

TRAVERSING "THE HIGH ONE" Journal Notes 2003 - Greg Miller

Denali, "the high one", as it is called by native Alaskans and those in the climbing community, is the most prominent peak in the spectacular Alaska Range, rising to 20320 feet. McKinley, of course a politician's name, has endured as the "official" title for none other than 'political reasons'. Why would I want to try and climb it? I suppose as a 'grand adventure' with a touch of mystery and danger, as well as the intense physical and psychological challenge of seeing what this old body and mind could endure. Most climbers take the West Buttress route up and back to a landing strip situated at 7200 feet on the Kahiltna glacier, just outside the designated wilderness area that encompasses the mountain. With a desire to experience the whole mountain I signed up for the "Traverse", heading up this main route, but then going down the peaks seldom traveled north side. This route takes you all the way to Wonder Lake, 35 miles out on the tundra plains, retracing the original route up the mountain, before the age of ski planes. After reading the history of these early climbs I was very curious to see firsthand the landmarks and routes so vividly described in these tales of heartache and endurance. I looked forward to the thrill they described as one first steps onto the green tundra grass after so many days of nothing but snow and ice. Something you obviously can't experience when flying off the mountain from a 7200-foot glacier. Starting a climb from Wonder Lake, at 1900 feet, thus doing the traverse "in reverse", is a big time brutal undertaking. Only attempted by those really hard core climbers wanting to walk up from the "very bottom", retracing the footsteps of the original "tough guys" from the early 1900's.

What follows are my journal notes, usually written in the evenings, as I crawled into the refuge of my sleeping bag.

June 6th - Anchorage- Earth B & B: All geared up and ready to "have at it". Had our gear check today and met the others in our group. A rather young and lean looking array of Brits (5) and Yanks (3), plus our three guides. A 6 to 5 veto advantage for us Americans should the Brits try to call for "high tea" while suspended on a 50 degree slope in 40 knot winds. Looks like three or four of us have perhaps cracked 40 with the rest in their 30's. Our guides, Chris, Andre, and Zach seem pleasant and well experienced. We were also greeted by Mt. Trip (our guide company) owner GaryBocarde who must be well past 50 but going on 25 in his youthful appearance and energetic manner. He seems genuinely excited for us as in the past few years traverse trips have apparently had a bit of trouble coming to actual fruition. The company offers just one traverse a year and hasn't had a group make it for several years now. Our guides are also quite excited, none of them having experienced a successful traverse attempt. Zach mentions he is 0 for 2, getting stranded a couple years ago for nine days at the high camp due to bad weather, finally having to bail out and head back down the West Buttress. Can only hope this is his year to make it.

Tonight is my second and last night at Earth B & B, a climbers mecca run by a vibrant high octane Dutch lady, Marguerite. She seems to thrive on the opportunity to practice all the languages in which she is fluent, including French, German, Italian, Spanish, and

of course English. The current patrons include a freshly arrived group of Frenchmen just off the mountain as evidenced by their wind beaten red faces and one chap supporting bandages over his frost bitten fingers. Apparently it was a rough month of May with lots of bitter cold. Also on hand are three young Swedes who plan to sled across Greenland next year, a solo Japanese (getting remarks that he's "kichigai" crazy), and Brendan, a Brit who will be in my group. An interesting bloke who is a bank security system designer, just removed from the 'top 150 most likely to be kidnapped' list in his homeland. Glad to know a walk to the Glacier Brew House with this guy won't result in my being "taken out" as collateral loss in any nabbing attempts. I'm the only Yank here now as Justin 'Birdhunter' from Wyoming via South Africa just took off after a month on the peak.

Tomorrow morning we'll head over to Inlet B & B where the rest of our group is staying for a shuttle ride to Talkeetna. With luck we'll be at the Kahiltna Glacier base camp by evening. Plan to fly out after our briefing at the Park service office. This is where they make sure you know what the hell you're getting into before letting you on the mountain. Will also purchase our permits (used for keeping rangers on the mountain and rescues) and be issued our official "poop" and trash bags. All trash is to be packed out and poop bags tossed into the deepest available crevasse.

Apparently it's quite hit or miss with regards to actually getting off the ground as the weather tends to "sock in" and "clear off" throughout the day up at base camp. The pilots often have just a narrow window of opportunity to get you in. I'm told often times you can be loaded up ready to take off just to get the message "deplane" as the weather deteriorates within minutes. Fully expecting to have to crash out in the air taxi shed at least a night. I hear sometimes it can take a week just to get out of Talkeetna. Rainy in Anchorage right now which doesn't bode well although the forecast is for clearing. Let's hope my next report is from the Kahiltna glacier. I hear the Fairview in Talketna is a landmark not to be missed but I'd rather pound a few beers "after" being on the mountain.

June 8th- Base Camp, 7'200 feet. Well, we did get a chance to sample the Fairview and not by choice. "Iffy" weather all day yesterday as we sat around the Talkeetna Air Taxi grounds. All 'amped up' one minute being told it was a "go" only to be let down moments later as the weather on the mountain 'socked in'. These pilots are ready to pounce when they get a clearing in the skies at base camp and will tell you to literally be ready to 'jump' on the plane. Once we had half our group loaded up ready to taxi down the runway when the call came in that it was it was "shut down" up on the mountain. Had to hop off the plane and plan for a night crashed out in the gear shed. A big backlog of climbers ahead of us due to several bad weather days so it looked like we may be stuck another day or so. Able to relax a bit with a last burger and beer and some midnight ping-pong in the hanger. Tortured by mosquitoes the size of small hummingbirds while sweating the hot night away lying on my 'polar' bag. When you can feel the air turbulence against your skin you know they are good-sized mozzies cruising by. Of course Nick and Andy, two Brits on the trip, slept like baby's one loft up from me and never had a single bug accost them. Perhaps something in the blood of an Englishman is not to the Alaskan mosquitoes liking.

Today dawned rather overcast so not a lot of enthusiasm about our chances. Hoping to not be one of those groups you hear about taking a week to just get up to the mountain, we weren't real hopeful. Alas, it was not to be. Yes, we will not be stuck here. Hurray!! The overcast was a low ceiling with brilliant sunshine above. Excitedly hoping aboard a couple planes we had a spectacular flight with the entire un-obscured Alaskan range spread before us, including the hulk of Denali itself. An exciting approach over the wide Kahiltna glacier with Mt Foraker looming next to us and the cluster of base camp tents visibly approaching. A surreal scene when emerging from the plane, almost fake looking, like a backdrop from a movie set it was so spectacular. Snow, ice, rock and massive mountains everywhere. Hard to gage the scale of it as you had no size references except the camp around you. The side of Foraker looked like you could scramble up it in a couple hours until an avalanche put it more into proper perspective. This huge wall of snow ripping down the mountain appeared to be in slow motion but we knew it was actually "hauling ass". The immense size of Foraker could only then be appreciated.

A rather cozy camp with our major chore digging out a kitchen, complete with chiseled out cooking shelves, seating area, pantry cupboard, and trash nook. After setting up our "kiddie" sleds for glacier travel it was time for a break. A chance for Wayne (another Brit) and a rather animated one at that, a chance to add his touches to a badly misshapen 'snow maiden', actually a headless torso. Trying to give the naked figure "super model" proportions he shaved a bit much ice off the 'derriere', causing the poor thing to topple. Well, time for a break and a trip to the designated "pee hole" a ways uphill. Several red flags signal the locations of these 20-foot chasms, near the several actual sit down wood seated 'privies' that are set up. Heck of a view but you must remember to concentrate on keeping gloves, toilet paper, glacier glasses, etc. well away from the hole since retrieval is not an option should you drop something in.

