

Analysis

Late season conditions (normal in October!) existed on the route making the novice climb technically difficult. Biddle later admitted that he had gone beyond his abilities to travel safely on the icy terrain. Without the support of a rope team, a novice solo climber takes great risks on technical terrain. (Source: Jeff Sheetz, Portland Mountain Rescue)

FALL ON ICE, ROPE SEVERED ON JAGGED ROCKS

Pennsylvania, Toby Creek, Buttermilk Falls

Police in Luzerne County say Luke Wolfgang (age not reported) fell 30-40 feet when his rope was cut on jagged rocks as he tried to climb the Buttermilk Falls area of Toby Creek.

Rescuers say the New Hope man was climbing with friends yesterday morning when the accident occurred. They say he was taken to a Scranton hospital with injuries that did not appear life-threatening, though he did suffer some broken bones.

Officials say his friends had to walk to the highway to get help because there is no cell phone service in the climbing area. (Source: From an Associated Press article sent to us with no date or additional information.)

FALL ON ROCK, CLIMBING UNROPED

Pennsylvania, Tohickon Valley Park

Joseph McDevitt (26) was in serious condition yesterday after plunging at least 70 feet to the ground in a fall off a cliff in Bucks County. He was airlifted and treated in the intensive care unit at St. Luke's Hospital near Bethlehem, officials said.

Analysis

The 200-foot cliffs of red shale along Tohickon Creek are popular among climbers. While falls like McDevitt's "do occur, it's not commonplace," county spokesman Chris Edwards said.

A witness said McDevitt had no rope or safety harness. Witnesses differed on whether McDevitt wore a helmet. (Source, from an article by Jeff Gammage, in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. No date given)

(Editor's Note: We are sure that other incidents occur in PA. At the moment, we rely on inconsistent sources for information from this region.)

FALL ON ROCK – RAPPEL ERROR (UNEVEN ROPES)

South Dakota, Needles, Moonlight Ridge

Another climbing legend passed on today. On June 24, Paul Duval (71) died of injuries sustained when he rappelled off the end of an un-equalized rope at Moonlight Ridge.

Paul was a very humble and gentle man. His contributions to rock climbing were numerous. We will miss him.

Analysis

Paul had set up a rappel using someone else's rope that had multiple markings, including markings about 20 feet from each end. Paul was not familiar with this latest in rope-design. It appears that he short-rope-d one side due to the selection of the wrong rope marking, which he apparently assumed was the middle mark. He had passed the first marking on the rope and then went all the way to the next mark, which was actually an end 'alert' mark, about 20 feet from the end of the rope. The center mark was faded and difficult to see. The short end of the rope was over a small overhang and Paul was facing in the opposite direction looking over an adjacent route off his left side. The overhang and short rope were off to his right side. He was also talking to the people who were on the ground and farther around toward the opposite side of the rock. Neither Paul nor the people on the ground ever saw or noticed that there was a short rope side to the rappel set-up and a very long side, because both ends were around a corner and behind Paul to his right. (Source: Peter Lev)

(Editor's Note: There are ways to ensure one has found the middle of the rope. The old fashioned way, guaranteed to work, is to grab both ends and slide back until reaching the bight of rope, which is the middle. Another method is to knot the ends of the rappel rope together so that it will jam in the rappel device.

Another reason the middle mark can be wrong is if one of the ends was cut off due to damage or some other reason.)

FALL ON ROCK

Utah, Zion National Park, Moonlight Buttress

Early on the afternoon of March 24th, a climber (40) who was following the first pitch of the Moonlight Buttress took an unexpectedly long pendulum swing, struck the rock wall, and sustained an incapacitating hip injury. One of his partners descended and reported the accident to a shuttle bus driver. Rangers responded and reached the injured man via a short technical climb to the small ledge he was resting on, which was about 50 feet above the talus slope at the base of the route. He was packaged and lowered via a guiding line system to a waiting litter team that carried him down the scree slope and across the Virgin River to a waiting park ambulance.

Doctors diagnosed his injury as a fractured pelvis. The rescue involved 14 park staffers and was completed during daylight hours. Ranger Andrew Fitzgerald was the operations supervisor. (Source from a report by Bonnie Schwartz, Chief Ranger, Zion National Park)