2006 Mountaineers

Annual Safety Report

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The purpose of the Safety Committee is to promote a culture of safety among the Mountaineers. This is accomplished by:

1) The collection and reporting of accidents and near misses

2) Education & training of our leaders and instructors

The ongoing goal is to build structure around this culture of safety such that the Mountaineers continue to be recognized as industry leaders in safety for outdoor activities.

Functions of the committee (from the Charter):

* Collect, develop and distribute safety education and knowledge pertinent to each activity.
* Benchmark volunteer and professional organization safety programs and standards.
* Work to stimulate creation and maintenance of Safety committees within each Branch. Help to standardize and educate safety concepts and awareness at the branch and activity levels.
* Develop and perform standardized collection of data on at risk activities from all branches, via trip, accident, near miss, and other reports, and make this data available to all branches.
* Standardize trip reporting to collect information on routes, accidents, and near misses, and enhance systems to share this information.
* Ensure a thorough and professional accident investigation is performed for all fatalities and major accidents in a timely manner. This is coordinated through the Executive Director and may include outside and/or professional input.
* Assist in the development of standards for leader qualification and continuing education.

The committee was formed and had its first meeting on May 23, 2006. The team developed modest and attainable goals for the year of:

* Collecting information on accidents in a systematic manner
* Writing up reports for major incidents in a systematic format
* Communicating summaries of facts from the accidents to club members
* Facilitating discussion of accidents and safety measures among club members

The committee met by conference call on August 22, 2006 to check progress on reporting and discuss ideas.

The committee met on December 3, 2006 to review all written reports, develop recommendations, and discuss next steps.**Summary Statistics:**

**Major incidents involving Search and Rescue and/or hospitalization**

There were nine incidents reported that required a search and rescue and/or overnight hospitalization. These fell into the categories of:

Snow Travel - 5 incidents

Fall on snow with ice axe/failure to arrest

1. Cracked pelvis, cracked vertebrae (SAR, hospitalized) – Crosby Mountain March 20, 2006
2. Lacerations of knee, bruised ribs (SAR, hospitalized) – The Brothers July 22, 2006

Snow travel on steep grade without ice axe

1. Broken leg (SAR, hospitalized) – McClellan Butte April 15, 2006.
2. Lacerations of head (SAR, Dr. Visit) – High Priest June 27, 2006

Other snow travel

1. Uncontrolled glissade, lacerations to face, abdominal puncture (SAR, hospitalized) – Red Mountain May 20, 2006

Rock Climbing - 3 incidents, including one resulting in an eventual fatality

Leader Fall

1. Bruising, chipped vertebrae (SAR, hospitalized) – Chair Peak June 20, 2006

Unroped Fall

1. Possibly caused by stroke - broken leg, back, neck, fatality by blood clot 3 weeks later (SAR, hospitalized, fatality) – Yellow Jacket Tower May 21, 2006
2. Concussion, ankle and wrist injury (SAR, hospitalized) – Lundin Peak June 18, 2006

Other - 1 incident

Party separation, spent two nights in solo unplanned bivy

1. Hypothermia, dehydration and frostbite (SAR, hospitalized) – Muncaster Mountain June 17, 2006

**Minor incidents that did not require Search & Rescue or hospitalization**

There were seven other incidents reported which did not require SAR or hospitalization, although this number is assumed to be less then actual as these less severe incidents tend to be underreported.

Snow Travel - 2 minor incidents

Other snow travel

1. Post-holed, bruised knee (Dr. Visit)
2. Hit by rock, bloody nose

Rock Climbing – 1 minor incident

Leader Fall

1. Bruising (Dr. Visit)

Field Trips – 4 minor incidents

Snow

1. Dislocated Shoulder
2. Dislocated Shoulder
3. Dislocated Shoulder

Rock

1. Mild concussion, bruises (Dr. Visit)

**Summary of Accident Reports:**

* March 20, 2006 – Crosby Mountain
* April 15, 2006 – McClellan Butte
* May 20, 2006 – Red Mountain
* May 21, 2006 – Yellow Jacket Tower
* June 17, 2006 – Muncaster Mountain
* June 18, 2006 – Lundin Peak
* June 20, 2006 – Chair Peak
* June 27, 2006 – High Priest
* July 22, 2006 – The Brothers

