

past, climbing teams seemed to be organized from an association of friends or mutual acquaintances. With the introduction of the Internet and increased communication (e.g. chat rooms, e-mail, and other common interest web-sites) people are finding partners with the same goal, but without the knowledge of skills and personal interaction that comes with meeting people face to face and going climbing. A member of a team should have some sense of responsibility for the other member(s), otherwise the team members are little more than weight on the other end of the rope.

In the second incident, in sharp contrast to the first, Palsmeier and his partner quickly recognized that he was not acclimatizing. With the help of his partner and a few other climbers, Palsmeier was able to descend before his condition worsened. Early recognition and a quick descent is the best treatment for altitude-related illness.

RESPIRATORY DISTRESS

Alaska, Mount McKinley, West Buttress

On May 26, the Casade-Dacks Expedition of Ron Fridell (50), Sid Perkins, and Don Andrews (43) flew to the Kahiltna Glacier to begin their climb of the West Buttress of Mount McKinley. Over the next five days the group proceeded to the 11,000-foot camp. On June 1, the team made a carry to 13,500 feet, which is a popular strategy for the difficult move from 11,000 feet to 14,200 feet, and returned to the lower camp. On June 2, the group was climbing past Windy Corner en route to the 14,200-foot camp when Andrews began having trouble breathing. According to Fridell, Andrews slowed down noticeably, began resting more often and developed a productive cough. Andrews' respiratory distress became so alarming that the group stopped and Fridell continued to the 14,200-foot camp alone and without his pack in order to summon help. Fridell arrived at the NPS Ranger Camp at 2130 and reported the incident.

By 2154, Volunteer Rangers Denny Gignoux and Jay Mathers were on scene assessing Andrews and administering oxygen. Within five minutes Joe Conroy and Marty Kimble, Air National Guard Pararescuemen (PJ's), were also on scene working with Andrews, while Gignoux and Mathers prepared an anchor to begin lowering the patient for possible evacuation.

By 2215, the PJs had conferred with Dr. Peter Hackett about Andrews' condition and it was decided that he should be evacuated, so the helicopter was requested from Talkeetna. The decision was based on the patient's history of cauterized esophageal varices that could rupture and cause serious internal bleeding if his respiratory distress continued or became more severe. Andrews was not responding as well as was expected to treatment with his personal inhaler and supplemental oxygen. He continued to be pale and cough up pink sputum.

At 2300, the NPS Lama rescue helicopter departed Talkeetna en route directly to Andrews. At this same time Chris Eng and Dan Howley (emergency hired climbers), departed camp with additional cylinders of oxygen. Upon their arrival at 2317, Eng and Howley replaced the existing oxygen and descended to 13,500 feet and prepared a landing zone for the helicopter. The Lama landed, the patient was put on board at 2339, and was on the ground at Basecamp at 2349.

Dr. Peter Hackett evaluated Andrews at Basecamp while waiting for the Air National Guard Pavehawk to arrive. At 0119 on June 3, Andrews was transported to Alaska Regional Hospital where he was seen and released.

PULMONARY EDEMA

Alaska, Mt. McKinley, West Buttress

While the incident with Andrews was unfolding at 13,500 feet, there was another incident developing at high camp—17,200 feet. The Black Ice Expedition, consisting of Sacha Friedlin (23) and Marie Cyr (24), were spending their third night at the 17,200-foot camp and Cyr had developed pulmonary edema. Ranger Gordy Kito was on scene at high camp with his Volunteer Patrol members Lance Taysom and Kevin Smith. Cyr's condition had deteriorated rapidly over the course of the evening. Taysom started her on oxygen and initially encouraged the team to rest. Because her condition was not improving, Kito conferred with the 14,200-foot camp and the Talkeetna Ranger Station. Since the weather was favorable and the Black Ice team was unable to have productive rest, it was decided that they should descend immediately. Departing 17,200 feet at 0223, Taysom and Smith accompanied Cyr and Friedlin to the 16,000-foot level, where they were met by Ranger Joe Reichert and Volunteer Jay Mathers and escorted down to the medical camp. While descending, Cyr remained on oxygen with a portable cylinder in her backpack. Cyr remained on oxygen and slept for the remainder of June 3 in the ranger medical tent. The oxygen and lower altitude aided Cyr's recovery. Her edema disappeared within two days. She remained at the 14,200-foot camp for over two more weeks before the team proceeded to ascend to Denali Pass and continue their traverse out to Wonder Lake.

(On a side note, Friedlin became only the third person to ever summit Mount McKinley, Mount Foraker and Mount Hunter all in the same season, and the first to do so after hiking in from Petersville.)

Analysis

It could be said that Andrews used poor judgment in making the decision to return to high altitude with his medical condition. Other than that, his team used sound strategy during their ascent and Andrews' evacuation was based on an emergency condition that was not being reduced on the mountain.

The second incident was not related to poor judgment. Cyr only moved to high camp after normal acclimatization at the 14,200-foot level. Her pulmonary edema developed quickly, as happens on occasion to people at high altitude. To their credit, they descended under their own power with minimal assistance with their gear from NPS Rangers.

FALLING ICE

Alaska, Mount McKinley, Mount Johnson

At 1500 on June 8, Jeff Benowitz (30) and partner Chris Turiano (29) started climbing a new route on the East Buttress of Mt. Johnson. Turiano was leading approximately 100 feet up the route when falling ice struck his belayer,