



## Denali's Howl: The Deadliest Climbing Disaster on America's Wildest Peak

*Andy Hall*

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*Denali's Howl* is the white-knuckle account of one of the most deadly climbing disasters of all time.

In 1967, twelve young men attempted to climb Alaska's Mount McKinley—known to the locals as Denali—one of the most popular and deadly mountaineering destinations in the world. Only five survived.

Journalist Andy Hall, son of the park superintendent at the time, investigates the tragedy. He spent years tracking down survivors, lost documents, and recordings of radio communications. In *Denali's Howl*, Hall reveals the full story of an expedition facing conditions conclusively established here for the first time: At an elevation of nearly 20,000 feet, these young men endured an “arctic super blizzard,” with howling winds of up to 300 miles an hour and wind chill that freezes flesh solid in minutes. All this without the high-tech gear and equipment climbers use today.

As well as the story of the men caught inside the storm, *Denali's Howl* is the story of those caught outside it trying to save them—Hall's father among them. The book gives readers a detailed look at the culture of climbing then and now and raises uncomfortable questions about each player in this tragedy. Was enough done to rescue the climbers, or were their fates sealed when they ascended into the path of this unprecedented storm?

## Denali's Howl: The Deadliest Climbing Disaster on America's Wildest Peak Details

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## **From Reader Review Denali's Howl: The Deadliest Climbing Disaster on America's Wildest Peak for online ebook**

### **Heather Starr says**

This is an interesting read, because you know what happens, but you're reading it for the details. There are a lot of characters, and I sometimes have a hard time keeping them straight. The climbers were around the age that my oldest son is now, so I thought a lot about how hard it must have been for the parents of these "children", knowing the risks an expedition like that could bring. My own son says "Mom, I'll be fine!" whenever I have concerns about the decisions he's making, but he's an adult now, even if he'll always be my baby. I can't imagine that parental worry becoming a reality.

I chose to read this because my younger sons's high school marching band is doing a show based on this book and I love to know the details. I can't wait to see the show. They are working so hard on it. I'm sure they'll represent the book perfectly.

Also, this book is not as long as it seems. Probably the last third of the book is pictures and notes.

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### **Anne says**

Whatever you do, do not listen to the audio book of this. The narrator sounds like John Wayne on a massive dose of Valium reading a phone book. Also, many of the names of mountains and sherpas were overdubbed as if, after it was all recorded, the producer learned that the narrator didn't pronounce the names correctly.

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### **Mara says**

This is a very methodical attempt to lay out everything we know about a doomed group of climbers on Denali in 1967--one can imagine that if one were very into mountaineering and had heard lots about this incident already, one would greatly appreciate seeing all the known evidence combined with the memories of an impressive number of the people involved. Since it's clear a lot of blame was thrown around both in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy and in the decades since, I think it's good that this book now exists as an attempt to sift through everything to separate out what we can definitely say happened from what we can only speculate about.

However, as someone coming to the book with no prior knowledge of the incident, I found Hall was mostly lacking the storyteller's spark that could have made this a truly gripping read for me. (With the exception of the Prologue, which is fantastic.) I got bogged down in all the details and it took me about two and a half weeks to read a book that's really only a little over 200 pages without notes. Hence the 3 star rating.

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### **Emily says**

A story of adventure gone wrong. A very descriptive and thoroughly researched book about this tragedy.

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## **Patti's Book Nook says**

First, big big thanks to Matt and Jess Norcross, owners of the independent bookstore McLean and Eakin in Petoskey, Michigan. This book was listed in their Bookseller Recommendation session at a reader's retreat and was enticingly described. I was riveted to the crazy idea that 12 people would seek an adrenaline high by climbing Mt. Denali in no more than the weekender camping gear available in 1967. Many of them were students, and barely had the money to buy necessities and equip the car with supplies and gas needed to drive the hundreds of miles to reach the mountain base. The author is a journalist who was a small boy at the time of this tragedy. His dad was the park superintendent in Alaska. Andy Hall remembers riding around with his unusually somber father in the truck as he was trying to save the remaining climbers that fateful July.

I feel weird giving a book like this a star rating. We get a lot of necessary geographical facts, biographies of the climbers, and mind-boggling statistics on the extreme weather systems that collided to produce a super-arctic storm that had been previously unrecorded. I applaud Andy Hall for his telling of this tragedy. A book like this can be easily sensationalized for sales reasons, but he provided an unbiased account based on radio transmissions, agency records, and extensive interviews. He honestly admits when there are conflicting accounts of one situation. He presents the various statements, and will occasionally remark if one was plausible considering the conditions and supplies available, and moves on- stating simply that it's impossible to know for sure. Some things must remain a mystery. Occasionally, truth is found. In one case, a climber was obviously lying by stating a pressure release valve malfunction on a stove was the reason for a cooking fire. The model didn't even have a pressure release valve. Oops.

