

Iain and Jim followed the typical approach, which is to climb up from Timberline Lodge on the south side to Illumination Saddle, then cross the Reid Glacier to Yokum Ridge. Like most routes on Mount Hood, this one relies on snow for travel. It is an alpine climbing, or mountaineering, route. It is not a hike, nor is it a rock climb. The descent is typically down the south side route.

The freezing level had been low recently but was rising at the time. The snow was refrozen enough to travel on comfortably with crampons. Snow cover on the route was good and only a very small section of the traverse around Yokum Ridge was bare. The headwall above the Sandy Glacier which constitutes the main climb to the summit ridges appeared to have very good snow coverage. The climbers saw a couple if isolated rocks fall as they approached the Sandy Glacier, but not more than one at a time and not an amount that is unusual for the Oregon Cascades. The pair spent all day Wednesday on the Sandy Glacier and did not observe any further large rockfall events, even in the heat of the afternoon.

The length of time the climbers took to assess their injuries—five hours—would have delayed the rescue significantly if airlift resources had not been available. Ground teams would have had to proceed in darkness.

For this route, a cellular phone would be a better choice for alerting authorities. Iain Morris believes that his helmet saved his life. (Sources: Oregon Mountaineering Association and Jeff Scheetz)

FALL ON ICE, ANCHOR AND CARABINER PROBABLY FAILED

Pennsylvania, Kitnersville, The Main Flow

About noon on December 27, JW (43) and BA (36) started on an ice climb popularly know as “The Banana” (WI 4) but more correctly called “The Main Flow” in Kitnersville. The conditions were good that day—cold (25-28 degrees F), cloudy, with somewhat brittle ice. The pair climbed the first 200 feet of the climb in two pitches with JW, the more experienced, leading. At this point they lowered a rope to a third climber BM (42) who had just arrived and wished to join them for the final pitch. All three men had been on the route before with JW having the most ascents. The crux second pitch having been completed, JW started on the longer final pitch (WI 3). While BM belayed from the trees to the right of the climb, BA sharpened a tool with a broken tip.

On the 70-80-degree ramp portion of the third pitch, JW placed ice screws at 28 feet and about 47 feet from the icy ledge at the base of the pitch and slightly above the belay. JW clipped both of the 8.8mm Bluewater ropes that they used into these pieces. His third screw, about 65 feet up on a 90-degree section, only got one rope since it was in better ice about five to six feet left of the line of the climb. At the top of the vertical section, at about 77 feet, JW put in a fourth screw and attached both ropes. At this point the climb gains a small ledge, taking the leader out of view of the belayer. Following this is a 12-foot vertical section. Down into the top of this formation JW placed his fifth and final screw at about 89 feet. The climb then angles slightly left on easy stepped terrain with some vertical sections of five feet or less. It ends at a rappel station on trees at about 157 feet from the base.

JW was out of sight and well above his last piece when he fell. There was no warning for the fall, no scream. Five or six feet of rope that came back to the belay was seen falling. He hit several times on the way down. His fall was to the left of his gear. With rope stretch, JW hit the icy ledge slightly above the belay head-first at a 60-70-degree angle.

The rescue call went in for help at about 2:00 p.m. The rescuers were on the scene very quickly. The Upper Black Eddy Fire Co., the Riegelsville-Palisades Fire Co., and the Point Pleasant High Angle Rescue Team among those responding. Almost as soon as the first rescue vehicles appeared on Route 32 at the base of the climb, there were three Philadelphia area news helicopters flying overhead. The noise of these helicopters made it extremely difficult for BA on the cliff with JW to communicate with the rescuers below and above. BM had informed the rescuers that there were houses on the top and that the best access would be from above. They lacked ascenders to use the rope BM had rappelled down on. The Point Pleasant Team set up on top of the cliff to get a Stokes basket down to JW. BA brought up blankets to keep JW warm and set a two-ice-screw anchor near JW's head for future use.

BM figured out that an EMT could gain the ledge quickly if he was belayed up a less icy rock corner to the right of the flow. The EMT from the Riegelsville-Palisades Fire Co. had a little rock climbing experience and no crampons or ice tools for the climb. BA used one of the climbing ropes and slings to rig a new belay on trees. BA again had great difficulty hearing or being heard over the helicopters. The EMT climbed to within 30 feet of the ledge, but the icy cracks in a vertical section proved too difficult for further progress. BA inquired about the possibility of the use of Prusiks to finish the ascent. BA dropped slings down to be used in this manner, but it quickly became evident that the EMT lacked the experience to use them and that BA would not be able to explain how to Prusik over the din of the helicopters. Instead BA fixed the free end of the rope to the belay and then tied loops in the rope so that the EMT would have a rope ladder to climb while BA continued to belay. From there the EMT was belayed to JW's position. As the EMT made his initial assessments BA hauled up his medical bag. The EMT intubated JW to keep his airway open, fitted JW with a neck collar and radioed his condition to those below.

The Point-Pleasant High Angle Rescue Team is a group of volunteers that mainly respond to incidents at Ralph Stover State Park—a popular nearby rock climbing area. They responded very quickly and bravely especially considering their lack of ice climbing gear or experience, plus they were less familiar with these cliffs. During this time the Point-Pleasant Team was trying to reach the ledge from above. When BA saw that the red rope they had lowered had reached the ledge, he shouted to let them know that they could start down. These shouts again were drowned out by the helicopters, because several minutes later BA heard them asking over the EMT's radio if rescuers below could verify that their rope had reached the ledge. BA then asked the EMT to relay this information to the team above with his radio. The Point-Pleasant Team then started down the rope to the ledge. About this time BM came back up to the ledge using Prusiks.

