

ACCIDENTS IN NORTH AMERICAN MOUNTAINEERING

Sixty-Second Annual Report of the American Alpine Club

This is the sixty-second issue of *Accidents in North American Mountaineering*.

Canada: At the time of publication, narratives and data from Canada were not available. The Alpine Club of Canada has recently secured a new editor for the Canadian content and a resumed regular contribution to *Accidents in North American Mountaineering* is expected next year. Accident reporting and additional information regarding the 2008 data can be viewed at <http://www.alpineclubofcanada.ca/>

United States: Please notice that we have changed the name of the American Alpine Club Safety Committee to the Safety Advisory Council. The members of the council have never really met as a committee, nor does it have any authority to set policy or take action with matters regarding mountain safety. The individuals have agreed to be “advisory” to the Managing Editor, primarily serving as sources of information and submitting reports. The new title more accurately reflects this role.

Two of this year’s accidents involved ascending devices. The one in Zion resulted in a fatality when ascenders severed the rope. The one on El Cap in May that could have had the same consequence was an attempt to reach a climbing partner who had fallen. As John Dill pointed out in this instance, the climber “...did not know what remained to catch him if the top piece pulled, and in a hard fall, his ascenders could have damaged or severed his rope. As he had never had to rescue someone before and didn’t know what else to do, he figured that if the top piece had held his partner’s fall it should be good for juggling.” We continue to see many reports of climbers not being familiar with the intricacies of ascending and belaying devices.

The fatality that occurred on Mount Rainier in June as a result of being stranded due to weather on the Muir Snowfield was counted as a climbing incident even though the party was, technically speaking, hiking. Many people make this ascent to Camp Muir with no problem. However, when the weather changes—and it often does so rapidly—the hikers are suddenly in a mountaineering condition. Often they are not prepared for changing and potentially hazardous conditions. Another kind of incident, not reported in the narratives, occurred when a skier fell 120 feet into a crevasse on the Nisqually Glacier. The party had stopped after skiing for only 15 minutes to evaluate whether they needed to rope up when one of them fell through

a snow bridge. The extrication was successful, though the skier was wedged face down. This is a case in which a ski adventure turns into a mountaineering mishap.

As mentioned in previous issues and throughout this report, there are some web-based resources that often provide good information and accident stories. Here is a short-list of some of those sites:

<http://home.nps.gov/applications/morningreport/>
www.supertopo.com
www.mountainproject.com
<http://www.tuckerman.org/>
<http://www.mountrainierclimbing.blogspot.com/>
<http://www.friendsofyoosar.org/>

In addition to the dedicated individuals on the Safety Advisory Council (especially Aram Attarian, who took on Colorado and North Carolina), we are grateful to the following—with apologies for any omissions—for collecting data and for helping with the report: Hank Alacandri, Erik Hansen, Leo Paik, Justin Preisendorfer, Eric White, all individuals who sent in personal stories, and, of course, George Sainsbury.

This year we pay special tribute to Daryl Miller—leader of the South District Rangers in Denali National Park for 18 years. He retired in September. His tireless efforts to educate climbers of all abilities and nationalities and his thoroughness in the reports he sent forward to us all those years are greatly appreciated. For those who have never met him, I recommend going to the climbinglife.com website to read an in-depth story about his life and work.

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