

1980 Native Denali Expedition planned

For at least 10,000 years, Alaska Eskimos, Indians and Aleuts have admired the beauty and magnificence of the highest mountain on the North American Continent. The Athabascan Indians gave it the name "Denali," meaning the "the great one."

An Athabascan was among the first successful climbers of the mountain. Scores of climbers from ethnic groups from all over the world scale the mountain every year. But there has never been an organized expedition of Alaska Native peoples to the summit of Denali.

Plans are being made this month for an Alaska Native "Denali Expedition" during the spring of 1980 to the summit of the mountain. In cooperation with a group of prominent journalists and other associates of the newspaper, the Native Denali Expedition has been proposed by staff members of the Tundra Times.

The climb is proposed to begin in late April of the coming spring, and may be anticipated to last about 25 days, depending upon weather conditions. It is hoped that members of the expedition would include a balanced representation from Alaska Native tribes. Two Native journalists from the Tundra Times, staff writer Martha Upicksoun and editor Tom Richards, Jr., both Inupiaq Eskimos, have been signed on with the expedition.

Two other Natives have also requested to be included in the party. Originators of the expedition proposal hope for two members of each tribal group to be recruited by January, when training is planned to begin for those joining the climb.

In a somewhat ironic yet prudent measure, non-Native professional mountaineers and others are being requested to accompany the expedition to furnish logistic and technical support. A minimum of ten persons are expected to make the climb.

Professional commercial photographers Andy Klamser and Rob Stapleton, of Stapleton/Klamser and Associates will join the expedition to provide photographic coverage of the event. Stapleton climbed the mountain last spring with Iditarod mushers Joe Reddington, Sr. and Susan Butcher, and the late, famed mountaineer Ray Genet.

Native health experts are being requested to assist in planning the expedition. Traditionally prepared and preserved Native foods are anticipated to provide a major part of the climbers' diet. The expedition also plans to plant a Native-designed "Denali" flag at the summit in support of the proposal that the mountain be officially known by its original Native name, rather than by its "Mt. McKinley" designation.