

27TH APRIL 2005

Im finally in Anchorage getting ready to attempt the last of my Seven Summits which i really hope to try and complete within a year. I have not been on a mountain now since i reached the summit of Aconcagua on 19th December. I have been taking a much needed rest since that climb which as you will have read in my diaries almost finished me off altogether climbing it in just 4 days. It was a bit of an aggressive plan to climb Aconcagua in such a short period of time having been on a mountain every month for 5 months and coming off a 3 week Vinson Trip in Antarctica, i can honestly say I have never been so exhausted!!

This is the earliest date that worked for me to come to ALaska to climb Denali. Not wanting to do a winter ascent on this mountain as it is almost as far North as the North Pole and can be as cold as minus 60, i was not wanting to climb in those frigid conditions having almost lost my toes to frostbite on Aconcagua. This ended up being the timing that worked for us once we got through all our permit issues!! I am climbing with my usual guide and friend Guy Cotter who has brought with him Mark Seddon from Adventure Consultants in New Zealand and we have two guides from Mountain Trip, Clark and Brent. Mountain Trip are one of the companies that have the concession to guide Denali so they have made this happen for me. I also have Greg here with me so its me and 5 guys the kind of ratio that ive been getting used to whilst mountain climbing!! That is with the exception of my Kosciusko trip where i took my sister and 3 blonde girlfriends of mine!!

The weather in Anchorage is at a record high of 66 degrees which makes me nervous as to what might happen over the next 17 days whilst on the mountain. I always anticipate that it could suddenly go to record lows, given the coastal weather this mountain is subjected to, so im a little apprehensive about this heat rather than enjoying it!! We have had our gear reduced in half by Clark whom cannot re iterate enough how important it is to travel light on this climb. Personal gear aside, We are carrying fuel, food and tents enough for 5 people for 21 days on the mountain.. I lifted up one of the food bags in the car yesterday and could hardly get it off the ground it was so heavy!! Tomorrow if the plane can land on the glacier, we have to carry our packs which will weigh between 40llbs and 75llbs and tow 100llb sleds for 10 miles which we are anticipating will take us around 8 hours. We do not want to do a carry whereby we take half the weight initially and return the next day for the rest of the gear. Instead we have opted to travel really heavy for the first day..ill let u know how this plan works out from my first dispatch!! Even i have scaled back on all personal creams and cosmetics - although saying that i have not cut off the end of my tooth brush like Clark advised me to!! We are even on loo roll rations so im hoping i dont get a cold!! I know this mountain is going to be really really tough with the weight we are carrying and the sheer length of the expedition. I am really nervous about the climb as always prior to a big event that i am undertaking and i think this will be a shock to the system having not been on a mountain for 3 months!! Im not even thinking about how scared i will be on the single propellar plane tomorrow and at the moment im just focusing on being in ALaska for the first time, its a stunningly beautiful place and its so great just to be here..

If i can get my PDA system up and running (mark seddon is being amazing helping me to get it sorted out!) and my girlfriend Kat can get my Satellite phone that iv borrowed from her up and running tomorrow then i will be sending out daily dispatches from the mountain about how we are all getting on... Im not stressing at this stage about my lack of communications set up as im just praying it all works tomorrow, if not i guess ill have a lighter load to carry!!

We need all the luck we can get with our health and the weather for the next few weeks..Greg is recovering from flu so hope he stays healthy and we dont get it!! From now on ill be sending dispatches but will post my lengthier journals at a later date... Over and out from a sunny and warm ALaska!

We left Anchorage at 7.30am for the small town on Talkeetna where we were to be getting the small plane to fly us to denali's basecamp located on the glacier. It was a 2.5 hour drive and i was wondering whether i had enough clothes given that my guides had been brutal on me in terms of yesterdays gear check and weight restrictions (i would definately come to reluctantly thank them for their brutality later in the trip!!)

Soon we were loading all our gear onto two single propped beaver planes and amazingly enough lifted off fine considering our weight and headed out to denali basecamp an hours flight away. The scenery in Alaska is absalutely breathtaking and it was nice to enjoy it from the plane. Often when you are climbing, you are just too exhausted or nervous about your whereabouts to take in the beauty of ur surroundings. We crossed a huge forest and i was looking for signs of the grizzly bears as they are now waking up from their hibernation period. The pilot had seen some on a previous flight but unfortunately i didnt see any this time. We were soon in the Denali national park and flying over knife shaped mountains until we were began circling a rather remote looking basecamp and came into land. We landed on the ice, the beaver plane had skis with which to land on and began the procedure of dragging our gear off the plane on sleds and we began distributing the weight between our packs and our sleds..We had more than 21 days of food, fuel and gear in order for me to be able to wait out weather if we got stuck beyond my target completion date of 15th May. Its horrible trying to climb a mountain with a timeframe restriction, so i was really trying not to focus on how important an issue it was for me to be done by 15th May and just to enjoy the climb and the experience of being in Alaska in this beautiful environment.

