

**REPORT TO THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
PUBLIC INQUIRY
THE FATALITY INQUIRIES ACT**

CANADA
PROVINCE OF ALBERTA

WHEREAS a Public Inquiry was held at the Provincial Court House
in the Town (City, Town, etc.) of Jasper (Name of City, Town, etc.)
on the 4th day of March, 1991 (and by adjournment
on the March 5, April 5, and April 8, 1991), before
Her Honour Sandra A. Hamilton, a Provincial Court Judge.

A jury was was not summoned and an Inquiry was held into the death of
Tyson Chad Albrecht (Name in Full) 10 (Age)
of Calgary, Alberta (Residence) and the following findings were made:

Date and Time of Death July 26, 1990 2:15 a.m.

Place Seron General Hospital, Jasper, Alberta

Medical Cause of Death ("cause of death" means the medical cause of death according to the International Statistical Classification of Diseases, Injuries and Causes of Death as last revised by the International Conference assembled for that purpose and published by the World Health Organization — The Fatality Inquiries Act, Section 1(d))

Cardiac arrest as the result of hypothermia as a consequence of entrapment in
an ice crevasse.

Manner of Death ("manner of death" means the mode or method of death whether natural, homicidal, suicidal, accidental or undeterminable — The Fatality Inquiries Act, Section 1(g))

Accidental.

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CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH DEATH OCCURRED

See Attached Report.

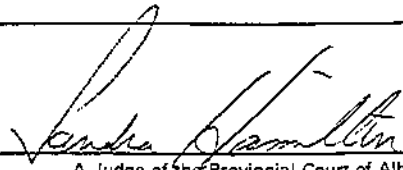
No. of additional pages attached 5

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PREVENTION OF SIMILAR DEATHS

See Attached Report.

No. of additional pages attached 5

DATED this 27th day of August, 1991



A Judge of the Provincial Court of Alberta

REPORT ON THE INQUIRY INTO THE DEATH
OF TYSON CHAD ALBRECHT

a) CIRCUMSTANCES OF DEATH

Tyson Chad Albrecht, age 10, was vacationing with his family in Jasper National Park on July 25, 1990. In the course of its travels the Albrecht family stopped, as do approximately 500,000 people per summer, to visit the Athabasca Glacier at the Columbia Icefields. This glacier is located on the west side of Highway 93, also known as the Icefields Parkway, approximately 110 kilometres south of the Jasper townsite.

It was approximately 4:50 p.m. when the Albrechts' southbound vehicle pulled into the parking lot located near the base of what is known as the toe, or bottom portion, of the Athabasca Glacier. This was the family's first trip to the Columbia Icefields, and they had failed to notice the building known as the Interpretive Centre, which is located on the east side of Highway 93.

As it was a hot summer day, the family wore light summer clothing; specifically, Tyson was wearing a short-sleeved cotton T-shirt, some short cotton pants known as "jams", socks and sneakers. Other tourists in the vicinity were similarly dressed.

Mr. Miles Albrecht and his two children, Tyson and Melissa, decided to walk up to the toe of the glacier. The only access from the parking lot to the toe is gained by crossing a footbridge over a stream adjacent to the parking lot. En route to this footbridge, the Albrechts noticed a sign located near the bridge, but did not stop to read the sign due to the large number of people clustered around it.

After crossing the footbridge, Mr. Albrecht and the children followed what appeared to be a pathway worn into the ground until they reached the lower periphery of the ice forming the glacier. At this point, after noticing that quite a few people were walking about on the ice and snow of the glacier, the Albrechts ventured onto the ice surface. Miles Albrecht had noticed a number of features of the glacier, notably cracks or crevasses in the ice surface and the fact that the ice might be slippery, and he cautioned the children about the slippery footing.

