

Brettholle's physical state, his susceptibility to, nor the severity of the High Altitude Cerebral Edema he experienced. Even the previous incident of unconsciousness in the Cascades reported by his climbing partners was not necessarily pertinent to this situation, according to medical professionals. Nor did medical advisors feel there was any indication or significant risk of a relapse as was seen at base camp. For these reasons there seems little that could have been done differently to avoid this situation, though this experience will certainly now inform how subsequent cases are handled. In particular, it would be advisable to consider continuing treatment with Dexamethasone once initiated to guard against the possibility of relapse.

It is also worth noting and praising the level of commitment shown by this expedition in assisting their team mate and trying to remain as self-sufficient as possible while facing a difficult situation. They acted as a team, the significance of which should not be underestimated. (Source: Ranger Margaret Perdue)

## **INEXPERIENCE—PARTY SEPARATED AND UNROPED, DEHYDRATION—EXHAUSTION**

### **Alaska, Mount McKinley, West Buttress**

Just before 0600 on the morning of June 8, Alexey Volkov (27) contacted VIP Michael Dong at the 14,200-foot Ranger Camp. Volkov was concerned that one of his teammates, Sergiy Voytovych (28) had not yet arrived at camp. Dong awakened Ranger Meg Perdue to assist in determining the nature of the situation and the need for NPS involvement.

The team had started from the 11,200-foot camp the previous evening at 1900. Volkov and his other teammate, Eric Nazar (22), had last seen Voytovych just prior to Windy Corner (13,500 feet) about 0330. At that time Voytovych was 100 to 200 meters behind Volkov and Nazar and moving very slowly. Volkov and Nazar arrived at the 14,200-foot camp about 0500 and had decided to bivy in a campsite and await the arrival of Voytovych's, who was carrying the group's tent. Due to the snowy, windy conditions at that time, Volkov was concerned about Voytovych's condition, and was himself starting to become cold and unable to rest or sleep. When he contacted the rangers, Volkov expressed concern over the fact that the trail had been blowing over quickly and Voytovych was the least experienced member of the group with altitude experience only as high as 3000 meters. When asked how well the trail was wanded, Volkov stated they had placed wands. However, further questioning revealed they had only placed three wands out of the total of five they were carrying. At 0640 Nazar, the third member of the group, was brought to the Ranger Camp in an effort to gather more information and determine the ability of the team to assist their own team mate. During discussions with Volkov and Nazar, Volkov expressed his willingness to descend to look for Voytovych. However, it was pointed out to him that one of the possible scenarios for Voytovych's failure to arrive in camp was a crevasse fall, a real possibility in that area which is known for

its crevasse hazard. Volkov responded that he would have no idea how to extricate his partner from such a situation.

Additionally, during this interview, Volkov was being treated for superficial and partial thickness frostbite he had sustained during the night. Nazar stated that because he had been out all night he did not feel capable of descending to look for his team mate.

Based on the information available and the stated inability of the team to provide assistance, Perdue contacted Talkeetna at 0710 to inform them of the situation and her intention to initiate a ground reconnaissance for Voytovych. Rob Gowler, a guide camped near the trail into the 14,200-foot camp, was asked to be on the lookout for Voytovych. Ranger Mik Shain and VIPs Tucker Chenoweth and Hans Hjelde were tasked with preparing to go out in search of Voytovych. At 0750 Gowler contacted Shain and informed him that Voytovych appeared to be coming up the hill into camp. Shain contacted the individual, who did turn out to be Voytovych, and determined that he was fine, though exhausted and dehydrated. At 0800 Perdue contacted Talkeetna to inform them that the situation had been resolved. By 0820 Dong had treated and released Volkov but not before strongly discouraging Volkov and Nazar from executing their plan to attempt to summit from 14,200 feet with an alpine-style push.

### **Analysis**

This situation had the potential for creating a very hazardous situation. This team chose to travel unroped through a section of the route known for its crevasses and the potential to fall into them. They did not stay together and they were clearly operating on a slim margin of personnel safety as evidenced by Volkov's frostbite. Nazar did admit during discussions with Perdue that they had made a mistake and should have stayed together. Volkov's expressing an interest in attempting to summit from 14,200 feet with minimal equipment is further indication of inexperience. It is also worth noting that VIP Ranger Dong was contacted later that same day by Volkov who requested to borrow a water bottle and indicated that the team had lost the handle to their only shovel. (Source: Ranger Margaret Perdue)

## **ABANDONMENT—CREATING A HAZARD**

### **Alaska, Mount McKinley, West Buttress**

Joseph Klopach (51) and his 15-year-old son Joseph, Jr. checked into the Talkeetna Ranger Station on June 3, where Ranger John Leonard briefed them. The pair flew to the Kahiltna Basecamp later that day, the starting point for their climb of Mt. McKinley. It appears that while in Talkeetna they met Dusan Golubic of the Slovak Republic who befriended the pair. The three joined up as a rope of three where they departed basecamp on June 3. They attempted to carry half their provisions all the way to 11,000 feet, but between 7,800 feet and 9,500 feet, Klopach Jr. experienced acute mountain sickness. Apparently they returned to base camp. Klopach, Jr. was left unsupervised at the Kahiltna Basecamp for four days while his father