Adventure Consultants have arranged the logistics of my whole year of climbing outside of Everest, and i have been extremely happy with what they have done for me and how flexible they have been to help me achieve my goal. It was also Guys last of the Seven Summits too and i really wanted him to be on Denali with me. In order to comply with the Denali National Park regulations we needed to work with one of their designated guiding companies and I worked with Mountain Trip whom were great. They were also flexible in the timing which i really appreciated. My guide from mountain trip was Clark Fynes and he was superb. He has guided Denali 10 times and he certainly knew the mountain really well which i was thankful for. His second guide was Brent Moore from Telluride, a technical ice climber and also a really nice guy. I also had from NZ Mark Seddon a really nice kiwi mountain guide and cameraman who was going to film our trip

and how i fared on trying to get to the summit and of course i had greg with me too whom had flown in from Johannesburg in South Africa.

The first thing that went wrong was that i realised i had left my PDA (the device from which i send my mountain dispatches) in Talkeetna. Clark jumped to the rescue as i sat in a complete panic about not being able to update my website, and got onto the radio to Talkeetna Air Taxi's. They miraculously located my PDA in my left luggage and put it on the next flight to basecamp!! As soon as i had my PDA we began the walk to camp one some 5 hours or so up the glacier. We had opted to do a single carry (ie, all our loads in one go as opposed to half our gear one day and returning back to basecamp to bring the other half the next day) It was really hard work and i would estimate that i had about 38 lbs on my back and about 60lbs in my sled. We were in two rope teams of 3, Clark, Myself and Mark Seddon on one rope and Guy, Greg and Brent on the other.

When we arrived at camp 1 some 5 hours later, it was 11.30pm at night and we were all exhausted, freezing cold and physically aching in all joints from carrying such heavy loads. My waist had welts on the side from where my sled was pulling on my backpack. We then had to prepare camp, pitch tents and Clark and Brent got us something to eat. It was by now about minus 30 and still light outside but no sun hence the cold - talking about settling back into mountain life with a bang!! I could hardly eat dinner i was so tired and we all fell into an exhausted slumber.

APRIL 29TH

I dreamt that i had imagined all the aches and pains in my bones but reality hit when i heard Guy waking us up at 9.00am. The pain was in every joint and i could hardly move in my sleeping bag it was so sore.. The sun was just coming up and it was still freezing, frost hanging from the tent ceiling and all our breath was a frozen layer of ice on our sleeping bags. With hugely unattractive puffy eyes i emerged from my tent and began the arduous job of reloading my sled and packing up our tent for the move up to camp 2. Again we were going to do a single carry to try and buy ourselves some extra weather days if necessary later on in the climb. The chances of getting stuck in a storm on Denali for weeks at a time is very likely so whilst it was sunny we were all anxious to move up to the higher altitudes as soon as we could, that was the upside to these torturously heavy loads that we were schlepping uphill!! By the time we had breakfast and broken camp it was noon and it was hot like you wouldnt believe after the frigid temperatures we endured overnight. The sun reflecting on the snow is like a solar oven and the heat is stiffling, however i prefer this to the cold so im not going to complain too much about the discomfort! Greg has been doing great, this is his third of the Seven Summits but Denali is a little bit of a shock after Kilimanjaro and Elbrus, which are his previous two climbs.. Both the length of the trip, the loads we have to carry and the climb itself - Denali is by no means an easy climb especially so early in the season as we are now, we pretty much have the mountain to ourselves unlike in June where apparently you can have a line of up to 200 people on the headwall at the same time!! - i can feel this is going to be difficult already on day 2!!

After about 5 hours of hauling our huge loads uphill, (i think we resemble jumbo tortoises) we made a unanimous decision to camp before Camp 2 in order not to blow ourselves up so early in the climb. We were probably an hour or so short of Camp when we started to pitch our tents for the night. It was nice to set up camp in the sun before the temperature plummeted and my left knee was throbbing from some pain or other. I did my diary interview with Marky Mark as i call him, we had dinner and we were all asleep imminently and didnt stir for 12 hours - gives you an indication how tired we all are from the weight!! I should mention that the guides are carrying way more than Greg and I - i think they would be cross with me if i didnt emphasize that, although dont think we were in any way light!!!

30TH APRIL

At 8.00am Clark told us to start trying to wake up! About an hour later we were packed up and coherent enough to leave the tent which i did with the same old puffy eyes as the day before. I honestly look like ive done a few rounds with Mike Tyson - thank god for sunglasses. We had breakfast and the plan today was to reach Camp 3 at 11,000ft and of course single carry..once again off we set with our huge packs and sleds further up the glacier. It was hot but not quite the intense heat from the day, although it still took us 3.5 hours to reach camp 3 (im so glad we didnt try and persevere the day before!) Camp 3 is located at the base of Motorcycle Hill, i have no idea why its called that apart from some guy wanted to ride a motorcycle up it - sounded like quite a good idea to me! It had numerous crevasses etched across its face and our camp was at its base.

As soon as we arrived at Camp, the boys started building tent platforms and a mess tent, as we were planning to be here a minimum of 2 nights as we were starting to do " a carry" up to 13,500 ft and return back to Camp 3 for the night before moving up to our next camp 4 at 14,200ft. This was also because it was much steeper terrain and also good for our acclimatisation process.

