



CLIMBING NOTES

2000 SEASON

NORTH CASCADES NATIONAL PARK

1999 Accidents: Nine Climbers Evacuated

There were 22 incidents that generated response from search and rescue (SAR) crews in North Cascades National Park during 1999. Ten of these involved significant effort and/or expense to find and evacuate nine climbers and one hiker from off-trail approach areas or climbing routes. In two incidents, the climbers were unaware of their location at the time of rescue, likely attributable to 1999's tremendous snowpack. Total unprogrammed or emergency cost to the National Park Service was \$21,506. Five of the incidents are summarized below:

June 19, Boston Basin/Sahale Peak
A party of five was ascending Sahale Peak's west side when one climber pulled a loose rock onto himself, the rock striking his head and causing him to fall 25 feet. One arm became entangled in rope, dislocating a shoulder. The group bivouaced the night on the peak, and used headlamps and a flare as a distress signal. Another party in Boston Basin detected the signal, and reported a suspected accident via cell phone. Rangers evacuated the climber by helicopter the



North Cascades National Park rescue helo on the Lower Curtis Glacier, Mt. Shuksan with St. Joseph's Med-Flight helo in the background

next morning. In addition to the shoulder injury, the climber suffered a fractured orbit, lost teeth, and numerous contusions.

July 19, Mount Shuksan/Shannon Ridge

Two climbers, one with previous Mount Shuksan climbing experience, attempted a three-day trip via the Sulphide Glacier route. Intermittently poor weather and the heavy snowpack were contributing factors that disoriented the pair upon their descent from

the glacier. Overdue by one day, a search ensued and found the pair well below treeline with a signal fire between branches of Shuksan Creek. Both were uninjured, but lost, and had ceased travel due to exhaustion from efforts to find the Shannon Creek Road.

July 29, Mount Blum

A party of two planned to climb Mounts Blum and Hagan over a four-day trip from Baker River. Overdue

Continued on back

What Makes a "Classic" Climb?

When Steck and Roper published their 1979 (2nd edition) book *50 Classic Climbs in North America*, they included two routes, relatively unknown at the time, found in North Cascades National Park. Recent guidebooks, such as Nelson and Potterfield's *Selected Climbs in the Cascades* (original and recently released 2nd volume) have highlighted particular North Cascades climbs over the hundreds of routes described in the all-encompassing volumes of Fred Beckey's *Cascade Alpine Guide* series. Numerous articles in climbing periodicals, including the *American Alpine Journal*, have touted various peaks and routes in the Park as "essential" or "must do".

So what makes a "classic" or "select" climb, anyway? Elements such as technical enjoyment, scenery, exposure, rock quality, geographical significance and level of commitment all contribute to a climb's overall aesthetic feeling – regardless of actual difficulty or grade.

Guidebooks and magazines usually provide excellent route descriptions and overviews. Novice climbers and those new to the area are especially covetous of this information. It is unfortunately inevitable, however, that these "classic" climbs are usually the most popular routes in the Park. Backcountry camping permits are in high demand for these areas, and the routes and bivy sites are often heavily impacted by years of high use that notoriety brings. Some climbers complain that when a route attains "classic" status, its wilderness quality is inevitably compromised.

The North Cascades are home to a seemingly endless number of spectacular climbs and high alpine traverses. As more people visit this area in search of a classic climbing experience, it is critical that climbers exemplify and practice *Leave No Trace* backcountry ethics in order to preserve a classic wilderness experience for all.

Climbing Johannesburg Mountain?

Plan on an extra day or two! The summer of '99 saw an unusually high number of climbs, and searches, on Johannesburg. Of those parties that completed a climbing register, indicating an expected return time, a full 50% of these were overdue by a day or more, triggering a search. In each case, climbing parties were neither lost nor injured – they were just late. The majority of parties completed the ascent in their expected time, but those descending via Gunsight Notch either encountered route-finding problems or simply had to descend far slower than expected.

