

(Editor's Note: There were a few other reports from NH, but none involving serious injury. Two of them were simply stranded climbers.)

VARIOUS FALLS ON ROCK (17), RAPPEL ERRORS (5), INADEQUATE BELAYS (5), INADEQUATE PROTECTION (5), PROTECTION PULLED (2), DISLODGED ROCKS (2)

New York, Shawangunks

There were 24 accidents reported from the Shawangunks this year, of which 18 happened while ascending. There was one fatality, occurring in March when an experienced 44 year-old climber fell while leading Strictly from Nowhere (5.7). He did not protect the traversing moves out to the end of the overhang. His fall was backwards—about ten or twelve feet—and he struck his head. He was not wearing a helmet.

There were five rappelling incidents, three of which were the result of going off the end of the rope. One involved four climbers, because when the rappel rope jammed, several rocks were dislodged in trying to free up the rope. The average age of the climbers directly involved was 33, the youngest being 16, the oldest being 51. Most of the routes were of modest difficulty. One accident involved Mike Cimino (32), a guide, who fell while leading Transcontinental Nailway, a 5.10 route. A piece of protection pulled, so he fell 20 feet to the ground on his back, resulting in "...six fused vertebrae, a couple of broken ribs, and a renewed sense of enthusiasm." His own analysis, for which we thank him, is as follows:

"Hubris got me hurt. I've climbed the route lord knows how many times... I was working a 'rope-gun' day (meaning nothing but single pitch 5.10 and 5.11 lines) with one of my regulars. ...I made poor decisions: no helmet (thankfully not a major factor) and I chose a tiny blue alien rather than a larger yellow one with a nut back-up as my first piece. When the unlikely fall happened, my gear was simply inadequate. As a guide, it's all too easy to slip into thinking of the gear as only being there as directionals for the clients' protection."

The Mohonk Preserve Ranger Team comprised of seven individuals has now completed about 500 rescues. They are trained in pre-hospital care and engage in weekly drills. Their ability to respond to a range of accident types has resulted in reducing morbidity and fatality, and in being asked to train military, police, and other rescue personnel. (Sources: Hank Alicandri –Director of Land Stewardship/Head Ranger, and Mike Cimino.)

STRANDED, WEATHER, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT-NO STOVE

Oregon, Mount Hood, Reid Glacier Headwall

This incident involved a climbing team that was part of a Portland-area climbing club. The following description of the events leading to the incident on January 11 and 12 was derived from an explanation provided by the climbing team.

Our intent was to climb the Leuthold Couloir. When we started up the Palmer Snowfield there were a couple of mild snow flurries and it was partly cloudy at Illumination Saddle. The weather cleared and was great as we traversed over to the start of the Leuthold climb. Around 9,800 feet we mistakenly took a gully to the right of the Leuthold Couloir that put us on the Reid Headwall. The weather conditions were still good at this time. Although I did not record times as to where we were, we seemed to be making good progress during this part of the climb. Once inside the gully on Reid Headwall poor snow conditions slowed climbing. We ran into loose, sugary snow conditions in steep areas that required belays.

As we made our way up through the more technical sections of the headwall, the weather started to deteriorate and we were hampered by poor visibility. I was becoming increasingly concerned about time but down-climbing the Reid Glacier Headwall would have placed us in danger on several known avalanche-prone slopes. Up and over was determined to be the safest route as many in the team were familiar with this part of the mountain.

As we traversed along the top of Reid Headwall towards the summit ridge, the storm had picked up strength. Strong winds and marble-sized hail hampered visibility that was poor anyway as it was starting to get dark.

We continued toward the summit with the hope of reaching the Pearly Gates before it got totally dark. We felt confident we could navigate down from there with our headlamps.

When down-climbing safely became increasingly difficult due to the poor visibility, we regrouped and had one party member climb down to make sure we were on route. He ran into a short vertical rock band and came back up. By this time party members were getting cold, so we decided to dig in and descend in the morning.

There were two reasons we called 911. (1) To inform the authorities that we were overdue and safe in a snow cave 80 meters below the summit. (2) Two party members were trending towards hypothermia and notification was given to the authorities in case assistance would be required to bring the climbers down if their conditions worsened.

The following morning two teams of rescuers ascended the mountain to search for the climbers. Winds averaged around 30-40 mph with heavy snow and twenty feet of visibility compounded efforts to reach the climbers.

Analysis

One lesson from this accident is that no matter how experienced or prepared you are, the weather in the mountains (particularly the Cascades of Oregon and Washington) can change very rapidly and storms may arrive sooner and harder than expected.

Climbers should consider all possibilities when preparing for a climb and plan their strategy so they can avoid storms, and survive them. Frequently this is a balance between going lightweight to avoid moving slowly on dangerous terrain, but not going so lightweight that you are unable to survive if you become stranded. In this case, these climbers acted properly once they realized they were in trouble. They had adequate equipment and knowledge

to survive. Rather than wandering around in a whiteout and risking becoming more seriously injured or disoriented, they protected themselves from the elements and called for help when they were unsure they would be able to self-rescue.

The leader of the climb made the following points:

- There had been forecasts of weather turning bad late in the day. Doing this climb with a fairly large party and uncertain weather and nothing more than emergency bivy gear left a smaller margin of safety.

- Route finding: Although I had climbed Leuthold before I did not remember the spot where we went to the right. Had I been paying proper attention I should have figured it out soon enough to get back on Leuthold and we would have made the summit before dark.

- Leadership: When the party started going slowly I should have taken control more. One option would have been to shorten the rope so I could communicate with the team better.

- Poor equipment planning: In hindsight, I can't believe that I had not included a stove in our equipment. Our near hypothermia could have been avoided. Also, the frostbite, from which one other team member and I have fully recovered, could have been avoided.

- Communication: When we originally called 911, we stated our intent to descend in the morning if the condition of the team did not deteriorate any further. We were advised to stay where we were and that a team would be mobilized to ascend. One other team member and myself were borderline hypothermic early in the evening but our condition improved in the snow cave. Although we communicated to the people at the rescue base that we were all ambulatory but cold, we should have been more assertive in holding to our decision to descend on our own in the morning. In our attempt to be agreeable with the SAR effort we needlessly endangered several of the rescuers.

A final note from Steve Rollins: Avalanche danger rose quickly during this storm, threatening to prevent rescuers from being able to reach the stranded party safely. Had conditions been any worse, it is possible rescue efforts would have been postponed, resulting in the party being stranded for an even longer period of time. Climbers should be aware that rescuer safety always takes precedence and therefore rescues are not always possible. (Sources: Steve Rollins—Portland Mountain Rescue; David Byrne—35; Jim Brewer—48; Bob Pelletie—38; Jared Cogswell—31; Keith Campbell—44; and a story from *The Oregonian*.)

FALL ON ROCK—CLIMBER LOWERED OFF END OF ROPE BY BELAYER **Oregon, Smith Rock State Park, Magic Light**

On February 21, Timothy Garland (24) climbed Magic Light in the Overboard Area of Smith Rock State Park. Magic Light is a bolted route rated 5.12b, two stars by Alan Watts in his *Climber's Guide to Smith Rock*. The lower portion is rated 5.11a and is often climbed, but the upper portion contains the real difficulties and is less frequently climbed according to Watts.