

PROFESSIONAL

# SURVEYOR

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# Enduring Monument

Two brothers summit Mount McKinley and discover a special monument placed 25 years ago.



FLATDOG  
MEDIA

**BACKGROUND:** Officially named McKinley, this peak north of Anchorage is also known as Denali, one of several names given it by Alaska Native tribes. Here, Craig and Kurt Konz are traveling up Kahiltna Glacier.

# BACK TO MOUNT MCKINLEY

Climbers locate a special, 25-year-old monument feared lost; it still marks the peak of North America's tallest mountain.

By Nancy Luse

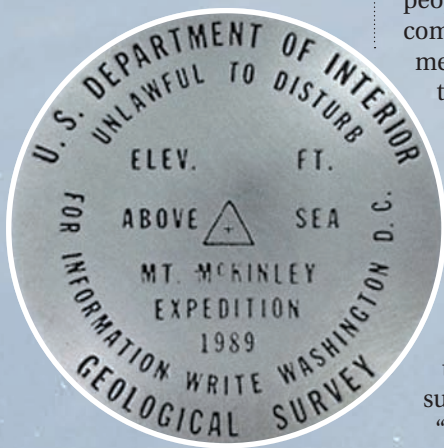
**R**honda Rushing, president of Bernsten International, Inc., regularly hears from people who have spotted her company's survey monuments, usually in places like the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse in North Carolina or at Disney World. The monument erected at the peak of Alaska's Mount McKinley, North America's tallest mountain, however, has been left out in the cold—that is until last summer.

"It's not something that a lot of people do. It's not like visiting the Four Corners or Disney World. Everybody doesn't just climb 20,000 feet," Rushing says—unless you're brothers Kurt

and Craig Konz, who made the ascent over several weeks last May and June.

In a series of coincidences, Rushing and her staff learned of the Alaska adventure from the climbers' grandfather, Steiner Stoneall, who happens to live in the same retirement community as Rushing's father, Phillip Peterson, company co-founder and current chairman of the board.

"The retirement community is a few miles from the plant [in Madison, Wisconsin], and they came in for a tour," Rushing says. That's when Stoneall "mentioned that his two grandsons had recently spotted the monument at the top of Mount McKinley. Possibly others have found it, but this is the first time we directly heard



**INSET, ABOVE:** This special monument is "a four-inch bronze/magnesium alloy cap, attached to a one-half inch stainless steel rod via a special locking mechanism"—text and image courtesy of Lasting Impressions.







that someone has found it. We're celebrating the 25th anniversary next year of its placement, and it's gratifying to us that 25 years later it's still there."

### Placing the Monument

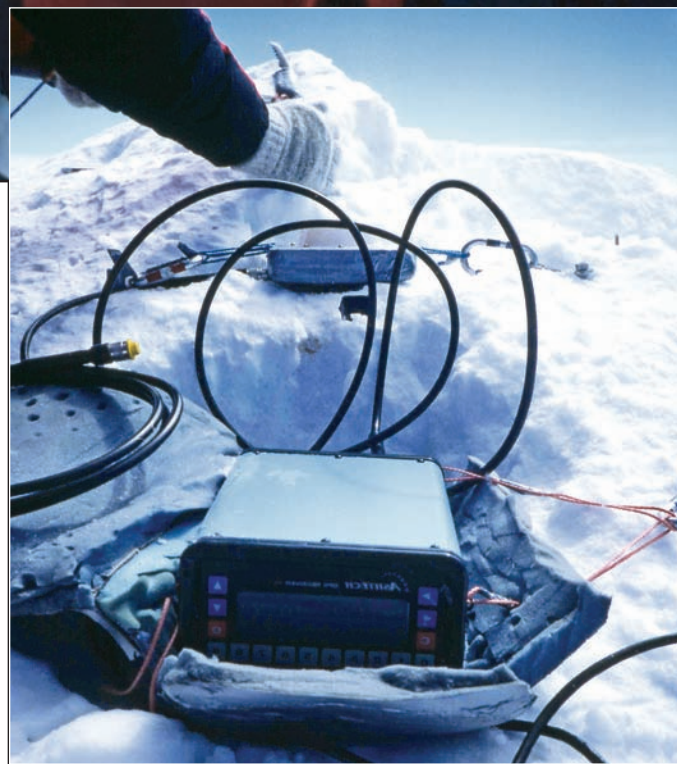
Rushing is proud also of the role her father played in the June 1986 expedition. "Dad was instrumental in helping develop this monument. They needed something lightweight—they couldn't be lugging something heavy up there; there was real collaboration. This was not a simple case of 'We'll take one of these,'" she says.

