

FROSTBITE, EXPOSURE, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT, EXHAUSTION, WEATHER

Alaska, Mount McKinley

On June 5, 1985, while “comfortably camped” in an igloo at 5300 meters in some nasty, but not awful, weather, we were awakened by two Dutch climbers who had come over the summit ridge from the Cassin Route. They had been out two days, having left with six days of food, and both were frostbitten and exhausted. We provided them with food and hot water, helped them unpack, and later pack, and descend. They could have managed this by themselves, but I have no doubt that they would have had worse frostbite if they had not run across us, as the weather stayed cold and stormy. (Source: Dr. James Edwards, Portland, OR)

Analysis

Even though they had been in the area for six weeks, they seemed to have underestimated the severity of the conditions. Their tent and handwear were inadequate. A couple from Colorado were on the route at the same time, and were able to camp higher up for a longer period of time—emerging unscathed. (Source: Dr. James Edwards, Portland, OR)

DEHYDRATION, CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING, FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE

Alaska, Mount McKinley

Fred Wilson, 22, was a member of the three-man “FAB-1” expedition which flew to the basecamp on May 26, 1985, to climb the West Buttress. On June 6, Wilson and his partners Bob Shannon and Daniel Lewinski were camped at 5250 meters and ready to climb to the summit. Wilson had been having flu-like symptoms and was unable to hold down much food or fluids for a couple of days. Early on June 7, the three started heading up toward the summit. At Denali Pass around 0930 Wilson became extremely weak and started losing his balance. The group decided to return to 5250 meters and Wilson was belayed by Lewinski since he was falling regularly.

As the group descended, two members from the “YMS” expedition (Barry Blanchard and Frank Lutick) noticed the FAB I problems and climbed over to help. The YMS group put Wilson in an igloo (1030) and tried to give him fluids and rewarm him. Wilson’s condition started to deteriorate and he started lapsing in and out of consciousness.

At 1200, Blanchard got O₂ from the NPS rescue cache and administered it to Wilson, then started down to the 4350 meter level for medical assistance, since no one had a radio at 5250 meters. At 1330, a climber came down from the summit and gave Wilson some Decadron orally. Wilson was now improving with the O₂.

Blanchard arrived at the Medical Research camp and a medical/rescue team was assembled leaving at 1600. Dr. Peter Hackett, Rob Roach and Charles Hollingshead arrived with Blanchard at 1830. Upon examination Wilson was given two liters of IV solution and some Compazine, which significantly improved his condition. At 2200 Wilson was ambulatory and lowered the first 200 meters down the rescue gully while on O₂. He was then helped down under his own power to the Medical Research camp. Before leaving 5250 meters, Hackett had to convince Wilson’s partners to descend to 4350 meters in order to help. They did very little to assist in the evacuation and care of Wilson while at the 5250 meter camp.

Once at 4350 meters, Wilson was diagnosed as being dehydrated, possibly having CO poisoning and Acute Mountain Sickness. Wilson had improved on his descent and was able