

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-

tion but that it was obviously blowing hard off of the summit plateau. One and a half hours later Tackle was back at the 14,200-foot camp and noted through binoculars that the Densan party had only progressed a few rope lengths. At that time the weather had deteriorated to the point that there was a visible lenticular over the summit. Tackle expressed his concerns about the party to ranger Kevin Moore that evening.

At 2200, the Densan team arrived on the summit plateau at 19,600 feet. Discovering that their water bottles had frozen, they were unable to hydrate themselves because of not bringing along a stove and pot. The clouds were obscuring their visibility so they proceeded on a compass bearing toward the summit. As they continued higher, the south summit would disappear in and out of the clouds.

Just after midnight on May 20, exhausted, they decided to rest in a small crevasse that they estimated to be 300–400 feet below the summit on the south-east side. According to Hollingshead, Vardy's eye was swollen shut due to current frostbite on an area that had previously been sunburned. Ball was shivering from hypothermia most of the time they attempted to rest, and no one was able to sleep.

At 0300, the team radioed a "Mayday" that was received by Tim Stageberg at the Kahiltna basecamp. Stageberg notified National Park Service Ranger Meg Perdue, and she was able to determine that the British party was requesting a rescue because one of their members was injured and unable to descend. Perdue's communications consisted of a series of yes or no questions that the Densan party would respond to with either one or two clicks of their radio because their battery power was too weak to transmit voice.

The Densan party began descending about 0430. At one point Vardy fell and pulled the others down the slope a short distance. The three were able to traverse the Football Field with considerable time and effort back to the top of the "Orient Express" (19,500 feet on West Rib) where they had ascended. The team debated rappelling the route and lowering Vardy back to their high camp, but chose instead to descend the less technically difficult West Buttress route. As they began to descend it became apparent that Vardy was unable to continue because he could not walk more than a few feet without falling down. So at 1330 it was decided that Ball, being the strongest, would descend the West Buttress alone in order to summon help.

Incident Commander JD Swed received a call from Perdue at his residence at 0400. National Park Service staff were summoned and the Rescue Coordination Center (RCC) was alerted. At 0830, an LC 130 launched from Anchorage and upon arrival over Mount McKinley, began passing weather observations to the ICP and receiving transmissions from the injured party on CB channel 19. These transmissions were only squelch breaks with no voice.

At 1122 Jay Hudson launched from Talkeetna in his Cessna 206 with ranger George Beilstein on board. They were able to make a pass at the 19,300-foot level and Beilstein saw three people—two standing and one lying down. Because of turbulence, Hudson descended and landed at basecamp. The National

Park Service high altitude LAMA helicopter was also positioned at Kahiltna basecamp and made three different attempts throughout the afternoon to get to the Densan Party. Meanwhile a ground rescue team of five climbers was ascending from the 14,200-foot camp.

The LAMA piloted by Jim Hood was able to deliver a pack of survival gear to two rescuers at the 16,700-foot level on the West Rib. On the fifth attempt the LAMA was able to deliver a pack to the Densan party at 2219 (this Dana Design backpack containing a Park Service radio, CB radio, thermos, MSR Wisperlite stove, North Face Tangerine Dream sleeping bag, ridge rest ensolite pad, and food was subsequently abandoned.)

Voice radio contact was established with the British climbers at 2250 via the new radios in the pack. It was determined that Vardy was the most critical patient, with frostbitten face and hands and a severe loss of coordination. Hollingshead reported that he also had frostbite on his hands and that he had bruised his right shoulder in the fall. The NPS also learned at this time that Ball had separated from the party at 1330 and was planning to descend the West Buttress. Based on the reconnaissance that Hood preformed while delivering the pack at 19,500 feet, it was decided to short haul the two patients off using a screamer suit. It was determined after Lead Climbing Ranger Daryl Miller talked with both climbers on the park radio that Miller would instruct Hollingshead on the procedures of short hauling. Hollingshead placed the screamer suit on Vardy then hooked him into the "God Ring," hanging from the 100-foot rope hooked to the NPS LAMA. Vardy was safely on the glacier at basecamp at 2323 following his five minute short haul ride down from 19,500 feet. Hollingshead was picked up in the same manner just after midnight and landed at basecamp. Vardy and Hollingshead were then flown by Hudson to Talkeetna where the lifeguard air ambulance took them to Providence Medical Center in Anchorage.