Its hard work making tent platforms and a mess tent digout area, i pitched in a little but was more concerned with trying to call my mother from guys sat phone. We had delicious cheese sandwiches and its now 7.00pm and we are all chilling in our tents preparing for tomorrows carry. Finally after 2 days of approach we have reached the actual mountain and will start heading up to begin the real climbing! Greg is asleep and i can hear a few moans and groans from Guy next door. Clark is doing an interview with Mark (hopefully saying nice things about me!) and i guess dinner is soon... goodnight from camp 2 on denali..

MAY 1ST

We got going around 1pm and started heading up Motorcycle hill. It took us about an hour to reach the top after weaving our way through the crevasses. No one has really been up yet so there is no specific trail to follow so Clark is creating the route. We then headed up Squirrel Hill (dont ask me why it got its name) which was covered in a nasty looking sheet of blue ice headed towards a large drop of about 2,000ft. Clark put in some

running belays as protection on the route to hopefully avoid any of us slipping and whizzing off the mountain. It therefore meant we were a little slower getting to the top of squirrel hill. From the top, we then had to cross a heavily crevassed gently undulating slope that took us up to Windy Corner - it wasn't hard to figure out why it got that name as I almost got blown off my feet. It was then a further hour of climbing across sheer blue ice and crevasses until we reached the place where Clark wanted us to stash all our loads. We spent the next hour hanging around whilst Clark dug out a big hole and then with great relief we all dumped our gear into the hole and buried it until tomorrow when we would pick it up on our way up to Camp 4.

Suddenly the weather changed, windy corner became engulfed in clouds and as we headed back down to camp 3 we were soon in a full on white out whereby you couldn't even see the ropeteam behind. It was amazing that Clark managed to find the route given that everything looked the same to me, I offered my advice about directions which Clark cleverly ignored!! Poor Greg fell into two crevasses on the way down, I know how terrifying it is to have your feet hanging over air!! Finally we all crawled into camp at 9.30pm at night by which time nearly 6 inches of snow must have fallen on the ground. We had dinner and got into our sleeping bags asap.. thoroughly exhausted.

MAY 2ND

We woke up with Clark very kindly bringing us some much needed coffee at 9.30am. A couple of other groups were now at Camp 3, a group with the army and two brothers and a son who were camped right next to our loo!! They were so close that when you were on the loo they actually stared directly at you which being British made me extremely self-conscious!!!

We then buried our gear that we were not taking up the mountain (I am by now so sore in my shoulders that I left my cell phone, any extra clothes, my journal, my deodorant and as much stuff as possible now that I had wisened up as to what it felt like with it all in my pack) we broke camp and before starting to head back up Motorcycle hill in about 2 feet of new snow that had arrived in the storm during the night.

No one wanted to break trail and I noticed everyone hanging around camp kind of waiting for someone to do the hard work. The people who ended up doing the hardwork were us, so Clark headed up Motorcycle hill like a piper with all the groups at camp following us up the mountain! We had some rangers, the army guys and maybe the two older men and their son too. My pack was unbelievably heavy as whilst packing up my tent I realised there was all my summit clothes which I had forgotten to take in yesterday's carry. The snow had covered the sheer blue ice on squirrel hill so we didn't have to put in the running belays and subsequently it was slightly easier going in the new snow. We waited about 40 minutes on windy corner for Greg and Guy, and whilst we were freezing our asses off on windy corner, unbeknownst to us they were taking their break beneath windy corner in the sun and out of the wind!! We got to our stash -. Our sleds were no longer as we had buried them at camp 3 and I almost buckled under the weight of my pack as I started up the final 40 minutes to camp 4. I was absolutely miserable, muttering

how criminal it was for a girl to be carrying this amount of weight - which it obviously fell on deaf ears as all the guys were equally laden down with all our gear.

The snail train crawled into Camp 4 at about 9pm at night, the sun was down and it was about minus 30.. I was feeling really ill with fatigue and the cold to the point i thought i was going to throw up. 6 hours uphill to 14,200 ft with about half my body weight on my back had taken its toll and i needed to lie down fast.

As soon as the first tent was pitched i jumped inside shivering uncontrollably. I tried to get warm but i think i was so fatigued my body was having problems with this. Clark managed to give me some hot soup and greg and i got into our sleeping bags. To make matters worse i actually managed to spill my pee bottle in my sleeping bag adding to my discomfort and dry crying i fell asleep - mountain life can be really tough!

MAY 3RD

I woke at 10.30am and our tent was like the sahara desert it was so hot! the sun was beating down on us and i was almost melting in my minus 40 sleeping bag and 5 layers of clothes including my down jacket! There is never an "inbetween temperature" in the mountains, its either one extreme or the other. Its meant to be a rest day today but on our rest day we still have to go back down the mountain to our stash and bring it up to Camp 4. We had a great big breakfast and took it easy until about 1.30pm when we got back into our harnesses, crampons etc and in our ropeteams we headed back down to collect our loads. Mark filmed us on a couple of the crevasse crossings and then we reached our stash and before you could blink our packs were back to their usual heavy weights as we turned around and headed back up the hill to camp 4. Back at camp we had cheese quesadillas for lunch. Guy and co built an amazing snow wall around our campsite whilst i catch up with my diary and dispatches. I did an interview with Mark in front of the headwall - it looks really imposing and has a nasty looking section of sheer blue ice for about 300 ft near the top. Tomorrow we are planning to do "a carry" to 16,200ft up the headwall and along the ridge... its going to be a hard day and i need some rest!!

