

earlier. Later several members of the party reported she stumbled several times before the fall and had difficulty keeping up with the party.

The weather was dry and warm. Snow conditions at the point where she fell were good with no tendency to slide and deep enough to offer good footing. The other members of the party had no difficulty.

*Source:* William Siri.

*California, Mt. Ralston*—On January 1, 1955, Allen Steck (28), Richard Houston, William Dunmire, and Kenneth D. Adam set out for a ski ascent of Mt. Ralston from Echo Lake, above Tahoe. Plans to attempt Pyramid Peak were cancelled because of a recent heavy snowstorm and 40-mile-an-hour winds. At 11:00 a.m., a mile and a half from the camp and 1500 feet beneath the summit, the four started across an open slope about 200 yards wide. When they were halfway across the area, without warning, they were suddenly engulfed in an avalanche. They were carried 120 feet downhill and encased in the snow. Houston was almost completely buried but was able, by means of a swimming motion, to free his face. Dunmire and Adam, by similar motions, made an airpocket for their faces. Steck, who was in the lead, came to rest face down under 4 feet of wet snow. Fortunately, a second party left shortly after the first group and came upon the avalanche site, one-half hour after the accident. Houston was dug out promptly and the others were finally recovered. Steck was unconscious but revived promptly.

*Source:* William Siri, Newspaper accounts.

*Analysis:* This accident occurred in only moderate terrain slope and involved a group of persons with extensive experience. It demonstrates the need for extreme caution during ski mountaineering and the real hazard presented by recent heavy snow fall.

*California, Higher Cathedral Spire, Yosemite National Park*—On April 17, 1955, at 5:30 a.m., Jack Weicker (24), Irene Beardsley (19), and Anne Pottinger (19) started up the talus at the base of the Higher Cathedral Spire. Roughly one and one-half hours later they began the climb. The weather was overcast at this point, but not actually raining. The first two pitches were climbed without incident. On the second pitch, the Bathtub, Weicker used a 15-foot sling and gave tension to Miss Beardsley, climbing third. During the course of the climb the girls took tension twice, but this is not unusual on the Higher Spire and Weicker reported that both girls were climbing well and showed no signs of undue fatigue. At the top of the Bathtub there was a short flurry of snow, less than five minutes. This wet sections of the upper part of the climb. The rock was cold, but there was ample opportunity to warm the hands between pitches. Weicker had a pair of buckskin gloves, and the girls shared an extra pair of socks.

The clothing of the party was that customarily worn by rock climbers in Yosemite. Miss Pottinger had two shirts and a wind breaker, Miss Beardsley one shirt and a parka, and Weicker a shirt and parka. The girls were wearing levis and boots, Weicker mountain pants and tennis shoes. The party had the usual climbing equipment, including adequate pitons and slings, first aid, three flashlights, and waterproof matches. They had a more than adequate supply of food, but this was left at the base of the rock climb.

After the snow flurry the sky continued overcast, and at the top of the Rotton Chimney, the fourth pitch, a heavy fall of wet snow occurred and continued throughout. None of the party expressed any desire to retreat, and none showed any signs of undue fatigue.

Weicker estimates that they reached the summit between one and two p.m. By this time the party was soaked and chilled by the wet snow. The wet ropes caused great difficulty on the rappels. The first rappel jammed but was finally lowered by placing a prussik sling on the rope and jumping on the sling. The second rappel went smoothly, but the third hung up irretrievably. During the descent Weicker realized that both girls were becoming very tired, but had no indication that Miss Pottinger's condition was any worse than Miss Beardsley's. At no time did Miss Pottinger complain of fatigue. Unable to retrieve the third rappel, Weicker climbed as high as possible and cut off enough rope to lower the girls to the base of the climb. He then rappelled on the single strand.

The base of the climb is some 1500 feet above the valley floor. The party reached this part at dusk between 6:00 and 7:00 p.m. Here Miss Pottinger gave evidence of extreme exhaustion. She split a candy bar with Miss Beardsley, the only food that any of the party had had all day. There is doubt as to whether Miss Pottinger actually ate the candy. Her exhaustion was complete, but they were able to lead her down the talus for approximately two and one-half hours until she was absolutely unable to proceed. It was found that one flashlight was inoperative, and even with two workable lights, progress on the snow-covered talus was slow.