June 9th - Ski Hill-Camp II, 7'800 feet. Now relaxing at the base of Ski Hill, a 4-5 mile walk up the Kahiltna Glacier from base camp. A good 'breaking in' hike as we carried all our gear in one trip. This meant heavy packs and sleds, but with a rather mellow slope and modest elevation gain, plus and an early morning start ensuring nice firm snow, it was a relatively painless hike on the well-packed climbers path. Chances of breaking through a snow bridge into a crevasse are greatest later in the day when things soften up but this fact doesn't seem to deter some people. We saw a lot of groups hiking in late afternoon and even several going solo. I've heard of solo climbers carrying a lightweight ladder on their waist to save them in the event of a crevasse plunge, although it appears these folks feel the odds on this well traveled route are enough in their favor to risk doing without one.

Our first day was rather pleasant and everyone seemed to be somewhat familiar with how to properly rig themselves up for rope travel. Clipping in your chest harness, waist harness, prussic slings and 'Jumars' for "inch worming" yourself out of a crevasse, making sure your harness belt is 'doubled back' so there is no way in hell it will pull loose, insuring your locking carabineer (your lifeline to the rope) is indeed locked, clipping and tying in your trailing sled (pulled by your pack and secured to the rope) are all rituals we will have to go through each time we rope up, doing so without fail. I already have a mental checklist to insure I don't forget one of these crucial steps. The

seeming disarray of ropes, twine, clips, and other hardware hanging off each of us is in actuality a quite purposeful and well-organized mess.

After some careful and tedious crevasse probing by our lead guide, Chris, we had a safe zone in which we could construct Camp II, encircled by small bamboo 'wands' defining the boundary you absolutely do not step beyond. This low on the mountain, encircling your tent with an ice wall is not warranted, since the winds are not as severe and being down on the glacier you can't be blown off a ridge, something that does on occasion happen up high to those not willing to invest the time and energy to properly protect themselves. Omitting this task makes setting up camp fairly easy with the major chores being the flattening of areas for the tents, digging out the kitchen, and of course digging out the 'poop' pit, today done enthusiastically by Wayne after his failure with the sculpture. A crude armrest on the sides of a hole with a plastic bag secured underneath. Still requires a bit of skill to balance yourself and hit the target. Also, you have to be careful not to put all your weight on your outstretched arm as I found out in my first visit. A sudden collapse of the snow under my arm meant nearly planting myself "in" the bag rather than over it.

Did not 'roast' on our trip up the glacier which this sometimes hot stretch is notorious for. Had a pleasant overcast afternoon and even a bit of rain while setting up camp. Morning was clear with the 'lenticular' cloud atop Denali indicating fierce winds up high, a definite non-summitable day, despite the dead calm here down low. Took an afternoon nap after setting up camp but it was a bit uncomfortable, as whenever the sun appeared the tent became an instant oven. Outside, the clatter of carabineers, ascenders, and other trinkets signaled the passage of other groups, sounding like medieval knights marching off to battle. My tent mate is Andy, a British police detective. Beside Wayne, we have two other Brits, Miles and Nick, both lawyers and always exhibiting that unique British flavored wit and sense of humor. Other "Yanks" beside our guides include Jose and Jeff, both from the East Coast and buddies of Wayne, all having met while climbing Aconcagua in Argentina. Lots of wisecracks, ribbing, and downright insulting of each other that can only come from well-acquainted friends. Of course these three share a tent.

Our head guide, Chris, from Tacoma, is battling what sounds to be a nasty head cold. He, Zach (the youngster of the trip, about 22 and a guide since high school), and Dre (first time on Denali and a pilot when back home in Salt Lake), seem very well prepared and competent in what they are doing. They aren't about to let four bloody 'Limeys' and a few Yanks think they are going to be pampered on this trip. Other than the cooking which is the domain of the guides (I can imagine the chaos, burned noodles, and wasted fuel if we were involved), we are fully expected to do an equal share in the exertive camp chores.

No sign of the three Swedes although I did see some tell-tail tobacco juice spit staining the trail. Inga, the youngest, promised he would leave the habit behind. Of course this 'sign' could be that of the group of heavily partying and 'wild' looking Alaskans we passed along the way. Yes there are actually a few people from this state up here.

The sun never really sets although it does dip behind the massive ridges surrounding our glacier. A noticeable and sudden plunge in temperature when this happens. Tomorrow's plan is to carry a load to 10500, cache (bury) it, then head back

down to camp. This will be our routine as we “carry high” and “sleep low”, the safest way to acclimate. In 2 days we head to our next camp at the base of Motorcycle Hill, 11000, giving us an easy jaunt to retrieve our cache the day after that. Already broken open the baby wipes, as I am quite ripe after just two days.

June 10th- Tough 2400 foot haul today as we buried our cache up at 10200, near the notorious Kahiltna Pass, a place where the opposing winds from the Alaskan arctic to the north and the warm Pacific to the south stage their battles. Back in camp tonight at Ski Hill. Quite toasty compared to the ‘whiteout’ we encountered while burying our cache. Not particularly fierce winds but plenty nippy. Lost a member of our team today as Andy has decided to call it quits. Feels he is not in sufficient shape to reach the top and doesn’t want to hold us up. Therefore he’s deciding to bail out now as Zach and Chris indicate the going will only get tougher and steeper in the days ahead. I feel sorry for him as we seem to have a good cohesive group but I suppose it’s best he doesn’t torture himself only to have to be led down from a higher camp. Two guides are required to escort a climber back to base camp because the Park Service rules forbid a guide to ‘solo’ climb back to his group. Another member of our group, Brendan, woke up the other morning in Anchorage on the day of our departure and decided, “my heart’s just not in it”. He had been up to high camp at 17000 feet a couple years ago only to get stranded by bad weather without a chance at even trying for the summit. Thought he’d give it another go but perhaps the pain and misery he knows awaits us is just not worth it anymore. That knocks us down to 6 climbers as the 9th original one signed up never even made it to Anchorage, having apparent frost bitten fingers from another climb. Miles is sad to see his buddy go but will gladly accept his role of toilet paper, since his own TP reserves suddenly became depleted after a role managed to “leap” from his pocket and into the crapper hole during the act of pulling up his trousers. A rule we are quickly learning is to ‘zip up’ all pockets when around the pee or crapper holes. Gloves are especially prone to being lost in the abyss. Came across the Swedes camped above us, and yes, Inga did admit he was the chew-spit culprit. We seem to be on the same pace with these gentlemen.

