

and Wagner arrived at the icefall. In fact, since the accident the site has had numerous collapses of ice burying the site deeper with debris piles.

It was Wagner's first trip to Alaska and he commented that he depended on Shaw for judgment calls regarding hazards on glaciers including crevasses and icefalls. It will never be known or understood why Shaw decided to go into this precarious area that was even too dangerous to conduct a ground search safely.

HAPE

Alaska, Mount McKinley, West Buttress

At 1000 on May 27, Richard Gustafson (34) and William Ross (45)—clients from two separate expeditions—were experiencing symptoms of High Altitude Pulmonary Edema (HAPE). Gustafson was with Alaska Denali Guiding and Ross was with American Alpine Institute. Evacuated by helicopter from the 17,200-foot high camp on Mount McKinley's West Buttress route, the National Park Service Lama helicopter transported Gustafson and Ross to the 7,200-foot Basecamp where they were assessed and transferred to an Air National Guard Pavehawk helicopter, which flew them to Alaska Regional Hospital in Anchorage.

Analysis

There is little doubt that Ross and Gustafson needed to descend. Given this, there is only a question of how best to accomplish the task. The National Park Service often must rely on information from rescuers on scene when making evacuation decisions. This is especially true where guides are concerned, since their experience and skills often mean they play an integral role in rescue operations. Given the extenuating circumstances of cold and the possibility of having to leave only one guide with the rest of their clients that confronted Bob Hornbein (head guide for ADG) and Michael Silitch (head guide for AAI), they made a reasonable decision when they requested a helicopter evacuation.

AMS, CLIMBING ALONE (PARTY SEPARATED), INEXPERIENCE

Alaska, Mount McKinley, West Buttress

The International Climbing Buddies Expedition, consisting of Ralph Nicholson, James Foutch and Brett Johnson (35), reached the 17,200-foot camp on May 27. On May 28, Nicholson and Foutch went to the summit. Johnson felt he needed another day of rest and decided to go the next day. On May 29 at 0600, Johnson departed for the summit alone. Nicholson and Foutch waited at the 17,200-foot camp until about 1930, and then descended to the 14,200-foot camp with the group's tent and stove.

At 2215, Nicholson and Foutch contacted Ranger Gordy Kito, stationed at the 14,200-foot camp. Nicholson and Foutch asked Kito to contact the 17,200-foot camp and ask if anyone had seen Johnson.

At 2220, Kito was contacted by Michael Maude of Team Rumpus, who reported that an Icelandic group had encountered a solo climber above Denali Pass who was disorientated and unsure of the descent. Maude stated that he also had encountered a solo climber above the Pass and was concerned about the individual's ability to descend safely from the Pass to 17,200 feet. Kito

asked Maude to call back when he received more information regarding the individual, but believed that the climber was Johnson.

At 2245, two people were reported descending from Denali Pass. At 2300, Maude confirmed the second person was Johnson. At 2311, Kito was notified that Maude, Bill McCormick and John Race of Alpine Ascents International (AAI), and Steve Sivils would start up to assist.

At 2355, Maude witnessed the climber take a couple of short falls close to the bottom of the traverse near the rocks just as the team was approaching. At 0025, Kito was notified that Johnson had been “short-roped” back to the 17,200-foot camp. Dr. Gretchen Lenz of the Huskies-2 Expedition assessed Johnson, revealing slight ataxia due to exhaustion. He was treated with warm fluids and rest. He slept in a tent with another group that was camped at the 17,200-foot camp. On May 30 at 1250, Kito, Taysom, and Smith departed from the 14,200-foot camp to assist Johnson down from the point at which they came into contact with him. Johnson roped up with the Team Rumpus Expedition and descended the West Buttress to the base of Washburn’s Thumb (16,800 feet), where he was met by Kito and Taysom, and short-roped down to the 14,200-foot camp.

On May 30 at 0930, Ranger Joe Reichert received a radio transmission from John Race at the 17,200-foot camp. Race stated that Sam Palsmeier (29) of the West Butt Bros. Expedition was suffering from AMS and possibly HAPE. Palsmeier had a pulse of 120, an oxygen saturation of 52 percent, was pale, and had audible rales.

