

contact the Talkeetna Ranger station and the Kahiltna base camp via cell phone. They tried repeatedly for over two hours, only getting the message, "Your cell phone is not authorized for this service--." Finally the group reached the State Troopers after calling 911. At 1927 the State Troopers made contact with the Talkeetna Ranger Station and were able to brief the Talkeetna staff and relay messages for the rest of the operation. The "Dancing Fools" expedition reported that they had one member with an injured back secondary to falling, one member with frostbite and symptoms of pulmonary edema, and that they had lost some equipment including a tent. At 2046 a fixed wing aircraft took off from the Talkeetna airstrip to act as cover ship for the NPS rescue helicopter. At 2056 the helicopter departed with pilot Doug Drury and Ranger Daryl Miller. By 2140, Drury had inspected the potential landing zone and reported winds at 30 knots out of the west with good visibility. As conditions appeared favorable the helicopter landed and took aboard Bluhm without the need for immediate medical attention. Masterson told Ranger Miller that Parry had a little frostbite and beginning signs of pulmonary edema but would try to descend the next day. A tent and C.B. radio were left with Masterson and Parry before flying Bluhm to the Kahiltna base camp. Bluhm was evaluated by NPS paramedic Eric Martin at the Kahiltna base camp and transported to Talkeetna by Jay Hudson where she was met by an ambulance which took her to Valley Hospital in Palmer, Alaska. Bluhm was released from the hospital the next day after being treated for a strained back and skin abrasions. No other injuries were reported.

Analysis

The length of this fall and the resulting injury may have been avoided by using more snow anchors during the running belay. An even better alternative would have been to use a sliding middle belay which would have enabled Bluhm to be lowered with a belay, Parry to descend a fixed line, and Masterson to descend with the same security of a running belay. Finally, the decision to continue on to the higher and more committing part of the route may not have been reasonable considering that one member was suffering from symptoms of pulmonary edema and minor frostbite. (Source: Billy Shott, Mountaineering Ranger)

FALL ON SNOW, INADEQUATE PROTECTION, CLIMBING UNROPED, INEXPERIENCE

Alaska, Mount McKinley, West Buttress.

On May 19, "Seven Summits Croatia" party of two flew into the Kahiltna Glacier with plans to summit Mt. McKinley via the Messner Couloir. They spent one day at 8000 feet, the third day at 11,000 feet, and the fourth at 14,000 feet. At this point they were forced to rest due to the rapid ascent and minor altitude sickness.

On the sixth day they reached 16,400 feet and rested a day to acclimatize better. Dolovski suffered minor headaches at this point. On the eighth day the two climbed to the 17,200-foot camp on the West Buttress to acclimate, then returned to 14,200 the following day and prepared to begin climbing early the next morning. A small high pressure system moved in and the weather was clear and cold. The two climbers left at 0200 on the tenth day to attempt the summit via the Messner Couloir. They reached the summit around 1330. At this point Ungar reports that the weather began to deteriorate. Both climbers agreed to descend via Denali Pass on the West Buttress route. Ungar

reports that Dolovski was feeling strong so he took the lead. Both climbers agreed to descend unroped in order to facilitate a rapid descent and because they lacked the necessary equipment to protect the route.

At the Football Field the climbers found themselves in a whiteout and decided to follow a wanded route down the mountain. They followed the wands onto a steep slope between 40 and 60 degrees and decided that they must be off route, but could not determine where they were. At this time Ungar took the lead with Dolovski following only two meters behind. Ungar estimates that he reached a bench in the slope at 19,000 feet, and decided to reanalyze the descent. It was at this time that Ungar reports Dolovski's sudden fall past him and quickly out of sight. Ungar continued his descent, searching for his partner, hoping he had successfully self-arrested. Ungar eventually came to a fork on the Orient Express and decided to search the left couloir. When he found no sign, he climbed back up to the col and began descending the right gully towards the 16,200 foot camp.

Ungar was sighted descending the Orient Express at 2132. His elevation was estimated at 17,500 feet. The high altitude rescue helicopter was put on alert, awaiting a clearing in the weather at 2200 and launched at 2245 in order to assist with the rescue of the solo climber. A Colorado party made the initial contact with Ungar at 2255 and determined him to be okay but very tired. At 2333 Dr. Colin Grissom's team from the 14,200-foot camp reached Ungar with the initial two rescue teams at 15,000 feet, and determined that the rescue helicopter was unnecessary and that his team would escort Ungar back to 14,200.

Analysis

Both climbers had very little high altitude climbing experience prior to coming to the Alaska Range and had no prior experience on McKinley. Therefore, the route they chose was ambitious and maybe more technical than they expected. The small window of good weather they received the day prior to their summit day proved to be only temporary and they had no plan of how they would descend should the weather deteriorate, as it did, up high. They brought insufficient snow/ice anchors for their climb and descent and as a result did not use their rope at all. It is possible that had they been roped without anchors, both climbers would have died on the descent. But considering the long and difficult ascent, and high altitude, it would appear that the placement of anchors while descending would have been a safe way to go, especially upon discovering they were off route and on steep snow and ice. (Source: Billy Shott, Mountaineering Ranger)

FAULTY USE OF CRAMPON—FALL ON SNOW

Alaska, Mount McKinley

The Spanish expedition "Lleida McKinley '96" had eleven climbers in the group, including Juanjo Garra (32). They began their ascent of the West Buttress on May 19. On June 1 at 1300, while ascending above Denali Pass, Juanjo Garra lost a crampon causing him to fall. During the fall he sustained a comminuted fracture of the distal fibula. A Ranger patrol at 17,000 feet responded and lowered Garra to the 14,000 foot Ranger Camp where he was evacuated by a military Chinook helicopter on June 3.

Analysis

The terrain on the West Buttress of Denali above 11,000 feet is often steep, exposed, and underestimated. It is demanding on climbers' attention and equipment. Faulty use