

but none were in evidence. (Source: Siskiyou County Sheriff's Office and Punto Alto Mountaineering)

Analysis

Sova was inexperienced and did not have the proper clothing or gear to sit out a winter storm. Roping up and retreating in the conditions that prevailed were indicated. (Source: Siskiyou County Sheriff's Office and Punto Alto Mountaineering)

STRANDED, BAD WEATHER, FATIGUE

California, Yosemite Valley

On March 31, Joel Seton (16) and Jeffrey Inman (17) got stuck on The Nose of El Cap. At 4:30 p.m., Ranger Griffiths received a report that someone was calling for help from the Nose route on El Capitan. Griffiths and Rousseau drove to El Cap Meadow and established communication, using a PA system and the Questar. Both climbers signalled they were OK. They appeared to be well equipped and settling in for the night. They were located just below the Gray Bands about two-thirds of the way up the route. The weather had been rainy for two days. About one-half hour after Griffiths had returned to the east valley, he received another report of the climbers calling for help. Rangers Griffiths, Dill, Setnicka and Rousseau returned to the area. This time it was understood that the climbers were too wet and tired to continue, and that they couldn't reverse the King Swing pendulum so they could retreat. They were told that they were near a rappel route and that we would return in the morning and talk them down.

At 8 a.m. Dill and Griffiths returned to El Capitan Meadow and proceeded to talk the two climbers down the wall using the PA system, and the Questar to locate anchor points. Setnicka arrived about midmorning and remained the rest of the day. At one point one of the climbers yelled down that his companion was sick. He was able to continue the descent, and he later reported that he felt better as the day progressed. The climbers reached the bottom at 4:30 p.m. and were taken to the SAR Office for an interview. Both climbers reported they got wet and cold from condensation, rain, and water running down the wall. They called for help because they didn't know the location of the rappel route and couldn't reverse the pendulum. They thought that the sickness was caused from eating food they found on El Capitan Tower. They also stated that they drank water running down the wall. They admitted to a lack of big wall experience and to being a little psyched. (Source: Thomas Griffiths, Yosemite National Park)

Analysis

Seton and Inman were experienced free climbers but had not successfully completed a Grade VI. This was to be another attempt. The two climbed slowly but steadily until bad weather stopped them. They were relatively well prepared for bad weather and wrote on their voluntary registration card "we are capable of

retreat.” The problem was they got too wet and tired and could not reverse the “King Swing” on the climb.

By loudspeaker they were advised they didn’t have to reverse the route; that they could easily rappel down and off an established route from their present location. By using a loudspeaker and telescope, directions were given them on how far down the next anchor point was. In this way they were able to get themselves off the wall. Better prior planning of retreat possibilities would have eliminated the need for government assistance. (Source: Tim J. Setnicka, Yosemite National Park)

FALL ON ROCK, PLACED NO PROTECTION

California, Yosemite Valley

On May 13 at 9:30 a.m., Darich Rapiotrich (26) was attempting to climb the first pitch of the Quicksilver Route located on the North Face of Middle Citadel, 100 yards west of the North Buttress. Rapiotrich was leading the first pitch of Quicksilver route. As she neared the top of the first pitch, it became very difficult to place proper protection; therefore no protection had been placed for approximately 70 feet. Rapiotrich and her partner talked about coming back down, but decided to continue. Rapiotrich was attempting the last move before the belay point. Hand and footholds were difficult and the victim may have moved a few feet off the route, onto the face. Rapiotrich lost the handholds and fell approximately 130 feet, which resulted in a broken wrist and severe strains of both knees. She was not wearing a hard hat, but sustained no head injuries. (Source: Bryan Swift, Yosemite National Park)

Analysis

Rapiotrich is an experienced climber who chose not to protect the last 75 feet. Protection is difficult on the climb but not impossible and, if placed correctly, would have decreased the length of the fall. (Source: Tim J. Setnicka, Yosemite National Park)

RAPPEL FAILURE

California, Yosemite Valley

John Garten (24), John Nygaard (22), and Jeffrey Graves (22), all experienced 5.10 climbers, fell to their deaths on May 14 while descending the Nose on El Capitan. The exact cause will never be known, but evidence revealed that both hangers failed and that possibly the manner in which the climber tied in was incorrect. (Source: Charles Farabee Jr., Yosemite National Park)

(Ed. Note: This accident generated “one of the most complete and intensive [investigations] in Yosemite’s history,” according to Tim Setnicka. The editor recommends an article written by Setnicka, which analyzes the accident, in Off Belay, August 1978, Number 40.)