

Sabella injured his right knee and ankle in the fall. The injuries sustained were diagnosed at the scene by an orthopedic surgeon as probable ligament damage to the knee and a possible fractured right ankle. The situation was reported to the White River Ranger Station by Jim Springer, Camp Schurman Climbing Ranger, at 4:15 p.m.

On June 1, Springer led the evacuation effort down the Inter Glacier with very few problems. Additional NPS personnel met the evacuation team at the foot of the Inter Glacier with the Anderson Wheeled Stokes litter and the White River Bergtrage; they assisted with Sabella's evacuation to the Glacier Basin trailhead where he was met by his wife and taken for medical attention. (Source: J. Krambink and J. Springer, Rangers, Mount Rainier National Park)

Analysis

The same comment applies as was made about the March 12 glissading accident on Cowlitz Cleaver. (Source: J. Williamson)

FALLING ICE

Washington, Mount Rainier

Rainier Mountaineering, Inc. (RMI), the professional climbing concessionaire at Mount Rainier National Park, was conducting a routine climb of the mountain on Father's Day, June 21, 1981. John Day (22), senior guide for RMI, was leading the party of 29, which included 23 clients and six guides. The party of six roped teams left their base camp at Camp Muir (10,000 feet) at approximately 3:50 a.m. in weather that Day later described as "excellent." The intended route was via Disappointment Cleaver, commonly called "the standard route."

At 5:30 a.m., after making a rest stop on Ingraham Flats (10,500 feet), guide Chris Lynch (23) returned to Camp Muir with three clients who decided they could not continue. Led by Day, Michael Targett, Peter Whittaker (22), Greg Wilson (23) and Tom O'Brien (20), the remaining five roped teams consisting of 25 climbers proceeded to the base of Disappointment Cleaver.

After arriving at Disappointment Cleaver, Day decided to unrope and check the climbing conditions on the Cleaver. The avalanche danger had been forecast as moderate to high above 10,000 feet and he was concerned about the slope conditions. Approximately 100-200 feet west of the "nose" of the Cleaver, where parties normally leave the Ingraham Glacier and begin their ascent of the Cleaver, the five roped teams stopped, coiled in their ropes, and sat down just above a large crevasse to wait for Day.

Day borrowed Wilson's rope and roped up with Whittaker and Targett, whom he considered knowledgeable about avalanche prediction; they then proceeded onto the nose. Wilson, O'Brien, and the remaining climbers waited as a group while Day and his fellow guides dug snow pits and checked the avalanche danger and general climbing conditions on the Cleaver. After consultation with Whittaker and Targett, Day determined that there was ". . . no real solid path like there usually is. . . ." on the Cleaver, so he made the decision to turn the climb around and go home.

Around 5:45 a.m., just as Day, Whittaker, and Targett started back toward the waiting climbers, they heard a very loud crack or roar on the glacier above them. Apparently, a very large serac or ice formation toppled over or let go about 800 vertical feet above the waiting

climbers. This ice formation broke into several massive ice blocks which crashed rapidly down the slope and created an unusually large snow and ice avalanche. Day, Whittaker, and Targett yelled at the group, telling them to run.

The climbers did attempt to run out of the path of the avalanche, but most of them were unable to get clear before the snow and ice was upon them. After the cloud of snow and ice dissipated, Day took a quick count from his position and determined that some of the climbers were missing. In fact, 11 climbers were missing and 11 others besides Day, Targett, and Wilson had survived the icefall or avalanche.

The survivors were moved to a safer location, a lookout was posted in case of another icefall, and the rest made a hasty search through the debris for other survivors. Although eyeglasses and other minor personal effects were found, none of the missing climbers could be located above or in the crevasse itself.

Day made radio contact with Ranger Gary Olson at Camp Muir and reported the accident; he later continued his search for approximately 30 minutes. The guides determined that the situation was hopeless and assumed that the missing climbers had either been swept into the crevasse or they were buried under an abundance of avalanche debris.

The missing climbers included guide Tom O'Brien and David H. Boulton (29), Mark Ernlund (29), Ronald A. Farrell (41), Gordon Heneage (42), David L. Kidd (30), Jonathan Laitone (27), Ira Liedman (30), Henry W. Matthews (38), Craig Tippie (28), and Michael J. Watts (36).

At 6:30 a.m. Wilson and Whittaker departed for Camp Muir with all but one of the surviving RMI clients, who stayed at the scene and continued searching with Day, Targett, and a group of independent climbers who had joined them.

Olson, accompanied by other climbers, reached the accident site at approximately 9:00 a.m. The weather at the accident scene deteriorated with heavy snowfall and very poor visibility. A search of approximately 45 minutes revealed only a pack, an ice ax, and a headlamp. After reporting extremely poor weather and the danger of further icefall, Olson received permission from Park Superintendent William Briggie to suspend the search. Around 10:45 a.m., all personnel returned to Camp Muir. At 12:00 p.m. the Disappointment Cleaver route was closed to the public.

Three support rescue teams, including Rangers Ed Wilson, Dan Dellings, Lee Hankle, and Vince Reed, as well as Lou and Jim Whittaker, Andy Politz, Ken Williams, Peter Simonson, John Smolich, Tracy Roberts, Bill Lokey, Cy Perkins, Jeff Sharp, Archey Blakeley, Don Goodman, Al Albright, Gary Glenn, Bruce Clement, and other members of the Seattle and Tacoma Mountain Rescue teams, left for Camp Muir at various times the next morning.

During the day on Monday, June 22, rescue teams dug three trenches at the top of the crevasse and two near the bottom. No victims were found during the intensive and extremely difficult digging. When the weather worsened again, the rescue teams returned to Camp Muir.

Late that evening a conference call was conducted with the principal rescue personnel and Superintendent Briggie. Olson reported that for several reasons, primarily concerned with the safety of the search personnel, ". . . to continue this operation at this time would be futile." On June 22, at approximately 10 p.m., 40 hours after the accident, search operations were called off. The next day, at 2:30 p.m., all search personnel were released for other duties from the worst climbing accident in United States history. (Source: Jerry Blanche, Communications Specialist, Mount Rainier National Park)