

ACCIDENT REPORT

GJERTVASSTIND.

Luster, Norway.

July 19, 2026



Norges
klatreforbund

Report by the safety commission NKf.

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On July 19th, 2026, a 27-year-old woman from the United States of America (US) lost her life in a rappelling accident on Gjertvasstind in Luster municipality in Norway. This report is based on firsthand accounts provided by the surviving climber, rescuers from the Norwegian Alpine Rescue Groups (NARG) and the Norwegian Search and Rescue Agency, (HRS) as well as information obtained from the police.

Approach and Climbing Plan

The day before the accident, the two experienced female climbers, one from Norway and one from the United States, began their approach to the mountain. They started from Helgedalen and reached the lower part of Gjertvassbreen (glacier), where they bivouacked for the night.

At around 4 a.m. the following morning, they crossed Gjertvassbreen roped together to reach the gully on the west side of Gjertvasstind. They planned to climb the south-facing wall of Gjertvasstind, an eight-pitch route with a crux graded Norwegian 8, equivalent to French 7b+ / US 5.12c. With an elevation of 2,351 meters, Gjertvasstind ranks as Norway's ninth-highest mountain. The climbers were both experienced in alpine climbing; however, this was the first time they were climbing an alpine route together. They had previously climbed non-alpine routes together.

Equipment and Rappel Setup

The two climbers were using one 9.6 mm Edelrid Tommy Caldwell dynamic single rope and one 6 mm Petzl Pur Line (tag line), both

were 65 meters long (the dynamic rope had been cut from its original length).

Based on the Norwegian climber's account, the climbers decided to rappel because the gully was approximately 60 degrees steep and the snow was icy and firm. They traversed a short section on the west side of the gully (left side in the photo) to reach the boulder they had chosen to use as their rappel anchor. Several climbing parties had rappelled from this boulder before, and they considered it safe. They placed a 7 mm static rope around the boulder and tied an overhand knot on a bight (Norwegian: slått overhåndsknute) on the static rope to create a master point/clipping loop (Norwegian: sentralpunkt) for the rappel. After completing the rappel, they would still need to downclimb a short section on snow to reach the start of the climb.

Both climbers were aware of potential risks present when rappelling with a tag line and a single rope. If there is no mechanism preventing the knot joining the tag line and the single rope from moving through the master point, depending on the rappel setup one of two things can happen:

A. Using ATC with one rope in each slot.

Assume one uses a classic belay device (ATC) with two slots, where one slot is used for the single rope and the other slot is used for the tag line. If the joining knot happens to be on the single rope side of the masterpoint (tag line runs through the master point), the knot will start migrating, making the tag line side shorter than

the single rope side.

B. Using belay device connected to single rope only

Assume one connects the belay device to the single rope only. For this setup to work, the joining knot must be on the tag line side of the masterpoint (single rope runs through the master point) along with a mechanism to prevent the joining knot from moving through the master point. In this setup, if the joining knot somehow moves through the master point, the climber will fall. Not even stopper knots at the rope ends will prevent this. Connecting the belay device to the single rope only, along with a mechanism blocking the joining knots from moving to the single rope side is the recommended procedure described in the [manual for Petzl Pur Line](#).

The climbers threaded the single rope through the master point and used a flat double fisherman's knot (Norwegian: stående dobbel fiskeknute) to join the single rope to the tag line on the other side of the master point. They chose not to tie stopper knots at the ends of the ropes because they were concerned that the ropes could get stuck when thrown down. Since they were rappelling on a low angle rather than on a vertical wall, they felt confident in doing so. They did not establish any mechanism to prevent the stopper knot from moving through the master point (other than possibly the small size of the master point).

The Accident

The Norwegian climber descended first, rappelling on both ropes using a Black Diamond ATC Guide belay device. Based on her recollection, she believes that the belay device was attached directly to her belay loop, in high-friction mode. She also recalls using a prusik backup attached to the harness with a locking carabiner. The climbers were not stacked before the rappel.

She reached a flat ledge below an overhang on the east side of the gully (right side in the photo), where she considered it safe to stand without being attached to the ropes or an anchor. She had about 5–10 meters of rope left when she disconnected her rappel device from the ropes.

She then shouted to the US climber that she could start rappelling. While the Norwegian climber was waiting on the snowy ledge, she decided to build an anchor in case they needed it later. The US climber started rappelling, and when she was about 10 meters above the Norwegian climber, the Norwegian climber looked up to see that she had started to fall. The US climber fell approximately 600 meters down the snowy gully and was unable to arrest the fall. She died from the injuries sustained.

Rescue and Recovery

The Norwegian climber immediately alerted the rescue authorities (police) at 06.59 a.m. The US woman was recovered by the Norwegian Search and Rescue Helicopter Service (Redningshelikopteret 330 Skvadron), at 09.08 a.m. The Norwegian climber was evacuated by the Norwegian Alpine Rescue Service (NARG) at 1.22 p.m.

Observations from the Accident Site

The US woman was found with the dynamic rope threaded through her Black Diamond ATC, which was connected to the belay loop with a locking carabiner, and with a friction hitch attached to the same rope. The tag line was neither connected to the rappel device nor to the friction hitch. She also had a Petzl GriGri connected to her belay loop; however, it was not connected to either rope. Why a GriGri was connected to the belay loop in addition to the ATC, we do not know. The rappel anchor was inspected by other climbers not long after the accident. The anchor (including the master point loop) was still intact and had not failed.