4TH MAY

We were up at 9.00am to do our carry to 16,400ft. After a big breakfast we started up the headwall, a 2,000ft wall of snow and ice that leads you up to the knife edged ridge that takes you to our high camp at 17, 200ft. The weather was actually quite warm as we followed Clark straight up the face of the headwall towards last years fixed lines (Clark doesnt believe in traversing up this slope due to constant slack in the ropes) actually it was a good move on his part. As we approached last years fixed lines (we were so early in the season, the new ropes hadnt gone in yet) i saw Clark suddenly slowing down substantially and then when it was my turn i knew why. It was sheer blue ice and it was really hard to get a grip even with crampons. I got into a bit of a panic as i began to slip and i actually had a bit of a blonde moment when i asked Clark if i could jumal our rope line!! anyway, i got a sharp NO and i soon recovered to continue up towards the actual

fixed lines. We took a break here and then started up the fixed lines. It was really hard going due to the whole upper slope just being sheer blue ice and your arms ended up doing way more work than usual. By the time i reached the top of the headwall my achilles tendon and heels were burning in pain and i was tired.. my arms look muscely but in fact are pretty weak so i found hauling myself and my load up the headwall really tiring. We took a break at the top of the ridge and enjoyed the breathtaking scenery around us. We then continued up to where we would be leaving our stash (i know everyone calls it a cash, but i prefer to call it a stash!!) En route we met an Italian guy who was returning from reaching the summit solo. He was the first man to summit Denali this year and he seemed delirious with fatigue.. apparently according to a group from Quebec who got to 18,000ft and turned back, there are two big ice crevasses on denali pass that are very hard to navigate. Clark says he has never seen Denali this icy or difficult in terms of the route. We arrived at 16,400ft and took a break whilst Clark and the boys dug a hole and buried our loads. The wind had picked up by this time and we were soon headed back down to our camp at 14,200ft. Clark decided to belay Greg and i down the top of the headwall because of the ice which was a little more time consuming but in my mind worth it and i felt much happier this way. As soon as we got beneath the blue ice i decided to make up for lost time and ran back down to camp much to the delight of Mark and Clark on my ropeteam.

Back at camp we had the best dinner of burritos (them and altitude are not the best combo!) got into our tents to fall into our usual fatigued slumber. Its by now on a mountain climb that you start looking really rough, my hair had started to form dreadlocks for those people that think i take a hairdryer on my climbs - i have proof of my new "do"!! Tomorrow is our first rest day and i was longing for it - a day without packs!! Its still around minus 30 at night so its pretty cold.. Greg and i both wear big fur hats with our eye shades - greg looks like biggles!

MAY 5TH

We got up leisurly at around 11.00am - i have to tell you that when im not climbing i never wake up at this time, im normally up by 7.30am!! Its really nice to wake up when the sun has somewhat warmed the tent. Clark cooked a great breakfast of pancakes - he really can cook some great stuff from our mess tent - it really puts my cooking skills to shame. The day passed fairly quickly, i caught up on some dispatches which iv just been too tired or cold to write at the end of each day. When i came out of my tent for lunch at about 4pm the weather had turned a little windy and the clouds had settled into our camp with some snow starting. One team did a short carry up the headwall before turning back as the weather started to deteriorate. We have a couple of teams on the same programme as ourselves, 3 IT guys from UBS in Zurich and two 54 year old twin brothers Jerry and Terry Humphrey and jerrys son Jeremy whom was with his dad and his uncle but doing his own thing - sounded like he was an amazing athlete.

The weather was by now bad and we were told that if the weather looked remotely unstable tomorrow would be another rest day. Its not a bad part of our acclimatisation progress but it also might mean that we dont have a rest day up at our high camp prior to attempting our summit bid.

Another frigid night in Alaska!

6TH MAY

As we were not woken up at 8.00am our designated departure time for moving to the high camp, i presumed that the weather wasnt great and it was another rest day. Sure enough there had been around 8 inches of snow overnight and it was a white out. We had a long leisurely breakfast and im now back in my tent writing my diary whilst greg is reading "into thin air" I read that book about 4 times whilst i was at Everest Basecamp last year and i think its an excellent read. I left my book at 11,000ft camp due to not wanting any additional weight to drag up the mountain and i was regretting it (ish!) They are not calling for good weather tomorrow, so lets see whether we get to move up to high camp or not. 9 days now no hairwashing, its so gross and a hat is necessary all the time!!

7TH MAY

Once again we were not woken up with frost dripping down on us so i guessed rightly that the weather was still not good enough for us to move up to high camp. It was clear and sunny when i emerged puffy eyed and greasy haired as usual from my tent. Before i gave Clark a bewildered look as to what we were still doing here and why we hadnt moved up, i saw a big plume of snow blowing off the summit ridge. Clark said that it would be "nuking it up there" as he put it, so we were staying put here at 14,200ft again today. This is where the importance of patience and safety in the mountains prevails over u wanting to achieve your goal no matter what. Before setting off on this trip i made it very clear to myself and to the guides that i wanted to do this in the safest manner possible and if i didnt get to the summit, whilst not great, i would far rather live to try it again. So whilst nice and sunny at camp 4 we hung around another day to wait for the right opportunity to move up to high camp. The rangers have installed the loos at camp now! Its a very public loo with two small planks of wood either side and a full view of all the tents in camp from the front!! I couldnt help but notice people sitting there with their pants down and when it came to my turn i actually saw one guy staring so intently that i waved at him from the loo!! Anyway you know how the British can talk lavatorial incessantly so ill leave it at that!! I ate a lot and rested and before i knew it another day was nearly over.

