

- The disturbance of the slope by the Hood River party and the Mazama party may have weakened the slope however the release may have been natural.
- Lack of awareness amongst many climbers on Mount Hood that day about the potential for large slab avalanches “even on nice days.”

(Source: From a report by the Incident Response Committee, consisting of John Blanck, Al Cooke, Josh Lockerby, Alan Proffitt, Dave Sauerbrey, Larry Stadler, and Ian Wade)

DISLODGED ROCK—FALL ON ROCK, ROPE SEVERED

Pennsylvania, Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, Mount Minsi

On the afternoon of March 26, Daniel O'Malley, Tim Feitzinger, and Jeff Sukenick decided to take advantage of the nice weather to go rock climbing on Mount Minsi. O'Malley and Feitzinger began climbing an established route. Sukenick waited for his companions at the base of the pitch. During the climb, O'Malley evidently dislodged a large rock, which knocked him off the mountain. Feitzinger was in the process of catching him when the climbing rope was severed by the falling boulder. O'Malley fell another 130 to 150 feet to the talus slope below. Sukenick heard the rock hit the ground near him. When he checked it, he came upon O'Malley. Sukenick detected shallow respirations and a soft pulse. He ran down across the talus field to a nearby highway and stood in the road until a vehicle stopped. The driver notified the county dispatch center via her cellular phone. Sukenick then returned to O'Malley and began administering CPR. Rangers and paramedics arrived on scene about 40 minutes after the fall and determined that O'Malley had died. The park's high angle rescue team, comprised of rangers and representatives from the Pennsylvania and New Jersey forestry services and New Jersey state parks, worked themselves into a position above Feitzinger, who was stranded on the cliff, and assisted him in climbing to the top of the rock face. Team members and fire and rescue personnel from several other agencies then removed O'Malley's body via a belayed carry-out down the talus slope in the dark. The response involved about 60 people from seven agencies. (Source: Ed Whitaker, DR, Pennsylvania District)

FALL ON ROCK, EQUIPMENT FAILURE—GRI-GRI

Texas, Barton Creek

The climbing accident concerning the failed Gri-Gri occurred on October 3rd at the cliffs along Barton Creek, near Austin. The climb is called Cyborg, and rated 5.11c; however, I was beyond the crux when I fell. My thigh slammed into a tree 20 feet below the overhang from which my fingers came loose. Blood poured from the numb area as I tried to determine whether my femur was broken or not. I was fortunate that my belayer sacrificed his right palm to slow me down and eventually break my fall. I was also lucky that the cliff overhang beyond the large horizontal ledge, which would have been much more damaging, perhaps even fatal, than the near vertical tree trunk.

Analysis

I am 39 years old and I have been climbing since 1993, with regularity. The one time I spoke with my belayer afterwards, he said later he inspected the Gri-Gri, and he found the rivet to be loose. He suspects this was the cause. I am always very meticulous about double-checking everything, and I remember carefully checking to make sure the Gri-Gri was threaded properly. What went wrong? The Gri-Gri failed. My belayer got a huge rope burn from tightly clenching the rope, and he eventually got the device to lock-up. No bones were broken, and a prescription of Hydrocordon eased the pain, but some lessons were learned.

The more parts there are in a device, the more things that can go wrong. If dirt gets into the Gri-Gri while climbing, it can hinder some of the device's mechanisms. If latch gets snagged in the open position, the rope can slide through. If a part get worn, bent, or cracked, the weakness may not be visible.

No belay device is completely safe. But when I begin climbing again, after I quit limping, I will never again allow anyone to belay me with a Gri-Gri. (Source: Seamus Munroe)

(Editor's Note: This is recorded as Equipment Failure, but it should be noted that I have not received any reports of this device failing until now. There have been reports of individuals using Gri-Gris "upside down," but there is a diagram drawn on the device now.)

RAPPELLED OFF END OF ROPE—NO KNOT AND MISCALCULATION, DARKNESS

Utah, Zion National Park, Moonlight Buttress

On February 18, M. C. and D. G. (ages unknown) began an ascent of Moonlight Buttress (V 5.9 CI). They planned to climb three pitches to the "Rocker Block," fix lines to the ground, then finish the route the following day. As a result of a late start, they didn't get to the anchors until dark. M. C. fixed their first 60 meter rope and rappelled with the second 60 meter rope, stopping at the first set of anchors he came to and well before the end of his line. After fixing the second rope, he began his rappel, expecting to reach the ground. About 50 feet above the ground, he rappelled off the end of his rope. He hit the ground, losing consciousness for three to four minutes. D. G. then rappelled further down the first rope and fixed the second rope to the next set of anchors, continuing to the ground to assist M. C. Amazingly, M. C. suffered only minor bruises and scrapes and was able to walk away from the incident. The team did, however, retrieve their gear the next day and abandon their climb.

Analysis

Darkness was clearly a factor in this incident, since M. C. could not see the next (correct) anchors on his first rappel nor could he see that his rope didn't touch down on his second. However, the accident could have been easily avoided had the topos been consulted, as many of them clearly show three distinct sets of anchors. (It is possible to reach the ground using three 50 meter ropes or two 60 meter ropes.) This combined with the fact that he had too much rope