

He suffered multiple fractures and internal injuries. (Source: From a report in the *Oregonian*, May 28, 1996)

*(Editor's Note: Gierlich was wearing a harness and rope, but there was no indication how he fell or what his partner was doing. It is interesting to note that Tom Layton, a chief in Fire District 14, said, "This is a real common occurrence. We pull about five or six climbers out of here every year.")*

## **STRANDED, FAILURE TO FOLLOW ROUTE, CLIMBING ALONE AND UNROPED, HASTE, WEATHER**

### **Oregon, Mount Hood**

On Friday, May 31, I arrived at Timberline Lodge at 2330 with the intent of climbing Mount Hood via the Sandy Glacier Headwall, a moderate snow and ice route. I hiked to the summit via the south side/Hogsback route before sunrise. Finding excellent snow conditions and clear, cold weather, I headed to the Sandy Glacier. Once on the Sandy Glacier, I made the critical error of failing to traverse far enough to the west. This left me at the base of the Sandy Couloir route rather than the Sandy Glacier Headwall route. I climbed the couloir to its top, where I was shocked to find rime-covered rock towers where I expected low angle snow slopes leading to the summit. I realized my error and recognized the rock towers were the upper buttress of the Yocum Ridge. It was late morning by this time and the ambient temperature had risen dramatically. I tried to climb east into the Leuthold Couloir, but was impeded by difficult rock climbing. My attempts to traverse west onto the Sandy Glacier Headwall and to downclimb the Sandy Couloir were stymied by deteriorating snow conditions. I planned on waiting until the next morning for the snow to consolidate before making another attempt at downclimbing the route. I alerted a climbing party on the Reid Glacier to my predicament in case I would not be able to extricate myself.

This, indeed, became the case as the night was warm and snow conditions failed to improve. I waited Sunday for my eventual rescue which came in the form of an Air Force helicopter.

### **Analysis**

I was climbing very fast, intending to summit twice in one day. I simply made a careless route finding error. Because I was attempting an easy route, I relaxed, got caught up in the fantastic climbing and made a stupid mistake. Climbing, especially alpine solo climbing, is a game in which constant vigilance is necessary. Had I been paying attention, this incident could easily have been avoided. (Source: Daniel Smith-27).

*(Rescuer's Note: Although this mission resulted in a successful air evacuation, the Air Force rescue helicopters [MH-60 Pavehawks] made two attempts before the extrication. The very warm temperatures which created the unstable snowpack and rendered the ground approach unsafe, also created density-altitude limitations for the aircraft. Mountaineers should be aware that rescue helicopters may be limited, despite "fair weather" conditions at even moderate altitudes. Getting off route on the approach to this particular route has happened before, and often enough so that it has prompted a warning in the guidebook. (Source: Jeff Sheetz, Portland Mountain Rescue)*

*(Editor's Note: There was another Oregon report of one fatality on Mount Thielson involving a young woman (20) who left her hiking partner to continue "a little farther" on more technical terrain. Her partner stopped, and shortly thereafter, she saw the fall. Kristen Gehling landed on her head after a 20 foot fall, then slid another 200 feet in the loose shale. Whether this was an intended technical climb or not, the terrain turned from a hiking venture into a climbing event.)*

## **FALLING ROCK**

### **Washington, Guye Peak**

On June 1, while climbing on the lower part of the south section of Guye Peak's West Face, Kristin Beerli was struck and injured by a large (about 100 pounds) rock slab that came loose while she was being top belayed. Seattle Mountain Rescue personnel responded, and a MAST helicopter from Fort Lewis was dispatched. The victim was rescued and transported to a medical center where she was treated for a punctured lung.

During the rescue, the medic's pack was blown off the ridge by rotor downdraft. It tumbled 300 feet down the face, scattering the contents over the scree slope below. Observers reported that the helicopter rotor had contacted tree branches while hovering above the victim. (Source: *Bergtrage*, Number 148, December 1996)

## **RAPPEL ANCHOR FAILURE, INADEQUATE PROTECTION, FALL ON ROCK**

### **Washington, Mount Thompson**

On September 17, John Cain and Dale Ramquist climbed Mount Thompson via the West Ridge. Instead of going down the East Ridge, the normal descent route, they opted to descend by rappelling their ascent route. They reportedly had a disagreement about the quality of their first rappel anchor, and, over Cain's objections, Ramquist proceeded to rappel. The anchor apparently failed as soon as he loaded it, precipitating a fall down the northwest corner and out of sight of Cain, taking both ropes in the process. Cain hiked out for help, presuming Ramquist had been killed in the fall.

Seattle Mountain Rescue personnel (first five, then three more) and Guardian I responded to the scene. At 0830 on the 18th, Ramquist was spotted by Guardian I. He waved. MAST's Blackhawk helicopter arrived and the victim was extricated.

It was later learned that Ramquist's injuries were minor, including a cut on his left leg and lots of bruising. In fact, he was ambulatory, in spite of an estimated 50 to 60 foot fall.

### **Analysis**

Single point rappel anchors need to be bombproof. The type of anchor these two had set up is not known, other than the fact that it was not adequate. (Source: *Bergtrage*, Number 148, December 1996)

*(Editor's Note: Reports were not submitted in time for publication from the key areas in Washington—Mount Rainier, Olympic, and North Cascades National Parks. They will be included next year.)*