

up “Heartbreak Hill.” By the time the six had reached base, Raymond and his partner were verging on delirium. Our group felt that this was an emergency situation and that Jim Raymond should be flown out. The next two climbers in line gracefully stepped aside and Jim Raymond and his companion were flown out. We have no further authoritative information, but understand that Jim Raymond lost parts of two fingers and two complete toes. (Source: Mountain Rescue Bulletin, October 1985, Washington)

(Editor’s Note: This climber was prepared to face the consequence of the conditions which can often be expected on Denali.)

HAPE, RAPID ASCENT, WEATHER

Alaska, Mount McKinley

The weather on Mt. McKinley during the months of April and May was consistently cold and stormy, which prevented climbing expeditions to move high on the West Buttress route. From May 21-25 there was a five day window of excellent weather where many groups moved high as rapidly as possible, causing four individuals to get HAPE and/or CE which required medical attention. All four of the individuals were seen and/or treated by the Medical Research Group and are listed separately.

Glen Lovelace (26) and his wife Sue took six days to climb from 2100 meters basecamp on the West Buttress route of Mt. McKinley to 5250 meters. The next morning Glen was suffering from a severe headache, muddled thinking and lack of appetite. That morning the pair descended, with Glen experiencing hallucinations while descending to the 4350 meter camp. Upon examination by the physicians, Lovelace was diagnosed as having HAPE and treated with O₂ and Diamox before descending under his own power to basecamp.

Edmond Schuster (49) was a member of a 13-man German expedition which took four days to get to 4350 meters from the 2130 meter basecamp on the West Buttress. Once at 4350 meters, Schuster had a headache and difficulty breathing. He went to the Medical Research camp and was diagnosed as having HAPE. Schuster was given some O₂ and Diamox which made it possible for him to wait while his party continued on to the summit.

Dr. Jacques Vallet (37) was a member of a four-man French expedition which took four days to get from basecamp to 4350 meters. At 4350 meters Vallet was examined by the Medical Research Group and found to have early signs of HAPE. It was recommended that he not ascend until the fluid in his lungs had cleared. But Vallet continued on to 5250 meters, where he had a headache and difficulty breathing. Vallet had to descend the following day with the help of his expedition members. The team had to retreat to basecamp the following day.

Hidenori Matsumoto was a member of a five-man Japanese expedition which took four days to get from basecamp to 4350 meters on the West Buttress. After the first night at 4350 meters, Matsumoto had a severe headache and could hardly move under his own power in the morning. He was diagnosed as having HAPE and CE by the Medical Research Group and give O₂ for the day and slept with O₂ that night before being taken down to basecamp the following morning by another climbing expedition. (Source: Scott Gill, Mountaineering Ranger, Denali National Park)

Analysis

A stretch of good weather caused many expeditions to move to higher elevations much too fast. The numbers of climbers getting Acute Mountain Sickness seemed to occur during

this stretch of weather. Ascent rates of 2100 meters in four or five days may leave some individuals feeling fine, but can cause serious illness to others. A slower ascent rate tailored to the individual on the expedition who is having the most difficulty can prevent the onset of serious altitude problems. The general rule of ascending only 300-400 meters per day once above 3000 meters is a good one. (Source: Scott Gill, Mountaineering Ranger, Denali National Park)

SLIP ON SNOW/ICE, CLIMBING UNROPED, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT, FAILURE TO FOLLOW DIRECTIONS

Alaska, Mount McKinley

On May 19, 1985, the 13-member German guided party, led by a guide named Zehleitner, began their ascent of the West Buttress of Mt. McKinley. Following a fast ascent, six days to 5250 meters, the party left for the summit from their 5250 meter high camp at 0400 on May 26. The party's entire ascent was made unroped and using ski poles rather than ice axes. Nine members summited around 1200 and then began their descent, reaching Denali Pass at 1445. Just down from the pass, party member Bernard Pfeffer (38) slipped on a small ice bulge. The fall was first seen by assistant guide Martin Anwander when Pfeffer was about ten meters downhill. Anwander yelled at Pfeffer, but he did not appear to respond as he cartwheeled down the slope approximately 200 meters. Pfeffer was traveling unroped with his ice ax on his pack. Anwander quickly descended and found Pfeffer's body contorted (possibly from descended multiple fractures) and with no sign of life.

Another member of the party, Karl Wimmer (36), descended and reported the incident to Ranger Roger Robinson, who relayed through Hackett that the German party was to bring the body down to their high camp and continue to lower it down to 4350 meters.

Ranger Scott Gill arranged for an 0730 callback time the next morning. On May 27 Zehleitner informed Gill that Anwander and he would begin lowering the body down the rescue gully at 0830. Ranger Gill, VIP Dan White and Brandt Hannah of the Medical Camp began ascending to meet Zehleitner. Gill's party reached the descending party at 5050 meters. They both descended with the body, arriving at 1130. Lowell Thomas, Jr. of Talkeetna Air Taxi was contracted to make the body pickup with his Helio Courier. He landed at the camp at 1100. and was back in the air with the body at 1200 and continued to Talkeetna. (Source: Roger Robinson, Mountaineering Ranger, Denali National Park)

Analysis

This was guide Zehleitner's fourth trip on Mt. McKinley. His guiding practice of ascending very rapidly (seven days to the summit) and not using ropes or ice axes is a style that has been contributing to an ever increasing number of accidents. In addition, this was an illegally guided expedition. One wonders about the level of experience of the guided individuals. And given the briefing which this party—as well as others checking into the Talkeetna Ranger Station—received, where the details of ascending slowly and the use of rope, crampons, and ice axes are covered thoroughly, one also wonders why there is such disregard for following the recommendations. (Source: J. Williamson)

CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING, FATIGUE

Alaska, Mount McKinley

On May 28, 1985, Raymond Weinrich (30) and Charles Wolf (34) had climbed up to 5250