Animal sitings include a couple ravens looking for a cache to raid and a small chickadee? hoping around camp perched upon ski poles, tents, and ice axes. Our cache, buried five feet deep, includes supplies we don’t need at the moment such as extra food and cold weather gear we won’t need until higher up. Since we won’t need our crampons for awhile they are buried just under the snow so any ravens trying to “dive bomb” into our goodies will get a rather rude welcome. A full speed plunge is apparently the way these ingenious birds, without hands or shovels, have learned to dig up a cache that is several feet down, thus the five foot rule. Should be a light day tomorrow as we definitely leave the rain heading up to the inevitable cold. I’m told it’s unusually warm and rain even down here at 7800 feet is not normal. Losing my tent mate Andy, means our 2 man tent is gone so it’s time to wedge into a 3 man tent between a couple of rather ‘ripe’ Brit lawyers, Miles and Nick. Our guides assure us the extra “coziness” of these intimate conditions will be appreciated when we get into the cold up high.

June 11th - Motorcycle Hill- Camp III- 11'100 feet. A large campsite, 30 or so, with lots of chatter in foreign accents. British, Japanese, and French to name a few and of course our Swedish friends just below us. A maze of wands sticking out of the snow, marking the numerous caches buried here. In fact part of our camp is just about right on top of one, a small flag indicating whose it is and when they started their trip. Amidst a spectacular backdrop of crevasses and seracs as we are now at the upper terminus of the 50+ mile long Kahiltna glacier. A very tough hike today even with our relatively light loads. Getting fried by the sun on the last steep stretch to camp had us wishing for the bit of wind and clouds that kept things comfortable down near Kahiltna pass. Watched a huge thunderhead flowering up over the tundra miles beyond the pass and actually got a late day mini blizzard from the remnants of the storm. Another casualty today. Just when Andy was ready to head back to base camp this morning, Miles decided to leave with him. A bad back was hurting him from an aggravated training injury. Tough luck for the Brits as their ranks have dwindled to just Nick and Wayne. We decided to keep the 2-man tent for Nick and I and sent out the big 3-man. No one else seems to be hurting, as the 'Aconcagua boys' appear blessed with unlimited energy, rousting about full of vigor after just a short nap upon arriving at camp.

Today's wildlife includes three flies. Two buzzing my head on the hike up and one seen perched on the snow. That's it! Feels like we are getting up there now, with the views below us as large as those above. One lesson I learned today. Do not to "wag" your tongue as you climb and strain, lest you get it torched. Yes, the tip is burned and is quite sore. Also learning to gob on the sun block and lip balm during each rest stop, paying particular attention to avoiding a burn on the underside of the nostrils, an area exposed to the reflected glacial glare from beneath you. Tomorrow is a recuperation day, since we only have to head down a few hundred feet to retrieve our cache.

June 12th - Bright and sunny today. A casual jaunt back down to retrieve our cache at 10200 feet. One of our "easy" days, or so we are told. The going gets steeper now but our guides indicate that at least the intense heat will be less pronounced up high. Zach and Dre, who escorted Miles and Andy back to base camp yesterday, reached us this morning after leaving base camp at 11 pm last night. Since it never gets dark, the firm snow conditions during the night make for the fastest and safest hiking conditions on the lower glacier. Wildlife today: Just the crazy Alaskans. Again camped next to the trail well below us. They seem to like to avoid the regular camps. Rolling smokes and offered us a shot of Jack Daniels as we trudged back up hill from our cache.

Tomorrow we start the steeper part of the climb and will be making use of our crampons and ice axes. Heading up around the 'infamous' Windy Corner, 13500 feet, to stash another cache. Just hoping the winds don't prevent our passage, as this is a spot people often can't get past for "days on end". Met several groups today coming down from the 17200 foot 'high camp'. Some spent the past week up there in high winds, finally deciding to 'bail out', never getting the chance to make a bid for the summit. Chris feels the 50% summit success rate on this mountain is an overestimation. He and Zach have plenty of experience to base that opinion on as they have been stuck in various camps for up to nine days before finally having to call it quits. Can only hope luck is on our side. Wildlife seen today, other than the Alaskans, a bee and a raven. Yes, a honeybee.

June 13th- Looks like we survived 'Friday the 13th' unless the mountain implodes in the next couple hours. This is our third night at Motorcycle Hill. We head up to our next camp tomorrow after successfully placing our cache past Windy Corner this morning. A bitter wind blasting down the dark cold hill as we struggled out of our bags to don our crampons and 'rope-up'. Spectacular views of the tundra plains to the north and the famous West Buttress leading to the upper mountain. The wind was apparently coming from the best direction today, for our sake, that being the north. We had absolute calm rounding Windy Corner, which I guess is more exposed to a South or West wind. Lucky. Lots of shedding layers then putting them back on as at one point you are in the shade and wind, freezing butt, then around the next bend you are suddenly roasting in sunshine and dead calm, almost in a panic to get your clothes off before you collapse from the heat. Our group is getting along very well with everyone very good about pitching in with camp chores. A small party now compared to the other guided group camped next to us, still with their full compliment of nine climbers. Our fearless leader, Chris, is one tough dude. He's still sick as a dog while working his butt off, all without any hint of complaint. He obviously loves what he does and cherishes being on the mountain. The Jose, Jeff, and Wayne are cozy in their tent with no bickering other than the occasional chastising of whoever crosses over their designated 'one third' of the floor space.

Met the first group of climbers to summit in over a week. They said the 'logjam' stuck at high camp has cleared out some, with 65 having made the summit today. This large exodus will hopefully mean we will have lots of empty camp sites from which to choose if we can make it that high. In other words, most of the strenuous block wall building will be done for us, compliments of these predecessors. Our goal tomorrow is the famous 14200 foot 'Basin Camp' situated on a large plateau just below the just as famous 'Headwall', a steep section, leading up to the West Buttress ridge. This is the camp where rescues are staged from with a group of 'climbing rangers' and a 'medical team' stationed here. They also post a daily weather forecast, which our guides take with a 'very large grain of salt'. In fact, Chris doesn't even like to read it. He says it's notoriously incorrect, often leading to many groups wasting a nice day sitting around camp because they 'read' it was supposed to be nasty. Our guides use their many years of experience on the mountain to gage the weather with observations of conditions such as snow contrails blowing off the high ridges or Lenticular clouds indicating a 'no climb' day. Still no headaches or complaints of altitude problems as we have taken our time acclimating. Chris assures us that once we reach 'high camp', headaches, sleeplessness, and generally feeling like crap is going to be norm.

June 14th - Basin Camp- Camp IV-14'200 feet. Well, here we are. A city of ice walls with a trail of 'ants' winding up the Headwall as a backdrop. Lots of elaborately constructed fortresses, many abandoned. No doubt built by those 'unfortunates' during the past few weeks who have had to endure relentless cold and wind. Again, little or no work on our part except shoring up the walls a bit. One tent site we chose has a well-engineered basement with a 'spiral staircase' leading down. Poor souls must have had a lot of time to kill, but then again, should their walls get blown over, this is the only safe haven in which to retreat and toss their gear. As in base camp, there are a couple

'johns' set up with regular wooden seats and a splendid view of the 'ants' heading up and down the Headwall. A sturdy looking cluster of tents with solar panels house the rescue ranger and medical tent. Our guide, Chris, and many like him, would rather they not be here. He feels their presence instills a false sense of security in some climbers and insights them to take foolish risks. Self reliance is a point that our guides say is necessary for a safe climbing trip. Something he feels some groups don't have a good grasp of, despite the required pre climb briefing by rangers back in Talkeetna.

