



Annual Mountaineering Summary: 2025

2025 Quick Facts

- **Climbers from the USA:** 610 (64% of total of both McKinley and Foraker registrants) US climbers came from all over with representation from 46 of the 50 states, plus the District of Columbia. Consistent with past years, most US climbers coming from the following four states: Washington State (87), Alaska (100), Colorado (79) and California (54).
- **International climbers:** 333 (36% of total) Denali National Park welcomed international climbers from 52 countries this year, once again the top was Canada (32), followed by Japan (26), Russia (22), Poland and the United Kingdom (21 each), and Norway (18).
- **Average trip length:** The average trip length (regardless of outcome) for non-guided groups was 17 days, with guided McKinley climbs averaging 16 days. This number remained the same regardless of whether the climbers summited or not.
- **Average age:** Submission of a climbers age is now optional when applying for a McKinley permit. Based off the individuals that did disclose their age this season, the average age for male climbers was 37, while women averaged 33 years old. The youngest climber was 14, and the oldest was 79.
- **Women climbers:** Women comprised 21% of climbers on McKinley and 14% on Foraker, or a total of 206 individuals – up from 2024 when 161 women (16% of the total) attempted McKinley and Foraker.
- **The majority of climbers attempted McKinley via the West Buttress**, with 922 out of the total 960 registered climbers (96%) ascending via this route. In much smaller numbers, climbers also registered for the Cassin Ridge (20), the West Rib (12), Messner Couloir (3), South Face (2), and Orient Express (1). 36% of these climbers reached the summit. McKinley's summit rate typically hovers just below 50%; poor weather at the beginning and end of the season most likely contributed to lower summit rate.
- **No one reached the summit of Foraker this year.** Notably, there was a team that attempted the mountain, made it to Crosson, and then descended to the north side of the Alaska Range. They then packrafted to Minchumina to get picked up by plane, just outside the park boundary.
- **Volunteers-in-Parks Denali Mountaineering Rangers** couldn't have pulled through the 2025 season without the help of 37 [mountaineering Volunteers-in-Parks](https://www.nps.gov/dena/planyourvisit/mountaineeringvips.htm) (<https://www.nps.gov/dena/planyourvisit/mountaineeringvips.htm>) (VIP's) who contributed a total of 6,124 hours.

2025 Search and Rescue Summary

Avalanche (May 13) 5 skiers were ascending a couloir they had just skied up to Grizzly Gap, one of the saddles accessing the Pika Glacier. A naturally triggered avalanche on a face 1,500' above them and on a different aspect funneled into the couloir when they were approximately two-thirds of the way up. Two skiers were able to step out of the way; three were caught and carried approximately 500'. Of these 3, two sustained injuries (a knee injury and a laceration). The third's gear had broken in the slide. The NPS was notified via InReach, and two rangers responded via helicopter. The patients were short-hauled from the scene to reduce exposure to remaining overhead hazard, and evacuated to Talkeetna.

Broken Ankle (May 17) A party of two was climbing the route Deprivation on the North Buttress of Mount Hunter when the leader took a 50' fall and sustained a broken ankle. With the assistance of another party on a nearby route, the climbers were able to self-rescue to the glacier. The NPS helicopter departed Talkeetna with three climbing rangers and deposited them in Basecamp. Due to flat light and the fear of the helicopter getting stuck in the range, two rangers initiated a ground response and met the patient with medical gear. The helicopter was able to retrieve the rangers and patient and evacuate to town, where they were met by local EMS.

HAPE and Frostbite (May 20) At the 14,200' camp, a guide service reported that one of their guides was suffering from HAPE and frostbite and requested NPS help. This injury was sustained on the move from 11,200' to 14,200'. The patient presented with Grade 2 frostbite on one finger, low SpO₂, and poor lung sounds. The patient was treated with altitude medications, oxygen, and periodic sessions in a portable high altitude chamber. Two days later, weather improved enough that the patient was able to be evacuated to Talkeetna via helicopter, where further care was refused.

Gastrointestinal Illness (May 25) A guide walked himself to the 14,200' Ranger Camp after descending from High Camp to report that he had been unable to keep food or fluids down for 48 hours, leaving him dangerously dehydrated and malnourished at altitude. The decision was made to provide medical intervention and evacuate. The patient was flown from 14,200' to Talkeetna with a ranger attending, assessed by local EMS, and released.

