



AAC Publications

Rappel Error--Tangled in Ropes, Inexperienced

Utah, Zion National Park, Subway

On September 18, Yoshio Hosobuchi (74), a retired neurosurgeon, was found dead after spending a night hanging upside down on his climbing ropes. He had been making a rappel in the Subway, a popular and demanding canyoneering route.

Hosobuchi was from Novato, California, and had no experience navigating the Subway. He was caught about midway in a narrow, nine-mile chasm with fast-moving cold water. His wife (61) was unable to free her husband, who was found hanging over a waterfall, said Superintendent Jock Whitworth. She hiked out after some difficulty to alert rangers, who had to wait until early the next day to recover his body with a helicopter.

Analysis

The couple had received local training on navigating slot canyons and had successfully climbed Keyhole Canyon on the park's east side before taking their "bucket list" trip into the Subway.

Park authorities said that when Hosobuchi's rope jammed in his belay device, he used a knife to cut his waist belt in an effort to free himself. However, the harness slipped down his legs and became entangled with his right foot as he tumbled over headfirst inside the waterfall. Hosobuchi appeared to be pinned by the force of rushing water, said park spokeswoman Alyssa Baltrus. This was the first death of a hiker/climber in the Subway in many years. What is known is that the man bypassed a more gentle descent down a rock slab for a vertical descent that left him unable to use his feet to maintain traction with rock.

Hanging in a harness for too long, especially upside down, can cut off a climber's blood circulation, said Mike Banach, a guide with Zion Mountain School who is familiar with the Subway. He said many climbers are left at their own peril because commercial guiding is prohibited inside the park. "People are going in without knowledge or experience, and don't even have the ability to hire a guide," said Banach. The accident happened at a 30-foot drop that isn't considered difficult if done correctly.

Park Superintendent Whitworth said of the Subway: "It is a very popular trail, but very difficult—the nine-mile hike requires rappelling and ascending skills, extensive routefinding experience, and swimming through several cold and deep pools. Unfortunately, its location inside the wilderness also means that rescues are not always possible or timely enough. Sound decision-making and problem-solving are critical."

"Our message is you can learn the basics of canyoneering, but what happens when something goes wrong is hard to teach quickly," said Baltrus. (Source: Edited from an article by Paul Foy, Associated Press.)

(Editor's note: Two articles on the subject of hanging in a harness are recommended by Dr. Joe Forrester: Mortimer, RB, Risks and Management of Prolonged Suspension in an Alpine Harness, WEMJ 2011 (22) 77-86; and Pasquier, et al, Clinical Update: Suspension Trauma, WEMJ 2011 (22) 167-171.)

Images

Article Details

Author	
Publication	ANAM
Volume	10
Issue	66
Page	93
Copyright Date	2013
Article Type	Accident reports