

Renegade Files®

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Welcome to Renegade Files Short Drives #6 – The Dyatlov Pass Incident .

This is number 6 in our *summer series* of shorter episodes called “Short Drives,” which explore strange stories, come out every Friday all summer, and are ***in addition to*** our longer, regular episodes which still air twice a month.

These short drives episodes are my presents to you for being a fan.

So come with me now as we get into Renegade Files, Short Drives #6 – The Dyatlov Pass Incident .

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Episode Text

Hello and Welcome to Renegade Files Short Drives #6 – The Dyatlov Pass Incident.

I’m your host, Lex Gordon, Broadcasting from the Jungle Villa Outpost, Deep in the Uncharted Tropics. You are now in the company of Outcasts.

This is number 6 in our *summer series* of shorter episodes called “Short Drives,” which explore strange stories, come out every Friday this summer, and are ***in addition to*** our longer, regular episodes which still air twice a month.

These short drives episodes are my presents to you for being a fan.

Hiking and mountain climbing at advanced levels can be a dangerous activity. Doing so in the frozen Russian winter, even more so.

It is not uncommon for mountain climbers, even experienced ones, to have accidents or end up in life threatening situations.

But 10 experienced mountain explorers all dying on a single trip is unusual. And when all 10 of them die in 10 different and unexplained ways, then we have what has become one of the strangest unsolved mysteries of all time.

Join me now as we go on a frozen expedition into a bizzare ... cold case? ... on Renegade Files, Short Drives #6 – The Dyatlov Pass Incident.

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As we start here, I will ask your forgiveness of my American attempts at some of the Russian pronunciations in this episode.

In 1959, a group was formed for a hiking and skiing expedition across the northern Urals in [Sverdlovsk Oblast](#), [Soviet Union](#).

The expedition was led by Igor Dyatlov, a 23-year-old radio engineering student who organized ten others for the trip, most of whom were his fellow University peers. The full group consisted of 9 men and 2 women. Each member of the group was an experienced [Grade II](#)-hiker with ski tour experience and would be receiving Grade III certification upon their return... grade 3 being the highest.

So very experienced hikers and snow skiers.

They arrived by train at [Ivdel](#) in the early morning of January 25, 1959. They then took a truck to Vizhai, a small village, and the last inhabited settlement to the north.

On January 27, they began their trek toward Gora Otorten. On January 28, one member, Yuri Yudin, who had developed some health problems, turned back because of knee and joint pain that made him unable to continue the hike. The remaining nine hikers continued.

Diaries and cameras found at their last campsite were used to track the group's route up to the day preceding the incident.

On January 31, the group arrived at the edge of a highland area and began to prepare for climbing. In a wooded valley, they cached surplus food and equipment which they planned to use for the trip back.

The next day, they began to move through the mountain pass.

Now remember, this is in the Russian winter and it is freezing cold. Over the course of the expedition during the times we know the hikers were all alive, temperatures ranged from 9°F to -23°F, depending on wind and the time of day.

Their plan was to cross over the pass and make camp on the far side the next afternoon. But the weather turned bad and a snowstorm caused visibility to be poor, which seems to have caused them to go off course. They ended up going too far west and this caused them, to begin to ascend the slope of [Kholat Syakhl](#), which is a mountain to one side of the pass they were aiming for.

Realizing this mistake, they decided to set up camp there on the slope of the mountain. They could have camped about a mile downhill in a forested area that would have offered some shelter from the weather, but it is thought that Dyatlov probably didn't want to lose the altitude they had gained.

By camping on the slope, they could, the following day, just traverse horizontally across to the pass, and avoid hiking down then back up again.

Okay. So this is how they ended up where they were. And describing their camp site as being on the slope of a mountain is misleading. The area was on the upward terrain, but this is still within a wide, basically flat location.

It's not like the side of a steep mountain. The valley is wide and the mountains are relatively low and wide, so, yes it's an uphill ridge, but not a dramatically steep mountainside at all.

Before they had set out, Dyatlov had agreed to send a [telegram](#) to their sports club as soon as the group returned to Vizhai. The plan was to be back by February 12.

The 12th came and went with no messages. As did the days that followed.

But delays were common on such adventures, and communication was far from what it is today, so no actions were taken immediately.

But when 8 full days had passed, on February 20th, the hikers relatives finally demanded a rescue operation. The first rescuers sent out was a group of students and teachers from the university. Soon they were joined by members of the Russian army and the local police, which arrived with personnel and helicopters to expand the search.

Six days later rescuers found the group's abandoned and badly damaged tent. The scene baffled the volunteers. The small tent doorway was still open, but the tent was partially down, and had apparently been cut open from the inside.

