



AAC Publications

HAPE

Denali, West Buttress

At 3:56 a.m. on June 16, Jacek Struk of the two-person Polish MJ Expedition, which was located at 17,200 feet (high camp) on the West Buttress Route, called Comm Center by satellite phone. Struk reported that his partner was experiencing respiratory distress after returning from the summit at 2 a.m.

On-call ranger Mark Westman in Talkeetna called Struk back at 4:05 a.m. and instructed him to locate ranger Tucker Chenoweth, who was currently in the high camp. Struk was able to find Chenoweth 30 minutes later. Chenoweth and VIP Andrew Latimer administered medical assistance to the patient and diagnosed mild HAPE. Upon reassessment at 9 a.m., it was determined that her condition was improving. Chenoweth and Latimer continued to monitor the patient until she and Struk were able to descend without NPS assistance to the 14,200-foot camp on June 17. (Source: Denali National Park Case Incident Report.)

ANALYSIS

Although descent is always the first and best treatment for altitude illness, this patient already had descended more than 3,000 vertical feet from her high point that day, and her condition likely resulted from a combination of altitude illness and fatigue. Further descent that night would have raised the risk of an accident on the steep West Buttress. The partner correctly sought medical assistance and monitoring, in case the patient's condition worsened. (Source: The Editors.)

Images

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