At 1142, Bill McCormick (AAI) and John Race (AAI) reported that Palsmeier was walking poorly. He was given 8 mg of Dexamethasone at that time. At 1150, Palsmeier (while on two liters-per-minute of oxygen) and his partner started down from the 17,200-foot camp with assistance from Race, McCormick, and Colby Jackson of the At a Medium Pace Expedition. Upon arrival at 16,200 feet, Taysom assessed Palsmeier and determined that he, along with his partner, were fit enough to descend the fixed ropes unattended. Kito’s observations of Palsmeier just below 16,200 feet reconfirmed this assessment. Volunteer Kevin Smith, who was on the fixed lines at approximately 15,900 feet, decided to follow Palsmeier and his partner down the remainder of the fixed lines in the event that they needed any further assistance. Smith continued to 14,200 feet with the two climbers.

Analysis

Nicholson and Foutch had previously attempted the West Buttress in 1999 as clients and made it to 17,200 feet. The deterioration of the team may have stemmed from the fact that this group was made up of two distinct parties. Nicholson and Foutch had originally intended on climbing with a third member who canceled in April. Johnson was added around this time. Johnson had taken a mountaineering course in the spring, but had not been on McKinley. A party of three is definitely safer than a party of two when it comes to glacier travel. The addition of another member for the sake of increased numbers does not take into account the group dynamics and possible conflicts that might arise from a disparity in ability, goals, and commitment to the “team.” In the

past, climbing teams seemed to be organized from an association of friends or mutual acquaintances. With the introduction of the Internet and increased communication (e.g. chat rooms, e-mail, and other common interest web-sites) people are finding partners with the same goal, but without the knowledge of skills and personal interaction that comes with meeting people face to face and going climbing. A member of a team should have some sense of responsibility for the other member(s), otherwise the team members are little more than weight on the other end of the rope.

In the second incident, in sharp contrast to the first, Palsmeier and his partner quickly recognized that he was not acclimatizing. With the help of his partner and a few other climbers, Palsmeier was able to descend before his condition worsened. Early recognition and a quick descent is the best treatment for altitude-related illness.

RESPIRATORY DISTRESS

Alaska, Mount McKinley, West Buttress

On May 26, the Casade-Dacks Expedition of Ron Fridell (50), Sid Perkins, and Don Andrews (43) flew to the Kahiltna Glacier to begin their climb of the West Buttress of Mount McKinley. Over the next five days the group proceeded to the 11,000-foot camp. On June 1, the team made a carry to 13,500 feet, which is a popular strategy for the difficult move from 11,000 feet to 14,200 feet, and returned to the lower camp. On June 2, the group was climbing past Windy Corner en route to the 14,200-foot camp when Andrews began having trouble breathing. According to Fridell, Andrews slowed down noticeably, began resting more often and developed a productive cough. Andrews' respiratory distress became so alarming that the group stopped and Fridell continued to the 14,200-foot camp alone and without his pack in order to summon help. Fridell arrived at the NPS Ranger Camp at 2130 and reported the incident.

By 2154, Volunteer Rangers Denny Gignoux and Jay Mathers were on scene assessing Andrews and administering oxygen. Within five minutes Joe Conroy and Marty Kimble, Air National Guard Pararescuemen (PJ's), were also on scene working with Andrews, while Gignoux and Mathers prepared an anchor to begin lowering the patient for possible evacuation.

By 2215, the PJs had conferred with Dr. Peter Hackett about Andrews' condition and it was decided that he should be evacuated, so the helicopter was requested from Talkeetna. The decision was based on the patient's history of cauterized esophageal varicies that could rupture and cause serious internal bleeding if his respiratory distress continued or became more severe. Andrews was not responding as well as was expected to treatment with his personal inhaler and supplemental oxygen. He continued to be pale and cough up pink sputum.

At 2300, the NPS Lama rescue helicopter departed Talkeetna en route directly to Andrews. At this same time Chris Eng and Dan Howley (emergency hired climbers), departed camp with additional cylinders of oxygen. Upon their arrival at 2317, Eng and Howley replaced the existing oxygen and descended to 13,500 feet and prepared a landing zone for the helicopter. The Lama landed, the patient was put on board at 2339, and was on the ground at Basecamp at 2349.