Jerry Humphreys son Jeremy did the most amazing thing today... he left camp 4 and ascended the west rib (a slightly more technical route than the one we were taking on the west buttress) and he traversed the football field beneath the summit headwall and had returned back to camp 4 all in one day... Really amazing. We were all talking about him as we had dinner and headed off to bed. We chatted to his father Jerry, whom was going to go for the summit with his twin brother Terry via the same route as us. Jerry had climbed Denali before and was planning to go to Everest next year and he was here to go to the summit with his twin brother Terry.

We crawled into our sleeping bags ready for another night of 10 hours sleep - i love it as im almost an insomniac when im not on the mountains i have so much to get done i cant sleep!!

8TH MAY

Clark woke us up at 8.00am saying that today was a "Go" and we were moving up the high camp. He wanted us ready fast with our tents packed up and ready to go by 9.30am. Adrenalin kicked in for me and it really felt like the push for the summit was on. In a complete fluster i managed to get all my stuff packed up and i lightened my load again substantially by losing my toothbrush (some people cut their toothbrushes in half to save on the weight) so i just thought i would leave mine behind completely! I just took one set of clothes with me and even scaled back on my cosmetics - not sunblock though!! We weren't ready by 9.30am, it's quite a long procedure taking down our camp and burying our stash that is to be left behind but we were on the way up by 11.00am. Our same route took us straight up the headwall to the sheer blue ice just beneath the fixed lines. We took a break here and noticed quite a few people behind us. There were the IT guys from UBS, and 4 ukrainian guys whom had arrived at camp 4 the night prior. Behind them the army guys were doing a carry.. I felt pressured to move fast up the fixed lines - the Ukrainians were quite consistently strong. The ice was as bad as it had been on the day of our carry and i was really tired going up the headwall. Again my achilles throbbed from walking like a duck on the thick blue ice and my arms were so tired i could hardly haul myself up the fixed lines.

I felt much better when i reached the ridge, it's probably psychological with me, in that as i hated the headwall so much my body automatically felt tired on it. I was back to my old self again at the top of the headwall and happily got stuck into some chocolate as we took a break on the ridge. We collected our loads from our carry and continued up the ridge. I don't know if i have mentioned but im really not very good with heights!! The ridge was really exposed and we were often walking on something less than a foot wide with thousands of feet drops either side. You never know if you fall at one of these exceptionally exposed points whether you would drag your rope team with you or not.. anyway i tried not to think about the exposure as i precariously trod on the narrow knife edged ridge. The scary thing was that carrying such a huge pack, combined with the sharp gusts of wind that kept occurring whether you would get caught off balance - i didn't like this part at all!! Finally after about 5 hours we arrived up at high camp at around 17,200ft. The Ukrainians were right up behind us and the IT guys were about 2 hours behind us and we raced ahead to grab the one snow wall that had been already built up at the high camp.. We then spent ages building more walls, pitching the tents and settling into high camp.

Dinner was ramen noodles, freeze dried mash potato and soup! Clark's cuisine had taken a sudden decline! I actually like noodles up high, it's one of the few things i can eat.. but Guy and Mark hate them from years and years of mountain life!! We all piled into one tent for meals. We only had 2 tents up here and were split into two groups of 3. After our carbo loading dinner we got ready to rest for the night in case it was good weather in the morning in which case we would try for the summit. I had my usual adrenalin rush of pre summit nerves and found it hard to sleep. Night one of no teeth cleaning.. hate it! The wind was already ripping at our tents as we went to sleep, feels like we are high up now.

9TH MAY

Clark woke everyone up at 9.00am and we all piled into our tent to have breakfast which consisted of cereal or oatmeal and a hot drink. Its quite a procedure boiling up all the water for our water bottles up at this altitude and it often takes at least an hour and a half to do this. At night we sleep with everything in our sleeping bags in order for things not to freeze. In my sleeping bag, i have my boot liners, my two waterbottles, my creams, my camera, my down clothes, my balaclavas, and my medical kit.. somehow amongst all that i manage to squeeze in there too!!! its seriously uncomfortable i can assure you.

Over breakfast we tried to decide whether to go for the summit, it was a sunny day and the wind had subsided, however we had all woken up with headaches, mine was from severe dehydration (i'd only drunk a quarter of a litre of water yesterday) Most of our headaches were a combination of dehydration and altitude i guess. The boys Guy, Brent and Mark i think were a little tired from moving up here yesterday and then intense work on our snow walls. If you dont know how strenuous it is try sawing and lifting huge blocks of snow for about 2 hours! We finally concluded that we should give the summit a go. I couldn't justify to sponsors to be sitting at high camp whilst the sun was shining. We got ready to move out of camp and to try for the summit.