Camp sits in a big basin with spectacular views of Mt Hunter and Foraker. Little wind here but the snow contrails blowing off the top of the West Buttress indicate that 'high camp', perched on this ridge, is a miserable place to be right now. A chalkboard at the ranger tent gives the forecast for here and high camp. Tonight's low: 0 down here and minus 25 up there, 3000 feet higher. Great views of some of the technical route up the mountain, such as the famous 'Orient Express', a gully that got it's name after several Asian climbers were killed falling down the thing. The Koreans and Japanese have a reputation up here as big risk takers, requiring a disproportionately large number of rescues. The Europeans are right behind them I'm told, also tending to bite off more than they can chew.

With a bit of time on our hands, Wayne and Jeff constructed an official archway entrance to our camp. A playboy centerfold attached to it with the Gibbon perched on top, the name "Wonderland" carefully made out with pieces of broken wand. The Gibbon is stuffed, you guessed it, 'Gibbon', that hitched a ride up Acongagua with Wayne. On this trip he/she/it is either attached to the climbing rope or perched on Wayne's pack. While hooked to the rope the thing jumps up and down waving it's arms as if to 'spur' you onward, trying to rally some enthusiasm in those following the trudge upward. Cache retrieval tomorrow followed by a rest day. Time to break out the heavy underwear and down parkas.

June 15th- Soon as the sun dipped behind the ridge last night it got bitterly cold. Watching the water freeze in your cup type cold. Can't imagine what it's like higher up with a touch of wind thrown in. Wind is something we have fortunately not had to deal with in this camp, 'yet'. Got in some practice today with clipping in to pickets for protection and using our jumars on a fixed line, to prevent a fall on the steep Headwall and Buttress. The top of the headwall has a 'fixed-line' placed and maintained by the rangers. It's a matter of clipping on your jumar and inching upward, stopping about every fifty feet or so to clip your rope through an anchored carabineer. A person reaching an anchor point will yell, "anchor", a signal for others on his rope to stop, so he can 'clip through' above this point. The yell, "climbing" indicates he's ready to move on. Tomorrow we do the real thing as we head up to stash a cache up on the Buttress. A landmark day today. Yes, it's day 7, which means I got to change my 'skivvies'. Have three along and figure a 21-day trip. A handi-wipe bath was quite refreshing. Brilliant blue skies today with a forecast high of 15 tomorrow, a measly minus 10 up at 'high camp'. An easy day today with cache retrieval our only activity. Upon returning we found someone had altered our 'Wonderland' arch to read "Weinerland". Clever. We are already gaining a reputation in camp, thanks to the imagination of Wayne and Jeff.

June 16th- Had no doubt one of the best views on the planet Earth today. Looking out on the Alaska Range from 16800 feet atop the West Buttress. Those who have been to the summit say the view up there doesn't compare. All right then lets pack up and head home. No need to see the top. Still have not lost a day due to bad weather and today we were able to ascend the headwall, caching a load at 16800, just below high camp. A very tough trudge today with a lot of elevation gain in a short distance. Some really thin air to suck in had us at times doing a bit of puffing. Tried the technique of "pursed-lip" breathing in which you force your air out against a shut mouth to create more pressure in the lungs. The idea is that this increased pressure mimics being at lower altitude, thus more oxygen is forced into your blood. The same breathing technique someone with severe emphysema would use. Seemed to help a bit today but just taking nice deep regular breaths appeared to be just as effective. After getting off the fixed lines atop the headwall the climb was still quite 'hairy'. The route along the buttress ridge is quite exposed, requiring us to use a running belay (pounding in pickets to clip our rope into) for added protection. Plenty of company coming and going and several rather daring/foolish un-rope French climbers rather casually stepping past us on some of the steepest sections. Our guides let us know their opinion of these climbers, considerably less than favorable. Almost no wind today, which everyone says, is quite rare this high up. Again a relatively clear day with just a touch of fog.

Our group seems to be quite strong with the only complaint today being an altitude headache that had Jose feeling pretty rotten. Tomorrow will be a full rest day. Our guides are leery about wasting a good weather day just lying around resting but then again they don't want to over-push us to the point of burn out. The Swedes are still next to us and eagerly grab their bowls when it's announced we have leftovers. Our cuisine is gourmet compared to their monotonous staple of freeze-dried noodles. Our menu will change when we get up to high camp with fat being cut out because it is poorly metabolized at real high altitude. Failure to cut out fats can result in some nasty digestive problems and ultimately an inability to continue the climb. The early expeditions on the mountain learned that the hard way since fatty foods such as 'pemmican' (dried meat pounded into a paste and mixed with fat) were their sole source of food. This was the reason for many of the early attempts being aborted.

The weatherboard says "Deepening low pressure by mid week with increased winds and snow". Not good news but then again they said it was supposed to snow today. At the base of the board is a statement from the rangers, "Unlike weather forecasters, we don't get paid to be wrong 50 percent of the time". The mountain has two weather zones according to Chris. That below 11000 feet and that above often times completely different conditions. He indicates it's common to be climbing in a 'whiteout' down low just to break out into bright sunshine above 11000. Looks now like a pretty solid cloud layer below us at about that elevation. We have been spoiled up to now. Just hoping our good weather fortunes can last a few more days.

June 17th- Tonight is our fourth and last night at Basin camp. A full rest day today. Didn't even get out of my bag until the sun began to melt the frozen breath clinging to the walls of the tent. The resulting mini slush storm inside finally coerced me into getting up. Once again a brilliant sunny day. Wayne and Jeff so 'amped-up' with the days rest they had to find some kind of project to vent their reacquired energy stores.

This time tearing down their arch and building an elaborate 'throne' from which to view their custom television. Although it only receives the Playboy channel, their tattered centerfold filling the screen, the TV is quite popular. Even had the National Geographic photographers take a break from their filming of the rescue rangers to check out our camp attractions. Perhaps we will make it onto their 'fall special'. Took a walk to the "End of the Earth", located on the edge of our big plateau where there is a sheer drop thousands of feet down to the Northeast Fork of the Kahiltna Glacier. A good view of the famous Cassin Ridge route above us. A nasty exposed knife-edge heading to the summit, popular amongst 'hard core' technical climbers, looking for a bigger thrill and challenge than the rather 'tame' west buttress. Although we were roped together and well anchored, the more bold of us (Wayne, Zach, and Jeff), me not included, were able to perch right on the edge of the abyss. A great pose for a spectacular picture. Nick, carrying a good ten pounds of camera and video equipment on the trip, precariously balancing his video camera on the edge. Of course our photos will never do justice to the true magnificence and size of this place.

With the nice weather there has been a steady flow of climbers coming down the headwall after summing. Most people try for the summit from high camp, a long round trip. Then the next day they head down past this (Basin) camp to camp at Motorcycle Hill giving them an easier trip back to base camp the next day. Basically all the way out in two days. Managed to stuff a handful of postcards into the pack of one such person. He and his climbing mate slowed up doing battle their constantly overturning sleds as they headed down. Still, they will be out long before we see any greenery again. A long arduous 'slog up' and a 'sail back' down the same path for most, but our route will be different, as we go down the 'other side' of the mountain, a region much less traveled. In fact we received news of a group that went out that way a few days ago, reporting twenty two crevasse falls on the lower Muldrow glacier, one being a fifty footer. An adventure it will be heading into the 'great unknown'. Although our guides are well versed on this route down the north side of the mountain, it's still a first for them, and they're quite excited about finally getting the chance.

