

## **Denali, AK, 20,320 ft. – June 7, 2014, HP #16:**

Since at least 2009 the seeds of one day climbing Mount McKinley (as it was still officially named back then) had been growing in my mind. By 2010 having climbed both Mt. Hood and Mt. Rainer the itch had gotten pretty serious. Nevertheless it wasn't until 2014 when I finally got the chance to do so. Over those four years I practiced sled hauling, did a lot of winter camping, and climbed a lot of mountains including 18,490 foot Pico de Orizaba in Mexico. I also improved my rock and ice climbing skills as well as my glacier travel skills, so as to be ready for Denali when the opportunity arrived and in March 2014 the opportunity arrived. March 16, 2014 I contacted thirteen people on Summitpost.org in regards to climbing Denali, and I ended up getting a positive reply from Art D of Texas. Art informed me that a team of three he was on for the end of May was in need of a fourth. I responded immediately that I was interested and Art passed the word along to his team lead, Calvin H of Colorado. By March 19 Calvin invited me to join his "Kicking Buttress" team and I accepted. In addition to Art and Calvin the other team member was Donald T also of Colorado. None of the four of us knew each other, so that was a slight concern, but we all had good climbing resumes and so it was worth the gamble. May 24 was the day the team was flying to Anchorage, with May 27 being the proposed date of flying from Talkeetna to the Kahiltna Glacier where the Denali West Buttress route begins. Thus from the time I joined the Kicking Buttress team I had only 65 days to arrange things on my end. First thing I need to do was to purchase my climbing permit as that needed to be done no less than 60 days prior to the climb start date (thus keeping the alternate team member slot open). March 22 I paid the \$360 permit fee, and March 25 I booked a flight to Anchorage – as such I was one hundred percent committed. Over the next few days I finalized my needed gear list and anxiously began to buy gear.

~~Coincidentally, we reached the south peak summit on a Saturday, the same day of the week as the very first expedition, and exactly 101 years, to the date, after the first.~~

~~A full year past from the time I stood on the highest natural point in Texas, until I reached another state highpoint. The wait was worth it, as the next one was the grandest of them all.~~

Since 2009 the seeds of one day climbing Mount McKinley (as it was still officially named back then) had been growing in my mind. By 2010, having climbed both Mt. Hood and Mt. Rainer the itch had gotten serious. The opportunity final came in 2014. Over those four years I practiced sled hauling, did a lot of winter camping, and climbed a lot of mountains including 18,490-foot Pico de Orizaba in Mexico. I also improved my glacier travel skills and had taken up rock and ice climbing.

Searching for Denali climbing partners, March 16, 2014 I contacted thirteen people through Summitpost.org. As a result, I found Calvin of Colorado who invited me to join his "Kicking

Buttress” team becoming its final member. None of the four of us knew each other but we all had good climbing resumes making the gamble worth it. We would all meet in Anchorage in 65 days.

Climbing permits needed to be purchase, for \$360, no less than 60 days prior to the climb start date, so I immediately took care of that and next arranged a flight to Anchorage.

Less than two weeks later disaster struck when I woke up from a nap to learn my house was on fire! I warned my wife, and then immediately set out saving my climbing gear before the police escorted me out of the smoke-filled building. Initially I feared I would have to cancel the Denali trip. Fortunately, I was able to make arrangements and my climbing plans remained.

Time passed quickly and soon I found myself in Anchorage arriving at close to midnight to a well lite night sky. At the ~~Hampton Inn~~ I woke up Art meeting him for the first time. Shortly after I meet Calvin and Ron as they arrived. The next morning, we made our way to REI, A.M.H, and Wal-Mart to pick up our remaining food and gear items. As the evening approached, I was filled with anticipation thinking about what we four strangers were about to take on together.

The next morning the Talkeetna Taxi shuttle service picked us up at 6:30 a.m. taking us 114 miles north to Talkeetna. Arriving at 9:15 a.m. we had plenty of time to first drop off the Russian climbing team, at Talkeetna Air Taxi, who were sharing our shuttle prior to our 9:45 a.m. orientation meeting at the Walter Harper Ranger Station. Denali’s Harper glacier and the Talkeetna Ranger Station are both named after Walter Harper an Alaskan native and the first recorded person to stand on Denali’s tallest peak. Harper was 20 years old at the time, and the date was June 7, 1913.

