

from the summit of Mt. Washington in the Olympic Range when one of the rope leaders, Steve Oak (36), slipped and could not stop his fall. He pulled three others who were on his rope down with him. They all went over a six to nine meter rock cliff, landed on a 35-40 degree snow slope and slid another 100 meters in soft, wet snow, coming to rest where the slope was about 25 degrees. Amazingly, one of the four escaped injury. Two other youths were tied to the rope, but were spared the fall, because the rope "practically fell off them" when the fall began. (Source: Jim Groh)

Analysis

Jim Groh and his climbing partner, Dick Waldo, were fortunately nearby. Waldo had his handie-talkie ham radio with him, and was able to call in some help. By the time the rescue operation was secured, 33 people had spent over 200 hours, including nine by helicopter and fixed wing aircraft.

The level of training this group had prior to the climb was one ascent of Mt. Ellinor. (Source: J. Williamson, gleaned from several reports)

LOSS OF CONTROL—VOLUNTARY GLISSADE, FAULTY USE OF CRAMPONS, MISCOMMUNICATION, INEXPERIENCE

Washington, Mount Shuksan

James Blilie (24), a strong but inexperienced climber, summited on Mt. Shuksan early on the morning of May 19, 1985, with several companions. As they started the descent, one of his fellow climbers told him how to glissade, but failed to tell him that he should first remove his crampons. In the resulting fall, he came directly into a 30-person party from the Boeing Alpine Society, some of whom could actually hear his left ankle snap. This incident occurred at the 2400 meter level at 0815. Dr. Roger Shay attended Blilie, while other climbers rigged a sled from skis and the whole party, by this time joined by five skiing physicians, descended to the 2000 meter level where John Pollock, the leader of the Boeing party, supervised the construction of a helicopter landing zone marked with stuff bags filled with snow and anchored with ice axes. The helicopter pick-up was made about 1600. (Source: *Bergtrage*, Seattle Mountain Rescue Council, 85-10, October 1985)

FALL ON ROCK, CLIMBING UNROPED, INEXPERIENCE

Washington, Mount Wow

On June 7, 1985, James Slayton (19) and three friends drove from Ft. Lewis to Mount Rainier National Park to practice rappelling off a roadside cliff. One of the members of the party was familiar with that area of the park. The group found a cliff to their liking and were able to climb around the cliff itself, through woods, to the top, immediately adjacent to the road and about 15 meters high. It was sheer for only the lowest six meters at its base. Midway on the cliff was a moss-covered, wet, and slippery 45 degree slope that separated the steeper sections at the top and base parts of the cliff.

They tied a nylon Kermantel climbing rope to the tree at the top of the cliff and three of the men rappelled to the base successfully. Finally, they decided to leave the area after all but one of the men was at the base of the cliff. Joel Crow (23) untied the rope from the tree and attempted to throw it to the base, but the rope got hung up on a rock or bush. Slayton, who is a licensed rappeller in the Army, then climbed the cliff without protection toward the entangled rope. At a point approximately ten vertical meters above the road, he lost his

footing on the slippery rock and moss and then slid on the steep slope for about three meters and then free-fell for about six meters more, landing in the drainage ditch at the road shoulder.

Rangers were contacted by one of his companions and responded to the scene, where they found Slayton in a private vehicle headed down the road. The vehicle was intercepted, and treatment was provided for his broken wrists, strained lower back and multiple contusions and cuts. An ambulance was requested, and he was transported to Madigan Army Medical Center.

Later it was learned that Slayton also broke a rib—which punctured his left lung. When contacted, he said he was going to go back for his new rope and would rappel back down to get it, “unless someone else gets there first.” (Source: John Wilcox, Ranger, Mount Rainier National Park)

(Editor’s Note: Well, we don’t know what is required to become a “licensed” rappeller, but whatever it is, it does not a climber make! Nor has this been counted as a climbing statistic, as the activity of rappelling is engaged in by many non-climbers such as the victim.)

AVALANCHE

Washington, Mount Rainier

On June 23, 1985, Barbara Miller (23) and Mark Valdez (26) were ascending the Emmons Glacier and had reached an elevation of 3800 meters when they heard a loud noise. Within seconds they were covered by a hard slab avalanche that pulled them 35-50 meters down-slope. Both were hit by numerous ice blocks. Valdez stated that the adze of his ice ax penetrated his groin during the slide. Valdez went to his partner Miller finding her dazed and asking for help. The force of the snow-ice avalanche caused both Valdez and Miller to lose several pieces of equipment. Both started a slow descent when another party helped them to descend to Camp Schurman. (Source: Mount Rainier National Park)

Analysis

Valdez and Miller were observing all safety practices. A large, hard slab avalanche one to 1.5 meters deep and 35 meters wide was probably triggered by serac fall from above. Valdez and Miller were hit by the side of the falling snow and ice. (Source: Mount Rainier National Park)

FALLING ROCK

Washington, Mount Rainier

On July 4, 1985, at 0100, Jay DeRocher (29) was struck by spontaneous rockfall from Cathedral Rocks Gap while attempting to ascend the Disappointment Cleaver Route. DeRocher was struck on the left side of the torso area by a one meter square boulder, and then fell ten meters down a scree gully. DeRocher was assisted back to Camp Muir by party members with the help of a second party. (Source: James Litch, Ranger, Mount Rainier National Park)

Analysis

Rockfall in this area is not unusual, but one doesn’t expect it at this time of night. (Source: J. Williamson)