

**POOR EXPEDITION BEHAVIOR—PARTY SEPARATED (ABANDONED INJURED AND ILL TEAMMATES), INADEQUATE MAINTENANCE OF TENTS DURING STORM, FAILURE TO FOLLOW DIRECTIONS****Alaska, Denali National Park, Mount McKinley, West Buttress**

On June 13, Ranger Meg Perdue received a radio call from VIP (Volunteer in Parks) Dave Hughes regarding a climber he had just contacted who had injured his ankle and been left alone by his party. Hughes and another VIP, Darren Castell, were returning to the 17,200-foot high camp with oxygen bottles they had retrieved from a cache at 16,200-feet when they met with Tomasz Pyjor of the seven man “Annapurna Klub” expedition below Washburn’s Thumb around 16,600 feet. Pyjor had injured his ankle and was awaiting assistance to continue to high camp. Three of his team had moved up the previous day and the remaining three, with whom he had been traveling, had continued on to high camp in hopes of finding the others to assist Pyjor. Perdue then contacted two members of the group, the expedition leader, Robert Rozmus, and Marcin Kuras at high camp. Perdue questioned them about the circumstances around leaving Pyjor, and in the course of discussions, realized that they had left a second member, Lech Slawski, who was sick and moving slowly, alone above Washburn’s Thumb near 16,900 feet.

Rozmus stated that they had come ahead to find the other three members of the group and wanted to bring Pyjor and Slawski to high camp despite the fact that one was injured and the other sick. The group of three, who had ascended to high camp the previous day, were nowhere in high camp. It was later determined they were still out on a summit bid at that time. Perdue informed Rozmus that it was inappropriate and unsafe to leave teammates alone, particularly when sick and injured, and that their intention to find assistance to help them continue up to high camp was absolutely ill-advised. Perdue strongly recommended that Rozmus and Kuras descend to assist their teammates and continue descending back to the 14,200-foot camp, as it was clear that individually and as a team they were ill-prepared to deal appropriately with conditions. Rozmus refused, stating that there was “no problem” and they would take care of the situation. Perdue then warned Rozmus that if their group required further assistance caused by incompetence on their part, they would be cited for Creating a Hazardous Condition (36 CFR 2.34 (a)(4) Disorderly Conduct). Rozmus acknowledged that he understood.

On the following day Perdue recontacted the group as the three members who had summited the previous day, Andrzej Michalczewski, Roman Dzida, Michal Wyganowski, and the injured member, Tomasz Pyjor, were preparing to descend. Apparently, this part of the group, rather than wait for the rest of their team at 14,200 feet, descended all the way to basecamp and flew out around June 15. The three remaining members, Rozmus, Kuras,

and the sick member Slawski, planned to stay and still attempt a summit bid. Perdue again reiterated the need for the group to stay together and be responsible for one another, take conditions seriously, and act appropriately. All three nodded agreement to this.

In the ensuing days a storm enveloped high camp resulting in people's inability to do anything more than get out and shovel out their tents and reinforce snow walls. At the height of the storm, with winds in excess of 80 mph, several groups had their tents destroyed and either built snow caves, moved in with other groups or asked for assistance (tent space) from the NPS. It should also be noted that many other groups and tents survived the storm. Those groups were the ones with the best snow walls whose members actively worked to maintain them.

On the evening of June 17 at 2015 as the storm was abating, Rozmus came to the NPS tent and requested a tent, stating that the group's two tents, both North Face VE25s, had been destroyed. Incidentally, this was the same type of tent used by the NPS which survived the very same storm. Perdue went to retrieve a tent from the rescue cache for the group. Upon reaching the cache she found the door ajar and many items, including all of the ropes used for technical rescues, strewn about. The bags in which the ropes were contained were packed full of wind-transported snow and were frozen and thus useless in their present condition. It was also impossible to know if any items had been lost due to the winds. Perdue found Kuras and Slawski inside the cache container itself. When asked why they did not take one of the tents from the cache, which were in plain view, or dig a snow cave rather than jeopardize the cache and its contents, Rozmus offered no other explanation than it was "too difficult." The group was incapable of setting the tent up on their own so Perdue and VIP Michael Dong had to assist them. Further, the team would not make the necessary efforts to build walls around the tent to protect it from the still-strong winds. As a result, the NPS tent was damaged overnight.

On the morning of June 18 the winds abated enough that it was possible to consider descending. Perdue went to each party at high camp to give weather information and find out their intentions. All the groups at high camp except for one were already in the process of packing up and planning to descend. At 1030, Perdue went to the tent given to the Annapurna members to use. It was clear to Perdue from her interaction with them and their utter lack of self-motivation and inability to grasp the gravity of their situation that they must be made to move down while they still had a chance of doing so under their own power. Perdue informed them they must go down. After they refused by making no move to pack up, Perdue began to take down the tent. They finally and extremely begrudgingly began to move and Perdue was forced to stay and assist and watch over the entire process. The group finally began their descent around 1300.

Perdue and Dong waited for all parties to depart high camp and did some clean up and reorganization of the cache prior to beginning their descent at 1830. Perdue and Dong assisted in a lowering from the base of the head wall during their descent and still managed to make it to the 14,200-foot camp within an hour of the Annapurna expedition. Again, at 14,200 feet, the Annapurna group requested a tent and required assistance from NPS staff to set it up. During this time the patient who had been lowered to 14,200 feet was evacuated via Lama helicopter, at which point Slawskie stated that he wanted a helicopter evacuation and claimed to have insurance that could cover it. He was informed that evacuation decisions were strictly based on need, not personal desires.

The group left to descend to basecamp the following day. It was only discovered after their departure that they had left a full gallon of fuel in the Ranger camp. They arrived at basecamp sometime that night and were discovered the following morning by the basecamp ranger, Karen Hilton, to be sleeping in the fuel tent.

### **Analysis**

From start to finish, this expedition showed a total disregard for their own safety and others. Their unwillingness to put aside their personal goals in light of their clear inability to deal appropriately under adverse conditions indicates that the only way to impress upon them the seriousness of their negligence was to issue them citations for Disorderly Conduct and Tampering. Hopefully, this will send a clear message that such behavior by anyone will not be tolerated.

## **FALLING ROCK**

### **Alaska, Denali National Park, Mount McKinley, West Buttress**

The Alaska Mountaineering School (AMS)-8 expedition led by Rob Gowler flew to basecamp on the southeast fork of the Kahiltna Glacier on June 10. The group progressed steadily up the West Buttress route. Even with several long delays due to weather, the entire team reached the summit on June 26. On the 27th they departed high camp planning to descend to basecamp. They spent a six hours at the 14,200-foot camp and continued their descent at 2110 in three roped teams of four with a guide at the rear of each team.

At 2140, as the first roped team was rounding the toe of Windy Corner, they heard a loud crack and an enormous quantity of rocks came cascading down, striking the first three climbers on the first rope team. Guide Steve Grillo was the fourth person on that roped team and felt a strong tug on the rope as he was on the ground in self-arrest position. Once the rocks stopped falling the first three people on the rope, Mark Morford, Gerb Islei, and Clint West were all seriously injured. Gowler witnessed the event and immediately started calling for help on his cell phone. His initial attempts to call the 14,200-foot and 7,200-foot ranger camps were not answered, so he called the basecamp manager who notified ranger John Evans and then