an NPS ranger and a local firefighter flew in the park helicopter to investigate the report of a possible downed aircraft near mile 145 of the Parks Highway. No signs of a plane were found during a one-hour aerial search, and in consultation with the RCC, the search was called off due to lack of further information or confirmation of an accident.

Stranded aircraft

Deteriorating weather during a flightseeing trip on July 2 forced a commercial pilot to make a landing on the Ruth Glacier for the safety of his six passengers. Snowfall and cloud cover kept the seven of them grounded for two days in the DeHavilland Beaver, which was supplied with sleeping bags, food, a stove, and a satellite phone. On July 4, to avoid an emergency situation, a ground team of four NPS rangers was flown via helicopter to the lower Ruth Gorge. The team skied up-glacier 3.5 miles with food, tents, and warm clothing to re-supply the group in the event their stay was prolonged further. The weather cleared sufficiently later that afternoon for the stranded occupants and pilot to return to Talkeetna. No injuries were reported.

2013 First Ascents and Interesting Statistics

The 2013 season was an exciting one as climbers used their imaginations and creativity to seek out virgin, unclimbed terrain. Favorable weather and climbing conditions yielded a significant number of new and technically difficult routes spread across an impressive variety of peaks, many of which were remote and seldom visited. The first new route of the season was opened in the Kichatna Mountains by Jess Roskelley, Ben Erdmann, and Kristoffer Szilas, who braved early April temperatures on The Citadel's east face. Their route, "Hypa Zypa Couloir", is adjacent to the established route "Supa Dupa Couloir", and follows a couloir system featuring a very aesthetic and impressive ice hose which gains the peak's summit ridge. They continued over the summit, made a challenging descent down the peak's north ridge, and returned to camp at the end of their third day.

The Mooses Tooth's east face, one of the largest and most continuously difficult walls in the range, is a tough face to find in good conditions, and sees far more attempts than successes. This season, however, featured the best ice conditions many veterans had ever seen. The face saw a frenzy of activity in April, despite extremely cold temperatures, and the result was three new and very difficult routes. Before this season, only six routes had been established on the face in 32 years, and none had been repeated. The powerful Austrian team of David Lama and Dani Arnold established "Bird of Prey", which follows a direct and uncompromising line up the center of the upper face, breaking left from the beginning

crux pitches of the 2004 route Arctic Rage. The route featured very difficult mixed climbing up to M7+ and rock climbing to 5.10R. Lama and Arnold completed the route to the top of the face but did not follow the final portion of the corniced ridge to the true summit of the peak. Scott Adamson and Pete Tapley teamed up to climb "NWS", a major ice climb following the significant feature to the right of and parallel to Arctic Rage. This route had been attempted many times in prior years, but the opening step in the primary couloir had lacked ice and thwarted all attempts. This season, a huge ice pillar poured over the step and touched down, creating a WI6 passage into the upper gully. From here, comparatively moderate and very aesthetic ice climbing (sustained grade 4 with occasional grade 5 steps) led upwards for many pitches until the line eventually tied in with the final pitches of Arctic Rage. Adamson and Tapley, like Arnold and Lama, completed the route to the top of the face but did not continue to the true summit along the final corniced ridge. They rappelled the route back to their camp on the Buckskin Glacier.

Adamson next teamed up with Chris Wright to establish an extremely difficult mixed route further to the left of the previous two lines. The line follows the Bridwell/Stump route "Dance of the Woo Li Masters" through the opening snow covered slab pitches and leftward traverses. Where that route continues further left to the prow of the east buttress, Wright and Adamson climbed a direct corner system on the right side of the buttress. Here they found very difficult and seriously run-out, mixed climbing that was described as being quite stressful and psychologically challenging. Their line, which was simply and succinctly dubbed "Terror", briefly intersected the Bridwell/Stump route again and used a bivi ledge on that route. Next, the pair broke out to the right again and continued through more difficult and unclimbed mixed terrain towards the center of the face to reach the summit ridge. Wright and Adamson then followed the summit ridge to the true summit of the peak, making only the fifth complete ascent to the summit by any of the mountain's east face routes. The pair then rappelled NWS, which they reported as a fast and straightforward descent route.

