

Analysis

Storms on Denali often occur without obvious warning. The High Dreams expedition experienced one such phenomenon. (Source: Kevin Moore, Mountaineering Ranger)

AVALANCHE, WARM WEATHER

Alaska, Mount Hunter, Moonflower Buttress

On June 6, at 1700, Allan Kearney and Steve Mascioli (38) were climbing during a warm weather spell on the North Buttress Moonflower route of Mount Hunter. Allan was leading the 17th pitch of this technically demanding climb with Steve Mascioli belaying when a massive snow block broke loose above Mascioli, striking him. Kearney was able to instantly see that Mascioli's body had sustained major trauma and blood loss, and that he was dead. Kearney was pulled backward to his last piece of protection by the force of the falling snow block. He then worked his way down and retrieved the haul bag along with other climbing gear. Kearney was unable to cut Mascioli loose because he was too far below him after descending to retrieve the haul bag. Kearney then rappelled to his bivy site on the 15th pitch. He assembled additional gear necessary to descend, and then began rappelling the route.

He rappelled to the fifth pitch, reaching it on June 8. He then stayed at the fifth pitch, while avoiding further snow avalanches caused by the warm conditions. Kearney stayed there for approximately half a day, then noticed that below him there was a tent site with other climbers and that the other climbers were preparing to leave. Kearney began yelling down to the other party to wait for him so he could rope up with them for the descent of the Southeast Fork of the Kahiltna Glacier. One of the climbers Kearney yelled down to was Eli Helmuth. Helmuth radioed Eric Martin at the 7,200 foot base camp using a CB radio. Helmuth told Martin that it appeared a single climber rappelling above him was in need of some type of assistance. Martin contacted the Talkeetna ranger station and advised them of the situation, and that poor weather prevented any type of aerial rescue.

Ranger Daryl Miller advised Ranger Martin to make preparations for a possible ground rescue. Preparations for a possible ground rescue were made at base camp while Helmuth attempted to get further information from the party above him. Helmuth again contacted base camp and notified Martin that no further assistance was needed, as Kearney's partner was dead and Kearney was uninjured. Kearney, Helmuth and Helmuth's climbing partner returned to base camp, arriving at 2120.

On June 11, NPS staff JD Swed, Joe Reichert and Dave Kreuzer did a series of reconnaissance flights over the site using the NPS LAMA helicopter. They determined that a recovery attempt would be feasible. NPS ranger Joe Reichert, using short-haul technique, successfully recovered Mascioli's body. Mascioli's body was transported from the 7,200 foot base camp to Talkeetna by Hudson Air Service, and then transported along with three gear bags belonging to Mascioli to Kehl's Palmer Mortuary.

Analysis

The North Buttress Moonflower route on Mount Hunter is one of the most technically difficult and demanding climbing routes in the Alaska Range. Climbing technically difficult routes during warm weather has been problematic in the past. The warm front made climbing this route hazardous. In this specific instance, the danger from breaking or falling snow and ice avalanches was extremely high due to warm weather, suggesting

that climbing activity on demanding routes could result in a probable accident. (Source: Eric Martin, Mountaineering Ranger)

HACE, PARTY SEPARATED, FAILURE TO TURN BACK

Alaska, Mount McKinley, West Buttress

Throughout the day on June 17, several expeditions passed Hiroyaki Hoshino (36) and his companions, between 18,000 feet and 19,700 feet. Everyone who passed Hoshino and was later interviewed said that Hoshino looked exhausted and shaky. A ranger patrol descending from the summit stopped to talk to Hoshino and in no uncertain terms tried to convince Hoshino to go down, but were unsuccessful. It is unlikely, but the language barrier could have been a problem in getting the point across to Hoshino.

At the "football field" (19,500 feet) Hoshino was too exhausted to go to the summit. His friends elected to continue and left Hoshino. Hoshino's friends summited and returned for him. Hoshino had become ataxic from altitude sickness and exhaustion and he needed assistance from his friends to hike down. The Japanese were able to make it down to Denali Pass, where they requested a rescue at 0130 on June 18.

At 0402 the LAMA helicopter and Hudson's Cessna 206 acting as cover plane were in the air to evacuate Hoshino. At approximately the same time, a ground rescue team comprised of volunteers from High Camp was climbing up to assist the Japanese at Denali Pass.

At 0459 the LAMA landed at 18,000 feet, and ranger Kevin Moore assisted the ataxic Hoshino to the helicopter. Hoshino was flown to Base camp where he was treated and stabilized.

Analysis

Hoshino overextended himself. His climbing partners failed to recognize the situation and react to it. Instead they elected to go to the summit. They were also improperly prepared to bivouac, which caused Hoshino to become hypothermic while waiting for a rescue. (Source: Kevin Moore, Mountaineering Ranger)

FALL ON SNOW—UNABLE TO SELF-ARREST, INADEQUATE PROTECTION, POOR POSITION, INEXPERIENCE

Alaska, Ptarmigan Peak, Chugach State Park

On June 29, two instructors and their twelve students in a University of Alaska, Anchorage, Alaska Wilderness Studies 105 Class—Beginning Mountaineering—fell 2,000 feet down the North Couloir of Ptarmigan Peak in the Chugach Mountains near Anchorage. Two of the climbers perished, and 11 of the remaining 12 were seriously injured.

The class hiked to the base of the route on Saturday, June 28. This was the second climbing trip for the twelve novice climbers led by AWS instructors Deb and Ben Greene. They left the tents between 7:00 and 7:30 AM. on June 29 to climb the 2000 foot couloir. All participants reported the ascent went efficiently, albeit slowly. The groups topped out of the couloir at some time between 2:00 and 3:00 PM. Some members of the group hiked to the peak's false summit while others rested. The roped teams reformed, made some adjustments with a few members changing groups and began to descend sometime between 4:00 and 5:00 PM.