

ing, the two rescuing climbers had reached Twete with extra water, Gatorade, and ropes. For three and a half hours more, all four climbers rappelled down, with the injured climber rappelling down on the back of one of the rescuing climbers. Once down to the base of the climb, the Riverside Moutanin Rescue Unit team had several volunteers and a helicopter ready to transport the injured climber. Seven hours after the accident, the injured climber arrived at the Hemet Valley Hospital. (Source: Myles Twete)

Analysis

Although the next-to-last pitch was rated within the capabilities of the injured climber, after six hours of climbing, fatigue and misjudgment began to take effect. The primary causes of the fall were physical and mental fatigue, inexperience, and leading off route (protection was scarce, holds and friction poor for the climber's abilities). Contributing to the severity of the fall was the placement of inadequate protection for such a fall. Thankfully, the belayer properly took up slack rope and held the fall with little difficulty. Luckily, the injured climber sustained only one compound fracture (right ankle) which was kept from bleeding significantly by a high-top climbing shoe. Also, he was lucky not to have any left-leg, head, back or torso injuries after the 30-meter fall.

The rescue operation was successful largely due to the skill and quickness of the two rescuing climbers, the climbing partner, and the help and skills of the RMRU team. Also, the fact that the injured climber never lost consciousness and lost little blood during the rescue made the 200-meter descent much quicker than it might have been. All in all, the injured climber was lucky to come out of this one alive. (Source: Myles Twete)

FALL ON ROCK, PLACED NO PROTECTION

California, Yosemite Valley

On June 15, 1987, Mike Vanderbeek age 22, was leading the first pitch of the Steck/Salathe on Sentinel Rock when he took a ten-meter fall to the ground. At the time, he was down-climbing a chimney and looking for an alternative route. He had placed no protection.

He broke his ankle and suffered deep scalp lacerations, but was able to descend the Class 4 slabs and talus slopes to the trail below with the help of his partner. (Source: Dan Dellings, Ranger, Yosemite National Park)

FALL ON ROCK, PROTECTION PULLED OUT, INEXPERIENCE, EXCEEDED ABILITIES, NO HARD HAT

California, Mount Whitney

On June 27, 1987, Ron Robinson (32) and Rick Maschek (35) were on the third pitch of Mount Whitney's East Buttress Route (Class 5). Maschek led the first two pitches without incident. Weather was partly clear, but deteriorated to light snow during the climb. Rock was dry, but frequent snow patches sometimes made footing tricky and may have hidden some good placements. Robinson led on the third pitch. He came across two fixed pins on what (for him) was a difficult move up a notch. Without

properly protecting his moves, Robinson used a pair of #8 hexes to aid up this notch. He clipped into a preplaced Lost Arrow (without testing it), then proceeded on slings. As he was attempting to clip into the second fixed pin (this one with a ring swaged into the head), he fell. Maschek later stated that although he heard Robinson shout, "Falling," there was no strain on the rope due to friction along the traverse preceding the notch. The other party on the route later said they heard Robinson bounce "three or four times." Robinson fell about 13 meters, pulling out two or three hexes and the Lost Arrow.

After recovering his senses, Robinson shouted to Maschek that he was conscious. Moments later, Robinson discovered that he was somewhat injured, and that he was wedged in a gully by his pack and ice ax. After extricating himself from the gully, Robinson climbed back toward the route, establishing visual contact with Maschek again. He noted that "an astonishing" amount of hardware littered the rope between his harness and the hex which had held his fall. Robinson mentioned at this point that he wished to continue the climb, but Maschek recommended descent/self-rescue. Robinson immediately agreed, not trusting his own judgment, as by now he had determined that he had a head injury, extent unknown. Robinson was badly shaken up the the fall and was longing for the safety of a secure ledge. He began to climb back, recovering what hardware he could. Arriving at the belay ledge, he then belayed Maschek who climbed out to recover more hardware, then Robinson and Maschek began to plan their descent.

At this point Maschek also gave Robinson a determined questioning to ascertain Robinson's orientation and fitness for descent. Although Robinson had earlier shown some disorientation in wanting to continue the climb, he was now more oriented and appreciative of their situation. A rappel point was selected and Robinson's rope was used as a fixed line to protect the traverse to the rappel point. (This rope has since been retired.)

Robinson walked out to Whitney Portal the following day. Maschek and another partner attempted the route the next day, recovering the fast-draw that Robinson had been attempting to place in the swaged ring (it was in the ring, but the 'biner gate was not closed) when he fell. (Source: Ron Robinson)

Analysis

This was my first fall ever. Controlled falls in a practice situation would have given me a greater appreciation for the seriousness of a fall. I purchased a helmet several days later. A chest-harness element in my harness system might have prevented the back strain and might have prevented my getting lodged in the rock gully. In any case, I now know why UIAA does not approve harnesses without a chest element present. I didn't adequately place or test my protection. Although I had been as exposed on technically easier climbs, and had climbed much more difficult rock involving less exposure, I had never been so unnerved on a route (by the exposure) and had never had the chance to note exposure's effect on my ability to climb technical rock. For me, the effect was real, I was affected by the exposure, and this did have an effect on my technical performance. When I climb this route again, or others like it, I don't intend to lead until I have completed a route or two like this as rope second. (Source: Ron Robinson)