

## **FALL ON ICE, INADEQUATE BELAY AND PROTECTION, OVER-CONFIDENCE**

### **Washington, Mount Adams**

On July 19, 1985, Jeff Hancock (33) and Frances Olszewski (43), with two others, were climbing Mt. Adams via the Adams Glacier when the following events occurred.

The party awoke at 0300, ate, packed, and were moving by 0400. The temperature was about 10°C, as the freezing level was above 4000 meters. The approach to the Adams Glacier was across dirt, rock, and ice but was fairly level. About 2215 meters, the glacier became steeper and icier and the party stopped to put on crampons, helmets, and rope up. Jeff and Frances were on one rope and Kevin Graham and Leonard Russell on the other. Both teams had 9mm, 40 meter ropes which they doubled.

Both rope teams swung leads as they negotiated crevasses. About 2500 meters the terrain steepened and the party proceeded up a 45 to 50 degree ramp which was 40 to 50 meters long. Jeff led up the ramp and near the top began having trouble with one crampon slipping off his boot. Kevin said that they noticed at this point that the hard, top layer of ice or verglas was underlain by six to seven centimeters of soft, granular snow/ice, which in turn was underlain by hard ice. Frontpointing was difficult, as it was very strenuous to kick hard enough to get the hard ice underneath the verglas and soft snow/ice. Flatfooting was the most successful technique for the conditions.

After the ramp the terrain leveled somewhat and Kevin took the lead, as Jeff was having trouble with his crampon. Somewhere in this section the party stopped to secure the crampon. Jeff took the lead after this.

The terrain steepened to another headwall and Frances took the lead. She proceeded up the left hand side of the headwall in a switchback pattern using flatfoot technique. The snow conditions were as described above and suncupped. The left hand side was a bit steeper and more broken up. Kevin led his rope up the right side of the headwall, going directly up the track of a fallen ice block. Suncups and indentations in the track offered occasional resting places.

All climbers were using only one ice tool; their second tool was in or on their packs. Frances had no visible ice screws on her harness or on the slings around her neck and shoulder. At this point Kevin said to the group that he thought they should put in some running protection. Frances looked back, said nothing, and continued on. No protection was placed. She had approximately eight meters to go to what looked like a stance or resting spot. The slope was about 45 degrees. About a meter or so from the stance, Frances planted the pick of her ice ax and tried to frontpoint. Her feet slipped, she grabbed the head of the ice ax with her other hand and tried to flatfoot again, but was only able to get one edge of the crampon points in the ice layer. She slipped and began sliding down the slope. She tried to self-arrest with her ice ax for about ten meters. She was having trouble getting her weight over the pick because her feet were dragging and tending to make her body perpendicular to the fall line rather than parallel. At ten meters, she bounced off a suncup and was airborne, and from that point on was in a tumbling, rolling fall. Jeff went into arrest position with crampons kicked in and upper body weight over the pick, but he was immediately yanked out of the stance when the rope came taut. He also began a tumbling, rolling fall. Frances was airborne two or three more times as she glanced off suncups. About 50 meters from the point of Frances' fall, she went over a ten meter ice cliff and stopped shortly after the impact with the ice. Jeff was falling parallel to her and slid down the ramp they had come up. He also came to a rolling stop. There was no movement from Frances, but Jeff sat up and stabilized himself with his hands.

Kevin and Leonard began immediately climbing down the ice block track they had come

up. Frances was not responding to calls to her. At 0700 Kevin reached Jeff, who told him he had a broken ankle, but was OK and to go to Frances. Her left ankle was contorted and she was unconscious. They removed her helmet and checked for head injuries. None were visible except from a small trickle of blood from either her nose or a small abrasion under her eye. Her breathing was fairly strong but somewhat labored. In a few moves Kevin and Leonard had her head upslope, insulation under her, and anchored to the slope. Her breathing improved some and she would thrash about occasionally. Kevin went to help Jeff remove his crampons, and when he returned to Frances she was pale. Kevin filled out an accident report form and left for the trailhead at 0730.

While driving for help Kevin met a person with a CB radio in their vehicle, but they couldn't get through, so he kept driving. (Kevin later learned that the CB operator got through at 0915.) Kevin reached John Pullman's house at 0945 and called the Yakima County Sheriff's office.

The long rescue which followed did not conclude until 0730 on July 15. The victim was in a deep coma until August 9. As of February 1986, her mind is clear and functioning, but she is in a wheelchair. It is expected that she will eventually be able to walk. (Source: Duncan Kelso, Seattle Mountaineers – Chairman of Safety Sub-Committee; and George Sainsbury)

### **Analysis**

Several party members mentioned that since Adams Glacier was reportedly a less difficult climb than Mowich Face, there was a feeling among them that the climb was going to be a "piece of cake" and would present no serious problems. Their "relaxed" attitude may have contributed to the points of the following two paragraphs.

There is wide debate in the climbing community whether a single 9mm rope offers the strength needed for technical ice climbing. When doubled it clearly does. However, when 40 meters is doubled, the 20 meter length severely limits the flexibility of the rope team in their placement of running and fixed belays.

When a team ropes up it is for security. On a technical ice climb the rope protects against falling into crevasses and falling on technical sections. To complete the security system, the rest of the equipment must be immediately available to the climber.

A common trap is not to place protection when the going is easy. The climber is lured into a difficult spot with no protection behind. Once in this predicament, climbing on is sometimes easier than stopping and placing protection or downclimbing.

Another common tendency is to relax concentration on technique when the relief of the belay stance is very near. (Source: Duncan Kelso, Seattle Mountaineers – Chairman of Safety Sub-Committee)

## **FALL ON SNOW, FALL INTO CREVASSE, CLIMBING UNROPED Washington, Mount Rainier**

On July 18, 1985, Gregory Sloop (18) reported to the rangers that members of his climbing party were injured on the Kautz Glacier and needed help at the scene.

Around 0800 that day, the Sloop party of four registered to climb the Kautz glacier route. The party intended to climb up to Camp Hazard and spend the night. The next day they would climb to the summit and return to Paradise by way of the same route.

While ascending the Wilson Glacier, about the 2600 meter level on the west side of the glacier, the Ellison father and son team suffered a fall into a crevasse. The team of four was ascending in order for Gregory Sloop (18), Gerald Ellison (45), Douglas Ellison (16), and