We got into our rope teams and headed to the base of the Denali pass. There was no real trail as the footsteps of the solo Italian guy were long gone. Clark started heading steeply upwards following the line of the rocks in the snow. Suddenly whilst Clark was behind some rocks fixing the running belays, i slipped and was hurtling down the icy slope. Its amazing how much speed you pick up before i was caught by our rope team. I screamed like mad as i went whizzing down the slopes, they probably heard me in Anchorage i was so scared. Once i knew i was safe, i pulled myself together and we continued steeply upwards following the rock line. Soon we were traversing high across the Denali pass, there was no trail so we were edging sideways frontpointing (where the toe of your crampons is sticking into the ice and we were facing into the mountain) The weather by now had suddenly changed and it was almost a white out and it began to snow. We had the Ukrainian guys behind us and we were moving slowly due to Clark having to place running belays constantly in order to protect us from falling down the Denali pass.

My shoulder was throbbing like you wouldn't believe and i was getting really tired with traversing the pass frontpointing. After about 3 hours we called for a group meeting as to whether we should continue. It was by now a full on white out and Clark said if we continued at this pace and the terrain up high was going to be like the Denali pass terrain that we were on, then it would be another 9 hours until we reached the summit. Whilst we had our discussion the Ukrainian guys went ahead, we were now heading straight up the Denali pass (having traversed about three quarters of its length at this point) as opposed to continuing the traverse until we reached the ridge. We all decided that it would be better at this stage given the weather, the now lateness of the hour - it was noon, and the fact we were all pretty tired from frontpointing that we would return back to our high camp and pray we had better weather tomorrow.

An hour later we were back at camp and a huge air of disappointment hung amongst our group. Everyone was at a low point... i had a back up spiel in my mind to say to people as

to why i hadn't made the summit of Denali and the thought of having to return to the mountain to re climb it was just too much to bear at this stage.

About 2 hours later the Ukrainians returned back to camp and told us that the winds up on the ridge were dangerously high and they had felt that it was unsafe to continue up towards the summit in these conditions. In a funny kind of way im glad that they formed the same conclusion to us, nothing worse than us having turned back if they had all reached the summit. I derived some consolation from this..

Soon high camp tent life resumed, and we were melting snow, not cleaning our teeth and getting ready for our dinner of ramen noodles and soup.

As i tried to sleep that night, the wind ripping against the tent i was convinced that i had missed my chance to climb Denali. I fell into a restless sleep.

10TH MAY

We woke up at 7.00am and Clark got straight onto melting snow for our drinking water. Everyone piled into our tent for our usual breakfast of cereal or oatmeal. Greg had a little melt down when he began drinking his hot chocolate and found remains of last night's ramen noodles in his cup and the day before's chicken soup in there too!! The weather was good and one team had come up from 14,200ft and were en route to the summit along a much lower traverse than the one we were on yesterday...

After we had returned to camp yesterday Clark and Brent had subsequently fixed some rope so that we could get across the crevasse and onto the lower traverse up the Denali Pass, so that was the route these guys were now on.

We started off about 9.50am and headed back up the Denali pass following in these guys' footsteps.. We moved along nicely today and despite the cold it was sunny and clear with a light wind. Two hours later we were at the ridge at the top of the Denali pass and i felt that today was my chance to get to the summit. We took a break on the ridge and i tried to thaw my frozen hands, grabbed a bite to eat and we started moving upwards. We took another break behind some rocks at the base of the slope that takes you up to the "football field" Once going again, although moving fine and being good for time, when i asked Clark if i could take a breather, he told me to take a Gu shot immediately. He said that he wasn't feeling comfortable with the nenticular type of clouds that were forming above the summit of Denali and unless i got moving faster he was going to turn me around. I could feel the panic at the thought of being turned around rising in me. I took one half frozen power gel and made a big effort to start moving faster. I took two more power gels at the base of the football field and by now i was moving fast and my lethargy had passed. I kept pretending to Clark that i couldn't see any cloud at all when he pointed it out to me and then i burst out laughing as he re pointed for the 3rd time..

I could now see the summit headwall straight ahead and someone was up by the summit right in front of me. Our other team of Guy, Greg and Brent were about 25 mins or so behind us. Now i was so determined to do it and almost chomping at the bit to get moving up the headwall. At the base of the headwall, i bumped into Jerry's son Jeremy whom had just been up to the summit via the Messner route (thats the most technically difficult route on denali) and he said hi to us on his way down.. His dad and uncle were apparently headed towards the summit behind us.

Soon we had climbed past the last crevasse and as i stepped up onto the summit ridge, the view literally took my breath away.. It was panoramic and stretched out as far as the eye could see, of snowy mountains and glaciers.. It was so beautiful and i had tears in my eyes already. The vertical drop on the other side of the ridge was thousands of feet so i tried to look outwards as opposed to straight down. Mark took the lead from here so that he could film me arriving on the summit. I was like a racehorse being held back and dying to move as fast as possible to get to the summit, but Mark moved slowly (as one should!!) to the actual summit of Denali followed by me and Clark taking up the rear. At 4.30pm I reached the summit of Denali and was so blown away that i had done it i couldnt even speak for the camera.. I was very emotional and then got onto doing all my sponsors photos holding their flags. Guy, Greg and Brent then arrived and we were all hugging on the top. This was Guys last of the Seven Summits and it was so great to be able to do it together. This was Gregs 3rd of the Seven summits and we have climbed 2 of them together which has been great. Greg then bent down and his camera fell out of his pocket and dropped off the 5,000ft drop (not sure how steep it was, maybe more than 5,000ft!) anyway he was reliant on my photos now!! We spent about an hour on the summit and Clark said that we were unbelievably lucky with the conditions and that he had rarely had a summit day like this. The clouds were around but Clark wasnt worried anymore. One Ukranian guy got to the summit at the same time as us and he wanted his picture taken with me.

