

using a single Wild Country Ropeman. After ascent to the drill site at 20+ feet, I needed to drop down a foot to hammer the bolt, opened the manual disengage on the ascender, and descended fine, locked up the teeth on the ascender again. However, in reaching for the hammer, I did not realize my finger was still slightly in the disengage cord, and by the motion of reaching for the hammer, unloaded the teeth on the Ropeman (difficult to describe—sort of when you reach out to one side your other arm tends to reach the other way for stability), and began to fall—instantly realized what was happening and pulled my hand away, but I believe the teeth were tardy in grabbing the rope since I was using my new ice climbing rope (fairly slick). I awoke in my harness near the ground.

The ascender did catch and thus I had a rapid deceleration injury with some impact on the ground (not a free fall, however). I had a head injury and loss of consciousness, but released the harness and used a cell phone to call my spouse. She called 911 after I tried to stand but could not. Search and rescue was called and I was life-flighted from the scene.

I spent five days in the intensive care unit and ended up with seven vertebral transverse process fractures, a right pneumo/hemothorax, a fractured rib, an acromioclavicular separation grade II, and a head laceration with concussion and loss of consciousness. Lucky!!!

### **Analysis**

The biggest issue that would have prevented this was the use of a backup ascender, which I normally always do, but (swear to god) one of few times I had ever gotten lazy enough not to throw on another backup ascender, and so I paid for it. Other key issues, however, were not climbing with another person (I was alone on a day off and no friends were around) and not wearing a climbing helmet—especially as I was alone. (Source: Edited from a report written by Jeff Gertsch)

## **RAPPEL FAILURE—TRYING TO PASS KNOT, CLIMBING ALONE**

### **Arizona, Phoenix, Waterfall Area, White Tank Regional Park**

On October 4, Maricopa County Sheriff's Office Mountain Rescue was notified via SAR Coordinator, Deputy Tony Navarra, that a climber had apparently been rappelling and had fallen to his death. Mountain Rescue Units were notified by David Bremson, via Team pager, of the situation so that following Team members would respond appropriately. Mountain Rescue was informed that, according to the climber's family, he had gone rappelling alone and had not returned home the evening of October 3rd.

### **Analysis**

David Bremson noted the following about the climber:

- He had become separated from his harness, which was approximately 175 feet above the subject's location and approximately 100 feet below the top of the cliff.
- His rope did not extend to the ground.

- Two ropes were connected together (red rope anchored to the top of the cliff, white rope tied to red).
- He had, apparently, fallen onto two small ledges prior to coming to rest in an eight-foot high bush growing in the ground.
- His body displayed severe trauma to multiple areas and did not appear to have survived the fall.

The following conclusions were drawn. Due to the configuration of the equipment on the rope, it appears that the man was rappelling down the red rope, reached the knot with the intent of passing it in order to continue rappelling to the ground. There did not appear to be any indication that there were equipment malfunctions. Carabiners were properly locked and an ascender was being used as a back-up device. There did not appear to be any indication that the subject did not double back his harness. Possibly he was unable to properly pass the knot on rappel and may have removed the harness and attempted to move to a ledge and off the cliff.

From information gathered from his wife, A.M. was an experienced climber and rappeller. His equipment seemed to be well worn, suggesting that it was often used. A.M. did leave his wife with information regarding his destination, but since he was alone, he would have been unable to seek immediate assistance in the event that he was able to do so, which he was not in this instance. (Source: From a report submitted by David Bremson, Rescue Specialist with the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office, part of Central Arizona Mountain Rescue Association.)

## **VARIOUS FALLS ON SNOW ON DESCENT**

### **California, Mount Shasta, Avalanche Gulch**

At least ten or twelve people slipped on snow descending Avalanche Gulch on Mount Shasta. Most appear to have been inexperienced. For example, one woman was carrying her ice ax upside down, so when she fell, the pick actually penetrated her neck and trachea! Most falls resulted in fractures or dislocations. These incidents happening on descent account for over 30 percent of this year's number in that category.

There was one fatality in March. A young man (21) climbing with his brother on the Casaval Ridge route was close to the 12,000 foot level when he tripped and fell 1,000 feet. He could not self-arrest. This route is not classified as technical climbing but is very exposed and long falls occur almost yearly, according to the rangers. (Source: From reports submitted by Matt Hill, Lead Climbing Ranger and Eric White, Climbing Ranger)

## **FALL ON WET ROCK, INADEQUATE PROTECTION, INADEQUATE CLOTHING AND EQUIPMENT, INEXPERIENCE, EXPOSURE, NO HARD HAT**

### **California, Yosemite Valley, Royal Arches**

On March 7, Greg McFalls (28) and I, Joe Hardy (25), set out to climb