

the descending party members. After consulting with Lanny Johnson, Medical Advisor, and verifying that Farnworth and Kerwin were still experiencing no problems on the descent, the decision was made to evacuate the body on the following day due to the approaching darkness.

### **Analysis**

Hehr fastened himself into the rappel system and just prior to weighting the system said, "I hope this flake holds."

This incident is an example of a situation where technical climbing ability greatly exceeds experience in an actual mountain environment. Farnworth was a 5.11 climber in a gym and had no problem with the level of climbing on the Southwest Ridge (5.6 or 5.7). Yet he had difficulty in protecting the route, and he did not back up his rappel anchor with artificial protection because he "did not trust protection that he placed." In a subsequent rappel, his partner noticed another anchor failure that occurred as Farnworth was just finishing his rappel. Sport climbers who turn to the mountains for additional adventure should note that altitude, weather, placement of protection, and so forth are all part of the activity.

When situations become complicated by intense weather, experience plays a major role in the decision-making process. After some discussion, the party made the reasonable decision to retreat by rappelling the route. Earlier they did have the opportunity to join up with another group above them, who were trailing a rope that had become stuck (for the second time). They simply "unstuck" the rope for them and never requested any assistance, such as a belay up the final pitch. In addition, once they had decided to retreat, perhaps a more reasonable approach would have been for Kerwin, who had more mountain experience and had climbed the route before, to play a more active role in setting up the rappel stations.

The group was making extremely slow progress on the approach. They were forced to circumnavigate the snow which they were not equipped to travel on. Most likely they did not begin climbing the route until after 1100. They should have been aware of the unstable weather since they had been stormed-off Guide's Wall the previous day, and of the strong afternoon thundershowers which had been forecast. They continued to climb even when the storm's arrival was imminent.

Early starts, proper attire, knowledge of weather, and solid decision making play a major role in preventing hypothermia, and this may have played a major role in the team's actions. They were forced to huddle and wait for breaks in an intense storm in a very exposed location subject to high winds along with the precipitation. Their attire in general was questionable as well. There was substantial confusion between Farnworth and Kerwin in setting up the rappel that failed for Hehr.

Although it mostly likely would not have made a difference in Hehr's demise, only Kerwin was wearing a helmet. The fact that Farnworth and Hehr were not using helmets reflects once again on their inexperience in the actual mountain environment. (Source: George Montopoli, Park Ranger)

## **FALL ON ROCK—CHANGE OF PLANS**

### **Wyoming, Devil's Tower National Monument**

On August 21 at 1450, the Visitor Center received a report from Lucas Bannister that a climber was calling for help on the Southwest Buttress. I notified Ranger Fontaine to organize the SAR team for a possible rescue and then responded to the Tower Trail with

rangers Martin and Drane-Martin. We located the individual, and Drane-Martin, an EMT, and I climbed to his location on the Southwest Buttress. When we arrived we contacted Kenneth Pisichko (49) and two friends, Craig Spakowski and Ray Kenny. Pisichko said that they had registered to climb the Durrance Route (5.6), but there were other climbers on it, so they decided to do the first pitch of Direct Southwest (5.7). Pisichko slipped and fell about six feet, catching and breaking his right ankle on a ledge. Sam Shafer, a local climber and nurse/paramedic, had already contacted Pisichko and splinted his right leg. Pisichko was alert, oriented x 3, and relatively comfortable. He had already taken four Tylenol 4's that he had with him. He had pulse distal to the fracture. He advised us that he was diabetic and that he had taken insulin earlier in the day. His vitals at 1545 were P/74, R/12. Four other climbers, Jim Bernard, Matt Lisenby, Jason Cushner, and Lynn Lee, were on the Tower and volunteered to assist with the rescue.

At 1615 the SAR team reached the top of the boulder field below the Southwest Buttress. Using one of the climber's ropes, we hauled up a 300 foot static line. That was anchored and used to bring up ranger Gallant with the litter. Pisichko was secured in the litter, his vitals were taken (P/102, R/20) and, accompanied by ranger Gallant, was lowered about 160 feet to the boulder field. The lower was completed at 1721. (Source: Jim Schlinkmann, Chief Ranger)

### **Analysis**

Here was a climber mentally prepared to do one route of a certain level of difficulty who then changed his route choice due to circumstances described. Being faced with a new objective and a degree of difficulty higher than anticipated has often contributed to the actual cause—in this case a fall—of an accident. (Source: Jed Williamson)

*(Editor's Note: This was the only climbing accident recorded at Devil's Tower this year.)*

## **FALL ON ROCK, FALL INTO MOAT, CLIMBING ALONE**

### **Wyoming, Grand Teton, Mount Teewinot**

On August 22, Larry L. Fahlberg (44) died while attempting a solo climb of the East Face Route on Mount Teewinot in Grand Teton National Park. Fahlberg was climbing alone and the accident was not witnessed. He was reported overdue from the climb by a friend on the following day, and a search was implemented the same afternoon. A total of 48 people were involved in search efforts from Grand Teton and Yellowstone National Parks, USFS helitack crew and pilot, Teton County Search and Rescue and Exum Mountain Guides. Field search teams were comprised of technical climbers, search dog teams and aerial reconnaissance.

Fahlberg's body was located by Grand Teton National Park rangers on August 24 in a moat at the 11,000 foot level on the East Face route. He had apparently fallen approximately 30 feet and died of his injuries and hypothermia. Fahlberg was raised from the moat and his body was flown by helicopter to Lupine Meadows and turned over to the Teton County Coroner at 1400.

### **Analysis**

By all accounts Fahlberg was an experienced climber and very familiar with the Teton Range. The route he was attempting was well within his abilities. The conditions found on the route the day of the accident were relatively good and a solo ascent by a climber with Fahlberg's experience was not unusual or unreasonable. He was appropriately