

WEATHER, FATIGUE, FAILURE TO FOLLOW ROUTE, FALL OR SLIP ON ROCK**Washington, Mixup Peak**

On August 18, 1989, Tim Backman (30) and David Newton (36) ascended Mixup Peak in North Cascades National Park. They began the climb in fog from Gun Sight Notch. Off route, the 4th class climb became a 5th class climb. Finally finding the top, they summited at 1330, but unable to see more than 30 meters, soon became lost on the descent and rappelled into a gully on the southwest side of Mixup.

Continuing down the gully to the 1650-meter level, they encountered a seven meter dry waterfall and could not find a rappel anchor. Backman belayed Newton down and then followed, down climbing. Facing into the rock, Backman couldn't find a foothold and fell over backwards about 2.5 meters. He tumbled down the 45-degree incline for approximately eight meters. His pack and helmet protected him until his right foot slammed into a rock, which broke his ankle.

They spent the night together, and Newton left on August 19 at 0500 to summon help. Park Rangers were contacted and tried to approach Backman from above while teams from Skagit Mountain Rescue and Skagit ESAR tried to approach from below. All had difficulty determining where to search due to rain and fog. Evacuation was finally accomplished by helicopter the following day just before heavy wind and rain entered the area. (Source: Compiled from accounts by Tim Backman and Paul Williams, Seattle Mountain Rescue Council)

Analysis

Poor visibility was the most important contributing cause. Even equipped with USGS map, route description, compass, and altimeter, we became lost on our descent. Two things could have been done to prevent the fall. First, just about where I fell there was a good crack that could have been used with chock and sling to aid the step. Second, my partner might have helped my descent from below with his hands and prevented the tumble down the gully. Neither of these thoughts occurred to me at the time. (Source: Tim Backman)

FALL INTO CREVASSE—SNOW BRIDGE COLLAPSE**Washington, Mount Rainier**

On August 27, 1989, around 0830, Park Ranger Nina Burnell (26) and her climbing partner Mark Ross (28) were descending the Disappointment Cleaver Route from the summit of Mount Rainier when a snow bridge collapsed, pulling them both into the crevasse. (They were on a 23-meter rope, which was doubled, so there was about 12 meters between them.)

At 0800 Burnell had radioed down from the summit with weather information. Then they began their descent down the mountain. When they came to the junction of the route they had climbed up and the older route, they decided to descend the older route. At the 4100-meter level they came to a snow bridge at the base of a fixed rope. Ross belayed Burnell across the snow bridge and then followed. When Ross stepped onto the snow bridge, it collapsed, pulling Ross and Burnell in. Both climbers were covered by blocks of ice. Ross dug himself out and then he located Burnell and dug her out. They both climbed a ramp to the surface of the glacier 15 meters above.

Once out of the crevasse, they assessed their injuries. Burnell's right foot was hurting,