

11TH MAY

We woke up at 8.30am and Clark said he wanted to go and check on Jerry and Terrys camp to make sure they got back ok last night (they were camped a little further uphill than us) Brent came into our tent to be in charge of breakfast this morning. We all had half a bagel as a treat!! The next thing that we knew was that Clark returned to our camp wanting a bottle of water a sleeping bag and some Gu and he was on the walkie talkie with the rangers down at 14,200ft sounding urgent and stressed... He asked Mark or Guy to go for a walk with him and Mark left camp with Clark almost straight away.

Brent, Greg and I were left in our tent having breakfast and we watched Brent sneak in about 5 bowls of cereal as Clark was out with Mark and Greg and i gave him lots of grief about his secret scoffing. We were all drooling at the prospect of eating Clarks bagel whilst he was busy, but none of us had the guts to do it! Then we heard the news and i was shell shocked. Jerry and Terry had slipped on the Denali pass and fallen to their deaths some 1,500ft below almost adjacent to our camp (about 10 mins walk away) and they were lying within a metre apart from each other despite being unroped. This led Clark to believe that one of them had knocked the other one off the crevasse at the top of the Denali Pass causing them both to slip down the treacherous slope. I cannot tell you how shocked and sad i was to hear this awful news and my immediate thoughts were of poor jeremy who was down at the 14,200ft camp. This put an immediate doom and gloom over our camp and i really had trouble with the notion that the guy i chatted to a few hours earlier was now lying at the bottom of the glacier adjacent to our camp. It was a real wake up call to the dangers that can happen whilst mountain climbing, especially climbing when very tired.

Clark was busy for the rest of the morning dealing with the terrible accident and trying to be as helpful as he could to the rangers down at 14,200ft camp. Whilst he was on the radio, we started packing up camp and preparing to walk down to basecamp that day as planned. The plan was to try and go from high camp to the 14,200ft camp, collect all our loads, have some lunch and then continue down to camp 3 at the base of Motorcycle hill. Here we would collect the rest of our gear and get re united with our sleds (oh id missed mine so much!) and then just push on down to basecamp. The reason for this big push was that there was some weather reportedly coming in and we were going to try and get an 8.00am flight from basecamp to Talkeetna before we got stuck in a 5 day storm or something (this was our incentive!!) This would be nearly a 10,000ft vertical decent and given that we were all still tired from summit day yesterday, would definately not be easy. By noon Clark told us to start heading down, Guy, Greg, me and Brent were all to go on one ropeteam and he and Mark would follow as soon as he got done dealing with things and try and catch us up.

We were all quiet and heavy hearted as we left camp trying not to look to our right and see the awful scene of the twins tragic ending. When we got to the knife edged ridge i think Greg and i were both nervous.. i guess a combination of having seen

only too tragically what can happen when you slip and fall on this mountain but also a strong wind was constantly blowing us off balance with our huge packs on making us very unstable on such a narrow path, it was most disconcerting.

It was labouriously slow as we made our way down the ridge on a rope team of four. I have to say i much preferred being on our two ropeteams of 3 so i was hoping that Mark and Clark would catch up soon. They caught us just above the headwall and i took a break for a while just to try and compose myself a bit, i really was shaken up by the incident i have to confess.

We were soon back down at 14,200ft camp - it was boiling hot down there and i couldnt get my clothes off fast enough, i mean i was still in my down pants making that 4 layers of pants that i was wearing and i was sweltering. After all of us shed about 3 layers of clothing, Farmer and Kim, some other great guides from Mountain Trip, produced half a bagel sandwich with cheese and salami! After 4 days of only noodles and oatmeal this went down unbelievably well!! We sat around at this camp for ages whilst Clark was in meetings with the rangers and then he had to sort out all our gear, as some food was staying for other expeditons. It was then decided that we would revert back to our old ropeteam of guy, greg, brent and i and we would head down the mountain first and Clark and Mark would again catch us up.

