Vinson Massif

Coordinates: 78°31′31.74″S 85°37′1.73″W

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Vinson Massif (/ˈvɪnsən mæˈsiːf/) is a large mountain massif in Antarctica that is 21 km (13 mi) long and 13 km (8.1 mi) wide and lies within the Sentinel Range of the Ellsworth Mountains. It overlooks the Ronne Ice Shelf near the base of the Antarctic Peninsula. The massif is located about 1,200 kilometres (750 mi) from the South Pole. Vinson Massif was discovered in January 1958 by U.S. Navy aircraft. In 1961, the Vinson Massif was named by the Advisory Committee on Antarctic Names (US-ACAN), for Carl G. Vinson, United States congressman from the state of Georgia, for his support for Antarctic exploration. On Nov. 1, 2006, US-ACAN declared Mount Vinson and Vinson Massif to be separate entities.[4][5]

Mount Vinson is the highest peak in Antarctica, at 4,892 metres (16,050 ft). It lies in the north part of Vinson Massif's summit plateau in the south portion of the main ridge of the Sentinel Range about 2 kilometres (1.2 mi) north of Hollister Peak.[5] It was first climbed in 1966. An expedition in 2001 was the first to climb via the Eastern route, and also took GPS measurements of the height of the peak.[6] As of February 2010, 1,400 climbers have attempted to reach the top of Mount Vinson.[7]

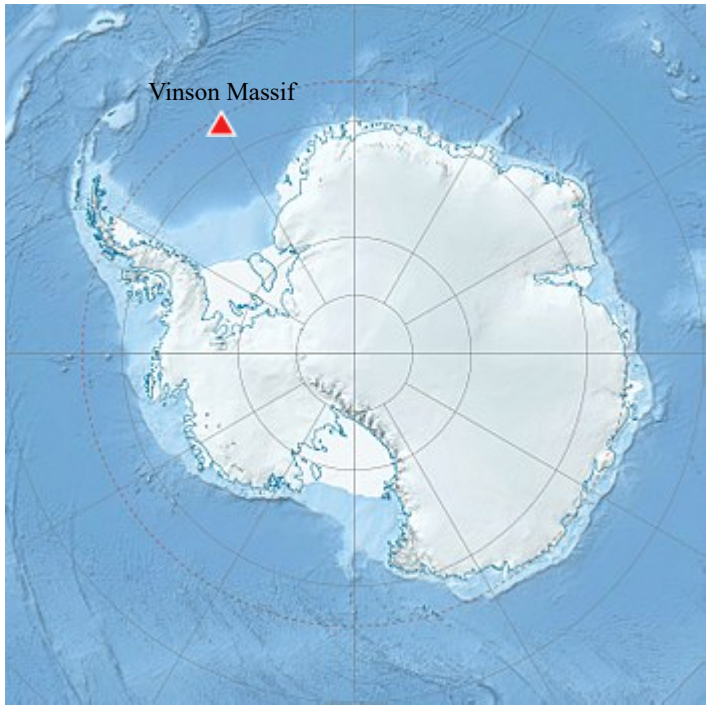
Contents

Geography

Vinson Massif	
 Mount Vinson from NW at Vinson Plateau	
Highest point	
Elevation	4,892 m (16,050 ft) [1]
Prominence	4,892 m (16,050 ft) [2] Ranked 8th
Isolation	4,911 kilometres (3,052 mi)
Listing	Seven summits Ultra
Coordinates	78°31′31.74″S 85°37′1.73″W [3]
Geography	

The Vinson Massif extends between Goodge Col and Branscomb Glacier to the northwest, Nimitz Glacier and Gildea Glacier to the southwest and south, and Dater Glacier and its tributary Hinkley Glacier to the east. The southeastern part of the massif ends at Hammer Col, which joins it to the Craddock Massif, of which the highest point is Mount Rutford (4,477 metres (14,688 ft)). The massif comprises both the high central Vinson Plateau with its few peaks rising to over 4,700 metres (15,400 ft), and several side ridges mostly trending southwest or northeast from the plateau.

