

apparently mis-stepped and fell backward 80 feet to rocks below.” Chris sustained multiple injuries, including a fracture to the upper face and mandible and fracture to both feet (right calcaneous, closed fracture of the left calcaneous and talus), a fractured left arm (both radius and humerus), a compression fracture of C-5 vertebrae, and a pelvic fracture. He was not wearing a helmet.

Analysis

I believe the combination of low light, exhaustion, and hurriedness contributed to my misjudging the security of my stance. In that situation remaining tied in to a tree or some other anchor would have prevented the fall”. (Source: Chris Chesnutt)

(Editor's Note: Living to tell this story was a minor miracle. The medical and rescue report on this incident was most interesting. There was one other report from Tennessee. There were few details, but it involved a fall from rock at Foster Falls State Park, resulting in a fractured arm and leg. We know there is a lot of climbing going on at both these parks, so we need some reliable reporting.)

LOSS OF CONTROL—VOLUNTARY GLISSADE, FAULTY USE OF CRAMPONS FALL ON SNOW, FATIGUE

Utah, Mount Olympus, North Face

The previous year we (Michael and Jane Feldhaus, 33 and 31), along with Paul (41) and Marion (36), had completed the same route on Mount Olympus in approximately 12 hours. We had decided to pursue the same route that Sunday morning of May 14. Leaving the parking area for Neffs Canyon at 7:30 a.m. would allow sufficient time to complete the route before dark. The route follows a gentle approach to the Great Couloir, which at this time of year is generally filled with snow and requires crampons and ice axes to safely climb the icy snow. The couloir opens up onto the face where some easy mountaineering scrambles and crampons and mountain axes allow access of the summit ridge west of the North Summit of Olympus. Some areas before reaching the ridge during the traverse of the face require some 5.6+ rock scrambling. After reaching the ridge, we walked it down to the west side of the west slabs. The route finishes up with a three-pitch rappel down the west side of the west slabs. From this point it is generally an easy walk down the snow filled gully present in front of the west slabs... but not this day.

Jane was first in the group heading down the snow gully with her crampons on and ax in hand. The snow was generally soft and slushy with intermittent icy spots at this late hour in the day, 8:30 p.m. We were about one hour (two miles) from the end of the route at this point. We were making good progress plunge-stepping down the 40-50-degree snow slope when Jane's snow-and-ice-filled crampon slipped and she started sliding down the snow on her butt. Jane was not too worried, as her forward progress was relatively slow and she felt she could easily stop. So she enjoyed the “free ride.” However, as she picked up speed and was headed toward large rocks, she rolled over to self-arrest and immediately dislocated her shoulder. But she was still able to arrest. She knew immediately her shoulder was dislocated. Mike quickly started getting more

clothing on her as she already looked “shocky.” Within minutes Paul and Marion were on the scene. A quick conference in the group led us to send Paul out to call for a mountain rescue as no one in the group felt comfortable reducing her shoulder. At this point the sun had set and a stiff breeze was coming down the gully. The snow was now returning to a hard ice. Marion, Mike, and Jane immobilized Jane’s shoulder by placing a one-liter nalgene water bottle in her armpit and immobilized her arm with some extra webbing. We also put on all available extra clothing from our packs. We then started to move her down the 400 meters of ice and snow. The technique we used to move Jane down the snow was to empty her pack and put the pack in a garbage bag. She then sat on the pack to help insulate her from the snow. With two mountain axes plunged in the snow just below her feet we were able to gently move her down the snow field by alternating the removal and placement of each ax one to two feet lower. This allowed her to remain secure with one ax used as a foot stop and allow her to slide down to the next ax stop. There was a rock shelf at the edge of the snowfield approximately 200 meters down from the fall. We made it to the ledge to rest and wait for help. By this point Jane was almost doubled over in pain from the muscle spasms in her shoulder, neck, and back. To take her mind off of it and to stay warm, we decided to continue down the snow field using the same method used earlier. As we moved her out to sit down on the pack once again, the jostling, the water bottle and good luck allowed her shoulder to reduce itself. At approximately 11:30 p.m., the first of 30 rescuers from the Salt Lake County Sheriff’s Mountain Rescue Squad arrived. We were approximately 40 yards from the end of the snowfield and continued down to the end of it. After a quick assessment of Jane’s condition, the mountain rescuers loaded her into a Stokes litter, lowered her down some rock falls, and carried her out. (Source: Michael and Jane Feldhaus)

Analysis

There were two major factors that led to this accident. There was overall fatigue of the group that led to the misstep and subsequent fall on the soft snow. She would not have gathered as much speed and therefore may not have had the stresses on her shoulder that led to the dislocation. The second factor may have been that her muscles were very tired and she may not have been in the best position when her ax caught and stopped her fall. A third factor was that her crampons, while okay to have on as long as she was not glissading, filled with snow. Finally, no one in the group had backcountry first aid experience, let alone knowledge of how to reduce a dislocated shoulder. Had we been able to reduce her shoulder immediately, the shoulder would have recovered faster with less damage and the group may have been able to slowly and safely move out of the backcountry without assistance.

By the time we reached Jane Feldhaus, her shoulder had self-reduced, but she was still in pain and unable to walk out. She was immobilized in a bean-bag vacuum splint in the litter, lowered about 15 pitches down the Z-couloir of Mount Olympus and then wheeled down the Z-trail to the road. (Source: Victims and Tom Moyer - Salt Lake County Sheriff’s SAR)