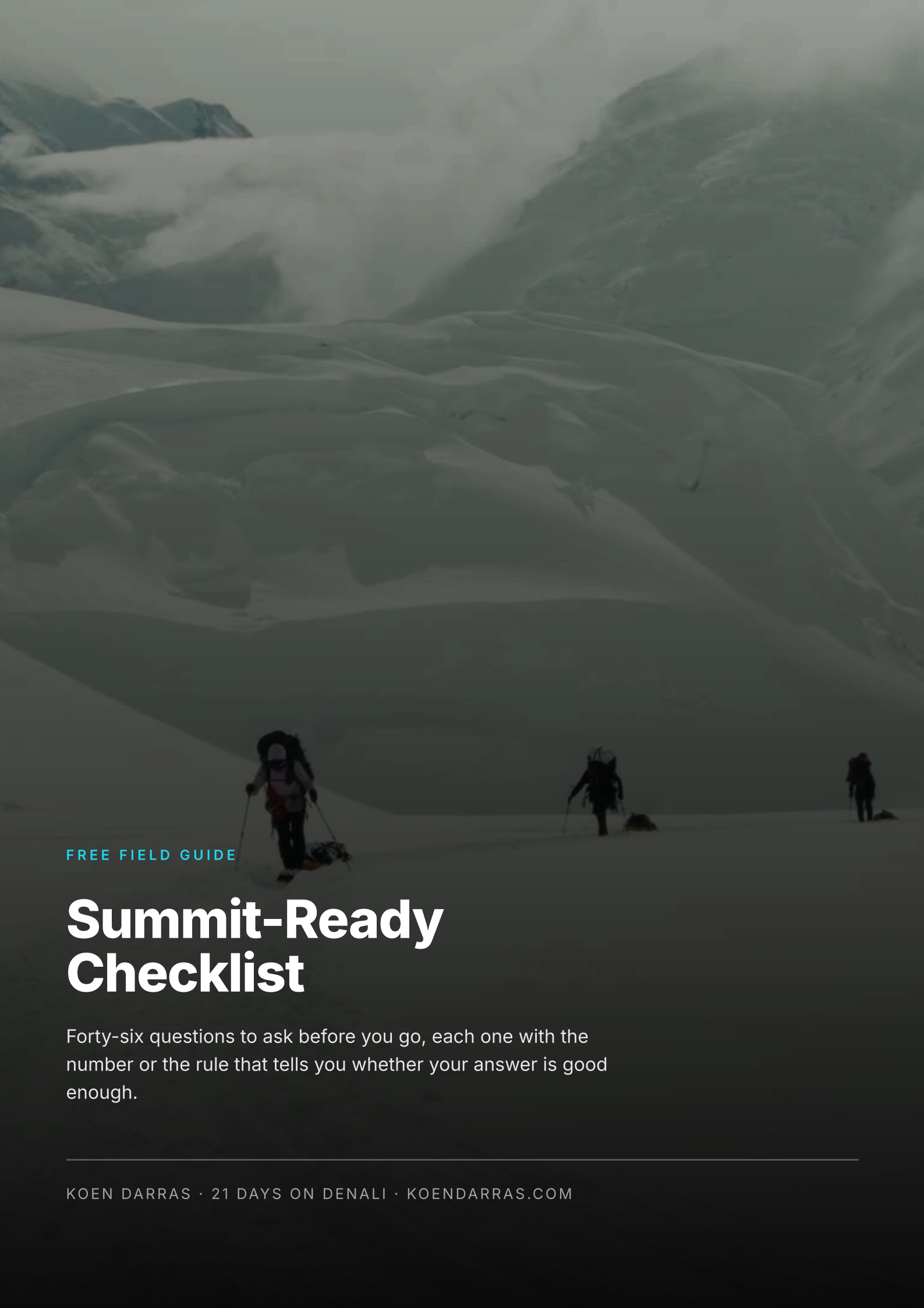


A grayscale photograph of a snowy mountain landscape. In the foreground, three hikers are visible, silhouetted against the bright snow. They are wearing backpacks and using trekking poles. The background shows steep, snow-covered mountain slopes and distant peaks under a hazy sky.

