

ANKLE INJURY AND HAPE

Alaska, Mount McKinley, West Buttress

This summary is comprised of two separate incidents that ended up as one continuous effort using many shared resources and with multiple overlapping responsibilities.

On May 26 Lee Jung Park (age unknown) of the “Duksung Women’s University Alpine Team Expedition” injured her ankle when her leg “gave out” while descending the West Buttress route on Mt. McKinley around 16,500 feet, just below “Washburn’s Thumb.” Park was lowered by her teammates with assistance from another Korean team that was descending from the 17,200-foot camp at the same time. On May 28, Park was evacuated from 14,200-foot camp to the 7,200-foot base camp by the National Park Service (NPS) contract Lama helicopter.

On May 27, Todd Passey (age unknown), a guide for Alpine Ascents International, was diagnosed with High Altitude Pulmonary Edema. Passey was put on oxygen, given Nifedipine and remained under observation overnight. On May 28, Passey, (along with Park) was evacuated by the NPS contract Lama helicopter to the 7,200-foot camp where he was transferred to a fixed-wing aircraft and transported to Talkeetna.

Analysis

The “Duksung Women’s University Alpine Team Expedition,” with help from another party, were able to execute a self-rescue and lowering of the patient in an efficient manner to within 100-200 meters of the 14,200-foot camp without the help of NPS personnel. Though the NPS took over care of the patient very close to camp, this self-initiated rescue effort, in poor weather conditions, is the type of behavior that is necessary in this environment to achieve a favorable outcome for the injured party. Had this team waited for the Park Service to respond, it would have taken a much longer time to get resources into place and may have resulted in cold related injuries much worse than those that were sustained during the lowering.

As for the HAPE case, everyone has the potential to be afflicted—even guides. Early recognition and descent are the keys to survival. Oxygen therapy will buy the patient time, but the best and most effective treatment is always to descend to a lower elevation. The patient’s team was initially planning on descending on the morning of the 28th, but with the Lama coming in to evacuate Park, it was determined that fewer people would be put at risk if Passey were evacuated. The decision to evacuate an injured climber via helicopter always requires a thorough risk assessment and is a decision that the Park Service Rangers never take lightly. (Source: Ranger Gordy Kito)

STRAINED BACK

Alaska, Mount McKinley, West Buttress

On the afternoon of June 2, an RMI guided group was ascending below the fixed lines around 15,000 feet when assistant guide Ryan Sorsdahl (24)

twisted awkwardly and felt something “pop” in his lower back. Keil Hillman, lead guide, assessed him and concluded that he could not continue up. He contacted the 14,200-foot Ranger Camp and informed Ranger Evans of this via CB radio. As Sorsdahl could move under his own power without a load on his back, it was decided to send up VIP Dave Hanning to assist Sorsdahl down. As the location was considered to be in a safe area, Hanning ascended by himself, then carried Sorsdahl’s backpack down while escorting him.

At the Ranger Camp Sorsdahl was examined by Medic Michael Dong, who diagnosed the damage to the soft tissue of the sacroiliac area involving the sciatic nerve. As a result, it was decided that Sorsdahl should ideally not walk down as further damage might occur. However, there was no urgency for evacuation. On June 4th the NPS contracted Lama helicopter was performing another rescue and took Sorsdahl from the Ranger Camp down to Base Camp where he flew out by fixed wing prior to medical examination.

Analysis

This was an unfortunate accident that, luckily for the group, occurred at a location where assistance was readily available. There is no doubt that if this had been in a more remote location the group would have had to give up on their climb and bring Sorsdahl down themselves. As it was we were able to easily give assistance and to include the med-evac in conjunction with another flight into the mountain. Medically this was also the best for Sorsdahl. (Source: Ranger John Evans)

FALL ON SNOW-INADEQUATE PROTECTION, HASTE

Alaska, Mount McKinley, West Buttress

This incident happened in May while we were descending the fixed lines of the West Buttress. We happened to be the only roped team (as well as our other two climbing partners ahead of us on another roped team) allowing for the team ahead of us to get off the fixed line before we got on it, but many people were right on our tails on the way down. My partner and I were spaced out exactly one fixed rope length apart, so that when I reached the anchor to switch over to the next fixed line down, my partner would be getting onto the fixed line I was on previously. Just as he did this and just switched over from his fixed line (second to the last), a climber only five feet behind him slipped and fell. The climber hit the anchor but had a runner over five feet long, so he fell five feet below the anchor, jabbing my partner in the leg with his crampon. My partner went into ice ax arrest, but on the steep blue ice with a full pack, he couldn’t hold it for long and so he fell the full fixed line length before hitting the anchor below (just a few feet above me). As the anchor caught him, he swung around and his pack hit me in the shoulder and knocked me off. I didn’t fall nearly as far, as my crampon caught in the remaining line not anchored, as it was the last line getting off the fixed lines and not secured with a picket. However, I was upside down with my back laying against the snow and my ax had pinned me in such a