

As McDonald descended, the rappel rope above him went over a diagonally-sloping ledge. McDonald pendulummed to one side and out of sight as the rope shifted sideways at the point where it went over the ledge. Breitenberger saw the rope suddenly begin to slide through the anchor. It pulled completely through and dropped out of sight before he had a chance to grab it.

McDonald fell approximately 1,000 feet down the west Gunsight Couloir to his death. In the coroner's report, it was determined that he died instantly in the fall. Breitenberger began downclimbing toward McDonald and reached him at 8:30 p.m. He was not sure whether or not McDonald was still alive, so he covered him with some tarps and a foam pad, and ran out for help; he reached Jenny Lake at 11:00 p.m.

Four climbing rangers with EMT gear left Lupine Meadows shortly after midnight and reached McDonald at 5:15 a.m. During the rest of the morning, the rescue team lowered McDonald's body to a level area and evacuated him by helicopter. (Source: Craig Patterson, Ranger, Grand Teton National Park)

Analysis

An 11-mm Kernmantle rope was still attached to a carabiner brake system that was attached to McDonald's climbing harness. A 3/8-inch Goldline rope was tied to the 11-mm rope with a grapevine knot, but the 3/8-inch rope did not go through the brake system. The victim was wrapped up in the Kernmantle rope and both ropes were strung out on the snow above him. There were no knots in the bottom ends of the ropes, nor was there a safety prusik hooked to the rappel ropes.

Apparently McDonald somehow rappelled or slipped far enough down his ropes for the Goldline to go completely through the carabiner brake system; his weight then pulled the rope through the anchor as he fell.

Knots in the ends of the ropes might have kept McDonald from going off the end of his rope, but even knots can slip through carabiner brakes. The climbing community still needs to develop an effective way to secure rappels. (Source: Craig Patterson and Robert Irvine, Rangers, Grand Teton National Park)

FALL ON SNOW, INEXPERIENCE, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT, FAILURE TO FOLLOW ROUTE

Wyoming, Tetons

On July 26, 1981, Keith Walton (27), a relatively inexperienced climber, made a solo ascent of the Southwest Couloir on the Middle Teton. Descending the same route, Walton lost his way. He had descended about one third of the distance from the summit to the saddle before he realized that he had strayed to the east. He decided to work his way west instead of retracing his steps to the regular route. While downclimbing a rock rib, he attempted a short jump into a snow gully, lost his footing on the hard snow at the edge of the gully and began somersaulting. His fall carried him over a small section of scree and into a second patch of snow. He came to rest in a collection of rocks at the bottom of the gully. He sustained a deep two-inch laceration below his right knee. Walton estimated his fall at 100 feet.

He wrapped the wound with a bandana and without further complications made his way into the south fork of Garnet Canyon. He met Karen Noar near his campsite which was 30 minutes above the meadows. Noar properly bandaged the leg and, with two friends, Rick and Carolyn Wallen, helped Walton break camp and assisted him to the meadows. The

Wallens returned to the valley with Walton and gave him a ride to St. John's Hospital. (Source: John Carr, Grand Teton National Park)

Analysis

Walton was climbing in lightweight hiking shoes and was not carrying an ice ax. He also sustained scratches on his right hip and leg as a result of wearing shorts. (Source: John Carr, Grand Teton National Park)

FALL ON SNOW, UNROPEd, INEXPERIENCE

Wyoming, Tetons

On August 11, 1981, about 6:00 p.m., Travis Plunkett (22) slipped on a snow patch in the south fork of Garnet Canyon while descending from the Middle Teton. Plunkett slid about 100 feet and hit some rocks at the base of the snow, damaging his left ankle. Olsen and Plunkett reached the Garnet Meadows and camped there that night. About 7:00 p.m. on August 12, Ranger Bob Irvine administered first aid and contacted the Jenny Lake Ranger Station for transportation. Ranger Tom Owen met Plunkett at the Garnet Platforms with horses and transported him to Lupine Meadows. Plunkett was driven to St. John's Hospital by Olsen at 3:30 p.m. (Source: Tom Kimbrough, Grand Teton National Park)

Analysis

During the 1981 summer in the Tetons, falls on snow accounted for five injuries and one death, all to climbers of moderate or little experience. Perhaps our emphasis on high standards of rock and ice climbing have left the hazards of a 35-degree snow slope unrespected by beginning mountaineers. (Source: Craig Patterson, Ranger, Grand Teton National Park)

FAILURE OF RAPPEL, NO HARD HAT, INADEQUATE PROTECTION, INEXPERIENCE

Wyoming, Tetons

Around 4:30 p.m. on September 7, 1981, Joe Bailey (23) was descending from the summit of Nez Perce. He set up a rappel at 11,500 feet despite the fact that his partners had down-climbed the pitch and urged him to do the same. He anchored to a large boulder that was lying on the ledge he was about to descend from. As he stepped over the edge, the boulder dislodged and pulled his anchor loose.

Bailey fell approximately 100 feet before hitting a large ledge and then somersaulting another 50 feet to the edge of the same ledge. His five climbing partners, who were waiting on the ledge, saw the fall and were immediately at his side. Bill Rosqvist briefly examined the injured climber, and instructed the others to stay with Bailey and to do what they could for him; then he departed for Lupine Meadows to get help.

At 7:10 p.m., he arrived at Ranger Bob Irvine's cabin where he was met by Rangers Irvine, Hollis, Harris and Patterson. As coordinator, Patterson instructed Harris to round up the available rescue team and have them ready to go out overnight as soon as possible.

They were unable to get a Forest Service helicopter, so Kjerstad was contracted. At 8:15 p.m., Harris and McQuarie had landed in the south fork of Garnet Canyon with emergency medical supplies. No other flights were attempted because of poor light.