

When lost, one's pace slows while trying to decide which way to go. Slowing down in such conditions would accelerate the onset of hypothermia. Hypothermia impairs one's ability to make rational decisions. With their predicament rapidly spiraling downward, and still facing extreme conditions, we begin to get a picture of how these two succumbed to the environment.

One may be tempted to make a pronouncement regarding what the Starks should have done or pick out mistakes that should have been avoided: their lack of map and compass, wearing cotton, their failure to set up their tent and stay put in their sleeping bags. What is hard to grasp is the ease with which each small error snowballs, eventually creating an untenable situation. And then, of course, the rational mind cannot comprehend what causes the hypothermic victim to do the irrational. (Source: Mike Gauthier, Climbing Ranger)

## **FALL ON SNOW—UNABLE TO SELF-ARREST**

### **Washington, Mount Rainier, Gibraltar Ledges**

On June 10 about 0600, Mike Beery (29) and Ryan Tillman were climbing the Gibraltar Ledges route on Mount Rainier. Having just exited the ledges and entered Gibraltar Chute, Beery, who was a few steps in front of his partner, fell. Tillman did not notice the fall until his partner slid by him. Tillman shouted as he watched his partner unsuccessfully attempt to self-arrest. Beery continued to slide down the 45-50° slope and over a small rock outcropping. At this point, Tillman lost sight of Beery, who tumbled some 900 vertical feet down the chute until he came to rest on the shallower slope below.

Tillman pulled out his cell phone and called his girlfriend, who then called 911. He then began his descent down Gibraltar Chute to look for Beery. Approximately 35 minutes later, having found several pieces of his partner's equipment strewn along the route, including his ice ax, Tillman found Beery lying face-down with his pack wrapped tightly around his neck. Tillman, an EMT, cut the pack loose and took Beery's vitals. At 0635 Tillman found no respirations but a weak pulse of about 35. Ten minutes later, when he could no longer detect a pulse, Tillman began CPR on Beery. He continued CPR until 0855 when climbing rangers Matt Hendrickson and Andy Winslow, who were on a routine patrol of the Ingraham Direct, arrived on scene and relieved him.

The rangers had descended to Camp Muir and then ascended the Nisqually Glacier with rescue equipment. Once on scene, Hendrickson checked vitals on Beery and found him to be pulseless, unresponsive, and not breathing. Beery had obvious signs of serious trauma and was bleeding from the head and ears and nose. At 0900, with the information provided

by the rangers, Mount Rainier's medical control advised rangers to stop CPR and pronounced Beery deceased.

At this point the rangers' highest priority was getting Tillman out of the chute as rockfall had increased with the warmth of the day. They escorted him down 250 feet onto a rock spur. After Tillman was secured the rangers went back to package and fly Beery's body from the glacier via helicopter. Hendrickson and Winslow then escorted the exhausted Tillman back to Camp Muir. Tillman was then flown off the mountain.

### **Analysis**

It is unlikely we will ever know what caused Beery's initial slip, but the firm early morning snow surface, which had not yet been softened by sunshine, made any self-arrest a difficult prospect. Beery and Tillman were unroped at the time of Beery's fall. Tillman stated afterward that they had elected to remain unroped while traversing the ledges because of the lack of available points of protection along the catwalk-like section of route. At the time, there were only a few inches of snow on the narrow loose path. Pickets or ice screws are generally un-placeable along this stretch of route except, perhaps, in winter. While rarely used, rock may afford some protection, but is limited by the overall poor and friable quality of the rock here. Tillman reported that he and Beery had agreed that they would rope up as soon as they left the ledges. The location from which Beery fell was right in the transition from ledge to chute. While it is possible that Tillman may have been able to arrest his partner's fall, had they been roped, a more likely scenario is that without protection, both climbers would have fallen to their deaths. (Source: Mike Gauthier, Climbing Ranger)

## **FALLING ROCK**

### **Washington, Mount Rainier, Fuhrer Finger**

At 0720 on June 29, while ascending Fuhrer Finger, Brian Benedict was hit by rockfall and sustained an open fracture of his tibia and fibula. Benedict was a client of a Rainier Mountaineering Incorporated (RMI) guided party led by Kurt Wedburg. Wedburg immediately reported the accident and notification was provided to Mount Rainier National Park. While Wedburg's party assessed, stabilized, and splinted Benedict's leg, climbing rangers made arrangements for air extrication. Simultaneously, three other RMI guides led by John Race left Camp Muir to rendezvous with Wedburg's team.

With Benedict unable to walk, Wedburg's party methodically lowered Benedict back down the Fuhrer Finger taking care to avoid further rockfall. Upon reaching approximately 9,300 feet on the Wilson Glacier, Race's team began improving an area to serve as an LZ for the helicopter extraction.