

Brush Bash to clean R's screws and draws, and retrieve the rope. All of RM's screws (five up to the point of the fall) were acceptable placements, though several could have been better placed, and the draw on the screw below the one that held RM was twisted and "back clipped" to the rope.

BC transported RM to the hospital where the diagnosis was a badly sprained ankle.

Analysis

Two factors contributed to RM's fall. One factor was technical, the other psychological. The technical factor was placing his tools too close together. The psychological factor was RM was clearly not comfortable leading. Up to the point of his fall, he verbalized to BC his lack of confidence and uncertainty.

RM demonstrated stoicism and maturity throughout. Though obviously in great pain, he did not lose consciousness and contributed to his own self-extraction. All of the rescuers used clear thinking, good first aid skills, and cooperative teamwork. The result is that within a fairly short time an injured climber was safely evacuated to medical care by a team of self-reliant climbers. (Source: Bob Loomis, 56, Spokane, Washington)

FALL ON ROCK, EQUIPMENT FAILURE DUE TO MIS-USE

West Virginia, New River Gorge, Kaymoor

On June 12 Karen Feher (33) and her partner were climbing Rico Suave (5.10a). Upon reaching the anchor, she clipped in. Her setup: She had two thin dyneema slings girth hitched to her harness. At the end of each sling was a locking carabiner held in place with a rubber Petzl keeper (called 'Petzl Strings'). The "string" is designed to fit on the end of a Petzl runner in order to keep the lower carabiner on a quickdraw in place for easy clipping and to protect the webbing from abrasion.

She clipped a locking carabiner to each bolt and probably called, "Off belay." It is unclear if she was going to rappel or be lowered. It doesn't matter. She took a fatal fall about 50 feet to the ground.

The day after the accident, a local climber climbed to the anchor and found a locking carabiner on each bolt with a Petzl String still affixed to each. Both Petzl Strings were torn on the side. It is unclear if the two slings were still attached to her harness, as her harness went with her and EMS, but I am assuming this to be true.

Analysis

How could this happen? This is one of the safest setups for cleaning an anchor. At the top of Rico Suave is a small ledge to stand on and clean. If you're not fully weighting the system, these rubber strings will hold about 15 pounds before breaking. I'm guessing they were able to hold just enough weight to feign security while she untied to feed, until just enough weight was added to cause the break.

There is some level of speculation, but with the evidence at hand this seems to be the most likely scenario. (Source: Mike Williams, from a post on rockclimbing.com, and <http://www.dailymail.com/News>)

AVALANCHE

Wyoming, Grand Teton National Park, South Teton

On February 22 at 1120, Wray Landon (31) was caught in an avalanche and carried to his death while skiing near the summit of the South Teton. Landon was skiing with partners Nathan Brown (32) and Brady Johnston (27). Both searched the slide path for Landon immediately after the avalanche occurred. They descended the path to the edge of a steep cliff where they could see something in the debris field over 1000 feet below, though they could not tell if it was Landon. At that point, Brown called 911 and was connected to Park Dispatch. Park rangers and several Teton County Search and Rescue (TCSAR) personnel responded to the scene using the Teton County Sheriff's Office rescue helicopter.

At 1335, rangers located the debris field and Landon's body, and while hovering nearby, determined that Landon was deceased. TCSAR personnel used explosives which were dropped from the helicopter to control slopes that rangers would have to cross over or under to reach the body. Rangers were flown to a staging area at Snowdrift Lake where they then skied to the body. The body was extricated via helicopter long line to the valley and the rescue rangers were picked up at Snowdrift Lake and flown back to the Jackson Hole Airport.

I talked to Brown by cell phone and told him to descend Garnet Canyon via the route they had climbed that morning. Johnston and Brown skied back to the Taggart Lake Trailhead without further incident, arriving at 1600.

Analysis

Under mostly sunny skies at the summit, these ski mountaineers discussed their options. They considered skiing the Southeast Couloir, but were concerned that with its east and south exposure, it would be sun crusted and not very enjoyable skiing. The second option was to ski the South Face, which also had the potential for sun crusts given its aspect. Everyone in the party knew that one of the south couloirs, known as the Amore Vita, had been skied two days before by a party of two. The group could still see the ski tracks in the snow and Brown had spoken to a member of that party, Steve Romeo, about the conditions. The group felt that the Amore Vita was their best option because it had been previously skied and would likely provide better and safer snow conditions because it was protected from direct sunlight. Johnston told me that he and Landon had skied that line together about three times in the past. Brown told me that he had skied the South Face one time before.