FREE FIELD GUIDE

Summit-Ready Checklist

Forty-six questions to ask before you go, each one with the number or the rule that tells you whether your answer is good enough.

A checklist of questions is useless if you have nothing to measure your answer against. So every question here comes with the number, the rule or the test that tells you whether your answer is good enough. Where the honest answer is "it depends on you", it says so.

THE CORE QUESTION

Are you preparing for the actual problem, or for the photo at the end?

01 Training

☐ **Can you move for hours under load?**

Not a single hero day. Back to back days, on a loaded sled or pack, is what the mountain asks for.

☐ **Have you trained the boring repeated effort, not only peak performance?**

The expedition is almost entirely boring repeated effort. Peak performance appears once, on summit day, and only if the boring part went well.

☐ **Have you practised on tired legs?**

Every serious decision gets made when you are already tired. Training only when fresh tests the wrong version of you.

☐ **Have you trained in bad weather?**

If you have never been cold and wet for eight hours, you have tested your gear but not your system.

☐ **Do you know your effort zones?**

You need to be able to hold a pace you could keep for six hours, not the pace that feels right in the first thirty minutes.

☐ **Have you trained patience as well as intensity?**

Weather days are part of the expedition. Sitting still without unravelling is a trainable skill.

IN THE FIELD NOTES

Koen's own answer to this section is four tests, each with a pass mark, and a way to turn your results into the number of months you still need. Eight months before Denali he could not pull one tyre through wet sand.

[See the Field Notes](#)

02 Gear

☐ **What problem does this item solve?**

| If you cannot say it in one sentence, it is not gear, it is weight.

☐ **What happens if it fails?**

| Anything that keeps you warm, fed, found or connected needs an answer to this.

☐ **What is the backup?**

| One of anything that keeps you alive is none.

☐ **Who carries it?**

| Put a name next to every shared item before you leave. On our expedition every line in the budget had one.

☐ **Can you use it with gloves on?**

| Test it at your kitchen table: zips, buckles, stove, bottles, phone, camera, GPS, radio, snack wrappers. Everything you will touch up there.

☐ **Does it still work cold, wet or in wind?**

| A wet or frozen rope loses its shock absorption. Cotton stops working the moment it is damp, and it is still the most common beginner mistake.

☐ **Is it worth the weight?**

| Every kilo has a consequence. Overpacking usually starts as fear, underpacking as ego, and both get punished.

03 Food and fuel

☐ **Do you know your daily calorie need?**

Four to six thousand a day on a normal climbing day, and over eight thousand on summit day.

☐ **Can you eat it when you are tired and cold?**

This is the one people underestimate. Most climbers manage only thirty to seventy percent of what they burn, because appetite disappears at altitude. Your plan has to survive not wanting to eat.

☐ **Do you have an emergency margin?**

We planned 28 breakfasts, 28 lunches and 25 dinners for a 21 day window. The extra days are a decision, not a rounding error.

☐ **Have you tested it during training?**

If you have not eaten it on a long cold day at home, you do not know yet whether you can.

☐ **Is morale food included?**

Food is fuel and it is also morale. A small good thing at altitude changes the mood of an entire team.

☐ **Do you know what freezes?**

Anything with water in it. Work that out in a warm kitchen, not at minus twenty with gloves on.

04 Cold

☐ **Do you know your own weak points?**

For most people it is hands, feet and face. Find out which is yours on a training day, not on a summit day.

☐ **Do gloves and boots still work when wet or when you are exhausted?**

Exhausted is the condition that matters. Systems that need dexterity fail exactly when you have none left.

☐ **Can you operate everything with gloves on?**

Same test as the gear section. If you have to take a glove off at altitude to do something routine, that is a design fault in your setup.

☐ **Have you practised changing layers before you are freezing?**

The layer you put on once you are already cold takes far longer to work. Change early, while it still feels unnecessary.

☐ **Do your teammates know the signs of cold injury?**

Numbness, white skin, a waxy feel, loss of dexterity, unusual colour change, and a teammate insisting they are fine. That last one is the most common.

