



AAC Publications

Rappel Failure – No Knot on Rope End, Fatigue

Washington, North Cascades, Le Petit Cheval, Spontaneity Arête

On September 6 my husband, Eric Peter Anderson (28), and I (27) summited Le Petit Cheval via the Spontaneity Arête (5.7) for our first anniversary. It was a gloriously clear day and we took our time on the route, admiring the views and relishing the wilderness. We descended the climbing route via a combination of several rappels and a rotten gulley, and arrived at the base in early evening. After packing our gear, we began the class 2 or 3 scramble down the lower slopes, looking forward to dinner.

We descended easily to the upper fixed line on the approach route. (There are two hand lines installed along steep areas of the approach.) This hand line had a few core shots—in fact, we had not used it for this reason while climbing up in the morning. Eric arrived a minute or so before me at the line, and he noticed there was a rap station there and began to set up a rappel with our rope. It was 7:15 p.m. Eric rappelled first, tightening his auto-block before he began to descend. Suddenly the rope went whipping through the rappel rings and Eric was falling, bouncing off the rocks like a toy. I screamed his name several times as he fell out of sight. Upon receiving no response, I began calling for help and descended the sketchy hand line.

Several climbers below me had found Eric curled in a heap under the trees that had stopped his fall. When I finally arrived, climbers had already begun descending for help. Two drove to Mazama to call 911. Others stayed on the road and along the trail to guide rescuers. James, Paul, and I stayed with Eric, who was bleeding heavily from the head. There were no vital signs, though James said he felt a faint pulse when he first arrived. We gently elevated Eric's head with my pack, covered him with jackets and a sleeping bag, and waited for rescue. We stayed on the mountain until 11 p.m., when we received word from the sheriff that mountain rescue planned to do a body recovery in the morning by helicopter. I descended to the road with James and Paul.

ANALYSIS

James and Paul examined the rope as we waited for rescuers. It looked as though Eric had only tied a knot in one end. He must not have realized he'd reached the ends of the rope—or the ropes were uneven—and when he hit the single knot the other side of the rope was pulled through the device and the anchor, causing him to fall to the ground. It appeared that he had been killed nearly instantly from severe head and neck trauma. I will never know why Eric did not tie a knot on the second end of the rappel rope. He was an aerospace engineer with ridiculous intelligence, and he was meticulous to the point where it was annoying. However, even the most scrupulous people can forget things when they're tired. It had been a very long day, and I think we had only gotten about five hours of sleep the previous night. Due to fatigue, I think Eric simply forgot to tie the second knot.

The rescue response and kindness from climbers on the mountain that night was indescribable. Thank you to all those who volunteered to help and to the helicopter crew that retrieved Eric's body the following morning. (Source: Dandelion Dilluvio.)

Images

Article Details

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