



AAC Publications

Fall on Snow – Ski Mountaineering Descent, Exceeding Abilities

Alaska, Denali National Park, Mt. McKinley, West Rib, Orient Express Couloir

Ilkka Uusitalo (36) and the three other members of expedition “L10 at Denali 2012” left the 14,200-foot camp on the West Buttress route to ascend and then ski down the couloir by the upper West Rib on May 22. Due to deteriorating weather, the group made an unplanned bivouac on the route and then continued their ascent on May 23. As they were skiing, Uusitalo fell at about the 18,000-foot level in the couloir and slid to approximately 15,850 feet, falling over a rock band in the process. He came to rest about 60 feet deep in a crevasse. His teammates descended to his location and left two members there while one continued descending to the 14,200-foot camp, where he notified NPS rangers of the incident.

Ranger Joe Reichert received the initial notification at 2:30 p.m. Ranger Tucker Chenoweth, who was also at the 14,200-foot camp, and three patrol members were dispatched to the scene. Upon arriving at 3:50 p.m., Chenoweth reported that the other members of L10 had gone into the crevasse and had determined that Uusitalo had died from his injuries. Ranger Chenoweth and his team extracted Uusitalo’s body from the crevasse, and it was flown to base camp and eventually Talkeetna, where it was transferred to the medical examiner. (Source: Coley Gentzel, Lead Mountaineering Ranger.)

Editor's Note: This report has been edited slightly from the original version to update a route name.

Images

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