

belaying the third climber on a traversing pitch.

The Black Diamond “Guide ATC” device is commonly used to belay two climbers at once. However, a good understanding of its use and limitations is necessary for both the belayer and the seconding climbers. When the belayer is lowering a climber whose weight is on the rope, he must be well versed in this procedure so as not to lose control of the lower, which is what happened here. It is prudent to practice this technique before having to use it in a real situation. (Source: Ranger Martin Vidak – Incident Commander)

FALL ON SNOW – UNABLE TO SELF-ARREST, FAULTY USE OF CRAMPONS

Wyoming, Gannet Peak

On August 10 about 1300, the Sublette County Sheriff’s dispatch center received a call from a party of five on the summit ridge of Gannet Peak (13,804 feet). The party stated that one of the members of their group had lost his footing and had fallen, then slid down the east face snowcap, just near the summit of Gannet. They said he had lost his ice ax (failed to self arrest) and had slid out of their line of sight towards the large cliff band that separates the upper peak and the Gooseneck Glacier. The snowcap on Gannet peak is very steep near the summit and gets steeper and steeper towards the cliff band. The reporting party was not able to get to the fallen member because of this terrain and could not tell what condition he may be in.

Tip Top Search and Rescue of Sublette County was paged out and responded in their contract helicopter (Bell L4). Members Milford Lockwood, Jason Ray, and Tony Chambers along with pilot John Ruhl departed the Pinedale airport at 1424. Sublette County emergency management coordinator Jim Mitchell and Tip Top member Leanne Rellstab manned an incident command post to monitor the operation.

Upon arrival at the scene, the rescue crew was able to quickly identify the reporting party located just below the summit ridge and then the slide path of the missing subject. After a quick aerial search, the subject – Don Scott (63) of was located in the rocks just below the snowcap, but fortunately above the cliff band and Gooseneck Glacier. He had slid roughly 350 vertical feet. Scott appeared to be unresponsive to the helicopter crew but his exact condition was at this point unknown.

The rescue crew, in conjunction with the incident command post, decided that the quickest and safest way to access the climber was to use the short-haul method. The rescue crew established a landing zone in the Dinwoody drainage at 10,800 feet, rigged for short haul, performed a check flight, and satisfied all other safety parameters. The crew inserted one short-hauler to the accident scene and at 1545 determined that Scott was deceased.

Gannet Peak’s summit ridge is the divide between Fremont and Sublette County. Since the climber had fallen into the Fremont County side, the mission was a joint effort between Fremont County and Sublette County. At this point the Fremont County coroner

requested that the rescue crew fly to Lander, allowing Fremont County officials to determine the safest way to remove the body. The Fremont County coroner requested that the Sublette County crew remove the body using the short haul method. A recovery attempt was made the following morning, but for two consecutive days high winds prevented all attempts. The following morning (August 13) conditions were favorable, and a successful body recovery was made.

Analysis

The climbing party of five was moderately experienced. In the past, as a group, they completed climbing trips together at least on an annual basis, but not on a regular basis. Failure to self-arrest by the subject was obviously the biggest error made that day. The subject was also wearing crampons, which may have contributed to his fall. When Scott was located, it was apparent that he had also lost his helmet. (It was found one crack system to the north). Over the years, I have often times noticed just how many people wear their helmets loosely or improperly. I have no idea if this was the case with Mr. Scott, but since his helmet did come off, I have wondered if it was secure. (Source: Tony Chambers, Tip Top Search and Rescue)

AVALANCHE – FAILURE TO ANALYZE SNOWPACK, POOR POSITION Wyoming, Snowy Range

On November 6th, Brice Portwood (27) and I (Ed Warren – 25) were trying to climb a mixed route (a summer rock route, but never climbed as a mixed/ice climb as far as we know) in the Snowy Range. Conditions were not ideal at 0800 when we left the car, with winds between 15 and 25 mph and occasionally higher gusts and temps in the low teens. But the sky was clear at the trailhead with clouds around the peak, and the forecast for the rest of the day was improving conditions. It was a pretty typical WY winter day.

Snowpack was unusually low. Typically, by November, the highway department closes Route 130, but because of the abnormally scarce snowfall, it was still open. The approach to the climb was a quick two miles with snowpack never more than knee deep. At the base of the climb, we discovered deeper snow. We dug a snow pit (doubling as a belay platform) and didn't notice any layering or slabs.

Brice led the first pitch, which was mostly mixed terrain. I led the second pitch, which was almost exclusively ice, and found a spot to belay underneath a slight protrusion of rock on the right side that I hoped might provide a bit of protection from falling ice.

We were a good 400+ feet up, having stretched-out the first two pitches. Brice led the third pitch. When he was about 100 feet above me, he reached the top of the ice slot and encountered a snow band. He shouted down that the terrain had moderated and it would be a ways to the next potential anchor so we might have to simul-climb again for a bit. I told him I understood.