

MULTIPLE BEE STINGS

California, Yosemite Valley

Early in October, I was on the second belay ledge of a three pitch climb called "The Caverns" in Yosemite Valley's Five Open Books area. My friend, Robin Supplee, was following up, cleaning the protection. About a third of the way up the pitch, I felt a sharp pain at my right calf. I looked down to find a bee there, as well as about ten more surrounding my right foot. I moved to the left side of the ledge to try to avoid them, but I only made my situation worse. By moving my right foot, I uncovered the crack in the ledge which was the entrance to their nest.

Very quickly I realized that I was the trespasser on this ledge, and the rightful inhabitants were giving me their eviction notice. Within seconds multiple swarms flew out of the nest and attacked my legs, stomach, chest, arms, neck and head. My rucksack fortunately saved my back from their venomous torture. I alternated swatting the pests with my left and right hands so as not to let go of my rope and my partner. For a minute or two, I wondered how could this be happening? Why me? And would the bees ever return to their nest?

I knew I had to get down before these bees injected me with too much venom. I knew I wasn't allergic, but even so, how much could a person take and still survive? I had no idea, nor was I about to wait and find out while tied to a cliff 100 meters above the ground. I was cursing vehemently, and I am sure everyone in the vicinity heard me quite clearly. My pulse rate was moving off the charts, and my body was throbbing so hard I felt as though I might explode soon. My skin itched terribly where I had been stung, and the temperature of my skin was rising fast.

I yelled at Robin to stop climbing at the next piece of protection that she could anchor into. When she anchored in, I told her to put me on belay so that she could lower me. I set up a top-rope anchor around a bay leaf tree growing from the ledge and told her to lower me. When I was about ten or eleven meters below the ledge, the bees ceased to follow me. I cleaned the protection I had placed on my way up as Robin continued to lower me to a ledge below her. At the ledge I anchored in, and then lowered Robin to the ledge. I set up two rappels, sending Robin down first each time.

At the base of the cliff I downed a liter of water, while Robin packed the climbing gear into our two rucksaks.

At the medical center I was given injections of epinepherin and was also put on IV with benedryl. The doctor even put me on oxygen just to be safe.

The doctor told me that due to the late winter last year, the bee population was ten times greater than its usual size. The medical center personnel had seen a number of people this fall with severe bee stings, but by far I was one of the worst cases with at least 200 stings. (Source: James Gordon)

(Editor's Note: The bee population in general is up in those areas of the West which have been experiencing drought. This is one of many reports on climbers encountering bees. We are thankful to Mr. Gordon for his contribution, and commend him for being persevering under such extreme stress.)

FALL ON SNOW, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT

California, Mount Whitney

On October 6, 1989, Louis Morris (31), Steve Nootenboom (33) and Bruce Hubbard