The Albrechts followed some other people along what appeared to be a "path" worn into the ice surface. Tyson was a few feet ahead of his father and sister, and may have been hopping and skipping along, according to the recollections of Michael Martling, an American tourist who was present. Mr. Martling observed a child, whom he thought in hindsight was Tyson, to slip on the ice at one point. Tyson's father observed him to bend over and touch the ice on occasion. Tyson was walking near another man and his son when last observed by Miles Albrecht. After making a brief comment to his daughter, Mr. Albrecht turned back to the path and was advised by the man with whom Tyson had been walking that a boy had slipped into a crevasse some 10 to 15 yards away. Approximately 15 minutes had elapsed between the family's departure from the parking lot and this news.

Miles Albrecht immediately went to the indicated crevasse, noting his son to be lying on his side about eight feet down in the crack of ice. He estimated the time at this point to be approximately 5:15 p.m.

Noticing a guide with a rope leading a group about 1500 feet away on the glacier, Mr. Albrecht summoned him over. That guide, Rodden McGowan, was

employed at the time by Canadian Mountain Holidays as a professional mountain guide, and was conducting walking tours of the glacier for his employer. At the time, he was leading a group of approximately thirty fifteen year olds with their teacher. He described the group as "rangy", which was taken to mean excitable and boisterous. Mr. McGowan was fully outfitted for mountaineering activity, and had taken his group to that point on the glacier by carving out steps in the ice with his ice axe and having them follow him in line.

Upon being summoned by Mr. Albrecht, Mr. McGowan left his group and proceeded to the edge of the crevasse where Tyson was located. Using a portable radio provided by his employer, Mr. McGowan then immediately radioed the staff at the Interpretive Centre, requesting that they notify the warden service of the need for a crevasse rescue, and the location of the incident. Evidence seemed to suggest that this radio transmission by Mr. McGowan was made just prior to 5:30 p.m.

Mr. McGowan then set about placing an ice anchor in the wall of the crevasse and lowering his rope to Tyson, who was conscious and talking to his father. By this time a number of people had assembled at the crevasse. Mr. McGowan determined one of them to be an Australian doctor, Dr. Balis, and one other to be potentially of assistance. He demanded that all other people leave the area, as he felt they would hamper rescue attempts.

Mr. McGowan, Mr. Albrecht, the doctor and the fourth man pulled on the rope which had been lowered to Tyson but were unable to dislodge him. He was wedged into the crevasse at his shoulder and his hips.

Mr. McGowan then made a slip knot in the rope and again lowered it to Tyson, instructing him to slip it over his ankle. Another ice anchor was placed to set up a Z pulley system, upon which the men again pulled. This attempt was terminated when Tyson cried out in pain.

Mr. McGowan attempted twice to climb into the crevasse himself unbelayed by rope, but could not get any purchase on the ice wall with his crampons, which are special equipment strapped to one's boots to give better footing on ice and snow. After these attempts failed, Mr. McGowan rather reluctantly agreed to lower Tyson's father into the crevasse on the rope; however Mr. Albrecht, after grabbing Tyson's leg, was unable to dislodge him. Mr. Albrecht testified that at that point Tyson had lost consciousness.

Mr. McGowan did not at any point go into the crevasse on the rope to attempt to rescue Tyson. He had a number of reasons for refusing to do so. Firstly, as he appropriately noted, the first concern in a rescue situation is to preserve the living, and he was extremely worried about letting his group of 15 year old charges out of his sight, as he was fearful of another accident. Ironically, earlier that afternoon Mr. McGowan had performed the first crevasse rescue he had made at the toe of this glacier, using his rope to remove a teenaged boy who had slipped into a crevasse. He was understandably concerned about ensuring the safety of his group. Furthermore, Mr. McGowan testified that there was no one present that he would trust to send him down on the rope. It would appear that of the group present only Mr. McGowan had the necessary mountaineering experience to carry out such a belaying attempt.

During the course of the rescue attempts, Mr. McGowan used his radio a number of times to attempt to get help to the scene. It appears from the evidence that the Parks Interpretive Centre, upon receiving McGowan's first transmission, radioed the Sunwapta Station where they spoke to Warden Terrence Damm at 5:30 p.m. Warden Damm was the only warden on duty at Sunwapta Station at that time.

