

rating, with a low cloud cover. The park contract helicopter was able to fly seven park rangers to the Lower Saddle on the Grand Teton before conditions worsened. Six of the rangers began a search of the Owen-Spalding route. At 1409, Rangers McConnell and Jackson made contact with Stockton and Feldman as they climbed toward the Upper Saddle. They were in good condition. Stockton and Feldman were assisted to the Lower Saddle, where their condition was assessed. They were able to descend to the valley by themselves. The rescue team also descended, reaching the trailhead at about 2000.

Analysis

Stockton and Feldman felt they were in control of their situation. They had heard the helicopter, but they didn't think it was associated with them. They didn't want to follow the rangers because they had already gone down that way, and it didn't work. This party had good gear and extra food. They didn't feel there was any reason to get excited over their late return.

It's important to realize that when a party doesn't return when there is severe weather in the mountains, people worry about the party's safety. When the rescue team is called, we are obligated to investigate. In this case, a call to the Exum guides on the Lower Saddle said that the mountain was in bad condition, and they had to turn back that morning. Past parties caught out in storms with snow and high winds have shown us that there is cause for concern. That is the reason that we accepted the costs and risks of flying to the Lower Saddle and searching in marginal conditions. Sometimes conditions in the mountains are the reason we should do a rock climb down low. Sometimes it's our physical limitations due to lack of acclimatization or our need for rest that should cause us to choose less-ambitious goals. Setting out on a major undertaking like a day climb of the Grand Teton when not at the top of your game, especially knowing that a storm cycle is predicted, should result in being more conservative. When the party is not progressing as rapidly as anticipated, there is good cause to lower the goals or turn around. (Source: Dan Burgette, SAR Ranger, Grand Teton National Park)

FALLING ROCK—FALL ON ROCK, IMPROPER BELAY TECHNIQUE, INADEQUATE PROTECTION

Wyoming, Grand Teton National Park, Nez Perce

On June 30 about 9:30 a.m., Jeff Heinrichs (29) of Jackson, WY, took a leader fall on Nez Perce. He was unable to walk after the fall, so his partner, Dave Simpson (33), went for help.

Heinrichs was leading the first pitch of what he thought was the South Ridge of Nez Perce, but in fact he was east of the normal route. He was trying to place his first piece of protection about thirty feet above the talus. His belayer, using an ATC, wasn't anchored as he sat on a ledge about fifteen feet beneath the leader. A large block that Heinrichs was standing on fell away, so he fell about thirty feet before hitting the talus. Simpson instinctively reached for the rope and began to haul in slack. He was unable to hold the fall, and as the rope slipped through his hands, they were burned. Heinrichs continued to tumble down the slope for another fifty feet. His helmet and pack saved him from serious injury.

Analysis

The lack of an anchor and proper belaying technique resulted in an eighty foot fall instead of a thirty-footer. Fortunately the belayer wasn't pulled from his ledge. (Source: Dan Burgette, SAR Ranger, Grand Teton National Park)

RAPPEL ERROR—NO BACK-UP ON RAPPEL, FALL ON ROCK, BEING IN A HURRY

Wyoming, Grand Teton National Park, Grand Teton, Owen-Spalding

On July 18, Ryan Sasser (27) and I, Holly Beck (26), got a late start out of our Moraine Camp on the Grand Teton due to an early morning rainstorm. Hiking up to the Lower Saddle, we reached the base of the Petzoldt Ridge around 8:00 a.m. We topped out on the Petzoldt Ridge before noon and continued to the Upper Exum Ridge to complete our route. We had climbed the entire Petzoldt Ridge in coats and gloves, and by the time we started up the Exum Ridge, we were climbing in intermittent snow and rain. At the bottom of the Windtunnel pitch we had to hide out for about twenty minutes while a brief hailstorm beat down. We finally summited just after 3:00 p.m. We had seen parties on the Upper Exum that day, so we were surprised to have the summit to ourselves. We had brought a topo and a photo of the Owen-Spalding route for the descent. It was clear that a storm was coming in when we headed down.

On our way down we were never really sure if we were actually following the "official" descent route. When we got to a spot that looked like an anchor for a big rappel on the often-guided climb we decided that was our rappel to the Upper Saddle. Ryan rigged the rappel, tied knots in the end of the rope and tossed the rope straight down. We could see that the rope was not touching the ground, but we had been told by more than one climber to expect this and that we would only reach the ground with rope stretch. Even though Ryan weighs more than I, we decided that I should go down first since I was a more experienced climber. I felt that if we had to do a second rappel, I would be able to set it up more easily. I took some gear with me in case I needed it and went down the rope. I chose to rappel without an auto-block, since I rarely use this type of backup.

The farther I got on rappel the more I could see that I was not going to get to the ground. Since this was a free-hanging rappel, I was kicking against the wall to keep myself moving and my options open. Looking around, I spotted a ledge to the left that I thought I could drop onto from above. I planned to get a handhold with my left hand and get my feet on the wall, and then down-climb or drop onto the ledge. In order to make it to the ledge, I decided to untie the knots in my rope to prevent them from becoming stuck in my belay device before I reached the ledge. With this plan in mind, I untied the knots and started kicking towards the wall above the ledge. I found a handhold with my left hand that felt promising. On my next swing I grabbed it again just to see if it was good. As I did so, I lost control of my brake hand, probably as my left hand was holding me in to the wall but my momentum was swinging me back to the right.