

also safe and better practice to remove crampons when the snow is starting to ball in them. Also, installing some sort of anti-balling plates on the crampons (or purchasing new ones with plates) can help with this potentially dangerous problem.

Two factors made this a straightforward and expedient rescue. It was extremely fortuitous for Aaron Zabriskie to have made contact with the rangers. Had the timing been different by a few minutes, Martin Cash most likely would have had to spend a night out. Given the clear stable weather, this would have been survivable, but would have increased the risk of infection and tissue damage to Mr. Cash's leg. (Source: Rob Burrows, Climbing Ranger, and Kelly Bush, Wilderness District Ranger)

FALL ON SNOW, FAULTY USE OF CRAMPONS

Washington, Mount Rainier, McClure Rock

On July 4, Mr. Wilkinson (47) was descending the mountain following an Alpine Ascents International (AAI) summit trip. About 2015, Wilkinson tripped over his crampon and fell, with his left knee landing on a picket, resulting in a puncture wound. Guides bandaged the wound and helped him walk down the following morning from approximately McClure Rock at 7,385 feet to Pebble Creek at 7,200 feet. (Source: From a report by Ken Worstell, Park Ranger)

Analysis

It appears that Mr. Wilkinson was climbing alone. The snow conditions were described by Ranger Stefan Wick as "soft," so descending with crampons was not a good idea. (Source: Jed Williamson)

FALLING ROCK – ROCK CAME LOOSE, FALL ON ROCK

Washington, North Cascades – Pickett Range, Mount Terror

Steph Abegg's Narrative: The Picket Range is one of the most rugged areas of the North Cascades. Although the difficulty of the climbing is often moderate, the routes are committing and remote, and any mishap can turn deadly. On July 5, a climbing accident occurred on the North Face of Mount Terror. A member of our climbing party fell, suffering a head injury and broken heel and femur. The injured climber was rescued by National Park Service Rangers before nightfall on July 5, but his uninjured companion was stranded on the North Face for four days in inclement weather.

Mount Terror proved to be aptly named for our party from July 5-9, 2009. There were four of us in the climbing party: Donn Venema (59), Jason Schilling (33), Steve Trent (43), and me (Steph Abegg, 26). All of us are experienced climbers, and have made several previous excursions into the rugged Picket Range. The first three days of our six-day trip had been wildly successful, during which we had climbed the South Face of Inspira-

tion, West McMillan Spire, Degenhardt, and The Pyramid. On Day 4 we started off on our last major climb of our trip: the Stoddard Buttress on the north side of Mount Terror. The Stoddard Buttress is one of the longest and most committing classic lines in the Pickets, and we were excited for the climb.

We left our camp in Crescent Creek at dawn, traversed through the Ottohorn-Himmelhorn col, and reached the base of Mount Terror around 8:00 a.m. It was not long before we began simul-climbing up the buttress, taking a relaxed pace to enjoy what promised to be a sunny and warm summer day in the Pickets. Donn and Jason formed one rope team, and Steve and I formed the other rope team. Steve and I were the leading team.

The accident occurred at 10:30 a.m., shortly after we had traversed around a sharp prow about a third of the way up the route. Steve and I had switched leads and Steve was leading the way up low fifth class ledges back onto the buttress crest. I had just left the belay and begun simul-climbing when I heard a yell above me. I looked up. I think the first thing I saw was a climbing shoe flying through the air. Then, I saw the giant rock and Steve silhouetted against the sky. The next thing I knew I was jerked upwards as Steve hit the end of the rope. He had fallen about 60 feet. Unhurt and surprised, I immediately began calling out to Steve asking him if he was okay. He did not answer me. He was hanging head down at the end of the rope and I was shocked to see quite a bit of blood running down the rock. I yelled to Donn and Jason below. They heard me and began to climb up towards us.

I was able to lower Steve to a ledge and climb up to him. I noticed that the rope attached to Steve was frayed to the core. I was afraid of the potential for the rope to break or slip loose at any time, so I set up additional anchors on some nearby horns. I then maneuvered over to Steve and somehow flipped him so that his head was up. He was still unresponsive, but moaning. His left leg was clearly fractured and he had lost quite a bit of blood from a head wound.

Donn and Jason reached our precarious perch about 15 minutes after the fall. They anchored in and helped to situate Steve to a better position on the small ledge. With his head now fully upright, Steve began to drift in and out of consciousness. Of the three of us, Jason had the strongest first aid skills and he stepped up to the challenge, taking control of addressing Steve's injuries. Under Jason's calm directions, we bandaged Steve's head wound and created a makeshift split for his left leg using the aluminum stay from Donn's pack. Steve began to shiver and display signs of shock, so we layered him with our extra coats. We were encouraged by the fact that Steve tried to help put his arms into the sleeves as we told him what we

were doing. He began to be responsive enough to complain of the pain in his leg, and asked repeatedly what had happened.

