

ACCIDENTS—1957

New Hampshire, Mt. Washington—On February 28, Peter K. Luster (Leader, 21), Boyd N. Everett, Jr. (22) and James Wheeler (19), all members of the Harvard Mountaineering Club, were ice climbing in Damnation Gully in Huntington Ravine. Luster, who is considered a competent ice leader by the H.M.C., had had very little sleep the night before and was carrying no extra clothing. About 4 P.M., the sky clouded over and a few snow flurries appeared when Luster was half way up what he thought was the final pitch of the climb. Upon reaching the top of the lead, however, it became apparent that the ice continued for some distance. About 5 P.M. the party left the gully and climbed diagonally up over the rocks to the north of the gully in a rapidly worsening storm, reaching the crest of Nelson Crag at 10 P.M. by means of a snow gully. Owing to darkness and the severity of the weather, short leads and frequent belays were required. Shouts of a search party in Huntington Ravine were heard, but no communication could be exchanged and the search party was forced to return to the H.M.C. cabin on Boott Spur, due to the cold and the inability to hear or see much of anything. The party started down over gentle snow slopes to the north-east of North Gully, moving slowly and resting from time to time. During the night the temperature on the summit fell to 5°F below zero and the wind velocity averaged 80 m.p.h.; the open slopes of the descent route offered no protection from the wind, which was from the east. Snow fell heavily until about 3 A.M. and the visibility was very poor. The party encountered waist-deep snow over small evergreens at about 1 A.M., which made walking very difficult. At 2 A.M. Luster became exhausted but was able to reach the floor of Huntington Ravine. At 3:20 A.M. Wheeler started back to the H.M.C. cabin for help, while Everett stayed with Luster, who was unable to move. Aid from the cabin arrived at 6:15 A.M. and Luster was evacuated to the Fire Trail by a toboggan from the first aid cache in Huntington Ravine. From there he was taken to Pinkham Notch by weasel. He was treated for exhaustion and mild frostbite at the Memorial Hospital in North Conway.

Source: Peter K. Luster, Boyd N. Everett, Jr., Caspar Cronk (Member of Rescue Party), and John Humphreys; *Appalachia* 31: 406, 1957.

Analysis: (Luster). "The party had been relying on reaching a known escape route down the rocks on the north side of Damnation Gully. Owing to weather and darkness, however, it did not seem wise to attempt the descent over steep rocks, necessary to reach this route. Instead, the slower, but easier route described above was selected. Clearly the party should have turned back earlier than it did. Additional clothing, flashlights, and a compass would have been useful under these conditions."

This demonstrates how important it is, particularly in winter, for the leader to be aware of the possible consequences of pushing on with a climb when he is bordering on fatigue. If climbing in bad weather in the dark is to be contemplated, the party must be fully prepared to meet these conditions, which this one was not.

New Hampshire, Cannon Mt.—On June 8, S. M. Ornstein (27), Robert Jahn (27), John F. Noxon (28), and John S. Humphreys (24) climbed the

Whitney-Gilman route (class 5) on the face of Cannon Mt. All were experienced climbers, the weather was good, and no particular difficulty was encountered on the climb. At about 5 P.M. with the lead rope of Ornstein and Jahn on top and Humphreys leading through the last 10 feet of the top pitch, Humphreys slipped and caught his full weight on a right handhold that was originally at waist level and somewhat to the side. The jerk was sufficient to dislocate his right shoulder. Recovering his balance, he called for a rope from above, which was passed down, and he was quickly brought to the top. When Noxon, as fourth man, had completed the pitch a brief but unsuccessful attempt was made to reduce the dislocation on the spot, after which the party scrambled up through the brush and down the Kinsman Ridge trail to the road, arriving there about 8 P.M. Humphreys was then driven directly to the North Conway Hospital where the shoulder was put back in its socket professionally.

Source: John S. Humphreys.

Analysis: (Humphreys). "The immediate cause was simply carelessness. I had become slightly chilled waiting below and was eager to reach the top to join the first rope, and as a result I was climbing too fast. It was late in the day, and I was perhaps not aware of the fact that I was becoming tired and my coordination was less good. This illustrates well the serious consequences that can result even from a minor slip, and points up the ever present need for caution, particularly on the part of the leader."

W. Virginia, Quarry near Ridgley—On 13 October, Donald R. Anderson (20) fell about 35 feet when his rappel rope broke while rappelling in a quarry near Ridgley, W. Va. There were three others in the party. The purpose was to practice rappelling prior to spelunking. Rope used was $\frac{7}{16}$ inch manila purchased in early 1956, three strand, other characteristics are unknown. The break occurred in the portion of rope in mid-air, not in contact with rock. Rappel was made on a single length tied at the top of the overhanging slope. Break was perpendicularly across all three strands of the rope and there was no indication of a previous cut. The rope had been used in a dozen or more caves, usually for a hand line or belay rope. It had also been used by others for such things as lashing furniture on a truck. As far as is known the rope had not been used for a tow line or other heavy strain. Two weeks before the accident the rope had been loaned to another caver who used it in a wet, muddy cave. The rope was not washed or dried after this use but was left on a basement floor for some days and later stored for a further indefinite time in the trunk of a car.

Anderson fell on his feet into about 18 inches of water and loose rock. He sustained a temporary paralysis of his legs for a few minutes after the fall, but was ambulatory shortly afterward. Later x-rays showed hair-line fractures of vertebrae L-1 and L-2.

Anderson had been exploring caves for three years. He is a member of the National Speleological Society. He had used climbing ropes for about 6 months for rappelling, prusiking, and some belaying from above.

Source: From Anderson; reported by A. C. Lambeck.

Analysis: The object lesson of this accident is one of rope care including examination and testing prior to use on a given trip and the necessity for