

Laeremans and Baeyens reportedly did not eat and drink well for five days prior to this incident. An adequate high carbohydrate diet and high fluid intake are essential for combating the effects of severe cold and extreme weather on Denali.

The AMICAL expedition began their descent from 14,300 feet in very poor weather conditions. The Windy Corner area is notorious for its extreme conditions. It is advisable to wait for weather conditions to moderate before attempting to climb through this area of the route.

Fortunately, the group recognized the potentially serious condition of Laeremans and Baeyens, and took action to find shelter in a snow cave. (Source: Jim Phillips, Mountaineering Ranger, Denali National Park)

HYPOTHERMIA, EXPOSURE, WEATHER, INADEQUATE CLOTHING

Alaska, Mount McKinley

On May 22, 1994, Korean climbers Sang Myeung Lee (25) and Kee Won Kim (27) departed from the 14,200 foot West Buttress camp on Mount McKinley. They climbed the headwall west of the fixed lines to 16,200 feet, reaching the ridge crest in high winds. Lee and Kim failed to return as the weather deteriorated. An NPS search was conducted when weather permitted. The NPS patrol located the body of Lee, which was clipped into the fixed lines at 15,900 feet.

The patrol searched the area for three hours in whiteout conditions and was unable to locate Kim. They descended to the 14,200 foot camp with the body of Lee. A search was conducted using both a helicopter and ground parties for the next several days. On May 25, a guide radioed from 16,200 feet, reporting that Kim was found dead at 16,100 feet in a rock band. Kim's body was retrieved on May 27 and transported to Talkeetna.

Analysis

It is ironic that this fatal accident occurred to Kim, as he had been selected by the National Park Service to educate the climbers in Korea concerning the risks involved in climbing Mount McKinley. Kim had Alaska experience in mountaineering with expeditions to McKinley in 1992 and 1993, reaching the summit each time, and one attempt on Mount Foraker. Lee had climbed various other peaks, including Mount Rainier. Both climbers were in excellent physical condition and acclimated. Prudent judgment decisions pertaining to weather on Mount McKinley require climbers to evaluate their situation constantly. The deteriorating weather along with their slow progress (eleven hours on the headwall) was a warning to descend from their climb. Their decision to continue compounded their predicament as this unforgiving Denali storm quickly encompassed them with 100 mph wind gusts. Wearing no wind clothing, despite the fact they had it in their packs, contributed to their exposure, hypothermia, and ultimately their deaths. (Source: Daryl Miller, Mountaineering Ranger, Denali National Park)

ACUTE MOUNTAIN SICKNESS, FATIGUE, DEHYDRATION

Alaska, Mount McKinley

On the evening of June 1, 1994, Bennett Austin (29) developed a severe case of acute mountain sickness while climbing between 19,000 and 19,400 feet on the West Rib route of Mount McKinley. At 0200 on June 2, a fixed wing aircraft was launched with a ranger aboard to contact the ranger patrol at 17,000 feet on the West Buttress and perform an air drop of emergency gear to the party which was not 150 feet below the "football field"