We had brought along a cellphone to try to call friends and family from the summit. Now, dealing with a serious accident on one of the most rugged spots in the state, this cellphone would be our lifeline. On the previous days, we had been able to get cell service from the summits of both Inspiration and Degenhardt. We agreed that the quickest way to make a call for help would be to continue climbing the buttress to the summit of Mount Terror. We formed a plan. Jason would stay with Steve. Donn and I would continue up towards the summit as quickly (and safely) as we could and try to initiate a helicopter rescue before the night set in. Making the phone call in time was crucial, as Steve's chances of survival would decrease if he had to spend the night on the mountain, especially considering that the deteriorating weather forecast for the coming days.

Donn and I left the accident scene at 12:00 p.m. to simul-climb the rest of the Stoddard buttress to the false summit. When we passed the location of Steve's fall, we saw a large, fresh, dihedral-shaped gash. It is likely Steve had been standing on this section when a sizable chunk of what had appeared to be solid rock tore loose below him. He just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

As Donn and I simul-climbed towards the summit, we checked repeatedly for cellphone service, but to no avail. When we reached the false summit, we were discouraged that we still could not find a signal. It looked as if we would have to take precious time and climb to the true summit and make one last effort at finding a signal. Then, in a final effort before continuing upwards, Donn found a signal on the far south end of the false summit. At 4:00 p.m., we established contact with 911 and initiated a rescue operation out of the Marblemount Ranger Station. It is scary to realize how critical this call was to getting Jason and Steve off of the mountain alive. About an hour later we were able to call and talk directly to the rangers before they departed in a helicopter to locate Steve and Jason. Shortly after, that we descended to our camp in Crescent Creek Basin.

Rescuer's Narrative: At 16:06 the North Cascades National Park Communications Center in Marblemount received the report of Donn Venema's call via Skagit County 911. A helicopter was put on standby and SAR rangers were notified. Rangers Kelly Bush and Kevork Arackellian flew reconnaissance of the incident site with HiLine Helicopters pilot Jason Moorhead. Steve and Jason were located at 17:57 and it was quickly decided that this would require a short-haul rescue. However, due to the severity of the terrain and local turbulent winds, pilot Moorhead declined to fly this particular short-haul mission. Upon this decision, Bush radioed

from the helo for Comm Center to contact both pilot Anthony Reece, as well as first notification to Whidbey Naval Air Station, for the consideration of their involvement. Pilot Reece responded and flew the second recon with Bush and Arackellian. On this flight, a short-haul staging site was chosen above the climber's camp in Crescent Creek Basin. Bush was dropped off there and briefed Donn and Steph on the situation, leaving them an NPS radio.

The helicopter returned to a staging area near Newhalem, took on fuel and the short-haul rigging. During this time, it was decided that there was likely only enough daylight for one short-haul maneuver. The helicopter returned to Crescent Creek Basin where Ranger Arackellian attached to the short-haul line at 20:25. Steve was plucked from the Stoddard Butress at 20:30 and flown directly to the Newhalem helipad. This was an approximate ten-minute flight, with Arackellian attempting to hold Steve in a stable position while both hung 100 feet below the helo. Ranger Cori Conner directed medical care of Steve at Newhalem until 21:17 when an Airlift NW medical helicopter arrived. Steve was transferred to flight nurse care and taken to a hospital in Bellingham, WA.

During the three day period of waiting for clear weather to fly Jason out, his spirits were bolstered at his bivy by regular check-ins on the radio, which included the opportunity to talk briefly with loved ones. Concern for Jason's emotional health grew each day, as he was forced to stay put on a ledge through rain and snowstorms, hoping for a rescue, but knowing it would not come as long as he was shrouded in clouds. During this time media interest and outside pressure to complete the rescue grew as well.

On the morning of July 9 the SAR team was prepared for either a short-haul or a climbing-based evacuation. The weather forecast was uncertain for that day. While there was no forecast for precipitation, the partly cloudy forecast could have meant either partial clearing around the high peaks or them remaining shrouded in the clouds. Rangers Erin McKay and Rob Burrows from North Cascades NP and Rangers Philippe Wheelock and Rachel Muehler from Mount Rainer National Park readied to be inserted via helicopter below the cloud level to climb to Jason and descend with him. However, at 09:09 the weather appeared to clear enough for a short-haul attempt. They backed off the first attempt because of uncertain cloud level, but soon after a second successful attempt was made. Jason was short-hauled to the staging site and then flown inside the helicopter to the Newhalem area staging site, arriving at 10:08.

