

## Scenario 4 - Bailing off The Chief

Last summer we took a group of 6 participants up to Squamish after they completed a multipitch climbing course. There were 4 leaders and 6 participants. Unfortunately, it had rained hard the day before we arrived, so we spent the first day cragging at the smoke bluffs while the chief dried out. On the 2nd day, to make up for a lost first day of multipitch, we decided that we'd climb the Chief - 2 teams (a team of 2 and a team of 3) would climb the apron (the lower 5 pitches) on a route called Diedre, 2 other teams (a team of 2 and a team of 3) on a parallel route called Over the Rainbow. Once we got to Broadway Ledge, 1 team of 2 would continue over to Memorial Ledge, climb Memorial Crack, and finish up the Squamish Buttress. One team of 3 would continue from Broadway Ledge over to Echelon Wall, and summit via a climb called Ultimate Everything. The remaining team of 2 and team of 3 would climb Butt Lite, the easiest route up the Chief.

We had a strong group of participants. Most of them learned more advanced things than normally taught in the class, and they really impressed us. We had one participant, Meg, who we were a little concerned about. She was a strong climber with a great attitude, but she had less stamina than the others, and she was a bit uncoordinated physically.

Everyone was excited to get on a big multipitch, and we started with a 5:30am alpine start. I had agreed to generally be sweep. We broke into our separate parties to climb different routes, and we planned to all meet up on Broadway Ledge before continuing up our routes, and again meet up at the summit before hiking down together. We also had walkie talkies to stay in touch. We anticipated a fun, well-orchestrated day where we could have a whole group experience without clogging up any individual route.

We hiked up to the base of the Apron. Meg was a bit behind the others, but smiling the whole way. We roped up, and John's team of 3 headed up Diedre while Joe's team of 3 headed up Over The Rainbow. I then started leading up the first pitch of Diedre, while Sandra started leading the first pitch of Over the Rainbow, with Meg belaying him. Although the rock had had a day to dry out, there was still some seeping in places. It wasn't a big deal, but it added a little bit of spice to the climb.

We all successfully made it to Broadway Ledge, where we grouped up and ate a very early lunch. The Squamish Buttress team left with John, and the Ultimate Everything Team left with Sandra. Joe and I packed everything up and got ready to climb Butt Lite. Joe would lead first with a team of 3, since I was the designated sweep. We put Meg on that team because she seemed a bit tired, and we thought she'd benefit from a team of 3 where she didn't have to lead as many pitches. Joe began climbing with another student belaying, and Meg waiting.

As Joe climbed, Meg approached me to say she was concerned that she was holding everyone back, and maybe she should just hike off (which was an option from Broadway Ledge). I assured her that we were doing fine time-wise, and she was doing a great job. She then shared that she was just completely exhausted, and she wasn't confident that she could move safely on

rock, or belay safely. Quickly, I chatted with the participant who was supposed to be on my rope, explained to them the situation, and added them to Joe's rope team, so that I could walk off with Meg. While it wasn't possible to communicate this to Joe, the participants were briefed on the plan, and would be able to communicate to him once they reached him. Joe reached his anchor, and yelled down "on belay!" and the other two participants began to climb. I hiked off with Meg.

On the hike off, Meg was relentlessly apologetic, but I explained to her that I had climbed the chief before, and I would rather everyone make safe decisions. She said that she had pulled a hamstring on Pitch 4 but it hadn't bothered her - probably because of the adrenaline - and it was now starting to hurt on the hike out. We returned to the car, had a snack, and then went to the rec center to relax in the hot tub. Meg's spirits lifted, and we all enjoyed stories during a late dinner after everyone else had returned.

## Reflections on Scenario 2

This trip overall went well, but upon debriefing, the leaders believe there were some emotional factors we overlooked that contributed to Meg's exhaustion:

- Although Meg was a strong climber and had led single-pitch climbs that were more difficult than Over the Rainbow, she only had climbed one route that was more than two pitches, and that was R&D in Leavenworth, which doesn't have a lot of exposure. Over The Rainbow is 5 long exposed slab pitches. She mentioned the exposure several times on the climb, but being in such a strong group, was reluctant to let on that it terrified her.
- The second pitch of Over The Rainbow, which was the first pitch that Meg led, had an 18" waterflow that needed to be stepped over - this was residual seepage from the rain earlier in the week. This particular spot was steep slab with no hands. Meg was very nervous making this move on lead, but Sandra encouraged her, knowing that she had the skills to do this. Meg made the move without falling. Around this time, I looked over from Diedre and could see Meg, and smiled and waved at her. She dutifully smiled and waved back, despite her fear, because this was supposed to be fun. When she belayed Sandra up, Sandra high-fived her and reaffirmed that she knew she'd crush that pitch.
- Sandra led the third pitch which finishes over a roof that looks improbable from afar. On this pitch, especially towards the bottom, the climber cannot see their belayer, so Meg felt alone on steep slab climbing towards an improbable roof. As she approached the roof, she could see Sandra in the trees, and Sandra gave her good tips for easily overcoming the roof.
- Sandra's positivity and encouragement didn't leave much room for Meg to opt out of leading the 4th pitch, so she did, despite her fears snowballing. The 4th pitch has an undercling arch that the climber traverses, and just before mounting the top of the arch, there's a single bolt to protect the move. Meg was so fearful of falling and swinging that she pulled a hamstring as she strained to clip the bolt. Not able to communicate with her belayer, she continued on to the top of the pitch. With so much adrenaline, it seemed her hamstring was fine.

By the time Sandra and Meg reached Broadway Ledge, Meg was completely exhausted, and we believe that at least half of that exhaustion was mental exhaustion from 5 pitches (3 hours) of compounding fears. We think that if we had done a better job of acknowledging and mitigating her fears, she might have had the energy to climb the full route. But as leaders, we were focused on Meg's physical ability to climb, and we were excited to share with her one of our favorite climbs. We had no doubt that she'd be able to do it. We knew she was the weakest of the group, but the group was so advanced that we didn't really think much of it.