Upon receiving the transmission from the Interpretive Centre, Warden Damm immediately contacted the Jasper Fire Station, which serves as the Jasper area emergency services centre. The Fire Hall in turn contacted the head warden office just outside of Jasper and made other necessary calls. Within two minutes Warden Damm had spoken to head office and advised them there was a crevasse rescue to be performed. Four or five minutes after the initial call, Warden Damm received word that Wardens Murray Hindle and Bill Hunt were en route from the Cavell Warden Station, which is situated 21 kilometres south of Jasper.

Meanwhile, Warden Damm went about collecting all necessary rescue gear, which is stored at the Sunwapta Warden Station. He also received two more calls from the Interpretive Centre asking that he hurry up. As he was about to leave, he received word that Warden Hindle was within 13 kilometres of the Sunwapta Station. At this point Warden Damm decided to collect more rescue equipment. A further call came in from the Interpretive Centre, who said they would phone back. Warden Damm waited a minute or two for that phone call, which never came. He then left for the Icefield, some 25 minutes after receiving the initial call for help.

Meanwhile, in Jasper, other wardens and an ambulance had been deployed to the scene. Warden Mike Briggs received a call at his home at 5:48 p.m. and arrived at the Main Warden Office at 6:00 p.m. where he was assuming the role of base rescue leader, in charge of organizing the deployment of men and equipment and coordinating the rescue effort.

Warden Briggs did not contact the Columbia Icefields because he knew that Warden Damm was in contact with them and was obtaining information. Warden Briggs considered the possibility of a helicopter, but learned that the helicopter normally used by the Warden Service was at Valemount, B.C. where it is normally stationed, with an estimated arrival time at the Icefields of one hour and twenty minutes. Access by motor vehicle was obviously more expeditious in those circumstances.

Monitoring the incoming radio calls, Warden Briggs noted that the rescue party had arrived at the site of the incident at 6:28 p.m., and that Tyson was unwedged from the crevasse at 6:50 p.m. At 7:00 p.m. Tyson was evacuated by stretcher from the crevasse site, and by 7:24 p.m. the ambulance bearing the boy was en route to Jasper.

The times noted by Warden Briggs were in accord with the recollections of various members of the rescue party. Warden Damm had arrived at the parking lot just a minute or two before Wardens Hindle and Hunt arrived. After very brief consultation with Tyson's mother, Mr. McGowan (who had come down to meet the rescue party and inform them of the situation) and Parks personnel, the rescue party quickly put on the necessary gear and ascended to the site where Tyson had fallen. While their progress appeared "frustratingly slow" to at least one witness, it appears that the team moved with the appropriate blend of dispatch tempered by the necessary caution due to icy conditions.

Once the rescue team arrived at the crevasse, matters progressed very swiftly. A new set of ice anchors was put in place, as Mr. McGowan's had come loose. Warden Bill Hunt was lowered by rope into the crevasse. The initial entry by Warden Hunt was feet first, but in that position he couldn't even touch the boy. After ridding himself of some gear while still suspended in the crevasse, Warden Hunt manoeuvred himself into the very narrow point of the crevasse. He yelled at Tyson but received no response. He then secured a rope around Tyson's arm and instructed team members to pull. This effort failed, as Tyson's chest was wedged tightly in the crevasse. At that point Warden Hunt managed to place a rope around Tyson's ankle, and the rescue team dislodged the boy and removed him from the ice. Warden Hunt was then pulled out. Twenty two minutes had elapsed from the rescue team's arrival at the parking lot to the removal of Tyson from the crevasse.

Immediately upon bringing Tyson to the surface, the rescue team stripped off his wet clothing, applied heat packs and placed him in a sleeping bag on a stretcher. Dr. Balis, the Australian doctor who was still present, had done a check of the vital signs; there was no pulse and no breathing, so CPR was immediately administered by Dr. Balis and Warden Hindle. The CPR continued while the stretcher carrying Tyson was borne down the glacier to the ambulance crew waiting at the base. The ambulance, operated by Lifeline Ambulances, had arrived in the parking lot during the time that the Warden rescue team was removing Tyson from the crevasse. Concern had arisen during the ambulance's journey from Jasper due to the fact that radio communication between the ambulance and the wardens and other parties involved had broken down at a number of points. Nevertheless, the problem with the ambulance's radio did not in any way slow down its response to the site.