The most important facts obtained are these

- The dynamic rope was the only rope still connected to the deceased climber's rappel device and her friction hitch when she was found.
- The tag line and dynamic rope were still connected with the same joining knot when the deceased was found.
- The rappel anchor was still intact.
- The surviving climber states that the joining knot was originally on the correct side of the master point, but also that it could possibly fit through the master point.

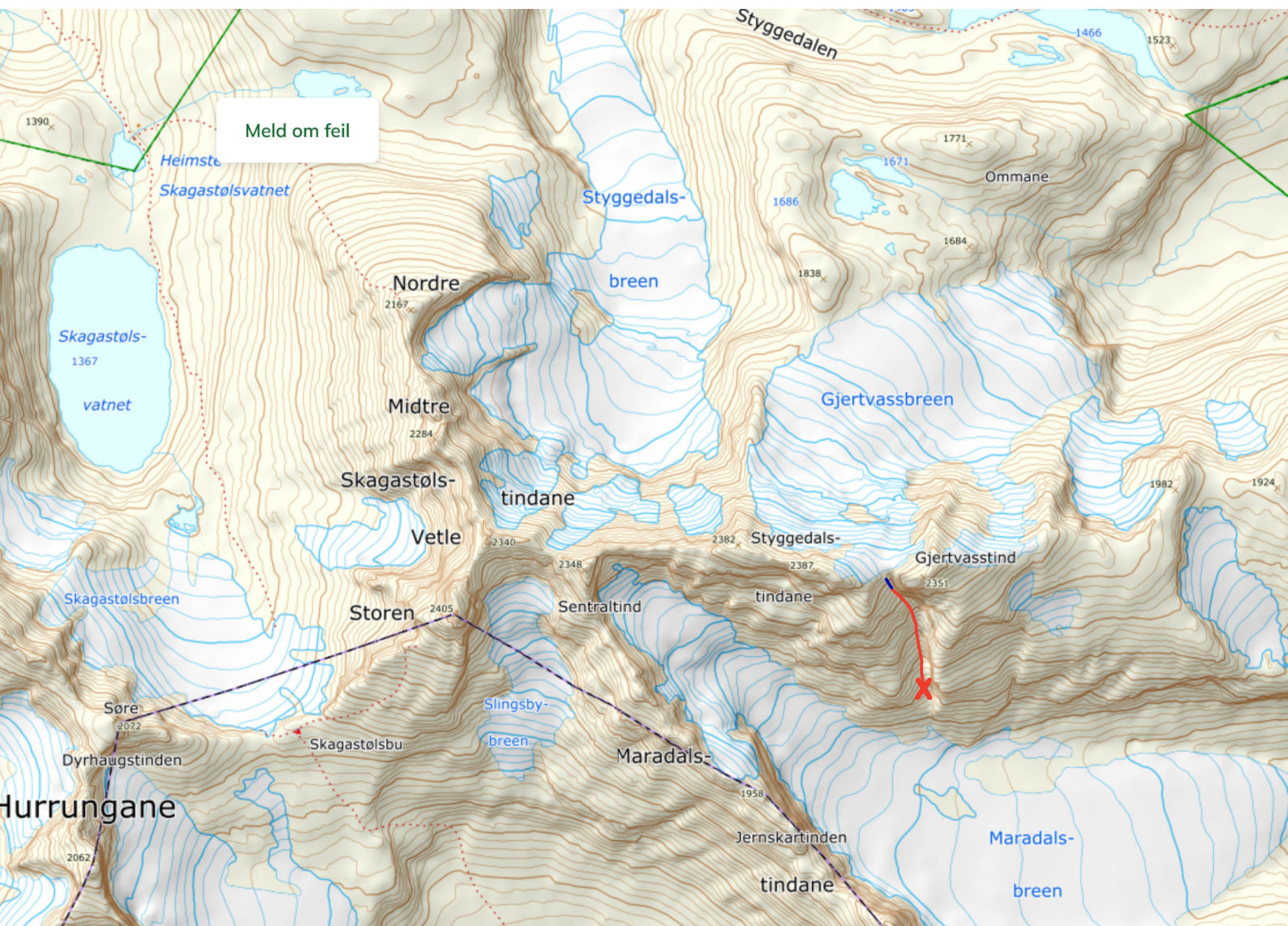
Somehow the rappel system the climbers used

failed when the US woman was rappelling. The findings are compatible with the hypothesis that the joining knot has somehow made it through the master point loop and started migrating as described in A above. Given this scenario and that no stopper knots were used, the climber would eventually rappel off the tag line that has become shorter due to knot migration and start falling.

We can, however, not exclude the possibility that

the US climber had attached the belay device only to the single rope as described in B above. The climber will in this scenario start falling immediately if the joining knot moves through the master point.

In any case, this accident again serves as a sad reminder of the inherent risks related to rappelling and the need to understand and mitigate those risks to stay safe.



This map excerpt depicts the alpine terrain in which the accident took place, focusing on the Styggedal Ridge, of which Gjertvasstind forms a part. The blue line indicates the planned rappel route, while the red line shows the fall trajectory. X marks the point of discovery.

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Aerial view of the South Face of Gjertvasstind. The climbing route follows the red line. The three circles shows the approximate locations of: Blue: Rappel anchor. Green: Norwegian climber after she finished the rappel. Red: Location of the US climber when the accident happened.



Illustrative photo

The photo shows how the tag line was joined to the single rope by a flat double fisherman's knot and threaded through the master point before the climbers started rappelling. Note that this is not the actual anchor used, and the size of the master point loop used may differ.

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