

and rappelled off the end of his rope. He landed at the base of Firepoint, luckily missing the large rocks at the base of the cliff. He sustained a broken left humerus, a bruised lung, several cracked lower vertebrae, and several small cuts.

He was packaged in a litter and carried to the Blue Ridge parkway a short distance away. He was transported to medical facilities in Johnson City, TN, via helicopter.

Analysis

It is not known whether the impending thunderstorm may have hastened the descent. Climbers should take precautionary measures when rappelling by utilizing some type of safeguard or “backup.” Always tie a knot at the rope end; use a prusik or other backup (kleimheist knot, autoblock, etc); and be familiar with your surroundings. (Source: Randy Franklin)

FALL ON ROCK, EXCEEDING ABILITIES, FAILURE TO FOLLOW ROUTE, NO HARD HAT

North Carolina, Looking Glass Rock, Bloody Crack

In late November, two people began climbing Bloody Crack (5.8), a popular rock climb on the south side of Looking Glass. The first pitch to Stage Ledge was completed without incident. One of the climbers was leading the second pitch when he moved off route (due to wet rock on the face) onto the arete. He had placed four or five pieces of protection in the main crack. However, he was unable to place gear on the arete. He climbed to a point approximately 20 feet above his last piece when he fell. His fall was partially broken by the tree at the base of the pitch. He landed in a crack on Stage Ledge (on his back), suffering numerous lacerations and a concussion. He was not wearing a helmet. The backpack he was wearing absorbed the majority of the impact, sparing him further head injury.

Brevard Rescue Squad and EMS arrived on the scene, stabilized the patient and executed a litter lower. The patient was carried out, assisted by Job Corps personnel, and transported to Transylvania County Hospital.

Analysis

This climber moved off route because of wet rock. With more experience he may have been able to negotiate the wet rock or the new terrain. Wearing a helmet could have minimized head injury. (Source: Bill Zink)

FALLING ROCK – BLOCK PULLED OFF

New Mexico, Sandia Mountain Wilderness, Hail Peak

After breakfast and coffee, Sinjin Eberle and I set out to have a nice day for a multi pitch 5.8 climb of Hail Peak on May 9, Mother’s Day. The weather was warm and stable with a storm possibly moving in later that evening. The Sandias typically keep many climbers away because of the long approach times and thick raspberry and oak groves. We got an early start and planned to be off the climb by mid-afternoon with only a moderate pace.

As many climbers in the Sandias can attest, the old granite is great to climb, but the amount of loose rock is a major drawback, especially on approaches to many areas. The primitive approach to Hail Peak is no exception, with a two-

hour fourth- and fifth-class terraced traverse that steadily gains exposure as Echo Canyon drops below.

I had just scrambled my way up some loose blocks and saw Sinjin about 40 meters behind so as not to risk getting hit by rock fall. Sinjin asked, "How does it look?"

"O.K., as long as you don't pull on anything too hard," I replied. Then all of a sudden I heard a quiet "Oh... Marc..." I turned to look back and saw that Sinjin had pulled an incredibly large piece of granite loose. He lost his footing on the sandy slope attempting to balance the rock back into position for enough time to escape its path. The boulder expanded from the face and first crushed Sinjin's hands and then rolled on top of him. I tried to tell him to jump (out of the way), but it was clear that I was getting ready to watch a friend die.

All I could see of Sinjin was from the middle of his shins down and the top of his head. The rock covered the rest of his body and was dragging him down the slope I had just crossed. The ledge was only two to three meters wide and ended abruptly with some yuccas and a 50-meter cliff. Somehow, with the inertia of the rock (250–300 kg) and all of his strength, Sinjin was able to get the rock off of himself, but not before it clipped him in the back of the head, throwing him around like a rag doll. Blood was flying in the air from his crushed hands and torn open leg.