The ambulance crew, upon meeting the rescue team at the toe of the glacier, intubated Tyson, who was still not breathing, and continued the CPR. He was placed in the ambulance, with Warden Hindle driving and Dr. Balis and the ambulance crew carrying out medical procedures, including administration of cardiac drugs and defibrillation.

En route to Jasper, the ambulance again experienced radio problems and developed engine trouble which caused the unit to fill up with smoke. A second ambulance was dispatched as back-up, but the first ambulance was fortunately able to make it to Jasper at a rapid speed, arriving at the Seton General Hospital at 8:18 p.m., some 36 minutes after leaving the Icefield.

The Seton General Hospital staff had been alerted of the situation, and knew they would be dealing with a hypothermia case. A medical team immediately took over efforts to revive Tyson, who upon his arrival was pulseless, not breathing, and had a flat electrocardiogram. Dr. Andrew Piers, who was in attendance, described Tyson's case as the most severe case of hypothermia which the Seton Hospital had dealt with during his eight years on staff. Dr. Piers related that Tyson's core body temperature was 25° C., as opposed to a normal temperature of 37° C. Hypothermia, he explained, involves a drop in the core body temperature, which may cause the heart to stop beating and the brain to cease receiving oxygen. Various factors such as age, physical condition, extent of exposure and the like would affect how soon after loss of consciousness a hypothermia victim might cease breathing. It was not determinable here when Tyson's breathing and other bodily functions had ceased. It seems clear from the evidence that at the time he was extracted from the crevasse, he showed no vital signs.

Standard medical procedure for the treatment of hypothermia involves bringing the body's core temperature back up to a certain temperature, by use of heat packs, injection of warm fluids into body cavities, and administering warm humidified air. These steps were taken by hospital staff, as well as other standard life support efforts. The hospital team made heroic efforts for seven hours to revive Tyson. They succeeded in bringing his core temperature up to 34⁰ C., but were never able to get any response from him in the way of vital signs, and he was finally pronounced dead at 2:15 a.m. July 26, 1990.

A medical team from Edmonton had been flown in in case Tyson had to be evacuated to Edmonton, but this did not prove to be necessary. The Seton General Hospital had all equipment and personnel necessary to deal with a severe hypothermia case, and no effort was spared in attempting to save Tyson's life.

Dr. Piers testified that Tyson showed all the signs of death at the time of his admission, and that essentially his opinion was that "the damage had been done by the time the boy came out of the crevasse." He did not feel that a speedier transport to the hospital after removal from the crevasse would have made a difference in this case. He also felt that the ambulance team had carried out all appropriate treatment en route to hospital, and that the administration of CPR during the evacuation from the glacier was also appropriate.

The evidence heard at this inquiry supports the conclusion that while death was not officially pronounced until 2:15 a.m. July 26, 1990, Tyson Chad Albrecht was "dead" (i.e. showed no vital signs and never resumed any) at the time he was dislodged from the crevasse at 7:50 p.m. July 25, 1990.

b) Recommendations

Tyson Chad Albrecht died in a heart-rending tragedy, succumbing to the quiet killer known as hypothermia, within view of and just a few metres away from his distraught father. The tragic death of a child in these circumstances evokes an acute hindsight, a minute scrutiny of what might possibly be done to prevent similar deaths. That hindsight, however, must at all times be cognizant of the setting in which the tragedy took place.

Despite the fact that over half a million people visit it each summer, the Columbia Icefield is regarded as a wilderness area. In fact, it is precisely the natural glacier that attracts so many tourists to the area. The Icefield is located in the Jasper National Park, an area decreed by federal legislation to be "made use of so as to leave [it] unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations" and "dedicated to the people of Canada for their benefit, education, and enjoyment."

