

Air Taxi arrived on a routine flight at 1450 and was informed of the situation. Geeting and Saiget flew over the col and observed the words “no food/fuel” and “broken leg” stamped out in the snow next to a tent on the Tokositna Glacier. At 1515, Geeting contacted Ranger Roger Robinson at the Talkeetna Ranger Station, who in turn contacted Park Headquarters. Jim Porter of Evergreen Helicopters was contacted for the pickup in an Alouette III. Geeting flew back to the Mountain House and gathered food and fuel for an airdrop, which he made at 1640. At 1643 the helicopter with Porter and Ranger Robinson departed Talkeetna. At 1725 the two climbers were picked up and flown to Providence Hospital in Anchorage. (Source: Roger Robinson, Mountaineering Ranger, Denali National Park)

Analysis

Tuckey and Kimbrough felt the climb was over on the day of the fall, which probably contributed to the accident.

The two had left word with their pilot and the Park Service about their route and the date to be picked up. This was actually several weeks from the time of the accident. The fact that they left no specific dates could have led to a different conclusion had they been more seriously hurt. (Source: Roger Robinson, Mountaineering Ranger, Denali National Park)

SLIP ON SNOW, ICE AXES IN PACKS, FATIGUE

Alaska, Mount McKinley

The four members of the Utah Exploration Society flew into the Southeast Fork of the Kahiltna Glacier on May 4, 1983, to climb the Wickersham Wall on Mount McKinley. The expedition climbed rapidly and reached their high camp at 5000 meters on the Northwest Buttress on May 17. On May 19 at 0700, after a rest day, the four members, Rick Wyatt, Chris Noble, Kelly McKean and Evelyn Lees (25) headed for the north summit. At 1130, the group stopped at the 5580-meter level, where there were 30-knot winds and -25°C temperature. Lees and Wyatt decided to turn back while Noble and McKean kept going on toward the summit. As Lees and Wyatt started back to camp, they put their ice axes on their packs due to the very flat terrain in the 5400-meter basin. The terrain from here down to the 5000-meter camp was steeper (30–35 degrees), and the snow much harder. They did not take their ice axes off their packs before traveling on the slope and were not roped. On the descent Lees slipped and was unable to self-arrest since she did not have an ice ax. She fell 200 meters before stopping on the flat runout close to camp. In the fall, Lees broke her right ulna and possibly cracked her right pelvis. Wyatt was able to help Lees back to camp, arriving about 1800. Later that day Noble and McKean returned from the summit.

The group rested a day, and then, on May 21, moved toward the West Buttress route. Lees traveled without a pack and had to be lowered down the steep sections on her left side. They climbed to the 4800-meter camp on the West Buttress that night.

On May 22 Lees was lowered to the High Latitude Medical Research group at 4300 meters where Dr. Peter Hackett examined her. Hackett felt she had a possible stable fracture of the hip. The Utah Exploration Society team were willing to

continue to base camp with Lees until Hackett recommended flying out on a fixed-wing aircraft from the 4300-meter camp. A plane was coming in already to pick up another climber who was suffering from frostbite. Both were flown to Talkeetna around 2330 on May 22, and from there to Providence Hospital in Anchorage. (Source: Scott Gill, Mountaineering Ranger, Denali National Park)

Analysis

Lees' fall could probably have been stopped if she had had an ice ax in her hand. Possibly the altitude and fatigue made it an inconvenience to take the ice axes from their packs. Numerous falls due to altitude and exhaustion have occurred while climbers descend from high altitudes on Mount McKinley. (Source: Scott Gill, Mountaineering Ranger, Denali National Park)

FROSTBITE

Alaska, Mount McKinley

Claudia Berryman was a member of the guided eight-member Fantasy Ridge expedition to the West Rib of Mount McKinley. The expedition was guided by Michael Covington, who is the director.

The expedition flew into the Southeast Fork of the Kahiltna Glacier on May 1, 1983. They moved rapidly up to the West Rib, reaching their high camp at 4920 meters on May 14. Here they waited for the ideal day to go to the summit.

On May 19, the wind started to increase, and Covington told the clients to start bracing the tents. At 0200 on May 20, Berryman and her two tentmates put on their clothes and had to brace the tent constantly. Berryman put on one pair of socks and her Koflach boots (thinsulate liners) but did not put on her overboots. The group held the tent up in winds estimated at 140 knots. After some time, Berryman's feet got very cold and needed to be warmed by a tentmate, but there was no sign of frostbite. Around 1200, the tent collapsed and Berryman moved into Covington's tent where her feet were once again rewarmed. There was still no sign of frostbite.

At 1800 the winds decreased and everyone started packing up to descend to 4300 meters on the West Buttress. By 1900, the group started down in strong winds.

Berryman complained of cold feet before descending, but they were feeling better as she went down. The expedition reached 4300 meters that evening, and the following morning Berryman went over to the High Latitude Medical Research Group.

Dr. Peter Hackett looked at Berryman's feet and diagnosed frostbite. He discussed the injury with Dr. Mills at Providence Hospital in Anchorage and then thawed both feet with little discomfort. Both doctors felt the frostbite was bad enough to warrant an air evacuation. Covington was convinced by Hackett to have Berryman flown out, so he contacted Lowell Thomas of Talkeetna Air Taxi. Thomas was scheduled to make the pickup in his Helio-Courier, but weather conditions prevented him from landing on May 21 or 22.

On May 22, pilot Jim Porter from Evergreen Helicopters and Mountaineering Ranger Jon Waterman were flying in an Alouette III to rescue Niklaus Lotscher, who was in critical condition at 5200 meters on the West Buttress. At 2045 Porter