Denali, is a Native American word meaning “The High One” and it is the tallest mountain in North America towering even above its neighbors. When measured from base to peak, with a vertical relief of 18,000 feet, it is the tallest (even though it is not the highest) mountain in the world. The mountain’s extreme cold has a record low of minus 77 F (-61 C) with wind chill down to minus 148 F (-100 C). Strong winds are common, and have been estimated to gust as high as 300 miles per hour. It is by far the coldest of all the mountains in the United States. In fact, during the summer Denali is still colder than any location in the other 49 states during the winter. By some measurements it is also considered the coldest place on earth. The mountain is always covered in snow and ice, but below that the mountain is formed of granite. On average the mountain is only totally visible four days a month during the summer months meaning there is nearly constant weather issues.

Following the orientation, we walked down Talkeetna Main Street carrying our issued Clean Mountain Cans (CMCs) making our way to K2 Aviation, where we had previously left our gear. As my teammates went into the office to obtain our flight schedule, I entered the hangar to change into my climbing clothes and to prepare my gear for flight. Prior to boarding the Cessna that would fly us to base camp each of us with his gear was weighed ensuring the combination did not exceed 300 pounds. By 1:10 p.m. we were in the air looking fresh and full of excitement.

Soon we left all signs of the green landscape behind, as we enter a world of jagged mountains and wide, glacier-filled valleys. The 55-mile scenic flight to the Kahiltna Glacier landing strip at a 7200 feet elevation took 30 minutes. It is here that the West Buttress route begins. The mountain has other routes but today eighty percent of climbers use this route.

By 2:00 p.m. our gear was unloaded, and we had checked in with the base camp manager. The weather was clam, so after we dug the required food and fuel cache, we set off for Camp I. Having to move four weeks' worth of food, fuel, and gear requires each team member to carry a 50-60 pound pack, while pulling a 60 pound sled.

Traveling over glaciers necessitates tying the team and sleds to a rope which if keep tight limits the danger of falling into hidden crevasses. Our rope order was Calvin in the front, followed by me, Art, and then Donald. Being in the back is the toughest position as leaving Base Camp entails descending 400 feet down Heart Break Hill. Pulling a sled downhill without rigid polls, when there is no one behind you to control it, is an inconvenience. Also, if the last person falls into a crevasse he risks being hit by his sled as again there is no one behind him to stop it from following him into the crack.

It took us 4 hours to cover the five and a half miles to Camp I. The camp was in the shade of the surrounding mountains when we arrived and so we immediately bundled up to avoid catching a chill. We set up our two tents, a two man tent to be used by one person, and a four man tent to be used by the other three. The idea with the tents was that we could all take turns in the small one thus providing us with some alone time. By the time we set up camp, and melted water, and prepared dinner it was 11:00 p.m.

Tuesday, May 27 we woke to snow falling. It was cold enough and windy enough that the tent poles were covered in rime ice indicating the wind was from the south. Before leaving Talkeetna we had been warned of an approaching storm, knowing that it might last multiple days we decided to move up to the second camp in case conditions further deteriorated.

The 2.5 miles from Camp I to Camp II involves going up Ski Hill to just below Kahiltna Pass to an elevation of 9700 feet. This leg is often done as a double carry meaning loads are taken up with two trips. With concerns about the weather and still full of energy we decided to tackle it as another single carry. In low visibility due to the snow falling, we broke camp at 3:25 p.m. and labored up to Camp II in 4.5 hours. It is astonishing how much time it takes to go such a short distance when loaded down with heavy packs and sleds.

At Camp II it was cold enough that I put on my summit parka even as we shoveled snow and erected walls for our campsite which took an hour and a half to complete. It was midnight before we ate and after one a.m. when we went to bed. Bear in mind that at this time of year darkness never reaches the mountain – 23 hours of sunlight are granted and just one hour of twilight. I did not even bring a headlamp onto the mountain.

Along with us camped at Camp II were members of the British military known as the 1 Rifles Alaskan Bulge team, a group of Black Diamond employees, a troop from Columbians, and a two Russian teams.