The attraction of so many people to this vast natural resource known as the Jasper National Parks is fraught with the difficulty of balancing the education and safety of visitors with the preservation of the area in its natural state. It is bearing those factors in mind that this court makes the following recommendations:

- 1) THAT THE MEANS OF ADVISING THE PUBLIC OF THE DANGERS OF THE AREA BE IMPROVED.

At present a number of methods are employed by Parks Canada to educate the public about the natural phenomenon known as the Columbia Icefield and advise them of the dangers inherent in this wilderness area. Visitors upon first entering the National Park can obtain pamphlets upon request about specific areas. Large signs at all Park entrances advise motorists there are many natural hazards in the park, and suggest calling for information or visiting a Parks Information Centre. Signs on the highway near the Icefield draw tourists' attention to an information band on their car radios which describes the area and cautions against walking on the glacier, directing people to the Interpretive Centre for further information. The Interpretive Centre itself, located on the opposite side of the highway from the glacier, provides trained bilingual staff to answer questions and contains displays and pamphlets which both describe the environment and warn about potential hazards. At the glacier itself, a large low-slung sign near the footbridge describes the area and cautions about icy conditions and hazards on the glacier.

An abundance of information appears to be available to those who would seek it out. Clearly, there will always be certain people who will disregard any signs and warnings they might encounter. However, this court must concern itself with the ordinary prudent tourist, such as Mr. Albrecht, who struck the court as a person who would never knowingly have exposed his family to danger. Mr. Albrecht did not even see the Interpretive Centre, and while he noticed the sign near the footbridge, he did not read it, as there were too many people clustered around it. The large number of people seen walking about on the glacier in summer attire would tend to suggest that the dangers of doing so were not properly drawn to their attention. Parks Canada might well, therefore, give consideration to the following improvements:

i) Signs

The sign in the parking lot should be replaced or supplemented by a sign which clearly draws people's attention to the fact that walking on the glacier is dangerous and not advised. That sign should be prominently displayed where people will unavoidably see it. The feasibility of placing it at the entrance or exit of the footbridge suggests itself. Consultation with experts in this field would seem advisable, with a view to providing notice of the dangers to the public in such a way that congestion is avoided and a universally-recognizable danger symbol is incorporated into the sign. The sign should efficiently set out that icy conditions, crevasses and natural hazards make walking on the glacier dangerous. As the precise wording of the sign is probably best left to an expert in the advertising arts, such consultation should take place.

The fact that only half the people visiting the Icefield go to the Interpretive Centre, which is unfortunately located across the highway from the glacier access, suggests that other people may fail to notice the Centre, as did Mr. Albrecht. The possibility of creating signs in the parking lot and on the highway which better draw one's attention to the Centre should be considered.

A sign should also be placed at the point where the "path" meets the bottom of the glacier, warning against travel beyond that point except by trained mountaineers or in the company of a trained mountain guide.

While aesthetics should clearly be considered by those designing these signs, the prime consideration must be given to informing the public efficiently and emphatically of the dangers in the area.

Railing, roped off areas and other physical restriction of access to the area would seem an impractical and unnecessary intrusion on the natural beauty which we seek to preserve as our heritage. Such measures are impractical due to the ever changing terrain in the area, and unnecessary or superfluous if adequate warning is provided by proper signs.

ii) Pamphlets

The present pamphlet on the Icefields Parkway should be revised to more effectively draw to tourists' attention that walking on the glacier is not advised. At present the pamphlet suggests that one can even go up and touch a glacier, but does not properly deter people from venturing beyond that point.

The present system of distribution of pamphlets, which makes them available upon request at all Park entrances and on display for the public to help themselves at various Information Centres, seems to be appropriate. While evidence was led that pamphlets are routinely handed out at entrances to a number of American parks, that would seem to create a potential environmental problem when unwanted pamphlets are discarded, so as to make such a "solution" seem more serious than the problem it seeks to address.

