

Denali Pass. Ibanez, falling the shortest distance due to his position on the rope team, had no injuries while Mira received facial, wrist, shoulder, and upper leg injuries and Sanchez suffered ankle and rib injuries. Despite these, the men were able to descend the remaining 1,100 feet to their established camp at 17,200 feet by 2200.

On May 14 at 1000, Ibanez contacted an NPS Ranger patrol camping in the same area. Ibanez reported that his group had an accident and “need(s) some help.” After evaluating the injured climbers and contacting the Talkeetna Ranger Station an air evacuation was coordinated. At 1345 the injured climbers were loaded into the NPS LAMA Helicopter and transported to the 7,000-foot basecamp. At 1359 the injured climbers were transferred to an NPS contracted fixed wing aircraft and flown to the Talkeetna airport. They were transferred to Providence Life Guard aircraft and transported to Providence hospital for treatment. Luis Ibanez descended to the 14,200-foot camp with assistance of the NPS patrol and continued to basecamp with other climbers.

Jose Sanchez and Francisco Mira were treated and released from Providence hospital. Sanchez’s injuries included two left fractured ribs and a sprained right ankle. Mira’s injuries included facial lacerations, broken nose, fractured left wrist, bruised left shoulder, and left thigh puncture wounds.

### **Analysis**

The 18,300-foot level on the West Buttress has a history of falling accidents. The short, icy section of forty-five-degree terrain continues to prove itself a hazard for fatigued climbers descending from a summit attempt. Climbers, especially guides, have frequently set a short fixed line over this area to prevent accidents. A running belay would also avoid falls in this area. Despite its non-threatening appearance, this area, and others like it, should be crossed with caution as even small injuries such as sprained ankles can have enormous consequences in high mountains. (Source: Kevin Moore, Mountaineering Ranger)

## **FALL ON SNOW, AMS**

### **Alaska, Mount McKinley, West Buttress**

The Denali Ski “Challenge 1999” expedition from Italy included skier Mauro Rumez and photographer Franco Toso. Their plan was to climb Denali by the West Rib and have Toso photograph Rumez as he skied the route.

They flew in on May 10 and began ascending the Northeast Fork of the Kahiltna Glacier on May 12, arriving at the bottom of the West Rib on May 14. Over the course of three days they climbed to 16,200 feet on the West Rib, camping there on May 17. The next day, Rumez left Toso and attempted to go to the summit, but was turned back by high winds at the “Football Field” (19,500 feet). Toso did not attempt to summit because he had AMS and was not feeling well. The climbers spent their second night together at 16,200 feet on the West Rib.

On May 19 they started to descend, with Rumez skiing and Toso on foot. Rumez skied the remainder of the route and stopped at 10,000 feet to watch Toso descend on his own. At 14,900 feet, Toso was making his way down through

a serac field when he lost his footing and fell off a serac. Toso continued to slide, and fell over another serac cliff before stopping in some soft snow. Toso was unable to self arrest during the 65-foot fall. Rumez witnessed the fall and skied out the Northeast Fork to the 8,000-foot camp on the West Buttress looking for help. He contacted other climbers there and asked for assistance. Meanwhile, the Team Hung Low expedition from Crested Butte also witnessed Toso's fall and climbed up to Toso from their camp located at the second ice dome. Team Hung Low dialed 911 on a cell phone and explained the situation to the operator. The message was relayed to the Talkeetna Ranger Station at 1858.

At 2315, the LAMA helicopter piloted by Jim Hood brought a screamer suit to the scene where the injured Toso waited. Team Hung Low, who had been caring for Toso, prepared him for the short haul. Toso was lifted from the scene and flown down to Basecamp at 7,000 feet, where he was further stabilized by Park Service staff and volunteers. Toso was transferred to a Life Flight transport in Talkeetna and then flown to Anchorage Regional Hospital where he was treated for contusions to his right chest wall and left leg.

### **Analysis**

Toso was unanchored when he lost his footing and fell. He was quite fortunate to stop in soft snow and come away with only contusions. The fact that he was experiencing Acute Mountain Sickness most likely played a role in his accident. (Source: Kevin Moore, Mountaineering Ranger)

## **EXCEEDING ABILITIES – OFF ROUTE, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT AND WATER, HYPOTHERMIA, FROSTBITE**

### **Alaska, Mount McKinley**

On May 3, the Densan party from Great Britain arrived at Kahiltina basecamp, 7,200 feet on the Kahiltina Glacier. The three members of this expedition were Steve Ball (42), Antony Hollingshead (33), and Nigel Vardy (29). The team spent an average amount of time working their way up the West Rib route on Mount McKinley, 17 days to a high camp at approximately 15,900 feet. Climbing expedition style, carrying gear high and sleeping low as they moved upwards, the team reported that they were feeling acclimatized for their summit attempt.

At 0800 on May 19, the trio began their summit bid from the 15,900-foot level of the West Rib. Progress was made through the rocks and up the left of the two prominent couloirs on that route.

At 1730, an independent climber, Jack Tackle, contacted the group at the 18,800-foot level. Tackle was on a day climb from the 14,200-foot camp for acclimatizing and had set his own turnaround time for 1800. Tackle spoke with the group for 30 minutes. He noted that they did not have overnight gear, the climbing order was Ball, Hollingshead, Vardy, and that Ball had lost a glove. Tackle stated that the group was moving slowly but they were continuing up and also that they were too far right in the couloir consequently climbing steeper terrain than necessary. Tackle reported that the weather was calm at their loca-