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Pakistan helicopter search planned for 2 missing US climbers

BRADY MCCOMBS, ASSOCIATED PRESS

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — The Pakistan military plans to search with helicopters Saturday morning for a pair of well-known Utah climbers missing on an icy mountain peak that has been encased by thick clouds and snowfall for days.

This would be the first time the weather has cleared enough for helicopters to look for mountain climbers Kyle Dempster and Scott Adamson, said Jonathan Thesenga, of Black Diamond Equipment. **An organization called Global Rescue also has helicopters and a medivac aircraft on standby.**

A rescue effort was launched last Sunday near northern Pakistan's Choktoi Glacier after Dempster and Adamson failed to return Aug. 26 to base camp following an attempt to climb the north face of a 23,901-foot mountain.

Thesenga says the two left base camp on Aug. 21 to begin their ascent. Their cook, at base camp, spotted their head lamps about halfway up the peak on the second day. On the third day, though, snowy and cloudy temperatures rolled in that have socked in the area, he said.

"After days and days of waiting, the upcoming dawn in Pakistan brings us our greatest opportunity for rescuing Scott and Kyle," said Thesenga about a search that will begin Friday night in U.S. time zones.

He is the global sports marketing for Utah-based Black Diamond Equipment, which is sponsoring Dempster.

Dempster, 33, and Adamson, 34, both of Utah, are two of the most accomplished alpinists of their generation. Dempster is a two-time winner of the coveted climbing award, Piolets d'Or. He last won in 2013 for a climb he did with others in the same area in Pakistan.

They were attempting a climb never before done on the north face of a peak known as Ogre II. It is part of a grouping of mountains called Baintha Brakk.

The two faced a nearly 4,600 feet vertical to overhanging face of ice, rock and snow, Thesenga said. The route presented challenges even for the experience hikers, requiring a host of climbing equipment including ropes, crampons, ice axes, ice screws, and helmets, he said.

The peak has only been reached once before, by a Korean team in 1980s via less difficult route, Thesenga said.

Last year, Dempster and Adamson nearly died trying the same climb. Adamson broke his leg after a 100-foot fall and the two fell again 400 feet while trying to get down the mountain. He said the duo hoped they had learned from their mistakes during the near-death experience to make it this time, Thesenga said.

Six other climbers, including two from the United States, who were in the area are at base camp and ready to ascend if they can help, he said.

Four guides — known as porters — have climbed up a nearby glacier behind where Dempster and Adamson were and are hoping to look for them with binoculars.

Dempster and Adamson have made careers of climbing peaks from Pakistan to Alaska. In a video posted on the Black Diamond website, Dempster talks about the risk of his daring sport.

"It's a journey to something that inspires you," Dempster said. "On that journey, you go through the feeling of fear and to an eventual outcome. You use your pool of experience and common sense and intuition to help make decision and mitigate the dangers."