

Analysis

The route where the climber fell is on the central face, to the right of the south wall. A popular climb, it is considered difficult and has limited protection options of small cams and nuts.

This was the climber's first lead fall in over twelve years of climbing. She is experienced and had climbed this route several times before. She would usually place a fifth piece of gear, something she did not do on this climb because she felt it was going so well. Additional protection would have helped limit her fall, and she states that in the future she will always put that extra piece in on this climb. In addition, she was wearing a helmet, which protected her from further injury. Her helmet was cracked in the back and along both sides on the outside while the insert was also cracked.

(Three weeks after her fall she was still experiencing issues with the pneumothorax and has not regained her full lung capacity, but she is hiking and expecting to snowboard in the winter and be out climbing next spring.)

Additional Comments: Evacuation from this area can be difficult due to large talus fields and heavy tree cover preventing helicopter evacuation. Rangers worked with Park trail crew, who were working nearby to repair earthquake damage, to establish an alternate route off the mountain rather than the climber access path. The alternate evacuation route allowed rangers to avoid a dangerous and highly technical route and made a timely rescue possible. Rangers performed one steep angle lower and a second litter belay to evacuate the injured climber via the alternate route. She was then evacuated by helicopter to Eastern Maine Medical Center where she underwent surgery to have her L-1 vertebrae fused. (Source: Edited from a report by Therese Picard, Ranger, Acadia National Park)

FALL ON ROCK

Montana, Glacier National Park, Gendarme

On July 3, rangers from Glacier National Park and wardens from Canada's Banff National Park and Waterton Lakes National Park cooperated in the rescue of an injured climber. The climber, Denis Twohig (68) from Whitefish, had taken a 15-foot pendulum fall while leading a technical rock climb on the "Gendarme" late on the afternoon of July 2nd. His climbing partner stopped Twohig's fall.

The uninjured partner lowered Twohig a short distance to a ledge and secured him. He then left Twohig and descended Little Chief Mountain, reaching the Rising Sun Lodge store about 11:00 p.m. He reported the accident to Glacier dispatch. Recognizing the extreme technical nature of the incident and Twohig's emergency medical needs, rangers held search and rescue planning sessions through the early morning hours to coordinate different rescue options.

After a reconnaissance flight and a briefing by Glacier park rangers, two Canadian park wardens were each inserted via short haul from a Parks Canada helicopter to Twohig's location in the notch of the Gendarme. After Twohig was secured, he was short hauled from the ledge, then transferred to ALERT air ambulance and flown to Kalispell Regional Hospital around 9 a.m. Parks Canada utilizes highly trained helicopter pilots and park wardens for technical SAR missions throughout the mountain parks of Canada. Their assistance was critical as they provided the most viable option for Twohig's immediate rescue.

Analysis

This rescue is an excellent example of the outstanding relationship and true partnership between Parks Canada and the National Park Service at Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park. This relationship is well documented by the Peace Park agreement and is cultivated by frequent contact and cooperation between the two park staffs. Waterton-Glacier is the world's first International Peace Park, and 2007 is the 75th anniversary of the Peace Park designation. (Source: Melissa Wilson, Public Affairs Officer)

(Editor's Note: This report is included primarily because of the admirable international cooperation noted in the analysis.)

FALL ON ROCK, INADEQUATE CLOTHING

North Carolina, Shortoff Mountain, Little Corner

On Saturday March 17, M. McNeely (age unknown) and her husband David, both experienced climbers, were attempting Little Corner (5.6) a rock climb located on Shortoff Mountain at the south end of North Carolina's rugged Linville Gorge Wilderness Area. It was late in the afternoon when Ms. McNeely started the climb, getting solid gear placements as she led the first pitch. She was well into the climb when her hand unexpectedly slipped out of a hand crack. She fell backwards approximately 15 feet striking her back on the rock. Her gear held, limiting her fall. Luckily, her head didn't make contact with the rock, as she wasn't wearing a helmet, which could have compounded her injuries.

David lowered her to the ground. Upon reaching the ground, she had no complaints or concerns about injury. At this point, the couple made plans to climb out, with David taking the lead. However, as the adrenalin rush wore off, Ms. McNeely began to complain of back pain. (She was later diagnosed with four cracked vertebrae). She was also beginning to get uncomfortable and because of her injury and the steepness of the terrain, so she elected not to climb out. This caused the couple to rethink their plans. To compound the situation, the McNeely's were not prepared to spend the night, as they did not have the appropriate gear.

Around 5:30 p.m., David used his cellphone to call Burke County EMS