

By choosing to stay with Labrie and Fielding, Smart also became hypothermic. While one's intentions may be good, critically evaluating one's own ability to assist versus the possibility of becoming a liability must be considered carefully. Like the other climbers, Smart was tired after a long summit climb. In the end, he did not have the energy to erect a wind-break or fire up the stove and became a third victim in need of assistance.

Consideration was given to trying to hoist the patients off that evening, but given the technical nature of the terrain and the lack of experience of most paramedics in a technical alpine environment, it was determined that inserting a medic without mountaineering experience on the upper mountain would have set the scene for creating a fourth victim. The decision was made to wait until climbing rangers could secure the site and prepare for the hoist operation. (Source: Mike Gauthier, Climbing Ranger)

LOSS OF CONTROL—VOLUNTARY GLISSADE, IMPROPER USE OF CRAMPONS

Washington, Mount Rainier, Inter Glacier

On July 15 at 1348, the communication center notified Camp Schurman that a climber had broken his leg near the bottom of the Inter Glacier. Climbing rangers Chris Olson and Stoney Richards left Camp Schurman at 1415 arriving on scene at approximately 7,400 feet on the Inter Glacier 30 minutes later with a Cascade Litter.

Randy Kruschke (age unknown) had been glissading when his crampon caught an edge causing him to tumble and break his right tibia and fibula. Kruschke's teammates had already splinted his leg with a foam pad and ski pole and after quick evaluation of the injury, Olson elected not to re-splint the fracture to prevent further injury or delay. Olson and Richards packaged Kruschke into the litter and with the assistance of Kruschke's teammates lowered him to the base of the Inter Glacier where he was wheeled down to Glacier Basin. Kruschke was airlifted to the hospital from Glacier Basin

Analysis

Crampons are a great tool when on firm snow and ice but quickly become a hazard as the snow warms. Knowing when to use them and when to remove them—and then stopping at the appropriate time to make the change can lead to preventing this kind of accident. Novice climbers often mistakenly assume that they must wear crampons whenever on snow. It is hard to imagine a time when glissading with crampons would ever be considered a good idea.

Kruschke chose to leave his crampons on even though it was late in the day, the snow was soft, and he was glissading. In the classic fashion, when Kruschke picked up speed during his glissade, the rear tines of his right

crampon snagged in the snow. This resulted in snapping the two bones (tib/fib) of his lower leg and throwing his body over his feet, sending him into an uncontrolled tumble. (Source: Mike Gauthier, Climbing Ranger)

FALLING ROCK HITS CLIMBER—DESPITE DOING ALL THE RIGHT THINGS

Washington, Mount Rainier, Disappointment Cleaver

On July 29, Estee Fernandez (29) was descending the base of the Disappointment Cleaver with her partner when a two-foot diameter rock hit her in the back, knocking her about ten feet down the slope. She and her partner walked to Camp Muir and contacted the guide service who then contacted the Park Service.

As there was a language barrier preventing good initial communication, the mechanism of injury became the deciding factor in evacuating Fernandez by air. A Bell 206 Long Ranger piloted by Doug Uttecht flew Climbing Ranger Andy Anderson to Camp Muir to pick up Fernandez who was loaded on a backboard and the two were flown directly to Harborview Medical Center.

Analysis

The Disappointment Cleaver is notorious for both natural and human-triggered rockfall. Fernandez and her partner were fairly experienced climbers from Spain. They were fit and knew that they could move fairly quickly on the route. Most parties leave from Camp Muir between midnight and 2 a.m. Often this will create a traffic jam on the route and cause people to stop in zones where rock and icefall are a hazard. Fernandez and Jon knew this and chose to leave later than most people at 2:30 a.m. to avoid the crowds. Fernandez and Jon climbed to the top of the Cleaver without running into any of the other parties. They caught up with and passed all of the other climbers between the top of the Cleaver and the summit. To stay ahead of the crowds, they descended quickly and well ahead of all of the other parties.

This accident illustrates that even when you make good decisions the mountains can be dangerous. Fernandez and her partner knew their fitness and skill levels well enough to determine their own safe time to depart rather than following the decision of the masses and ending up in a traffic jam. They had proper equipment and clothing, including helmets. They were traveling early in the day when natural rock and ice-fall are presumed less common. Fernandez said that they also had not exhausted themselves on the climb because they wanted to be alert and safe on the descent. Short of having lightning reflexes and being able to dodge a rock that is falling toward you from behind, there is not much more that these two could have done. Even after the accident they did the right thing: having determined