

and a rappeller entangling himself in his rappel rope 45 meters above the ground. Both required the services of the Albuquerque Mountain Rescue Council.)

FALL ON ICE, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT, UNCLEAR LEADERSHIP/DECISION MAKING

New York, Adirondacks

On Saturday morning, March 11, 1989, Linda Hepburn (36) arrived with four companions (Art Portmore, Patrick Clark, Peter Osborne, and Mike Douglass) at the base of Trap Dike on Mount Colden. Hepburn had no ice climbing experience and apparently intended just to watch the others for a while.

Conditions in the lower part of the dike were apparently good, so Hepburn was allowed to accompany the group as far as the first waterfall. There, Portmore found the bypass to the right relatively easy, and the whole group continued on to the second and higher waterfall. Again Portmore decided to take the gully to the right as the group did not have a rope and was not prepared for any technical climbing.

Hepburn looked at the steep gully and decided that she could climb it, so she continued with the group. The group then proceeded onto the sides on the face of Colden, where there was a foot or so of snow overlain by an icy crust as a result of the previous weekend's rain. The crust generally provided a good surface for climbing, as crampons pierced it easily or could in places kick a step; but a few small bulges had only a thin layer of easily fractured ice on the underlying rock. Portmore, as the strongest member of the party, was leading, kicking steps as he went, followed by Hepburn, who by this time did not have her ice ax, as she had laid it down above the gully and forgotten it. Douglass was last, having had some difficulty in the gully with the soft snow. He found her ice ax and tried to have her stop so he could give it back to her, but Hepburn was moving rapidly nine to ten meters behind Portmore and the other two climbers between Douglass and Hepburn could not relay the message.

Around 1300, Douglass heard a scream and looked up to see Hepburn sliding head first. She slid approximately 300 meters before being stopped by a small island of trees.

When Douglass reached her, she was unconscious and suffering from a broken leg, abdominal injuries, and an obvious head injury. Douglass covered her first with warm clothing and administered what first aid he could, but her injuries were too severe and she died, probably around 1430.

As soon as the accident occurred, Osborne and Clark headed up and over the summit to summon help, but a skier on Avalanche Lake had also seen Hepburn fall, and he started out immediately to seek aid. He met Dave Dohman, Lake Colden caretaker, on "Misery Hill" above Avalanche Lean-tos at 1310. Dohman skied back to Lake Colden to call for a rescue about 1330. In response, the DEC alerted the Backcountry Rescue Team as this was obviously technical terrain.

Using snowmobiles, the rescuers reached Avalanche Lake and climbed to the accident site by 1645. It was apparent that she was dead. Hepburn's body was lowered to Avalanche Lake and evacuated by snowmobile, reaching South Meadow shortly after midnight. (Sources: Mike Douglass, Mark Ippolito, newspaper accounts)

Analysis

Contrary to many newspaper accounts, Hepburn was not totally inexperienced, as she had hiked and climbed with Portmore the previous summer in the Canadian Rockies,

including some steeper snow walking. The Trap Dike was a more difficult climb than she had attempted before, but her strong performance on even the steeper pitches of the lower sections led the rest of the party to believe that she would have no trouble on the lower angle slides above. Exactly what precipitated her fall is not known, but it could have been anything from a crampon catching on a leg to a step giving way. What role relative inexperience played in the fall can therefore not be determined, nor is it possible to speculate whether she could have self-arrested had she been carrying her ice ax at the time.

This group was a typical mix of relatively experienced climbers. Likely any of the four others could have functioned as the leader; but, as so often happens, none felt that he had been so designated or that it was even appropriate to take charge of others of similar experience. The result was that the decision to allow Hepburn to continue was made incrementally and without any one individual taking responsibility to make sure that she was able to handle the terrain and conditions.

As a general rule, a party should rope whenever a slip could result in serious injury or death. Taking this rule literally, one should rope up on the west side of Saddleback. That isn't done because the actual danger of a fall is low enough. The danger of a fall on the Bottle Slide on Giant is greater, but still one does not usually use a rope.

The Trap Dike and the slides on Colden in the winter, especially with glazed surface conditions, is terrain obviously much closer to the point where a rope would be an absolute requirement. For inexperienced members of a party, a rope becomes a requirement before it does for experienced members; it is the leader of the group who must make that decision. In this case, there was no clearly defined leader. Hence, no clear decision was made that since the party had no climbing rope, Hepburn should not be allowed to continue past the upper waterfall. (Source: *Adirondac*, Vol. 53, No.5, June 1989)

VARIOUS FALLS ON ROCK, MOSTLY NO OR INADEQUATE PROTECTION New York, Shawangunks

In 1989, there were 19 climbing accidents. They can be divided into three categories: (1) solo climbers or boulderers, who use no rope; (2) lead climbers; and (3) those climbers being seconded. The great majority of climbing accidents involve lead climbers. Of these, seven leaders fell, and either pulled protection or had placed none, and hit either the ground or a ledge. Six accidents involved a leader falling a moderate distance, six meters or less, with protection holding yet an injury resulting.

Perhaps the most interesting category of injuries is those that happened to climbers coming second. Seconding is usually considered to be relatively safe, so injuries here are notable. All three injuries in this category occurred for different reasons: a loose rock, a shoulder prone to dislocation being stressed, and a climber coming second whose rope appears to have jammed and he was not aware until he fell; and then there was just too much slack in his rope and he fell two or three meters. (Source: Mohonk Preserve)