

Analysis

The Tuveris indicated that Broisat and Legras thought the danger of crevasse falls in the area was minimal. A difference of opinion on this between the two groups resulted in different methods of roping up and of tying the sled into the rope. None of the four had heard sounds of the snowpack settling that day, nor had they seen or heard anything to indicate a weak layer in the snow. The direction of travel of Broisat and Legras was parallel to the direction the crevasse was running and directly over it. Broisat and Legras were only two meters apart. Their combined weight plus the weight of the sled created a 225 kilogram force in a small area. While a probing of the area would not have revealed that a crevasse was present, the undulations in the windpacked snow suggested that crevasses were in the area and a placing of at least 25 meters would have been more appropriate. Broisat was an experienced Chamonix guide, but his chosen method of tie-in offered no protection in the event of a crevasse fall. (Source: Ralph Moore, SAR Ranger, Denali National Park)

FALL ON SNOW—SKIING, BINDINGS FAILED TO RELEASE

Alaska, Mount McKinley

On May 17, 1986, Heim Gunther (30) and the other ten members of the “Schwaebische” expedition were returning to 4350 meters from a successful summit climb of the West Buttress. The party had left their skis at 4600 meters, continued to the summit and returned to 4600 meters where they began a ski descent with packs to 4350 meters. During the descent, Gunther fell three times. During the first two falls, his ski bindings released. On the third fall, they did not. He sustained a twisting injury to his left knee. Ranger Scott Gill and Dr. Peter Hackett examined Gunther and decided to allow him to rest overnight and see if the injury improved by the next day, which it did not. Dr. Peter Hackett, at medical camp, contacted the Talkeetna Ranger Station to report that Gunther was unable to ski or walk out.

Gunther was in considerable pain and was concerned about safely navigating Windy Corner while he was strapped to a sled. (The previous day, Ranger Gill had indicated Gunther should be ambulatory to assist in the traverse around Windy Corner.) After evaluating his mental and physical state, and having no way of evaluating the expertise of the other members of the German party, Seibert authorized a fly-out from 4350 meters. Poor weather prevented that evacuation until May 19 at 1100. Lowell Thomas landed his Heleo-Courier airplane at 4350 meters and Gunther and his wife were flown back to Talkeetna. All costs for the flight were paid for by the victim. (Source: Bob Seibert, Mountaineering Ranger, Denali National Park)

Analysis

This section of the route is often very hard packed or wind slab snow. Most people ascend and descend using a fixed rope. While skiable for an expert, the probable consequences of a fall, especially if one’s bindings do not release, brings into question whether skiing on this slope should be chanced. (Source: J. Williamson)

SLIP ON ICE, INADEQUATE PROTECTION, UNFAMILIAR WITH ROUTE

Alaska, Mount McKinley

About 1300 on May 18, 1986, Steven Locher (20) a member of a four man “Pro Leisure