



AAC Publications

DENALI NATIONAL PARK ACCIDENT SUMMARY

Alaska, Denali National Park

Many of the illnesses and traumatic injuries that led to ranger response could have been prevented with prudent decision-making and reasonable ascent profiles during the expeditions. Climbers should always err on the conservative side of risk management and not underestimate the terrain nor weather, commonplace in the Alaska Range.

As in the 2021 season, a false SOS message launched an unnecessary search and rescue (SAR) operation. Please protect any emergency satellite devices appropriately during travel to prevent these inadvertent SOS alerts.

In total, 21 climbers met the life, limb, or eyesight threat criteria to be evacuated via helicopter. The following list summarizes the annual SAR incidents in Denali National Park and Preserve, and a few of the notable incidents are detailed in reports below.

Traumatic Injury: seven cases, including two fatalities. This total includes two avalanche patients with non-life-threatening musculoskeletal injuries and one patient with a head injury who fell from Denali's summit ridge and later from Denali Pass. One patient was unable to self-evacuate due a back injury, and another patient due to a pre-existing knee injury.

Medical Illness: eight cases, including one fatality. This total includes one patient with HAPE and COVID-19 complications, one stroke patient, one patient with kidney stones, one patient with high-altitude retinal edema, one patient experiencing a panic attack that presented as a cardiac complaint, one patient with a gastrointestinal illness, and one patient with significant hypoxia.

Frostbite: three cases.

High-Altitude Cerebral Edema: one case.

High-Altitude Pulmonary Edema: two cases.

(Source: Denali Mountaineering Rangers.)

Images



Denali is one of the most striking features on the planet and the crowning peak of the Alaska Range. High altitude, heavy snowfall, arctic cold, severe winds, and avalanches are some of the hazards that aspiring climbers must face.

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