

doors/into the 30s/outdoors/into the 80s Third time becomes charm for mountain climbing group

By Ed McClymont

Although many UNL students had their own version of outdoor recreation during spring break—being stranded on Interstate 80—it was a far cry from the outdoor winter experience of seven UNL students and one staff member during spring break.

Led by outdoor recreation director Mark Ebel, the students scaled the highest point in Wyoming, 13,785-foot high Gannett Peak. The expedition team lived for 12 days in tents, eating dehydrated food to accomplish its goal. Ebel had led unsuccessful attempts to reach the peak for the previous two years. They failed because of a lack of time caused by the mountain weather, Ebel said.

"Last year a storm hit us and wiped out our time. The extra time this year was what we needed." To overcome the weather this year's trip started a full week before spring break to allow for bad weather, he said.

"It snowed every day of the trip except for the day of the climb, so it was a truly winter experience," Ebel said.

The trip was offered in conjunction with several climbing exercises the intramural and recreation department sponsors throughout the year. The basic rock climbing course is offered three times a year, and is open to 10 students each trip. Ebel said all three trips were full this year.

"We have a pretty unique program in that climbing is offered through the recreation department," Ebel said. "(Recreation) provides the staff and equipment and as a result the costs are a lot lower. In colleges in the Rocky Mountains, students do it on their own."

For example, the UNL group package to Wyoming cost each individual \$175, compared to the \$300 cost per individual a Wyoming tour company charged for the trip.

The actual climb to the summit was carried out after the group made a 25-mile cross country ski trip into its base camp.

The first day of the trip was the worst, according to Ebel. To get to the ski trail, a poma ski lift at a nearby downhill ski resort had to be taken, which every member of the team feel down on.

"One member said if he could have gotten out of the trip after the first day he would have," Ebel said. "But there was always the knowledge that every day your pack was getting lighter." The pack weight for the trip was 75 pounds.

As far as navigation, there were two major problems faced on the trip. There were no trail markings, leaving compasses and topographical maps as the only guides. Winter conditions also made it difficult to distinguish the land markings, Ebel said.

"We got lost a couple of times and had to do some backtracking and bushwhacking," Ebel said.

The actual ski and climb to the peak from base camp was 15½ hours, beginning at 2:30 a.m. The first part of the climb was ascending the Continental Divide, which they reached at sunrise.

"Most of us felt, me included, that the first part of the trip was the hardest part," Ebel said. A cross-country ski across Dinwoody Glacier, one of the eight biggest in the United States, was next. The group set its skis aside some two hours later and climbed to the peak. From that point, the group viewed the majestic Grand Teton mountain range.

"After the climb, you forget the grunt and pain getting up and just remember the beauty of the scene," Ebel said.

With this summit tackled, there has been a proposal to scale the highest point in the United States, Mount McKinley in Alaska. The differences between this trip and the one just completed wouldn't be all that great, according to Ebel.

"The expedition would be similar, except it would be longer (three weeks as opposed to two) and it would be at a higher altitude." The cost is estimated at \$1,000 per person.

UNL RECREATION PRE-SESSION RECREATIONAL TRIPS

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May 9-16 (8 Days/5 Rafting) Cost: \$150 Sign-up deadline: May 2
Minimum: 8 Maximum: 9 Experience recommended.

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Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado (Longs Peak, 14, 256 ft.)
May 17-23 (7 Days/5 Climbing) Cost: \$100 Sign-up deadline: May 8
Minimum: 5 Maximum: 6 No experience necessary

Open to novices and intermediates. Cost includes classes in basic rock climbing and snow climbing, as well as guided climbs.

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