

left on his first rappel should have tipped him off to the fact that he was not at the correct anchors. Finally, a simple knot at the end of the rope would have averted the incident entirely. (Source: Tony Thaler, SAR Ranger, Zion National Park)

## **FALL ON ROCK—CAM HOOK CAME OFF, NO HARD HAT, INADEQUATE PROTECTION**

### **Utah, Zion National Park, Forbidden Wall**

On December 27, V. G. (25) and L. E. (20) obtained a backcountry permit to climb Moonlight Butte. Whether they couldn't find their intended route or changed their minds is unknown, but the two instead began an unnamed/unknown route on Forbidden Wall near the Temple of Sinawava. V. G. began by climbing a 200-foot pitch to a vegetated ledge. The two then hauled their bags and moved across the ledge to the base of their next pitch. V. G., the more experienced climber, began leading out on Leeper cam hooks. About 15 feet on the ledge, V.G. placed a cam, climbed another ten to fifteen feet and placed his second cam. About ten feet above his second cam, and again out on cam hooks, V. G. expressed concern to L. E. about his next hook placement, thinking it suspect. After several minute of tinkering with the placement, V. G. committed his weight to it and the hook blew. He fell more than 20 feet, flipping upside down and striking his head against the wall, losing consciousness. By tugging on the belay line, L. E. was able to reposition V. G. so that he leaned against the wall in a head-up orientation. L. E. then tied him off in place and escaped the belay to get help, using a second lead line tied off to a single cam anchor to rappel from. After scrambling down several hundred feet of scree and then talus, and then crossing the Virgin River, L. E. met another climber, G. A., on the canyon scenic drive. G. A. immediately drove to Zion Lodge and notified park dispatch of the incident while L. E. returned to the scene to assist V. G. Despite a very serious potential hazard, the Zion SAR team safely stabilized V. G., lowered him to the ground, and got him transported to the hospital where he remains in a coma as of this report.

### **Analysis**

Several factors come to light here. First, V. G. decided not to wear a helmet, while insisting the L. E. wear his, since he was the less experienced climber. Second, they were climbing an unknown route of undetermined difficulty. The established routes on Forbidden Wall are some of the hardest and least repeated in the park, some checking in at A4 and A5. The probable lack of sufficient gear likely contribute to the third factor: the question of why V. G. chose not to place reliable protection between the cam-hook he was on and the suspect hook that blew. Finally, L. E.'s failure to construct a safe rappel anchor was almost disastrous. After G. A. summoned help, he returned with L. E. to the belay ledge, ascending the fixed rope. Once Zion SAR team members arrived, G. A. rappelled the line to assist with rescue efforts. SAR team members then ascended the line. So at this point, the single cam anchor had been rappelled on twice and ascended on four times. Upon reaching the ledge, SAR Ranger

K. H. checked the anchor for the other team members and found the nearly expanded single cam behind a fractured block! (Source: From a report by Tony Thaler, SAR Ranger, Zion National Park.)

## **FALLING ICE, NO HARD HAT, CLIMBING ALONE**

### **Vermont, Smuggler's Notch**

On December 30, a man (41) was five or six feet off the ground on a climb when he was struck by a piece of falling ice three feet in diameter. He was knocked off his ice route and fell an additional 30–40 feet down-slope. He suffered lacerations, a concussion and multiple skull fractures.

Fortunately, there were climbers nearby who reported the incident to the Stowe Hazardous Terrain Evacuation team. He was lowered and transported to Burlington. After six weeks in the hospital, he was released, having lost sight in his right eye, but with no other “permanent deficit.” The victim called with the rescue team to thank them, and to say that he feels lucky to be alive. (Source: From a report by Neil Van Dyke, Stowe Hazardous Terrain Evacuation Team)

## **AVALANCHE**

### **Washington, Mount Rainier**

This accident occurred as a RMI guided team was descending from the summit. Two rope teams were clipped into the same fixed line when the avalanche occurred. The avalanche caught the first rope team, which pulled two of the anchors on the fixed line. The slide continued unattested also pulling the second rope team down the hill. Finally one anchor (a picket) held at the other end of the fixed line as a few climbers became entangled at the top of the cliff-bands. What was left is detailed. One guide and one client were caught on the fixed line above the cliff. Three clients and one guide clung to the top of the cliff, tangled in the rocks and ropes. Three clients dangled below them on a cliff of ice and snow, while the solo client (Nestler) hung below a second cliff band in a waterfall of snowmelt. Nestler died as a result of this exposure.

The Park Service assembled climbing rangers from Camp Schurman and Muir, Mountain Rescue Volunteers, Rainier Mountaineering Guides and helicopters assist with the rescue. On scene, Gauthier along with Rainier Mountaineering Guides Randolph and Eicshner worked to assess the situation. The location was extremely hazardous with 40-degree icy slopes, 20-foot vertical rock bands, exposure to avalanche hang-fire and a 300-foot drop to the glacier below. The danger made it necessary for rescuers to secure the exposed climbers with new ropes and reliable anchors. One of the distressed climbing teams was pendulumed over a refrigerator-sized rotten rock; the other clung to the cliff or dangled on a rope which was frayed to the inner strands and pulled tight over a sharp rock held by one picket! Once new anchors and ropes were established, on scene rescuers negotiated the cliff securing the injured and triaging the patients.

Teams of climbing rangers and guides were inserted with US Army and private helicopters at Ingraham Flats. Some of the rescuers climbed to the accident site to assist with the raising evacuation while another team headed to the