Got word that some 'animal' just made it to the summit from base camp in 18 hours. I think the record is 14 hours. To do this these climbers must come up high and acclimate for a while, then head back to base camp. This way they hope to avoid a fatal case of high altitude pulmonary or cerebral edema from such a fast ascent. Forecast for our move to high camp tomorrow is snow and light winds. So far it's been 'snow' forecasted every day, none of which has materialized. I suppose it's a safe bet for them to say that just as back in Seattle it's always a no miss for the weather people to predict "showers".

Our three guides just tested positive at the Medical tent for Strep throat. Chris just informed us and assured they are trying their best to avoid infecting any of us. It's tough to have to watch poor Chris constantly poking his head out the cook shelter entrance every time he has to cough. Since they are all in the same tent together it's understandable they all have it, although Chris is still the only one showing really bad symptoms. My biggest fear is waking up with that 'tell tail' hint of a sore throat that might imply doom for me. This is strenuous enough when you're in the best shape of your life. Toss in a bad chest cold and it would be "curtains" for any of us other than the guides. As far as other ailments go, no one has any problems. I am suffering a bit with a burned tongue tip and lower lip despite trying to be diligent about gobbing on the sunscreen and

lip balm. My blood oxygen saturation is about 80% according to our mini oximeter, with everyone else being somewhere in the 80's. This is an expected reading this high up, compared to a normal 97% at sea level. Still able to function reasonably without much notice of being at altitude. Well, next report from 'high on up'.

June 18th- High Camp- Camp V- 17'200 feet. Now perhaps I know what it's like to be an old man with severe emphysema, perpetually short of breath, gimping about. Any exertion is very taxing and none of us is showing a lot of spunk. Certainly no archways, lounge chairs, or televisions will be built at this camp. Lucky for us, again there seem to be a lot of empty campsites with walls already built. It was hard enough just getting up here as the 3000-foot climb up the headwall and buttress took its toll. Lot's of 'rest stepping' (moving one foot forward, planting yourself on that foot for a quick rest, then taking your next step). Rather tedious concentration required to avoid hooking a crampon on your bulky neoprene 'over-boots'. An act which could send you into a 'face plant', something you certainly want to avoid in some of the areas we passed with extreme exposure. These over-boots will be worn throughout our climb on the upper mountain as frost bitten feet now are a real concern.

As our second rope team followed us into camp, Jeff was displaying the 'drunken man' stagger, trying not to collapse from exhaustion. Nick, standing bolt upright and never wavering, like an indestructible machine. I sense however that he is hurting as much as the rest of us but that tough British resolve to keep a "stiff upper lip" is hiding his true agony. Wayne even fell silent for a while toward the end of the climb, a real indication that even this lean and wiry chap was effected by the hike. Our guides, including the hacking sick Chris, are 'mountain goats', looking like they could run back down the hill and do it over again just for fun.

Another gorgeous day with just a bit of snow early on, welcomed because it prevented an uncomfortable baking from the intense sun on the headwall. Even though it may be zero degrees out, if the sun is shining, your tent holds so much heat it can be rather pleasant. This afternoon I was able to sprawl out on top of my bag with my bare feet airing out. Once the sun dips behind the ridge it's another story. Instant chill. We plan to spend two nights here, retrieving our cache tomorrow, then the day after heading to our next camp just over Denali pass. This is where we break from the main crowd which stages their summit bids from the camp we are now at. We must get over the pass and set up camp "before" we try for the summit. Zach and Chris assure us that if we do a summit climb from our present location we will then be very reluctant to carry all our stuff back over the pass to climb down the other side. They feel it would be to tempting to instead opt for the "easy way out", back down the main route. In other words, let's get the nasty stuff out of the way first. Going to be a real challenge for us, as we will have to carry all our gear over the pass in one trip. Yes, that means dragging sleds over the famous "Autobahn". This is a steep exposed slope leading to the pass, gaining it's name after a couple unfortunate Germans fell and slid to the bottom, several thousand feet below. Another re-enforcement to the adage "always rope up".

June 19th- Today's a 'semi-rest' day to acclimate and recuperate from yesterdays exertion. Popping a few Ibuprofen as I'm experiencing a bit of elevation induced 'throbbing' of the head. The "old timers" in camp around us are commenting on how

warm and windless it is. They say it's 'never' this nice up at high camp. No bitching here. A thin overcast today with a touch of snow but almost dead flat calm. No major news except I don't recommend using a collapsible canteen for a 'pee bottle'. Sure this type of canteen folds up nice for packing but it's a real challenge inside your bag to keep it from spilling. I also brought a regular hard Nalgene bottle for such purposes. I was hesitant to leave it behind despite it being suggested I do so during gear check. Glad I hung onto it. Also, on more than one occasion I have 'topped off' this bottle, therefore also requiring the collapsible. Since keeping well hydrated is of utmost importance to prevent mountain sickness, sometimes your nighttime pee output can be quite impressive.

The Swedes (Inga, Mathias, and Andreas) just came staggering into camp, looking rather 'spent'. Luckily, they managed to find a pre-made wall to camp behind since they didn't appear to have a lot of 'juice' left in them. I've been popping a few Ibuprofen all day for the head and doing things 'slowly' so as not get out of breathe. Our oxygen saturations are around 70-76%, alarmingly low if you're at sea level, but quite expected at this height. The lethargy displayed by someone with emphysema is quite understandable after getting a little taste of what they must feel like. Promises to be a rough day tomorrow with us dragging everything over 18200 foot Denali pass. We'll set up camp, from scratch, a few hundred feet down the Harper glacier. No pre-made tent platforms and walls on that side of the mountain. Going to have to do it all ourselves. From that camp we will stage our summit attempt, perhaps the next day. We are carrying enough food for about six extra days if bad weather should set in. Let's hope our sunny calm conditions continue, so in perhaps just a few days we can laying back, toes sunk in cool green tundra grass, enjoying the mosquitoes and other living creatures.

June 20th- Harper Glacier- Camp VI- 17'700 feet. Didn't think it was possible to top the exhaustive efforts of our haul up the headwall but sure enough the struggle up Denali pass was a killer. It's hard enough keeping a nice flatly packed sled from flipping over but a top heavy one is a nightmare. Sure enough just a ways up the slope I had a fuel can shift and create a lopsided headache that was impossible to keep upright. Every time we reached a clip in point at a picket I would plant myself securely then drag the blasted thing up to me and flip it back over. Of course this would last only a few yards before I'd again be dragging the *&%#@ thing upside down again. Tearing it apart and repacking was not an option as this steep dangerous hill was not a place to be fiddling around with your gear. The weight of the sled hanging straight downhill is bad enough as it's a constant burden on you. Not intending to join the rank of Germans at the bottom of the infamous Autobahn I had to "grin and bear it". Thought about anchoring the damn thing to a picket then coming back to retrieve it after dumping my pack at the far end but Chris, leading our rope team just in front of me, indicated that was not an option as we had another group 'hot on our heels'. Finally struggling to the pass it was a casual stroll 500 feet down the Harper Glacier to our selected camp spot. Being a spot where no others stay, we had to forge our tent platform and cut our wall blocks from scratch for the first time. This on top of already being totally trashed by the slog up the pass really has taken a toll on me and as witnessed by the lethargy in camp, those around me. With no rest day awaiting us, as is the usual case before a summit

attempt, we will make a charge to the top tomorrow if the weather holds. We would all love to have a day to recuperate but when conditions are good you've got to 'go for it'. You just never know whether tomorrow will be the last descent day to reach the summit for the next two weeks.

