

VARIOUS FALLS ON ROCK, PROTECTION PULLING, FALLING ROCK, INADEQUATE PROTECTION

New York, Shawangunks

In 2005 there were 14 climbing accident reports, two of which were bouldering falls. Ten of the incidents occurred while ascending. Individuals fell, and six of the falls were made worse as a result of no or inadequate protection. There was one rappel incident in which the climber rappelled off the end of his rope, and there was one incident in which the climber had untied the rope before down-climbing. He fell 15 feet. Another climber tumbled over backward while trying to pull down a stuck rope. He dislocated his shoulder.

The average age of the climbers involved was 37, the average difficulty of the climbs was 5.6, and the average level of experience was moderate to experienced, with only two having little or no experience.

Not counted in the data were two snake bite events, one in which the climber was bitten with no consequence. (Source: From reports submitted by the Mohonk Preserve)

RAPPEL ERROR—FAILURE TO CHECK ANCHOR, INADEQUATE PROTECTION

North Carolina, Shiprock, Hindu Kush

On July 3, Lewis M. Jones II (22), and his partner, Joe Wilson (23) climbed Hindu Kush (5.8), a popular Shiprock route. Shiprock is a popular climbing area located in the Grandfather Mountain Corridor area of the Blue Ridge Parkway. After completing the climb, the pair decided to rappel down to their gear rather than hike back down to the base of the cliff. According to Wilson, they threaded their ropes through the anchors and threw the ropes down one by one. Wilson said when Jones attached himself into the rope via his ATC, he was above the anchors, so he moved to one side and lowered himself to a position below the anchors to begin his rappel. Jones leaned back to rappel and to Wilson's disbelief, he heard Jones yell and saw him fall approximately 100 feet to the ground.

Wilson ran over to the nearby trail that led down to the Rough Ridge parking area, located a hiker with a cell phone, and called EMS. After making the call, he made his way back to Jones. Upon reaching him, Wilson rolled him over to check his pulse and received no response. Evidently, Jones died instantly after hitting the boulders below. EMS arrived shortly thereafter.

Linville Central Rescue and Linville VFD members attached Jones to a defibrillator but were unable to revive him. He was transported to Watauga Medical Center in Boone, NC.

Analysis:

The accident was investigated by National Park Service and Linville Rescue personnel. When topping out Hindu Kush, the first set of anchors which can

be seen are those on the aid line, the Odyssey (to the east atop the prow that contains the climb Castaway). While the anchors on Boardwalk are much closer to the standard rappel route, they are obscured from view when finishing Hindu Kush. Lewis and Jones moved over to the Odyssey and set up their rappel through a pair of super-shut anchors, which allow the rope to be clipped directly into the shut rather than threaded through. Both climbers held an end of rope and dropped them to the ground. Jones placed himself on rappel while still on top of the cliff. Somehow in the process of lowering onto the anchors, the rope between the shuts and the climber clipped itself through the shuts, resulting in a bight of rope threaded through both shuts. Apparently Lewis was unaware of this happening. As Lewis eased his weight onto the anchors to get below them, the bight of rope slid through both anchors resulting in the accident. The investigation revealed that the gates of the super-shut anchors played a role in holding weight, as they were bent outward from the main axis of the equipment, suggesting that they were loaded by Lewis' body weight as he began to rappel.

An approaching storm may also have been a factor in the retreat chosen by the climbers.

A number of common practices could have been considered: 1) Attach to the anchors via a daisy chain or sling, down-climb to a point below the anchors, and then go on rappel; 2) before going on rappel attach an autoblock, prussik, or similar knot on the rope and attach to the harness, followed by placing a properly threaded rappel device above the pre-placed friction knot; 3) the climbers could have chosen to walk-off the climb, especially if incoming weather was a concern; 4) have your partner check the anchor and rappel setup before going on rappel. (Source: *Watauga Democrat*, July 6, 2005; Anthony Love, from a posting on carolinaclimbers.org on July 8; and Aram Attarian)

FALL ON ROCK, RAPPEL ERROR—RAPPELLING TOO FAST, INEXPERIENCE

North Carolina, Great Smokey Mountain National Park

Around 2:30 p.m. on July 25, Adam Holenberg (23) was rappelling from a cliff above Rainbow Falls in the Cherokee Orchard area when he fell approximately 30 feet, sustaining serious injuries. Holenberg had hiked three miles in to the falls, scrambled to the top, then solo rappelled down the face of the 80-foot-high cliff. He was using a very small (9 mm diameter) rope with an anchor and a figure-eight descending device. Witnesses said that he took very long bounds down the cliff, shock-loading the system, and that he was two-thirds of the way down the cliff when the rope severed and he fell about 30 feet to the boulder field at the bottom of the cliff. Bystanders called via cell phone for assistance.