Inside it was empty, But all of the groups belongings, including shoes had been left behind.

Nine sets of footprints we're clearly seen walking away from the tent. Experienced trackers in the group noted that some of the footprints seemed to be from people wearing socks, some of them were made by people wearing 1 shoe, and others were made by barefoot walkers.

Some of the tracks led to a nearby wooded area about a mile away. This would have been the wooded area that the group decided not to camp in on the night before.

In the forest at the base of a tall Siberian pine rescuers found the remains of a small fire. Near this fire they found the first two bodies both shoeless and wearing only underwear. Some of the branches had been broken off of the tall tree as high as 30 feet off the ground, and rescuers thought that this could have been caused by one of the men climbing the tree, to look for something, perhaps their original campsite or others in their party.

Between the forest fire and the original campsite the rescuers found three more bodies at locations ranging from 980 feet to 2070 feet from the campfire tree. Their positions indicated that they were making an attempt to return to the tent.

It took more than two months to find the other 4 hikers. They were found in a Creek under 13 feet of snow about 246 feet further into the woods from the pine tree fire. Some of the clothes they were wearing had belonged to the other members of the party and one of those found, one of the women was wearing pants that had been burned, and her injured foot and shin had been wrapped in a torn jacket.

One of the hikers had a small crack in his skull, but medical examiners did not think that that was a fatal wound.

Three of the hikers had major skull damage and broken ribs. The force required to cause such injuries is said to have been extremely high, comparable to that of a high speed car crash. The bodies with these broken bones had no external wounds, as if the bones had been broken by an extreme application of sudden pressure.

All four bodies found in the Creek we're either fully or partially in running water, one of the women was missing her tongue and eyes, as well as a fragment of her skull bone. The others had missing eyes and eyebrows, and it's possible that all of these occurred from scavengers after the hikers had died.

It was initially thought that perhaps the local manly people, who are indigenous reindeer hunters, had attacked and killed the hikers for encroaching upon their lands. But only the hikers' footprints were visible, and there was no indication of any hand-to-hand struggle, and none of the hikers had been struck with arrows, axes, or swords, and so this initial theory was quickly abandoned.

Also, investigators discovered traces of radioactivity on some of the hikers' clothing.

The official conclusion at the time was that the members of the party had died of, a quote, "compelling natural force."

The current cause of death for all 10 of the Dyatlov Pass hikers is listed as disputed.

The official investigation into the event was ended in May of 1959. And according to an article in the Saint Petersburg Times, that's Saint Petersburg, Russia, and not St. Petersburg, FL, but according to an article in that newspaper, all of the information and files gathered as part of the investigation into the incident were sent to a secret archive.

Interesting things of note include the testimony of Yuri Kuntsevich, a 12-year-old boy at the time, who had been fascinated by the story of the hikers and attended 5 of their funerals, said that all of their skin had a deep brown tan.

Also, another group of hikers in the mountains to the south at the same time, reported that they saw strange orange spheres in the sky to the north on the night of this incident. Similar glowing orange spheres were seen in the sky from February to March of that year by various independent witnesses, including people in meteorology service, and the military.

Theories

Avalanche. Many people think that the tragedy was caused by an avalanche. They say this explains why the tent was cut from the inside, because if the hikers were trapped under the snow in the tent, cutting through it to get out of it would make more sense. They say this is why they sought shelter in the wooded area because the trees would have stopped the snow if there were a second avalanche.

But there are several holes in this theory. The hiker's Diaries indicate very light snowfall in the area on the first leg of their adventure, and in the days leading up to whatever tragedy befell them.

Also this area is not prone to avalanches. Where they were camping is relatively wide and flat. While it is possible that they were hit by a phenomenon known as a slab avalanche, which happens when a large chunk of frozen snow slides down a hill face. This could account for some of the bruises and broken bones that we see on the victims. But for this to have been what caused the situation, the slab of snow would have had to travel a farther distance than seems possible.

When you see pictures of the tent in the aftermath, you realize that these explorers were camping in a very wide open basically flat valley between the mountains in the distance. And while much has been made by the fact that Swiss avalanche ambassadors, in the process of helping the investigation, actually saw an avalanche occur in this area, what they witnessed was actually an avalanche that happened 5 miles away from where the hikers were.

We also have pictures taken by one of the rescue parties on February 26th, and in one of those pictures you can clearly see a spot where the hikers had stored a cache of their outdoor gear, and among this gear are all of their snow skis, and ski poles, that have been stuck into the snow and stored vertically.

All of these vertical skis and ski poles remained undisturbed, which is an indication that no avalanche, slab or otherwise, crushed the hikers in their tent.

