

thanks to helicopter and rescue personnel, both Bullitts were retrieved from the mountain.

All the climbers recovered fully, although Ben Bullitt lost one toe. (Source: John Wilcox, Mt. Rainier National Park, and *The Seattle Times*, May 9, 1979)

(Ed. Note: No analysis was provided. It may be noted that the Liberty Ridge is a route for experienced climbers and that distance compounds mishaps and bad weather conditions.)

FALLING ROCK

Washington, Mt. Rainier

A high-altitude rescue was successfully completed on June 4 on the Liberty Ridge climbing route in the Carbon River District. A four-man Seattle Mountain Rescue Team especially trained for difficult high-altitude rescues along with a U.S. Army Chinook helicopter and support from an NPS team at Carbon River managed to remove Bruce Clement (21) from the Thumb Rock area of Liberty Ridge after Clement had been struck by falling rock and had suffered five broken ribs and a fractured collarbone.

At 2 a.m. on June 4, Chris Mork (27) and Diane Eldrenkamp (23) reported to District Ranger John Wilcox at the Carbon River Ranger Station that they thought there was an injured climber near Thumb Rock who would need assistance. Mork and Eldrenkamp were two of a four-member party that had been climbing Liberty Ridge during the weekend and they believed that the injured person was one of the two party members remaining on the mountain. They summarized the events leading to the incident as follows.

On June 2, their party had left the Carbon River Ranger Station for a climb of Liberty Ridge, a difficult snow and ice climb that requires ascending a 50-degree slope with constant exposure, and had climbed up the lower slopes and across the Carbon Glacier to the base of Liberty Ridge that day. On June 3, they ascended as a team as far as Thumb Rock, (10,200 feet). Mork and Eldrenkamp climbed more slowly from that point, while their companions Clement and Stuart Coleman (20) climbed more rapidly and left them behind. Mork and Eldrenkamp decided to end their climb, for various reasons, by the time they had reached 11,500 feet and descended the ridge to the upper Carbon Glacier. Clement and Coleman continued the climb and successfully reached the summit of the mountain at Liberty Cap later that day. As Mork and Eldrenkamp crossed the upper Carbon Glacier, they watched the progress of Clement and Coleman as they downclimbed the ridge. However, Mork reported that by 8 p.m. they noticed Clement and Coleman proceeding very slowly and thought they could see one person tediously belaying the other and climbing back to bring the other's pack down, indicating that apparently one person had somehow been injured. This was the information given to Wilcox on which the rescue proceeded.

In actuality an injury had occurred. Clement and Coleman later said that as they were descending the ridge, they reached the 11,300-foot level and stopped to remove their crampons since they were balling up with snow. Just as Clement stood up to put on his pack and proceed, he was suddenly struck from behind by a rock that was about the size of a helmet. The rock struck him on the right shoulder blade and knocked him off his feet and forward down a very steep snow slope. Coleman and Clement did not have ice axes in their hands at the time because they had just been removing their

crampons, so Coleman could not effect an ice axe arrest to stop Clement. He was able, however, to dig his feet and hands into the snow well enough to stop Clement's slide after about 50 feet. Although Clement was stunned and seriously injured, he never lost consciousness and was able to help Coleman somewhat in descending further to a snow cave at the normal high camp at Thumb Rock. Clement's right arm and shoulder could not be used at all and thus could not protect Coleman if the latter should fall. A decision was then made to stay at Thumb Rock and wait for help.

Upon learning of the probable accident from Mork and Eldrenkamp, Wilcox notified Chief Ranger Bob Dunnagan at 2:30 p.m. who in turn informed Visitor Management Specialist Bill Larson. Wilcox asked Larson to get the Seattle Mountain Rescue high altitude response team to assist with the rescue. The team arrived shortly after 6 a.m. with two of the four members coming into the Carbon River Ranger Station via NPS helicopter (Aerocopters) and the other two in a personal vehicle. The plan at that time was to fly the team as close as possible to Thumb Rock where they would then evacuate the injured person by ground to a suitable landing place for a helicopter. Unfortunately, the weather deteriorated during the early morning hours and by 6 a.m., there were low, low clouds throughout the Carbon River Valley. An attempt was made by Wilcox to fly as an observer through an opening in the clouds to view the Thumb Rock area from the air, but the ship was unable to find an opening in the thick cloud layer. Instead, the four-man team, consisting of Steve Trafton (leader), Al Errington, Gary Glenn, and Don Goodman were flown up the Carbon River Valley to the foot of the Carbon Glacier where they began climbing toward Liberty Ridge. This flight saved nearly two hours of hiking time.

At 2:15 p.m., a Chinook helicopter came in, picked up Errington and lowered him by winch to the injured climber. After examination, the injured climber was placed in a hoist and lifted to the Chinook and flown to safety. The Chinook pilots have to be given credit for such a performance in a tight spot with gusty winds. (Source: John Wilcox, Mt. Rainier National Park)

Analysis

It is often on descents that a climber's attentiveness is off guard. These climbers were in a place where rockfall is not uncommon. (Source: J. Williamson)

BAD WEATHER, HYPOTHERMIA, NO EXPERIENCE

Washington, Mt. Rainier

Craig Hixon (28), who spent two nights on Mt. Rainier wrapped in a sleeping bag and a torn tent and without shoes, was found alive and well about 7:30 a.m. on Monday, July 2.

"Somebody was looking out for him," said a National Park Service spokesman, Larry Henderson.

Henderson said a MAST helicopter from Fort Lewis lifted Hixon off the mountain east of the Muir snowfield at 8:35 a.m. Hixon, who suffered possible frostbite, was flown to the Harborview Medical Center, where he was receiving oxygen.

Hixon, part of a nine-person Mormon Church group from Seattle, was found at the 8,500-foot level by a Park Service rescue team that spent the night on the mountain.