

Ranger Sherwood interviewed one of the two groups climbing the face of Half Dome at the time of the incident. Group #1 had started climbing early that morning (about 0600) and had passed Group #2, who were on their third day. Neither had noticed the group below or admitted knowing of a rock falling at the time of the incident. (Source: Kathy Sherwood, Ranger, Yosemite National Park)

FALLING ROCK, FAILURE TO TEST HOLDS

California, Mount Whitney

On July 3, 1986, Mike Meteyer (27) and Jim Raymond (28) were climbing the Classic East Face route on Mount Whitney. In the early afternoon they were at the lower portion of the Grand Staircase when a basketball size block that Mike had moved up on broke away. Jim was hit a grazing blow by this falling block but not seriously injured. Mike fell about three meters and sustained what turned out to be three broken ribs. They continued to climb to the top of the Grand Staircase where the difficulty again increases. Unable to continue, they called for help and were able to attract the attention of two climbers just finishing the Keeler Needle. These two climbers came to their assistance with extra clothing for Mike and then one of them hiked out with Jim to call for a rescue. Arriving in Lone Pine in the middle of the night, they waited at the U.S. Forest Service office until it opened to ask for help. They should have called the Inyo County Sheriff. The China Lake Mountain Rescue Group was called at 0700. With Forest Service contract helicopter support, we were landed on the summit and got to Mike by late morning. After applying first aid and providing food and water, we were able to climb with Mike to the summit where he was flown to the hospital. (Source: Al Green, China Lake Mountain Rescue Group)

Analysis

Mount Whitney East Face climbers should be aware that there is considerable loose rock on this route and great care must be exercised for their own safety and for those below them. This particular route is becoming increasingly popular and the China Lake Mountain Rescue Group has several operations there each year. (Source: Al Green, China Lake Mountain Rescue Group)

FALL ON ROCK, CLIMBING ALONE AND UNROPED

California, Joshua Tree National Monument

On July 16, 1986, at 0946, I contacted D. Michalakis (23) in campsite #9 of the Hidden Valley Campground concerning his extended stay in the park. I confronted Michalakis about several violations that I had observed. After a citation was issued, Michalakis advised me that he had fallen 20 meters while solo rock climbing on July 4. Michalakis received injuries to his right ankle, head, chest area and both arms. Most injuries consisted of lacerations and contusions. Michalakis stated that he did not know that he was required to report injury accidents to Park Rangers. Therefore, Michalakis reported the incident to no one and sought his own medical attention.

Michalakis was advised that he would have to leave the park no later than July 23. Failure to comply with request would result in his arrest. It was also learned during the interview that Michalakis was involved in a traffic accident on June 14 that he also failed