

<http://cascadeclimbers.com/forum/ubbthreads.php/topics/43671/2>

Re: Death at the Coulee

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Posts: 299

TRs: 0 Photos: 0

Loc: Seattle

Here is my accident report. It has been shared with all parties involved.

Erden.

A tragic death

Göran Kropp, my hero, has passed away in my presence on Monday September 30th, 2002 around 14:40. It was a sad day for humanity. We lost an exemplary human being who had impacted the lives of many of us.

That Monday was the first time that we were going to go climbing together. We had talked about this for about a year, and given his busy schedule, we had not been able to connect. I had been talking about climbing with my friend Marcus Hysert, and we were undecided about where to climb that day. I invited Göran Kropp and Richard Murphy as well, pending confirmation on Sunday evening as to the location. Given the iffy weather forecast, we chose to go to Frenchman Coulee near Vantage as it is usually dry there.

I drove with Richard and Marcus in Richard's car to meet Göran at 10:00 at the lower parking lot by the bulletin board and the portapotties. When we arrived, the Coulee was deserted and Richard's was the only car on the parking lot. We waited until about 10:20 and I asked Richard and Marcus to get started on their climbing, and that I would wait for Göran a few more minutes. We agreed that I would join them by the Sunshine Wall area.

Göran arrived around 10:40 driving like a madman down the winding pavement. He charged out of his car, apologizing profusely. I had no problems, just wanted to finally be with him to climb. As we were packing to get on the climber's trail to the Sunshine Wall, he was telling me that he had to respond to the Outside Magazine that morning. The magazine wanted pictures from him for a feature article that was going to cover his upcoming expedition to trace the US borders in North America next year. He does not cease to surprise me, I thought. I asked if he needed a partner...

He kept talking to me about this next project. He was excited, he wanted to share, he wanted to tell me that he and Renata, his girlfriend, would start in the Northwest in Fall, follow the Pacific Coast in a folding double kayak. They would fold up the kayak at the Mexican border and carry all 32 pounds of it along the Mexican border. He was planning to cover the desert in winter. Then when they arrived at the Gulf of Mexico, they would get back in the

kayak, around Florida up to Maine. I had to ask: "so will you do the northern border too, you are not going to carry the kayak again, will you?" The answer was, yes he would carry it, and that he would actually need it on all the waterways and lakes that are on the northern border with Canada...

Göran and I had connected ever since I met him in Seattle during a slide show that he gave about his extraordinary trip from Sweden to Everest and back. He carried all the necessary gear and food for the climb on his bicycle to the base camp of Everest. He did summit Everest and helped in the tragic rescue efforts on the mountain as they unfolded that year. I had already read Göran's book and I wanted to talk to the man, to find out what it took to pull off such a daunting challenge. He was most approachable, he listened to me, and he encouraged me to take on my own projects. He was a true hero all along.

We wound our way down to Sunshine Wall. When we found my friends, Marcus was leading Air Guitar (5.10a) in the King Pins area, and Richard was belaying. Göran and I decided that we could climb right next to my friends and keep the group together. After all, we all wanted to expand our circle of friends for future climbs.

We started with bolted arêtes to get comfortable with each other. Göran had said that he had been to the area only a few times before, so I was opting to belay him and to have him enjoy the climbs. We would pull the rope, and I would lead it also. Among others, we did lead Whipsaw (5.9), and top roped Pony Keg (5.10a), a crack climb right next to Whipsaw. Göran looked solid and strong in the crack as I was belaying him. When he came down, Göran said he felt challenged in that crack and we talked about how we should go on a Yosemite road trip to get him to become a crack climbing expert.

By this time, Air Guitar (5.10a) was the only climb left accessible from the ledge on which we were standing. Richard and Marcus were already climbing to our right around the corner, visible from our ledge. We considered moving next to them. Somehow, Göran accepted to lead Air Guitar. I did not object, as this crack climb is one of the better climbs in the area with clean rock that will take protection well except for the very top. Guidebook said that there is supposed to be a bolt at the top to supplement gear placements.

Göran started climbing, and I belayed him using a Petzl Reverso. He placed a small nut then what seemed like a #2 yellow TCU. The other gear that I could identify after we left the scene included a #3 red TCU, a #1 red Camalot, and a #3 blue Camalot. I am not certain if he placed any more gear.

Just before I looked down to my feet while belaying, I saw him near the top, with a piece of protection by his foot. He had to have been about 20 meters up on the climb. We were using a 60-meter rope and earlier in the day, had plenty of extra rope when we rappelled from the anchors of the climbs that we were doing. Then I heard a commotion above me. Göran was falling.

He was falling and I saw his first piece pull. His rope went slack. My instinct was to duck and I crouched low into the corner to take up the slack. I think I pulled some rope through the belay device, but I am not sure. I did throw my left arm into the lead line to press it closer to the ground as I did crouch. It wrapped my arm once, caught my left biceps and cinched it. I was not wearing a shirt. It appeared after the fact that the belay action was delivered by the one loop around my arm that resulted in a full circle rope burn with trauma and I did not feel much pull on my belay device.