The monument is "a four-inch bronze/magnesium alloy cap, attached to a one-half inch stainless steel rod via a special locking mechanism. An ice auger bit was attached to the first rod for setting the

monument into the ice cap," Rushing writes in her 2006 book, *Lasting Impressions*. She also describes how the eight-member team braved harsh weather conditions—"McKinley is considered to be one of the coldest mountains on Earth"—to place the monument that definitively established McKinley as the continent's highest mountain.

### Finding the Monument

The Konz brothers faced the same frigid temperatures that, coupled with stiff winds, at times felt like minus 40 degrees. "We dressed in head-



**TOP:** Vernon Tejas installs the marker on the summit during the 1986 expedition. **ABOVE, RIGHT:** GPS gear on McKinley during that same expedition—*photos courtesy of Jeffrey Yates.*

to-toe cold weather gear," Kurt recalls, and used cold-rated sleeping bags. A storm that blew in on their way back down the mountain had them snowed in for four days.

Kurt says their trip took shape because, "my brother never done anything at high al-

titude before, never done glacier travel." The brothers are accomplished back-country skiers and, although they had no formal training in climbing, had two buddies "who were on the mountain before," and they imparted their experiences and advice.

## Rushing and her staff learned of the find from the climbers' grandfather, who lives in the same retirement community as Rushing's father.

Kurt works as a carpenter in Montana, and Craig lives in Colorado and is employed by an energy company. Preparations for their climb included "figuring out the gear, the logistics, and the air taxi in," Kurt says. They also had to obtain a permit that allowed them on the mountain.

Kurt says it took six days to reach the summit, where "it was impossible not to see" the monument. He describes the view from the top as "awesome, definitely surreal ... you're looking down on

everything. It was a perfect blue sky, and all the mountains around us were covered with ice and snow."

They returned to the camp established just below the summit and spent six days skiing. Despite the potential dangers of unexpected crevices and slick blue ice, Kurt shrugs off the idea of being scared. "Both of us are pretty confident in our abilities," he says. Answering the question

**BELOW:** Kurt skis down to Base Camp after two weeks at 14,000 Camp.

of what's next, he says simply, "Working. I've checked this off my list."

### Monumental Significance

Rhonda Rushing says that hearing about monument sightings is "really a fun part of what we do. When I go to conventions and talk to people, a lot will say they saw our monument at Disney Land. These are people who are in the business, but to hear from the general public is also special."

She says people have told her after seeing the markers, "Now I understand what you do [in your business]. Now I'm always looking down at the concrete." Rushing says some even make a treasure-hunt game out of finding the markers.

"They're all different," Rushing says of the products

of the 41-year-old company, "and I love them for many different reasons," whether it's on the Appalachian Trail or at Thomas Jefferson's Monticello. But "Mount McKinley is a favorite monument. It is really special ... it's hard to think of monuments of ours being set under more difficult conditions" than at this site.

"Surveyors do face a lot of dangers ... there was not just the challenge of climbing the mountain; there was also science involved, working with GPS technology. It's a privilege to be in on these projects. As humans it's important to know where you are and how high you are. It was exciting to see that it was accomplished." ▼

Nancy Luse writes and edits a magazine in Frederick, Maryland.