Yet another gorgeous day as we sat at the legendary Denali pass eating lunch in virtual dead calm. This is reputed to be one of the harshest places on Earth where 100+ knot winds are a regularity. More than one stranded climbing party has had to bury themselves in snow caves to survive here when descent to the safer confines of high camp were impossible. A group attempting the first winter ascent back in the 60's was bivouacked in a snow hole for several days in estimated wind chill of -148 degrees. The wind chill scale happens to stop at 148 so who knows what it actually was. One consolation about our summit day tomorrow is that since we don't have to mess with going over the pass we can actually sleep in until about 8 am. If all goes well it will be about 6 hours up and back as we will just carry some extra clothes and severe weather stuff like neoprene facemask, goggles, and munchies. Should sleep well tonight.

June 21st- Water bottles wedged in the slot between Nick and I to prevent freezing, wearing two pairs of socks with a couple foot warmers and all my clothes on. Plus my down parka draped over the bag. Wet socks hanging from the ceiling awaiting tomorrow's drying warmth. Pee bottle in it's usual easy to reach spot. The evening bedtime ritual complete as I now make my journal entry before dozing off. Just another day in paradise at 17700 feet on the Harper glacier.

We all made it to the top today. Started out overcast but calm as we headed back up toward Denali pass, then the wind kicked up. Got strong enough to warrant some discussion between our guides regarding whether or not we should turn back and try again tomorrow. The verdict was to go for it and see how things were away from the pass further up toward the summit. Sure enough things calmed considerably to the point where there was very little breeze. The real struggle today was going to be making it to be dealing with the exhaustion of yesterday and trying to summit without a rest day. Feeling thoroughly trashed from the get go I knew it was going to take some doing to will my tired bones onward and upward. With a 2500-foot gain from camp it should not have been an overwhelming task but poor sleep and little recuperation time from the previous days ordeal guaranteed it would seem like 25 thousand feet.

Slogging upward to a large flat basin called the 'football field' we only had the summit ridge to ascend before walking it's 'knife edge' to the top. Dropping our packs at the football field we were "going light" up this final steep slope, carrying just some cold weather gear (goggles, neoprene face mask, etc) in our pockets or in a day pack. Telling Chris at this point that I wasn't sure if I had the juice to reach the top, he replied by saying, "You can wait for us here but I think you have it in you to make it up". This was an inspiration, as I knew he would never let someone who was genuinely 'wasted' jeopardize themselves or others trying to struggle up. I had been keeping up the pace so apparently my body was not so bad off but rather my mind was simply weary. If I had been able to see the 1000-foot slope we had to trudge up I may have balked, but being rather foggy, I could only make out a few hundred yards. Surely the top must be just above the fog I told myself. After wolfing down a prized power bar I had been cradling in my jacket next to my skin I felt a bit of a "second wind" and began the last stretch. Of

course it was agonizingly endless ridge syndrome but eventually we did arrive at the crest for a well deserved last break. Now came the fun part. The summit ridge is a knife blade you must walk along with a 9000-foot drop down one side and perhaps 4000 feet down the other. The snow was quite soft and deep so at least you never felt like you were on a skating rink, but still it required careful placement of pickets to clip into for protection. A lot of concentration to keep yourself from snagging a crampon on your over-boot and taking an ill advised face plunge. Everyone seemed to have plenty of energy, as we knew we were just about there.

Of course people said it was twenty minutes along the ridge to the summit, but in fact it was one hour later that we finally reached the large flat summit where you could safely un-rope and walk about. Comments from our guides that they had never had it so warm on the peak. In fact one of our summit photos was of them standing on the pinnacle with their shirts off. I was able to take off my gloves and spend several minutes loading a role of film in my camera with no discomfort. A far cry from the stories we had heard of people loosing a glove and freezing their fingers within minutes. A surreal surrounding as we were fogged in with no view but our immediate surroundings. With somewhat 'iffy' weather at the start, several groups had decided not to try for the top today, so it was just us and of course our buddies the Swedes coming in a few minutes behind us. It was so pleasant at the top we spent a good hour milling about and taking pictures. Finally had to head back down and bid a final farewell to Inga, Mathias, and Andreas as they would be heading back down the standard route via the west buttress. Wish them luck on their Greenland crossing. An uneventful trip back to camp as the physical toll was readily felt by us all. Again, a lot of concentration to not snag a crampon as you lift your now very heavy legs. Donned the neoprene facemasks near the pass as the wind picked up again but soon we were on the lee side heading down to our sheltered camp. Everyone in relatively good shape with no altitude-related problems whatsoever. With sightseeing planes buzzing the peak on a clear day I am kind of glad we had the peace and quiet of a fogged in day to enjoy the summit.

June 23rd- Noon-Muldrow Glacier- Camp VII- 10'000 feet. Writing this afternoon as we are hitting the hay early following an "all-nighter" in which we hiked for 20 hours straight, staggering into our present camp at 9 am. A thrilling trip down the Harper glacier and Karstens ridge to the "thick" air here at 10000 feet on the upper Muldrow glacier. A bit of trail breaking since so few climbers go this way. Crevasse probing on the glacier was rather tedious at times with Zach carefully picking our route, twisting and winding our way down around the larger obvious cracks. When encountering a hidden crevasse he would make an X on the spot with his pole, an indicator to us that this was a spot to "hop" over. Needless to say, there were occasional breakthroughs but nothing more than a plunge up to the waist. Still, when you start to bust through you don't know for sure just how far you may go, adding a bit of anxiety and determination to avoid even the most benign appearing crack. Keeping a taught rope between climbers ensures that even if one of us broke through a really big hole, the fall should be minimal as the others anchor themselves to stop his fall. The key is to not allow any momentum to build as someone falls in. Sounds easy, but we still have not had to test our reaction times in such a fall. Hopefully we'll get out of here without having to do so. Passed beneath a huge chunk of 'hanging glacier' named Big Bertha. The rangers stressed

steering our way out a ways from the potential impact zone and not to linger when passing by. In other words, “haul ass” when you scoot through. This big chunk of ice looks rather permanently attached to the steep valley wall but of course at any time a chunk can decide it's time to bust off and since it is after all a 'moving glacier' this does undoubtedly occur on a regular basis.