Over the next three days the storm did not let up, as such we stayed put. Overnight the tents would become buried in snow and we would have to wake up and dig them out to prevent the aluminum poles from bending or breaking under the extra load. As we waited on the storm, we had plenty of work to do improving the camp walls, keeping the area inside the walls dug out, melting snow for water, and cooking. Free time was spent playing cards or resting. In spite of being pinned down I wrote in my journal "I love this experience".

Our sixth day on the mountain, and our fourth day in Camp II, I was the first one out of the tent and the weather broke momentarily causing me to notify the others and prompting us to start packing. I was eager to start up even when the snow shower resumed but we decided to wait to see what the Brits did as they had sent out a reconnaissance team to scout out the path and conditions. When the Brits returns saying the trail was heavily wanded our team prepared to move up to the next camp.

Camp III is located at the base of Motorcycle Hill 1.5 miles away. The elevation gain from Camp II to Camp III is 1,300 feet. Again, we traveled in a storm. As we went up, we passed groups coming down the mountain many who had been stuck at the 14,200 foot camp for as much as 10 days, without a chance to attempt the summit. I notified one of the descenders that his nose was white indicating the possibility of frostbite.

We arrive at the 11,000-foot camp at 7:30 p.m. Under the labor of the ascent I was down to a polyester shirt over a wool shirt when we arrived. Once we stopped moving it became very cold and being sweaty, we felt it even more. We were not luckily enough to find a vacated camp spot as there were many teams staying at Camp III. As such we had to get to work preparing a spot by digging and sawing snow to erect wind block walls, and to level out spots for the tents. It was after midnight before we crawled into our sleeping bags.

The next day I woke with a stomachache and was out of the tent by 7:00 a.m. No one in the camp appeared to be up yet. By 7:30 a.m. Calvin joined me, and him and I improved the camp walls and added a large kitchen area. It was windy and cold till about 10:00 a.m. when the sun came over the ridges and soon folks were heading up Motorcycle Hill. By 1:30 p.m. we too were hauling a cache up the hill. Thankfully, we encountered no wind at Windy Corner. We were carrying small enough loads that we did not use the sleds this day. After covering 1.75 miles and arriving at 13,500 ft. we dug a hole in the snow and buried a cache of food and fuel. Food caches necessitate being buried in the snow to prevent ravens from getting into them. Also they have to be marked with wands so they can be found after a snow storm. Mountain regulations required the markers be labeled with stickers issued to each team during orientation, that way if caches are not recovered the violators can be fined.

Our eight day on the mountain turned out to be mostly clear, and we took advantage of that by moving up to the Basin Camp (aka Camp IV) located at 14,200 feet, passing by and leaving our cache on the way. I was in favor of leaving two of our four sleds behind at our Camp III cache and sharing the remaining two sleds but we ended up taking just one. As such we had full back packs. Calvin was a real champion this day as he single handedly pull the overloaded sled all the way to the Basin Camp.

Wandering into Camp IV we found all the established spots to be full so once again we had to dig snow and build walls. I would guess that around 30 teams (or more) were camped here. At any given time, during the peak climbing months it is very possible to have around 500 climbers on the mountain, in fact when we checked in there were 489 climbers on the mountain. Typically fifty percent will reach the actual peak. The Annual Mountaineering Summary by the National Park Service reported that for 2014 only one in three climbers reached the summit. Between 1967 and 2014 (inclusive) only in 5 seasons has the summit reaching percentage fallen below 40%.

Temperatures were around 0F (-18 C) at that time of day, 9:30p.m., and I donned my 390 gram 850 fill summit parka over my other five layers – two wool shirts, a fleece, a 150 gram 850 fill down coat, a Gortex shell. Having become a pattern we didn't eat until 11:30 p.m. and we went to bed about 12:30 a.m.

At 26,200 feet on the south col of Everest the lowest October temperature recorded is -17 F (-27 C), in comparison in June on Denali at 14,000 feet, and higher, night time temperatures are routinely -30 F or lower.

The next day we learned that no one on had gotten onto the Kahiltna Glacier after May 26 for about 5 days, as such it was very lucky that flown when we did. Sure we had been pinned down at 9700 feet for several days but at least we were on the mountain and acclimating rather than being stuck at nearly sea level in Talkeetna.

