

At 1658 additional medical supplies were flown to the scene on the short haul line, during the hover check phase, by the Mountain Rotors helicopter for use in the evacuation of Mr. Schall.

Mr Callahan was short hauled, with Ranger Berkenfield as spotter, from the scene to the Garnet Canyon Meadows at 1710. Mr. Callahan was then transferred to the Kjerstad helicopter and flown directly to St. John's Hospital in Jackson, Wyoming, with Ranger Martin attending, arriving at 1724.

Mr. Callahan was diagnosed at St. John's Hospital as having a compound tibia/fibula fracture, which required surgery, and a scalp laceration. (Source: Jim Woodmencey, Ranger, Grand Teton National Park)

Analysis

In a phone conversation with Mr. Callahan on July 28, I was told that he was descending from the Lower Saddle of the Grand Teton, after a failed solo attempt on the Exum Ridge, at 1030.

Mr. Callahan stated that he was glissading down the snow near the base of the Middle Teton, south and west of the trail near the caves in Garnet Canyon, when his right heel caught on hard snow or a submerged rock. His leg snapped, he lurched backward and hit his head on a rock.

Mr. Callahan also stated that he stopped in place and was able to drag himself to some nearby rocks. He then yelled for help and was soon met by other climbers in the area. Peter Krantz and Peter Lenz, M.D., administered first aid. Krantz descended to report the accident and Lenz remained with the victim until rangers arrived.

Mr. Callahan stated that he did not have an ice ax with him. (Source: Jim Woodmencey, Ranger, Grand Teton National Park)

FALL ON ROCK, CLIMBING UNROPED, PARTY SEPARATED, PROBABLE THOUGHT PROCESS IMPAIRMENT

Wyoming, Tetons, Grand Teton

On September 16 at 1100, Russ Soderlund (40) was climbing the Owen-Spalding route on the Grand Teton with a friend, Gretchen Rupp. Soderlund and Rupp left the Owen-Spalding route above the rappel station and traversed the southeast side of the mountain, near the Exum ridge, to continue to the summit from there. Soderlund continued down a 5.4 friction slab, then continued out on a more difficult face. About the 4100 meter level, he slipped and fell onto a ledge, landing on his heels, with his body leaning backward. He continued to fall approximately 20 meters to another ledge where witnesses saw him sustain fatal injuries. He continued to fall, hit another ledge, and continued into the Ford Couloir where he slid to a point approximately 60 meters above the top of the Petzoldt ridge on the west side of the couloir where he came to rest. He came to rest approximately 60 meters above the toe of the snow, falling approximately 180 meters total to about 3900 meters.

At least three other climbers were in the vicinity of Soderlund when he fell. Austin was next to Soderlund when he fell and Coletti was 30 meters below and to the west. After watching Soderlund fall, Coletti, who was soloing, continued to the summit of the Grand Teton, saw that Rupp was safe with another climber (Scott Cole, a Jackson Hole Mountain Guide), and from there ran down to Jenny Lake Ranger Station where

he reported the accident to Ranger Tory Finley. The body was sling loaded from the site at 1912. (Source: Tory Finley, Ranger, Grand Teton National Park)

Analysis

Ms. Rupp stated they had signed out for the Owen-Spalding route and everything was going according to plan until they reached the bottom of the "Owens Chimney." At this juncture, Soderlund stated he wanted to take a different route other than ascending the chimney. This route was about a five minute traverse around the south side of the mountain and across some large slabs of rock. Soderlund stated he had ascended and descended by this alternate route both times he had climbed the Grand Teton. Rupp stated about five to ten minutes after leaving the chimney they came to a location on the southeast side of the mountain which was "very exposed"—slabs of rock were sloping outward and downward and fading into a sheer exposure. At the top of the slabs were a male and a female roped up.

While she was on the summit ridge, she was contacted by a Jackson Hole Mountain Guide. He asked if she was the woman who had just broken up with her climbing partner to take separate routes. When she indicated this was true, he told her Soderlund had probably fallen to his death. Scott offered to permit her to join his group and make the descent and she accepted. She was contacted by Ranger Martin about the time they arrived at Lupine Meadows. The following was learned.

Rupp has had quite a bit of experience in third and fourth class climbing and extensive experience in second class. She has done some technical climbing.