Analysis

All members of this party are strong climbers with experience in the North Cascades range, including trips into the Picket Range. These routes are known for their unsavory approaches, remote location, and committed

routes. They all agree that this accident was being at the wrong place at the wrong time and was not preventable unless they did not climb the route. All agree that Steve is a careful climber versed in testing holds on less than solid rock. It seems there was no obvious sign of the instability of the rock that calved off. This incident is a powerful reminder that the risk of death and/or injury from objective hazards is clear and real when climbing in the mountains. Climbers can be high caliber in skills and character, but this does not insure safety. Mount Terror has been shedding rock and ice for millions of years and it is in the laws of probability that sometimes we are in the way. Climbers must be willing to assume this risk, which is beyond human control. "Sometimes bad things just happen in spite of our best efforts to avoid them," as Donn Venema said.

If they had been belaying pitches instead of doing a running belay, Steve's fall might have been shorter, but it might not have prevented the injuries. Also they would have been climbing twice as slow, a significant risk in and of itself on such a long route.

Another life-saving decision was to simul-climb on a 60 meter, doubled over, small diameter rope. In the fall, one of the strands of rope was completely severed with the other damaged to the core. Had the party been using a single strand, this could have resulting in both members of the rope team taking a very long fall.

The role of the cellphone was crucial to initiating a rescue on that last day of good weather and likely saved Steve's life. Having knowledge of where the cellphone would work and managing use so that there was the possibility of a call was important. Had Steph and Donn headed down instead of ascending further up Mount Terror, the phone call connection would not likely have worked. Cellphone coverage on top of some of the summits in the southern Picket Range is a new phenomenon in the last few years and there are still many, many places in the North Cascades where there is no coverage.

When asked to reflect on the incident, Donn Venema provided a lengthy narrative. His final paragraph is quoted here:

"We were very lucky to have been climbing in a team of four. Steph has said she is not sure what she would have done had Jason and I not been there. I'm not sure what I would have done in that situation either, but I think it would have probably come down to leaving Steve alone and either rappelling the face or, more likely in this case, soloing to the top in hopes of making a cell call. In either case, leaving Steve alone would have been extremely dangerous for him, not to mention very difficult emotionally for the partner leaving him. And obviously, climbing alone either up or down on technical terrain to go for help carries its own risk. I would never recommend to any climber that they always climb in larger groups, but, especially in remote areas, there's no

question that numbers increase your safety should there be an accident, and that fact is something that climbers should at least consider. Even though I've done the vast majority of my climbing as a party of two, and will continue to do climbs as a party of two, I've become more conservative in recent years and tend to prefer the safety of having more bodies around as we get farther and farther from civilization. If this incident has had any effect on how I climb in the future, it is probably to reinforce that preference.” (Source: From Steph Abegg's narrative and Kelly Bush, North Cascades Wilderness District Ranger, and the rangers who were on the rescue)

BLOCK OF ICE CALVED OFF – FALL ON ICE

Washington, North Cascades National Park, Torment-Forbidden Traverse

On August 9, AMGA Instructor Pool member, Certified Rock Guide and former member of the AMGA Board of Directors, Craig Luebben (49), died of injuries sustained while attempting to climb the Torment-Forbidden Traverse. Craig and Willie Benegas were climbing and training together for an upcoming AMGA Alpine Exam at the time of the incident.

They started the traverse on the SE Face of Torment via the Taboo Glacier. At the bergschrund, with Craig leading and Willie belaying, Craig attempted to bypass the remnant ice hanging above the bergschrund by ascending rock on the right and then traversing left on to the ice for the exit moves. According to Willie, around 0630, as Craig transitioned from the rock to the ice, a block of ice 100 feet by 20 feet by ten feet calved off, taking Craig with it, resulting in a 30-40-foot fall. A single cam device held his fall. While not struck by the initial block, Craig was critically injured by falling ice and debris as he hung from his rope. Willie managed to get Craig to his belay stance in the bergschrund, stabilize and treat his injuries and contact rescue personnel. Despite Willie's heroic efforts and a swift response from NCNP SAR personnel, Craig succumbed to his injuries.

Willie suffered minor injuries to his leg and is expected to make a full recovery. (Source: From an AMGA posting and a report by Kelly Bush, Wilderness District Ranger)

(Editor's Note: There was one other report from the North Cascades that came directly from two climbers, 43 and 50, one of whom momentarily lost control on a rappel, resulting in a fractured seventh rib. The climber thinks that if he had been using an autoblock, he might have been able to use his hands to avoid hitting the ledge with his back when he lost his balance. This is a good observation in general.)

BOLT HANGER “FAILURE”, FALL ON ROCK

Washington, Index, Upper Town Wall

While climbing the route “Calling Wolfgang” on the Upper Town Wall at