This story is a scary reminder of the force of human nature. At the end of the day, regardless of preparation, if the force is against you..not a lot can be done except hunkering down (if possible). In this case, the sheer brutality of the winds and temperature- sustained not over the course of a few hours but a full week, became insurmountable. Rescue planes that needed to make tight turns for crevasses while carrying additional supplies were grounded. This is an epic adventure story that will make you want to stay inside this winter (if you have my temperament at least!). This mission helped bring about important changes in rescue organization, radio communication, and requirements for climbing applications to be approved. I enjoyed that Andy Hall caught up with the survivors close to publication and gave an update on what their lives became after this harrowing event. Great, great nonfiction.

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## **Linda says**

Denali's Howl was a perfect storm--today's meteorologists who sat down with their computer modeling and the author explained it as a once-in-a-100-year collision of extreme high and low pressures over Denali in July 1967. An expedition of twelve young climbers was at or near the summit when the storm hit. Andy Hall was the five year old son of the Mount McKinley (Denali) National Park superintendent and was deeply impressed by his father's involvement in the tragedy. Nearly fifty years later, he has done a great job piecing together the written records and interviews with the survivors, other climbers, and experts. He portrays the personalities, the necessary but awkward melding of two different climbing groups, and probable weaknesses and mistakes. But in 1967 communication was primitive and search and rescue just starting as a discipline. Hall tells stories of some more recent experiences with storms on Denali and shows how even with modern techniques, humans are frail and limited in the face of such an overwhelming force of nature.

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### **catzkc says**

Despite, or maybe because of my hysterical fear of heights (it's difficult for me to even climb a few steps up the ladder to change light bulbs), I love reading about mountain climbing disasters. A lot of people will be comparing this to *Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mt. Everest Disaster*, and that's understandable. Both are about a mountain climbing disaster. But that's about all they have in common, and that's ok. While Andy was present at Denali at the time of the disaster, he was only 5 years old. So his recounting of the event is based upon historical documents, notes and interviews with survivors and rescuers. His personal relationship to the park superintendent (his father) and others bring a more personal feel to this account. With a 12-man expedition, plus other individuals that got involved later, there's a lot of people to keep track of. That was one weakness. Also, since I'm not familiar with Denali, it's geography and such, maps detailing the route the parties took and where the bodies were located would have been a big help.\* Still a great read!

\* I later discovered that at the very end of the book - after the Notes and Index, there was indeed a map, as well as pictures. Wish these would have been placed earlier so I could have referred to them while I was reading. (I was reading the Kindle version.)

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### **Dave Allen says**

A good, solid telling of this ill-fated attempt at climbing Denali.

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### **Richard Campbell says**

As the most deadly climbing accident ever on Mt. McKinley (aka Denali) this story has been written before, and I've read four versions, but none match Hall's treatise. With seven bodies still snow-bound somewhere on the mountain and the details of their final days unknown, mystery still surrounds the catastrophe.

On top of mystery of the climbers' final days and whereabouts, there was ensuing controversy regarding responsibility for the rescue effort. Could the climbers have been saved? By whom? Errors were made, but of what significance? This is a story about extraordinary men in an intense environment where minor mistakes can have deadly consequences.

Hall supplements the events on the mountain with interviews of the surviving climbers, with professional guides, with rescuers and with meteorologists. All this expertise aside, the funnest insights are Hall's own. He was at McKinley Park during the climb, albeit only 5-years old, and his recollections from childhood add a Scout-Finch flare to the narrative.

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### **Michele says**

I am an adventure-adrenaline junkie. Okay, let's amend that: I am an adventure-adrenaline junkie....from the comfort of my couch. In other words, I love true adventure books. Especially ones about mountain climbing. I have no idea where this love came from given that I've never climbed a mountain in my life, nor do I intend to. I've even been known to avoid small inclines while taking a stroll around the neighborhood. Reading

about these adventurous souls who tackle the world's most dangerous peaks, however, stirs something in my soul. Probably a little smugness that I'm not the one who fell down an icy crevasse in sub-zero temperatures and ended up a frozen mummy abandoned on a mountain side.

Whatever the reason, a well-written climbing story will always find its way onto my bookshelves. This summer, the book I couldn't resist was Andy Hall's *Denali's Howl*, the riveting story of the ill-fated 1967 Wilcox Expedition on North America's tallest peak, Denali.

Formerly known as Mt. McKinley, Denali dominates the Alaska Range. At 20,237 feet high, Denali isn't the highest peak in the world, but the climb from the base of the mountain to the peak is 18,000 feet and that is the largest of any in the world.

In July of 1967, twelve young men set off to conquer Denali. Most of them had enough climbing experience that it should have been a routine ascent. They had planned and conditioned themselves for this climb for months and months. What they hadn't planned for was an unforecast super-storm that bore down on the mountain just as the Wilcox Expedition was approaching the summit, trapping them in far-below freezing temperatures and hurricane force winds in the matter of minutes, conditions that continued for ten days.

Of the twelve men who left the base of Denali, only five were to return. What happened up on the summit of that mountain has been shrouded in mystery for over forty years. Reluctant and conflicting accounts from the survivors over the years have only added to the confusion as survivors and those who watched from afar passed around accusations and blame.