I yelled at him not to move as he could have easily rolled once and gone the distance. He managed to hook a foot on a bush and maintain his position, as he was still remarkably responsive. I have seen a lot of trauma from ten plus years of EMS, and I could tell already from the extent of his injuries that he would need a trauma center. Fortunately, I had brought a cell phone. With one hand I was calling a friend from the Mountain Rescue team and with the other I was setting an anchor so I could lower Sinjin off the rock. I called Steve Attaway:

"Steve, how are you?" He knew me right away.

"Good, how are you?"

"Fine, but Sinjin needs a helicopter to the West Face of Hail Peak—he's been crushed by a rock."

"O.K., see ya soon." Steve knew the situation was critical and didn't dally around with details. He knew the right people to call at the New Mexico State Police and he immediately got the rescue team in motion at the same time. The call was short, but it was all that was needed and I had to save my phone battery for later.

Meanwhile I managed to assess Sinjin and see that his hands were crushed, bleeding and useless to him. His leg was split open at the shin but not obviously broken although he could bear little weight and had numbness in his right foot. But perhaps worse was that his arms and neck were severely bruised. Crush syndrome could easily ensue from the mechanism of injury and organ failure was a real possibility. He was also facing the permanent loss of his hands or arms and major lifestyle changes. I did all the medical care I could with a sparse first aid kit and then got him ready for a long lower.

I could not do a standard pick off because the only anchor was questionable at best, and I had to back it up with my own body weight. So, after determining

Sinjin most likely did not have a dangerous spinal injury, it was necessary to lower him off the ledge for a rescue team to gain access to him. Sinjin became courageous enough to be lowered off the cliff and was able to maintain most of his weight on one foot until he reached the bottom. Although he could manage this, he could not walk, and attempting to do so would exacerbate the situation. All fours were needed to get out of the canyon and Sinjin had maybe one and a half at best.

Hours later, Jen Semon and Steve arrived with a rescue medical kit and we gave Sinjin a desperately needed IV and narcotics. Moments after that, a Kirkland Air Force Base CH 53 helicopter arrived with a Para-rescue team. The winds were shiftier at about ten to fifteen knots, but the down draft in that little vertical canyon made it seem like a hurricane. Sinjin was lifted by winch at a 35–40-degree angle with a tag line and taken to the hospital. A ground rescue for Sinjin would have been complicated and absolutely taken into the next day. The storm that came in an hour after the rescue had gale forces that would have made it impossible for the CH 53. This would have proven a bad outcome for his medical well-being as he would most likely have lost a major portion of his hands and possibly his foot to secondary infection and sepsis. He spent an extra two hours in surgery to make his hands functional again.

Analysis

What I learned from this experience is that good decision making, being prepared, being lucky, and good, fast connections can all come together to escape disaster. Sometimes a safer route cannot be taken, so it is important to realize when the danger zone is present. It was a humbling experience for both of us to find ourselves at the mercy of nature, especially since we have many years of climbing experience between us. (Source: Marc Beverly)

FALL ON ROCK, CLIMBING ALONE AND UNROPED, INADEQUATE CLOTHING, EXCEEDING ABILITIES

New Mexico, Organ Mountains, Organ Needle

On December 1, John Smith (name changed) was reported overdue from a solo climb of the 4th-class route up the Organ Needle (9,012 feet). Following a lengthy search, his body was found at the base of a 60-foot frozen waterfall on the east side of Dark Canyon, directly below the Organ Needle. The subject had apparently fallen while either attempting an unnamed fifth-class route from below the Dark Canyon Saddle to the summit of the Organ Needle, or traversing below the south side of the summit. He had apparently survived the initial fall but suffered a second fatal fall while attempting to down-climb the ice.

Analysis

Reports from friends and family indicated this man was experienced in this area; however, he was clearly exceeding his abilities. The subject was clothed in cotton jeans and a light cotton jacket. While unusually mild weather existed at low elevations, temperatures at summit elevation were regularly below freezing. The exact details of the accident will never be known, but the subject appeared to be attempting either an unroped solo climb or an unroped traverse. And, while he