

steep to glissade. Strength got them up, and lack of experience and fatigue led to the fatality. (Source: Pete Panarese, Superintendent, Chugach State Park)

AVALANCHE

Alaska, Mount Foraker

On May 1, 1987, Dan Daugherty (32), a former Chairman of the Alaska Mountain Rescue Group, and Mickey Pratt (28) registered for a climb of the southeast ridge of Mount Foraker, indicating a due-out date of May 12 or 13. On May 2, the Canadian team of Ian Bult (24) and Dan Guthrie (27) registered for the same route, after which they planned to do the Infinite Spur, then the Cassin Ridge on Mount McKinley.

On May 14 the groups' pilot, Doug Geeting, overflowed the route and saw no signs of the climbers. Later that afternoon, Rangers Seibert and Robinson searched the route from a helicopter. No climbers were found, but tracks were observed leading into the starting zone of an avalanche and mountaineering equipment was observed mixed in avalanche debris at the bottom of that avalanche. A ground search of the avalanche debris zone was determined to be too hazardous. Although no bodies have been recovered, observations of the equipment from a hovering helicopter and the recovery of a stuff sack positively linked Daugherty and Pratt to the avalanche. A yellow climbing suit was seen which matches the description of a suit worn by one of the Canadian climbers. All evidence points to the four men having been swept to their deaths in the avalanche. (Source: Bob Seibert, Mountaineering Ranger, Denali National Park)

Analysis

Both climbing teams were aware that at least one guided party had turned around earlier that season on a climb of the same route because of what the leader described as extreme avalanche hazard. Daugherty and Pratt personally spoke with that guide prior to their departure and were told it was the type of snow instability that would not resolve itself in the near future unless a slide removed the unstable snow layer. Tracks leading into the release zone crossed two separate avalanche crown fracture lines before crossing a third fracture line which probably represented the small slab release which carried the teams to their deaths. Possibly the teams felt these previous releases had neutralized the avalanche hazard.

All evidence indicates that Daugherty and Pratt triggered a slab avalanche about the 3300-meter level along the southeast ridge of Mount Foraker. Both men are believed to have been killed in the resulting 1000-meter fall. The avalanche deposition zone lies beneath a very active ice fall which poses unacceptable hazards to ground search teams. As a result, no bodies have been recovered, nor will ground recovery efforts be made. There is strong evidence indicating that Ian Bult and Dan Guthrie were climbing with the Daugherty-Pratt team and were also killed in the same avalanche. (Source: Bob Seibert, Mountaineering Ranger, Denali National Park)