

## ANALYSIS

Accidents happen on the way to and from climbs, not just on the route. Wearing a helmet until the descent was completed could have meant a less tragic outcome. It's quite possible that fatigue and haste also played a role in the fall. A storm was moving in (rain, wind, and lightning hampered the rescue operation), and the team may have felt time pressure. Timeliness is often critical in the alpine, but in exposed terrain it's important to move cautiously, choose your route carefully, and rest frequently. (Source: *The Editors*.)

**FORBIDDEN PEAK RESCUES:** *The Navy search and rescue team based on Whidbey Island conducted two helicopter rescues on Forbidden Peak in the summer of 2018. On June 19, two climbers were hoisted from the mountain in a nighttime operation. On August 2, the Navy crew rescued a climber who had fallen at around 7,500 feet and was wedged between rock and ice with multiple fractures. Additional details were not available.*

## RAPPEL ANCHOR FAILURE | Inadequate Anchor and Backup

*Mt. Rainier National Park, Dewey Peak*

On August 14, three climbers summited Dewey Peak, a 6,710-foot mountain on the east side of Mt. Rainier National Park with a third- or fourth-class route to the



top. The climbers had met earlier that year in a local climbing course, in which Climber 1 acted as a volunteer instructor and Climbers 2 and 3 were students with no previous experience. After summiting, Climber 1 first inspected the normal rappel from Dewey Peak, then decided to look for an alternative anchor.

Climber 1 selected a large block to sling for an anchor. The rock was about the size of a microwave oven and tilted only slightly above horizontal in orientation. After debating the merits of this anchor and looking for other options, the party agreed to use the large rock as the primary anchor and place a backup for the first couple of rappellers.

The primary anchor consisted of a doubled cordelette slung over the rock and tied into a master point. The backup was a cam placed in a crack four to six feet behind the cordelette anchor. The cam was connected to the cordelette by a prusik cord hitched to two opposed

Rappel anchor that failed on Dewey Peak. An investigation concluded the yellow cordelette around the block was held in place by the carabiners linking that cord to a backup cam (not seen). When the backup gear was removed, the cordelette slipped over the block as the last rappeller started down. *Climber 3 Photo*

non-locking carabiners, which were clipped to the cordelette on top of the block.

The climbers rappelled with a doubled 60-meter rope. Climber 1 went first, based on the idea that he was the heaviest and could straighten out rope tangles ahead of the two student climbers. Climber 2 rappelled second. Climber 3 (male, age 35) was told by Climber 1 to clean the cam anchor before rappelling. He removed the cam

and carabiners clipped to the top side of the cordelette anchor. As he rappelled, the cordelette slipped off the rock and Climber 3 fell to his death.

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Tacoma Mountain Rescue and the National Park Service revisited the scene of the accident on August 25 and re-created the rappel anchors, based on photographs taken by Climber 3 before the accident and recovered from his phone. An evaluation determined that the two carabiners connecting the cordelette to the prusik sling had helped hold the cordelette in place. When the first two people to rappel loaded the cordelette with their weight, the carabiners essentially pinned the cordelette in place on top of the block. Once these carabiners were removed, the cordelette was only held in place by friction, which was insufficient to keep it from rolling and slipping off the rock.

As is often the case with alpine climbing accidents, this was the result of a series of decisions, any one of which might have prevented the accident. These include:

- Not using the peak's standard rappel anchor.
- Rappelling instead of downclimbing or lowering the student climbers.
- Choosing a block anchor without a sufficient lip or horn to hold the cord securely.
- Use of cord instead of slings to build the anchor (sling material would not be as prone to rolling).
- Loosely slinging the cordelette rather than girth-hitching it around the block.
- Arranging the backup in such a way that the cordelette had to be lifted to clean the carabiners, possibly making the cordelette less secure.
- Putting an inexperienced climber in the position of cleaning the backup, evaluating if the cordelette anchor had been compromised by removing the cam and carabiners, and rappelling without a backup. (Source: Tacoma Mountain Rescue.)

## FALL ON ROCK | Broken Hold, Inadequate Protection

*North Cascades, Concord Tower*

Shortly before 10:30 a.m. on August 28, Benjamin G. Antonio (67) was climbing on the north side of Concord Tower, near Washington Pass, when a handhold broke and Antonio fell. He swung about 45 feet and hit the wall feet first. His partner lowered Antonio to a ledge, where a doctor who was in the area assessed his injuries. (Concord's north face is directly opposite the very popular southwest face of Liberty Bell.)

Antonio activated his personal locator beacon, and several other people in the area used their inReach devices to call for help, advising that the patient was suspected of having a possible broken pelvis and back injury. King County sent a helicopter crew, but they were unable to hoist Antonio out due to the difficult terrain. A crew from Naval Air Station Whidbey Island responded and airlifted Antonio to Seattle. (Source: Chelan County Sheriff's Office.)

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Holds should be tested before weighting them, especially in a mountain environment. Given the long fall, the leader does not appear to have placed adequate protection. This party was prepared with an emergency device to call for help, as were others in the area, which sped the rescue. (Source: The Editors.)