

FALL ON SNOW, FAILURE TO FOLLOW ROUTE, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT, EXCEEDING ABILITIES

Oregon, Three-Fingered Jack, South Ridge

On October 26, Karl Iwen (20s) fell to his death while descending Three-Fingered Jack.

As he was unfamiliar with the mountain, Karl asked to join two climbers he met at the trailhead. They completed the "technical" part of the climb (ascending and descending) then unroped to hike out. There was a patch of snow covering rock west of the climber's trail, and Karl ventured out onto this snow. He slipped and could not stop his fall. The other two climbers watched Karl, but were unable to help him. He carried an ice ax, but it was strapped to his pack at the time of the fall. He slid into a couloir and dropped about 600 feet in a tumbling fall.

Analysis

Karl was not familiar with the mountain and the route, but left his companions and did not follow the climber's trail off the mountain. Also, venturing out onto snow above the west face of the mountain with his ice ax strapped to his pack showed a lack of awareness of the dangers he faced in this alpine environment. Karl had just moved to Oregon from the Midwest. (Source: Jeff Sheetz, Portland Mountain Rescue)

(Editor's Note: The other three accidents from Oregon included AMS brought on by fatigue, occurring at the 11,000 foot level on Mount Hood; a fractured ankle incurred upon jumping over a crevasse on Mount Hood; and a fractured heel after a 15 foot fall on Mount Washington's West Ridge. There was a telemark skiing injury below Crater Rock on Mount Hood. He fell several times, ultimately attributing this to having his skis on the wrong feet!)

FALL ON ROCK, RAPPEL ERROR, DARKNESS

Utah, Zion National Park, Prodigal Son

On New Years, 1997, John Christensen (36) died while soloing Prodigal Son in Zion National Park. Having fixed two pitches the previous day, he tried to complete the route in one push on December 31, New Year's Eve. I last saw him climbing by headlamp at 9 pm. I was bivied on the seventh pitch of the Lowe Route.

Analysis

Judging from the speed he was climbing, it seems that he would have made it to the top. But for some reason, at night, he rappelled the route. The SAR team recovered his body January 2. (His watch had stopped at 1:34 am.) The SAR team believes that because he was rappelling on ropes of different diameter (7mm and 10.5 mm), he rappelled off the end of the thin rope after it slipped. But no one is sure.

He should not have rappelled. If he made it to the top, he should have walked off. There is a paved descent trail which takes one hour to walk down. If he did not make it to the top, it's highly probable he made it to the bivy at the base of the last pitch. Perhaps he couldn't free climb the sparsely protected 5.4 section in the dark. Then he should have bivied. There is a large dirt ledge (you can unrope) and trees and bushes for protection. It was cold, but above freezing, so he would have survived. He was climbing with full rain and cold weather gear.