

RAPPEL FAILURE, INADEQUATE PROTECTION, INEXPERIENCE Utah, Little Cottonwood Canyon

A group of four spelunkers were descending to the mouth of a small cave on May 26, 1980, when this accident occurred. Lori Huntley (18) began an unbelayed rappel with no gloves, using a figure eight descender. This was her first rappel attempt. Her arms became tired, so she let go with her brake hand and grabbed the rope above her. She slid rapidly 60–70 feet, landing on a ledge, which resulted in several fractures and burns. (Source: Dr. Richard Wallin, Salt Lake City, Utah)

FALL ON SNOW, FALL INTO MOAT, CLIMBING UNROPE, LOSS OF CONTROL—VOLUNTARY GLISSADE, NO HARD HAT, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT, INEXPERIENCE Utah, Mt. Timpanogos

This narrative and analysis will cover the accidents of both Richard Lambert, M.D., and Richard Weaver because of the ironically similar events.

On June 8, 1980, Lambert (26) left for a solo ascent of Mt. Timpanogos via the Aspen Grove trail. From film retrieved from his camera, it appears that he followed the Grade 3 route via Emerald Lake to the summit. In late summer, this is a well-prepared and well-maintained trail. However, due to a heavy winter snowpack and an unusually large amount of avalanche deposition, the route was 95 per cent covered with consolidated snow.

Lambert was apparently descending a 30°-snowfield in a natural wide drainage when he either lost control of his glissade or unknowingly crossed a thin area at the edge of a 100-foot vertical rock band. He apparently fell through the snow, plunging into a large, cavernous moat created by a six-foot wide, three-foot deep stream. He fell free for 75 feet into the stream which formed a 75–100-foot waterfall before it disappeared beneath the snowpack. Lambert was not reported overdue until 9:30 a.m. on June 9. The delay in the report was due primarily to the fact that he and his sister had been overdue in the same area the previous week and had walked out before a search was organized. His sister felt that he had probably spent the night at the Emerald Lake Shelter.

On June 9, 1980, Richard Weaver (26) and his brother Roger (18) followed the Aspen Grove approach to Emerald Lake. After reaching the lake they began a glissading descent wearing tennis shoes. Richard was several hundred feet below Roger on the same 30°-snowslope that Lambert had descended when he lost control and plumed through the same opening leading into the large moat. He fell approximately the same 75-foot distance into the water and died around 10:30 a.m. When Roger saw that Richard was lost, he rapidly descended for help.

The rescue team responded to the search for Weaver without any knowledge of Lambert's whereabouts. After finding a passage into the cavern, the team was able to locate a body in the stream at the base of the waterfall. Because the water greatly hampered visibility and created a very cold atmosphere, the team quickly removed the body without further search for articles, etc. At the base of the mountain, it was determined that the body was not Weaver but Lambert. A second descent into and search of the moat resulted in the finding of Weaver's body underwater and 15–20 feet downstream. Both victims suffered major head injuries and both had compound fractures of upper and lower extremities. (Source: Dr. Richard Wallin, Salt Lake City, Utah)