



AAC Publications

Frostbite

Alaska, Denali, Upper West Rib

On May 25, a solo 36-year-old male climber was treated for severe frostbite injuries to his fingers and hands. This climber ascended and descended the Upper West Rib climbing route over approximately 22 hours. Upon returning to 14,200-foot camp, he noticed that he had injured his hands and sought assistance. He was assessed by NPS medical personnel and evacuated by air.

ANALYSIS

Frostbite injuries can have long-term consequences. It is critical for climbers to actively rewarm cold body parts before frostbite occurs. When environmental circumstances prevent rewarming, climbers must seek shelter or descend to more hospitable conditions immediately to prevent further injury.

[Editor's Note: These steps are almost always more difficult to accomplish when climbing alone.] Once frozen body parts are thawed, climbers must prevent refreezing, as that will increase the severity of the original injury. (Source: Denali Mountaineering Rangers.)

ANOTHER FROSTBITE INCIDENT: On June 6, a 47-year-old male climber was evacuated from 17,200-foot camp with deep frostbite to nearly all of his toes and fingers. It is not clear if he reached the summit, but he had lost one of his mittens on the upper mountain and wore only a light glove on one hand when his rescue began. This patient had to be lowered from Denali Pass due to the severity of his injuries. A ranger post at the "Denali Dispatches" blog describes the difficulties and teamwork involved in such rescues, as well as some climbers' decisions—including heading for the summit in poor weather—that led to debilitating frostbite injuries during the 2019 season. Search "Denali Lima Charlie" to find the post.

Images

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