

Five rangers attempted to search the slopes above Paradise Saturday night, but were forced back by high wind and snow. The next day park rangers and Mountain Rescue Council parties searched the vicinity but were handicapped by twenty inches of new snow, high winds, and poor visibility. Lowell Linn was not found.

*Source:* Richard McGowan, newspaper accounts, V. Josendal.

*Analysis:* Apparently this inexperienced snowshoe hiker became lost in bad weather, after separation from his companion. He did not survive due to lack of food, clothing, equipment and mountaineering experience.

*Washington, Castle Rock*—On 8 Dec. Leonard Miller (33) and Dick Wahlstrom (24) had completed a good fifth class climb up the face of Castle Rock. Conditions were bad due to ice and snow on the rock, but both were eager climbers and of moderate experience and had protected themselves well with pitons during climb. They returned to the start of the climb which is a big ledge about half-way up the 7,800 foot face of the rock. It is reached by walking onto it from the slope out of which the rock protrudes. They left all climbing gear and set out for the car to pick up lunches and return. In leaving the ledge Wahlstrom took a short cut to reach the overgrown scree slope which slants down to the highway. He found himself half-way down a snow covered slab before appreciating his danger, and as he turned to retreat, he started slipping. The slab is a recognized alternative route which Wahlstrom had used casually only a month earlier, but the coating of snow slid him over the edge. He fell 15-20 feet through bushes before stopping. Miller applied minor first aid and evacuated him to their car and then to the nearest hospital where he remained three days under suspicion of concussion. It had been five hours before he had regained adequate clarity of mind.

*Source:* Miller and Wahlstrom from Willi Unsoeld.

*Analysis:* Failure to estimate correctly the effects of snow cover on normally easy rock, and possible let down in awareness of margin of safety as a result of successful completion of the difficult and exhilarating portion of the climb.

*New Mexico, Organ Mountains—Rabbit Ears Area*—On February 22, William Martin (24) and Ronald Hahn (25) left their car at 5:00 A.M. and hiked upward about 2000 feet to the base of a small pinnacle at approximately 7500 feet which was to be the first climb of the day. The weather was cold and overcast; however, in this region a light rain or snow flurry is the worst weather to be expected in the winter. They reached the base of the pinnacle about 7:30 and began the 200 feet of 4th and 5th class climbing. Shortly before reaching the summit at approximately 9 a light rain had started, which turned into sleet for a few minutes as they started down. The sleet and drizzle soon let up but left the rope, rock and bushes wet.

It was about 10:00 A.M. when they rigged the last rappel around a rock and several small bushes. Good rappel points are difficult to find in the Organs and they used no sling rope, having nothing better than nylon parachute cord in their packs. Martin rappelled first, descending about 40 feet straight down a chimney to where it changed into a steep gully. Hahn rappelled slightly to the right, to a more open section of ledges where it would be easier and safer

to retrieve the rope. After Martin had descended the gully to a safe distance, Hahn tried unsuccessfully to pull the rope down. Martin then stated that he would give it a try from the gully. Hahn threw the ends of the rope over the buttress separating them and Martin ascended to where he could reach them.

At the time Martin began trying to retrieve the rope, he was standing on top of a large chockstone which formed a 5 to 10 foot wall in the gully. As he pulled on the rope he tried to keep a close watch for falling rocks. The rope would not run around the rappel point, though, and after giving an especially hard pull he looked up to see a large rock in the air about 20 feet above. He had heard nothing to indicate its pulling loose, and by the time he saw it, it was too late to dodge. The gully was quite narrow, which would have made dodging difficult in his case. He has no recollection of what happened in the next few seconds; apparently he either jumped or fell off the chokestone on which he was standing and next recalled rolling and tumbling about 15 feet farther down the gully. Although he cannot be certain, it is his belief that the rock did not actually hit him, due to the absence of any serious injuries in the upper body regions. Hahn reached him within a couple of minutes and helped to stretch him out on his back in a fairly comfortable position. He had a spiral break of his right thigh bone (femur) and a cracked right shoulder bone (scapula). However, his greatest pain and concern came from pains throughout his chest and back upon inspiration. Although fully conscious and rational, he felt he suffered from shock due primarily to the fear of severe back or internal injuries.

*Source:* William Martin.

*Analysis:* (Martin). The accident can be attributed to two major errors. First, in being improperly equipped and secondly, in exercising faulty judgment.

Although we both realized that rappel points in the Organs are difficult to find and of poor quality (often small bushes, doubtful rocks, or pitons driven into the usual shallow, inadequate Organ Mountain crack), we had often neglected to carry sling rope, which would have made rappelling from small trees and bushes much safer and more expedient. In this case, if we had used sling rope, Hahn almost certainly would have been able to pull down the climbing rope and if the rock had been dislodged I would have been far enough down the gully to easily avoid it. Even without a sling, a better rappel might have been set up with a little additional time and effort.

However, the second error seems even more inexcusable. The rope should have been pulled either from Hahn's comparatively safe position or other positions not directly under the rappel point. If the rope could not have been pulled down from a safe position, it would have been a relatively easy procedure to go back up the climbing route using the rope for direct aid and relocate the rappel. (This is the method actually used to retrieve the rope while awaiting the stretcher.)

It is difficult to say just why I attempted to retrieve the rope while in such a poor position when we were well aware of the large quantity of loose rock in the Organs and on that particular climb. It must have been a combination of the factors so conducive to "descent" accidents: the inclement weather, perhaps fatigue from the early start (for this climb we had arisen at 2 A.M.) and lack of sleep, and the general "off day" feeling.