June 4 was another clear, sunny day identical to the pervious one and we speculated that a lot of folks were finally reaching the summit. Later it was rumored that as many as 100 people summited this day. Until now the summit percentage for the season was 20% or lower with only 15 people having reached the summit the day we had our orientation. We too decided to take advantage of the weather and moved a cache up the headwall. Art did not join us as he had decided the 14,200-foot camp was the end of the line for him.

Climbing from 14200 feet to the 16,200-foot col at the top of the headwall is the steepest part of the West Buttress route we were following. This steepness necessitates ascending fixed lines on an ascender. It was fun to go up the lines, however coming down the fixed lines was dangerous as protection of an ascender will not work then traveling down.

That night we ate spaghetti. Our meals were arranged on a three day repeating schedule, which was helpful for buying the food but which we didn't necessarily stick to on the mountain. Our

three breakfast choices were freeze dried bacon and eggs with freeze dried yogurt and dehydrated apples, or instant oatmeal with freeze dried pineapple, or granola. Herbal tea, and/or hot chocolate was also part of breakfasts. For lunches we had bagels, wraps, salami and cheese, or snack food such as trail mix or potato chips. Our dinner menus were either pre-packaged freeze-dried meals, or Rice-a-Roni, or angel hair spaghetti with pesto and parmesan cheese. Granola bars, chocolate, hard candy, and similar snacks were also part of our diet. We also had a few limited variety items like couscous, Ramon, beef jerky, freeze dried desserts, and fig newtons. Our diet was satisfactory but supplementing and varying it with items traded for from other teams was appreciated.

June 5 was a rest day and the following day we moved to the high camp at 17,200 from where we would make our summit bid. The three of us started at toward the headwall at 12:45 p.m. At this point the snowshoes we had worn up to the Basin Camp were left behind, and we attached crampons to our boots. This time it took us 3 hours and 15 minutes, 45 minutes longer than our caching trip, ascend the fixed lines as there were more people using the lines which slowed us down as did our heavier packs.

After digging up the cache we decided to just take enough food for that night, and for the next day, and for the following day's breakfast, even though in the cache we had four days' worth of food for three people. As such we were really banking on making the summit on June 7 and being able to get back to either the 16K cache or the 14K camp June 8.

From the cache it took 3 hours to cover the 1000 feet up the 16 K ridge, over Washburn's Thumb, and into Camp V at 17200 feet. I had read that climbers should plan on covering only 300 vertical feet per hour at the higher elevations and that was about our speed. It was cold but calm and sunny and it seemed like the shadow that covers 14K camp at 7:30 p.m. would not reach Camp V for a while, so we wandered over to the top of the rescue gully and took a few pictures of the 16 K ridge, as well as Basin Camp below with Mt. Foraker behind it.

Unlike the 11,000 ft. and 14,200 ft. camps the high camp contained very few other teams. By 9:30 p.m. we had camp set up, it went quite quickly as we were able to modify an existing spot. During the night Donald woke up and complained about having trouble breathing. I explained to him that that was to be expected as at our high elevation there is only 50 percent the amount of oxygen as there is at sea level – the air was thin! At that elevation it one must inhale twice to obtain the same amount of oxygen of one breath taken at the sea. Denali's latitude is 63 degrees north. Being so far north of the equator results in lower barometric pressure and thus less oxygen – the oxygen level at 20,000 feet in Alaska is comparable to 23,000 feet in the Himalaya.

Saturday June 7, we were up at 8 a.m. yet it took until 11:45 a.m. before we set off for the summit, mostly because it takes a long time to melt snow to have enough water for three men for a full day. We tried to pack reasonable light and still be prepared for emergencies. Between us we carried a sleeping bag, an insulated mat, a stove, 3 pickets, an extra pair of crampons, a

snow saw, and a shovel. Additionally we each carried extra clothing, a camera, food, and water. At these high elevations we donned our insulated pants, shell pants, over boots, and multiple layers on the top half of our bodies. My upper body clothing was a toque on my head, a neoprene mask for my face, two wool shirts, a fleece jacket, a down jacket, a water proof wind proof layer (Gortex), goggles, and double layer mittens. In my pack I also carried my large down parka, -40 degree mittens, and a neck gaiter protection I anticipated needing on the summit.

