

FALL ON ICE, POOR POSITION, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT, INEXPERIENCE

New Hampshire, Meadows Cliffs—Rumney

On January 27, 1990, Mark Jacobson (23) and Zvi Cohen (22) were ice climbing in the Meadows area in Rumney, New Hampshire. They completed one climb, rappelled off, and began to look for another route. As the temperature had risen above freezing and the cliffs faced the sun, few climbs were in shape. They proceeded to the far right area of the cliff where Cohen soloed a short climb and Jacobson followed with a belay. They then decided to walk along the top of the cliff in the woods to look for another climb or to rappel off. As they were walking in the woods, Cohen decided to take a closer look at two other climbers who were finishing up on Centerfold. Cohen walked closer to the edge of the cliff onto a slab covered with wet leaves and dirt.

The two climbers, Robert Augart (23) and John Morris (21), saw Cohen and warned him that it was not safe to stand there. Cohen responded by turning around and taking a few steps back up the ledge, when he slipped and fell onto his side. He was unable to arrest his slide, since he was not wearing crampons or carrying an ice ax. He fell approximately 25 meters, and was knocked unconscious. Morris rappelled down to see if Cohen was all right. He did not respond, so Morris ran to his car and drove to a nearby house and called for help. Jacobson walked down the side of the cliff as Cohen was carrying their only rope. Jacobson met the rescue team and led them to the victim. During the rescue a large part of Centerfold collapsed, nearly hitting Cohen and the rescue team. Despite the fact that Cohen was less than 200 meters from the road when he fell, it took over an hour to get him to the road. He died several hours later in a hospital in Plymouth. (Source: Robert Augart and Mark Jacobson)

Analysis

Cohen had been rock climbing for two years, but this was his first season of ice climbing. He had picked up the technique of vertical ice climbing very quickly and was confident in leading. He had less experience in evaluating changing conditions and terrain. More winter climbing experience might have led Cohen to reconsider his position at the edge of the cliff, or at least to wear his crampons or carry an ax in hand. (Source: Robert Augart and Mark Jacobson)

AVALANCHE

New Hampshire, Mount Washington, Tuckerman Ravine

On March 30, 1990, the Mount Washington area received about 20 cm of new snow, with winds greater than 65 kph from the south. The winds continued through the night.

At 0800 the next morning, with 20-40 cm of overnight wind deposited snow noted in gullies and catchment areas, USFS Snow Rangers stationed in Tuckerman Ravine posted avalanche hazards as "HIGH", unchanged from the previous day, for all the skiing routes above the Little Headwall." This information is prominently displayed in two places: at the trailhead by the AMC base camp in Pinkham Notch, and at the Hermit Lake shelter at the base of the ravine.

At 1000, a nearby gully (Express) avalanched spontaneously. About the same time, we observed a solitary skier, carrying his skis, climbing near the top of Left Gully, which rises about 275 meters from the floor of the ravine toward the southwest. Two additional skiers were about 180 meters below him. Because of the highly unstable