

Analysis

Frostbite remains as the most frequent mishap, affecting 5-10 percent of the climbers on McKinley each year. This year, frostbite was reported by 32 climbers, representing 5 percent of the 695 climbers on the mountain in 1984. (While acute mountain sickness exceeded this number, over half the cases were mild—52 out of 77).

Clients (or climbers inexperienced with sub—zero cold) have to be aware of body maintenance subtleties such as: non-constricting footwear, rehydration, and warming techniques. Climbers (particularly guides in charge of clients) must anticipate the surmountable inconvenience and potential ego hang—ups involved in halting a summit push so members can warm their feet on others' stomachs. Unattended "numb toes" is usually an invitation to frostbite. (Source: Jon Waterman, Mountaineering Ranger, Denali National Park)

FROSTBITE, DEHYDRATION, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT

Alaska, Mount McKinley

A three member party was on the ascent of the South Buttress of Mount McKinley. On May 31 at 0900 they left for the summit from their high camp at 5500 meters. They experienced little wind and temperatures to -30°C , returning to their high camp at 1930. That evening Michael Beiser (29) began to experience pain in his left large toe and realized he had frozen it over the course of the day. Beiser had gone to the summit wearing felt inner boots that were damp, using only lightweight supergaitors. His fluid intake was low on the summit day, consuming only half a quart.

His toe became swollen, turning black overnight. AT 0900 Beiser attempted to call by CB radio the 4350 meter Medical Rescue Camp for advice, but made no contact. Instead, he reached Jim Okanek with K2 Aviation in Talkeetna who in turn contacted Ranger Roger Robinson at the Talkeetna Ranger Station. AT 0940 Robinson informed Beiser that he should try to descend and protect his toe from further injury. Beiser stated that he would start descending and would make another radio contact when they reached the 4700 meter saddle. They attempted to call Talkeetna once they arrived at 4700 meters but were unable to make contact. They continued down the "Ramp Route" to 3400 meters, where at 1612 Doug Geeting made contact with Beiser, who said he would continue out to Kahiltna Base without assistance. They arrived at Kahiltna Base the evening of June 1. They were flown out to Talkeetna. (Source: Roger Robinson, Mountaineering Ranger, Denali National Park)

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In addition to everything said in the previous analysis, the following specific facts are added: (1) Beiser chews tobacco, which is a vaso-constrictor, impeding circulation; (2) in terms of fluid intake, three to four liters daily are essential in aiding prevention of frostbite in high Arctic environments; (3) a dry set of inner boots should be available, especially for summit bids; (4) often supergaiters are not adequate early in the season on Mount McKinley. (Source: Roger Robinson, Mountaineering Ranger, Denali National Park)