



AAC Publications

Avalanche – Stranded

Alaska, Denali National Park, Ruth Gorge, Mt. Dickey

On May 11, at approximately 5:30 p.m., rangers received a call from K2 Aviation saying that one of their pilots had spotted an SOS stamped in the snow above 747 Pass (between Mt. Dickey and Mt. Bradley). Two climbers were present at the SOS and waving their arms for help. The pilot also reported ski tracks coming out of avalanche debris above them and a possible (unconfirmed) third climber in the debris.

A plan was made to send two rangers with a helicopter and a backup team in a fixed-wing aircraft. At 6:30 p.m., chopper OAE launched from Talkeetna with rangers Tucker Chenoweth and Joseph McBrayer on board. The rangers were able to establish communication with the party via a radio that was delivered to the scene. It was reported back to the station that no one was missing and the two climbers had called for help because they were unable to descend safely from their location.

The helicopter went to a staging site to offload gear and make room for the climbers, who were picked up at 7:44 p.m. and flown to their campsite in the Ruth Gorge. (Source: Denali National Park Case Incident Record and press release.)

ANALYSIS

The two climbers, both in their 20s and from Idaho, triggered a large slab avalanche between 7,500 and 8,000 feet. The avalanche began in a shallow area of the slab but propagated widely, with an average crown depth of more than a meter. Neither climber was caught in the slide, which crossed hundreds of feet of their ascent track. The two searched for an escape route but were unable to find a way off the ridge without risking more avalanches. Their attempt on Dickey began soon after a large snowstorm (more than one meter of new snow at the 11,000-foot camp on Denali between May 8 and 10, with 15 inches reported at the 7,200-foot Kahiltna base). Waiting another day or two before climbing might have given the new snow time to stabilize. (Source: The Editors and Denali Field Report blog.)

Images



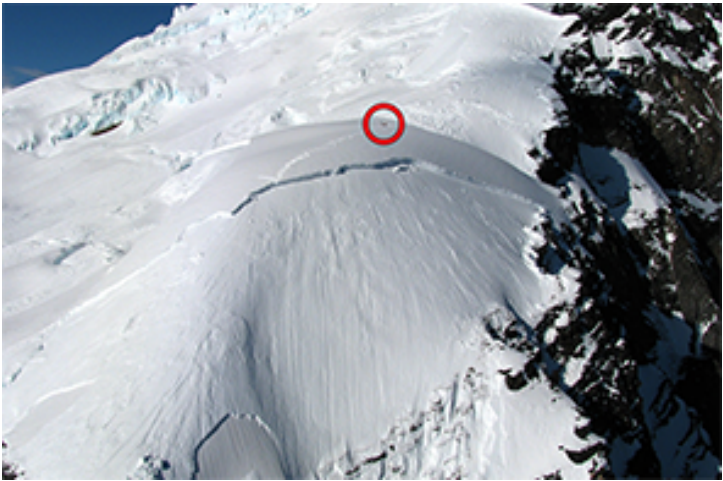
Climbers stranded by a large slab avalanche on the west ridge of Mt. Dickey.



Extensive crown lines and avalanche debris on and near the west ridge of Mt. Dickey.



Huge slab avalanche and stranded skiers on the west ridge of Mt. Dickey.



Stranded by Avalanche

Article Details

Author	Denali National Park Case Incident Record
Publication	ANAM
Volume	11
Issue	69
Page	32
Copyright Date	2016
Article Type	Accident reports