

concessions. Thanks to an education program, these events are now infrequent. But when they happen, they are worth mentioning and becoming part of the orientation for seasonal workers.)

FALL ON ROCK – INADEQUATE BELAY, MISCOMMUNICATION

Wyoming, Lander, Sinks Canyon, Scud Wall

Chelsea Jackson (20) was sport climbing on the Scud Wall in Sinks Canyon on June 21 when this incident occurred. She had recently met her climbing partners, Garrett Newcomer and Christina Locastro, at her new job at Jackson Lake Lodge.

About 3:00 p.m., Jackson cleaned their gear off of the anchor at the top of Banoffee (5.10a). She never asked for the belay to be changed while she was cleaning the anchor. Her belayer, Newcomer, unsuccessfully tried to communicate to her that he was taking her off of belay. When she re-weighted the rope, she fell approximately 50 feet while her belay rope zinged through the top anchor, she bounced off the ground in a seated position, then she rolled down the steep slope below.

Newcomer said that, “We told her she was off belay when she tied into the anchor, but she never responded. I let go of the rope, a few minutes went by, then she screamed and fell right next to us, landing on her hip before she rolled down the hill.” Newcomer said he thinks she never realized she was ever off belay and that he expected her to get off belay while clipped in, and then ask for a new belay before she descended.

Jackson was taken to the hospital and treated for a dislocated hip, bruised lung, and mild whiplash. At the time of her interview a month post-accident, she had returned to work waiting tables and was climbing again.

Analysis

Jackson later concurred that she never realized she was ever off belay and was shocked when she started falling after unclipping herself from the anchor.

While her injury was quite serious, two similar falls in Sinks Canyon have resulted in much more severe injuries. Possible mitigating factors for Jackson’s fall included: 1) friction from the belay rope zinging through the anchor (two rings spaced about 6 inches apart), and 2) Jackson landing on a very steep slope which redirected her kinetic energy—akin to a ski jumper landing on the outrun.

Lessons learned: This was a “normal accident” (Charles Perrow, *Normal Accidents: Living with High-Risk Technologies*, 1984) involving human error and a failed redundant pathway.

The climber (not the belayer) is the one who initiates the belay being taken off, no matter what the belayer expects the climber to do. Also, the belayer should not let go of the rope unless the climber specifically asks to be taken off of belay. These two standards are universal. While it is certainly

common for groups of climbers to develop their own routines for how they handle belays for lowering or rappelling off of anchors, these routines need to be communicated clearly. But human error happens, which is why high-risk systems often include redundancy.

Jackson pointed out that she could have thwarted this accident if she had communicated with the belayer before weighting the rope for getting lowered. This type of redundancy in critical communication can prevent a fall like this, no matter what belay routine is being used for cleaning anchors. (Source: John Gookin, SAR Commander, FCSO)

SLIP ON SNOW – UNABLE TO SELF-ARREST, OFF-ROUTE, NO HARD HAT, INEXPERIENCE

Wyoming, Grand Teton National Park, Mount Teewinot, Northwest Couloir

On July 11, Sam Russell (22) fell approximately 200 vertical feet down the Northwest Couloir of Teewinot, sustaining significant injuries. The fall resulted from a slip on snow that occurred at the top of the NW Couloir just below the prominent “V-notch” near the summit of Teewinot at about 12,000 feet of altitude. He was unable to self-arrest in the snow, sliding and falling some 100 feet. He then impacted rock and fell approximately another 100 feet over rock, coming to rest in a steep alcove just below a large rock block. Three companions witnessed the fall.

They split into two parties, one descending skiers’ right of the gully (N. Evon and D. Ozment) and the other descending skiers’ left (S. Reece and S. Russell). Reece assisted Russell with the crampons and began to descend. Reece slipped on the hard snow, but was able to self-arrest. He then moved skiers’ right over to where Evon and Ozment were descending. Russell then began to descend. He was not wearing a helmet.

About 1130, Russell slipped at the same location as Reece, but was unable to self-arrest, despite several attempts. After about 50 feet, he began to tumble and cartwheel. After another 50 feet, he impacted rock, and continued his fall over steep rock for another 100 feet. He finally came to rest in a steep alcove just below a large rock block.

Ozment climbed down to Russell and assisted him as best he could while Evon contacted Grand Teton Dispatch via a cellphone call to his girlfriend (who relayed the information to GRTE Dispatch). Reece and Evon remained about 100 feet above the accident site, where they were able to communicate with the Rescue Cache using a cellphone. SAR Coordinator R. Johnson received the initial call and established contact with Reece. Johnson then turned over rescue coordination to G. Montopoli so that he could assist with the helicopter component of the operation.

The rescue got under way. One ranger was flown to a spot where he could climb to the accident site. Three other rangers were flown to a heli-site.