

Two other parties came to the ledge, both guided. One guide climbed up to see what the delay might be. He found the leader hanging upside down, about 30 feet below a piece of protection. She had obvious head injuries and was unconscious. Both guides then climbed to her and lowered her to the ledge on top of the fifth pitch. One of them then went for help.

The Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department helicopter was dispatched, and rescue personnel got to the ledge to establish a lowering system. They found that the victim had succumbed. She had sustained a massive basilar skull injury.

Analysis

The victim had been climbing for ten years, but had just started leading this year. She was described as able to follow 5.10, but had limited leading experience. The guidebook advises taking large gear to protect the last two pitches. She may not have had adequate gear to protect, though since the guides took her rack, we have no idea what she had. That she was not wearing a helmet obviously led to her fatal injury.

Request: If you come across an accident like this, don't remove gear if at all possible. Leave it for the SAR team. Removing evidence from the scene makes analysis very difficult. (Source: Russell Peterson, SAR Officer, LVMPD)

(Editor's Note: Peterson reported three other accidents from the area, but they were hikers who had gone astray. One of them, a 32 year old male with a church group, had gone "scrambling" in the cliffs above their picnic area. He was last seen traversing on a small, exposed rock ledge high above. He fell 200 feet, striking the rocks three times before landing at the bottom, fatally injured. This kind of event often gets identified as a "climbing" accident, which for our purposes it clearly is not.)

AVALANCHE, FAILURE TO FOLLOW DIRECTIONS—WARNING NOTICES, INEXPERIENCE

New Hampshire, Mount Washington, Lion Head Trail

On January 5, the body of Alexandre Cassan—one of four members in a party attempting an ill-advised winter ascent of the 6,288-foot peak—was discovered by a U. S. Forest Service snow ranger about one hour after the 1420 avalanche near the Lion Head Trail on Mount Washington's steep southeast slope. All but one hand of Cassan was buried in the snow. The French Canadian hiker and his three companions apparently lost their way while attempting to climb up the recently closed Lion Head winter hiking trail. After losing the trail a short distance from its start off the popular Tuckerman Ravine Trail, the group made its way into an area that is prone to snow avalanches. Authorities are unsure if the hikers created the avalanche themselves, or if they just happened to be in its path. Cassan was discovered in an area just a couple of hundred feet from where rescuer Albert Dow was killed in a similar avalanche 14 winters ago.

U. S. Forest Service snow ranger Brad Ray said warning signs alerting hikers to the high avalanche danger were posted at the base of the mountain at the Appalachian Mountain Club's Pinkham Notch Visitor Center, and along the trail. Additionally, signs warning hikers that the old Lion Head Trail had been closed permanently were also in place. Forest service snow rangers Chris Joosen and Brad Ray both responded to the scene immediately. Joosen was first to arrive and he spotted Cassan's hand sticking out of the snow-covered slope.

Analysis

The French-speaking Quebec hikers, who had some winter hiking experience, may have misunderstood the warning signs, said Rebecca Oreskes, a public information specialist for the U. S. Forest Service. Nonetheless, the hikers had been advised by AMC personnel in the area not to attempt the hike up the mountain as conditions on the summit were extreme—with minus 33 degree temperatures and 100 mile per hour winds—and the avalanche danger on the mountain's lower slopes very high.

The Lion Head winter trail, long a favorite of winter climbers on Mount Washington, was closed by the Forest Service two months ago after a late autumn landslide created increased winter avalanche risks along the route. Last month the Forest Service established a new alternate route up the mountain. This new route, while steeper than the Lion Head winter trail, is signed and open for winter hiking use. (Source: From an article by Mike Dickerman in *The Courier*, Littleton, NH, January 10, 1996)

(Editor's Note: Had Cassan's partners done a hasty search before going for help, they might have seen his hand. This was one of six deaths in the Presidential Range, four of which would be classified as skiing- and hiking-related incidents. Two were skiing on Gulf of Slides when another skier triggered an avalanche, and they were in the path of it.

Two other fatalities were the result of falling. In one case, a man on top of Lion Head rocks dropped his sun glasses, and when he went to recover them, he fell into Tuckerman Ravine. The other case was a climber who took off his rope on easy ground near the top of Pinnacle Gully and went to see other climbers. He fell to his death, just missing two other solo climbers.

The sixth victim died from exposure and hypothermia during his descent from Mount Eisenhower on a cold winter day.)

FAULTY USE OF CRAMPONS—GLISSADING**New Hampshire, Frankenstein Cliff and Gulf of Slides**

At Frankenstein a woman was doing a seated glissade from just below Standard Route. She caught a crampon and was flipped face down for the remainder of the slide to the tracks. Her ankle was injured and she had to be carried to the parking lot.

In the Gulf of Slides a man was doing a seated glissade when he caught a crampon. He flipped and impaled himself on his ice ax through his mid-section. He walked out to the AMC Pinkham Notch Camp with the ax still through his abdomen from the upper left to lower right quadrant. No organs were injured.

Analysis

There is no good reason for glissading with sharp spikes on our feet. (Source: George Hurley)

FALL ON ROCK, INADEQUATE PROTECTION**New Hampshire, Cathedral Ledge, Book of Solemnity**

On August 15, a husband and wife team were climbing The Book of Solemnity on Cathedral. The leader crossed the crux traverse (5.9+) in the second lead without placing protection. He belayed at the end of the traverse at the trees on Upper Refuse. The second climber fell while trying to make the hard moves at the crux. Since the rope ran