So how many first ascents did Fred Beckey make in his 70 plus years of climbing?

If you believe what some climbers and authors think, the total of first ascents is several thousand.

In the Chapter One article on this website, I stated the current total of first ascents that I have accounted for is 260. But I also state that I don’t believe it is 100% accurate.

The point of this particular article is to share the number of first ascents as claimed by Fred Beckey at different points of his climbing career, in order to deflate the claims made by other people that he climbed thousands of first ascents.

Remember my definition of what a first ascent is, along with a new route, from Chapter One. I believe Beckey agreed with this definition, when he talked about the number of first ascents he made at various times during his life. If he didn’t agree with my definition, Beckey’s totals would have vastly exceeded the totals I came up with in my research. In others words he would have combined his number of first ascents and new routes, and referred to this total as the number of first ascents. Which is the mistake many people make, when they give an opinion on the number of first ascents made by Beckey.

**First ascent**: The first successful ascent to the summit of a peak.

**New route**: The first successful completion of a route on a peak or rock-climbing feature, but not the first climbers to reach the summit.

In my research I didn’t come across Fred Beckey being mentioned in “Ripley’s Belief It or Not.” But he did get a shout out in “Strange as it seems” in the *Tacoma News Tribune*. See the lower left panel.

A picture containing text, book

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*Tacoma News Tribune*. May 6, 1951, 71.

Here is an article from *The Province* newspaper of Vancouver, British Columbia, in which Beckey visited the city during wintertime to show climbing and skiing films.

A close up of a newspaper

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*The Province*. February 7, 1952, 15.

Below is a table which lists the date and sources for the number of first ascents claimed by Beckey. In the next column, I list the number of first ascents that I discovered during my research. The last column is the number of first ascents listed in the Appendix of Beckey’s book “Challenge of the North Cascades.”

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Source** | **# of FA stated in Source** | **My Research on # of FA** | **CNC Appendix # of FA** |
| 8-22-42 | Seattle Post Intelligencer, 11. “Brothers Climb Mt. Waddington.” | 22 | 28 | 27 |
| 7-28-46 | Seattle Times, 19. “Seattleites To Ascend Alaska Peak.” | 26 | 35 | 34 |
| 9-3-46 | Seattle Times, 14. “Three Conquer Alaskan Peaks.” | 27 | 37 | 36 |
| 6-15-47 | Seattle Times, 11. “Six to Tackle Mt. Hozomeen.” | Greater than 30. | 44 | 43 |
| 9-4-47 | Seattle Times, 25. “Conqueror of Canadian Peaks Returns.” | Greater than 50. | 55 | 54 |
| 7-9-48 | Seattle Times, 4. “ U.W. Students Conquer Peaks.” | Greater than 60 | 63 | 62 |
| 8-31-48 | Seattle Times, 15. “U.W. Climber Adds Seven First Ascents.” | Nearly 70. | 79 | 70 |
| 4-16-50 | Seattle Times, 68. “Conquering ‘Old Smoothie’.” | Greater than 80. | 108 | 98 |
| 5-6-51 | Tacoma Tribune, 71. “Strange as it seems.” | 105 | 123 | 113 |
| 2-7-52 | The Province, 15. Beckey There First 100 Times.” | 100 | 129 | 119 |
| 1969 | “Challenge of North Cascades”, Appendix: Chronology of Climbs 1936-1968. | 180 | 202 | 180 |
| 2-5-07 | Billings Gazette, 6. “Unclimbed Summits Abound in Alaska, but not Lower 48.” | 400 to 500 | 260 | DNA |

A pattern is noticeable, that for the most part Beckey’s stated totals of first ascent are less than what I’ve been able to identify. But for me that is not the key point.

Beckey turned 46 years old in January 1969, the year “Challenge of the North Cascades” was published. Unless Beckey was the person the short story and film “The Curious Cause of Benjamin Button” was based upon, one wouldn’t expect him to exceed the number of first ascents he climbed early in his life during the latter part of his life in order to reach 1,000 first ascents claimed by others.

To reach 1,000 first ascents during a 70 year of period of time, Beckey would need to average about 14 first ascents a year. The total of 40 first ascents in 1948 and 24 in 1952 were aberrations. There were five other years in which he exceeded 10 first ascents. In most of the remaining years he logged single digits totals of first ascents and several years he made zero. From 1978 to 2013, Beckey made a total of 15 first ascents. The opportunity to climb 10 to 20 first ascents in a year was getting fewer and fewer by the mid-1950s for Beckey, as it was for all climbers.

As mentioned earlier the current total of first ascents I have identify is 260. I expect feedback from his climbing partners and their surviving relatives to increase this total.

But the number of first ascents Beckey made is in the hundreds, not in the thousands that some people claim.

This article is not meant to diminish Beckey’s climbing achievements at all. Just provide data so people won’t make excessive claims about the number of first ascents climbed by Beckey, but never claimed by him.

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