05 Team rules

☐ **Who makes the weather call?**

Name the person. A team where everyone decides is a team where nobody does.

☐ **Who can call a stop?**

Everyone should be able to. Agree it out loud before it is needed.

☐ **What is the rule when somebody feels bad?**

Agree the words. Saying "I want to go down" has to be a normal sentence and not a confession.

☐ **What is the turnaround rule?**

A clock time, agreed before you leave camp. Not a feeling and not a view.

☐ **What does "too risky" actually mean to each of you?**

This is where teams find out they disagree, and the wrong moment to find out is on the mountain.

☐ **How do you protect somebody from shame after turning back?**

| Decide this in advance, because afterwards nobody will want to raise it.

06 Route and navigation

☐ **Do you know the camps and the decision gates?**

| Know which points on the route are the ones where you either commit or turn round.

☐ **Do you have GPS and a backup?**

| Batteries die in cold. Carry a map and compass you can actually use, not one you own.

☐ **Do you have offline maps?**

| Assume no signal exactly where you need it, because that is where it will not be.

☐ **Do you understand where the route gets serious?**

| Glacier retreat exposes crevasses that were not there before, so a route description from five years ago is a hazard rather than a help.

☐ **Have you planned for losing visibility?**

| Trail wands. One set split across the team came to two dollars each, which makes it the cheapest safety item on the whole list.

07 Mental game

☐ **Why am I doing this?**

| Would you still go if you could never tell anybody about it? The answer changes which corners you cut.

☐ **What will make me want to quit?**

| Name it now, while it is theoretical.

☐ **How do I behave when I am cold, hungry or afraid?**

| You already know. Ask somebody who has travelled with you if you do not.

☐ **What sentence brings me back to calm?**

| Have one ready. You will not compose it at altitude.

☐ **Who am I responsible to besides myself?**

Everyone who would have to come and get you. A helicopter is possible on Denali but rare and weather dependent, so in practice that is people.

IN THE FIELD NOTES

The sentence Koen repeats to himself on a summit push, in his own words, and how he uses it when the push gets hard.

[See the Field Notes](#)

08 The descent

The descent gets its own section because people relax too soon, and that is when the decisions get worse. Before you leave the summit, check all six.

- ☐ Food still available and reachable
- ☐ Warm layers still available, not buried
- ☐ Communication still active
- ☐ Pace deliberately conservative
- ☐ No celebration until you are down
- ☐ Hands, feet and face checked, on yourself and on each other

One thing to carry

A question you cannot score is just anxiety. A question with a number next to it is a plan.



NOW AVAILABLE · FOUNDING PRICE

The Must-Have Denali Field Notes

The checklist tells you what to ask. The Field Notes give you Koen's own answers, with the receipts next to them.

- ✓ **How many months you still need.** Four tests with honest pass marks turn your current fitness into a date, then an eight month training plan you can run next to a job.
- ✓ **Every one of the 17 cost lines, worked out.** Buy or rent per item, the order you pay in so pulling out does not cost you everything, and the two policy clauses that decide whether an unguided team is insured.
- ✓ **Where to start, and in what order.** The timeline worked back from your departure date: which permit first, which skills to practise before you fly, and the team rules that have to exist before anyone is tired.

Plus the other insights that prepare you to push your limits further: the three purchases that were worth double, the three that were wasted money, and the ten decisions that kept it at \$2,717.

GET THE FIELD NOTES · €29

Founding price until 30 November, then €39. One month, full refund.
koendarras.com/denali-fieldbook

Next: this checklist tells you what to ask. The **Must-Have Denali Field Notes** have Koen's own answers: the four tests he would set anyone before Denali, how long you still need, and what he tells himself on a summit push.

More, free. The full film of those 21 days: youtube.com/watch?v=jbCXFFQ-yBU. Every dollar it cost, line by line: koendarras.com/denali-cost. Everything from this expedition on one page: koendarras.com/denali.

Calorie figures are widely cited ranges for high altitude mountaineering and vary by person, altitude and workload. Cold injury signs were reviewed with Koen in August 2026. This is not technical mountaineering instruction and it does not replace training. Use qualified guides, official route information, medical advice and local regulations for real expeditions.