

mission, or an off-duty incident resulting in not more than \$50 expense. Major SAR missions involve expenditures of \$500 or more. In 1991, there were 19 major missions, 42% of which involved technical climbers in trouble. Of the 267 total callouts, 27.0% were for overdue parties, 71.9% were for emergency medical services, and 1.1% were for stranded parties.

Of the 267 total callouts, 32 (12.0%) involved technical climbers. Of these 32 callouts, 12 were missions and 20 were incidents. There were 19 overdue parties, 11 medical responses, and two stranded parties. Three of the overdue incidents were quite significant in that they involved overnight responses, lots of manpower and other SAR resources, and large expenditures of money. Interesting and unusual for the year are two reports of accidents involving technical rescuers in practice session.

*An additional comment is that one "overdue" party was cited by the Park Rangers because of their negligence in not following their itinerary and not returning to the trailhead to recontact family and park officials of their new plans. Failure to do this resulted in an extensive search effort.)*

## FALL ON ROCK, OLD PITON BROKE

### **Maryland, Delaware Water Gap NRA, Mount Tammany**

On August 11, 1991, Mike Morlock (16) and Rick Lago (24) had finished climbing the Rib (5.3) and started climbing Triumvirate (5.4). Mike led the first pitch to a ledge, set up an anchor system, and Rick started following. Rick got nervous and tightened up. Mike said, "No problem, I will let you back down using the rope." When Rick reached the ground, he sat down and watched Mike pull the rope up, do some rigging and start down climbing.

Mike threaded the rope through the eye of a rusty steel angle piton that was left by a previous party. He tested the piton by putting weight on the rope. Mike put both sides of the rope through a figure 8 rappel device to use as a back up in case of a fall. He down climbed about 15 feet when he put an estimated 30% of his weight on the rope. The piton broke, Mike lost his balance and fell back an estimated 45 to 60 feet, striking several ledges and hit his head on the bottom. He remained conscious and told Rick to go get an ambulance.

After a few minutes, Mike got up, coiled his rope, packed his gear, and started walking down the steep, rocky path toward the road about half a mile away. Two-thirds of the way down the trail, Mike was met by another climbing party that helped him to the road where he met Park Rangers and Portland Ambulance.

### **Analysis**

Any climbing area has several resident placements, which are pieces of protection left by previous climbers. Resident protection is known to be risky and often used to supplement other placement. Mike had a full rack of equipment with him but used one old piton for his sole protection. The piton was found on the rope and was about 75% rusted through where the shaft entered the rock. Mike was confident in his ability to safely down climb the route but said he got lazy and put his weight on the rope. (Source: Ronald Matthews, Delaware Water Gap NRA)

*(Editor's Note: There were two other incidents reported from this area, both of them involving non-climbers who became stranded and had to be rescued. One was a ten*

*year old boy, whose father had allowed him to climb on a shale cliff. The other was a female German Shepard. Both required technical rescue. The dog required some food and water before a harness could be rigged on her, as she seemed to be frightened and angry.)*

## **FALL ON ROCK, EXCEEDING ABILITIES, INADEQUATE SUPERVISION AND INSTRUCTION, POOR JUDGMENT, IMPROPER PROCEDURE, ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION**

### **Michigan, Oak Park, Grand Ledge**

On May 5, 1991, about 1550, Kathy Wizinsky (27) fell 30 to 35 feet to the ground while on a "top roped" climb known as Ultimate Bushwack (5.5). She sustained multiple fractures, cuts and bruises. Wizinsky was part of a group of seven climbers out for the day at a local climbing site known as "The Ledges" in Grand Ledge, Michigan. The group leaders were Paul Konarski (38), Justin Rundle (30+) and Bob Vipond. At least three group members had no previous climbing experience including Wizinsky.

While instructing a beginner course in rock climbing at the base of the cliffs, I was asked by climbers who had witnessed the accident to lend assistance. Myself and my assistant instructor, Matt Patten, were EMTs. We stopped class and grounded all students and then responded to the accident which occurred about 25 yards from us. We immediately sent a climber to request an ambulance and backboard.

When I got to the victim she was lying on her left side in a semi-fetal position. There were members of her group trying to move her while several bystanders heatedly tried to convince them not to move her. I identified myself as an EMT and along with Patten convinced them not to move her. We then proceeded to treat the injured climber (Wizinsky). We took an initial set of vital signs, determined potential extent of injuries and then proceeded to treat and stabilize the victim.

When emergency services arrived on scene, another set of vitals was taken and all medical data was relayed to them. Wizinsky was then backboarded and evacuated by climbers and emergency personnel to a waiting ambulance where she was transported to a local hospital for treatment. Wizinsky was conscious and responsive throughout the experience. I later spoke to the victim in the hospital where I learned that she had sustained injuries including a shattered left ankle requiring surgery, a broken tailbone and a broken pelvis. After extensive interviews with the victim, participants and bystanders, the causes and factors which contributed to the accident were determined.

### **Analysis**

The Ledges are used as a "top rope" site exclusively. The local ethic is to get lowered on the rope upon completing a climb rather than "topping it out." This reduces ecological damage from human activity at the tops of the cliffs. This fact is important because the group involved in this incident was not abiding by this local standard. When local climbers informed them of this, they then followed the local norm. The accident occurred on their first attempt at lowering a climber in this manner.

Witnesses state that when Wizinsky got to the top of the climb she signaled her belayer to lower her. She then put her weight on the rope. Initially it held her. Wizinsky then heard a "pop" and fell backwards to the ground hitting a boulder outcropping before grounding out. Wizinsky was tied in with a locking carabiner. After the fall, the end of the rope that she had tied into was still at the top of the climb with the carabiner still locked. There was also a carabiner on her harness.