

Two other factors may have contributed to the accident. First, it was late in the second day of climbing and both were somewhat fatigued and therefore less attentive. Secondly, the climbing up to this point had been both challenging and successful, which probably led to both climbers being in a somewhat overconfident state of mind. The same factors may have led to the instructor's failure to notice their error in not placing enough protection. Both climbers have since returned to climbing, somewhat wiser.

One very significant lesson learned by those involved in this incident was the importance of wearing a proper helmet when rock climbing. Without it this accident would most likely have resulted in the climber's death or permanent disablement. (Source: The Mountaineers)

FALL ON ROCK, FALLING ROCK, NO HARD HAT, EXCEEDING ABILITIES

Washington, Index—Town Wall

On May 5, after freeclimbing two-thirds of the way up the route, we encountered water dripping down the face. We continued to climb up into the chimney. Mike freeclimbed up and then sent down a rope. He had me on belay as I climbed the chimney, back to one wet wall, feet to the other wet wall. About three to four meters up, I slipped. On belay, I hung there, but when the rope went tight over the edge, it released the rocks that struck me. The first rock hit my head, then my shoulders, then the rope on the rocks below. The second rock hit my head and along with the rest of the rocks, hit, cut and ruined the rope below. My head stung—then it felt wet—then it started to drip. By ten seconds after the rocks first fell, Mike called to find out what happened. I told him I was bleeding and to let me down. He couldn't see me and he couldn't hear me very well. Below us other climbers were coming up. One pretty close, one farther down, and one at the bottom. Between them they could hear both of us. Not being able to see me or know the severity, one went to town and sounded an alarm. The climber closest to me called out that he was in a position to climb up if necessary. It took Mike about one and a half to two minutes to let me down. I thought the best idea was to get to the closest climber below before blood loss became a factor. The cut was bleeding at a fair flow and I could not stem it. I rappelled about 15 meters to the climber who was already well anchored in. We were on a good ledge to rest. A helicopter appeared, spotted us, hovered for a moment, and landed. The climber put me on belay, and I rappelled down to another climber. I stayed on the first rope and finished the descent. Waiting at the bottom was the rescue team. (Source: Chuck Amon—27)

Analysis

Basic knowledge and attention to safety in rock climbing would have prevented this accident. Use ropes, use a helmet, and don't climb wet rock. (Source: Chuck Amon)

LOSS OF CONTROL—VOLUNTARY GLISSADE, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT AND INSTRUCTION, EXCEEDING ABILITIES

Washington, Stevens Pass Ski Area

While practicing head-first glissade and self-arrest procedures with a group of 40 students and 14 staff from an Everett Mountaineers Scramblers course on May 16, 1990, Brian Fletcher (16) lost his grip on his ax and could not regain control. In the slide either the spike or pick end of the ax sliced a small cut across his chest and made a puncture wound near his stomach, just missing vital organs in the abdomen. He was rescued using the ski area's grooming machine for transport. (Source: Neil Johnson)

Analysis

Snow conditions were very hard at the time of the accident. Fletcher had practiced this arrest many times the previous day, but in soft snow. With hard snow conditions, the slope might have been too aggressive for students with one day of experience. Also, there needs to be more emphasis on buying gloves and axes that allow students a good grip on the spike end of the ax.

There seems to be considerable confusion about the best way to do the head-first-on-the-stomach arrest. Different instructors and different books say different things. We think more research needs to be done to establish good principles for this arrest. (Source: Neil Johnson)

(Editor's Note: This accident, and the July 28 accident on Mount Baker, reflect the range but by no means the full number of glissade incidents reported this year in Washington State. From the hard snow to soft snow conditions shown here, from fortunate minor injury to unfortunate fatality, the accounts of problems glissading were too numerous to include other than in the actuarial data.

Various analyses accompanying the reports raise an equally wide range of issues, from suggestions to avoid axes with ring loops to the dangers of using no ax at all to reminders to avoid the lure of the easy way down.)

FALL ON SNOW, WEATHER, EXCEEDING ABILITIES, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT**Washington, Snoqualmie, Silver Peak**

On June 17, this accident occurred while a party of 11 "Alpine Scramblers" were descending Silver Peak. Lori Levin (30) reported the following:

The leader and the group were in a hurry to get home due to fog and rain. The snow was especially icy and slippery. I tried to keep up and overstepped a hill and fell (45 meters) into a tree off a cliff. My ice ax slipped out of my hand so I could not self-arrest. I screamed and fell. A half hour later I was rescued and walked out OK after rescue help. (Source: Lori Levine)

Analysis

I will always secure my ice ax with a wrist loop and I will never go on a trip when I am exhausted from a stressful week. The conditions of bad weather, being inexperienced and afraid helped make the trip difficult. I won't go on advanced trips when I am a beginner. I won't climb if I've had a bad week, and I will only do easy scrambles. (Source: Lori Levin)

HAND-HOLD AND ROCK ANCHOR CAME OUT, FALL/SLIP, OFF ROUTE**Washington, Mount Thompson**

On July 22, five climbers left base camp between Mount Thompson and Bumblebee Pass at 0500 for a Mountaineer's led climb of the West Ridge. Steve Sulzbacher led the party, with Diane Magyary assistant leader and designated first aid leader. Other members included Randy Johnson, Bruce Gaulke, and Kathy O'Toole (27). All climbers were wearing hard hats and seat harnesses, though no one was using a chest harness.

The third pitch appeared to go up a gully, which Gaulke led with some difficulty. They concluded that the "correct" route was actually to the left of this gully. O'Toole