



AAC Publications

Denali National Park Accident Summary (2023)

Alaska, Alaska Range, Denali National Park

National Park Service (NPS) mountaineering rangers treated a total of 33 patients during the 2023 climbing season in the Alaska Range. The following list provides a breakdown of the diagnoses. (Some patients had multiple diagnoses.)

- **Traumatic Injury:** 11 cases (includes one facial laceration, three shoulder injuries, one traumatic brain injury, one case of fractured ribs, one neck injury, and four patients with various musculoskeletal injuries)
- **Frostbite:** 11 cases
- **Medical:** Six cases (includes two cases of hypothermia, one diverticulitis, one spontaneous pneumothorax, one possible case of anxiety, and one case of anaphylaxis)
- **High Altitude Cerebral Edema (HACE):** Three cases
- **High Altitude Pulmonary Edema (HAPE):** Three cases

Twenty-one patients required helicopter evacuation from Denali National Park. Three patients were evacuated by NPS rangers on the ground, and nine patients self-evacuated after receiving treatment.

There were three mountaineering-related deaths in the Alaska Range during the 2023 climbing season, with an additional post-evacuation fatality. One occurred when a solo skier was caught in an avalanche. Two fatalities occurred due to a fall from the Mooses Tooth in the Ruth Gorge. On Denali's West Buttress, a climber suffering from severe altitude illness was treated and evacuated, but subsequently died in hospital.

While some accidents are difficult to predict and prevent, many of the medical illnesses and traumatic injuries are preventable with prudent decision-making and a reasonable ascent profile during climbing expeditions. Additional information regarding the prevention, recognition, and treatment of common mountain medicine maladies can be found at the Denali National Park website: search "Denali mountaineering medical issues." (Source: Denali Mountaineering Rangers.)

Images

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