

was then given the message, and he contacted the 17,200 foot camp. It was decided that Sakamaki was seriously injured and would need evacuation. Weather conditions at this time were mostly clear at 14,000 feet and above, but cloudy with whiteout conditions below which prevented any flights until the next day.

Meanwhile, the "AAI 2" expedition, led by Mimi Bourquin, arrived at the Kahiltna base camp on June 4. The expedition reached the 14,200 foot camp on June 14 and had established a camp at 17,200 feet by June 18. The group was feeling and moving well. On June 19 the expedition made a summit bid. At 1500, after reaching the 19,000 foot level, client Debbie Sherman complained of a severe headache and began displaying odd behavior. Bourquin immediately descended with Sherman, who was ambulatory, and arrived at the 17,200 foot camp around 1750. Bourquin and Sherman continued descending and arrived at the 14,200 foot Ranger camp at 2100. Sherman was evaluated by medical personnel and held in the medical tent for continued treatment and observation. Sherman's condition continued to worsen with increasing periods of unconsciousness, ataxia, and confusion. Plans were made to evacuate as soon as weather would permit.

On June 21 at 0935, the Park Service LAMA helicopter departed Talkeetna. At 1021 the LAMA helicopter picked up Ranger Miller at the 14,200 foot camp and departed to pick up Sakamaki. At 1039 the LAMA helicopter returned to the 14,200-foot camp with Ranger Miller and Sakamaki, picked up Sherman, and continued to the 7,000-foot base camp. At 1123, pilot Jay Hudson took aboard Sherman, Sakamaki, and Paramedic Ranger Eric Martin, and flew to Talkeetna where both patients were transferred to Alaska Regional Hospital via Flight for Life helicopter. Sakamaki was treated for broken ribs and released after three days. Sherman was held overnight for observation as her symptoms of high altitude pulmonary and cerebral edema subsided.

Analysis

The "AAI 2" expedition never gained more than 1000 feet per day, which is generally the safe rate of ascent in avoiding altitude illnesses. However, it is not uncommon for individuals to begin suffering from HAPE or HACE during or after a summit attempt regardless of how acclimatized they are. In addition, though small groups are statistically at more risk of obtaining an altitude illness from ascending too rapidly, large groups are also at an increased risk as members may be less likely to report early symptoms of altitude sickness.

The area in which Sakamaki fell has been the sight of numerous falls with injuries ranging from twisted ankles to head injuries. This section is not technically difficult but is steeper than surrounding terrain and often very icy. Sakamaki may have been able to avoid his accident simply by using more caution and slowing down, since climbing solo did not allow any type of practical belay. If Sakamaki had not been able to walk after his fall the consequences would have been far worse as there were few, if any, climbers descending behind him. (Source: Billy Shott, Mountaineering Ranger)

CRAMPON PROBLEM, INEXPERIENCE

Alaska, Mount McKinley, West Buttress

On June 8, the "Love Mountain and Beer" party of three Japanese climbers flew in to climb the West Buttress. They reached the summit on June 21 at 1620 in very good weather conditions. They were several hundred meters from reaching their high camp

(17,400 feet) when at 1830, Takeshi Nagao caught a crampon on his overboot causing him to twist and fall on his back. Nagao injured his left leg and ankle in the fall. He was last on the rope, sliding five meters on the 30 degree slope. Nagao felt a lot of pain when he put weight on his ankle. The two other team members assisted Nagao to camp, arriving at 1900. Once in camp they consulted Fantasy Ridge guide Vern Tejas. Tejas examined Nagao. He instructed his party to begin applying ice on the injury. At 2030, Tejas reported the incident by radio to Ranger Daryl Miller at the 14,200 foot Ranger Station. Tejas suspected Nagao had a broken leg due to its appearance and location of pain. He reported that Nagao would need assistance in getting down. They would check back in the morning.

Nagao felt he had only sprained his ankle and by resting several days he would be able to descend on his own power. On June 22 at 0800, Tejas examined Nagao and he found him to be in a lot of pain and non-ambulatory. Tejas convinced Nagao that he had a serious injury and that it would not get better by waiting. Nagao agreed with Tejas that he should be evacuated from the 17,200 foot camp.

At 0850, Tejas radioed the 14,200 foot camp, reporting that Nagao's condition was unchanged and felt that he either needed to be lowered or helicopter evacuated. With the good weather conditions, Ranger Miller felt a helicopter evacuation would be the safest means to evacuate Nagao. Nagao was picked up at 1309 and was transported to Talkeetna, and was then transported by ambulance to Valley Hospital in Palmer. Nagao had broken his left fibula.

Analysis

This is another example of a climber using equipment that is unfamiliar. The combination of crampons on overboots, altitude, and, most likely, fatigue increase the probability of this kind of mishap, though it is unusual that the resulting injury is as serious as this one was. (Source: Jed Williamson)

(Editor's Note: It seems that evacuation from this altitude is becoming more common.)

AVALANCHE, POOR POSITION—UNDER OBJECTIVE HAZARDS

Alaska, Mount Hunter, West Face

At 2400 on June 21, Chuck Drake (27) and Joshua Hane (28) departed the 7,200-foot Kahiltna Base Camp. They were attempting to climb a previously unclimbed route on the West Face of Mt. Hunter, with a return down the West Ridge. They were using an alpine style ascent, carrying only four days food and fuel, bivvy sacks and down parkas. Weather conditions were favorable for the first two days, but deteriorated significantly on the third day. The climbers were reported overdue by park rangers on June 27. Aerial search and ground observation efforts were initiated at 1018 on June 27. Weather conditions severely limited flying and search activities until the 30th. A total of 42.8 hours of fixed wing and helicopter overflights were conducted for the next week. Rangers flying in the LAMA helicopter reported sighting a body. Further observation of the area by ground and aerial spotters revealed the area too hazardous to attempt a recovery operation.

On July 7, Drake's body was swept approximately 1,000 feet to the bottom of the avalanche cone. Spotters watching the accident site concurred that a body recovery was possible if conducted in the early morning.