

9TH MAY

Clark woke everyone up at 9.00am and we all piled into our tent to have breakfast which consisted of cereal or oatmeal and a hot drink. Its quite a procedure boiling up all the water for our water bottles up at this altitude and it often takes at least an hour and a half to do this. At night we sleep with everything in our sleeping bags in order for things not to freeze. In my sleeping bag, i have my boot liners, my two waterbottles, my creams, my camera, my down clothes, my balaclavas, and my medical kit.. somehow amongst all that i manage to squeeze in there too!!! its seriously uncomfortable i can assure you.

Over breakfast we tried to decide whether to go for the summit, it was a sunny day and the wind had subsided, however we had all woken up with headaches, mine was from severe dehydration ( i'd only drunk a quarter of a litre of water yesterday) Most of our headaches were a combination of dehydration and altitude i guess. The boys Guy, Brent and Mark i think were a little tired from moving up here yesterday and then intense work on our snow walls. If you dont know how strenuous it is try sawing and lifting huge blocks of snow for about 2 hours! We finally concluded that we should give the summit a go. I couldnt justify to sponsors to be sitting at high camp whilst the sun was shining. We got ready to move out of camp and to try for the summit.

We got into our rope teams and headed to the base of the denali pass. There was no real trail as the footsteps of the solo italian guy were long gone. Clark started heading steeply upwards following the line of the rocks in the snow. Suddenly whilst Clark was behind some rocks fixing the running belays, i slipped and was hurtling down the icy slope. Its amazing how much speed you pick up before i was caught by our rope team. I screamed like mad as i went whizzing down the slopes, they probably heard me in Anchorage i was so scared. Once i knew i was safe, i pulled myself together and we continued steeply upwards following the rock line. Soon we were traversing high across the denali pass, there was no trail so we were edging sideways frontpointing ( where the toe of your crampons is sticking into the ice and we were facing into the mountain) The weather by now had suddenly changed and it was almost a white out and it began to snow. We had the Ukranian guys behind us and we were moving slowly due to Clark having to place running belays constantly in order to protect us from falling down the Denali pass.

My shoulder was throbbing like you wouldnt believe and i was getting really tired with traversing the pass frontpointing. After about 3 hours we called for a group meeting as to whether we should continue. It was by now a full on white out and Clark said if we continued at this pace and the terrain up high was going to be like the Denali pass terrain that we were on, then it would be another 9 hours until we reached the summit. Whilst we had our discussion the Ukranian guys went ahead, we were now heading straight up the Denali pass ( having traversed about three quarters of its length at this point) as opposed to continuing the traverse until we reached the ridge. We all decided that it would be better at this stage given the weather, the now lateness of the hour - it was noon, and the fact we were all pretty

tired from frontpointing that we would return back to our high camp and pray we had better weather tomorrow.

An hour later we were back at camp and a huge air of disappointment hung amongst our group. Everyone was at a low point.. i had a back up spiel in my mind to say to people as to why i hadnt made the summit of Denali and the thought of having to return to the mountain to re climb it was just too much to bear at this stage.

About 2 hours later the Ukranians returned back to camp and told us that the winds up on the ridge were dangerously high and they had felt that it was unsafe to continue up towards the summit in these conditions. In a funny kind of way im glad that they formed the same conclusion to us, nothing worse than us having turned back if they had all reached the summit. I derived some consolation from this..

Soon high camp tent life resumed, and we were melting snow, not cleaning our teeth and getting ready for our dinner of ramen noodles and soup.

As i tried to sleep that night, the wind ripping against the tent i was convinced that i had missed my chance to climb Denali. I fell into a restless sleep.