

(Editor's Note: This was one of several "unable to self-arrest" situations on Mount Hood. In this case, it was because of icy conditions. In other cases, it was because of inexperience. One of the falls was caused by soft snow balling up in crampons. For other examples, read on.)

FALL ON ICE, UNABLE TO SELF-ARREST, PLACED NO PROTECTION, EXCEEDING ABILITIES, FATIGUE

Oregon, Mount Hood, Leutholds Couloir

On June 3, 1994, a party of five was climbing Leutholds Couloir on the west side of Mount Hood. The group reached the "hourglass" (9,200 feet) around 0815 and rested for about 20 minutes. Continuing, the lead team of three led by Rocky Henderson had made it through the steepest section and beyond where the angle eases to about 35 degrees. At 0915, as the second rope team of two was just coming out of the "hourglass," the lower climber stumbled and yelled, "Falling." He attempted to shove his ice ax into the snow, but it would not penetrate. The lead man was pulled off after attempting the same technique. They slid down the snow field, across a snow bridge and ended up about 1,000 feet below on the Reid Glacier. Henderson, using a cellular phone, called the Clackamas County Sheriff's Office and notified them of the accident, location, and the need for assistance. He then belayed his team back down, reaching the injured parties at 1015. Both parties were conscious and first stage hypothermic. One had head and shoulder injuries, the other a compound finger fracture, broken ribs, and badly bruised hip and elbow. Using packs and all available clothing, they were able to stabilize both patients and wait for more help. At 1100 radio contact was made with CCSO and patient assessment was given. At 1220 the 304th Air Force Reserve Rescue Squadron arrived on scene with two H-60 helicopters. Both patients (ages 46 and 47) were evacuated to Portland area hospitals and eventually made complete recoveries.

Analysis

Several factors contributed to this accident: lack of experience, fatigue, and over climbing their ability. I had climbed with the four other climbers on several occasions and as their climb leader felt that they were ready for something more challenging. They were all excited about doing a new route on Mount Hood. Before we left Illumination Saddle that morning, I had done a quick refresher on self-belay and general rope management. I have always been a very strong believer in the self-belay concept to the point of down playing self-arrest. I tell students that self-arrest should be thought of as a last ditch effort. I had that morning demonstrated jumping on the head of your ice axe, but barely mentioned self-arrest. I believe this was a factor, because when the fall occurred, the reflex response was an attempt to drive the shaft in. When that failed, they did not reflexively go to a self-arrest position. I believe a more experienced, better trained mountaineer could have arrested the fall. Both climbers were extremely physically fit, which no doubt helped in their recovery. The climber who triggered the fall was not performing at his optimum due to the fact that he was working late the night before.

Another interesting fact regards the use of helmets. Largely from reading *Accidents in North America*, I have become a proselytizer for helmet use. We were all wearing helmets, but the two victims lost theirs in the fall. They had rented Elderid helmets from REI. Pictures showed later that they were wearing them over ski hats and probably too loosely.

In retrospect, I believe that I should have placed some protection in the hourglass. A couple of pickets as running belays would have prevented the accident. I overestimated the abilities of my fellow climbers and they paid the price. (Source: Rocky Henderson, Portland Mountain Rescue)

LOSS OF CONTROL—VOLUNTARY GLISSADE, POOR POSITION, NO HARD HAT, EXCEEDING ABILITIES

Oregon, Mount Hood, Southside Route

On June 12, 1994, Paul Luty (39) was descending the south side (Hogsback) route, when he lost control during glissade and slid/fell about 700 vertical feet, impacting several large rocks and stopping on the upper White River Glacier at 9,100 feet. A joint agency rescue team (USFS, Hood River Crag Rats, AMR Ambulance, Nordic Ski Patrol) stabilized the subject, and raised him several hundred feet off the glacier. A snowcat from the ski area transported the subject to an ambulance at the ski lodge.

Analysis

Glissading is a safe method of descent under the following conditions: a) climbers are experienced in the technique; b) climbers are adept at ice axe self-arrest; c) the glissade route has been previously scouted and surface conditions of snow/ice are known; d) there are no hazards threatening the route; e) the runout along the glissade route is safe; and f) the slope is not subject to avalanche or snow slides. (Source: Jeff Sheetz, Portland Mountain Rescue)

FALL FROM RAPPEL, UNCLIPPED FROM SAFETY LINE, NO HARD HAT

Oregon, Camp Baldwin

On July 6, 1994, Adam Clark (17) was teaching a group of Boy Scouts—about 17 of them—how to rappel. According to the report, he unclipped from his safety line to adjust the slack in the line. He then lost his balance and fell 70 feet to his death. (Source: Jeff Sheetz, Portland Mountain Rescue)

Analysis

The details here are difficult to sort out. One question would be to ask why he was “clipped in” to a safety line. Standard practice for teaching rappelling is to *tie* in to a belayed line before clipping into the rappel line. There was no explanation forthcoming from the Boy Scouts as to why this young man was allowed to teach such a large class, to be unsupervised, and not to wear a helmet. (Source: Jed Williamson)

FALL ON SNOW, FALLING INTO CREVASSE—SNOW SLIDE, UNABLE TO SELF-ARREST, EXCEEDING ABILITIES

Oregon, Mount Hood, Cooper Spur

On July 23, 1994, about 1330, a party of four was descending the Cooper Spur route when at least one individual lost his footing high on the route (c. 10,000 feet). The roped party was unable to team arrest before sliding and tumbling about 1,000 feet onto the upper Eliot glacier. Gerald Milton (51) and Ole Groupe (16) were buried in a crevasse at 8,800 feet by the ensuing wet snow slide which followed their fall line.

The accident was witnessed and reported independently by two climbing teams. One