After picking our way through the crevasse riddled upper Harper icefall we entered the 'compression zone' below. This is an area where the glacier is in a 'bowl' or flattened out area below the icefall thus compressing (squeezing) any potential cracks shut. A relatively safe place where you can move quickly. Having to break a fresh trail however, we encountered some waist deep snow. A few moans and groans as some of us voiced our opinions that we should put on our snowshoes or at least “slow down”. Exhausting work is breaking trail through this deep stuff if you're unfortunate enough to be at the head of the pack. Skirting the top of the un-climbable jumble mess of broken and splintered ice known as the Lower Harper Icefall, we finally arrived at the upper reaches of Karstens ridge, a steep but climbable spine that parallels the icefall, leading us down to the massive Muldrow glacier which is our highway out. Met up with a couple Norwegians coming up the ridge, separately, as in 'un-roped'. Crazy in our eyes but just another climb through the snow for them. In certain spots on this route, if you are un-roped, falling is simply not an option. They obviously feel confident enough in their experience and abilities to take the risk. Perhaps not entirely sane but certainly a tough couple of dudes. Huge packs and starting out from Wonder Lake, which sits twenty miles out on the tundra, at just 1900 feet elevation. Coming up this side of the mountain is certainly reserved for the hardest of the 'hard core'. Our trip down, a 'cake walk' in comparison. A cakewalk in that it's all down hill but certainly not implying that it's by any means an easy climb down. After a midnight dinner cooked up under the spire of Browns Tower, we headed down the ridge, watching the sun briefly set behind the adjacent ridge. With virtual daylight 24 hours a day, you can climb throughout the night. Headlamps are something you don't need on Denali in June as just a few hours after sunset we were treated to a 'sunrise'. Picking our way down the steep ridge, Chris painstakingly placing protection pickets, having to leap the occasional ridge top crack, some of which you saw no bottom if you happened to glance down, several thousand straight down either side, endless glaciers and jagged mountain peaks. I felt in another dimension, on another planet. A world with perpetual sunlight yet cold as ∞ . After skirting our way around a particularly nasty overhanging cornice, we finally reached a spot where the Norwegians had set up camp, a long awaited break time spent enjoying the view and relishing in the fact we made it down, well almost down. Didn't look bad from here down but sure enough on e of the nastiest stretches greeted us just before reaching the flat glacier valley. Again it was time to curse the %&\$^@ sled. Trying to walk 'side-hill' with the blasted thing dragging me down the mountain, the line wrapped around in such a way that the weight was trying to spin me rather than simply hanging straight down. Trying to hank the thing up the hill and flip the line to the correct side of your body each time you changed direction was not feasible so you just had to grit your teeth, mumble a few choice words at your sled, and endure it. A good workout for the arms since you had to use your free hand to pull up on the sled leash, keeping the awkward weight from pulling on your hips all the time. On a couple steep down-climbs this free hand was not available since you needed them both. In one agonizing stretch I

literally 'inched' my way along, perhaps a bit over concerned about slipping or being yanked down by the sled, to the point where Jeff and Zach, behind me on the rope, felt impelled to spur me on a bit. As in "come on, it's not that steep, you have to get moving". A polite rendition of, "get your ass in gear".

As we finally approached the flat broad Muldrow, a small avalanche put on a display, crashing down a steep hill into a cloud of snow as it plowed into the glacier. Entering an area just below our own hill, obvious avalanche debris around us, Chris spurred us onward, indicating this was no place to hang out and 'Lollygag'. After his brisk pace brought us out onto the relative safety of the middle part of the glacier, well away from any potential avalanche fallout, I finally felt like the day was actually going to end. An hour or so of heading down the occasionally crevassed glacier brought us to a compression zone that looked good. After standing for twenty minutes, patiently trying to not collapse while Zach probed our campsite, it was finally time to "pass out". A couple of us just lay down with our packs on like an overturned turtle. Thankfully not having to build walls in this rather sheltered valley, we finally were able to hit the hay around noon. A long but unforgettable day. Tomorrow should be fun as we tackle the lower Muldrow, where things will get a bit more mushy. This being the zone where the group going out last week experienced most of their couple dozen crevasse falls. We plan to get a very early start around 3 am to hopefully scoot through this area when things are still firm.

June 24th- Green grass. Camp VIII- 4'700 feet- A couple miles down McGonagall Pass-

Well, our anticipated crevasse falls did not materialize. Had a bitterly cold night which froze things solid even down on the lower reaches of the glacier. At 10000 feet it was by far our coldest night of the trip even compared to our camps at 17000. It was the first time I had to wear my down parka inside my bag. With an early morning start we breezed through the spectacular Great Icefall, weaving our way through giant crevasses and seracs. Having a path to follow made it easier as we retraced the tracks of a NOLS group that was coming up this way and had camped near us. National Outdoor Leadership School is what it stands for. Up here to do some training of potential future guides and naturalists. This bunch had been holed up on the Muldrow for many days, not moving because of the socked in weather. They weren't to thrilled when we told them that up high it had been crystal clear the past week.

As we wound our way down the icefall an occasional hole signaled where one of the previous group had punched through an ice bridge. Leaping over these spots was sometimes a challenge as you had to coordinate your leap with the people roped in front and behind you. The guy in front had to know when to stop so he didn't yank you into the hole before you could prepare your jump, and the guy behind you had to know when to give enough slack so when you did finally leap the line didn't go taught and stop you in mid air hovering over a potentially bottomless crack in the Earth. Although we never had any breakthroughs, some of us did have a rough time negotiating the undulating terrain. Jose, Jeff, and Wayne had all rented snowshoes from Mt Trip and were forever regretting it. The snowshoes were a pain to keep on with their odd strap design and worse yet they had very little in the way of metal spikes (crampons) on the bottom. The result was frequent spills for these three poor blokes when we would head

down a steep pitch. Wayne was roped in just behind me and having quite an ordeal, taking frequent headfirst plunges into the hard snow. A few yelps and terse British remarks, "bloody hell slow down", aimed at our rope team leader Chris. Try as I may, I had a tough time trying to provide the poor Limey some slack and not pull him off balance. Getting yanked on from two directions at the same, trying to keep on your feet, at the same time trying to not drag down your rope mates, can be quite a challenge and I'm sure at times amusing to watch. Taking it all in good spirits the three of them had a good time laughing at each other during their various spills. Their snowshoes certainly won't get any endorsements on this trip.

Finally, at around 7000 feet we spilled out onto the broad gently sloping lower Muldrow. Appeared to be a casual stroll out from here on, but it was not to be. With a mass of crevasses and soft snow preventing climbers from heading down the glacier center, we had to instead traverse over to the left side and walk along the lateral moraine, where the glacier meets the mountain ridge forming it's border. No more path to follow and a jumbled mess of broken and rotten ice blocks mixed with rocks and dirt. This is the zone where the glacier is carving away at the mountain as it grinds downhill. The result is a very tough slog for us. Small cracks gobbling up your legs constantly, having to negotiate around house sized chunks of up-heaved ice, and walking across rocks on snowshoes made for slow going. Taking a break near the sheer slate hillside bordering this mess, we heard our first bird chirping and spotted our first plant, a little obscure plant hugging the bare dirt that was a show in brilliant pink flowers. With our goal to sleep that night on the green grass beyond our exit point from the glacier, McGonagall pass, we appeared to be nowhere close to keeping pace. Finally we hit an area where we could venture back out onto the main glacier and despite a few small cracks we made good time as the snow was still relatively firm. McGonagall pass is a gap in the ridge that parallels the north side of the glacier, with a trail leading from there all the way down Cache creek then out onto the tundra to Wonder Lake. You could see this gap from many afar beckoning us but in the meantime we had a bit of mushy glacier to cross including jumping a few streams running a deep aqua blue across the ice. The thick air a real pleasure to breath we finally were able to reach the pass and scramble the couple hundred feet up to the gap, savoring our first glimpses of solid ground and green plants. The mosquitoes now readily apparent but nonetheless a welcome sight.