The current height (4,892 metres (16,050 ft)) of Mount Vinson was measured by a GPS survey that was conducted by the 2004 Omega Foundation team comprising Damien Gildea of Australia (leader) and Rodrigo Fica and Camilo Rada of Chile.[8] Since 1998 and continuing through 2007, the Omega Foundation has placed a GPS receiver on the summit for a suitable period of time to obtain accurate satellite readings.[8]



Antarctica

Parent range	Sentinel Range
Climbing	
First ascent	1966 by Nicholas Clinch and party
Easiest route	snow/ice climb

Climate and glaciers

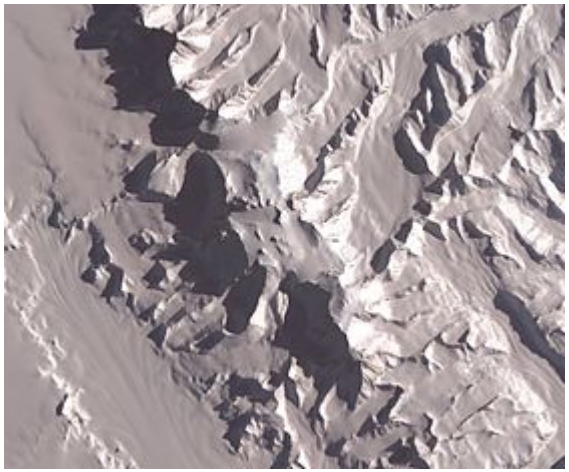
The climate on Mount Vinson is generally controlled by the polar ice cap's high-pressure system, creating predominantly stable conditions but, as in any polar climate, high winds and snowfall are a possibility. Though the annual snowfall on Mount Vinson is low, high winds can cause base camp accumulations up to 46 centimetres (18 in) in a year. During the summer season, November through January, there are 24 hours of sunlight. While the average temperature during these months is −30 °C (−20 °F), the intense sun will melt snow on dark objects.

Over successive years, the limited amount of snow that falls on Vinson Massif compacts and is transformed into ice, forming glaciers. These glaciers follow the topography and flow down the mountain's valleys.[9] The uppermost glacier occupies Jacobsen Valley on the north face of Mount Vinson, and flows either into Branscomb Glacier to the west or Crosswell Glacier to the east. The Crosswell Glacier flows into the Rutford Ice Stream via Ellen Glacier.[9] The south face of Mount Vinson is drained by Roché Glacier, which flows westwards into Branscomb Glacier, with the latter leaving Vinson Massif to join Nimitz Glacier.

History

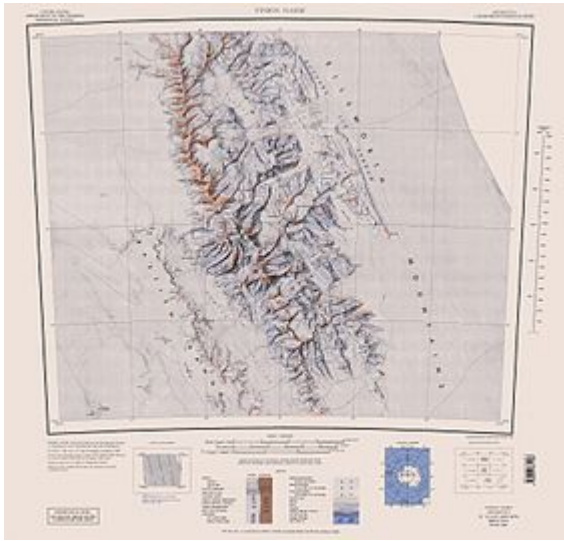
A high mountain, provisionally known as 'Vinson', was long suspected to be in this part of West Antarctica, but it was not actually seen until January 1958, when it was spotted by US Navy aircraft from Byrd Station. It was named after Carl Vinson, United States Representative from Georgia who was a key supporter of funding for Antarctic research.[4] The first measurement of the Vinson Massif was established in 1959 at the elevation of 5,140 m (16,864 ft).[4]