2. THAT A REVIEW OF STAFFING PROCEDURES AT THE SUNWAPTA WARDEN STATION TAKE PLACE.

The team of wardens who responded to this situation exhibited bravery, determination, and excellent mountain rescue and first aid skills. All warden personnel receive extensive training in mountaineering, wilderness survival and rescue, and the training programs given to wardens by Parks Canada are internationally recognized. Thus the competence of the team that responded to this accident is not in question. What is questionable, however, is the delay in responding. That delay would seem largely attributable to the fact that Warden Damm was the only warden at the Sunwapta Warden Station at 5:30 p.m. July 25, 1990 when the call for help came over the radio from staff at the Interpretive Centre.

The Sunwapta Warden Station is the closest operational warden station to the Columbia Icefield, which is one of the busiest tourist destinations in Jasper National Park. The Sunwapta Station is in charge of an area covering 1/4 to 1/3 of Jasper National Park, yet only 1/7 of the total wardens in the Park are assigned to that Station during the summer. Summer is clearly the busiest season by far in the area. Shift schedules are such that all 5 Sunwapta warden members might be at the Station on one day, and only one on another. The Station is open 24 hours a day during the summer, yet frequently only one member is on duty after certain hours. The Icefield Interpretive Centre stays open until 7 p.m. during the summer months.

On July 25, 1990, Warden Damm, after receiving the distress call, remained at the Sunwapta Station for at least 25 minutes before embarking for the Icefield. Part of that time was spent gathering the necessary rescue equipment. However, that equipment was readily available in a nearby storage shed and obtaining it appears to have been a straightforward task. Warden Damm, however, found himself in a situation of having to man the radio to obtain further information and get operations underway, until Warden Briggs came on the radio as base rescue leader from Jasper at 6:00 p.m. Had another warden been immediately available to see to those functions at the Sunwapta Station, Warden Damm could conceivably have left the Station for the Icefield within a very few minutes. As it was, he did not arrive at the Icefield until just a minute before Wardens Hindle and Hunt, who had travelled from the Cavell Station, which was at least 20 minutes drive (at breakneck speeds) north of the Sunwapta Station. In situations where the potential for hypothermia exists, every moment is precious, and an immediate departure for the site by personnel from the Sunwapta Station may have made a crucial difference. Keeping at least two wardens on duty at least for the same hours as the Icefields Interpretive Centre remains open, and preferably for 24 hours throughout the summer, would probably prevent the recurrence of such an unfortunate delay. Alternatively, the immediate takeover of the task of coordinating the rescue by a base rescue leader manning the radio at another station would have freed Warden Damm up to travel to the rescue site. No explanation was given as to why that base rescue leader function was not assumed immediately at another point; it would seem that perhaps no one was at the Jasper Station at the time the call came in through Warden Damm. Certainly Warden Briggs did not arrive there until 6:00 p.m., a good half hour after the initial call for help had been placed.

After personnel arrived at the parking lot, the rescue was performed very efficiently. However, one cannot help but be left with the feeling that a faster arrival initially might have impacted upon the ultimate result. This is of

course hindsight, and Warden Damm did not know of the presence of Mr. McGowan, a trained guide who could have assisted him. Nonetheless, a prompt arrival of trained personnel from the Sunwapta Station to any emergency in their area would seem be an important priority which the provision of adequate staff could help ensure.

The Sunwapta Warden Station itself seems well located to carry out its functions, and is close enough to the Icefield to provide reasonable services. One must remember that Jasper National Park is a vast wilderness area, and one cannot expect the services one takes for granted as readily available in an urban centre. Tyson Albrecht's death is the only fatality to have occurred on the toe of the Athabasca Glacier in 20 years, during which time 7.5 million people have visited the area. The wardens have only been called upon to respond to 13 incidents of people slipping into crevasses on the toe of the glacier since July 1970. It would be impractical and expensive to maintain rescue personnel wherever accidents might conceivably occur. Routine daily patrols are made to the Icefield and a cache of rescue equipment is available at the Interpretive Centre should people qualified in its use require it. That would seem sufficient in the present circumstances.

