

FALLING ROCKS – BROKE AWAY FROM ROUTES

Pennsylvania, Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, Mount Minsi, Mount Tammany

There were three climbing incidents reported from this area.

The first report was of a fall on a route called Raptor of the Steep (5.10) on Mount Minsi. Dan O'Malley was about 25 feet above a belay site. His partner Tim Feitzinger watched him make a move to climb up on a large rock. The rock teetered and then came free from the face, knocking O'Malley backward and off the mountain. The rock nearly hit Feitzinger. While he was busy avoiding the rock, he lost track of O'Malley. Then he realized that O'Malley was not on belay because the rock had severed the rope. A third partner, Jeff Sukenick, began efforts to get help for O'Malley, who was seriously injured. Sukenick and Feitzinger, and then two paramedics, were unable to revive O'Malley.

In July on Mount Tammany, Laura Glockeler was ascending a fixed rope when she began to pendulum. She reached for a large rock and it broke off, crushing her left arm in the process. She required reattachment surgery, which was successful.

In August on Mount Minsi, another accident involved a fall to a ledge as a result of a rock (foothold) coming loose. The climber, Dr. Mike Sinclair, fell about 20 feet onto a ledge. His injuries included a pneumothorax, torn cervical ligament, several fractures (T5&6, ribs, hip), lacerations, and a concussion. He survived, thanks to a technical rescue effort involving a dozen people. During the rescue, part of the ledge gave way, and while a rescuer below was trying to run from possible harm, he broke his ankle. (Source: Incident Reports submitted by Delaware Water Gap NRA)

FALLING ICE – UNSTABLE ROUTE, MISJUDGED CONDITIONS

Utah, Sastaquin Canyon

We had a five-day warm spell followed by a weak cold front for 36 hours prior to the climb. Overnight temperatures had been well below freezing, so the ice was brittle.

We climbed the approach pitch to the first ledge. From here we could see the pillar hung mostly free for about 50 feet, almost touching the ground. A week earlier, this route was barely touching the ground and had been climbed. Now there was a crack and four inches of space near the ground showing that the pillar had retracted in response to the weather conditions. Looking at the ice structure caused my partner and me to comment on its apparent instability. She was convinced it was unsafe and suggested that we climb a different route. I had climbed this route in a different year when it was not touching down, though its dimensions looked less stable this day. I climbed up without really swinging my tools, either hooking or tapping my picks in on the bottom overhang, then chimneying between the ice and the rock, once that was possible. There is a bolted line on the rock behind the pillar that is a dry tool variation. I had clipped in to one bolt about 25 feet from the ground. About 40 feet up, I felt like I was past the most unstable part. I was near the place where the ice attached to the rock about ten feet above