

twisted awkwardly and felt something “pop” in his lower back. Keil Hillman, lead guide, assessed him and concluded that he could not continue up. He contacted the 14,200-foot Ranger Camp and informed Ranger Evans of this via CB radio. As Sorsdahl could move under his own power without a load on his back, it was decided to send up VIP Dave Hanning to assist Sorsdahl down. As the location was considered to be in a safe area, Hanning ascended by himself, then carried Sorsdahl’s backpack down while escorting him.

At the Ranger Camp Sorsdahl was examined by Medic Michael Dong, who diagnosed the damage to the soft tissue of the sacroiliac area involving the sciatic nerve. As a result, it was decided that Sorsdahl should ideally not walk down as further damage might occur. However, there was no urgency for evacuation. On June 4th the NPS contracted Lama helicopter was performing another rescue and took Sorsdahl from the Ranger Camp down to Base Camp where he flew out by fixed wing prior to medical examination.

### **Analysis**

This was an unfortunate accident that, luckily for the group, occurred at a location where assistance was readily available. There is no doubt that if this had been in a more remote location the group would have had to give up on their climb and bring Sorsdahl down themselves. As it was we were able to easily give assistance and to include the med-evac in conjunction with another flight into the mountain. Medically this was also the best for Sorsdahl. (Source: Ranger John Evans)

## **FALL ON SNOW—INADEQUATE PROTECTION, HASTE**

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

This incident happened in May while we were descending the fixed lines of the West Buttress. We happened to be the only roped team (as well as our other two climbing partners ahead of us on another roped team) allowing for the team ahead of us to get off the fixed line before we got on it, but many people were right on our tails on the way down. My partner and I were spaced out exactly one fixed rope length apart, so that when I reached the anchor to switch over to the next fixed line down, my partner would be getting onto the fixed line I was on previously. Just as he did this and just switched over from his fixed line (second to the last), a climber only five feet behind him slipped and fell. The climber hit the anchor but had a runner over five feet long, so he fell five feet below the anchor, jabbing my partner in the leg with his crampon. My partner went into ice ax arrest, but on the steep blue ice with a full pack, he couldn’t hold it for long and so he fell the full fixed line length before hitting the anchor below (just a few feet above me). As the anchor caught him, he swung around and his pack hit me in the shoulder and knocked me off. I didn’t fall nearly as far, as my crampon caught in the remaining line not anchored, as it was the last line getting off the fixed lines and not secured with a picket. However, I was upside down with my back laying against the snow and my ax had pinned me in such a

way that if I sat up, it crammed down on my arm. So my partner had to come down using his Tibloc so I could right myself. I consider myself in excellent shape, at 5'8" and 155 pounds. I climb sport and trad at a high level. But I felt so helpless in this predicament, even though I was on a fairly low angle (maybe 45 degrees at this point) slope. I came out of it with no injuries, but my buddy was less fortunate. He had the puncture wound from the crampon in his thigh and had tweaked his knee, but was able to descend under his own power, albeit slowly, and he was in pain. The climber who hit him caught up to us and apologized emphatically.

Upon reaching 14,200 feet, we had Ranger John Evans assess my partner and determined that with deteriorating weather coming in, the helicopter would not be able to pull him off for a few days. He decided to make a go of it down, but knew that once he started he would not be able to stop due to swelling and pain. We unloaded all of his gear and divided it up between two roped teams. We used skis as our mode of transportation on the lower slopes, but my partner was not able to put skis on until the more mellow five-mile "traverse" from 7,900 feet to basecamp. We made it out in one push.

### **Analysis**

Often teams want to get down the mountain in a hurry, to get back to the 14,200-foot camp and not wait until the team ahead of them is off the first fixed line. Coupled with no breaking devices on the fixed lines, just using an arm rap with two cordelettes with 'biners to act as runners on the fixed lines, it means that when one climber falls, he takes out the others below him. (Source: Ryland Moore)

## **KNEE INJURY, INEXPERIENCE**

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

On May 30, the two members of the Sled Dog expedition, Matt Sachs (34) and June Braugham (40) were evacuated from the 14,200-foot camp on Denali. On the 29th, Sachs sustained a knee injury while climbing to the fixed lines and requested ranger assistance to descend. Sachs was lowered approximately 1,200 feet by NPS personnel to the 14,200-foot Ranger Camp where he received medical assistance for the night. Sachs was flown to 7,000-foot camp the following morning by the Denali Lama helicopter. Due to her very limited mountain experience, Braugham accompanied Sachs to Denali basecamp after it was deemed unsafe for her to continue climbing on the mountain.

### **Analysis**

It is likely Sachs' prior knee injury contributed to its final blow-out. By avoiding consecutive days of heavy use on a weakened knee, Sachs could have better monitored the extent of his previous injury. Once evaluated by a doctor, it was determined that Sachs damaged his lateral and medial collateral ligaments. With no additional damage to surrounding ligaments, injury may have resulted from the cumulative use of a sprained knee. Having a CB radio did prove beneficial in expediting a rescue. However, choosing