Alaskan author Andy Hall's account of that fateful expedition is masterful. Despite his obvious meticulous research he never once allows the narrative to bog down with onerous details. Facts are presented where known and where they aren't, Hall provides plausible scenarios based on the evidence that is known. He provides first-rate biographical background on each member of the expedition, making it easy for the reader to keep track of each team member as the doomed party makes their way unknowingly towards disaster. Throughout the fast-moving narration, he also intersperses an excellent geological history of the imposing mountain as well as the fascinating climbing history over the past one hundred years.

Overall, *Denali's Howl* is so well-written it certainly rivals Jon Krakauer's blockbuster climbing hit *Into Thin Air*. If you enjoyed the one, you'll certainly appreciate the other.

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## Janette Fleming says

*Denali's Howl is the white-knuckle account of one of the most deadly climbing disasters of all time.*

*In 1967, twelve young men attempted to climb Alaska's Mount McKinley—known to the locals as Denali—one of the most popular and deadly mountaineering destinations in the world. Only five survived.*

*Journalist Andy Hall, son of the park superintendent at the time, investigates the tragedy. He spent years tracking down survivors, lost documents, and recordings of radio communications. In *Denali's Howl*, Hall reveals the full story of an expedition facing conditions conclusively established here for the first time: At an elevation of nearly 20,000 feet, these young men endured an "arctic super blizzard," with howling winds of up to 300 miles an hour and wind chill that freezes flesh solid in minutes. All this without the high-tech gear and equipment climbers use today.*

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*climbing then and now and raises uncomfortable questions about each player in this tragedy. Was enough done to rescue the climbers, or were their fates sealed when they ascended into the path of this unprecedented storm?*

### **'On Denali, death is never far away for the careless and the unlucky'. Andy Hall**

Denali boasts the greatest vertical relief on earth, soaring 18,000 from base to summit compared to Everest, although 29,029 above sea level, that rises 12,000 ft to its summit from its base on the Tibetan Plateau.

An expedition of 12 young men took on Alaska's Mount Denali in the summer of 1967. The team, a mix of experienced climbers some little more than beginners, was soon torn by conflict. Bitter arguments broke out and at times members refused to talk to each other. Not ideal when your survival depends on teamwork.

The author doesn't play the 'blame game' but mistakes were made that could have been avoided. What was not avoidable was the incoming low-pressure system that was destined to collide with a high-pressure system to create a super storm on Denali with winds over 300 miles per hour.

A cautionary tale, moving, tragic and utterly engrossing

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### **Dusty Wight says**

I'd give it 6 if I could.

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### **Joy D says**

True story of the ill-fated Wilcox Expedition that climbed to the summit of Denali in 1967. Twelve climbers set out; five returned. The author, Andy Hall, has a personal connection to the tragedy. He was five years old at the time, and his father was the park superintendent. The author has done a good job of assembling the puzzle pieces to suggest what happened to the climbers during the mega-storm that blew hurricane force winds over the high peaks. He tells the story in a journalistic manner and throws in interesting peripheral information about mountain climbing, meteorology, and what has changed in the past almost 50 years to make climbing safer. He also includes a touching tribute to his father.

Hall pulls together research and interviews into a compelling account. He comments on the transience of human memory, as many of the accounts differ as to the specifics of what happened. I felt the author sifted through all the information to come as close as possible to figuring out what happened. My primary issue with it is that the audio sounds like a dull droning documentary. The narration improves toward the end and includes more voice inflection, but I feel I would have appreciated it even more if I had read rather than listened to it. Content warnings include descriptions of bodies, explanations of the many ways death can occur in conditions of extreme cold and altitude, and a bit of profanity. Recommended for readers interested in mountaineering and its history.

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## **Diane Moyle says**

Denali's Howl is gripping, harrowing nonfiction account of a 12 man expedition to reach the summit of Mount McKinley in 1967. Formally called Mount Denali, it is the tallest mountain in North America. Although 12 went up the mountain, seven never returned. This is the account of what happened and the "perfect storm" that descended on Mt. Denali that sealed the climbers' fate.

I found this book very informative and fast moving. I don't know anything about mountain climbing but I found this very easy to read. Enough facts were provided that I could understand what was going on but I didn't get lost in details. I wanted to keep reading to find out how and why the catastrophe occurred. I appreciated the author's knowledge and delivery of the subject. The only thing I found confusing was keeping track of who was who. This was by no means the author's fault though since there were 12 climbers and he allowed you to get to know each one.

I highly recommend this book to anyone who loves to read nonfiction. It is very enlightening and you don't have to be a mountain climbing enthusiast to find it interesting and compelling. You will start the story and not be able to put it down till you turn the last page.

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## **Twobchelm says**

Why do people climb treacherous mountains, it's in their DNA and are drawn to the challenge . This was a combination of climbers that were not compatible, some were not experienced and a storm that no one could have predicted. It was horrifying to read the actions and inactions that lead to the demise of the Wilcox expedition mountaineers.

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