Soon we decided to start moving down and began the long decent. We passed the 3 UBS guys on their way up to the summit, and although moving slowly they seemed steady. At the bottom of the headwall we took a break as it was fairly warm and we had been moving fast (i wanted to take off my down jacket) and we came across Jeremys dad Jerry. He stayed and chatted to us for a while, he told us his brother Terry was going very slowly but as he hadnt reached the summit of Denali, Jerry wanted him to do it. Jerry had climbed Denali once before and was planning to go to Everest next year. I didnt really think about how late it was for them to be still going to the summit (it was probably 7.00pm or 7.30pm at this point) nor did i think if it was foolish for someone so apparently tired to continue on up the headwall at this time of day (they probably had a couple of hours to go to reach the summit at this point) Nor did i think it my place to offer any advice to someone that didnt need a guide to climb a mountain (i do!!) so we just chatted and left it at that.

We said our goodbyes and our group sped off down the mountain moving fast. We were back at camp by 8.30pm and i was ecstatic to be back down at high camp with all my team having reached the summit - i was almost looking forward to ramen noodles!! We heard the UBS guys come back at midnight and Clark went out and gave them some water. Soon we were all in an exhausted sleep and didnt stir until the next morning at 8.00am

11TH MAY

We woke up at 8.30am and Clark said he wanted to go and check on Jerry and Terrys camp to make sure they got back ok last night (they were camped a little further uphill than us) Brent came into our tent to be in charge of breakfast this morning. We all had half a bagel as a treat!! The next thing that we knew was that Clark returned to our camp

wanting a bottle of water a sleeping bag and some Gu and he was on the walkie talkie with the rangers down at 14,200ft sounding urgent and stressed... He asked Mark or Guy to go for a walk with him and Mark left camp with Clark almost straight away.

Brent, Greg and I were left in our tent having breakfast and we watched Brent sneak in about 5 bowls of cereal as Clark was out with Mark and Greg and i gave him lots of grief about his secret scoffing. We were all drooling at the prospect of eating Clarks bagel whilst he was busy, but none of us had the guts to do it! Then we heard the news and i was shell shocked. Jerry and Terry had slipped on the Denali pass and fallen to their deaths some 1,500ft below almost adjacent to our camp (about 10 mins walk away) and they were lying within a metre apart from each other despite being unroped. This led Clark to believe that one of them had knocked the other one off the crevasse at the top of the Denali Pass causing them both to slip down the treacherous slope. I cannot tell you how shocked and sad i was to hear this awful news and my immediate thoughts were of poor jeremy who was down at the 14,200ft camp. This put an immediate doom and gloom over our camp and i really had trouble with the notion that the guy i chatted to a few hours earlier was now lying at the bottom of the glacier adjacent to our camp. It was a real wake up call to the dangers that can happen whilst mountain climbing, especially climbing when very tired.

Clark was busy for the rest of the morning dealing with the terrible accident and trying to be as helpful as he could to the rangers down at 14,200ft camp. Whilst he was on the radio, we started packing up camp and preparing to walk down to basecamp that day as planned. The plan was to try and go from high camp to the 14,200ft camp, collect all our loads, have some lunch and then continue down to camp 3 at the base of Motorcycle hill. Here we would collect the rest of our gear and get re united with our sleds (oh id missed mine so much!) and then just push on down to basecamp. The reason for this big push was that there was some weather reportedly coming in and we were going to try and get an 8.00am flight from basecamp to Talkeetna before we got stuck in a 5 day storm or something (this was our incentive!!) This would be nearly a 10,000ft vertical decent and given that we were all still tired from summit day yesterday, would definately not be easy. By noon Clark told us to start heading down, Guy, Greg, me and Brent were all to go on one ropeteam and he and Mark would follow as soon as he got done dealing with things and try and catch us up.

We were all quiet and heavy hearted as we left camp trying not to look to our right and see the awful scene of the twins tragic ending. When we got to the knife edged ridge i think Greg and i were both nervous.. i guess a combination of having seen only too tragically what can happen when you slip and fall on this mountain but also a strong wind was constantly blowing us off balance with our huge packs on making us very unstable on such a narrow path, it was most disconcerting.

It was labouriously slow as we made our way down the ridge on a rope team of four. I have to say i much preferred being on our two ropeteams of 3 so i was hoping that Mark and Clark would catch up soon. They caught us just above the headwall and i took a break for a while just to try and compose myself a bit, i really was shaken up by the incident i have to confess.