Down in the Ruth Gorge, climbers established several impressive new routes. On Mount Johnson, New England climbers Peter Doucette and Silas Rossi climbed a very difficult and thinly iced system of runnels and smears on the back wall of Mount Johnson's north face. The line boldly takes a series of ephemeral smears and a crux pillar of fragile ice up the wall to the right of the Japanese route "The Ladder Tube". Doucette and Rossi reached the top of the wall, which is the ridge separating Mount Johnson from Mount Wake to the north, then descended their line, which they dubbed, "The Twisted Stair", in keeping with the theme of Mount Johnson's other routes (Escalator, Elevator Shaft, Ladder Tube). Also in May, Mount Johnson saw a second new route completed, this one to its seldom-visited summit. Todd Tumolo and Josh Hoeschen began climbing the Escalator route on the peak's east face, then shortly after that route enters its signature couloir at mid-height, Tumolo and Hoeschen broke out to the right and into a parallel couloir system. After a few hundred feet, they again traversed right into a more prominent system which parallels the protruding (and unfinished) east buttress closely on the left of the buttress. The line, which was mostly moderate climbing, led the pair directly to the summit. The route was named "The Fire Escape", again following the theme of Mount Johnson routes. Prior to the ascent of Mount Johnson, Tumolo, along with partner Dusty Eroh, established a major route on Mount Bradley's unclimbed true north face. The line of the route is difficult to see from the Ruth Gorge, which probably kept it a hidden secret for so long. The route was characterized by sustained thin ice and poorly protected compact snow climbing ("s'nice"). This, along with the suspicious nature of the integrity of the protection and tool placements gave the route its name: Neve Ruse. The pair summited and descended the west ridge to the Wake/Bradley col.

Across the Gorge, Sam Hennessey and Eitan Green made the first ascent of the north face of Peak 7,400', the point separating Cavity Gap from the formation known as "London Bridge". The peak has several established routes on its western and southern faces, but Hennessey and Green's ascent was likely the first of the enigmatic and very steep north face. The route followed complex terrain which became increasingly difficult higher on the route, including several pitches of M6, and ending with some "sketchy" snow and mushroom climbing to gain the summit.

After their climb of Peak 7,400', Hennessey and Green traveled to the Thunder Fork of the Kahiltna Glacier where they established a new route on the northwest flank of Thunder Mountain. The route ascends a 2000 foot face of ice and moderate mixed climbing to gain the shoulder west of Thunder Mountain, continuing another 1700 feet on easy snow terrain to Thunder's summit.

In June, Austrians Gerry Fiegl and Alex Blumel completed a new route on the Gargoyle's west face, which they named "Beauty and the Beast". The "beauty" lay in the route's quality lower pitches of beautiful cracks. The "beast" came high on the route in the form of a wet chimney filled with very loose rock and sketchy protection. Fiegl and Blumel also headlined the list of significant repeat ascents in the Ruth Gorge during the 2013 season, repeating the "Tooth Traverse", the massive enchainment of Sugar Tooth, Eye Tooth, Missing Toof, Bear Tooth, and Moose's Tooth. This traverse was first completed by Renan Ozturk and Freddie Wilkinson in 2012 after four prior attempts. This spring, Wilkinson and Ozturk were joined by California rock climbing ace Alex Honnold to make the second ascent of "The Pearl", a difficult and high quality route on Mount Bradley's south face, established in 1995 by the late Austrian alpinist Andi Orgler and his partners Helmut Neswadba and Arthur Wutschner. Orgler made a phenomenal number of first ascents in the Ruth Gorge between 1986 and 1995, and he noted the Pearl as one of his finest. Honnold, Ozturk and Wilkinson also made what is probably the fourth ascent of the Southeast Face route on Mount Dickey, the historic 5000 foot rock climb established by David Roberts, Galen Rowell, and Ed Ward in 1974. Honnold, Ozturk and Wilkinson made the round trip ascent in an incredibly fast 25 hours from their camp. The trio also made a very fast ascent of Mount Barrille's Cobra Pillar. Meanwhile, the Broken Tooth saw only its fifth complete ascent when Alaskan climbers Jay Rowe and Peter Haeussler established a challenging new start variation to the west ridge route, then completed the line of the original west ridge to the true summit. The pair accessed the ridge from the south, beginning from the Coffee Glacier. They bivouacked on the ridge before continuing to the summit on the second day.

