

of codeine sulfate and 30 mg of dalmene from a personal supply without telling the guides.

At noon on June 23, Kearney and Boyer reported to NPS Mountaineering Ranger Buchanan, who was in the same area, that Wheeler was really exhausted and that they thought they would wait a day to descend. Around 2:00 p.m., Buchanan observed that Wheeler could not stand without assistance and had significant coordination problems.

A radio contact was established with Dr. Drummond Rennie in Talkeetna about 1:00 p.m. and the situation was discussed. Besides motor problems, Wheeler had a bad headache and pain in his kidneys during urination. Rennie recommended immediate descent and not to "sleep on it."

The group packed immediately and departed the high camp at 6:45 p.m. NPS personnel Ralph Baldwin and Scott Gill accompanied the group down the West Buttress to help haul loads and assist in belays. Buchanan coordinated radio communication for the high camp. The group reached the fixed lines at midnight where Gill and Baldwin left to return to the high camp. Wheeler was lowered to the camp at 14,200 feet where all spent the night exhausted from the efforts.

The following day, Wheeler had not improved and late on June 24, he was taken to a lower elevation by sled. He reached Kahiltna base camp early on June 25, still without showing significant improvement, and was immediately flown to Talkeetna. He improved on the descent to Talkeetna. Several doctors en route diagnosed Wheeler as having cerebral edema. (Source: Dave Buchanan, Mountaineering Ranger, Denali National Park)

### **Analysis**

Aside from the obvious fact that guides can rarely know their clients well before they arrive, the situation encountered here points out that the problem is exacerbated when a client resorts to clandestine activities such as self-medication. Another example of this case occurred during a semester-long climbing/outdoor leadership school program this past year when a client, separated from the guides for several days, became hypothermic. The problem was not just the hypothermia, which, in fact, the clients dealt with, although it took them 36 hours; the more disconcerting aspect was that the clients did not tell the guides (who were in contact with them by radio) what was happening because they were concerned about "letting the guides and other clients down." The general point to be made is that trying to please others, especially by not informing them of your condition or by administering self-prescribed medication, may result in achieving the opposite effects from those desired. (Source: J. Williamson)

## **FROSTBITE, BAD WEATHER, INEXPERIENCE**

### **Alaska, Mount McKinley**

A ten-member Fantasy Ridge party, with guides Mike Covington and Steve Gall, made a successful ascent of the South Buttress on Mount McKinley. They reached the summit on June 25, 1981 and returned to their 18,000-foot high camp that afternoon. On the 26th, the party descended to a 15,500-foot camp on the South Buttress, arriving in deteriorating weather. An intense storm developed overnight, burying the party's four tents in heavy drifting snow. Round-the-clock shoveling was maintained to prevent the tents from collapsing. Snow caves were started but the heavy drifting caused them to collapse. Covington located a crevasse around midday and began work inside excavating sleeping ledges. By late

in the day of the 27th, three tents had been either destroyed or completely buried while the fourth remained free of drifting snow. This tent was used by the expedition members to get out of the weather for warmth and hot brew throughout the day.

At 5:00 p.m., Nick Gilman (19) came to Covington in the crevasse and complained of being cold and hypothermic. Covington noticed that he was shivering uncontrollably, that he was not wearing his gaiters or overboots and that his boots were unlaced. Covington repeatedly asked Gilman to put on his gaiters and overboots but Gilman took little notice of these requests, stating that "his overboots and gaiters didn't fit right." Helping Covington in the crevasse, Gilman recovered quickly. That evening, five members, including Gilman, spent the night in the crevasse. Covington noticed that Gilman's boots were full of ice, but when he was asked about his feet, Gilman stated that they were okay.

On the 28th the weather improved; by 4:00 p.m., the party began their descent off the South Buttress down to the east fork of the Kahiltna Glacier. They descended throughout the night, stopping for food and drinks at an 11,000-foot cache. Assistant guide Gall observed that Gilman was concerned about his feet. Gall noticed that Gilman's right foot was very white. Gilman told Gall that his foot was numb but okay. Due to a high potential for avalanches in the area, the party continued their descent. They finally stopped at 9,200 feet, when Steve Combs collapsed from exhaustion at 7:00 p.m. on the 29th. The party had slept only ten hours in a 74-hour period. Camp was established at this 9,200-foot location on the east fork. At 6:00 p.m. Gall mentioned his earlier discussion with Gilman to Covington. Covington immediately checked Gilman and found that the toes on his right foot were all black. Overnight, Covington had Gilman sleep with his foot outside of the sleeping bag. The next morning Covington bandaged Gilman's foot and placed him on a sled for the descent to the landing site. At 11:00 p.m. they arrived at Kahiltna Base, where a doctor from the U.S. Army High Altitude Team, Robert Breffeith, examined Gilman. At midnight he began a thawing treatment of the foot. At 8:00 a.m. on July 1, Gilman was flown out to Talkeetna and admitted to Providence Hospital on July 2. Gilman will lose most of his big toe and portions of the second toe, according to Dr. Dean Rau.

Gilman had mentioned to Covington that he "felt the frostbite occurred during the storm." Covington stated that Gilman acted with little or no concern for his feet during most of the climb, repeatedly ignoring his warnings. Covington stated, "All the other members were subjected to the same conditions with no incidence of frostbite." (Source: Roger Robinson, Mountaineering Ranger, Denali National Park)

### **Analysis**

Following up on the analysis of the previous accident, this situation illustrates that clients cannot be counted on to take care of themselves, even when (a) the guide knows the circumstances and (b) has told the client what to do. Visual inspection of feet and hands, actually dressing the client, and watching food and liquid intake are among the tasks sometimes required in a guiding situation. (Source: J. Williamson)

## **LOST CLIMBERS, BAD WEATHER**

### **Alaska, Mount McKinley**

A three-member mountaineering expedition, the Skin and Bones Expedition, from the Kansei Climbing Club (KCC) of Japan, failed to return from an attempt on the South Face of Mount McKinley. The three members, Makoto Kinoshita (28), Masuaki Ohnishi (35) and