



AAC Publications

Rappel Error – No Knots in Rope Ends

Washington, Mt. Garfield, Infinite Bliss

On September 7, at 5 p.m., Ross Halverson and a partner completed Infinite Bliss, a 23-pitch 5.10c that climbs the south flank of Mt. Garfield, near North Bend. They texted a friend from the summit, took a few photos, then immediately headed back down the route via double-rope rappels. The pair knew they had hours of rappelling before them and only two hours of full daylight remaining.

Near 7 p.m., about halfway down the route (it has been difficult to pinpoint exactly what pitch the two were on), Halverson rigged another rappel and started descending. Presumably to expedite the descent, he knowingly passed the next rappel station and continued toward a lower anchor. The ropes did not reach the next station, however, and Halverson came off the end of the ropes. He fell about three pitches to his death.

ANALYSIS

Fundamentally, this accident could have been avoided by putting knots at the ends of the rappel lines. However, as with many accidents in the mountains, the chain of events and decisions leading up to the accident present a complex case worthy of closer reflection. The stated goal of the two climbers was to do the entire climb in a single day on their first attempt, which is not an unrealistic goal in itself, but as a pair they had never tackled an objective of that scope. It became evident to the climbers about halfway up the route that they were moving slower than desired. It is at this point that they had a “go, no-go” conversation. They decided to continue with full knowledge of the added risk of rappelling at night. At this point the heuristic trap of commitment drove the climbers into a higher risk situation. It can be argued that the desire to rappel as quickly as possible, racing the sun, led to decisions like not placing knots at the end of the rope and skipping a rappel station.

As climbers we make risk calculations, and at times our focus on certain risks—particularly future risks—can blind us to the risks of the present. So too our goals and commitments can trap us into a series of events that have potentially fatal consequences. (Source: Matthew Denton, climbing guide and friend of the deceased.)

Images

Article Details

Author	Mathew Denton
Publication	ANAM
Volume	10
Issue	68
Page	0
Copyright Date	2015
Article Type	Accident reports