From high camp the route heads northeast (mostly east) along the steep "Autobahn" toward 18,200-foot Denali Pass. This section does not get sun until the afternoon and so it is extremely cold, as such most avoid early starts out of Camp V, however our start was unusually late.

The Autobahn has a steep dangerous fall line to climbers left and has been the site of many Denali accidents so as we went up we took advantage of pickets in place and clipped our rope to them.

It was stimulating to reach the top of Denali Pass at over 18000 feet where we turned south toward Arch Deacons tower. Above 18,000 feet on Denali a person is reduced to roughly 50% of his mental capacity due to the lack of oxygen, and one could really feel a difference. At the apex of Denali Pass we had a decent view directly east of the Harper Glacier - which on first sight I thought looked like the football field but that was still a long ways off.

The Denali Pass vicinity is where the 1967 Wilcox expedition had their high camp from which they made their submit bids. On July 18 after splitting up, with five descending and the remainder lingerer to make their summit attempt one of the fiercest storms in the mountains history ravaged the locale. By the time the storm subsided and the group of five reached base camp the other seven members of the expedition had died. To date this may be considered the severest mountaineering disaster in North America. Since then over one hundred more have perished on Denali, averaging out to about one death per year.

On Pig Hill we met the guide camped next to us at 17200 ft. who was short-roping down one of his Japanese clients. Another guide was bringing down what I assumed where Russian clients. Gaining the summit ridge, we trudged along on the left side, in strong winds, aware (but unable to see) that the right side drops over 8000 feet down to the east fork of the Kahiltna Glacier. Nine hours and fifteen minutes after leaving Camp V we reached the top of North American at 20,320 feet. The time was 9 p.m. and no other teams remained at the high point. Coincidentally, we reached the south peak summit on a Saturday, the same day of the week as the first expedition did, and exactly 101 years, to the date, after the first.

The amazing views were hidden from us obstructed by clouds and blowing snow, and all I could think about was getting down before the already bad weather worsened. I snapped a picture of the summit marker, and one of Calvin at the marker, then had him take a photo of me, followed by a selfie. I also got a photo of Donald approaching the summit, as he was the third one on the rope, and a picture of Calvin's watch to document the time. We could not have

been on top for more than five minutes and all my photos were taken within the same minute (9:02 p.m.) before my camera could freeze. We did not even take the time to don our extra summit layers as we started down without resting leaving no time for our body temperatures to drop.

The winds were gusting extremely strong as we descended, blowing up a lot of snow and reducing visibility to 20 feet or less; likely it was also snowing. On the way down my face mask froze up and I had to switch to my neck gaiter. To avoid frostbite I would often place my gloved hand on my nose and cheeks. At one point Donald was having some trouble with his goggles so he removed them, and rime ice immediately began to grow from his eye lashes.

I hoped that once we turned to go west down the Autobahn that we would get out of the wind but in fact it only worsened. I worried we could really be in trouble and prayed we would make it back to High Camp without an accident. Fortunately, the other teams we had seen coming down were in front of us and now and then we could still find their tracks and very rarely we caught a glimpse of them.

Much to my relief eventually we caught up to another group and at 1 a.m. we rolled back into High Camp dehydrated, hunger, and too tired to solve either. The drinking water in one of my bottles had frozen so I put the bottle in my sleeping bag to warm it up, popped a hard candy into my mouth, and lay down to sleep thankful to be back at camp and delighted we had made the summit.

The cold and wind gusts of the evening before continued the next day - our fourteenth day on the mountain. All the same our objective was to get back down to the more protected Basin Camp at 14,200 feet where the fourth member of our team awaited us. We broke camp at 2:30 p.m. and one and a half hours later we retrieved our cache at the top of the headwall. As we had experienced ascending the headwall the fixed lines were more difficult and time consuming to descend with our loaded packs taking us two hours to get back to Basin Camp from the 16,200-foot col.

Arriving, with light snow falling to the relative comfort of our established camp at 14,200 feet felt really nice. It was good to see Art and he was pleased to learn of our success. Our tiredness soon overtook us as Art melted us some snow for drinking water. Donald fell asleep with his sunglasses on.

