

The Solo Ascent of Mt. McKinley in Winter  
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February 13th, 1998. I was standing alone on the dark Kahiltna Glacier. Because daylight is short and the sun's position low in winter, no sunshine reaches Kahiltna Base Camp (2,130 m) during winter. The weather was fair with a weak southwest wind, temperature at  $-20^{\circ}$ . I could hear the sound of an avalanche occurring at the Northeastern Wall of Mt. Foraker.

This was my second time to see the South Peak of Mt. McKinley (6,194 m). It was only a year since I last saw it, but looked up toward the Summit with acute nostalgia.

I had learned from my last year's experience and prepared about two months for this year's climb. The extension of the climbing period necessitated an increase in supplies, and the load (food, fuel and equipment) weighed 100 kg. I had to carry the heavy load entirely by myself.

February 15th, at 8:00 p.m. at BC (2,200 m). The weather was fair, with a gentle wind from east-northeast, temperature at  $-25^{\circ}$ . I stuck my face out of the tent and looked up at the night sky. It was different than the sky in summer with its midnight sun. Though I couldn't see the aurora which I was looking forward to seeing, the sky was a vast treasure house of shimmering stars and meteors.

February 22nd at 9:00 p.m. at C3. The weather was fair with a medium wind from east-southeast, temperature at  $-20^{\circ}$ .

I toiled with my load to C4 (3,340 m). It was so cold ( $-25^{\circ}$ ) with the wind against me that I had to warm my hands and feet every ten minutes as I climbed, I saw wisps of snow rising at the top of Mt. McKinley and the wall of Mt. Foraker. I surmised that a strong southeast wind was blowing up there.

February 26th at 7:00 p.m. at C4 (3,340 m). It was snowing lightly with dense fog and a medium west-southwest wind, temperature at  $-33^{\circ}$ .

Because of poor visibility, I had been staying at C4 for the past four days. Just above my camp I expected to encounter three or four hidden crevasses. I had to be careful in moving under such white-out conditions. When the weather deteriorated last year, I had to stay five nights. So, I judged it would be best to be patient. The radio reported that the weather at Anchorage was recovering that morning.

March 1st at 8:00 p.m. at C5 (3,700 m, a grotto in the snow). The weather was fair, with an east-southeast wind, temperature at  $-28^{\circ}$ .

The weather was fair enough to carry my load to C6 (4,300 m, another grotto in the snow). Two crevasse belts just under the Windy Corner (4,000 m) laying almost

at the same place as the previous year, and I could pass them without trouble. I left red flags at those crevasses. From there up to C6 there were numerous crevasses or hidden crevasses. On my way up, I stepped through a hidden crevasse and was scared to death. It was a hard climb ploughing through deep snow carrying a load over 40 kg.

On March 3rd at 7:00 p.m. reached C6 (4,300 m, another grotto in the snow) safely. It was cloudy and the direction of the wind was unstable, temperature at -26 . Yesterday the wind was strong enough to erase the trace. So, I had to walk forward ploughing hard in the snow. On my way dense fog occurred and it began to snow a bit. I encountered a blizzard just before C6. I couldn't see Mt. McKinley above 5,000 m because of dense fog. It took three hours and a half to make a strong two-meter high grotto. My left toe had severe chilblains.

March 5th at 8:00 p.m. at C6 (4,300 m, in my snow grotto). The weather was fair, with a weak north wind, temperature at -26 .

I climbed West Buttress carrying a load to a 5,050 m point on the West Ridge. The wind was weak on the West Ridge. It was an ideal day to challenge the summit. I climbed the ice wall just below the shoulder of West Buttress using double ax technic.

March 6th at 11:00 p.m. at C7 (5,200 m, another grotto in the snow). The weather was cloudy with a medium southeast wind, temperature at -30 . I had finally reached my attack camp.

The weather was fair in early morning, but clouds began to rise at around 9:00 a.m. around the summit. Fortunately the turbulent air stream and dense fog at the top didn't come down to the West Ridge. So, I could continue my ascent. If there were a sudden change in weather while I was attempting to reach the summit, the result might be fearful. Just the thought scared me.

At the crevasse zone, the lower part of the ice wall I fixed an 8 mm-diameter rope for 40 meters. I just passed the depot spot, and ascended to the site of C7, where I looked for an appropriate place to set up the attack camp. Then, I came back down to the depot spot to fetch my load, which I safely restored and carried to C7.

Because the snow and ice were hard, it was very difficult to make a grotto at C7.

March 8th at 7:50 a.m., 24th mornings after I began the climb. I left C7 heading for the summit. The weather was fair with a gentle south wind, temperature at -27 .

I'd noticed several ominous signs that predicted a deterioration in the weather

as I left attack camp: the morning glow, a Brocken phenomenon, sheer hovering of the clouds at the south side of the summit.

I began my traverse for Denali Pass (5,500 m). I was in a cold sweat as I passed three hidden crevasses on the way. After an hour and forty minutes, I passed Denali Pass as I had scheduled. A south wind became stronger gradually, which reminded me of the clouds I saw at the south side of the summit in the morning. The sight made me nervous.

After I climbed the last part of the Ridge leading to the South Peak passing a vast plateau at 5,900 m level, four hours had already passed since I began my final ascent. Now the ominous south wind was sending gray clouds toward not only the top but also toward its south side and even the North Peak of Mt. McKinley. A white veil covered them. It was easy to judge that the weather was deteriorating. To continue the ascent or not, that was the serious question. "Hurry, The summit is so close to you" I said to myself, while another self tried to persuade me "Be calm! If you are surrounded by dense fog at the top, you would have to bivouac there which could lead to your death." I compared the speed of my climbing with the speed of the weather deterioration. I also took into consideration the visibility on my way down after making the summit.

I made up my mind to go. Because of the severe cold, the right lense of my eye glasses, where the frame had broken while I was digging a grotto at C7, was frozen with frost on it. I managed to pass a zone of hidden crevasses just under the Ridge leading to the summit with only left eye visibility. When I cleared the last big cornice, the figure of the Mt. McKinley's South Peak came into view.

I reached the summit at 1:06 p.m. on March 8th. The weather conditions were dense fog, strong south wind, temperature at  $-37^{\circ}\text{C}$ , atmospheric pressure 466 hectopascal.

Reference : Sangaku 1998 Japanese Alpine Club Annual Report.