

Owen-Spaulding route. Evidently, when he saw that sections of it were melted out and that it was unskiable, he went out toward the lower East Face from Teepe Col looking for a route to ski. Evidence indicates that he traversed from the col on a ledge system and slipped at an exposed corner. He fell about 30 meters to the top of the Teepe Snowfield where his skis and pack were found. After sliding down the snow about 265 meters, he stopped. He had a broken arm and was unconscious. Lying on the snow in the early morning shadow of Disappointment Peak, he died of hypothermia.

The body was discovered by John McCormack on July 12 as he approached Teepe's Pillar. He notified the rangers and, at 1400, Rangers Bob Irving and Dan Burgette were flown to the scene to recover the body. (Source: Dan Burgette, Ranger, Grand Teton National Park)

Analysis

This is an example of the kinds of things that can lead from a minor mishap to death. An intense desire to achieve a goal, heightened by the pressure of a deadline, can cause one to push too hard. A slip on verglas, or skis sticking out of your pack hitting rock, can cause one to fall. Not wearing a hard hat allows a bump on the head to cause one to black out. Not having a partner prevents one from being helped off the snow and rewarmed. (Source: Dan Burgette, Ranger, Grand Teton National Park)

FALLING ROCK, ANCHOR FAILURE, ILLNESS

Wyoming, Tetons

At 0230 on July 18, 1982, Ron Johnson (33) and Jeff Averkamp (22) left the Lower Saddle to climb the Black Ice Couloir on the Grand Teton. Snow conditions on the Valhalla Traverse caused them to move more slowly than they had hoped and they did not reach the base of the Enclosure Couloir until 1630. At that point, Averkamp, who was leading, began to feel dizzy and asked Johnson to belay him back to the pitch. After discussing the situation, they decided to abort their attempt on the Black Ice Couloir. Averkamp didn't want to reverse the Valhalla Traverse because he was afraid of falling or blacking out while belaying and, thereby, endangering Johnson's life. They decided to rappel and downclimb into Valhalla Canyon.

They estimated that it would take three rappels to reach the snow field at the base of the Enclosure Couloir. Johnson set the rappel anchors and Averkamp rappelled first with a prusik safety. He anchored himself at the bottom and Johnson followed. The third rappel went over steep rock with a few ledges—the first ledge may not have been within reach of their rope. For this reason, Johnson went first, in the event that a prusik back-up would be required. Johnson was able to reach a three-centimeter-ledge at the edge of the snowfield with about three meters of rope to spare. He placed two pitons and a Friend and Averkamp joined him. Due to Averkamp's dizziness, they decided to make one more rappel down the steep upper part of the snow field before they traversed over to the snow field coming down from Gunsight Notch into Valhalla Canyon. It was approximately 0930. They were preparing the final rappel anchor when they heard rockfall coming off the west face of the Enclosure. The largest blocks were between one-half to one meter on a side, with lots of smaller rock and ice also being knocked loose.

Johnson put his arm around Averkamp, who was still on rappel, and they pressed against the wall. Several smaller rocks hit them before one of the larger blocks hit Johnson's legs. Averkamp pendulumed out from the wall and slid to the end of the rope; he continued to fall when the rappel anchor (2.5-centimeter webbing around a large horn) failed. Their fall carried them down the snow field, over a five-meter rock band and down more snow and a smaller rock band. They came to rest at the edge of the talus after a fall of about 35 vertical meters.

When Averkamp regained consciousness, he heard Johnson's moaning. He crawled the three meters to Johnson, checked his injuries and helped him into a semisitting position. They talked about what had happened while Averkamp, who had two broken legs and a broken-dislocated arm, crawled over to their pack about 15 meters away to get a first aid kit and water. He had just pulled out a pair of warmup pants when he noticed that Johnson was no longer talking. When he returned to Johnson, he could not detect any breathing or pulse. Averkamp determined that he could do no more for his friend and realized that, if he were to survive, he would have to get to a lower elevation where water was available. As he was warmly dressed, he took only the warmup pants and began crawling down the canyon, dragging himself with one arm. (It was later determined that Johnson had died from hypovolemic shock from his severely broken legs.)

On July 15, when the party was overdue, Rangers Renny Jackson and Peter Hollis flew over the route and Valhalla Canyon. They saw Johnson's body and, finally, Averkamp, who had crawled about one kilometer during the preceding 1¼ days. A rescue team was flown in and pilot Rick Farnsworth flew Averkamp out after dark at 2145. Johnson's body was recovered the next morning. (Source: Dan Burgette, Ranger, Grand Teton National Park)

Analysis

This seems to be a case where the climbers were doing everything right but objective dangers caught them. They used good judgment in aborting their climb when Averkamp became ill. Johnson watched after the safety of his partner admirably. Johnson had difficulty finding a secure anchor for the last rappel but he had clipped into two pins and a Friend. They all pulled and remained attached to his daisy chain. It is interesting to note that neither climber suffered severe head injuries during this long fall and that they were both wearing hard hats.

Averkamp's will to live is impressive. He wasn't sure if he would be found, so he decided to crawl to the valley. He was determined to crawl for four days, thinking that if he could get below Symmetry Spire, he would surely meet a climber in that area. This is a good example of how important it is to have a tenacious, self-reliant, optimistic attitude when injured and waiting for rescue. (Source: Dan Burgette, Ranger, Grand Teton National Park)

FALL ON ROCK, CLIMBING UNROPED, LOOSE ROCK

Wyoming, Tetons

On August 7, 1982, at 1400, Donald Decker (56) and Paul Beard (19) attempted to climb the west face of the saddle between the South and Middle Tetons. Decker was a very experienced Teton climber who had always wanted to reach that saddle from the west. They were on a backpacking trip with one of Decker's sons and his daughter-in-law. Decker had signed out to climb the Southwest Couloir of the Middle