



## AAC Publications

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### **Leader Fall on Ice**

Alaska, Denali National Park, West Kahiltna Peak

**At 9:42 a.m. on April 14, rangers were notified about an injured climber by a local air taxi service that had received a text from the climbing team's Garmin inReach device.** The team of three reported that one climber had broken his right leg while attempting a new route on the west face of West Kahiltna Peak, at approximately 9,600 feet. Subsequent text messages confirmed that the 34-year-old male patient had sustained an open lower leg fracture during a 10- to 15-meter fall on ice while leading the third roped pitch of the line.

Favorable conditions in the mountain range enabled a helicopter reconnaissance flight and full scene assessment prior to patient evacuation. Rangers located the patient and teammates on an exposed snow and ice slope directly beneath a vertical rock face.

At 1:47 p.m., the rescue team landed at a staging area at 8,000 feet on the Kahiltna Glacier, and the helicopter was configured for a short-haul extraction using a 200-foot line. One mountaineering ranger functioned as the short-haul rescuer while another served as safety officer from the landing zone with a full view of the operation. Due to the steepness of the terrain and the potential for rockfall, the ranger remained on the short-haul line while assessing and packaging the patient, in order to expedite an extraction if required.

At 2:22 p.m., the ranger and patient landed back at the staging site, where the patient assessment was completed prior to loading into the helicopter. The patient was transported to Talkeetna in a full-body vacuum splint for both comfort and to stabilize the injury. The team landed in Talkeetna at 3:15p.m., and the climber was transferred to ground ambulance for further treatment at a local hospital. (Source: Denali Mountaineering Rangers.)

### **ANALYSIS**

This was a highly skilled team pushing into uncharted terrain on a difficult route (later rated AI5+ R M6+ C1). The leader fell when a bulge of rotten ice disintegrated. His fall was held by a screw, but any long fall on ice has the potential to cause serious injury. With the patient safely evacuated to the hospital, his two partners returned to finish the new route and later said the third pitch, where the patient fell, was the crux of the climb. (Source: The Editors.)

## Images



The site of an accident on West Kahiltna Peak is shown, three pitches up a new route on the west face. The patient, who had a lower-leg fracture, was flown from the face in a short-haul mission.

## Article Details

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