

week or ten days doing it, make sure you're in the best shape possible and are comfortable moving on exposed big mountain terrain with a pack.

Glissading seems like an easy way down the mountain, but it's also dangerous. Many climbers and hikers are injured glissading on Mount Rainier each summer. What seems like an innocuous descent technique has actually resulted in numerous broken ankles, twisted knees, pulled muscles and, at minimum, loss of gear. (Source: Mike Gauthier, Climbing Ranger)

(Editor's Note: If snow conditions are such that crampons are needed, then one should not be glissading.)

FALLING ROCK

Washington, Mount Ranier, Disappointment Cleaver

On September 23 about 5:30 a.m., a rock struck and killed noted double amputee climber Ed Hommer. Mr. Hommer and three companions were climbing the Disappointment Cleaver route in preparation for an attempt next year on Mount Everest.

The team of four climbers spent the night at Camp Muir and started their climb at 1:30 a.m. The climb proceeded normally and the team took a rest break at Ingraham Flats (11,000 ft.). The route from the Ingraham Flats ascends another 300 feet then traverses right onto the "Nose" of Disappointment Cleaver, a prominent rock feature that separates the Ingraham and the Emmons Glaciers. Later in the climbing season, Disappointment Cleaver is mostly exposed, loose rock. Any remaining snowfields are hard and icy and have large sun cups that require slow careful climbing.

At 5:40 a.m., the sky was dark and the moon was setting as Jim Wickwire led Herlehy, Rose, and Hommer up the Cleaver. They were traversing rock bands near 11,700 feet when Wickwire heard a the whizzing sound of falling rock. He responded by yelling, "ROCK!" Shortly thereafter, Rose (third on the rope) reported getting tugged backward and thrown off balance. After regaining his balance, he called down to Hommer and received no answer.

Wickwire then belayed Herlehy and Rose down to Hommer, which took about 30 minutes. Once there, it was apparent that Hommer was struck and instantly killed by stonefall. Hommer was found lying face up on the snow with visible trauma to his upper torso, neck, and head.

The climbers were on scene with Hommer for over an hour while they called the Park Service for help. Another team of two climbers on their way to the summit came to the aid of Wickwire's team. They declined to continue to the summit and instead assisted Wickwire's party back to Camp Muir.

Ranger's Kirschner and Winslow planned for a body recovery operation. Two climbing rangers, Giguere and Shank, boarded a helicopter at Kautz Heli-base and were flown to the top of the Disappointment Cleaver. From there, they down-climbed the route to the accident site where they then placed Hommer into a body bag and then into a cargo net. From there, Hommer's body was flown off the mountain to Kautz Heli-base.

Giguere and Shank, along with Wickwire's team, were also flown off the mountain too.

Analysis

Disappointment Cleaver is the most popular route on the mountain. It subjects climbers to sustained periods of rock and icefall hazards at varying locations. Teams that move quickly and safely limit their time in these areas. Hommer's team got an alpine start and was moving at a reasonable pace. Sadly, rockfall is common on Disappointment Cleaver, especially late in the year.

Colder conditions may reduce the rockfall hazards. It seems, however, as though there is always some amount of rockfall and/or icefall hazard on Mount Rainier, making it possible for experienced teams like Hommer's to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Hommer was not wearing a helmet at the time of the accident. It is believed that a helmet wouldn't have made a difference however. Though a helmet may not have made a difference in Hommer's case, the National Park Service strongly recommends that all climbers wear helmets when ascending Mount Rainier. (Source: Mike Gauthier, Climbing Ranger)

FALL ON ROCK, PROTECTION PULLED, CARABINER BROKE, EXCEEDING ABILITIES

Washington, Frenchman's Coulee, Air Guitar

On September 30, the famed Swedish adventurer Göran Kropp died from a fall while rock climbing. He was leading Air Guitar, a 65-foot 5.10a crack that requires precise nut and cam placements. Kropp was near the top of the route when he fell some 60 feet to a rock ledge. Though wearing a helmet, he sustained fatal head injuries.

During the morning and early afternoon of that day, Kropp and his partner took turns leading sport routes. After climbing four or five bolted arêtes, Kropp took advantage of an opportunity to top rope a crack, Pony Keg (5.10a). Although Kropp looked solid in the crack, he told his partner that he found the climb challenging. Kropp then decided to lead Air Guitar.

Kropp started up the route, placing, in order, a small nut, two micro-cams and three small to medium cams. He fell near the top of the climb—the crux, shortly after placing a three-inch cam. That cam pulled, and the wire-gate carabiner clipped to the rope on the next cam broke, resulting in Kropp's fall all the way to the ledge.

Analysis

This accident resulted from a series of combined incidents. Kropp was relatively inexperienced at placing natural gear, and though a powerful athlete, was at his lead limit. The fact that the top cam pulled indicates that it was either placed incorrectly or walked to an insecure position, which is possible since he clipped all of his protection with short, stiff quickdraws. Another scenario is that Kropp dislodged the piece himself by kicking it with his foot when he climbed past it. Regardless of either event, experi-