**March 20, 2006 – Crosby Mountain**

Location: Crosby Mountain (5,520+), Steven’s Pass area (USGS Grotto7.5)

Injuries: Fractured pelvis

Cause of Accident: Fall on steep snow slope, failure to self arrest

**Summary:**

On March 20, 2006, a party of five set out to climb Crosby Mountain via the standard winter scramble route. The team used snowshoes and ice axes as the snow deepened and terrain steepened. The party began to spread out as they continued up steep terrain with the last person of the team, LW, out of sight of any other team member. At about the 3,800’ level, those in the lead stopped to make sure LW emerged safely from a steep section (40 degree slope). At about 11:00am, LW encountered a section of trees where the snow was crusted over with ice, and his feet slipped out from under him on the icy section. His ice axe was planted but ripped out of the snow during the fall, he lost the axe almost immediately, then slid down on his stomach 200’ without the axe, tumbling out of control, until hitting a 3’ diameter tree. Injuries included a fractured pelvis and vertebrae. Contact was made by cell phone with rescue authorities, and LW was evacuated to Harborview that evening. Cause of accident: fall on steep snow slope, loss of ice axe, failure to self arrest.

**April 15, 2006 - McClellan Butte**

Location: McClellan Butte, North Basin route, Interstate 90 exit 38

Injuries: Broken left leg (tibia & fibula)

Cause of Accident: Slip on icy crust, no ice axe in use

**Summary:**

On April 15, 2006, a party of four set out to climb the Intermediate level North Basin route on McClellan Butte. The party summited without incident early afternoon. The party began their descent with crampons, but then switched back to snowshoes as they neared the base of the route. The party encountered periodic crusty/icy conditions on 30 degree slopes where they did not break through the crust. Some party members took out their ice axes at this time, and the climber in the lead reports self arresting a couple of times due to slippery conditions. At approximately 5:15pm, MW, who was not using an ice axe, was backing down a steep snow slope, slipped on the icy crust, fell, and broke his left leg. A rescue was requested by cell phone, and a rescue was initiated by Seattle Mountain Rescue and others. MW was evacuated by ground to Overlake hospital. Cause of accident: slip on icy crust, no ice axe in use.

**May 20, 2006 - Red Mountain**

Location: Red Mountain, Snoqualmie Pass

Injuries: Ice axe injuries of puncture to abdomen, lacerations to face & torn nostril.

Cause of Accident: Uncontrolled glissade

**Summary**

On May 20, 2006 a party of twelve set out to scramble Red Mountain (Snoqualmie Pass), taking the normal winter scramble route. The party had attained the summit and were descending about 1:00pm, when CA lost control while glissading and was unable to self-arrest. CA had started his glissade to come to the aid of other party members who had previously fallen and had slid down the mountain (without injury) when he lost control of his own glissade. He tumbled quite a ways down the slope and came to a stop without hitting any rocks or trees but had ice axe injuries. These injuries included a puncture wound to the abdomen, lacerations to his face, and a torn nostril. CA never lost consciousness; his vital signs were good and he was able to walk. Because of the uncertainty of the abdominal wound and his age (74), the party requested a helicopter evacuation by cell phone. This was provided by Whidbey Naval Air Station. CA was airlifted to Harborview and was listed in satisfactory condition and was released the next day. The entire incident, from injury to evacuation, took approximately 2.5 hours. The Whidbey Island SAR team was highly complementary of the professionalism of the climbing party in communications, signaling, and the medical information given to the SAR personnel. Cause of accident: uncontrolled glissade.

**May 21, 2006 – Yellow Jacket Tower**

Location: Yellow Jacket Tower, Icicle Canyon, Leavenworth Area

Injuries: Broken femur/sacrum/hand/ribs, lacerations, contusions, & bleeding in the brain. A blood clot released 3 weeks later resulted in death.

