

the party was treating their hike as a training mission for a further summit date, they had brought minimal supplies with them to camp Muir. Also, even though visibility was low, the party was disoriented in relation to where they thought they had initially hunkered down once their friend had been injured. The party did have a GPS, which was being used to help locate their location prior to Kessler's discovery of the party. As a general rule, it is not safe to glissade down a path where the runout is not visible. (Source; Sam Cowan, Park Ranger)

FALL ON ROCK – RAPPEL ERROR, FATIGUE, POSSIBLE HASTE

Washington, Beacon Rocks State Park

On July 24, Nathan Turner (30) and his partner were in the second rappel of "Jill's Thrill," a common descent route for the area. The first rappel placed the two climbers onto a small ledge without incident. They lowered safely onto the ledge and setup their second rappel by threading the rope through the second set of chain anchors. Setup took longer than expected. Turner mentioned to his partner that it felt like he'd been "pulling rope a long time." After this was said, they saw black markings on the rope signaling what they believed was the middle of their rope. Turner threw the side of the rope he'd been pulling up over the ledge and then setup his ATC to rappel. Last checks were made and he began his descent.

It started well enough. No failure occurred when the climber first took himself off his personal anchor. The failure occurred after a few seconds of lowering. Turner's partner heard a loud "snap!" and then watched the rope rapidly unravel through the chains. He and two witnesses climbing an adjacent route then watched Turner free-fall, strike "Snag Ledge" below, and disappear from sight ultimately falling to the floor.

Analysis

It is believed that the rope wasn't set with half the rope equally on each side of the anchor chains. What likely occurred is that when they initially missed the halfway markings, Turner kept pulling and centered the rope on the end warning marks. The rope they used was a 70 meter (9.4mm diameter) Petzl Fuze, which has markings both at the middle of the rope and at six meters (~20ft) from the ends. The markings in the middle are a solid black line. The ones on the ends are dashed black lines. The rope itself was blackened over a season of use but was in excellent condition. The rope with these markings is no longer in production. The surviving partner made contact with the manufacturer—Petzl—a few months after the accident and he was told they had decided—actually prior to this accident—that they had weren't going to produce future ropes with any end markings on their ropes until the CE—European Committee for Standardization—established a unifying standard for all manufacturers to follow. The process for this standard is ongoing.

It is unsure exactly when he started his free fall. If he had been only rappelling on six meters of rope, the start of his fall would have been in-line with what they observed when he fell around 6-12 meters to his first contact point on Snag Ledge. This makes their account consistent enough to support the misbalanced rope hypothesis. The “snap” his partner heard at the start of the fall was likely the end of the rope whipping through the ATC. It’s not clear how the two mistook the markings aside from attributing it to end of day fatigue.

Nathan Turner was experienced having mountaineered for seven-plus years and had done technical rock climbing for two years. His partner was in his 4th year of technical rock climbing. Rappelling was not new to them.

For this scenario to be plausible, how could such a misbalanced and fast-pulling rope not slip free if it was so misbalanced? The proposed answer is that it wasn’t likely an issue of six meters of freestanding rope balancing 64 meters of freestanding rope. It was more likely six meters of rope balancing the distance from the anchor to Snag Ledge (~10m) where the thrown end of the rope had snagged (hence the name Snag Ledge). That unfortunate rope accumulation on the ledge left Turner in a situation where he wouldn’t have noticed the weight imbalance unless he or others around him looked at the ends and noticed something wrong.

Only one rope-end was confirmed to have had a Figure-8 knot. The other side could not be confirmed to have had a knot. It is unclear why. The most likely explanation is the knot did not get re-tied when the rope was re-threaded through the next set of chains. There was an irregularity in procedure that could have been the cause of the misstep. Turner’s partner recalls it was he, not Turner, who actually did the re-threading through the chains. After that there was an exchange like: “Hey, do you need to do anything with this?” “Nah, we’re good.” Turner’s partner did not re-tie a knot. (He wasn’t instructed to). If that rope was allowed to just freely lower and hadn’t ever gone back to Turner to tie the standard Figure 8 knot, it would explain how the knot didn’t get put back onto the rope. So, sometime when the two partners were shifting around to setup the rappel and fighting end-of-day fatigue, it’s likely that tying a back-up Figure 8 just didn’t happen and went unnoticed by both of them – as with the rope markings.

In prior documented cases of similar rappelling mistakes (of which two were found in prior publications of ANAM), common traits shared with this incident were:

- Using ropes with extra markings.
- Rappelling done at the end of the day.
- The full rappelling path view was obstructed
- Stopper knots weren’t used (or verifiably used).
- The longer end of the rope stuck to something so the weight misbalance wasn’t noticed.

(Source: Michael Aubrey, The Columbian, Portland, OR, and www.supertopo.com)

(Editor’s Note: There were a few other “loss of control while glissading” and “altitude illness incidents” on Mount Rainier, but the examples provided in the nar-

tives here cover the ground.)

FALL ON ROCK – OVERCONFIDENCE ON FOURTH-CLASS TERRAIN

Washington, North Cascades, Washington Pass

The plan of the day (August 13) was to do a bunch of routes on the Early Winter Spires from 5.6 to 5.9. We were on the ascent/descent gully trail to the col between Liberty Bell and Concord tower in good time. Racking up, we raced up Becky's route as a warm up (5.6, three pitches) and rapped back to the col. Concord Tower was the next choice, but it was very busy with other parties, so we quickly packed up and headed back down the gully to find something less busy. The gully is 3rd and 4th class and VERY loose, so, we kept our helmets on. I remember the first time I came here I was very careful, but now having done it so much, I was just scooting along with no care in the world, using one hiking pole for balance. Around 12:30 p.m. about one third of the way down, my foot slipped as a loose rock moved. I lost my balance and came down hard on my right leg, which broke my right tibia and fibula in multiple places. I was in a steep section, so I pulled myself to a little better location. I had a SAM splint and tape, so I moved my leg back around to the correct position and tried to support it as best I could. At this point Todd (who I did not know) came down off his climb to see if I was ok. He had a SPOT device (we had no cell coverage). I had him activate it (I feel bad for Todd's folks who might have thought he was the victim). At 12:45 p.m. I had my partner Crystal hike back out to the car and drive until she came to a phone. She called 911 and advised that a helicopter would be required due to the nature of the injury and the location and terrain. She then stayed with the SAR people down at the road to provide additional advise.

The SAR reached me at 6:00 p.m. and fixed an additional splint. Then the US Navy helicopter from Whidby Island lowered Brent McIntyre on a long line to extract me and take me to Omak Hospital (7:30 p.m.) where I underwent an operation that included 15 screws and two plates.

Analysis

Fine weather, the SPOT device, no wind, strong SAR and Navy support, having a SAM splint, basic medical supplies and training made this a fairly straightforward rescue.

Being an experienced climber made me over-confident on anything less than steep class-5 climbing. Just because you go up and down a gully a dozen times with no mishap doesn't mean you can relax and be complacent. Could this have been avoided? Absolutely! If the weather was poor, if I had been climbing alone as I often do, could it have been MUCH worse? Yes! I did not give the mountain environment the respect it deserved. (Source: Jason Wheeler – 40)