She stated that Soderlund had lived in Aspen for quite some time and had made ascents of many of the 4200 meter peaks in Colorado. She believes he had had about the same level of experience as she. She had never seen him with any type of technical climbing equipment since he had lived in Montana. She had known him for about four years, but Soderlund first came to Montana about seven or eight years ago.

She stated Soderlund was in outstanding health. He was a golf course supervisor and much of his work was physical. He used a pair of old leather Raichle climbing boots for climbing. It was her impression he was a very deliberate person and she felt he was prudent and careful.

Soderlund made the traverse across the slabs without any protection. They had not taken ropes with them, thinking to turn back if the climb got "too dreadful."

Rupp watched Soderlund make the traverse across the slabs and then she hollered down to him that she was not going to attempt it. The traverse was probably 30 feet across and down. Soderlund hollered back that it was "OK"—he would go ahead and make the ascent this way and Rupp could go back and try the chimney route and they would meet on the summit. So Rupp went back and climbed the chimney by herself. The ascent of the chimney took her about half an hour.

An interview with the decedent's sister revealed the following. Ms. Soderlund stated that her brother had been involved in two very serious bicycle accidents in the last six years, both of which involved head injuries which required extensive hospitalization.

The first occurred approximately six years ago in which the doctors told him that he should never ride a bicycle again. The reason was that he had suffered a severe skull fracture and brain injury that led to a form of amnesia. The doctors felt that if he fell or was thrown from a bicycle, it could kill him.

The second accident occurred approximately one and a half years ago when he was struck from the rear by an automobile while riding his bicycle. He was thrown to the ground and suffered a major concussion that required two weeks of hospitalization.

Ms. Soderlund said the accumulated injuries from these two accidents resulted in her brother being moderately disoriented when he involved himself in activities that required even minor thought processes. Ms. Soderlund provided an example: "Russell was driving her down a street that he was unfamiliar with. He would insist he knew where he was going and that he had been on that street before. When it became apparent to him the destination to which he was driving was not there, he became very frustrated and finally realized he was on the wrong street."

Ms. Soderlund went on to say that he was aware of his permanent impairment and therefore was very meticulous about everything he did. Usually his being meticulous compensated for his thought process impairment. Ms. Soderlund felt that is definitely not out of the realm of possibility and in fact very probable that when he began to advance on the fatal climb, he thought he was on a route that he had free climbed previously and would be able to successfully accomplish the feat.

Ms. Soderlund finished our interview by saying she felt he was disoriented on the climb and that disorientation probably led him to attempt climbing a route in which there was no chance of success. She stated that based on her observation of his past disorientation and statements from witnesses in this accident, she was not surprised that he had fallen from a route that he may have thought he was familiar with. (Source: William Miller and Donald Coelho, Rangers, Grand Teton National Park)

(Editor's Note: This tragic fatality is difficult to categorize and even to count as a mountain climbing event. It is included to alert everyone who has—or knows someone who has—a concussion history to heed the advice provided.)

FALL ON ROCK, EXCEEDING ABILITIES

Wyoming, Fremont Canyon

TW (36) and EO (37) planned a weekend (in August) of climbing in Fremont Canyon. They arrived on Saturday morning at 0900. To start the day TW rappelled to the sloping ledge just above the river at the bottom of the canyon below the route Hemateria, then proceeded to set up a belay anchor. After the anchor was set up, EO rappelled down to join TW. Next, TW proceeded to lead Stone King. This route involves a difficult traverse to a small pedestal at the base of an arete. Tom made the traverse and was about four meters up the arete when he took a leader fall. Because of the traverse, rope stretch and the fact that EO was pulled off the belay ledge, the total distance of the fall was six to seven meters. There was no problem with the protection or the belay anchor. In the process of falling, TW's ankle struck the pedestal which resulted in a fracture. At this point both TW and EO were hanging over the river. TW was hanging from his protection with EO holding him on belay. EO was hanging from the anchor. EO was able to climb back onto the ledge while holding TW on belay. EO then proceeded to throw a loop consisting of the slack part of the rope to TW which he used to pull himself onto the belay ledge. TW was unable to climb out of the canyon on his own. They had brought a pair of mechanical ascenders but had conveniently left them in the car. They decided that EO should climb out, get the ascenders, and return rather than use Prussik loops. This was because TW had little or no experience using