

FALL ON ROCK—RAPPEL ERROR, DARKNESS

Utah, Zion National Park, Grasshopper

On October 8, Eric Wehrly (33) and his partner Ian Whyte were rappelling the final 80 feet from the climb named Grasshopper when this incident occurred. Wehrly was the first one down. He set up the rappel by doubling his rope—but not exactly. One end was short by 20 feet, and that is the distance he fell to the cliff bottom. He proceeded to roll and tumble another two to three feet until finally coming to a stop.

Whyte was able to get down to the road and flag down the Zion shuttle bus. Fortunately, the Zion Park ambulance and personnel were able to respond quickly, treating and transporting Wehrly to a helicopter. He was taken to Las Vegas University Medical Trauma Center.

He sustained multiple system traumatic injuries, including a severe head injury, flail chest, bilateral fractured clavicles, and a pneumothorax. (Source: Cindy Purcell, NPS Ranger, Zion National Park)

Analysis

Perhaps fatigue played a part here, as these were two experienced climbers. That Wehrly did not at least tie individual knots in the ends of the doubled rope is surprising. It would have been even better to have tied the ends together before tossing them down. Hopefully there will come a year when this kind of incident does not happen. (Source: Jed Williamson)

FALL ON ICE, CLIMBING ALONE, PLACED NO PROTECTION

Utah, Provo Canyon, Stairway to Heaven

On December 18, a man (24) was on the second pitch of Stairway to Heaven when he fell attempting to climb over an ice bulge. Both feet popped from their holds. He dropped 50 feet to the ground, suffering a compression fracture of L-5. (Source: Dennis Chapman - Utah County Sheriff's SAR)

STRANDED, FALL ON ROCK, PROTECTION PULLED

Virginia, Seneca Rocks

In early April, a climber (age unknown) started soloing a chimney on the West Face of the North Peak. He got up 15 or 20 feet and decided that he would rather have a rope, so his partner threw the end of the rope up to him and the climber tied in. He placed a Camalot, climbed a few feet farther, and then fell. The Camalot pulled. The climber fell down the chimney, sustaining severe head and internal injuries. He was unconscious when several climbers with EMT training first reached him. They unsuccessfully tried CPR to resuscitate him when his heart stopped. (He was not wearing a helmet, though later comments from the coroner indicated that a helmet probably would not have saved him due to the severity of internal injuries.)

Analysis

For me, the most important lesson from this accident came a month later, when I heard via the Internet that the victim had tested positive for Hepatitis B. While one of the ambulance crew had asked the police personnel present at the acci-