

is the final pitch of Lakeview. They had bought a cellular phone for their trip to Cannon. (Their usual climbing area was the Shawangunks where the routes are short.) The time was late, they were confused about how to get off the cliff, and there had been rain showers, so around 1900 they telephoned 911.

Two rescuers rappelled down to the couple. The four people then rappelled another 40 feet to a brushy ledge which they followed north to meet the descent trail. They reached the Profile Lake parking lot at 0200 on the 25th.

Analysis

Lt. Eric Stohl of the New Hampshire Department of Fish and Game (in charge of all rescues in the State) was quoted in the Conway Daily Sun as saying that people should not expect a cellular phone to replace proper equipment, common sense, and an understanding of one's own limits while ... climbing. A cellular phone can be a great help, as it was in two serious rock climbing injuries this past season, but it should not take the place of self-sufficiency. (Source: George Hurley)

NOT ANCHORED AT BELAY—MISCOMMUNICATION, NO HARD HAT New Hampshire, Cannon Cliff, Slip O' Fools

On October 1, Daniel Gelsomini (29) fell 35 to 40 feet from the top of the first pitch of Slip O' Fools at the north end of Cannon Cliff. He had reached the belay stance and called, "I'm off." Lori Gelsomini (29), Dan's wife and climbing partner, unlocked the carabiner which held the belay device. Before she removed the rope from the device, the rope started rushing through the belay plate. She looked up and saw Dan falling, with rocks falling with him. She was wearing a helmet, still anchored, and she was able to grab the moving rope and stop the falling, unconscious leader. She received second degree rope burns on both hands and arms.

Two other climbers, Randy Garcia and Will Higgins, from a nearby route, came to help Lori get Dan to the ground. Higgins then ran to his car phone to call for a rescue while the other two gave first aid.

Dan does not remember what caused him to fall. Lori Gelsomini thinks that Dan was struck by a rock falling from higher on the cliff (possibly from Lakeview which curves above the slab routes) before he was anchored. His skull was fractured in two places and his right eye immediately swelled shut. The force of the blow caused his brain to move forward suddenly, causing extreme swelling and bruising which resulted later in the loss of a small part of his frontal lobe.

Analysis

In her written account Lori Gelsomini says: "Always wear a helmet! It may not be the 'cool' thing to do but it can save your life. Clip into belay anchors immediately (before calling 'Off belay') even if you think you are safe."

Avoid climbing below other climbers. There are loose rocks on every cliff and Cannon is particularly unstable. (Source: George Hurley, Lori Gelsomini)

FALL ON ICE AND FROZEN MOSS, PLACED INADEQUATE PROTECTION New Hampshire, Cannon Cliff, Black Dike

The ice on the Black Dike did not reach all the way to the top of the route on this Thanksgiving Day, November 23. Fred Abraham (35) was forced to climb frozen moss and thin

ice at the very top of the final pitch. When he was about three feet from the trees and easy ground, his tools pulled out. He fell and was caught by his next ice screw, a small Black Diamond. Because the talus bone in his ankle was broken, he set up an anchor and his partner, Brian Donelan (37), led on to the top. Brian helped Fred to the top and Fred then mainly crawled to their truck, taking about four-and-a-half hours for the descent.

Analysis

Fred thinks that there may have been a bulge of ice under the handle of his ice tool and he may have levered the tool out because of that.

I have been in either the same place or in a similar place and have thrown a weight on the end of a long cord (17 feet of 7mm perlon) around a small tree at the top of the cliff. After tying the ends of the cord together, I had protection for the final few feet. The end of a haul line or one of two double ropes would work even better, since the leader could have a top rope belay. A few carabiners make a good weight for throwing; a third tool would be used to weight the rope since it might hook something solid even if it did not fall neatly around a tree.

Under some conditions rappelling the route rather than climbing a poorly formed final pitch would be wise. In this case, the two men discussed that option after the accident and decided against it, since the talus slope was not yet filled in with snow and because they were climbing with only one rope. (Source: George Hurley)

VARIOUS: FALLS ON ROCK, FALLING ROCK, PROTECTION PULLED OUT, INADEQUATE BELAYS, STRANDED, BEES

New York, Mohonk Preserve, Shawangunks

Of the 28 accidents reported from the Shawangunks in 1995, 17 were the result of falling, and in three cases, protection pulled out. The serious injuries included eleven fractures and one dislocation. There were two cases where the rappel rope did not reach the ground, and in one, the person rappelling unclipped and started to down climb when he found that his rappel rope did not reach the ground. He dislocated his shoulder when he fell. A man rappelling from Shockley's ceiling had to be rescued because he became stranded where the rope ended. Another fellow became stranded when he got stuck on Modern Times (5.8) and tried to prussik. His rope jammed, so he could not move.

There were six instances of falling rock, two of which were the result of climbers pulling a block of rock off. (A massive spontaneous rock fall was discovered in the Near traps days after it occurred.)

There was only one formal report of a bee attack, and that was on Classic (5.7). The climber got about 50 stings, but he did not fall or jump, and was all right. The rangers report that every year there are a number of accidents that go unreported because the injured person walks off or self-rescues. Yellow jacket and wasp attacks are common, but most go unreported.

The average age of the victims was 27, and the average difficulty of the climbing routes on which the incidents occurred was 5.6. This is about the same as in the previous year. (Source: Mohonk Preserve)

RAPPEL ERROR—CLIPPED TO ONE ROPE, FALL ON ROCK

Oregon, Smith Rock State Park

On February 4, John Elgin (24) fell 60 feet after failing to rig his rappel properly. All that is known is that another climber shouted to Elgin to recheck his rig as he prepared to