I heard him impact just behind me on the 2-3 meter wide shelf, and then there was silence. It all happened very quickly. I looked up and there was only one piece left on the climb, the #2 TCU. All other gear had pulled in sequence as he came down. The rope went from me to the TCU, and then down to Göran who was now laying on his back on the climber's trail below the King Pins.

I got off the belay. I could not see Richard who was belaying Marcus who was half way up another climb to climber's right with respect to me. I yelled to Marcus to immediately lower and help me.

When I descended next to Göran, his helmet had shattered and was not on his head. Given the amount of blood on the talus and the severity of the injuries, I have no doubt that he died on first impact with the shelf.

I had just received training as a Wilderness First Responder. I knew the drill. There was mechanism of injury for intra cranial bleeding, for spinal injury, for severe trauma on all organs. I had to restore breathing, I had to restore pulse, I had to stop the bleeding. After a while, I was applying CPR with my right arm only, as my left arm had become useless at this point. Positive pressure ventilation did not help.

Richard pulled me away from Göran and started to tend to me. I wanted to go back, plug his bleeding but it was the most helpless situation. I thought I was trained, ready to care for anyone and reality was in front of me. I was experiencing Acute Stress Reaction. My hands, my chest, my face, my temples were all tingly; my hair was standing on end. I was getting dizzy. My left hand was going numb at the same time. I deduced that was due the trauma to the left arm, but why was my right hand also mirroring the same symptoms? I was hyperventilating, and Richard kept talking to me. He took my pulse. He made me lay down behind a rock so he could attend to Göran, asking me to take slower breaths. I felt helpless and weak.

Marcus had run up to the parking lot, found other climbers and placed a call to 911. Soon a gentleman arrived who said he was trained in first aid. I told him that I was OK, that Richard and I had cleared me for spinal injury, that I had no impacts, no falls, and no mechanism of injury that I could tell for vital organs.

Soon after that, a team of Fire Rescue folks arrived on the scene. Then, Sgt Andrew Quen arrived by a military helicopter from 54 Med Co out of Ft Lewis, WA. The crew of that helicopter hovered over us repeatedly: they first lowered Sgt Quen by cable to assess the scene of the accident. Their decision was to hoist me up with Sgt Quen, to buckle me in, to lower Sgt Quen back down, then to lower the litter, to pick up the litter after Göran was secured, then to finally pick up Sgt Quen.

The crew of that helicopter was doing the most dangerous thing for a helicopter, hovering over us. I told Sgt Quen to not take any additional risks, that I could walk out on short rope. He convinced me that I should ride with them. After all was said and done, given my mental condition after the accident, I understand that he was right.

Monday was a sad day for humanity.

I lost a friend.

I lost my hero.

CONCLUSION:

I am estimating that the accident happened around 14:40 at Frenchman Coulee, in the King Pins area of Sunshine Wall on Air Guitar. The cause of death was falling on rock due to multiple protection pieces that came out of the crack. There was severe trauma to head, spine and internal organs. Coroner's report says: "Severe Head Injuries, due to Blunt Force Trauma."

I was unable to restore Göran's breathing, nor his pulse and had to stop around 15:00. When Richard checked the time, it was 15:11 at which time Richard assisted me away from Göran and laid me down. One Camp wire-gate carabiner had sheared next to the stem and was found on the scene. I am not certain if any other pro was attached to that quickdraw. The Grant County Sheriff has kept that hardware as evidence. I have a nut, a #3 TCU, a #1 Camalot and a #3 Camalot that I have identified as the gear involved in the accident.

10/02/2002 Update on Gear Involved:

Fellow climber Paul Detrick gathered two pieces from Air Guitar on 10/1/02. A #2 Camalot was near the top of the climb, that had a quickdraw clipped to it that was missing one carabiner, the one through which the rope would be clipped. The quickdraw had one Camp wiregate carabiner remaining on it, identical to the one found broken below the climb.

Therefore, consistent with the size of the climb that widens from a finger crack to hands to fist, the pieces involved in the fall in sequence from the top down were:

- #3 blue Camalot that has a frayed trigger wire and the unit is somewhat distorted.

- #2 yellow Camalot, where the carabiner broke, that did its job and stayed in the crack.

- #1 red Camalot that has stripped cam surfaces

- #3 red TCU the cams of which do not have the kind of surface damage that would compare to those on the red Camalot.

- #2 yellow TCU that stayed in the crack and low enough that it probably did not take any load in the fall except after Göran reached the climber's trail.

- one small nut, first piece that popped when the lead line went tight.

Carabiner failure may be due to a preexisting fault in the carabiner, or due to an open gate during the fall. No data is available on the fracture surface of the broken carabiner until that surface is properly investigated. Tensile tests on the lot of wiregate carabiners that Göran was using may be possible.

[10-05-2002, 01:42 AM: Message edited by: erden]