

### **Analysis**

Allred and Yu found no clues to the accident above or below the ledge from which Choi had apparently fallen, but at the ledge they found the following: A quick-draw was clipped to the anchor. Attached to the quick-draw were 1) a sling with a loop tied in the free end, apparently Choi's tie-in, and 2) a friction device (brand unknown), through which the haul line was rigged. Both ends of the haul line hung down the face. The haul bag hung from one end; the other end was free but the two ends were twisted around each other. When Yu and Allred untwisted the rope it began feeding easily through the friction device, lowering the bag.

Two of the three carabiners in the belay chain were non-locking types. The third was a locker, but was unlocked. None were doubled for security. There was no carabiner in the free end of the sling. Choi had probably anchored himself by clipping the free end of this sling to a carabiner in his harness. Jung later stated that he had found only a single non-locking carabiner in Choi's harness after the fall.

Apparently Choi managed to free the stuck haul line, and the suddenly slack rope allowed the bag to drop a short distance until the rope twisted around itself. We don't know why Choi fell, but he fell the whole pitch because either 1) he had deliberately disconnected from his anchor sling to work on the stuck rope, or 2) the sling had accidentally unclipped from his harness.

Whether or not the latter occurred, Choi had set himself up for an accident by relying on four separate unlocked carabiners. The belay chain should always use locked carabiners or reversed and opposed non-locking carabiners. Furthermore, by girth-hitching the anchor sling to the harness, one carabiner can be eliminated.

The stuck rope did not cause the accident but, like some past cases, it may have led to impatience and shortcuts in safety. The tree and blocks on the first rappel are easily recognized as traps for a pulled rappel line; many climbers break that rappel into two for that reason. We never learned why the party did not pull the haul line before all members were past the potential snags. Possibly they had used it as a rappel line. (Source: Mark Harvey, Steve Yu, John Dill, NPS Rangers)

## **STRANDED, DARKNESS—LATE START, OFF ROUTE, INADEQUATE CLOTHING, CREATING A HAZARDOUS CONDITION**

### **California, Yosemite Valley, Fairview Dome**

On August 9, about 1100, Bill Ott (47) and Hugo Orellana (24) began climbing the Regular Route (III-IV 5.9) on Fairview Dome. They were the last party to start up the climb that day. At least five parties were already on the route so Ott and Orellana had waited about an hour for their turn.

They were slowed by the groups above, and they also had trouble placing protection. On the sixth pitch, off Crescent Ledge, they lost the route. They rappelled back to Crescent Ledge and searched for bolt anchors that they remembered being shown in the guide book as a rappel route, but they were unable to locate them. During this time it became dark; they reclimbed the off-route pitch above the ledge but had to stop there because they were lost and could no longer see to climb.

Another climbing party reported to the NPS that Ott and Orellana might need help, and at 2130 a ranger contacted them by loudspeaker. At first they denied needing assistance, by signalling with a camera flash. After a brief discussion they signalled that they did need help. They stated that a cold wind was blowing.

A ten-person rescue team started hiking at 2230 and reached the top of the route at 0017. Two rescuers went over the edge at 0130 and reached the climbers, 500 feet below, at 0200. Everyone was safely on top by 0530. Ott and Orellana were cold and exhausted. They were given food and warm drinks and assisted to the Tioga Rd.

### **Analysis**

Orellana was dressed in climbing tights and a T-shirt. Ott was wearing shorts and a short-sleeved shirt. Neither climber had additional clothing for low night-time temperatures or a change in the weather, nor had they brought a watch or headlamps. They had studied the route topo but had left it in the car, and had brought water but no food. They had two ropes and a large rack of hardware—several full sets of nuts and cams.

The Regular Route, on the north face of Fairview, is approximately 800 feet high, involving eight pitches of 5th class and three pitches of 4th class climbing. This makes it one of the longest routes in the Tuolumne Meadows area, a serious undertaking that may require most of a day. Since the altitude of Fairview Dome lies between 8800 and 9700 feet, temperatures frequently drop below freezing at night. (The low on August 10 was 34° F and the wind chill was much lower.)

Orellana had been climbing five years and leading for three. He had climbed at other areas, including one route on El Capitan. Ott was a novice, having very limited experience since taking a four-day course the year before.

On the day prior to attempting Fairview, they had completed two one-pitch climbs and a four-pitch climb, in the Tuolumne Meadows area, which gave them the confidence to tackle Fairview. Those routes, however, are much easier and far less committing than the Regular Route.

Ott and Orellana recklessly created a hazardous condition for themselves by starting the climb at a late hour and choosing to climb into the evening when they did not have headlamps. Their clothing was inadequate for the length of the climb and the possibility of spending the night on the route, and they had all the gear they needed to rappel the route before dark. Ott and Orellana were cited for Disorderly Conduct (creating a hazardous condition), 36CFR 2.34 (A) (4). They were each ordered by the court to pay half the cost of the rescue—\$990 apiece. (Source: Dave Page, NPS Ranger.)

## **FALL ON ROCK, NO HARD HAT**

### **California, Yosemite Valley, El Capitan**

On August 16, about noon, Brian Biega (23) was leading the 6th pitch of the Salathe Wall, belayed by Andreas Zegers (24). Their goal was to make Mammoth Terrace in two hours. They had 40 minutes to go, and Biega, nearing the end of the slab section, was “French-freeing,” i.e. grabbing fixed pieces as handholds rather than free-climbing or using etriers.

Suddenly Biega called, “Watch me,” and fell. Zegers saw the rope catch behind his leg, flipping him over. Biega fell backwards, headfirst, struck his head and stopped. He was unconscious and bleeding from the back of his head. He had fallen about 20 feet and was now hanging 30 feet above and 15 feet to one side of the belay.

Zegers yelled for help, then lowered Biega on the belay line and pulled him to the anchor with the haul line. He bandaged Biega’s head wound and checked his vital signs: he was still unconscious, his pulse was rapid and weak and his breathing was shallow, so Zegers worried that he might be in shock from blood loss.