First ascent



NASA image of Vinson Massif from space

In 1963, two groups within the American Alpine Club, one led by Charles D. Hollister and Samuel C. Silverstein, M.D., then in New York, and the other led by Peter Schoening of Seattle, Washington, began lobbying the National Science Foundation to support an expedition to climb Mount Vinson. The two groups merged in spring 1966 at the urging of the National Science Foundation and the American Alpine Club, and Nicholas Clinch was recruited by the American Alpine Club to lead the merged expeditions. Officially named the American Antarctic Mountaineering Expedition 1966/67, the expedition was sponsored by the American Alpine Club and the National Geographic Society, and supported in the field by the U.S. Navy and the National Science Foundation Office of Antarctic Programs. Ten scientists and mountaineers participated in AAME 1966/67. In addition to Clinch they were Barry Corbet, John Evans (University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN), Eiichi Fukushima (University of Washington, Seattle, WA), Charles Hollister, Ph.D. (Columbia University, New York, NY), William Long, Ph.D. (Alaska Methodist University, Anchorage, AK), Brian Marts, Peter Schoening, Samuel Silverstein, M.D. (Rockefeller University, New York, NY) and Richard Wahlstrom.



Map of central and southern Sentinel Range, Ellsworth Mountains with Vinson Massif.

In the months prior to its departure for Antarctica the expedition received considerable press attention, primarily because of the reports that Woodrow Wilson Sayre was planning to fly in a Piper Apache piloted by Max Conrad, the "flying Grandfather", with four companions into the Sentinel Range to climb the Mount Vinson. Sayre had a reputation for problematic trips as a result of his unauthorized, unsuccessful, and nearly fatal attempt to climb Mount Everest from the North in 1962. His unauthorized incursion into Tibet led China to file an official protest with the U.S. State Department. In the end, the purported race did not materialize as Conrad had difficulties with his plane. According to press reports, he and Sayre were still in Buenos Aires on the day the first four members of AAME 1966/67 reached Mount Vinson's summit.

In December 1966 the Navy transported the expedition and its supplies from Christchurch, New Zealand to the U.S. base at McMurdo Sound, Antarctica, and from there in a ski-equipped C-130 Hercules to the Sentinel Range. All members of the expedition reached the summit of Mount Vinson. The first group of four climbers summited on December 18, 1966, four more on December 19, and the last three on December 20.

On August 17, 2006, from nomination by Damien Gildea of the Omega Foundation, US-ACAN approved naming the subsidiary peaks south of Mount Vinson for the AAME 1966/67 members Nicholas Clinch, Barry Corbet, Eiichi Fukushima, Charles Hollister, Brian Marts, Samuel Silverstein, Peter Schoening and Richard Wahlstrom. Other peaks in the Sentinel Range had previously been named for John Evans and William Long.[10]

Later ascents

The climb of Vinson offers little technical difficulty beyond the usual hazards of travel in Antarctica, and as one of the Seven Summits, it has received much attention from well-funded climbers in recent years.[7] Multiple guide companies offer guided expeditions to Mount Vinson, at a typical cost of around $30,000 per person, including transportation to Antarctica from Chile.

Gavin Bate ascending Mount Vinson in 2000

First ascent from east side

While the vast majority of prior climbs to the summit have used the western side of the massif from the Branscomb Glacier, the first ascent from the east side was successfully completed by an eight-person team sponsored by *NOVA* in January 2001.[6] The team consisted of:

- Conrad Anker – expedition leader
- Jon Krakauer – mountaineer and author
- Dave Hahn – mountain guide with 34 ascents, including ascents to Gardner, and Shinn.
- Andrew Mclean – extreme skier
- Dan Stone – glaciologist
- Lisel Clark – producer
- John Armstrong – cameraman
- Rob Raker – assistant cameraman and sound recording

The team not only made the first ascent from the east side but also performed scientific research into snow accumulation at different elevations as well as taking the first ground based GPS reading from the summit. The GPS reading gave the elevation of the highest point in Antarctica as 16,077 ft (4,900 m), eclipsing the earlier established heights recorded in 1959 and 1979.

Another first was the successful aircraft landing of a Twin Otter on the Upper Dater Glacier on the eastern slopes of Mount Vinson.

NOVA named the production "Mountain of Ice", which first aired on PBS in February 2003.[6]

Maps

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- D. Gildea and C. Rada. Vinson Massif and the Sentinel Range. Scale 1:50 000 topographic map. Omega Foundation, 2007.
- Antarctic Digital Database (ADD). (http://www.add.scar.org) Scale 1:250000 topographic map of Antarctica. Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR). Since 1993, regularly updated.

See also

- Vinson Plateau
- Mount Sidley – highest volcano in Antarctica

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External links

The Vinson Massif. (http://www.explorersdream.com/mt-vinson/)

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