

UNITED STATES

RAPPEL FAILURE—INADEQUATE ANCHOR

Alaska, Moose's Tooth, Shaken Not Stirred

In the early morning of May 1, around 0200, Kevin Cooper and Ryan Jennings (ages unknown, as they did not register) were descending from the "Shaken Not Stirred" route on the Moose's Tooth. The two had begun their second-to-last rappel utilizing a slung block. Jennings was in the process of rappelling while Cooper waited at the anchor clipped off to the sling. The block began to pull away from the surrounding rock and fell. The two estimated their fall at approximately 1000 feet over both vertical terrain and angled snow slope. There were four other climbers in the area who heard the fall and responded to offer assistance.

Two climbing teams, Mark Westman and Joe Puryear and Seth Hobby and Coley Gentzel, assisted Cooper and Jennings to the rescuers' tent and stomped out SOS in the snow. Later that morning at 1115, a plane in the area operated by K2 aviation saw the distress signal and reported it to Talkeetna Air Taxi since they were known to have climbers in the area. By 1155, TAT reported to NPS that Roderick had picked up Cooper and Jennings and was en route back to Talkeetna.

Jennings had sustained a possible right tibia and fibula fracture while Cooper had an injury to his left knee.

Analysis

This incident is another reminder of the real hazards presented by rappelling and the difficulty of determining anchor security particularly in alpine environments where climbers are often relying on "natural" protection for part or all of their anchor system. Rock quality varies drastically throughout the Alaska Range, thus creating a particular need to carefully check all anchor systems. Another factor may have been above average temperatures causing a freeze-thaw cycle which loosened the block from its position. (Source: Ranger Margaret Perdue)

HAPE—ASCENDED TOO FAST

Alaska, Mount McKinley, West Buttress

On May 4, an Austrian party called Team Outback departed Talkeetna, for a climb of the West Buttress of Mount McKinley. Three days later the group arrived at the 14,200-foot camp. After one night there, the team attempted a carry to the 17,200-foot camp. After waking up on the morning of May 9 with a headache and ataxia, Karl Wieser (35) decided to seek NPS medical attention. Upon examination by NPS medical personnel, the climber presented with crackles in both the right and left lung as well as significant dyspnea on exertion. It was determined that he was suffering from HAPE.

Treatment consisted of Nifedipine, Diamox, and oxygen therapy. Due to weather conditions it was determined that descent was not appropriate. After four day's of monitoring and treatment, weather conditions improved and