

## **FALL ON SNOW, UNABLE TO SELF-ARREST, POOR ROUTE SELECTION, HASTE**

### **Wyoming, Grand Teton National Park, Mount Teewinot**

On the afternoon of May 14, 1994, Arlo Morrill (51), Steve Olsen (45), and Terri Buceambuso were descending the east face of Mount Teewinot after a successful morning ascent. During the descent the first member of the party to traverse the narrow couloir, Buceambuso, slipped and fell approximately eight feet, pulling with him the fresh snow and exposing an icy layer below. These conditions were communicated to Olsen and Morrill above, prompting Olsen to select a higher route across the couloir. Morrill elected to continue behind Buceambuso. A short distance below the summit notch Morrill slipped while traversing this snow-filled couloir which extends down the east face. Attempts to self-arrest with his ice axe were unsuccessful resulting in a fatal fall of approximately 2,000 feet.

### **Analysis**

Morrill was described by his companions as an experienced mountaineer who was climbing a route well within his range of skill and capability. A week prior to the climb a series of storms had dropped up to ten inches of fresh snow on the mountain, a deposit now resting on an older snow surface influenced by warming spring conditions.

During a follow-up interview with Olsen, he stated that the group was anxious to get off the mountain and was descending accordingly. He offered speculation that this may have been a contributing factor to the accident. He also questioned, in hindsight, why they had not shared a more serious discussion after Buceambuso's fall, such as considering a traverse like the one Olsen opted for, and/or stopping to put on crampons. After Morrill's fall, Olsen and Buceambuso continued their descent with crampons.

The use of crampons, or sometimes even chopping a single step, may make the difference. As the late Leigh Ortenberger noted in his 1965 edition of *A Climber's Guide to the Teton Range*, "Many of the climbing accidents in the Park have occurred on the snowfields of this route." With the passing of 30 years, this continues to hold true. It should also be noted that unarrested falls on snow and ice continue to be the leading cause of serious injury and death in the Teton Range.

*(Editor's Note: Except where others are noted, the source for all the reports from Grand Teton National Park is Mark Magnuson, SAR Coordinator. There was a report received second hand that a sport climber fell four feet from a climb at Wild Iris, outside of Lander, WY, resulting in a severed nerve in his leg, and bleeding that was so difficult to stop that a tourniquet—rarely used any more—was required.*

*There is also an addition to last year that has been recorded appropriately. A correspondent from Colorado, Robert Kelman, reported that in May of 1993, a young male climber fell from 40 feet on a route at Vedawoo, WY, and died two days later.)*

## **FALL ON SNOW, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT**

### **Wyoming, Grand Teton National Park, Paintbrush Divide**

On the afternoon of June 7, 1994, David Turk and Dan Turk (25) were traversing a steep snow couloir near Paintbrush Divide when Dan Turk slipped and fell approximately 300 feet down steep snow and rock. Turk's fall was stopped when he wrapped a small tree just prior to launching over a 30 foot cliff. Injuries included an open fracture to the lower leg and multiple deep lacerations to the head, lower back (with potential spinal