Another argument against the avalanche theory, is that rescuers noted the footprints of the doomed hikers indicated a very calm and casual exit from the area. No one seemed to be carrying any other person, or helping them walk, and the footprints seemed to all walk off in their separate directions in a very even slow and steady manner.

If the party had been crushed by an avalanche, and this is what caused their broken bones, broken ribs, and skull fractures, then they would not have been able to walk under their own power and crossed such a great distance in such a calm way.

Because of these observations and others, the authors of the exhaustively researched website, dyatlovpas.com concluded that an avalanche could not have been responsible for the fatalities.

There are several other theories as well, but none of them are completely conclusive.

One is that an incident of ball lightning occurred in the area, and perhaps lingered over the tent increasing the heat to such a degree that the hikers were forced to flee. But this still doesn't explain why they would cut out of the tent from the inside when the doorway to the tent is right there. It also doesn't explain any of the injuries sustained.

Another theory is the katabatic wind. This is a type of wind that flows down the mountain side and could have destroyed the tent and covered it with snow causing the hikers to have to cut their way out, but this also does nothing to explain the combination of violent injuries sustained away from the tent and a calm methodical exit with everyone walking away in a healthy manner.

Another theory is that an incident of infrasound caused the hikers to lose their mind and panic. This could have caused them to leave the tent and die in the cold before they came to their senses. Such a sound is caused by certain wind patterns around the low mountains, and the phenomenon creates a low vibration that has been known to induce irrational fear in humans. But once again none of that explains the bizarre injuries, and it's unlikely that such a phenomenon would last long enough to cause the group to split up and build multiple shelters and fires away from their camp.

Another theory is that a startled herd of reindeer followed the trail to escape whatever danger they were running from, and this trampling herd ran over the hikers causing them to flee their tent without their clothes and that this melee caused all of their injuries. Once again the footprints of their calm and collected exit do not bear this out. A similar theory is that the group was attacked by a pack of Wolverines, but once again this theory fails for the same reasons.

The Discovery Channel actually aired a documentary that put forth a theory that the Russian Yeti was responsible, but historically yetis have only been seen from a distance and are often considered far more elusive than even their North American Bigfoot relatives.

Another idea is that the explorers fell prey to methanol poisoning which caused them to go insane. One idea is that during their evening meal they somehow accidentally got some of the methanol based stove fuel into their food, and accidentally consuming it caused them to lose their minds cut themselves out of the tent and fight with each other, which is a way to explain their scattered appearance and injuries. But by all accounts the Dyatlov group used only wood for their stove.

Another theory is that the group died while Authorities were conducting a Russian national scientific experiment which released radioactive material onto the group from above using a hot air balloon. Some also have suggested that the hikers

were mistaken for fugitives who had escaped from a nearby prison. A small concentration camp which is an outpost of the gulag prison camps it's situated just a few miles from the site of the tragedy. Some have suggested that the authorities attacked and killed the hikers believing that they were escaped criminals from this facility. But there were no known escapes of prisoners at this immediate time, although several had escaped a few months before. However, it's unlikely that escaped prisoners would have remained camping in the bitter cold, when townships were within walking distance.

In the end this is a truly unsolved mystery. It's a case that generates far more questions than answers, and even the officials who investigated it on the ground were baffled. The theories which attempt to explain what happened fall into these inconclusive categories where any one of them can explain some of the things that were found there, but none of them can explain everything.

It's clear that most of the members of the party died of hypothermia, so in other words they simply froze to death. While others had injuries that were severe but did not seem to kill them. Broken bones, missing eyes, shattered ribs, burned clothing, Some found under a tree by a fire, some found in a Creek, and others buried in the snow between the woods and their original campsite.

The most mysterious question isn't what killed them in the end, but why would they leave their tent in the first place, cutting themselves out from the inside when the tent doorway is just a flap toss away, and within arms reach of the spot where they cut themselves out?

And after doing so, why would they leave the tent, in some cases in their underwear with no shoes, none of them wearing 2 shoes, and some of them barefoot?

Their exit, not a scrambling, crawling, frantic one, but a calm collected stroll.

A stroll where some of them walked to a tree in the woods a mile away and built a fire. While others continue deeper in the woods to die in a Creek. And still others seemed to turn back and freeze to death in the snow in the middle of nowhere.

The entire event is a tragedy. And in the end all we can do is wish their spirits safe travels in the afterlife.

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Also be sure to check out our main Renegade Files Episodes, which are longer, come out about twice a month, and are deeper dives into esoteric subjects where logic clashes with the official narratives.

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Until our next adventure, I'm your host Lex Gordon...

Stay Wild, Milkyway Child!