Frostbite (May 28) A climber ascended to the summit in the afternoon wearing ski boots. He noticed numb feet around 10 pm, but felt that this was normal for him in ski boots, and continued to ascend. He reached the summit at 4 am. The following day upon returning to camp and removing his ski boots, he noticed that his toes looked frostbitten. He reported to the Ranger Camp and was diagnosed with frostbite on all ten toes, with the worst being Grade 3 on his big toes. He was cared for in the ranger camp until weather allowed him to be evacuated to Talkeetna with another patient.

Knee Injury (May 29) A skier descending the Orient Express fell due to flat light and variable snow conditions. She and her partner were able to self-rescue to 14,200' for evaluation by the ranger team. The injury was deemed unusable and the patient was flown out with another patient when weather permitted, three days later.

Fatality (June 3) The 14,200' Ranger Camp received a radio report from a guide at 11,200' camp that a skier had fallen from the top of Squirrel Hill toward the Peters Glacier and was missing. His partners had made an anchor and attempted to locate him, but weather was very poor with high winds and low visibility due to blowing snow. They descended to camp and approached the guided group for assistance. NPS ground response from 14,200' was put on hold due to very poor conditions. The two climbing partners continued to descend to 7,800', where another NPS team were able to provide them with shelter, as their tent was with the fallen skier. The fallen skier had an InReach, and Garmin was able to provide that the patient was located on the Peters' Glacier, 3,000' below his last seen point, and that he had not moved in 4 hours. The patient was also not responding to InReach messages. Early the following morning, a weather window allowed the helicopter and two rangers to approach the Peters' Glacier from the north side of the Alaska Range, determine the patient was deceased, and recover him.

Frostbite (June 6) Presumably following a summit attempt, a group of three walked into the Ranger Camp at 14,200' after one of their members reported numb fingers. There was a language barrier and suspicions that this group was illegally guided. Examination revealed that the patient had Grade 2 and 3 frostbite on nine out of ten fingers. The patient's fingers were thawed in a water bath, and weather allowed him to be evacuated the following morning. He was within the 24-hour window to receive thrombolytic treatment and thus was transferred to an air ambulance in Talkeetna and flown to Anchorage.

Back Injury (June 6) An NPS patrol at 11,200' camp witnessed a member of a guided group fall on motorcycle hill. They were able to assist him back to camp, where it was determined that he had a pre-existing back injury that was exacerbated on a cache run up to Windy Corner. The patient was unable to move effectively and it was determined helicopter evacuation was needed. Weather cleared the following day and allowed the patient to be flown to Talkeetna, where he was transferred to local EMS.

Fatality (June 10) Two NPS rangers on an acclimatization ski about the 14,200' camp witnessed a skier and snowboarder get caught and carried by a D2.5 avalanche from the Rescue Gully. One was partially buried and the other was fully buried. Due to the rangers' proximity to the slide, they were able to immediately assist and it was estimated the second victim was unburied within ten minutes. He was determined to be pulseless and resuscitative efforts were initiated. Another ranger team at the top of the Fixed Lines was able to visualize the Rescue Gully and determined that there was still remaining avalanche hazard, and despite repeated radio requests to avoid the area, two skiers were still attempting to descend. Resuscitative efforts were momentarily ceased so that the patient and rescuers could be moved to a safer location. After 35 minutes (per NPS protocol), efforts were discontinued and the patient was determined deceased. He was packaged and carried back to 14,200' and flown back to Talkeetna with his partner, who was uninjured.

Hypothermia, Inability to Descend (June 13) At 6:45 in the morning, the NPS was notified that an InReach SOS had been activated at 19,300' on the West Buttress route. The NPS established two-way communication with the party of two, who stated that they were hypothermic and unable to descend on their own. Poor weather prevented helicopter operations and the climbers were encouraged to continue to descend under their own power. After 4 hours, the party had reached Denali Pass at 18,200' and weather had begun to clear. At this point they ceased descent efforts. An aerial recon was completed with the NPS helicopter and a ranger, and conditions were deemed acceptable to short-haul the climbers in a rescue basket. The pilot was able to remove the climbers one at a time to 14,200', where they were briefly assessed, deemed stable, and evacuated to Talkeetna.

