

RAPPEL FAILURE—ANCHOR CAME AWAY, INADEQUATE PROTECTION

New Jersey, Mount Tammany, Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area

Steve Raible (22) fell about 120 feet to his death while rappelling from a route on Mount Raible and climbing partner Todd Garcia had completed a technical climb of “Double Overhang” (5.8) and were in the process of rappelling from the top when the accident occurred at 7:15 p.m. According to Garcia, Raible was rappelling on a double-rope, utilizing a sling on a resident rappel station. Garcia told NPS investigators that Raible had descended about 15 feet when the anchor failed, causing him to fall to the ground. Garcia descended and checked Raible, but could not detect either a pulse or breath.

Garcia then descended to a scree slope and then to a nearby highway where he flagged down a passing motorist. The motorist used his cell phone to make a 911 call. A state trooper and local fire and EMS reached the scene at 8:20 p.m. They found that Raible had suffered extensive and severe traumatic injuries and had no pulse or respirations. A carry-out of the victim’s body was completed after midnight by the Park’s high-angle rescue team and a township search and rescue squad.

Analysis

The fixed rappel station, located in the middle of the cliff consisted of resident webbing threaded through a crack and around a block. Garcia and Raible examined and tested the webbing, judging it to be safe. No back-up was used.

It is noteworthy to say that the webbing held Raible’s full body weight as he rappelled 15 feet down the face; therefore, no amount of testing could have produced the failure of the webbing.

ALWAYS back up resident rappel stations! In this case, it was not possible to thread new webbing through the existing crack, but a backup using our gear should have been used. (Source: From a report by Todd Garcia)

FALL ON ROCK—TESTING PROTECTION WHICH PULLED OUT AND FALLING ROCK

New Mexico, Sandia Mountains, The Shield

After a long approach on August 26, four well-prepared and experienced climbers began to climb the six-pitch Standard “S” Route (IV 5.6) on The Shield, the largest wall in the Sandia Mountains outside of Albuquerque. About 650 feet from the top, the 40-year-old male lead climber had just placed several pieces. Holding onto a small ledge with his left hand and standing on both feet, he was testing a nut by pulling on it to see how it would hold. Without warning the piece popped out and he was thrown off balance, lost his grip on the rock, and fell backward becoming airborne. The cam below him was loaded with the leader fall and failed under the force. He fell directly onto his right posterior lower rib cage on a ledge approximately 15 feet below him and then continued to fall another 10 feet until the belayer was able to arrest the fall. The leader did not lose consciousness and was able to be lowered to the belay ledge. However, he was unable to move because of chest wall and abdominal pain and was short of breath.

One of the climbing party members had his cell phone and radio to call for

help, and he also happens to be an active member of Albuquerque Mountain Rescue. A rescue was initiated which included mutual-aid from the Army National Guard, Air Force Pararescue, and other SAR teams.

A 600-foot rope was used to begin access from the top. A Sked litter was air lifted to the strike team on the face by a Blackhawk helicopter. One of the climbers had led another pitch and the 9mm dynamic rope was tied to the 600-foot static rope in order to access the patient another 50 feet further down.

The patient was complaining of shortness of breath, chest wall pain, abdominal pain, and numbness in his feet. The initial assessment of the patient revealed possible rib fractures, fractured lumbar spine, and retroperitoneal hemorrhage, all of which were later diagnosed in the hospital. A litter hoist could not be effected from the ledge because of how close it would place the helicopter to the rock in moderate and shifty winds. An attempt was made of putting the patient into the Sked and lowering him to a more accessible ledge was unsuccessful because of low light limitations. The patient was brought back up to the initial point of contact and the patient was transferred into a Stokes litter and vacuum splint for the 650-foot-high angle technical raise to the top of the Shield. The paramedics on the strike team started an IV line and morphine was given for pain before the transfer and technical raise.

The top is a narrow 15-foot-wide ridge with 1000-foot exposure on both sides. The haul system included a 90-degree change of direction that went up the ridge to the haul team. During the course of the haul, some carabiners on the change of direction pulley were loaded awkwardly which forced that gates to pop open and place the litter team in some danger. However, a second belay line was already attached if the haul system failed.

Two litter bearers were used in a difficult dihedral loaded with overhangs and loose rock. At the last part of the raise, a rock was accidentally knocked loose by the litter team. The rock crashed down through the dihedral system. "Rock, rock... everyone get close to the wall," was called out on the radio, but one of the other climbers on the climbing team was struck on the thigh, suffering a bruise that would prohibit her from climbing out.

A hoist from the Blackhawk was done with night vision capabilities off the top of the Shield and the patient was taken to University Hospital. Air Force Pararescue Team members lowered the 40-year-old female over 800 feet to the base of the Shield and she was airlifted out the next morning. (Source: J. Marc Beverly, WEMT-P, Albuquerque Mountain Rescue)

AVALANCHE, POOR POSITION

New York, Adirondack High Peaks, Wright Peak

On February 20, one skier was killed and five others injured when they were caught in an avalanche in the Adirondack High Peaks while skiing in an off-trail area. The avalanche occurred about 1:00 p.m. on the northeast side of Wright Peak. Department of Environmental Conservation Forest Rangers (MRA) reported that five of the skiers were found by 2:00 p.m. Searchers spent the next five hours looking for Toma Jacob Vracarich (27). Using a probe line, they finally found his body around 6:00 p.m. Of the five injured skiers, three were hospitalized.