



AAC Publications

Lead Fall — Ankle Fracture

Alaska, Mt. Hunter, North Buttress, Deprivation route

The North Buttress of Mt. Hunter with the line of Deprivation marked in red and the location of the fall indicated with a yellow X. Photo: JD Merrit.

On May 17, a party of two was climbing Deprivation on the North Buttress of Mt. Hunter when the leader fell approximately 50 feet and sustained an ankle fracture. The fall occurred on the upper route at roughly 6,400 feet on the Southeast Fork of the Kahiltna Glacier. With assistance from a second party climbing a nearby route, the injured climber's team lowered him eight pitches to the base of the wall and self-rescued to the glacier.

The NPS helicopter departed Talkeetna with three climbing rangers and landed at Kahiltna Base Camp. Due to flat light and concern about the helicopter becoming weather-bound in the range, two rangers initiated a ground response and reached the patient with medical gear. When conditions improved, the helicopter retrieved the rangers and patient and evacuated to Talkeetna, where local EMS was standing by.

ANALYSIS

Deprivation (Backes-Twight, 1994) is a sustained mixed route on the right side of Mt. Hunter's North Buttress, rated approximately AI5+ M5 with crux sections through four rock bands. The route is seldom repeated but has seen increasing traffic in recent seasons. A leader fall at that grade on steep mixed terrain carries significant injury potential, and a broken ankle at altitude—with thousands of feet of technical terrain below—presents a serious self-rescue challenge under the best circumstances. The successful outcome here depended on two factors: the availability of a second party nearby who could assist with the eight-pitch lower, and the injured climber's ability to participate in the evacuation to the glacier.

Parties climbing remote technical routes in the Alaska Range should carry a communication device capable of two-way contact and have a clear plan for self-rescue in the event of injury, since NPS response times from Talkeetna—even under favorable conditions—are measured in hours. The flat-light delay that prevented the helicopter from landing at the scene is a recurring constraint in the range and should be factored into any rescue planning. (Source: Denali Mountaineering Rangers.)

Images



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Article Details

Author	Denali Mountaineering Rangers
Publication	ANAM
Volume	14
Issue	1
Page	32
Copyright Date	2026
Article Type	Accident reports