Climbers can drive their cars practically to the base of the awe-inspiring north face of this peak. And because many of the routes can be done, according to Beckey's *Cascade Alpine Guide*, in nine to sixteen hours to the summit, many parties plan on "a long day", or expect to bivouac somewhere on the mountain. Experience is showing, however, that even for strong, experienced teams, one bivouac is not always enough!

Johannesburg is one of the most impressive sights in the North Cascades. Anyone who has hiked or climbed in the Cascade Pass area has surely witnessed spectacular ice avalanches sweeping across its north and east faces at unpredictable intervals. If you've got your sights set on this mountain, wear a helmet, move swiftly, and consider building some extra time into your planned climbing schedule.



Cell Phone as a 10 Essential?

As the 1999 Accident Summary shows, notification of a backcountry emergency by cell phone is no longer an unusual occurrence. North Cascades National Park neither advocates nor discourages packing a phone with your gear. But clearly, packing a phone *instead of* any standard gear that allows a climbing party to handle unexpected circumstances or accidents is a foolish plan. A cell phone connection may – or may not – be available within the Park.

If you do place a call to Park Dispatch (360-873-4500, ex 37) regarding a potential emergency:

- ☞ State your location and phone number early in the call in case of connections failure
- ☞ Communicate the purpose of your call and if you are requesting assistance
- ☞ Be prepared to handle your emergency as you would have without the phone

Accidents Continued

by a day, family members reported the two missing, and a search began early on day six. Aerial and ground searches were conducted, locating the pair in a gully at 2300' on the west flank of Mount Blum. The climbers were disoriented, dehydrated and unable to continue travel. Fluids and food were lowered to the pair; a ground crew reached them, and guided or carried them to Baker River by the morning of day seven.

August 3, Nooksack Tower

A party of three was on approach to the Nooksack Tower when one suffered a knee injury in rough, but non-technical terrain at the base of the Tower, rendering him immobile. A cell phone call alerted rangers, who evacuated the climber by helicopter within hours of the injury.

September 19, Mount Shuksan

Rangers were notified by cell phone that one member of a six-person group descending Winnies Slide on the Fisher Chimneys route had been injured in a fall. The climber was flown out by helicopter from the Upper Curtis Glacier with a fractured ankle. This climber said that it was possibly snow buildup on his crampons that contributed to the fall.

Miscellanea...

Sulphide Glacier Camps

There is increasing concern about pollution from human waste at climbing camps that are primarily snow camping the entire season. In response to this, a second composting toilet was added at the common area for camping on the lower Sulphide Glacier. It is recommended that climbers ask the location of one of the toilets upon obtaining a camping permit, and make an effort to camp nearby.

Blue Bag info

In addition to an increasing number of backcountry composting toilets, the blue bag program is expanding. Blue bags for packing out waste are available where permits are obtained. Beginning in 2000, deposit barrels will be available for collecting the used bags, with the waste transported for incineration in Oregon. Check for deposit barrel locations upon obtaining a camping permit.

Impact Monitoring of Climbing Approaches

The 1999 season brought increased emphasis on impact monitoring and this effort will continue in 2000. This involved locating and measuring with GPS units and tape measures any off-trail impacts such as approach trails and non-designated campsites. In Boston Basin the team inventoried 6113 meters of route, 616 meters of social trails and 25 campsites. Work will continue this year in Torment and Eldorado Basins. The information gathered will be used in managing cross-country areas, setting permit allocations, as well as restoration efforts.

Trailhead Parking Fees

Beginning in 2000 North Cascades National Park will be included in the trailhead parking fee program that adjoining US Forest Service areas have used in recent years. This involves a fee to park at trailheads (\$5 per day or \$30 annual pass), and will be required at entry points such as Boston Basin, Eldorado Basin and Cascade Pass. The complete list of trailheads included is available at Ranger Stations. This fee program does not, at this time, affect the (free) Backcountry Permit required for overnight camping, which has been in effect for over 20 years at North Cascades.