

(Editor's Note: There is a lot of climbing activity here, but very few accidents seem to occur.)

SLIP OR FALL ON SNOW, PARTY SEPARATED

Washington, Mount Rainier

On January 2, 1991, a three person climbing party consisting of Mark Fogarty (26), Phil Buck (26), and Binget Hanson (24) returned to Camp Muir after successfully climbing Mount Rainier via Ingraham Glacier. They planned to descend from Camp Muir on the Muir Snowfield the following day. Fogarty advised the two other members of his party that he was going to go to the western side of the snowfield to find better snow to ski on. As the party left Muir next morning in excellent weather, Fogarty intentionally separated at 1100 to begin a ski descent while the other two continued down on foot. He was not seen again by Buck and Hanson, and they reported his absence to park rangers at Paradise at 1400.

When Fogarty failed to return to Paradise by evening, a search effort was organized. Park rangers and Phil Buck searched throughout the night and found Fogarty's ski tracks leading to a steep, icy slope at the 9,050 foot level, where they disappeared over a cliff into Nisqually Glacier canyon. The next morning an aerial search was conducted, and Fogarty's body was discovered on a snow slope at the 8,000 foot level in the canyon. A ranger and a Tacoma Mountain Rescue volunteer were flown to the scene to recover the body. Further inspection of the accident site indicated Fogarty skied to the extreme western side of the snowfield, well outside the normal descent route, where he encountered a steep icy slope which caused him to fall and slide over the cliff. It was later determined he died from a fractured skull. (Source: Compiled from reports by National Park Rangers Rick Yates, John Wilcox, Stephen Winslow, and Rick Kuschner)

(Editor's Note: This is a mountaineering accident, and is included in the narrative account to advise of the dangers of attempting to ski technical mountain terrain. Park Ranger Rick Yates in his report also notes the intention of the Park Service to warn visitors of the hazards of backcountry skiing.)

FALL OR SLIP ON ICE, AVALANCHE AND/OR INADEQUATE BELAY, NO HARD HAT

Washington, Dragontail Peak

On January 27, 1991, two well known and experienced Seattle climbers, Hope Barnes (33) and Kathy Phibbs (33), began a climb of Dragontail Peak via Triple Couloir on the northwest face. In winter the route is a technical mixed climb involving steep snow and rock. Before leaving, Barnes left a detailed message describing the route and estimated they would be overdue if not back by 1800, January 29.

When no communication had been received by that hour, friends of the climbers reported their absence to the Chelan County Sheriff, who mobilized a land and air search. High winds and an approaching storm on January 30 prohibited close inspection by helicopter or landing at the site. The flight crew could only see into Hidden Couloir, first of the three couloirs on the route, but saw no evidence of climbers.

Early January 31 an eight-member ground search party moved up from the trail head to Colchuck Lake. About noon Phibbs' body was found in a crawling position

near the base of the climb. She had sustained fractures to her legs and ribs. Barnes' body was located about 300 yards above her, seated on a coiled rope and partially covered by snow. Her helmet was damaged and she had head injuries. Gear and personal items belonging to the climbers were scattered on the slope above them. Cause of death of both climbers was hypothermia complicated by trauma. (Source: Compiled from a report by Rob Jackson, Seattle Mountain Rescue, and documented observations of friends of the climbers written by Sprague Ackley and Chris Sherwood)

Analysis

Apparently, Barnes had led a pitch and placed her tools as protection and was either preparing to or was in the act of bringing Phibbs up to her when she fell or was swept out of her stance past Phibbs, dragging her off the slope. The two climbers fell to the bottom of the couloir, and out onto the snow slope below it.

Barnes landed below Phibbs, who had managed to crawl down to her and place the rope coil beneath her and prop her against her pack. Phibbs then attempted to crawl out for help, going about 300 yards before succumbing to her injuries. Her helmet was later found in her pack.

Exact cause of the accident will never be known. If it was a fall and not an avalanche, then inadequate belay would have been a contributing cause. (Source: Rob Jackson and Fred Stanley)

(Editor's Note: Two climbers were avalanched on this same route in November, 1990, just three months earlier. See ANAM, 1991, p. 53. Again, Becky's Cascade Alpine Guide warns of avalanche danger on this route.)

FALL OR SLIP ON SNOW, CLIMBING UNROPED

Washington, Snoqualmie Mountain

On April 14, 1991, a party of six Seattle Mountaineers assembled at 0720 near the Commonwealth Basin trailhead for an "Alpine Scramble" ascent of Snoqualmie Mountain. It was raining steadily at the start with no indication the weather would improve. The group leader polled members of the party and found they wished to continue the trip. After further discussion, they had decided on the shorter, steeper Alpentel route, which would get them higher sooner where the rain might turn to snow and shorten the trip as well by about four miles. The group also discussed safety issues and responsibilities and agreed on assignments. Robin Day (36) volunteered to serve as assistant leader. The group then began a fairly uneventful ascent, "postholing" 300 yards, whereupon three members put on snowshoes to break trail for the others. The rain indeed soon changed to light snow, and as the grade steepened those with snowshoes removed them. The summit was reached at 1215.

Visibility had not improved, though snow conditions remained stable throughout the day. Given the weather and general level of fatigue in the party, the group leader indicated he was not comfortable leading a traverse over Guye Peak, and the group headed down at 1310 following their ascent tracks. About 1430 at the 4,400 foot level, Robin Day slipped while leading a snowshoe descent. She attempted arrest using her ice ax, but powder snow prevented any purchase, and she slid out of sight of the rest of the group into the trees lining the fall line.

The group leader directed the remainder of the party to move to a flat spot while he descended lower until he found Day clinging one-handed from a branch on a steep slope