

River Entrance Station at the northwest corner of the park. At 4:00 p.m. on Wednesday, January 14, they began hiking from the trailhead at the Ipsut Creek Campground. Traveling into the night, they eventually reached the Mystic Lake area of the backcountry where they made camp. By 8:00 a.m. on January 15, they were hiking again and soon reached and crossed the upper Carbon Glacier to the base of Liberty Ridge. By nightfall, they had climbed to the Thumb Rock area of the ridge, at 10,000 feet, where they camped for the night. On Friday, January 16, the climbers ascended the most difficult portion of the route. By late afternoon they were approaching the false summit of Liberty Cap when the weather, which had been mild and mostly clear until then, suddenly worsened. Strong winds developed together with a summit cloud that enclosed the upper section of the mountain in a thick veil. As visibility was reduced to a few yards, the climbers decided to camp until the weather improved. On Saturday, they attempted to climb the remaining distance over Liberty Cap in order to begin their descent via the Emmons and Winthrop Glaciers. However, they were only able to move a short distance before poor weather again forced them to camp and wait for improved conditions. By this time they were overdue from their climb as they had indicated that they would return on Friday, January 16. The poor weather conditions on the summit continued through Monday, and it was not possible to climb again until early Tuesday morning, January 20. As the climbers prepared to descend the Emmons Glacier, a US Army Chinook helicopter with park rangers on board arrived and flew them to Ashford, near park headquarters. (Source: John Wilcox, Ranger, Mount Rainier National Park)

### **Analysis**

Upon interviewing the overdue climbers, the park rangers learned that they were experienced climbers, were well equipped, and used common sense in waiting out the bad weather rather than continuing to climb. However, there were circumstances that caused their situation to become somewhat more serious as time went on. They had run out of fuel for their gasoline stove on Sunday and were unable to melt snow for drinking water except by placing the snow in containers within their sleeping bags which was a very slow process. Their food was exhausted to the point where nothing was left except some cheese and sausages. Several more days spent under such conditions would most likely have led to exhaustion and made them less able to contend with the rigors of the descent and to ward off hypothermia. The parents of the two climbers were most anxious that park personnel proceed with the search efforts without delay. The climbers themselves remarked that they thought that their evacuation via helicopter was warranted and that NPS actions were appropriate. The total cost of the evacuation came to \$6,758.40. (Source: John Wilcox, Ranger, Mount Rainier National Park)

## **LOSS OF CONTROL, VOLUNTARY GLISSADE, CLIMBING UNROPED, FAULTY USE OF CRAMPONS, INEXPERIENCE**

### **Washington, Mount Rainier**

At 12:28 a.m. on February 7, 1981, Jeff Warren (20) called Paradise from Camp Muir on the emergency radio stating that there had been an accident and that a climber was injured. The injured climber, Terry MacDonald (32), had fallen in the Gibraltar Chute and had slid approximately 1,000–1,500 vertical feet, stopping near the base of the chute. The two other members of the party had descended to MacDonald and checked his injuries; Warren then proceeded to Camp Muir for help. Warren stated that MacDonald had broken his left arm

at the shoulder, had facial lacerations, broken teeth, a badly bruised back and possible internal injuries. Warren stated that the accident had occurred at 11:45 a.m. and that MacDonald was in a lot of pain and getting "shocky." He stated that MacDonald had hit some rocks several times while he slid out of control down the chute and that he might have some serious back injuries. Warren admitted that neither he nor Matt Barns had much more than a basic knowledge of first aid and that they had no rescue experience.

At 12:40 p.m., Ranger Rick Kirschner called Rangers Gerry Tays and Pete Thompson and informed them of the situation. Because of the nature of the injuries, the location of the victim, and the time of day, Kirschner requested that a helicopter be used for the rescue. Since MacDonald had fallen about 1,200 vertical feet, had hit some rocks on the way down, had broken teeth and bad facial cuts, had back pain and a broken arm, Kirschner feared that the injuries might be fatal due to head/neck or internal injuries, complicated by cold and shock. Speed in evacuating the victim was deemed essential and a ground party would have taken at least five hours to reach the accident site. Therefore, a helicopter rescue was considered to be the best option.

Thompson immediately began working with VMS Bill Larson on the helicopter, while Kirschner and Rangers Olson and Randy Brooks got personnel and rescue and medical gear ready to go. Gear for a technical lowering operation was assembled and Kirschner, Olson, and Brooks were ready to proceed by 1:30 p.m.

