

While many were saddened by the outcome of this extended event after so much effort by so many people, it should be noted that the rescue was also a great success in that Richards returned safely and no rescuers were hurt. Without his climbing partner, Richards would have been placed in the difficult position of soloing the route in order to reach safety. (Source: Mike Gauthier, SAR Ranger, Mount Rainier National Park)

(Editor's Note: Another fatality and serious injury occurred on Liberty Ridge on June 3, when two climbers fell several hundred feet from just below the Black Pyramid.)

LOSS OF CONTROL—VOLUNTARY GLISSADE, FAULTY USE OF CRAMPONS, INADEQUATE PROTECTION

Washington, Mount Rainier, Emmons/Winthrop Glacier Route

On June 3, Doug Thiel (40) and his two climbing partners summited Mount Rainier via the Emmons Glacier Route. On their descent, Thiel started to experience a great deal of knee pain. The pain became so intense that he preferred to glissade instead of walking down. Thiel decided to glissade while roped and wearing crampons. It was the team's intent to descend in this fashion back to Camp Schurman.

At 11,600 feet, Thiel hit an icy section and was unable to stop his slide. He slid uncontrollably past his partners and pulled them off their feet. All three fell 75-100 feet before Thiel's two partners arrested. Thiel sustained a lower left leg injury in the process and recalled the rope wrapping around his leg, which he feels contributed to the injury.

At 3:30 p.m., the Park received a cell phone call from Thiel's team detailing the accident and requesting assistance. With a large rescue and body recovery already in progress on Liberty Ridge, the I.C. dispatched a reserve climbing ranger team to the site of the new accident. Climbing rangers Stefan Lofgren and Stoney Richards were inserted on the Emmons Glacier via light helicopter near 11,300 feet. They ascended to the accident site, assessed Thiel and then carried him to a Landing Zone and from there he was flown to the Kautz Heli-base where he was transferred to an ambulance.

Analysis

Thiel wanted to avoid requesting outside help while descending. Unfortunately, glissading, particularly on the upper mountain glaciers while wearing crampons, is dangerous. It would have been safer and more efficient for Thiel's partners to have steadily lowered him in a sitting position, one rope-length at a time. On most sections they could have simply lowered him hand over hand. On steeper sections, they could have lowered him off set protection (pickets, ice axes, etc). In the end, it is always best to avoid glissading. Glissading with crampons is never a good idea. (Source: Mike Gauthier, SAR Ranger, Mount Rainier National Park)