



AAC Publications

Fall into Crevasse, Fatigue

Mt. Rainier, Emmons Glacier

On September 1 at 4 a.m., the park received an emergency cell phone call from a team of climbers on the north side of the mountain. They reported that another climbing team, consisting of Canadian climbers Andrei M. Pipas (leader, 31), John Spence, 50, and Oudina Takpharias Chersi, 31, had sustained multiple injuries from a fall into a crevasse at 11,400 feet on the Emmons Glacier. Rescue operations were initiated immediately. The park's short-haul co-operator, Northwest Helicopters, inserted four climbing rangers at a landing zone approximately 100 feet from the scene. The patients were short-hauled from the crevasse and flown to the Sunrise area. Two of the climbers were transported by Airlift Northwest to Harborview Medical Center; the third was transported to a local hospital via ambulance.

According to statements given by Spence, they began their climb from Camp Schurman at 4 a.m. on August 31. They were climbing with two other rope teams from Canada. All three teams summited at 2 p.m. During the descent Spence's team became separated and spent approximately one hour trying to regain the "main" route. Spence said they were all very tired from the climb and the extra routefinding. Around 11,400 feet, Spence, in the middle position on the rope team, slipped or tripped and began to fall. He slid about 15 feet before falling into a crevasse. He stated that he was momentarily able to arrest his fall on the lip of the crevasse, but then was pulled off when Pipas and Chersi fell. They landed in a group on a ledge, about 40 feet down in the crevasse. Spence believes this happened around 5 p.m.

At 3:50 a.m. an independent climbing party of four came on scene and made the 911 call via cell phone. Another party of two arrived on scene and lowered a doctor into the crevasse to give care and provide patient updates.

Because of the nature of the injuries and the location of the incident, the plan was to short-haul the victims from the scene to Sunrise, where they could be transferred to ground or air ambulances and taken to hospitals. A ground evacuation option also was planned, utilizing resources from Olympic and Tacoma mountain rescue.

On September 2, Harborview nurses reported that Chersi was being treated for a liver laceration, fractured transverse processes of the spine, and possible spinal cord/nerve damage to his left brachial plexus, affecting his left arm. He was also initially treated for hypothermia and minor bumps and bruises. Pipas had been evaluated for head trauma, but was due to be released later that day. He remembered summiting, but was unable to remember anything leading up to the accident. (Source: Stefan Lofgren, NPS Ranger.)

(Editor's note: As noted above, this is the same incident described in the previous report, this time from the rangers' perspective.)

Images

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