Ankle Fracture, HAPE (June 13) At approximately 1400, the Ranger Camp at 14,200' received radio communications from a guided group that one of their clients had fallen on the fixed lines and broken his ankle. The guides were able to lower the patient to the base of the fixed lines while NPS rangers staged a ground rescue. The patient was lowered and carried back to camp, where it was also discovered that he had a persistent cough, bloody sputum, and low SpO₂. Immediate helicopter evacuation was available and the patient was transported to Talkeetna and transferred to local EMS.

Plane Incident (June 14) The NPS was notified that a plane had a hard landing and overturned in the tundra on the east side of the park. The occupants' condition was unknown. The helicopter was launched with three rangers and arrived on the site to find the two occupants uninjured. The helicopter was used to shuttle two people to the road, and returned to Talkeetna.

HACE (June 23) The NPS at 14,200' received a radio report from High Camp that a guide was experiencing symptoms of HACE after a summit attempt. The patient was ataxic and presented with low SpO₂. Weather was poor and descent inadvisable. The patient was treated with altitude medications. Weather improved by the next morning, and with altitude medications and oxygen the patient was able to descend to 14,200' under his own power, where he was evacuated by helicopter to Talkeetna. He refused care from local EMS.

2025 Medical Summary

Denali mountaineering rangers and patrol volunteers assessed a total of 37 patients during the 2025 season. 17 of these patients were treated by the Park Service, with 16 requiring NPS evacuation. 1 was treated and self-evacuated.

- Traumatic Injuries – 8 cases (includes 2 extremity fractures, 3 knee injuries, 1 laceration, mild bruising after an avalanche, and assistance with a pre-existing injury)
- Frostbite – 14 cases. We continue to see serious cases of frostbite, which is one of the most preventable injuries on the mountain. At least two of these patients have required multiple amputations of digits on hands and feet.
- Medical – 2 cases, including a gastrointestinal illness that required evacuation and a minor upper respiratory infection.
- High Altitude Cerebral Edema and High Altitude Pulmonary Edema—3 cases, in addition to 4 cases of AMS that were assessment only.
- Fatalities—2

**Some patients had multiple diagnoses resulting in a higher number of diagnoses than the total number of patients.*

Of the patients treated, 27 were independent climbers, and 3 of these were soloists. The remaining 10 were either guides or their clients. The NPS took 17 patients under our care at the 14,200' camp, which is the most common place we see patients. We assessed 20 patients who did not require NPS care, and with advice and direction, were able to either continue their trip in a safe manner or descend under their own power. Unfortunately, there were two fatalities in the park this season.

- The first fatality was a skier descending to 11,200' in poor weather. He had a heavy pack and sled, and had ascended via a slight variation of the route. Weather and visibility was poor, he hit a patch of ice, and fell to the Peters' Glacier. All of the above factors were most likely contributions to this accident.
- The second was a skier caught in an avalanche in the Rescue Gully, a more and more popular route for skiers out of High Camp at 17,200'. This skier and his partner triggered a D2.5 avalanche he most likely died from trauma. The avalanche report of this incident can be found [here \(https://avalanche.state.co.us/report/a22a4ca3-e9d0-4b7e-8fe8-dbd5c75537c0\)](https://avalanche.state.co.us/report/a22a4ca3-e9d0-4b7e-8fe8-dbd5c75537c0).

We are seeing more and more skiers in the Alaska Range every year. While the skiing in the Range can be amazing, there are a few things we are seeing that are concerning:

- Skiing may give the false impression that you have better floatation and thus can travel unroped more often. This is not necessarily the case. The crevasses on our glaciers can be quite large and your skis may not fully span them, nor do skis fully spread your weight out enough to safely cross all snow bridges.
- Ski boots are not nearly as warm as mountaineering boots, even with overboots. Skiers ascending to the upper mountain should be aware of this and monitor the condition of their feet carefully.
- Many of the prized ski routes on the mountain are thousands of feet long. Conditions can vary greatly over this distance. If you have not ascended your ski route, use extreme caution and be aware that very thin snow can be hiding glacial ice and catch you unaware.