Cause of Accident: Unroped fall on rock, possible stroke

**Summary:**

On May 21, 2006, a party of 6 set out to climb the basic rock route on the East Flank of Yellow Jacket Tower. The party approached the hidden gulley near the base of the tower, which is mostly 2nd and 3rd class climbing with a 4th class move at a chockstone. The leader free-climbed the gulley and set up a hand-line for others to follow. Three students and one other rope leader climbed the gulley with the assistance of the hand-line. HB was the last to climb and asked that the hand-line be pulled up, which was done. At approximately 8:30am, HB suffered a fall of about 300’ while climbing the gulley; he was not attached to a hand-line. His injuries consisted of: broken femur, broken sacrum, broken hand, broken ribs, lacerations, contusions, & bleeding in the brain. HB was evacuated to Harborview, eventually transferred to Madigan, and was making a good recovery when three weeks later a blood clot released, resulting in HB’s death. No autopsy was conducted by spousal request. Cause of accident: unroped fall on rock, possible stroke; according to HB’s wife, “doctors reported that HB suffered a [small lacuna] stroke on the day of the accident and that this stroke was the cause of his fall and subsequent injuries”.

**June 17, 2006 – Muncaster Mountain**

Location: Muncaster Mountain, Olympic National Park

Accident Date: June 17, 2006

Injuries: Hypothermia, dehydration, frostbite

Cause of Accident: Unplanned solo bivouac, communication breakdown, party separation

**Summary:**

On June 17, 2006, a party of four set out from high camp to climb the scramble route on Muncaster Mountain in the Olympic National Park. Conditions were foggy with light mist, and deteriorated as the day wore on to rain and wind in the afternoon; the party did not carry a rope. The proper route was hard to find in these conditions, with several forays made up various gullies and ridges to find the correct route. At about 1:00pm, AB stated she would not continue without a rope, and she turned around. AB stated that she could find her way back to camp on her own as she did not want to deprive the others of a summit. After discussion, the climb leader decided to split the party and assigned RP to accompany AB back to camp. A communication breakdown occured when RP caught up with AB lower in the basin. There is disagreement among the reports as to what conversation ensued, but there is consensus a communication problem existed, and all parties were frustrated with the situation. RP started hiking back to camp without waiting for AB to follow. Due to the foggy conditions RP lost sight of AB as he climbed out of the basin. RP was following tracks but soon discovered he was climbing the wrong basin once he caught sight of the ridge, and found that he had been following their tracks from a previous foray made earlier in the day, so he made a left hand turn to traverse to the correct gulley. AB followed RP’s tracks but missed his turn to the left, and continued following tracks to the top of the ridge. AB was not carrying a map or compass, she left those items in the tent. She glissaded or slid down the other side of the ridge which was very steep, eventually discovering she was lost, so decided to stay put in a clump of trees near the snow, and wait to be found. Once the other party members all got back to camp and discovered she was missing, they started a search about 5:30pm, eventually finding the saddle AB had crossed, but decided it was too dangerous to descend the other side given the approaching nightfall with rainy and foggy conditions, and the steep terrain without benefit of a rope, so returned to camp at 10:00pm. They broke camp early the next morning, reaching the trailhead around 11:00am, alerting authorities. The weather was not conducive for flying a helicopter that afternoon, so a rescue was delayed until the following day. AB was spotted and picked up at 1:00pm by helicopter on the 19th, she had spent two nights in an unplanned bivy with minimal resources in rainy and cold conditions. Injuries included hypothermia, dehydration and frostbite. Cause of accident: unplanned bivouac, communication breakdown, party separation.

**June 18, 2006 – Lundin Peak**

Location: Lundin Peak - West Ridge, Basic Rock Route, Snoqualmie Pass Area

Injuries: Gash on temple, broken right ankle, broken left hand

Cause of Accident: Unroped fall on rock face when large rock gave way

**Summary:**

On June 18, 2006 a party of 10 set out to climb the West Ridge basic rock route of Lundin Peak in the Snoqualmie Pass area. At about 10:15am, LN, a basic student, was the third person scrambling up the ledges and slabs towards the ridge and the start of the rock climb, the scramble rating was class 2 or 3. All parties were wearing helmets at this time. LN was about 10 feet below the ridge, was surmounting a final ledge, when the rock he was climbing on dislodged and pulled away. The rock was described as about 2’x3’ in size and about 250-300 lbs. LN fell about 75’, bouncing down the face and ledge system and came to rest in the moat where the snowfield joined the rock face. The dislodged rock did not fall on LN, but continued bouncing down the snowfield for another few hundred feet. LN suffered a puncture wound to the temple, a broken right ankle, and a broken right hand. A rescue was initiated by cell phone and LN was evacuated by helicopter to Harborview. Cause of accident: Unroped fall on rock face when large rock pulled away.

