

the experience to know what was required to self-arrest”, according to M. Stiff. Chris Pazder had climbed on several steep snow slopes in Montana’s Beartooth Mountains in the past ten years, and had climbed the Northwest Couloir on the South Teton in winter recently. M. Stiff said that Pazder “... knew how to use an ice ax”.

We will never know [for sure] why Pazder was unable to arrest his fall. A small rock outcrop prevented his friends from seeing his entire initial slide. “He was out of view for a few seconds and when he reappeared, he was cart-wheeling,” according to M. Stiff. The way that he was using his ice ax, swinging the adze into the slope, makes it much more difficult to go into an effective self-arrest position. Unfortunately, this translates to increasing velocity over time down the slope.

In closing, these observations may serve to prevent a similar accident.

- Familiarity and practice with the basic tools of mountaineering cannot be emphasized enough. The ability to self-arrest is crucial to snow travel in the mountains. An unchecked fall on steep snow can have dire consequences. One only needs to review the primary cause of mountaineering accidents in the Teton Range and around the world to have this point illustrated. The only way to acquire this skill is through practice.
- It is imperative that the climber be very focused while traveling in the mountain environment. While this may not have contributed to this accident, it serves as a reminder that a moment of inattention can have a terrible outcome.

Our thoughts are with Chris Pazder’s family and friends as they struggle with this tremendous loss. (Source: From a report submitted by Chris Harder, GTNP Ranger)

## **FALL ON ROCK, INADEQUATE BELAY – IMPROPER USE OF BELAY DEVICE**

### **Wyoming, Sinks Canyon, Killer Cave, Elmo’s Fish**

At 2:55 P.M. on November 23, Kelly Rush (29) fell from Elmo’s Fish, a climb in the Killer Cave area of Sink’s Canyon. She was on lead at the time and was not wearing a helmet.

Darran Wells, who was climbing nearby, said, “Stacy and I were between climbs on the right side of Killer Cave at the Main Wall in Sinks Canyon. We heard a loud crash followed by screams from about 200 yards South along the main wall (climbers left of Killer Cave.) I ran there to find [the patient] lying on her back on uneven rocky terrain at the base of Elmo’s Fish. She was still tied into the rope and had apparently fallen from 20 to 25 feet and landed in the position I found her (on her back with her head hanging off the edge of the rock). I immediately stabilized her head and asked her not to move until we could determine if she had injured her back. At that point, I yelled across the cave for someone to call 911. She was alert

and oriented (A&0x4) and denied any loss of consciousness. She had two friends with her (including the belayer) who were both visibly shaken up and standing nearby. She had apparently bitten her tongue on impact and blood was coming from her mouth. She complained of lower back pain and said that she had taken a lead fall near the third bolt.

About that time, Andy Blair (thankfully) arrived and began a thorough patient assessment and vitals while I maintained cervical spinal immobilization. Chris Agnew arrived just after Andy and wrote a complete SOAP note as Andy was taking vitals. After a few minutes, a woman (who's name I forget) arrived who said she was a PA at the hospital. Several others arrived to help. After Andy did a full patient assessment, a group of six of us lifted and moved her (BEAM technique) off the uneven rocks and onto a foam pad on the trail. We covered her with coats to keep her warm. After a third or fourth set of vitals, Deb (EMT) arrived with O<sub>2</sub> followed by SAR and Fire dept and Sheriff's office personnel with a stokes litter and wheel. Deb applied a neck brace and supervised moving Kelly onto a backboard. Andy administered O<sub>2</sub> with a nasal cannula, and we moved her into a Stokes Litter with a single wheel for transport down the hill to the ambulance. Kelly remained conscious and in good spirits throughout."

Word on the street was that Kelly was discharged from the hospital the same night with no major injuries.

### **Analysis**

Stacy talked directly with the woman who was belaying Kelly at the time of the fall. The belayer said she was grabbing the Grigri to pay out slack at the time that Kelly fell. She did not have a hand on the brake. When Kelly fell, she did not have the presence of mind to release the Grigri, so without a hand on the brake line, the rope just sailed through the device.

This is not a new problem, but certainly a critically important one for belayers using a Grigri to be aware of. (Source: Darran Wells and John Gookin)