



## AAC Publications

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### **Frostbite, Altitude Illness**

Alaska, Denali, West Buttress

**On May 12 eight members of the military climbing team “U.S.M.C. Mtn. Warfare Training Center” flew to the Kahiltna Glacier to begin their climb.** Over the following 12 days they progressed at an average rate up the West Buttress Route. On May 23, four of the team members departed for a summit attempt, reaching the top early on May 24. The party reported high winds and cold temps that contributed to their long push to the summit. The remaining four members of the team stayed in high camp to nurse varying levels of altitude illness.

The entire team of eight descended to the 14,200-foot camp during the afternoon of May 24 and immediately notified NPS personnel of a multitude of injuries and illnesses within their group. Following a brief triage of the climbers, it was determined that two warranted NPS medical assistance. One 25-year-old climber suffered from a variety of symptoms, including nausea, vomiting, dehydration, fatigue, headache, and profound weakness for multiple days. The second climber, 32, suffered partial- and full-thickness frostbite on all 10 toes and several fingers during his summit day. Both patients were stabilized and given recommendations for care during their descent. The two were re-evaluated on the morning of May 25 by NPS medical personnel before they continued down to the 7,200-foot base camp. They returned to Talkeetna on May 26 via their prearranged fixed-wing air taxi. [Source: Denali National Park Case Incident Record.]

### **ANALYSIS**

Recognizing the serious weather conditions and heeding warning signs of altitude illness as these climbers ascended the upper mountain should have convinced them to halt their summit bid before it continued long into the night, which, in turn, likely exacerbated the frostbite injuries. See Denali ranger Dave Weber’s short article on frostbite prevention, assessment, and treatment on the next page. [Source: The Editors.]

**Images**

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