

felt required immediate, advanced medical intervention. In addition, rapidly deteriorating weather conditions indicated that the window of opportunity for air evacuation was soon to close. The rangers reiterated to the patient their recommendations and concerns, emphasizing the importance of early treatment for potential cardiac emergencies, combined with the threat of incoming weather that could possibly keep the patient on the glacier for several days. The patient consented to evacuation by helicopter and at 1002 was evacuated from the site by a LifeMed B-3 air ambulance helicopter. The patient was transported to Mat-Su Regional Medical Center where he was admitted to the facility's Intensive Care Unit for cardiac evaluation and treatment. (Source: Mark Westman, Mountaineering Ranger)

CARDIAC ARREST

Alaska, Mount McKinley, West Buttress

On June 10, Brian Young (52) went into sudden cardiac arrest in his tent at high camp after having climbed to the summit of Denali earlier that day. The team that he was climbing with reported that during their summit climb, he suffered from altitude illness and was affected to the point of vomiting several times, stumbling, and losing his footing while descending to high camp. Upon his arrival at high camp, his climbing companions suggested that he check in with NPS rangers at high camp, but Young stated that he felt fine and would prefer to take a nap. He entered the tent, which was occupied by two other climbers, and they reported him falling asleep quickly and immediately exhibiting Cheyne-Stokes breathing. Shortly thereafter, they did not hear any breathing sounds coming from his sleeping bag. They opened his bag to find him unresponsive and not breathing. His tent mates notified NPS rangers who initiated CPR, which was terminated after 30 minutes due to no signs of a pulse. After conferring with the NPS medical director, Brian Young was pronounced dead at 1100. Poor weather delayed recovery of his body until June 16.

Analysis

Although it's difficult to predict who might develop an emergency cardiac condition while climbing at high altitude, it stands to reason that individuals with a history of cardiac issues can be considered at higher risk.

According to interviews with family members, Brian Young had no history of cardiac issues; however, he was reported to have lost 30 pounds in the four to six weeks leading up to the start of his climb. Common side effects of rapid weight loss are changes in blood sugar level, changes in blood pressure, electrolyte imbalance, and a higher risk of heart arrhythmias. Brian Young was described by all those who climbed with him on Mount McKinley as strong and healthy, with the exception of those who climbed with him above 17,200 feet. On his summit climb, Young was reported as having bouts of ataxia and vomited several times. Despite suggestions from his summit partners, Young did not feel like he had any reason to seek medical assistance once he was back at the 17,200-foot camp.

Although medical resources are very limited at the high camp, timely medical intervention might have been helpful in averting the final outcome. (Source: Coley Gentzel, Lead Mountaineering Ranger)
(Editor's Note: Episodes of illness, while not technically climbing accidents, are counted and some are reported each year. Some illnesses actually result in such accidents as falls on rock, snow, or ice. Some result in significant rescue efforts that may put park personnel and others at risk. Altitude-related illnesses are often due to rapid ascent and/or age and not being in good physical condition. In the case of guided clients, some have pre-existing conditions that they have not reported, which may include both illnesses injuries that flare up as a result of exercise and/or altitude.)

FALL ON SNOW, CLIMBING ALONE IN SEVERE WEATHER CONDITIONS Alaska, Mount McKinley, West Buttress

On the evening of June 28, a guided group at high camp radioed NPS rangers at the 14,200-foot camp to report that a solo climber had been on the upper mountain for more than 24 hours and had not yet returned to his tent at high camp. NPS rangers notified Talkeetna personnel of the potential need for a search and rescue operation, which, due to weather and time of day, could not commence until the morning. The climber, Juergon Kanzia (41), from Austria, was last seen ascending from high camp to Denali Pass. There were no other climbing parties on the upper mountain at this time.

The NPS launched a full-scale search via ground and air that was in its second full day of operation when rangers at the 14,200-foot camp spotted what appeared to be a body below a long couloir below the summit plateau known as the Orient Express. The NPS contract helicopter with a ranger onboard flew to the site and confirmed that it did appear to be a body and the climbers clothing matched the description of the missing climber. Rangers and volunteers climbed to the site and recovered the body and assorted equipment and confirmed the identity of the missing climber. Events leading up to Kanzia's fall and death are not known. He had left his backpack and skis at a point close to the entrance to the Orient Express couloir and was apparently trying to descend on foot.

Analysis

The most significant contributing factor to this accident is likely the decision by Kanzia to ascend into severe weather and in the face of an unfavorable forecast. Other teams at high camp reported losing sight of the climber as he ascended towards Denali Pass due to the formation of a lenticular cloud over the upper mountain. Earlier conversations indicated that, although he was a very experienced climber and guide in other parts of the world, he seemed to be unfamiliar with big mountain weather and conditions factors. (Source: Coley Gentzel, Lead Mountaineering Ranger)