We were soon back down at 14,200ft camp - it was boiling hot down there and i couldnt get my clothes off fast enough, i mean i was still in my down pants making that 4 layers of pants that i was wearing and i was sweltering. After all of us shed about 3 layers of

clothing, Farmer and Kim, some other great guides from Mountain Trip, produced half a bagel sandwich with cheese and salami! After 4 days of only noodles and oatmeal this went down unbelievably well!! We sat around at this camp for ages whilst Clark was in meetings with the rangers and then he had to sort out all our gear, as some food was staying for other expeditons. It was then decided that we would revert back to our old ropeteam of guy, greg, brent and i and we would head down the mountain first and Clark and Mark would again catch us up.

We departed camp 4 (14,200ft) at around 7.00pm and headed down the mountain as fast as possible. My toenails were in agony, i was about to loose what few i had left after the Aconcagua climb, Greg had a huge blister on his toe (actually it was debatable as to how big it really was!!) Brent thought his feet needed medical attention and Guy had a bad knee from another climb.. Our bedraggled group hobbled down the mountain and we reached Camp 3 at around 9.30pm. Here we dug up our gear and sleds and spent just over an hour putting most of the weight in our packs into our sleds.. Just as the sun started to go down (well it stays pretty light until about midnight and then it never really gets that dark after midnight but it does go a little darker and definately colder) we left camp 3 and started the long walk down to camp 1. Despite all our aches and pains, It was so beautiful walking down at night and i was transfixed by the beauty of Alaska, it was just so mesmerising and at about 11.30 pm we arrived at camp 1. I was anxious to keep going as i felt if i stopped for too long i would never get started again, you know when you have a big surpressed fatigue going on and you are just blitzing through it.. i was at that stage.

Anyway Guy had a bee in his bonnet about finding his lamb shanks that he had left buried in one of our food stash's. We weaved our sled team all over camp 1 trying to find where our stash was. Im afraid with all our noise and loud heated discussions as to the whereabouts of our stash, that we woke up the whole camp, but finally Guy found the stash and dug up those annoying lamb shanks that we had weaved all over camp looking for!! After 45 minutes our motley sled crew was ready to do the final push to basecamp about 3 and half hours away.. First i tried to depart camp without my sled attached to my waist harness (what a shame to forget my huge heavy sled!!) Guy pointed out my error and soon we were on our way to basecamp. Finally and i have to say i think i was hallucinating with fatigue at this point, we arrived at the runway of basecamp which is a long gradual uphill for about 30 mins or so (just what you need after walking for 8 hours and descending 10,000ft vertical) When we finally got to the top of the wretched hill and crawled into basecamp it was 3.00am and i was having a slight melt down, i was just so tired i could hardly stand up.

The guys pitched a tent and greg and i piled in and i was soon out for the count. The boys bivied outside as they said it was warm - i thought it was freezing and was so happy to be in a tent!!

I thought i was dreaming but i vaguely heard some voices at somepoint during my passing out, but then i fell back into my exhausted slumber until i was finally woken when i heard Brent complaining loudly outside about the pain in his toes and asking Mark whether he should be in the medical tent! Mark in his layed back kiwi manner said "No mate ur fine" (im glad i didnt go to Dr Mark to have my aches and pains trivialised!!!) Greg and i woke up at 9.00am and Guy informed me that my friend JJ from Mountain Link had kicked him on his way out of basecamp and said to say hi to me!!! I laughed so much that Guy got woken up with a message for me and im so upset that i

never got to see my friend JJ who i met on Everest last year. I also met Robert Link the owner of their guiding company up at the 14,200ft camp and he is really nice.. He went into my very good books when he lent me his sat phone to call my sister when we got back to camp 4 after our summit day as Guys sat phone had run out of battery the day before.

The bad news was that all our heroic attempts to get to basecamp in order to fly out at 8.00am were destroyed in that no planes could land due to bad weather. I had threatened upon arrival last night not to emerge from my tent unless i heard the sound of propellers so i had to reluctantly renegue on my threat and come out of my tent to a deafening silence in order to get something to eat as i was starving!! We had lots of pancakes for breakfast and i thought the fact that all our tents were now pitched was a bad sign and that we should probably resign ourselves to be here at basecamp for at least 5 days for the storm to pass through. While Greg was stressing about not getting out of basecamp i decided to try and change into some clean clothes and vaguely scrub up a little... then music to my ears... planes were coming in and we had 20 mins to get ready to get out of here. We got everything packed up in record time and soon we were loading all our gear onto the beavers to fly back to Talkeetna (oh and i emptied brents pee bottle for him - that was a labour of love!!) An hour later we were in Talkeetna, it was boiling hot and i couldnt believe that we had all done it! I phoned Mike Flannigan the sales Manager for Captain Cook the hotel that sponsored my stay in Anchorage (they are a part of Summit Hotels) and arranged with him for all our rooms for the night and told him to expect some hill billy type clientel that would be arriving back imminently!! Captain Cook were so great and of course everyone was talking about the terrible accident of Jerry and Terry. I think there have only been 4 deaths on Denali since 1996 so this was big news.

We had a huge lunch of Pizza, salad and basically anything we could get our hands on and Clarks fantastic girlfriend Lisa collected us from Talkeetna and drove our weary group back to Anchorage for a big celebration dinner..