A brief interview with the two British climbers in Talkeetna provided rangers with information on Steve Ball. Ball intended to descend the West Buttress route as far as need be to get help for his team. He had a few snacks, a map and compass, but no water. On the evening of May 20 there were no climbers camped at the 17,200-foot level. On the morning of the May 21 several private parties departed 14,200 for high camp and ranger Kevin Moore alerted them to look for Ball who was wearing a red insulated parka over orange and black wind stopper fleece. At 1056 a Cessna 310 was launched from Talkeetna with Ranger Joe Reichert on board to make an air search of the routes that Ball could have descended. The plane was on scene over the summit plateau by 1120 and made over 20 passes in a linear pattern without spotting Ball. At 1112 a Cessna 185 chartered from Hudson's Air Service and piloted by Don Bowers departed Talkeetna to continue the aerial search at lower elevations. Due to deteriorating weather, the 310 returned to Talkeetna at 1300. About this time a ground team reported that they had spotted Ball below Denali Pass. Within ten minutes Paul Berry, Dave Lucy, Stuart Parks, Thomas Ryan, and Richard Cariter had arrived on scene and reported to NPS via CB radio that

the person was indeed Ball and that he was conscious but severely hypothermic and had an open fracture of the left tibia and fibula. Parks reported that there was a possible landing zone for the helicopter 40 feet up slope from Ball. At 1351 the LAMA was en route directly to 17,200 feet. At 1407 the ground team received directions to administer a dose of Decadron via injection. Pilot Jim Hood inspected the site at 1450 and determined that there was too much of a slope for a landing, so he passed off a supply of batteries and descended to basecamp to receive a new plan. Over the following two hours the weather was unsettled. The ground team began lowering Ball toward the camp at 17,200 feet. At 1600 the LAMA launched from basecamp with the Bauman bag and a backboard connected to the end of the short haul rope. At 1620 the cargo was delivered to the rescuers at 17,700 feet and the LAMA returned to basecamp. Based on the power checks that Hood made when delivering the Bauman bag it was determined that a short haul would be performed to extract Ball before the weather deteriorated further. At 1645 the LAMA lifted off of basecamp with ranger Billy Shott attached to the short haul rope and ascended to 17,700 feet. On scene Shott attached the Bauman Bag to the short haul rope in a tandem configuration and returned to basecamp at 1717. An Air National Guard Pavehawk transported Ball to Providence Medical Center.

### **Analysis**

This unfortunate accident was a classic example of a party overextending themselves and being caught by the temperamental weather on Mount McKinley. Had they set a turnaround time and adhered to it, the rescue may have been avoided. A stove may have allowed them to rehydrate and revitalize their energy once the situation had become serious. All members carried frozen water bottles; hence, they were unable to utilize their water. Also, because of the dehydration, altitude sickness, and exposure to the high wind this team became dysfunctional, precluding any safe descent. They were forced to bivi at 19,500 feet, which was one of many questionable decisions made regarding their safety. Another note is the unfortunate trend among outdoor enthusiasts to rely more heavily on their technological means of communication to call for help in the event of emergency than to be prepared for such an event and remain self sufficient. The combination of dehydration, fatigue, and cold were nearly lethal for this team. (Source: Joe Reichert, Mountaineering Ranger)

*(Editor's Note: Jack Tackle's observation of the ascent indicated that the party was certainly not acclimatized to do a summit bid starting from 15,400 feet. Their ascent rate was about 250 feet per hour, by his calculations.)*

## **FALLING ICE, FALL ON ICE, ICE SCREW FAILED**

### **Alaska, Thunder Mountain**

On May 12 Malcolm Daly (43) and Jim Donini (57) of Boulder, Colorado flew onto the Tokositna Glacier at 7,500 feet to attempt a new route on Mount Hunter (14,573 feet). The Colorado team spotted a potential route on Thunder Mountain (10,970 feet)—a satellite of Mount Hunter—which has a short approach from the airstrip. Daly and Donini started climbing a couloir con-