



AAC Publications

Rockfall – Misguided Chivalry

Wyoming, Grand Teton, Owen-Spalding Route

Jed Williamson (left) and Peter Lev in the Tetons. Williamson is wearing the helmet he loaned to a client on the day he got hit by a rock on the Grand Teton.

In the late 1990s, I was guiding on the Grand Teton, and my client couldn't find a helmet she liked up at the Lower Saddle, so I lent her mine. I assumed we would be climbing Exum Ridge and I would be in the lead, with no one else in front. However, the weather changed our plans and we ended up doing the Owen-Spalding. A client in a guided party out in front of us kicked off a potato-size rock and didn't shout, "Rock!" The rock bounced down and hit me on top of the head.

I was bleeding but never lost consciousness. After doing a self-assessment of my condition, I stuck a handkerchief on the injured area, pulled on my wool hat, and brought my clients up.

ANALYSIS

I did not expect us to be on the Owen-Spalding, where there are more climbers, especially inexperienced ones. I might have made a different decision if I'd anticipated this. If the client above us had yelled "Rock!" I probably would have been able to dodge the bullet.

Nonetheless, my client, the wife of the undersecretary of agriculture at the time, was correct when she said, "You guides should wear a helmet!" Interestingly, I was one of the senior guides who had been saying this for years! (Source: Jed Williamson, former editor of Accidents in North American Mountaineering.)

Images



Jed Williamson (left) and Pete Lev in the Tetons.

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