

FALL ON ROCK, CLIMBING UNROPED

California, Joshua Tree National Monument, Echo Cove

On May 1, 1993, at 1413, I was notified of a climbing accident in the Echo Cove area of Lost Horse. I arrived on scene at 1425 and got to the victim at 1435. I found Matthew A. Walker (20) lying on a ledge about 40 feet off the ground. Around 1400 Walker had attempted to free solo climb "Palm-U-Granite," a 5.7 crack climb, when he fell approximately 45 feet to the ledge. Walker's main injury was a compound dislocation/fracture to his left ankle. His leg was splinted and he was placed in full C-spine precaution, then placed in a litter and lowered to the ground via a technical lowering system. Once on the ground, he was wheeled the 100 yards to the parking lot where Mercy Air Ambulance flew him to Desert Hospital in Palm Springs. He is fortunate to have survived this fall. (Source: David Trevino, NPS Ranger, Joshua Tree National Monument)

FALL ON SNOW, SKI MOUNTAINEERING, EXCEEDING ABILITIES, WEATHER, EQUIPMENT

California, Lake Tahoe

On March 28, 1993, at 0930, Peter Purgalis (54) fractured his left ankle during a fall while skiing with a full pack on the Trans-hut route west of Lake Tahoe just above Tamarack Lake. This was the morning of the second day of a planned week long traverse from Echo to Donner summits, utilizing both snow camps and Sierra Club huts. We had a late start the day before due to a detour caused by an avalanche closing Route 89. The four of us from the San Francisco Bay area had dug out the morning of the accident from about eight inches of new snow at our camp just past upper Echo Lake.

We pushed off uphill and over a series of ridges and gullies below tree-line in a moderate snowfall with poor visibility and at times whiteout conditions. While down skiing along a ridge line, in the changing snow conditions, in and out among evergreen trees, Pete took a fall when he was unable to negotiate a sharp turn. He later stated that he believed that the damage to his ankle occurred while he was trying to regain his feet under his unwieldy frame pack, on the steep slope in the deep snow. He reported hearing a "snap" from the ankle.

Mike Udkow taped the ankle, which was believed to be just badly sprained or an injury to the Achilles or soleus tendons, because there were no signs of a break. Pete sang a verse from the Latvian National anthem, strapped back on his skis and we proceeded up over Mosquito Pass after some delay in reckoning due to poor visibility. That night a snow pack was applied to the ankle at our camp along the Rubicon River, and Pete took several aspirin with codeine to relieve the pain. Monday was bright and clear as we traversed slowly above Rockbound Valley to Lost Corner Mountain to camp again. During the night it became obvious that it would be extremely difficult for Pete to continue to ski on his swollen ankle. Mike retaped it and we headed to Ludlow Hut which was our first bail out point along the traverse. The next morning we headed east toward Lake Tahoe and Oakland. That night Pete was seen informally by an orthopedic surgeon who diagnosed a torn soleus heel tendon, but because of continued pain, an x-ray was taken a week later which showed an unusual fracture through the fibula a few inches above the ankle.

Analysis

Ski mountaineering on widely ranging snow conditions, in deep new snow, requires a high degree of expertise even when not carrying a heavy external frame pack. The lack