We departed camp 4 (14,200ft) at around 7.00pm and headed down the mountain as fast as possible. My toenails were in agony, i was about to loose what few i had left after the Aconcagua climb, Greg had a huge blister on his toe (actually it was debatable as to how big it really was!!) Brent thought his feet needed medical attention and Guy had a bad knee from another climb.. Our bedraggled group hobbled down the mountain and we reached Camp 3 at around 9.30pm. Here we dug up our gear and sleds and spent just over an hour putting most of the weight in our packs into our sleds.. Just as the sun started to go down (well it stays pretty light until about midnight and then it never really gets that dark after midnight but it does go a little darker and definately colder) we left camp 3 and started the long walk down to camp 1. Despite all our aches and pains, It was so beautiful walking down at night and i was transfixed by the beauty of Alaska, it was just so mesmerising and at about 11.30 pm we arrived at camp 1. I was anxious to keep going as i felt if i stopped for too long i would never get started again, you know when you have a big surpressed fatigue going on and you are just blitzing through it.. i was at that stage. Anyway Guy had a bee in his bonnet about finding his lamb shanks that he had left buried in one of our food stash's. We weaved our sled team all over camp 1 trying to find where our stash was. Im afraid with all our noise and loud heated discussions as to the whereabouts of our stash, that we woke up the whole camp, but finally Guy found the stash and dug up those annoying lamb shanks that we had weaved all over camp looking for!! After 45 minutes our motley sled crew was ready to do the final push to basecamp about 3 and half hours away.. First i tried to depart camp without my sled attached to my waist harness (what a shame to forget my huge heavy sled!!) Guy pointed out my error and soon we were on our way to basecamp. Finally and i have to say i think i was hallucinating with fatigue at

this point, we arrived at the runway of basecamp which is a long gradual uphill for about 30 mins or so (just what you need after walking for 8 hours and descending 10,000ft vertical) When we finally got to the top of the wretched hill and crawled into basecamp it was 3.00am and i was having a slight melt down, i was just so tired i could hardly stand up.

The guys pitched a tent and greg and i piled in and i was soon out for the count. The boys biveyed outside as they said it was warm - i thought it was freezing and was so happy to be in a tent!!

I thought i was dreaming but i vaguely heard some voices at somepoint during my passing out, but then i fell back into my exhausted slumber until i was finally woken when i heard Brent complaining loudly outside about the pain in his toes and asking Mark whether he should be in the medical tent! Mark in his layed back kiwi manner said "No mate ur fine" (im glad i didnt go to Dr Mark to have my aches and pains trivialised!!!) Greg and i woke up at 9.00am and Guy informed me that my friend JJ from Mountain Link had kicked him on his way out of basecamp and said to say hi to me!!! I laughed so much that Guy got woken up with a message for me and im so upset that i never got to see my friend JJ who i met on Everest last year. I also met Robert Link the owner of their guiding company up at the 14,200ft camp and he is really nice.. He went into my very good books when he lent me his sat phone to call my sister when we got back to camp 4 after our summit day as Guys sat phone had run out of battery the day before.

The bad news was that all our heroic attempts to get to basecamp in order to fly out at 8.00am were destroyed in that no planes could land due to bad weather. I had threatened upon arrival last night not to emerge from my tent unless i head the sound of propellers so i had to reluctantly renague on my threat and come out of my tent to a deafening silence in order to get something to eat as i was starving!! We had lots of pancakes for breakfast and i thought the fact that all our tents were now pitched was a bad sign and that we should probably resign ourselves to be here at basecamp for at least 5 days for the storm to pass through. While Greg was stressing about not getting out of basecamp i decided to try and change into some clean clothes and vaguely scrub up a little... then music to my ears... planes were coming in and we had 20 mins to get ready to get out of here. We got everything packed up in record time and soon we were loading all our gear onto the beavers to fly back to Talkeetna (oh and i emptied brents pee bottle for him - that was a labour of love!!) An hour later we were in Talkeetna, it was boiling hot and i couldnt believe that we had all done it! I phoned Mike Flannigan the sales Manager for Captain Cook the hotel that sponsored my stay in Anchorage (they are a part of Summit Hotels) and arranged with him for all our rooms for the night and told him to expect some hill billy type clientel that would be arriving back imminently!! Captain Cook were so great and of course everyone was talking about the terrible accident of Jerry and Terry. I think there have only been 4 deaths on Denali since 1996 so this was big news.

We had a huge lunch of Pizza, salad and basically anything we could get our hands on and Clarks fantastic girlfriend Lisa collected us from Talkeetna and drove our weary group back to Anchorage for a big celebration dinner.....