



AAC Publications

Leader Fall on Ice – Hit by Unknown Falling Object

Colorado, Ouray, Camp Bird Road

On January 5, Dale Remsberg (44), an IFMGA guide and very experienced ice climber, was teaching an AMGA I2 Ice Instructor Course to students Aili Farquhar, the belayer at time of accident, and Kerr Adams. While leading pitch two of the Skylight (WI4+), midway up the pitch, Remsberg stopped to place his third ice screw, about 10 feet above his previous screw. During this process, he coached the students and described why he was placing another screw relatively soon (the previous placement had hit some air pockets and produced some surface cracking). Before he completed the third screw, Remsberg was hit by an unknown falling object, possibly a snow mushroom. The belay stance for this pitch is down a snow slope and around a corner, making it difficult to maintain a belay with minimal slack. The resulting fall was around 35 feet down an ice chimney. Remsberg's second ice screw held, and the belay halted the fall just before he hit an ice ledge at the start of the pitch.

With Remsberg still conscious, the well-trained students were able to self-rescue via a lower and then tandem rappel to the road below the climb.

Meanwhile, at the top of pitch one, Adams had called 911 and Remsberg called Nate Disser, the owner of San Juan Mountain Guides (SJMG). When guides from SJMG arrived on the scene, they aided Farquhar in conducting a thorough head-to-toe assessment and vitals check and produced SOAP (Subjective, Objective, Assessment, Plan) notes that were used during transport to a trauma center. An ambulance carried Remsberg to Ouray, from which he was flown via helicopter to the hospital in Montrose. He suffered three fractured ribs and a hemopneumothorax (abnormal air and blood in the chest cavity).

ANALYSIS

Dale Remsberg writes: I do not believe really anything went wrong in this incident, but rather everything went as well as it could. I had subscribed to the "ice leader must never fall" philosophy for 25 years and had never taken a leader fall on ice before. This climb was well within my ability and was in good shape. My takeaway was that, even when everything is done as well as possible, unfortunate things can happen and it's very important to have partners that have practiced self-rescue and have first-aid knowledge.

In addition, the fact that we had cell phone coverage made a huge difference in response time. Climbers should consider other forms of communication if they go out of cell range. I carry a two-way satellite communication device and a satellite phone on remote climbs. The trauma surgeon stated that if I not been able to get to definitive care as soon as I had, the outcome likely would have been much worse. (Source: Dale Remsberg.)

LINCOLN FALLS NEAR MISS: An experienced ice climber had a very close call in the Mosquito Range in February when a large sheet of ice (estimated at 10 by 6 feet) broke loose under him while he was leading the popular Scottish Gully (WI3). He fell about 40 feet into snow near the base of the climb. Prudently, he'd placed a screw partway up and the rope came tight as he neared the ground, preventing an even longer fall—a good reminder to place adequate protection even on relatively easy climbs.

Images



The screw that held Dale Remsberg's long fall above Ouray, Colorado.

Article Details

Author	Dale Remsberg
Publication	ANAM
Volume	11
Issue	70
Page	62
Copyright Date	2017
Article Type	Accident reports