

LOSS OF CONTROL—VOLUNTARY GLISSADE, INEXPERIENCE, CLIMBING UNROPED

Washington, Olympic National Park

On April 23, 1988, the following accident occurred to Mona McCalley-Whitters (32) on Mount Ellinor:

This was my first mountain climb. After loss of control as I was glissading, I was unable to arrest myself with my ice ax. I then tumbled over a ledge and down an icy chute for about 500 meters vertical drop. (A friend who rescued me had an altimeter.) The first person to reach me was my husband, who was an inexperienced climber. The next person was a member of Kitsap Rescue Team. I then had to work my way back up the icy chute for two and a half hours and glissade down Mount Ellinor. I'm happy to be alive! The Kitsap Rescue Team said I was very lucky to have survived the fall. No one could believe that I did not fracture or sprain my limbs. (Source: Mona McCalley-Whitters)

OVERDUE BACKCOUNTRY SKIER, MISCOMMUNICATION

Washington, Olympic Peninsula and Cascade Range

In late April 1988, Craig Peterson (32) left his housemates a note that he would be hiking and cross country skiing on the Olympic Peninsula. When he did not return on time two days later, his friends notified Clallam County officials, and a search was started. For four days, county, Olympic National Park and Olympic National Forest searchers checked trailheads and searched the area where they believed Peterson had gone.

When the search failed to produce anything by last Saturday, officials called it off. But about 60 of Peterson's friends continued looking for him, some of them centering their search in the North Cascades near where he had hiked before.

To the astonishment of friends who had about given him up for dead, he walked out of the Cascades and drove to Darrington, Snohomish County, late Sunday evening, nearly eight days after leaving on what was supposed to have been a two-day trek.

"It was like somebody coming back from the dead," said housemate Edy Schlosstein. "He's a strong little bugger, but it's a miracle. I was just sure he was dead." (Source: *The Seattle Times*, Tuesday, May 3, 1988)

Analysis

Peterson said that after he wrote the note and headed off in his car, he changed his mind and headed toward Glacier Peak in the Cascade Range. He decided to explore an area he discovered the previous summer.

At the trailhead, he hid his van so it wouldn't be vandalized. As an experienced hiker and cross-country skier, Peterson took along more than enough supplies for the planned two-day trek. His pack was heavy, laden with a tent, ice ax, shovel, several changes of clothing and enough food for four days. He had set out for the northeast side of Glacier Peak on Sunday afternoon, and by the light of the moon traveled well into the night.

It was midway through the second day that he fell. He went to explore a source of drinking water and fell through a snow bridge that had been weakened by the dripping water. He fell about three meters, but that's apparently where his bad luck ended. He landed in soft snow, didn't break any bones during the fall and landed right side up. Although the hole he fell into was too steep to climb out of, he was lucky that his pack ended up alongside him—with the food he needed for energy and the shovel he needed to dig his way out of the snow.

"I knew the only way out was to dig so I tunneled up through the snow," said Peterson. "It took me two days and by the time I got through I was exhausted. When I got out I got a little ways away from where I'd fallen and I pitched my tent and went to sleep. I wasn't hypothermic, but I was totally exhausted. I lost a day or two. If I'd known people were searching for me I'd have come down sooner, but I just slept in my tent and tried to get my strength back."

"This is not something I'm proud of," he said, looking back on the week he spent digging his way off the mountain while law-enforcement officials on the Peninsula and 60 of his friends searched for him.

"I'm embarrassed. I did some stupid things. I went by myself and didn't tell anybody where I was going." (Source: *The Seattle Times*, Tuesday, May 3, 1989)

(Editor's Note: While not a climbing accident, this case is worth reporting because of its obvious application for climbers.)

FALL ON SNOW, INEXPERIENCE, WEATHER

Washington, Mount Rainier

This is a report on the triple fatality on Mount Rainier in May of 1988. It turned into a media event. Fortunately, a summary of the essential details was prepared objectively by the rangers.

David Kellokoski (30), team leader, Craig Adkison (37), and Greg Remmick (32) fell to their deaths while attempting a climb of Liberty Ridge on Mount Rainier. The Kellokoski party signed out to climb on the evening of May 4. The party estimated their return date as May 11. On May 14, Lori Adkison (wife) called the Park and reported the party overdue. The search and rescue operation began on May 15. The three bodies were first seen from the air on May 19. The three bodies were recovered from the mountain and turned over to the Pierce County Medical Examiner on May 20. (Source: Park Rangers, Mount Rainier National Park)

Analysis

There is no way to know just what caused the fall that resulted in the deaths of the three climbers; it may have been a slip, an avalanche, or rockfall. Nor do we know for certain what time or day the accident occurred or whether the climbers were ascending or descending. However, from the facts available and from the reasoned judgment of experienced climbers and park rangers, the following scenario is probably a close approximation of what occurred:

On May 9, the climbers leave Ipsut Creek Campground at 0500 and hike probably as far as approximately Dick Creek Camp near the foot of the Carbon Glacier, where they spend the first night.