**June 20, 2006 - Chair Peak**

Location: Chair Peak, Northeast Buttress, Snoqualmie Pass Area

Injuries: Chipped vertebrae, bruised ankle, arm, head, and back.

Cause of Accident: Rock formation climber was standing on/ holding onto, gave way.

**Summary:**

On June 20, 2006, a party of eight set out to climb the basic route on the NE Buttress of Chair Peak. The climb leader had two teams climb the standard buttress route and two teams climb the face about 150’ left of the main route. All parties began to merge on the face near the fixed bolts. At approximately 11:30 am, JE, a first year Intermediate student on his first climb as a basic rope leader, was leading a pitch high on the upper face above the fixed bolts. JE’s route was somewhat right of what is considered the normal route up the face as he did not want to wait for the team ahead to move out of the way given the congestion forming. JE had overcome the crux move and was standing on flatter rock formations above the face when the rock formation he was standing on / holding onto gave way. JE took a leader fall of approximately 50 feet, and some protection pulled out of the rock formation as it crumbled. JE’s belayer states “imagine a pick-up truck load of rock dumping off the ledge with JE riding on top of it”. JE suffered injuries of chipped vertebrae, bruised ankle, arm, head, and back. A rescue response was initiated with Seattle Mountain Rescue by cell phone, and JE was evacuated by helicopter to Harborview that same afternoon. Cause the accident: rock formation climber was standing on / holding onto, gave way.

**June 27, 2006 - High Priest**

Location: Temple ridge, near Prusik Pass, Enchantments

Injuries: Lacerations to head, bruised shoulder

Cause of Accident: Fall on steep snow slope, no ice axe in use

**Summary:**

On June 27, at about 6:45am, a party of six was hiking out after a successful climb of the basic rock route on High Priest the day before. They had camped for the night at the 7,000’ level near Mt. Temple, and had gotten up early and were approaching Prusik Pass. The party was using trekking poles, their path gradually steepening on a rising traverse. Snow conditions were considered good. The snow steepened to 40+ degrees for a short section after a rock outcropping. Several in the party did not take out ice axes since the section was only 30’ to 40’ across. JQ led the way by kicking steps and successfully negotiated the steep section. RW was second in line and followed in JQ’s tracks, when on a down-step he stepped on a ribbon of ice and lost his footing, could not effect an arrest with his trekking pole, slid 250’ down the snowfield and across a rock band, finally coming to rest in a talus field. RW suffered multiple lacerations to the face and a bruised shoulder. He was not wearing a hard hat or using an ice axe. A rescue was initiated, but by the time one could be arranged, RW was able to walk out under his own power. Cause of accident: fall on steep snow, no ice axe in use.

**July 22, 2006 - The Brothers**

Location: The Brothers, Olympic National Park

Injuries: Deep cut on leg and broken/bruised ribs

Cause of Accident: Fall on steep snow, not using self belay, unable to self arrest

**Summary:**

On July 22, 2006, a party of eight was approaching the summit of The Brothers, South Peak (6,866’). The party had been scrambling up rock besides a steep snowfield when they came to a tricky outcropping that had to be negotiated at approximately 6,400’. Some of the party members decided to cross over a short section of steep snow to arrive at another rock section and continue the ascent. TP was following footsteps across the snow. TP was using an ice axe, and had a helmet on. He was navigating the final steps to gain the other side where he encountered a small moat (18”-24”). Just as he placed his foot near the moat for the final step to the rocks, he noticed the footstep was clear/slick. As he planted his foot and took the final step with his other foot towards the rock, his planted foot slipped out and he began a long tumble down the steep snow. His ice axe was not planted in self belay position as he took the step. He was unable to self arrest, eventually landing on a rocky area. His injuries included an ice axe cut to the knee, exposing the leg bone, bruised/cracked ribs, and multiple bruises and abrasions. A cell phone call was made that initiated a rescue, a Coast Guard helicopter was dispatched from Port Angeles and a high altitude snatch n grab was successfully carried out and TP was taken to Harborview. Cause of accident – fall on steep snow, not using self belay, unable to self arrest.