Monday, June 9 our plan was to take a rest day but by 2:00 p.m. the day was turning from warm to stormy so we decided to pack up hoping to get down to the 11K camp before the full force of the storm arrived. Arriving at our 13,500-foot cache the weather really started to deteriorate, and a guided group ascending informed us that there were a lot of snow pillows after Windy Corner which turned into trail-breaking for us. As we continued down it began to snow steadily. I was the third guy on our rope, behind Donald and Art respectively, and many times I could not see Donald. Luckily there were wands in place and we relied on them to find our way down. I had the side zippers of my pants unzipped to the knees for ventilation and



without stopping and using both hands it's not possible to zip them up so I was getting a lot of cold air circulating around my backside, and I thought to myself "you are literally freezing your butt off".

Right around Squirrel Point one of my crampons came loose and fell off. To get it back on was a big ordeal as it required removing my pack, securing that to avoid it sliding away, then cleaning snow and ice off the boot, and removing my gloves to reattach the crampon. The adjustment on the crampon was frozen and so I was unable to tighten it, but luckily it stayed on for the rest of the descent to Camp III.

Before arriving at Motorcycle Hill I was worried that it would be loaded with snow and as such a major avalanche concern (it has slid in the past and caught and killed climbers in 2011), but luckily the hill was on the windward side and the new snow was blown off it. It took us 3 hours to travel from Camp IV to Camp III a distance of 2.75 miles. Once again Calvin singlehandedly managed our only sled.

As might be expected the camp spot we had built eight days earlier was taken, but this time we were fortunate to find a vacate one, with existing walls, on the north end of camp. The next morning I slept late until 10:00 a.m. at which time I looked out to find it was still snowing and very windy and knew then that we would not be traveling. In the afternoon some Russians came down from Camp IV and asked if they could rest in our kitchen. They told us they had come down to get their food cache as they had run out of food at the higher camp. We still had a lot of extra food so we let them take what they wanted of ours. In the early evening the Russians returned, as we played cards in the big tent, and asked if we had any extra sleeping bags and/or pads. Turns out the Russian could not make it back to 14K due to the storm and so they were stuck at 11K.

Getting pinned down on the descent was wearisome and the Beach Boys song "Sloop John B" with its "Let me go home, I wanna go home" lyrics kept going through my mind.

Day 17, the skies cleared with many groups heading. I packed up expecting we would all want to do take advantage of the weather and head down too. However our team decided it might be easier to stay in camp all day and leave at 1 a.m. The idea was to avoid having to set up camp again at Base Camp should we arrive too late for a flight out today. A reasonable idea but I felt it was shrewder to travel while we knew the weather was good and also during the day when the temperature is warmer.

By 10:30 p.m. when Art and I were preparing our customary late dinner the camp had mostly cleared out, and the temperature had dropped significantly. That night, morning of June 12, we didn't make it out of camp until 1:45 a.m. in the very crisp cold air. I had on my wool long Johns under my insulated pants which were under my shell pants, as well as hand warmers on my ankles (to assist in keeping my feet warm). I also wore and all four of my coats.

Our rope order became Donald and his sled, trailed by Art's sled, then me and my sled followed by Art and Calvin's sled, and lastly Calvin. On the downhill the last on the rope does not pull a sled as without rigid poles there is not any efficient way to prevent a sled from running into him. It might seem like being behind two sleds, on the downhill, would be a lot of work to hold them back but since the gradient of the terrain we were on was not extremely steep, and with new snow on the path to slow the sleds down, the sleds only required occasional attention from their follower. Conversely being in front of the two sleds was probably the toughest position as it required some extra pulling effort when sections of the terrain were either flat or from time to time uphill (especially going up Heart Break Hill).

The journey down started out a bit sloppy as members of the rope team were losing snowshoes and one of the sled kept tipping over. Donald realized the seriousness of the situation when he mentioned that if he had to keep stopping that he risked getting frostbite. And so, not long after we left Camp III, we stopped to repack the problem sled and from then on the voyage down changed to incredibly enjoyable. With steady uninterrupted travel we soon warmed up even though the packs and sleds remained covered in frost.

It felt great to be the only ones out, as though we were the only ones on the mountain. We walked toward a full moon, and of course it stayed light all night. At one there was also alpenglow on the mountains along with the full moon and I wondered if that can happen at lower altitudes where the sun actually sets. It was so still and quiet with no one else around and no shuttle planes flying. So even though I was initially against traveling at night, it ended up being an amazing experience.