3. THAT A READY MEANS OF PLACING EMERGENCY CALLS FROM THE PARKING LOT AT THE ATHABASCA GLACIER BE CONSIDERED.

It was indeed fortuitous that Mr. McGowan was on the glacier at the time of Tyson's fall, with a radio to enable him to summons help. Had that not been the case, someone would have had to descend to the parking lot and then travel to the Interpretive Centre 1 1/2 km. away.

Evidence disclosed that a fibre optics line has been run through this area. It is recommended that an emergency telephone or a pay telephone be placed in the parking lot at the toe of the glacier in case of future emergency situations. One can reasonably anticipate the danger of hypothermia in any such incident, and time is precious in these situations. Ready access to a telephone could make a critical difference. The sheer number of people using the immediate area in question would suggest this installation as practical. While it is recognized that one cannot expect all the amenities of home in a wilderness setting; that one accepts the limitations of that setting; and that it is not desirable to clutter up our National Parks with unnecessary technological devices, it is nevertheless suggested in this case, due to the somewhat distant location of the Interpretive Centre, that a more efficient means of summoning help, such as a telephone, be provided. Short of providing personnel equipped with radio equipment at the glacier, which seems impractical and expensive, a telephone would seem to be the least intrusive solution.

4 THAT AMBULANCE FACILITIES IN THE AREA BE ASSESSED.

Lifeline Ambulances responded quickly to this emergency with an advance life support ambulance manned by trained paramedics. Nothing in the operation of the ambulance contributed to Tyson Albrecht's death. However, evidence disclosed that the ambulance experienced a number of problems which could significantly affect future rescue efforts if they were to continue.

First of all, Lawrence Mark, one of the paramedics who accompanied the ambulance, described the problems the ambulance had in maintaining radio contact with various parties. These radio problems were also described by two of the wardens. Mr. Mark stated that there has historically been a problem with radio communication between the ambulances and the warden service. On the day in question, that problem did prevent the ambulance attendants from having as much information as they would have liked about the incident and their prospective patient.

The ambulance used to transport Tyson also developed engine trouble en route, which fortunately did not impede its rapid response. However, the same ambulance broke down on a call in the Edson area within weeks of Tyson's death.

There was no evidence as to whether these problems had been rectified. Certainly priority should be given to ensuring accurate and reliable radio transmission is possible with any ambulance engaged in rescue activities. It seems trite to add that ambulance vehicles should be checked regularly to ensure that they are roadworthy and reliable.

Considerable evidence was heard about the feasibility of a rescue by helicopter. It is clear that the helicopter service available would in no way have sped up response time. In fact the response by motor vehicle was considerably faster in this case. Dr. Piers felt that a more rapid journey from the glacier site to the hospital would have made no difference, as "the damage had already been done" by the time Tyson was removed from the crevasse. Thus, while there may well be instances where a helicopter might be an appropriate rescue/ambulance vehicle, this situation at the Columbia Icefields was not one of them. Unless a helicopter becomes reasonably available from a point closer than Valemount, it would seem prohibitively expensive to make such an aircraft available routinely in Parks rescue operations where other means of conveyance may be just as efficient.

GENERAL COMMENTS

The emphasis of Parks Canada is on preventative programs and self-reliance of park visitors. Well-qualified rescue teams are provided when needed. That emphasis is appropriate to a setting such as a National Park, where people go largely to escape the structure and stress of daily life in an open, natural wilderness environment. People must be informed of the inherent features and dangers of activities which they are carrying on in the Park, in order to make informed decisions as to whether to pursue those activities. An effective communication of information in this case may well have prevented the Albrecht family from venturing onto the Columbia Icefield, thereby averting this tragedy. Other similar incidents may be averted in future by this means. The assurance of emergency communication facilities and of an adequate complement of staff such as the highly-trained and competent wardens who responded should speed up any rescue activities that may nevertheless occur.