

“my ice ax would not hold as my brake.” He said he slid over 100 yards, striking many exposed rocks. He was able to slow his descent somewhat by rolling onto his back and digging in his heels.

### **Analysis**

This accident could have been avoided if I had taken the time to test conditions. It would also have helped if I had used the shaft end of my ax, not the point.

Because of a severely sprained ankle and a gash on the back of my head, I was medivacked to the hospital in Jackson. I also received excellent help from other climbers in the area.... (Source: Steve Fleming)

## **FALL ON ROCK, RAPPEL ROPES KNOT “UNRAVELED”**

### **Wyoming, Grand Teton, Guide’s Wall**

On September 13, Karen Turk (32), Matt Goewert (33), and Carrie Dagher were descending Guide’s Wall when this incident occurred. Goewert and Dagher stated that the party of three had climbed the Guide’s Wall route to within two pitches of the top. At this point, Turk elected to remain while Goewert and Dagher finished the route. In preparation for their descent, Goewert tied both their ropes together using an overhand knot, leaving about six to eight inches of tail. One rope was 10mm in diameter and described as new, the other rope a 10.5mm in diameter was described as used. Goewert and Dagher each rappelled down to Turk’s position, then the three of them each rappelled once down to the next station. At this point, Goewert started to untie the knot by loosening it (for a single rope rappel) then decided to keep the ropes tied together as the final rappel would be another long, double rope rappel. Goewert re-secured the knot by pulling on all ends to tighten, which he demonstrated. The ropes were threaded through three rappel rings which were secured by multiple pieces of webbing tied around a tree. Goewert then rappelled approximately 80 to 90 feet to the next ledge. When Goewert finished this rappel, Dagher said that she and Turk moved the knot about twelve inches forward, but did not adjust it. Turk then proceeded to rappel. When Turk was approximately 30 feet above the ledge, Dagher states that she watched the knot “unravel,” causing Turk to fall. Turk fell about 15 to 20 feet, struck her back against a rock prow, then fell another ten to 15 feet onto the ledge, landing on her back.

Goewert said that Turk never lost consciousness, but was in significant pain. In conducting a physical assessment of Turk, he found a large laceration across her lower back, with exposed spine, but no other significant injuries. His treatment included care and comforting of the patient and monitoring vital signs. Dagher reported the incident via Goewert’s cell phone.

### **Analysis**

Goewert, an experienced lead climber, said that he’s been using the overhand knot for a couple of years, but has always been a little uncomfortable with it. He added that it’s a knot used by a lot of climbers he knows. He’s not sure why the knot came untied. It had held multiple rappels and, after having been loosened, had been re-secured by himself and rappelled on once again. Goewert added that he would no longer use this knot.

In a phone interview with Turk on the morning of September 13, she described herself as fairly new to climbing, having started in May of this year. She said she has climbed a lot in Illinois, but this was her first “alpine” route. She could offer no additional infor-

mation surrounding the nature of the accident, but added that Dagher had made a comment about the knot, to the effect that “it looked pretty weird” and she wasn’t clear how it could hold. This comment was made at the last rappel station. Turk said she was aware that Goewert had adjusted the knot at this station but did not see him do so.

Turk described her injuries as tissue only, with no fractures. The wound (approximately four inches long and one inch wide) had been surgically cleaned and sutured, but she was unsure as to the number of sutures required. (Source: Mark Magnuson, SAR Coordinator)

*(Editor’s Note: This method of tying the ends of two climbing ropes together started to appear recently, being referred to as a “Euro-guide knot.” One theory behind the use of the knot is that it does not snag as easily as other choices. Another theory is that it is easier to untie than a double fisherman’s or figure of eight after the strain of several rappellers. This later theory certainly appears to be true!)*

## **FALL ON ROCK, CLIMBING ALONE, INADEQUATE CLOTHING AND EQUIPMENT, INEXPERIENCE**

### **Wyoming, Grand Teton National Park, Disappointment Peak**

On October 5 at 1245, John Jay Leach (23) fell to his death while climbing up cliffs above Amphitheater Lake. He fell an estimated 150 feet from or near the East Chimney route on Disappointment Peak at an elevation of approximately 10,000 feet. Leach had been on a day hike to the lake with six companions where he separated from them with the intention of climbing the mountain. Unassociated hikers in the area witnessed the accident and went to his assistance, but determined that he had died in the fall. Mitchell Smith had also witnessed the fall and hiked down to a phone at Jenny Lake Ranger Station to report the incident to Grand Teton National Park officials. Two park rangers were flown to a heli-spot at Amphitheater Lake and then climbed to the victim, confirming that he died of head injuries. Leach was flown by helicopter sling load to the Lupine Meadows Rescue Cache where his body was turned over to the Teton County Coroner.

### **Analysis**

John Jay Leach was a novice climber with minimal formal training who was on very technical terrain. The investigation revealed that his experience was limited to some rappelling but no roped climbing. The cliffs that he fell from are moderate fifth class terrain where the great majority of experienced climbers would feel the need to be roped. Loose rock is always a consideration in the Teton range and could have been a factor in this incident.

He was not properly equipped to do an ascent of Disappointment Peak by the route he had chosen. He had no rope, harness, climbing protection or partner with him. Additionally he was dressed only in shorts, t-shirts and running shoes. Leach was not wearing a climbing helmet, although this piece of equipment would not have mitigated the injuries incurred in the severe fall and was not a factor.

This was apparently his first trip to Amphitheater Lake and he was unfamiliar with the Teton range. Leach would have passed a sign at the Lupine Meadows trailhead warning that mountain climbing is a hazardous activity and that loose rock was common in the range. This also advised that proper equipment and training were necessary. At least one of his companions had tried to convince him to stay with the group, but Leach