

Analysis

Paul Scarborough's body was found on November 11 at 3350 meters by two climbers after an intensive week-long search. (It is believed that the body was buried in snow until that morning.) No ice ax was in evidence. He had sustained superficial head lacerations, and fractures to the leg, arm and ribs; the cause of death was established as hypothermia. It is speculated that he lost his footing, and tumbled/slid several hundred feet down the ice, and that his ice ax was lost during the fall. One of the victim's crampons was dislodged; it is not known if this happened before or during the fall.

It is common (especially in low snow years) for the north side of Mount Shasta to be covered in "blue ice." This blue ice is old, highly transformed snow that is clear and extremely hard and brittle. It can require a fair amount of technique to place specialized ice-climbing tools from a good stance into blue ice; in the event of a fall on this ice, self-arrest may not be possible. In such conditions, unbelayed simultaneous roped travel is not advisable. The decision whether or not to use a belay needs to be carefully considered. In the absence of a belay, traveling unroped may be preferable.

There were several accidents on Mount Shasta over the past three years. These accidents resulted in five deaths and numerous injuries, many of which go unreported. It is important that climbers recognize that ascent routes on Mount Shasta vary dramatically in difficulty, and that experience obtained on the easier routes may not be sufficient for the harder routes.

Climbers should be aware that they can obtain current information on conditions 24 hours a day by calling (916) 926-5555. (Source: Tom Grossman, Bay Area Mountain Rescue Unit)

(Editor's Note: Dennis Burge, China Lake Mountain Rescue Group, reported three accidents which occurred on Mount Whitney and North Palisade. One was a climbing accident which resulted from a neophyte losing control on a glissade. Burge made an interesting observation regarding the contributing cause: "It is interesting that two accidents occurred within four days of each other on the same slope. Climbing Mount Whitney by the trail is not mountaineering in the summer season, but in November with ice on the trail, it becomes mountaineering. That both victims had ice axes is further evidence of this. The lack of snow this November, due to our drought, caused people to think about climbing it in the late season who probably would not have otherwise tried it then. Over the years there have been many accidents on the same slope in late September and October (at least one fatal). The fact that the permit quota system for overnight climbs makes it hard to get a reservation in the summer season without planning long in advance may also be a contributory factor to these late season climbs and accidents. The quota period now ends on October 15."

The Angeles Chapter of the Sierra Club reported nine accidents for 1990, six of which resulted in fractures. No narratives were provided.)

STRANDED, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT, WEATHER, EXPOSURE, EXCEEDING ABILITIES

Colorado, Longs Peak

On January 14 at 0900, Mark Swinnerton (34) and Danny Pyatt (34) passed by rangers Kurt Oliver and Jim Detterline at the Chasm Meadows Cabin below the East Face of Longs Peak. The rangers informed the climbers that a storm was beginning, ice/snow

conditions were marginal on the peak, and that overnight gear was highly recommended for winter attempts. Swinnerton and Pyatt continued on to attempt Kiener's Route. Slowed by the marginal ice/snow conditions and caught in the storm, they traversed over to the top of the Notch Couloir and spent a brutal night without bivouac gear. Unfamiliar with the descent, they ended up in Glacier Gorge where they were found.

Analysis

Swinnerton and Pyatt sustained minor cold injuries but the results could have been much worse. They did not have adequate clothing or shelter for the conditions. A map and compass and the knowledge of how to put them to good use should also be part of the climber's equipment selection. A search costing several thousand dollars was necessary to solve this particular incident. It included sending out ground searchers and a helicopter into the storm. (Source: Rocky Mountain National Park Rangers)

FALL ON ICE, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT

Colorado, Boulder Canyon

On February 9, Gary Wheeler (33) fell 15 meters and slid another 30 meters, landing at the base of a waterfall and against a tree.

Wheeler had climbed the waterfall, tied a rope around a tree, and walked down a dirt path to give his partner the one pair of crampons they had. The partner fell several times trying to climb the waterfall, so Wheeler went up the dirt path to adjust the rope. He slipped when he went to adjust the rope. (Source: *The Denver Post*, February 10, 1990)

(Editor's Note: According to Dixon Hutchinson, leader of the Rocky Mountain Rescue Group, this was the first ice climbing death in the area in ten years. One or two die rock climbing in boulder Canyon every year, but not all of these are climbers.)

FALL ON ROCK, PROTECTION PULLED OUT

Colorado, Longs Peak

On April 15, Randy Joseph (33) fell suddenly and without warning during a lead on Longs Peak of Alexander's Chimney. Conditions were mixed thin ice and bare rock, with protection mostly rock devices. Joseph had removed his crampons for a short stretch. He fell about ten meters, pulling out a stopper. Joseph sustained a fractured fibula and displaced tibia on his left leg. His belayer, Jim Scott, assisted him in rappelling three pitches to Lamb's Slide and in struggling to Chasm Lake. While Scott went for help, Joseph crawled to the Chasm Meadows Cabin. Rangers met Joseph at the cabin, and he was flown out from Chasm Meadows on the following morning. (Source: Rocky Mountain National Park Rangers)

Analysis

Joseph is a highly skilled climber and former Longs Peak ranger. His efforts in getting from the climb to the cabin with a painful injury in winter conditions are quite noteworthy. Mixed climbs on large alpine peaks in winter conditions are inherently dangerous. This is an example of a team which was prepared for, and effectively dealt with, an emergency which could have ended up in a fatality for a less qualified team. (Source: Rocky Mountain National Park Rangers)