Upon arrival at Base Camp, we pulled the sleds up near the door of the Base Camp managers hut, she opened her door and asked our group name and what airline we were with, and a few minutes later she announced K2 would be by to pick us up at 9:30 a.m. , an hour and a half away. Our timing had worked out perfect even if we were exhausted from the lack of sleep.

Once I got my snowshoes and harness off and my sled unpacked I grabbed my shovel and went to work digging up our cache. The cache was deep plus there was a lot more snow over it then when we buried it so it was a lot of work. With all the marked caches, from all the many teams on the mountain, all in one area I thought it seemed a lot like a graveyard. I had dug down to the cache when Art and Calvin arrived to help and they finished off the removal.

On the 30-minute return flight I was so tired that I dozed off. Back in Talkeetna we checked in at the ranger station and reported our success, returned the CMCs, then found a place to get a burger. In the afternoon K2 shuttled us to their bunkhouse and Calvin, Art, and I set up clothes lines and hung out our gear to dry. After showering we headed back into town for dinner. Donald ended up ordering the biggest calzone I have ever seen, and he finished 90% of it, while Art, Calvin and I shared two large pizzas.

I have been asked, since I got home, if I had fun climbing Denali. Sure, there were lots of moments of fun during the experience, but I do not think it is correct to say that mountain

climbing is fun. With that said, I do not mean to imply that mountaineering is not enjoyable. Of course, I enjoy it, in fact I would go so far as to say it is what I like the most in life, but nevertheless so much of the sport of alpinism is hardship and suffering. That seemingly inverse relationship between enjoyment and hardship seems to be a large part of what draws mountaineers back into the mountains time and time again. There is pleasure in working hard, and mountain climbing is mostly hard work which I hesitate to call fun least I cheapen it.

It is a tough sport, and it certainly is not for everyone, but its rewards are amazing, and looking back it seems we got to experience a lot of what Denali has to throw at climbers. We had sunny days, multi-day storms, white-outs, alpenglow, views, wind, clouds, and everything that goes along with these things. Every section of the climb had its own charms and challenges. For instance, trekking up the Kahiltna Glacier had us crossing open crevasses and offered broad views which were miles long. Getting pinned down at Camp II by one long continuous storm taught us patience and resilience. We learned how to fortify our camps with snow walls, and how to efficiently stay warm and cook in Arctic weather. We got to climb blue ice on the headwall while ascending fixed lines. From High Camp we were rewarded with amazing views of the Basin Camp, the Edge of the World, and Mt. Hunter and Mt. Foraker. Each time we would reach a higher camp I would say "if this is as far as I make it, this expedition has been worth it".

We got to meet some wonderful people, from the Rangers at the Walter Harper Ranger station to K2 Aviation employees, and fellow climbers from all over the world. But no one was as noteworthy as my three teammates. Calvin was an excellent organizer, and always willing to go the extra mile especially with load hauling and camp chores. Art was pleasant to be around, always willing to offer a helping hand and to learn from his teammates. Donald was quick with a joke, efficient in his methods, knowledgeable of the landscape pointing out the various mountains and routes by name, and a generous teammate.

**Boundary Peak, NV, 13,140 ft. – October 6, 2014, HP #17: It turned out to be no easy ridgeline with a lot of loose rock and rock pinnacles to down climb and skirt around.**

October 5th I left Provo at 6:15 a.m. and drove to the Nevada/California border, mostly via highway 6, to the Queens Mine trailhead of Boundary Peak. Boundary Peak is the highest point in Nevada at 13,140 feet. It took about 9 hours to get there, and since my plan was to climb the peak the next day I had plenty of time on my hands. After sitting for 9 hours my back was sore and I needed a walk so I wandered up the trail for about 50 minutes to just shy of where the Trail Canyon route joins the Queens Mine route, and in so doing I got a good feel for what I would be up against the next morning. I didn't see anyone else on the trail, but I thought I might as there was a van parked one switch back down from the trailhead.

When I got back to my vehicle, and moved it to a flatter spot to camp, a pickup with two brothers in it pulled up. By now it was about 5:45 p.m., and they talked as though they were