At about 9:30 p.m. Miss Pottinger was unable to continue, so Weicker left her with Miss Beardsley and went down for help. The stopping place was at about the level of the bottom of Church Tower, on the western talus slope leading down from the Spire. The party carried waterproofed matches, but the ground was so wet that they could not build a fire. There was no shelter at the stopping place. Miss Beardsley did all she could to keep her companion warm, while Weicker proceeded to the valley floor. Two friends, Sue Wheatland and Henry Stauffer, had been waiting in a car since 4:00 p.m. Weicker reached them about 30 minutes after leaving the two girls, and they were checked in at Government Center at 10:25 p.m. A rescue party was organized and 7 rangers, with Weicker and Stauffer, reached the two girls at 1:00 a.m. Miss Pottinger had died approximately at midnight. Miss Beardsley had noticed that her pulse had stopped and had tried artificial respiration for a half hour.

Upon arrival the rescue party located an overhang about 50 feet below the stopping point and succeeded in starting a fire. They tried artificial respiration and other measures for about an hour, to no avail. All members of the party were down by 4:00 a.m.

*Source:* The above facts were gathered by Robert Brooke, Jr., president, Stanford Alpine Club, from conversation with Weicker and Miss Beardsley, the account largely supplied by Weicker, and supplemented by conversation with Oscar Sedegren, Chief Ranger of Yosemite National Park.

*Analysis:* Robert C. Brooke.

"The specific causes of this accident are sufficiently obvious, though it is hard to believe that the results could be so serious. It is evident that the

party should have retreated at least by the time the snow started at the top of the fourth pitch. It is also evident that the strength of the party was insufficient for the difficulty of the climb. Of Weicker's competence to lead the climb there can be no question. He had been climbing in Yosemite and elsewhere for the past 6 years, had become a qualified leader in the Stanford Alpine Club in 1951, and had led 32 rock climbs in Yosemite Valley, including 4 previous ascents of the Higher Cathedral Spire. The two girls were technically competent enough to follow on the average Yosemite climb. Miss Pottinger had been on more arduous climbs than this one normally is, but the combination of technical difficulty, the wet snow and severe condition of the descent were too much for her endurance. There is no evidence of any cause of death other than exposure and exhaustion, though there is some indication that previous to the climb Miss Pottinger had not been eating or sleeping well.

"Weicker and Stauffer did not realize the inevitable delay in forming a rescue party, but it would seem to be a desirable rule, at least for Yosemite, that if anyone is available, he should return to the injured as soon as possible after notifying the rangers. Stauffer and Miss Wheatland were unequipped for climbing, but could possibly have brought assistance to the girls in advance of the rescue party. The existence of the overhang with dry fuel 50 feet from the bivouac appears to be an ironic occurrence which could not have been foreseen or discovered except by chance.

"Perhaps more important than the above specific causes is a question of more general nature. The primary cause of the accident lies in the current attitude of the majority of climbers in Yosemite Valley. The familiarity of these climbs has led to a continual down-grading of standards, to the point where competent climbers tend to feel that the most difficult climbs can be attempted with a party of inadequate strength. The climbs in Yosemite range from difficult to severe, and it would seem important that all who are connected with climbing in this area realize in full the high standards required. All Yosemite climbers and all organizations must increase their efforts to instill a sense of responsibility, *which is as necessary for second men as for leaders*, and the basis of this responsibility must be a complete realization of one's capacity for a given climb."

*California, Mt. Tom, Inyo County*—On January 1, 1955 J. P. Fazzi, Jr. (21) and W. E. Blanchard (39) were trapped by a blizzard while attempting to ascent Mt. Tom (13,659 feet). As they tried to descend to safety Fazzi fell 400 feet down the slope at the 9600-foot level. The party was apparently not roped. The exact cause of the slip is not known. Blanchard dug a snow cave and spent the night in it. He made his way out the next day.

*Source:* William Siri, Newspaper accounts.

*California, Royal Arches, Yosemite*—On April 3, 1955 Donald Tocher (28) was a member of a four-man climbing party. All were experienced and able climbers who had climbed various routes on the Royal Arches previously. The party was roped and properly equipped. Tocher led the second pitch, a steep, shallow, granite chimney, which under nearly all