

FALL ON ROCK

Oregon, Three Fingered Jack

Kate Tinnesand (23), a graduate student at Oregon State University and member of Corvallis Mountain Rescue Unit, died in a fall while descending Three Fingered Jack, on July 23, after a climb with two other Unit members. They had completed the “technical” part of the climb, had unroped, and were working their way down the south ridge when Kate slipped on a gravel-covered ledge and tumbled over 700 feet on the west side of the mountain, sustaining fatal injuries.

Comment

She had been coming to CMRU meetings and training sessions since January and had just completed the interview process in June to become a full member. Kate enjoyed the outdoors including climbing the Cascade peaks in Oregon and Washington. Kate was finishing a Masters in microbiology and had aspiration to work as a climbing ranger in the parks. She will be sorely missed by all who knew her and especially her team in Corvallis. (Source: Rocky Henderson, Oregon Region MRA)

(Editor's Note: There was a fatality on Mount Hood's Cooper Spur route in the summer, but no details were sent forward. There have been 18 recorded fatalities on this route.)

FROSTBITE, OFF ROUTE, INADEQUATE FOOD, LOST EQUIPMENT

Washington, Mount Rainier National Park, Ptarmigan Ridge

On February 1, Chris Bamer (25) and Robert Montague (28) set out to ascend Ptarmigan Ridge. Both were guides for Rainier Mountaineering Incorporated (RMI). They expected to complete the climb by Thursday, but Bamer asked his girlfriend to call the NPS if the pair were not home by the evening of February 4. At 2015 on February 4, Bamer's girlfriend contacted Mount Rainier National Park and notified them of the ascent. Later that same evening, however, she received a cell phone call from Bamer during which he explained that he was okay but had a little frostbite on his hand and toes. Bamer stated that the route was quite icy and that they were taking longer than expected. They were camped near 12,500 feet, had plenty of fuel, and though they were low on food, they did not require assistance. This information was relayed to park officials.

At 0745 on February 5, Bamer called the NPS on his RMI radio and asked for climbing route directions across the summit and how to descend the Gibraltar Ledges route. The team was still camped at 12,500 feet and had to climb through the rocks near 12,800 feet before ascending to Liberty Cap. Bamer reported the frostbite but felt things were going to be okay. The team was encouraged to complete their ascent, as the clear weather was forecast to deteriorate. Bamer was asked to notify the NPS

when they reached Liberty Cap (the false summit at 14,112 feet).

At 1444, Bamer called to say that the team had reached Liberty Cap and were making their way towards Columbia Crest. (Montague later stated that they were actually only at 13,200 feet when the call was made). At 1755, Bamer again called the NPS and reported that the team was somewhere between Russell Cliffs and Liberty Cap. They reported whiteout conditions, snowfall, and high winds; because of this, the pair elected to stop moving and set camp.

At roughly 1130 on Feb 6, Montague reported being in a steam cave on the summit. Their plan was to descend towards Gibraltar Rock and then to Camp Muir. He also reported on Bamer's frostbite, which included blackness in his toes and fingers and some blisters on his fingers. The team was in a snow cave on the summit and had run out of food and fuel. The wind was blowing 15mph and snow was falling.

Bamer and Montague left the summit at 1150 heading towards Gibraltar Rock. Along the way, they reported deteriorating weather conditions and numerous crevasses, reaching a rocky, corniced ridge at 1315. The team continued to descend, but the heavy snowfall and unfamiliarity with the route made route finding difficult. Over the next two hours, the pair tried to negotiate the Gibraltar Ledges but, in the end, had to rappel over some cliffs and descend steeper slopes towards the Nisqually Glacier.

The pair was in communication with the NPS throughout this process. NPS advised on route alternatives and predicted avalanche conditions. Bamer and Montague had difficulty with their GPS and compass. They reported very poor snow stability as they continued their descent.

Two rescue teams had been dispatched to Camp Muir earlier that day. The first team consisted of RMI guides Paul Maier and John Lucia, who arrived at Camp Muir around 1645 and, after a short break, continued toward the Nisqually Glacier to search for the pair. They reported dangerous avalanche conditions, low visibility, and heavy snowfall. They returned to Camp Muir at 1906 to get gear that would enable them to go out onto the glacier safely. A second team consisting of climbing rangers Stony Richards, Chad Kellogg, and Lara Kellogg arrived at Camp Muir at 1745 and then also headed out to search.

At 1817 Bamer and Montague experienced a small fall over steep terrain. They elected to cut their rope in order to get themselves out of their predicament. Montague lost his ice tools while digging himself out of the deep snow, which was over his head following the fall. They also lost a GPS and compass. Montague also reported that his headlamp was no longer working, and that the avalanche danger was extreme.

At about 1835, Bamer and Montague had regrouped and were descending once again. After about 30 minutes, they reported from 10,500 feet that

the slope they were descending had become lower angle. At 2040, Kellogg, using a flash beacon, met up with Bamer and Montague at the 9,800-foot corner of the Nisqually and Muir Snowfield. Rangers Kellogg and Richards escorted them back to Camp Muir by 2130.

At Camp Muir the rescue teams provided food and medical care to the exhausted party. Bamer had not felt his feet for 36–48 hours. Many of his digits on both hands and feet were bruised to the first joint. The tips of his fingers and toes were purple and red. Blebs and blisters had already begun to appear on his hands. As transport would have to wait until the next morning, Bamer's extremities were dressed and packaged in anticipation of extraction and transport to a medical facility the next day. Montague was in good condition with no signs of frostbite.

The next morning Bamer was taken by helicopter from Camp Muir directly to Harborview Medical Center. Montague descended to Paradise with the team of rangers.

Analysis

Bamer and Montague set off expecting to complete their journey in three days with a fourth day for contingency. On the morning of the day they expected to be out they were only at 10,200 feet with all of the technical climbing still ahead. By evening they had ascended only another 1,200 vertical feet with more difficult climbing ahead. It may have been wise at some point during this day or even the previous one to reevaluate their plans in view of their slow progress, dwindling supplies, and the difficult conditions. A logical point for reevaluation would have been the base of the ice cliff at 10,500 on the ridge, as the more technical climbing begins at this point. Backing off the climb at this point would have been a tough decision for the pair having come this far and with their objective right before them. They would have already gained 7,000 feet with only 4,000 more to the summit.

On the other hand they had already used two-thirds of their planned time and they had not even begun the climb. There would have been little reason for the pair to presume the going would get any easier. If anything, the more technical terrain would likely slow the progress as they encountered the steeper ice pitches. On the morning of their fourth day, already out beyond their expected return, this was still a reasonable time for reevaluation of the feasibility of continuing the climb. At the rate they were climbing (1,200 feet/day) through the technical section they could have predicted that it would take them another two days to reach the summit. Even if they had to rappel several pitches to descend the technical climbing, it still would have taken less time and effort than continuing on. Descending would have also spared them from climbing through the questionable weather ahead. (Source: Mike Gauthier, Climbing Ranger)