

when a large rock was knocked loose from above and struck her on the right side of her head. In September, an 11 year old Boy Scout was engaged in a rappelling experience with his father and several others when he “appeared to slip, then screamed and disappeared from sight,” of the adults at the top. Rangers climbed up to him—just seven meters from the bottom of the rappel—and found that he had just made a sideways swing, which had scared him. No injury resulted, and it was observed that the activity was being run safely. (We did not count this as an accident.)

The other fall involved a couple who were making their way back to the road by way of a bank beside a creek. The woman, Elizabeth Taylor (30), fell 40 meters, hitting a rock and losing consciousness. This, while not a climbing accident, resulted in a technical climbing rescue. (Source: Reports, submitted by Jim Yestor, came from the Delaware Water Gap N.R.A.)

FALLS ON ROCK, PROTECTION PULLED OUT, NO HARD HAT, ETC.

Utah, Cottonwood Canyons

Four reports of climbing accidents were filed for this area, one resulting in a fatality when a solo climber fell while descending Mount Superior’s north side. The others resulted in injury due to the length of the falls. (Source: H. Thad Moore, Salt Lake County Sheriff’s Office)

WEATHER, EXPOSURE, EXCEEDING ABILITIES

Washington, Mount Rainier

During the week of March 19-23, 1989, a ten-person Special Forces Unit of the U.S. Army climbed from Paradise to the Camp Muir area and back for the purposes of testing equipment and men in a winter mountaineering and survival environment. Three members were sent back to Paradise at 1200 on March 21 because two of them, SSGT Bronn (28) and SFC Taylor (36), were suffering from various degrees of hypothermia, frostbite, and fatigue. SFC Martinez, a medic, was assigned to look after them. The party encountered blizzard conditions and a near white-out. Progress was very slow, with two men on skis and the third on snowshoes. For reasons unexplained, some of the equipment that would have assisted with navigation down the snowfield was given to a member of the seven-person unit continuing to Camp Muir. The three became disoriented and descended Paradise Glacier instead of Muir Snowfield.

The group of three encountered continued severe weather the next day. Despite the danger of travel on glaciated terrain, they chose not to rope together. In fact, they traveled closely bunched together in order not to get separated from each other.

At 2200 they stopped for an extended period to melt snow for water, soup, etc. They did not set up a tent or dig a snow cave to spend the rest of the night, choosing instead to continue walking slowly. They were not able to return to Paradise on either the 21st, as expected, or the 22nd.

The evening of March 22 and the morning of the 23rd plans were made and teams organized to search for the overdue party. Just as three park rangers and 15 volunteer Seattle and Tacoma Mountain Rescue people were about to initiate a ground search, the three soldiers arrived back at Paradise at 0500. Bronn was later treated for second degree frostbite to his lower back and toes and Taylor for a back injury. The remainder of the Special Forces Unit successfully descended from Camp Muir to Paradise in

clear weather without further incident, although two individuals were reported suffering from some degree of frostbite. (Source: George Sainsbury)

Analysis

We concluded that the personnel on the training mission had flunked navigation, passed survival, and flunked communication. (Source: George Sainsbury, Paul Williams, Seattle Mountain Rescue Council)

FALL ON ROCK, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT, FATIGUE

Washington, Icicle Creek Canyon

This accident occurred on April 15 while I was participating in an Intermediate Rock 1 climbing course field trip with the Mountaineers. The subject of the class was the placement of protection and leading.

The morning and early afternoon was spent placing protection while top-roped on the three main cracks of Flake Slab. In the afternoon, while leading for the first time, I fell from near the top of the Middle Crack while attempting to move up. At the time of my fall, I was probably not more than two meters beyond my last piece of protection. However, the Middle Crack ascends diagonally, and I fell onto the rounded top of an adjacent flake below the Middle Crack. My protection held and the belay absorbed part of the force of the fall; my rib cage absorbed the rest. (Source: Jim Green—46)

Analysis

Climb with good climbing shoes, and place protection effectively. Had I not been wearing a climbing helmet, I may have suffered a head injury as well. (Source: Jim Green)

FALL ON ROCK, CHOCK PULLED OUT, INADEQUATE PROTECTION, INEXPERIENCE

Washington, Icicle Creek Canyon

On April 15, I could not complete a lead in mid-afternoon and was down climbing/being lowered when the top protection pulled out. The chock hit me in the right eyebrow, breaking my glasses, causing a nose bleed and unconsciousness. I fell four to five meters to hard ground landing on my left side and then rolled onto my face. I was unconscious for about a minute, and thought I was reasonably coherent. I have no recall of events for 20 minutes. Other injuries were a bruised left elbow and fractures of three to four transverse processes from the left side of the lumbar vertebrae. Others in the group called EMS in Leavenworth and the Mountaineers trip leader. I was splinted for back injury and quickly transported to the hospital. (Source: Frank Rossi—47)

Analysis

If one cannot complete leading a pitch, place additional protection, and downclimb as much as possible. Do not rely on being lowered. Wearing a hard hat and eye glasses undoubtedly prevented further injury. I was unconscious from being hit by the chock, causing me to be relaxed when I hit the ground. Four weeks later I was backpacking again. (Source: Frank Rossi)