

extremely cold and wet, but were able to walk unassisted and could discuss their rescue.

After the successful rescues by Angel 1, a helicopter from Rogers Helicopters began a demobilization of the 27 rescue personnel from the east shoulder of Half Dome. Because of the forecasted severe weather by 1400 that afternoon, a request was made (and granted) for Angel 1 to assist with the evacuation of rescue personnel. The Rogers helicopter flew about 12 loads of personnel or equipment and Angel 1 flew two loads of personnel from a landing zone on the shoulder back to Ahwahnee Meadow. The demobilization of personnel was completed when the three-person spotting team hiked back down from Little Yosemite Valley at noon. (Source: Michael Murray, SAR Officer, Yosemite National Park)

Analysis

Mike, John and I are grateful to be alive. Our sincere thanks goes out to all those involved in the effort—the National Park Service, the climbers on the rescue team, and to the guys from Lemoore Naval Air Station.

For the benefit of those who plan to do big wall climbs in winter conditions, I'll outline what I feel are the main lessons I learned from our fiasco:

1. To avoid low-angle routes like the South Face of Half Dome. It got plastered with ice, and snow avalanched continuously when the storm finally abated.

2. To have a reliable porta-ledge and storm-fly. Mike and I had second-rate affairs which nearly proved to be our undoing.

3. To get while the gettin's good. If there is a chance to retreat early on in the storm, take advantage of it. Get down before the place is plastered with ice and your ropes are rendered useless. (Source: "Winter Blunderland," an article by Steve Bosque in *Summit*, September–October, 1986)

STRANDED, WEATHER, FATIGUE

California, Yosemite Valley

Clint Cummins (29) had 13 years' climbing experience in various mountain ranges, including ice climbing in the northeast and three El Capitan climbs in 1985. About 0600 on May 3, 1986, Cummins and his partner John Lockhart started climbing the Direct North Buttress of Middle Cathedral Rock. About 1100 it started raining when they had reached the top of the twelfth pitch. They rappelled off the route by mid-afternoon.

About 1630, Cummins left Lockhart at the Church Bowl parking area to go and work on cleaning a proposed climbing route on the Church Bowl Cliff. Cummins hiked up the talus field to the west of the Church Bowl cliff. It was still raining and Cummins was wearing Nike Approach shoes, wool socks, polypro pants, knee pads, rain pants, a cotton T-shirt, a cotton long sleeved shirt, a Gore-tex parka, and an acrylic hat. (Most of his wool clothing was wet from the DNB climb.) He had two climbing ropes with him (9 millimeter and 11 millimeter), six carabiners, three slings, and a nut cleaner.

Cummins made a two-rope rappel without incident. On the second rappel, Cummins ran the ropes through a sling that was connected to two sturdy bushes. The end of the sling was about 30 centimeters away from the edge of the drop. He rappelled down about three meters, then test pulled the ropes, which moved with difficulty. He continued down the ropes, tied off, and began cleaning dirt and moss out of a crack. About 1930, as it was getting dark, he decided it was time to descend. Cummins finished the rappel to a tree and tried to pull the ropes down, but he could not. He tried several

different techniques to “yard” on the ropes but could not budge them, so he yelled down to Lockhart for help, who in turn reported the situation to the SAR Office.

After he was contacted by SAR technician John Dill, Cummins tried to prusik up his ropes using his nylon webbing sling. He made it up about 12 meters, but feeling cold and tired, was reluctant to prusik through an overhanging section because he was afraid that he would get stranded in the middle of it. Cummins waited at the location until his rescue was effected by NPS rescue climber Bill Russell, assisted by Cummins’ partner, John Lockhart. (Source: Michael Murray, SAR Officer, Yosemite National Park)

(Editor’s Note: It is interesting to speculate as to whether (a) something other than webbing would have served better for prusiking under these conditions or (b) a Heden knot, or better yet, a Bachman knot, might have slid easier than a prusik knot.)

FALL ON ROCK, INADEQUATE PROTECTION

California, Yosemite Valley

On May 5, 1986, Yasuhiro Fujira (21) from Kyoto, Japan, fell to his death from the belay ledge of a climb called “Catchy” on Cookie Cliff. He had completed the climb, as had his partner, Nozomi Hori, when he lowered to the ground. He was preparing to descend when the accident occurred. (Source: Michael Murray, SAR Officer, Yosemite National Park)

Analysis

There was no equipment failure found, either at the fixed anchor or with Yasuhiro’s personal equipment.

When Yasuhiro lowered Hori down the climb, Yasuhiro was tied into the anchor with his own purple sling and his figure-8 was attached by carabiner directly to the fixed anchor slings for belaying/lowering Hori. A few minutes later, when Yasuhiro and the rope fell, he was not connected to the rope, and his figure-8 was not attached to his sit harness as though prepared for rappelling, and his purple tie-in sling was being carried over his shoulder as climbers normally carry equipment to keep it out of the way.

It appears that Yasuhiro unhooked himself from the anchor point after lowering Hori to the ground, then slipped and fell while preparing to rappel.

This type of accident is preventable if the climber remains hooked into his anchor until he has completely prepared the rope for rappelling and has actually hooked his rappel device to the ropes. After double-checking to ensure that the rope is correctly run through the fixed anchor slings, that his rappel device is correctly attached to the rope and secured to his sit harness, and that all carabiners involved are closed (and locked in locking-type), then the climber can safely unhook his belay sling from the anchor and rappel. (Source: Michael Murray, SAR Officer, Yosemite National Park)

FALL ON ROCK, PROTECTION PULLED OUT

California, Yosemite Valley

Mike Brochu (31) and his partner, Mike Ewing, bivied at the base of the West Face of El Capitan the night of May 10, 1986. About 0110 on May 11, Brochu was leading the second pitch of the West Face route. He was aiding, when he shifted his weight to a fixed bashie, then tried to top-step on it. The bashie pulled out. Brochu fell and two more