Farther west, in a remote area between the Lacuna and Yentna Glaciers, Mark Allen and Graham Zimmermann made the first ascent of the imposing east face of Mount Laurens, one of the peaks that extend southward from Mount Foraker's "Shark's Fin" feature. Mount Laurens was first climbed by Austrian speed soloist Thomas Bubendorfer in March 1997, who climbed the peak's western face from a camp on the Yentna Glacier. Mount Laurens' east face is a steep and impressive series of snow plastered rock ribs and is plainly visible from Mount Hunter and Mount Foraker, but until this year had remained unvisited. Allen and Zimmermann approached from a glacier landing in the Ramparts, a group of granite spires on the west side of the lower Kahiltna Glacier, and approached the face by an off shoot of the Lacuna Glacier. After retreating from an initial line, they attempted a different line on the northeast buttress, or right side of the face, where they initially found difficult ice and mixed climbing. This led to easier but heady snow slopes which gained the summit ridge, where they traversed an extremely corniced crest to gain the highest point. Using GPS and an altimeter, they obtained a reading of 10,042 feet elevation for this peak, which to date existed only as a closed contour on the map. The pair

rapelled and down-climbed through a series of couloirs on the southern margin of the east face. In early May, Japanese climbers Watanabe Daizo and Tani Takeshi climbed a new route on the south face of Mount Francis, which lies directly north of Kahiltna Basecamp. The route follows the great couloir on the south face then continues straight up through mixed terrain graded AI4 and M5 to reach the false (south) summit. They continued from here to the summit following the final portions of the popular southwest face route, and descending via the East Ridge. Though many variations are known to have been climbed on the mountain's south face, most have gone unreported so it is not known how much of Daizo and Takeshi's line may have been climbed previously. Daizo and Takeshi named the route "Jumping Jack Flash" and have dedicated their ascent in memory of their friends Junya Shiraishi and Jiro Kurihara, who were killed in an avalanche while attempting a new route of Mount Francis in May 2011.

In late May, Jens Holsten, Seth Timpano, and Jared Vilhauer went exploring in the west fork of the Ruth, before finding an inspiring feature on the upper east face of Reality Ridge. Reality Ridge is a long, granite studded ridge rising from the west fork at just over 7,000' until it joins the Southeast Spur at point 13,100'. Holsten, Timpano and Vilhauer skied far up the valley separating Reality Ridge from Peak 11,300' and began climbing the 5000-foot face by way of a long and continuous couloir system filled with many pitches of aesthetic, sustained ice climbing. After a full day they bivouacked at the crest of Reality Ridge, then after a full day of rest they continued up Reality Ridge's severely corniced upper section, in search of a logical high point, which they found at the top of peak 13,100'. The trio descended back down their new route, which they dubbed the "Reality Face".

100 Years and Counting

A lot has changed in the last one hundred years...the development of reliable maps, more efficient transportation, lighter weight clothing, life saving communication tools, and technologically superior gear, to name just a few. But one thing that hasn't changed is the basic drive to reach the top. Of course, a successful climb often takes far more than drive—be it luck, skill, good weather, experience, judgement—but a climber won't see the summit without it. Whether it was 1913 or 2013, the individual motivations behind that drive vary from team member to team member. Fame, exploration, sheer adventure, personal challenge, or perhaps simply doing a job that puts food on the table. And no doubt for some, all of the above hold true. This year, climbers and historians alike celebrated the 100th anniversary of the first summit of Denali. Hudson Stuck, Harry Karstens, Walter Harper, and Robert Tatum were the first mountaineers to reach the top, standing on the south summit on June 7, 1913.

Descendants of the original expedition members, including the four that reached the top as well as those that provided the crucial ground support, honored the historic achievement of their ancestors by making a commemorative ascent of Denali. Beginning their climb at the McKinley River on June 7, a team of six descendants and four guides headed up the Muldrow Glacier route, the same route up the mountain pioneered by their ancestors. In addition to the guides from the Alaska Mountaineering School, the 'Denali 2013' team consisted of Samuel Alexander, Dan Hopkins, Ken Karstens, Ray Schueneman, Samuel Tatum, and Dana Wright; four of whom stood on top of the South Peak of Denali on June 28, capturing a view similar to what their forefathers saw a century prior.

