



AAC Publications

Fall on Snow — Inadequate Protection, Fatigue

Alaska, Denali, Denali Pass

On May 10 four members of the Romanian team “Explorer Denali 2014” flew to the Kahiltna base camp to begin their climb. Over the following 13 days they progressed at an average rate up the West Buttress Route.

On May 23 three of the team members made their summit attempt, departing high camp at 9:45 a.m. High winds made for a challenging and long day, which continued into the early hours of May 24. Having completed 85 percent of the traverse back to high camp from Denali Pass, one of the climbers was preparing to clip into the final protection picket when she was pulled down the slope by the fall of one of her partners. After the fall, this climber was reported to be unconscious for approximately 30 minutes. Her two partners and another climbing team transported the injured climber back to high camp. At 2:30 a.m., guides from several companies established communication with ranger Dave Weber at the 14,200-foot camp and provided medical care.

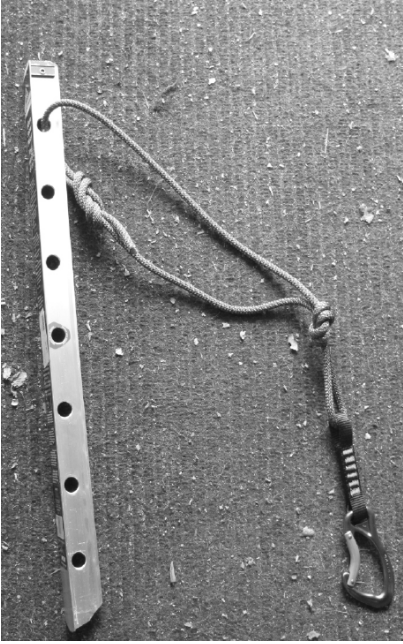
The NPS rescue helicopter launched from Talkeetna at 5:37 a.m., picked up ranger Weber from the 14,200-foot camp, and proceeded to high camp. The patient was loaded onto the helicopter and flown to Talkeetna, where she was transferred to an air ambulance. She was assessed at the hospital and released the same day. [Source: Denali National Park Case Incident Record.]

ANALYSIS

This team was roped up and using protection as they descended the Autobahn traverse, but they had not clipped sufficient protection to stop the entire team from sliding once one climber fell. After a very long summit day, it’s likely that fatigue contributed significantly to the fall. [Source: The Editors.]

Editor’s note: Guides Ben Adkison and Kyle Bates, both with Mountain Trip, received the 2014 Mislou-Swanson Denali Pro Award for their efforts and expertise in orchestrating the rescue of the critically injured Romanian climber. Adkison and Bates managed the patient’s care for five hours in the middle of the night until daybreak, when National Park Service personnel could be flown to high camp. “Their professionalism allowed for a seamless and timely evacuation in the demanding mountain environment at 17,200 feet, and their extraordinary efforts resulted in a positive outcome for a severely injured patient,” the award citation read.

Images



"Fixed" picket prepared for the traverse to Denali Pass.

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