Following an afternoon of efficient rescue efforts, the victim was flown off the mountain at 5:45 p.m., transferred to an Army MAST Huey and flown to Harborview Hospital in Seattle, where he was treated. (Source: Rick Kirschner, Ranger, Mount Rainier National Park)

### Analysis

At noon on February 5, MacDonald had contacted Brooks at Paradise concerning signing out to go to Camp Muir. Brooks told him he could use the trail register at the old ranger station as long as he was just going to Camp Muir. MacDonald then stated that he might possibly do some ice climbing near Camp Muir. Brooks told him that he could not go out on a glacier or above Camp Muir alone without the Superintendent's permission. MacDonald asked if it would be okay to join a party at Camp Muir (if one were there) and do some ice climbing. Brooks responded that that option was acceptable if he could find a willing party. Brooks had MacDonald fill out a climbing card, on which MacDonald listed his experience as: "Ascents of Rainier; ice climbing, North Cascades; spelunking." He had all the necessary equipment. Brooks noted on the card, "May join party at Muir for ice climbing. Not a summit attempt." Brooks had never met MacDonald before and did not know that he was the same person who was involved in the "Charity Mountain" rescue of September 1979. As far as Brooks was concerned, MacDonald was not going to attempt a summit climb.

In conversations with Barns and Warren on February 7 and 9, Olson and Kirschner were told the following: On Friday the 6th, Warren and Barns met MacDonald near Pebble Creek and began talking about their climb. The three all agreed to join and climb together. Neither Warren or Barns had signed out on climbing cards, but they had signed the trail register at the old ranger station. For their destination they marked "Muir-Summit." They had arrived at Longmire at 11:30 p.m. on the 6th, found the downhill gate open and gone up the road. The gate had probably been opened by the persons involved in the burglary of the Paradise Inn on February 5. After sleeping in their car at Paradise, they left for Camp Muir on the 6th.

The three got to Camp Muir at 3:00 p.m. and spent the night. They left Camp Muir at

4:30 a.m. and climbed the upper Cowlitz Glacier to the beginning of Gibraltar Rock. The party was not roped up nor was anyone wearing crampons. Warren explained that the footing was very stable, due to the soft, deep snow, and that there was no reason for anyone to fall. MacDonald was much slower than the other two, so they had to wait for him at the ledge. They continued up the ledge, then up the chute and toward the summit to an elevation of 13,000 feet, all the while without crampons and unroped. At 10:45 a.m. they decided to turn around because of the slow going in the deep snow. They decided to descend the Gibraltar Chute because they felt it would be safer and faster than the ledges. The group began descending, unroped and without crampons, doing the plunge step in the soft snow; the footing was apparently good. MacDonald was hesitant about the plunge step and seemed to be doing it improperly. A short distance down the chute, Warren and Barns glissaded down a 30-foot section. Warren did a standing glissade while Barns did a controlled glissade in self-arrest position. MacDonald climbed off some rocks and sat down to start his glissade. He rolled over on his stomach and started sliding down; then he rolled onto his back and began sliding out of control. Warren stated that it did not appear to him that MacDonald ever really self-arrested. He hit rocks on the side of the chute and started tumbling and rolling. He went out of sight down the chute. Warren and Barns continued plunge stepping down the chute and, at 11:45 a.m., found MacDonald at about 10,800 feet.

Warren and Barns had moderate climbing experience, having climbed Mounts Rainier and Baker and several other Northwestern peaks. Warren felt that they had done nothing wrong by climbing unroped and without crampons and by glissading down the steep chute.

At 1:30 p.m. on February 9, Kirschner contacted MacDonald at Harborview Hospital and obtained his version of the incident. MacDonald had signed out with Brooks on February 5 with the intention of doing some climbing around or above Camp Muir if he could join a party. He was not specifically considering going to the summit; but if the opportunity arose, he would try for it. He spent the night of the 5th camped at Pebble Creek; on the 6th, he met Barns and Warren. They discussed their plans and decided to join forces and climb together. After a night at Camp Muir, they left and began climbing to Gibraltar Ledge. Because of the good footing in the soft snow, MacDonald was comfortable about not being roped up or having crampons on during the entire ascent. Coming down, however, he was concerned about the steepness and the harder snow conditions in the chute. He told Warren and Barns that he thought they should have their crampons on and possibly be roped up. Warren told MacDonald that they might be able to glissade down the chute, in which case they would not want crampons on. MacDonald told Kirschner that because he was the addition to the climbing party, he did not feel that he should push the issue, so he reluctantly agreed to go down. When they reached a narrow spot in the chute, Barns and Warren did a glissade down 30 feet (described earlier). MacDonald was even more apprehensive about this section, but since the other two were below him and had the rope, he felt he had to get down to them first and then demand that they put their crampons on and rope up.

In retrospect, all three climbers agreed that they probably should have roped up and put crampons on in order to come down the chute safely. I feel that poor judgment was shown in trying to glissade down the steep chute and that the party should have been roped up for the entire climb. (Source: Rick Kirschner, Ranger, Mount Rainier National Park)

## **FALL ON SNOW, FAULTY USE OF CRAMPONS**

### **Washington, Mount Rainier**

Around 7:00 a.m. on March 12, 1981, Eric Simonson, a Rainier Mountaineering, Inc.