

FALL ON ROCK

Wyoming, Wind Rivers, Cirque of the Towers

On July 29, 1991, four climbers set out to climb Pingora via the Northeast Face as two separate rope teams. The first rope team was Ian Cruikshank (52) and Jeanette Helfrich (47). The other team was Charlie Dorian (46) and Ricky Todd (41). We had been climbing in the area for the previous five days and were feeling comfortable with the altitude and the granite. We started climbing about 0745. Both teams were swinging leads and making fairly good time on the route. Charlie had finished our seventh pitch (the Hummock Pitch) at 1400. I started up the next pitch, following a crack in the center of a near vertical face. I had climbed about 15 meters above Charlie and was standing on a slight bulge contemplating my next series of moves. I had a #6 Wired Stopper with a short Hero Loop attached placed in a bombproof crack about ankle level. I had placed the first piece to direct the pull on the belayer as well as several intermediate pieces. I moved up to attempt the rather awkward move that I had to do to continue the pitch. After two attempts, I decided that I would go for it. I felt that the protection I had placed would hold. I went up and when I was approximately one meter above the stopper, my hands came out of the crack. I fell about two meters. All the components of the belay system held. I was wearing a chest harness, which kept me upright at the end of the fall. My right foot (closest to the rock wall) must have struck on the way down. (Alti 5.10s with stealth rubber do stick quite well!) My right ankle was quite swollen and hurt quite a bit if I put any weight on my foot. Charlie lowered me down, I tied myself in and we switched ends of the rope. We agreed that I should try to at least climb to the next belay ledge.

By this time my ankle was throbbing, discolored and looked pretty bad. I was able to loosen up my gortex hiking boot enough to get it on my foot. I kind of hopped the two miles back to our base camp at Lonesome Lake. I arrived back at base camp about 2100. The next day, two members of our party hiked out and arranged to have an extra horse brought in so I could ride out the 18 miles to the trailhead. By the time I reached the emergency room in Lander, it was 0100 on August 1.

Analysis

As it turned out, I sustained a fracture of my mid talus as well as substantial soft tissue injuries. We were able to deal with this accident without relying on outside help (other than the horses that were scheduled to take us out anyway). I guess the main reason that I'm taking the time to write about this incident is to show that not every accident requires outside help and countless hours of rescue by volunteer organizations. I feel that we were able to deal with this situation because we were experienced, a large party, acclimatized, familiar with the route and started early in the day.

Perhaps it's also good to remember that even a short leader fall can cause serious injuries. (Source: Ricky Todd)

SLIP ON SNOW, FAILURE TO SELF-ARREST

Wyoming, Disappointment Peak

On August 4, 1991, at 1445, Kent Fortner (22) and Thomas George (20) were attempting to climb Disappointment Peak via the east couloir above Amphitheater Lake. Approximately half way up the steep snow of the couloir, George planted his ice ax and