

very fortunate things had happened: Tirey had been conscious enough to see the three hikers on the ridge and Whitney had been curious enough to bushwhack one mile through a boulder field of drifted snow toward the screams for help. Whitney and his two friends were the only three hikers in the area that day; if they had not responded, it could have been days before anyone else happened upon the scene.

At 4 p.m., six and one-half hours after the avalanche, the accident was confirmed via a phone call from Whitney to Pinkham Notch Camp. He reported that Tirey had a broken right ankle and possible broken ribs, while Morse had severe head lacerations, was semi-conscious and very cold, and had vomited blood. Whitney had leveled out a platform with a snowshoe, put Morse in a sleeping bag and bundled Tirey up as best he could.

All signs pointed to a long and involved rescue; the injuries were severe, the temperature was dropping, and the climbers had spent all day lying in the snow. It was just dusk when, after bushwhacking through the ravine, and following Whitney's tracks, the first rescuers reached the victims. Tirey was in good spirits; Morse had severe head injuries, was cold, and was only moderately responsive. Morse's injuries were treated as well as possible, while a great deal of attention was given to Tirey's injured ankle and foot, both of which were very cold. The litter crews arrived 30 minutes later and the long process of evacuation began. At this point the two climbers had been in the snow for ten hours and there was an urgent need to get them to a hospital. The carry, although long and difficult, went smoothly; at 2 a.m., 17 hours after their initial fall, both climbers were in the ambulance bound for Androscoggin Valley Hospital.

Tirey was released from the hospital several days later. Morse was transferred to Mary Hitchcock Hospital in Hanover for further treatment of his head injuries. Both recovered satisfactorily. (Source: from a report by Jon Martinson, Manager, Pinkham Notch Camp)

Analysis

King Ravine is a remote area that draws relatively few winter climbers. The accident was not caused by any error on the part of either climber but was simply the result of the inherent dangers involved in winter climbing. Whitney's response was instrumental in saving both lives. (Source: Jon Martinson, Manager, Pinkham Notch Camp)

FALL ON ROCK, FAILURE TO FOLLOW ROUTE, PLACED NO PROTECTION, EXCEEDING ABILITIES

New Hampshire, Cathedral Ledge

On September 17, 1980, a nearby resident heard calls for help coming from Cathedral Ledge. The Mountain Rescue Service was notified. When we arrived at the scene, we found Steven Thompson (26) at the base of the ledge suffering from bruises, abrasions, and a possible broken jaw. These were minor injuries considering that he had fallen over 100 feet. (Source: Rick Wilcox, Mountain Rescue Service Leader)

Analysis

This climber got off route and was 50 feet above his belayer with no protection when he fell. A couple of months earlier, on nearby Whitehorse Ledge, a climber took a leader fall of only 30 feet and wound up with a spiral fracture of the lower leg. By comparison, Thompson was quite fortunate. (Source: Rick Wilcox, Mountain Rescue Service Leader)