This pass is the way the climbing pioneers of the early 1900's approached the mountain. Seems like a brutal long approach to us but the alternative of getting dropped off by a plane was not at their disposal in 1910. An approach from the south was unthinkable because the Kahiltna glacier on that 'wet side' of the mountain extends out 50 miles.

The two Norwegians we met higher up are so far the only ones we have met trying to retrace this original route. At 5700 feet the pass then drops steeply down Cache creek with snow paths in the narrow valley allowing a few of us to still drag our sleds. Further down it became a hardship trying to pull a sled along the rocks, the blasted thing twisting and rolling, like dragging along a pissed-off and reluctant alligator. As Jeff sailed past me merrily pacing along with his sled I realized it would help to cinch up the line more like he did, almost to the point of where the thing was riding your heels. Finally reached a nice flat spot in the grass amongst a spectacular wildflower display. A perfect

campsite with a view down the valley to the lowlands and Wonder Lake. Mosquitoes immediately swarmed us sending some scurrying for head-nets and bug juice. After a while however it became apparent that these were rather docile mosquitoes, as in they rarely actually bit you. After a little getting used to it was no big deal to sit and relax without a head-net. The plan now is to get back into the daytime mode. Sleeping all-night and getting up around 7 or so. Another sixteen miles to the McKinley River crossing which should be a thrill. This is where a large group is at an advantage because you can form a 'human chain' when crossing to insure no one takes a plunge. More than a few solo climbers, after successfully scaling the summit, have met their demise trying to cross this glacial silt laden river. Since the river runs right out of the end of the Muldrow glacier we will have to hit it early in the morning when the flow will be at it's lowest of the day. With cool days recently we are hoping the glacial melt has slowed. Meanwhile we have a long haul just to get there. Walking barefoot through the grass was one of the great pleasures I enjoyed this day.

June 25th- Turtle Hill- Camp IX- about 2'500 feet. Lying in the tent, rumblings of hunger emanating from my belly, waiting out of the rain and mosquitoes for our final dinner call. Ran out of lunch munchies today so I'm a bit famished. A very long grueling ordeal with heavy loads, now all on your back, including my beloved sled. Packs in the 80-pound range, some rather spongy sections of trail, and very little wind to knock down the cloud of mosquitoes buzzing your face. It was a challenging day as we finally made it to Turtle Hill, a high spot in the low rolling tundra, overlooking the maze of gravel bars and water braids that make up the broad McKinley river. Lush green hills dotted with picturesque ponds, some a mere puddle and others almost small lakes. A prime breeding ground for mosquitoes. At times you were afraid to inhale lest you choke on the blasted things. Again as with yesterday, just more bothersome than actual biting. If and when these buggers decide it's time to slurp some blood it's going to be living hell for man, caribou, grizzly, or whatever is unfortunate enough to be stranded out here. Approaching the small rise that is this spot we were hoping to be exposed to a bit more bug shoeing breeze but it seems to be the rain that has sent our little tormenters for shelter.

A beautiful backdrop to our camp is the Alaska Range to the south, with Denali still buried in clouds. It's said the mountain is fully visible just twenty days a year. Without the glacier sun our gear is getting soggy. The weather down here actually seems more hostile than up high where the reflected sun made most days quite dry and toasty at times. Oh well, just one more day of moist socks, soon to be wet socks, as we cross the river bright and early tomorrow morning. Once and 'if' we make it across it's just a couple miles to Wonder Lake where one of the Park Services tourist buses will take us out to the park entrance. There are no private vehicles allowed in the park so everyone gets around on one of the old school buses.

Wildlife today: 7,328,745,093,918 mosquitoes, no grizzlies (but several crap piles), no caribou or moose (but a few old antlers), a scattering of ducks on some of the ponds, a couple of us saw Ptarmigan, and most noticeable were the Whimbrels (a large sandpiper type bird) that appeared to be nesting out on the tundra. These birds seemed to 'dance' off the ground as you walked by, not to bothered by a few mangy looking bipeds. A rather tasty rice dish and plenty of it has our bellies satisfied. I have eaten like

a hog on this trip yet Chris commented the other day I looked like I'd lost quite a bit of weight. Expedition climbing can't be beat. What else can you do where you're allowed to pig out on candy bars to your hearts content and actually come home fifteen pounds leaner. Intruding mosquitoes now squashed against the tent wall, all is quiet, and it's time to call it a day.

July 2nd- Relaxing. Sitting on a sandbar, fly rod in hand, nine miles up the Russian River on the Kenai Peninsula. Trying to do something constructive with those eight extra "bad weather" days we never used up on the mountain. Tussling with a few ravenous 15 inch Rainbow trout, gulping my pheasant tail bead-headed nymph, it's been a fine way to pass the time. Our last days hike out was of course a "grueler", right to the bitter end, as we were in a bit of a hurry to catch a bus that was supposed to be leaving Wonder lake around 11 am. The straining hips as we hoofed out proved a tad too much as the 11 am deadline passed before we ever hit the road on which we could flag down the bus. Oh well, turns out there are buses going back and forth all the time so we were able to commandeer enough space on one a couple hours later. Just getting from Turtle Hill down to the river was a chore with the trail becoming a boot sucking bog. The actual river crossing was fun, though at times a bit harrowing, our group having to form a human chain to get through some of the really fast water. Never more than mid thigh deep but really "rippin'". A solo Japanese fellow, who had camped near us at Turtle Hill, now quite a ways behind us, caught our attention as he began his crossing odyssey. . Turning around to see how he was faring we noticed him take a plunge and have to paddle to shore with his pack as a float. He then started hiking upstream in a hopefully not vain search for a safer spot. Of course joining up with us was not an option as we were already almost across. Never saw the poor guy again. The first survival rule of crossing is to unclip your pack belt for a quick get away should you be swept downstream That way you can easily slip it off and use it as a float as our Japanese friend demonstrated. With so many channels to cross we were able to try various form of the human chain, from a "V" pattern to a straight across line with interlocking poles. Exhilarating and no mishaps. Nonetheless, the second we unhitched in the safety of the shallows, Jeff took a face plant.

Sprawled out on the road waiting for the bus, we made for motley looking bunch. Scraggly beards and gear scattered about, we seemed quite derelict, yet when a bus pulled up I noticed several people snapping photos of us. Not quite the majestic creatures (caribou, sheep, bears, moose, and birds) they had been photographing but we were nonetheless thrilled to be worthy of a picture. Upon entering the bus, the dozen or so others aboard were quite interested in what we had done. Our sad looking condition bringing out a few offerings of crackers, cheese, and beef jerky. With Wayne absent for a short while, the Gibbon, being unrestrained somehow ventured into traffic and was run over by a bus. He survived however, with a new streamlined body, fine for his next climb.

A great trip with a good bunch of people. All of us getting along quite well. Of course we never had to endure a stormbound week huddled in a tent 24 hrs a day with each other. This intimacy I hear can turn even the best of buddies into archenemies. We realize we were a bit spoiled with our weather fortunes but you'll hear no complaints from us. Chris, Dre, and Zach were great guides and seemed were quite thrilled to finally complete the Traverse climb. They pushed us hard yet knew our limits, were very

personable, and always put safety first. Overall, the trip was more strenuous and more spectacular than I had imagined. I would highly recommend doing the Traverse route if you want to experience from top to bottom the whole splendor of Denali and the 'other world' that is the Alaska Range.