

FALL INTO CREVASSE, SKIING UNROPED

Alaska, Mount McKinley

Peter Nadler (36), an experienced professional guide, was the leader of a seventeen member Swiss expedition on the West Buttress Route of Mount McKinley. On June 2, 1984, the group was flown into base camp on the southeast fork of the Kahiltna Glacier by Cliff Hudson. On June 5, two members of the group decided not to continue and returned to Talkeetna. The expedition members camped that night at 3340 meters.

On the morning of June 6, the weather had deteriorated. The temperature dropped, it was snowing, and visibility was poor. Eight climbers, led by deputy leader Diego Wellig (23) ascended to establish the next higher camp at 3600 meters. They were all on skis and traveling unroped, with the intention of backhauling supplies from the cache at 2800 meters.

The climbers started skiing down at 0930 through 20 centimeters of new snow. They had been gone from the camp approximately 15 minutes, with Nadler in front pulling a sled. They could not stay directly on the trail because of the slope, but they stayed as close as possible. Manfred Struhhoffer (54) and Rudolf Roesel (48) were following Nadler and saw him fall into the crevasse. Nadler had almost skied to a stop, and it appeared that the edge of the crevasse had crumbled, causing him to fall. The crevasse was open, but difficult to see until the climbers got close because of flat lighting and because there was a slight rise in the foreground. The crevasse was about two meters wide at the top, increasing in width under an overhanging lip.

Efforts to make voice contact with Nadler were unsuccessful. As the climbers had no ropes for a rescue effort, three members of the group started up to get assistance. On the way they met a group of Austrians, who immediately descended to the accident site to provide assistance. One of the Swiss climbers continued up and contacted three doctors from another Swiss expedition, and Wellig. All descended to provide assistance.

When the Austrians arrived, they belayed one of their members, Manfred Egger, into the crevasse. He descended approximately 20 meters, but did not have enough rope to go further. He reported that the crevasse was very dangerous because of the apparently unstable overhanging lip. As Egger ascended, Wellig arrived at the scene. By joining the two ropes together, Wellig descended 50 meters to a point where he located Nadler's sled. The crevasse was very narrow at this point. He cleared snow away from the sled and tried to loosen it, but the sled was jammed.

Wellig returned to the surface and dispatched two groups of climbers (one up and one down) to find someone with a radio. One group contacted a Tacoma, Washington, expedition, who managed to contact mountaineering ranger Scott Gill at 4300 meters. Because of bad weather it was not possible to get a helicopter to the accident scene. The Tacoma climbers then went to the scene to provide communications. As there was considerable manpower available for the rescue effort, Gill remained at 4300 meters to provide a radio/telephone link in case the weather improved and outside efforts were needed.

At 1538 Wellig and Egger again descended into the crevasse. They dug through about one meter of compacted snow underneath the sled and found Nadler's rucksack. They tried to move the pack, but it too was jammed. They continued to dig and found that Nadler was still attached to the rucksack. They determined that Nadler was dead. They unsuccessfully tried to free his body, but the crack was too narrow

and the snow was very hard. They attached a rope to the rucksack and ascended back to the surface. The rescuers tried to recover the body by pulling up the rucksack, but the straps on the pack failed.

No further efforts have been made to recover Nadler's body because of the hazardous conditions in the crevasse. (Source: Tom Griffiths, Chief Ranger, Denali National Park)

Analysis

There is an increasing tendency for climbers to travel on the Kahiltna Glacier unroped, particularly when following a packed trail. There will continue to be serious crevasse falls as long as this practice continues. The poor visibility at the time of the accident made it difficult to differentiate crevasses, especially skiing downhill. Also, the party might have been able to begin rescue efforts sooner if they had not left all their ropes in camp.

This type of accident emphasizes the need for parties in remote areas to be as self-sufficient as possible. There is not a rescue team or helicopter immediately available, and the weather often precludes air access for several days at a time. (Source: Tom Griffiths, Chief Ranger, Denali National Park)

SLIP ON SNOW/ICE

California, Mount Whitney

On February 4, 1984, Rob Heineman (22) was descending the Mountaineers Route off Mount Whitney after a successful ascent of the East Face with his partner. The descent route is normally done third class, but because of ice and snow on the route, the climbers decided to rappel. Part way down, Heineman's foot broke through the snow and ice and went into a crack in the rocks, resulting in his falling over backwards and breaking his fibula and a bone in his foot. His partner helped him down and went for help. (Source: Michael Renta, China Lake Mountain Rescue Group)

RAPPEL FAILURE, OFF ROUTE, DARKNESS, INADEQUATE PROTECTION AND EQUIPMENT, FATIGUE, ILLNESS

California, Yosemite Valley

On April 23, 1984, about 1900 hours, Donald W. Barnett (39) took a fatal fall of approximately 50 meters from about mid-point of a route known as "Overhang Bypass," a dihedral on the north face of Lower Cathedral Spire. Interviews and evidence indicate that the fall came as a result of Barnett rappelling off the end of his rappel rope and being unable to secure himself to temporary protection that he had placed in the face of the rock. The following account has been edited from an interview with Howard Replogle (37), his climbing partner, conducted by Chief Ranger C. W. Wendt.

Howard Replogle and Donald Barnett had come to the park to do some climbing. They entered the park via route 120 and set up camp at Big Oak Flat campground just inside the entrance station on the left. Replogle had only been climbing since January 1984. Barnett had been climbing for the past eight years. On Sunday, April 22, Replogle and Barnett climbed on an area known as "Manure Pile." Barnett led