

UNITED STATES

FROSTBITE, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT

Alaska, Mt. McKinley

On March 17, 1980, Ron Gregg and Ernie Shiwanov (26) left Park Headquarters to ski to Wonder Lake and the Muldrow Glacier. They planned to climb Pioneer Ridge and to use Taylor Spur for their approach to the ridge. By April 4, they had reached the 10,500-foot level of the Muldrow Glacier, at the base of the Taylor Spur. On April 6, they began their ascent of Taylor Spur which involved steep, difficult ice climbing. That day they ascended three pitches, reaching the ridge crest of the spur at 12,500 feet at 11 p.m. where a small ledge was chopped in the ice and an open bivouac was made. The temperature that night was -15° to -20° F with some wind.

The next day, April 7, Shiwanov noticed he had frozen both large toes. The two moved their camp to a better place over the ridge crest and set up a tent at this location. On April 8 and 9 they remained at this site, waiting to see the seriousness of the frostbite. Once it was determined that the frostbite was more serious than anticipated, the decision to descend was made. On April 10, after four nights at 12,500 feet, a descent was made to the camp site at 10,500 feet on the Muldrow Glacier. On the evening of the 10th, they met the three-member Marmot Mt. McKinley Expedition, led by Bill Lokey, who also planned to climb the Pioneer Ridge.

Shiwanov wished to be rescued and, as the Marmot Expedition carried a Radio Anchorage unit, a call was planned for the next morning. On April 11 at 8:45 a.m., John Scott placed a call to Radio Fairbanks stating that Shiwanov had frostbitten toes and needed evacuation. Their location at 10,500 feet and one-quarter-mile east of Taylor Spur was given. In a later radio call Scott described Shiwanov's frostbite as both big toes frozen and blistered and one blister oozing.

At 12 noon, a Jet Ranger helicopter arrived from Fairbanks and at 12:10 p.m. departed for the mountain with ranger Dave Buchanan on board. The pick-up of Shiwanov was made at 1 p.m. at the 10,500-foot level on the Muldrow Glacier. At 1:35 p.m. the helicopter arrived at the McKinley Park airstrip and Ranger Roger Robinson interviewed Shiwanov for this report. At 2:15 p.m. the helicopter departed with Shiwanov for Fairbanks Memorial Hospital. Gregg remained at 10,500 feet throughout a storm of several days duration and then descended the Muldrow Glacier following wands left by the Marmot Expedition. On April 24, Gregg returned to Park Headquarters. (Source: Roger Robinson, Park Ranger, Denali National Park)

Analysis

It appears upon examination of Shiwanov's foot protection that his supergaitors were inadequate, especially for an open bivouac on Mt. McKinley in March. Shiwanov also stated that he had had previous problems with his toes on other climbs. (Source: Roger Robinson, Park Ranger, Denali National Park)