WILDERNESS IMAGE

Fatal Avalanche on Mount Everest

Dale R. Wagner, PhD, FACSM

Kinesiology & Health Science Department, Utah State University, Logan, UT

On the morning of May 7, 2009, a section of the hanging glacier on the west shoulder of Mount Everest broke free, creating this avalanche that spread across the Khumbu icefall. Avalanches are common in this area. Climbers in Everest Base Camp become accustomed to hearing distant avalanches and somewhat desensitized to it, in the same way that a soldier in combat might become

accustomed to nonthreatening distant mortar explosions. However, the sound and proximity of this avalanche caused everyone to take notice immediately. Unfortunately, Lhakpa Nuru Sherpa, age 33 y, perished in this avalanche.

Photo taken from Base Camp (GPS: 28°00'15.60" N and 86°51'20.39" E).