Several major Alaskan museum exhibits specifically high-lighted the first ascent in 2013. The Museum of the North in

Fairbanks curated a multi-media exhibit with historical artifacts, extensive narratives, and a digital mapping exhibit. From its direct vantage point of the Muldrow Glacier route, Denali National Park's Eielson Visitor Center hosted a specialized interactive exhibit that brought the pioneer 1913 climb to life for park visitors. Throughout the summer, Denali National Park also hosted a diverse 'Centennial Speakers Series' held at the Denali Visitor Center's Karstens Theater. Local historians spoke on epic pioneer climbs and adventures in the Alaska Range, kicked off on June 7 by a presentation on the 1913 climb by Tom Walker, author of *The Seventymile Kid* about the legacy of Harry Karstens. Other speakers included Brian Okonek (1912 Parker-Browne Expedition), Dave Johnston (First Winter Ascent), Jane Bryant (Lindley-Liek Expedition), and Terrance Cole (1910 Sourdough Expedition).

2013 Medical Summary

Not only was 2013 a quiet search and rescue season, the medical tent was significantly quieter than in years past, with mountaineering rangers, volunteer medics, and physicians treating only 18 patients. Review of the run sheets indicate a typical variety of ailments and injuries in 2013, though perhaps with fewer cold injuries than usual due to the balmy spring temperatures. In the Medical—Other category, ailments include pink eye, spontaneous pneumothorax, toothache, and abdominal distress.

- 6 Traumatic Injuries (33%)
- 6 Altitude-related Illness / AMS (33%) 4 Medical—Other (22%)
- 1 Cold Injury (0.5%)
- 1 Medical—Cardiac (0.5%)

Denali's Dynamic Duo

Any reader of these Mountaineering Summaries over the past decade or more will recognize the names Dr. Jennifer Dow and Paul Marcolini. Dow and Marcolini are indispensable assets to Denali's emergency medical program. Both work hand-in-hand, year-round, with Denali mountaineering ranger and lead medic Dave Weber to coordinate staff medical training, visitor care, and promote professionalism in the field of outdoor emergency medicine.

Dr. Dow, or Jenn as she is known around here, has served as Medical Director for Denali's mountaineering program since 2000. As Denali's sponsoring physician, Dr. Dow assumes professional responsibility for all EMS response in the Park, and oversees all prescription pharmaceuticals dispensed by park rangers. Since 2000, Dow has expanded her medical direction to include all national parks in the Alaska Region. Her dedication and service to the NPS earned Jenn the 2008 George B. Harzog, Jr. Award for Outstanding Volunteer Service, the highest honor in the NPS Volunteers-In-Parks program. In her 'off time', Dr. Dow is an ER doctor at Alaska Regional Hospital in Anchorage.

Paul Marcolini, a longtime paramedic who applies his emergency medical expertise back home at the Central Maine Medical Center, has been serving as volunteer medic on Denali mountaineering patrols since 2006. Marcolini keeps

coming back for more each spring, sometimes serving on multiple field patrols in a given season. With extensive paramedic field experience and EMS training expertise, Paul began co-instructing Denali's pre-season EMT medical refreshers with Dr. Dow starting in 2011. In recent years, Paul has devoted time and off-season attention to drafting a training curriculum, medical field guides, an evacuation matrix, and other operational manuals.

In addition to such responsibilities as providing medical instruction, debriefing medical incidents, quality improvement, revising EMS protocols, and participating in telephone consultations during rescue emergencies, both Dow and Marcolini routinely devote extensive volunteer field time on Kahiltna Basecamp patrols and 30-day high altitude patrols. All Denali staff are grateful for Jenn and Paul's expertise in the field of emergency medicine, as well as their love of the mountains.

Mountaineering Volunteers-in-Parks (VIPs)

Denali's mountaineering program would not be possible without its VIPs. In 2013, 40 highly skilled volunteers dedicated over 12,200 hours of work in medical treatment and training, technical rescue, resource protection, cleanup, and education.

2013 South District Staff

- South District Ranger: John Leonard
- Lead Mountaineering Ranger: Coley Gentzel
- Mountaineering Rangers: Tucker Chenoweth, Chris Erickson, Brandon Latham, Joey McBrayer, Joe Reichert, Roger Robinson, Mik Shain, Dave Weber, Mark Westman
- Rescue / Shorthaul Adviser: Renny Jackson
- Admin / Public Information: Maureen McLaughlin
- Supervisory VUA: Missy Smothers
- Visitor Use Assistants: Julia Crocetto, Pam Robinson, Robert Zimmerman
- Chief of Planning: Miriam Valentine
- Concessions Specialist: Martha Armington
- Interpretive Ranger: Jay Katzen
- SCA: Natalie Croak
- Maintenance Worker: Cary Birdsall