

stated that he didn't know his location. A climbing ranger and a volunteer were notified at Camp Muir, and they descended the snowfield attempting to locate him that night. They ran into zero visibility and eventually had to give up.

Teams composed of rangers, mountain rescue volunteers, guides and friends of John Repka searched intensely for the following eight days. Poor visibility, heavy precipitation, high winds, and hazardous terrain hampered their work. Helicopters and air scent dogs greatly aided search efforts during two days of clear weather. The primary search area was thoroughly covered, although a significant amount of new snow fell during the week. The active search was called off on day nine after no clues were found. Rangers remained on alert for potentially emerging clues as the snow melted throughout the summer.

In September during a routine maintenance helicopter flight, pilot Jess Hagerman spotted a body matching the clothing description of Repka in an icefall. It was located near 8,100 feet on the Paradise Glacier (very near where Corroone had fallen). Climbing rangers were flown to the site where they descended to the body and confirmed the observation. Repka was found in his bivy sac next to his ice ax, backpack and two way radio. He had died from exposure, not traumatic injuries, and his remains were flown off the mountain.

### **Analysis**

If one thing can be learned from this accident, it is to stay together and communicate when in teams, especially large ones where organization and management are problematic. Repka was part of a 50-plus person group that day. Somehow though, misunderstandings and assumptions led to his being left behind. The radio also provided a false security. Radios, cell phones, and other electronic devices are not substitutes for critical communication, navigation, and survival needs. (Source: Mike Gauthier, SAR Ranger, Mount Ranier National Park)

## **FALL ON ROCK, INADEQUATE BELAY, MISCOMMUNICATION**

### **Washington, Peshastin Pinnacles**

While I have no memory of this accident, I have been able to reconstruct the event based upon the observations of my climbing partner, Lynn. On May 22, she and I climbed the Tunnel Route (5.6) on Orchard Rock at Peshastin Pinnacles in eastern Washington. Upon reaching the top, I tied into two bolts placed about 15 feet from the vertical edge on a 20-degree slope. Due to the distance of the bolts from the edge, I chose to tie into a long runner (a 20-ft. cordelette tied in half) to be closer for communication while belaying. About 20 ft. from the summit, Lynn was unable to reach a camming unit I had placed in a crack about 4 ft. from the route. She was able to unclip the climbing rope from the sling and proceed to the top. After a brief discussion, we decided to lower her back to the piece, giving her greater access to remove it, while allowing her to climb the most enjoyable part of the route once more.

After making the decision to lower, I turned away from Lynn for some unknown reason while she was standing, still on belay. She thought it was safe to lower and stepped back to weight the rope. Due to miscommunica-

tion between us, however, I was not ready for the weight shift, and it pulled me off my feet, swinging me violently around on the long tie in. I slammed the rock with the back of my head, my skull was fractured, and I fell unconscious, losing the belay. Lynn began to fall over the edge of the rappel route and dropped approximately 80 feet to the ground. Her left ankle and right wrist were shattered and her left femur was snapped. Miraculously, she sustained no internal injuries, her femoral artery remained intact, and she had no severe head injuries, as she had chosen not to wear a helmet. She is very, very lucky not to have needed it this time and to have survived a fall severe enough to have killed most people. She remembers seeing and hearing my head hit the rock with such intense force that she firmly believes I would not have survived the impact without the protection of my helmet. Two climbers discovered us roughly ten minutes after the accident, called 911, and began first aid. Chelan County Mountain Rescue arrived with the paramedics and, after a brief description of events from Lynn, began climbing the route to where I was. Meanwhile, as Lynn was being carried to the ambulance, I became conscious and attempted to untie myself from the anchor—a common problem when head injuries have occurred while climbing. Luckily the SAR team was able to convince me to remain anchored until they were able to reach my location to rig a litter for lowering.

I required brain surgery to remove the blood clots that formed after the accident and remained in a coma for 5 days. After that, I was unaware of my identity or where I was for about another week. My memory continued to return slowly over the next several weeks, although I still remember nothing of the accident or anything between May 22 and June 2. I was able to leave the hospital on June 17, but still experienced bouts of severe dizziness and was unable to drive until August. Lynn initially underwent six and one half hours of surgery to repair her injuries, and has required several more surgeries to assist in her recovery. She continues daily rehabilitation.

### **Analysis**

We believe the accident was caused by the instability of the long tie in, miscommunication between us, and my failure to remain in proper position while Lynn was on belay. I should have been sitting, and never should have turned away from my partner. Also, had Lynn clipped into the anchor the moment she reached the top of the pitch, much of this accident could have been prevented. Any one of these factors alone might not have caused any damage; added together, they were catastrophic.

We would both like to thank the two women who found us, called for help, administered first aid, and stayed until the professional rescuers arrived. We would also like to express our deep gratitude to the Chelan County Sheriff, Chelan Mountain Rescue volunteers, and all the doctors, nurses, therapists and friends in Wenatchee and Seattle who assisted in our rescue and helped us begin to recover from this terrible event. The accident deeply affected our families, and is estimated to have created more than \$150,000 in rescue and medical expenses. (Source: Greg Sullivan)