The Kitnersville cliffs are poorly bonded and friable red shale. They gain cohesion with the winter freeze so that ice climbing is safe. Nevertheless there is still a lot of loose rock to knock down in addition to hanging ice. Rappelling must be done with delicacy to reduce these dangers, especially in less traveled areas. As the first two members of the Point-Pleasant Team rappelled to the ledge, they knocked a few small rocks down. As a third member came down the rope, BA thought to warn him about the loose rock. His shouts were again futile even at a distance of 50 feet due to the din of the helicopters. Not 10 feet further down the rope, the rappeller knocked at least 100 pounds of rock down. Fortunately no one was injured, but it hit close to the six people on the ledge and continued on to the ground where most of the personnel were located. BA and BM screamed warnings of "Rock!" but these too were probably lost in the noise. That these rescuers suffered increased risks just so someone could get a better camera angle seems particularly odious.

A difficult litter lower was completed, taking about three hours, and JW was flown to St. Luke's Hospital in Bethlehem, PA. He died the next day from his injuries and probably would have done so even with instantaneous help.

Analysis

The gear was retrieved two days after the accident after a half-inch of new ice had formed over it. The measurements were taken eight days after the fall and are based on memory of the placements so they are not totally accurate. The climb had changed considerably in the meantime and 12 inches of snow had fallen. It is thus conceivable that JW was at the rappel station when he fell, since there is only a three-foot difference between the rappel station at 157 feet and the calculated fall of 154 feet. Also BM, the belayer, recalled that no rope had gone out for a short time preceding the fall.

On recovery of the gear it was learned that the fifth screw at 89 feet was missing the carabiner that would have attached to the ropes. This fifth screw showed no signs of impact and BM does not remember any significant tug or jerk before the fourth screw caught the fall. The carabiner on the fourth screw was deeply notched by the impact. The screw eye also was slightly bent.

Additional thoughts on what might have happened to the rope-side carabiner on the fifth screw: 1) It came off the sling and was on the ropes and went unnoticed. Certainly this was possible given the chaos that ensued, but it is not what was remembered. 2) It broke and we have not found the pieces. This is possible only if it could happen without marking the carabiner at the screw and without a noticed jerk at the belay. There was a lip, but no sharp edges nearby. Chris Harmston of Black Diamond performed an analysis of the situation based on accounts, diagrams, and video of the area. His analysis points to carabiner failure as the most likely cause. 3) It might have come off both ropes and the sling through vibration, but this seems unlikely.

As for what initiated the fall, this will never be known. Evidence suggests that JW was at the rappel station, but not fully anchored to it. Something then happened to make this anchor fail. Obviously another piece of gear could have lessened the severity of his fall. JW was on easy ground for him (he has climbed WI 6) and may have been unaware of how far he was above his last piece. He

did not have any more screws with him to place, but he did still have a Spectre or could have slung a small tree with some effort. As for the fifth screw, perhaps a locking carabiner or two in opposition would have been better before such a long run out.

Some notes on the media involvement in the story. The noise generated by three news helicopters was overwhelming on a cliff where communication is difficult if one car goes by on the road below. Their noise made it extremely difficult for BA and BM to talk to each other and to talk to the rescuers. They significantly increased the risks, while slowing the response of those involved. For JW, BA, BM and most climbers to have a rescuer killed or injured attempting their rescue provides a greater fear than their own injury or death. To have these generous people harassed and endangered for a news story seems irresponsible at best and possibly criminal. The value of this story was pure spectacle. The people that needed to know the information, JW's family and friends, would have been much better served by a caring phone call. Instead the story only created panic, as all the ice climbers in the area got frantic phone calls from friends and loved ones to see if it was them on the cliff. The story certainly did not warrant nor need live helicopter "dramatic footage" from the scene.

The media continued to behave poorly after they left the rescue. They failed to report the noise of the helicopters as a problem for the rescue even though BA made pointed remarks about it in a statement given as he left the incident. Reporters then had to be kept at bay by the hospital staff from the family and friends who came to visit. When approached for footage shot from the helicopters to assist in the investigation of why the gear failed, they flatly refused saying they would only turn over the part shown on TV and not without "a court order." Finally Yvonne Latty, a reporter from the Philadelphia *Daily News* approached the family to do a story about the incident. BA and BM gave her an extensive interview including taking her to the scene so that she could get photos as well as an idea of the dangers of the area and the difficulties of communication. She did not include anything about the helicopters causing problems, indicating that the Rescue Captain had said they were not a problem. We requested that she include the addresses of the rescue squads that JW's family and friends have sent money to. The article that did come out only sensationalized the sport and used JW's death to highlight the dangers. (Source: BA - who asked that we only use initials)

FALL FROM ROCK WHILE SETTING UP RAPPEL, NO HELMET **Tennessee, Prentice Cooper State Park**

On May 1, Chris Chesnutt (30) and two friends, Jerry Roberts (34) and Travis Eisman (30) spent a long day climbing in an undeveloped area in Prentice Cooper State Park (just west of Chattanooga). Following the completion of a new route they named Ironie (5.11), Chris moved away from the cliff edge and, feeling comfortable with his position, untied from the rope and began setting up a rappel. As Chris reported, "It was getting dark fast and I wanted to get back to camp before darkness fell. In the process of setting up the rappel, I