

Siskiyou County Sheriff Search and Rescue (SAR) team was contacted and a search was initiated, coordinated by Sgt. Dave Nickelson. At 1530 the pack left by Turegun and Cain was spotted on the step where they had left it by CHP helicopter and the base camp was overflowed and was still unoccupied. Checks of other trailheads and roads yielded no results. At 2040 the search was halted and arrangements were made for use of a high altitude military helicopter the following day. On May 28, California National Guard helicopter arrived at Siskiyou County airport and loaded four SAR members on board for a high altitude search at 0830. USFS Mountain Ranger Dan Towner hiked from Northgate to the base camp and found it unoccupied and undisturbed at 1024. At 1055 the CNG helicopter reported a possible sighting and landed, offloading two SAR members to investigate. Cain was pronounced dead at the 9,400 foot level of the base of the Bolam Glacier. The body was hoisted aboard and flown out.

It should be noted that Turegun and Cain were on school break from their work as math professors at Oklahoma City Community College and had attempted Mount Shasta earlier. Cain got altitude sickness so they turned back and traveled to Mount Hood in Oregon, but the weather was too bad to climb. They then returned to Mount Shasta for their ill fated climb. (Source: Ron Cloud, with thanks to Sgt. Dave Nickelson—both SAR members)

(Editor's Note: Ron Cloud sent forward two other accounts of incidents on Mount Shasta. Two men (30) and a woman (27) slid 500 feet down the Hotlum/Bolam Route when one of them lost footing on hard ice, fell, and pulled the other two off. They had a cell phone and were able to summon help. In October, a man (50) did the same slide, fracturing a leg and dislocating a shoulder. Taking the time to set up an anchored belay when the glacier turns to ice is time consuming, but so are complicated rescues and healing from serious injuries.)

FALL ON ROCK, INADEQUATE PROTECTION, PROTECTION PULLED OUT, NO HARD HAT

California, Yosemite Valley, Cookie Cliff

On May 26, Stephen Ross (32) was mortally injured in a fall while leading Beverly's Tower, a one-pitch 5.10a route at Cookie Cliff.

Beverly's Tower is reached by scrambling up third-class ledges for about 100 feet. It follows a crack for about ten feet, then continues up a shallow (one to two feet deep) dihedral. There is a 5.10a crux low in the dihedral. Jason Hollinger (23), Ross' partner, anchored himself to a fixed piton in a crack eight feet left of Beverly's Tower and about one foot above his feet. He belayed with a Black Diamond ATC. Meanwhile two friends, Matthew Pearce and Nicola Woolfard, were 10 feet directly below the start of the route on the third class ledges, unroped, looking at other climbs.

Ross climbed 10 feet off the ledge and placed his only protection, a .75 Camalot with an attached 4-in. sling. He said he would move this piece higher as he climbed, then he began to move up into the dihedral. When the Camalot was at his waist he said, "F... me," and fell. Hollinger felt almost no upward force as the Camalot pulled out.

Ross fell past the belay ledge, struck Pearce in the head and back, then struck a ledge with his head and was stopped by the rope after a total fall of 25-35 feet. He probably also struck the rock above Pearce, slowing himself enough that he did not knock Pearce off the wall.

Ross was unconscious and bleeding from head wounds. Hollinger lowered him three or four feet further to a large ledge, where Pearce and Woolfard could help him, then drove to the Arch Rock Entrance Station to notify the NPS. When the first rescuers reached Ross a few minutes after receiving the report, they found him unconscious and not breathing but with a strong pulse. As more rescuers arrived, paramedics stabilized him with an endotracheal tube, oxygen, IV, and spinal immobilization. He was lowered 300 feet down cliffs and scree, and flown by helicopter to Doctor's Medical Center in Modesto. He died the next day from his head injuries.

No one saw the start of Ross's fall (the sun was in Hollinger's eyes), and he did not say anything to Hollinger about the quality of the Camalot placement. The crack at that point was slightly flared; if Ross had brushed the Camalot as he moved up it may have rotated upward and walked closer to the edge of the crack. When we inspected the Camalot, it showed no unusual wear and functioned perfectly. (Source: Mark Fincher, NPS Ranger, Yosemite National Park)

Analysis

According to Ross's partner, Jason Hollinger, Ross was very experienced and led mid 5.11, A4, while Hollinger had been climbing three years and led 5.10c. They had climbed one route together previously. Because this climb starts in steep terrain, the leader faces a serious fall almost immediately and the protection should take this into account. First, the belayer should insist on the leader placing a bombproof directional just off the ledge to establish a direction of pull. Second, the leader should attempt to place solid protection higher, not just a single piece that he/she will move, since it is the only insurance against striking the ledges below. Third, although it apparently did not play a role in this incident, trusting a single fixed piton for a belay, and one that's only a foot off the ledge, is asking for trouble—even if it holds, the belayer may not be stable against a downward pull.

It seems obvious that wearing a helmet might have made all the difference in this situation. All these points may seem obvious after the fact, but all the shortcuts above are common. Maybe the key lesson to remember is that the mistakes were made by a climber with lots of experience - like many of us. (Source: John Dill, NPS Ranger, Yosemite National Park)

PROTECTION PULLED OUT, FALL ON ROCK, NO HARD HAT

California, Tuolumne Meadows, Stately Pleasure Dome

On June 7, 1996, Shannon Meredith, 25, and Dennis Papa decided to climb "West Country", 5.7 PG, on Stately Pleasure Dome in Tuolumne Meadows. Shannon had been climbing for three and a half years and handled nine or ten traditional 5.7 routes. Dennis had been climbing intermittently for ten years and comfortably led 5.8. Shannon led the first pitch, a dihedral on a 70 degree slab allowing only occasional protection in a shallow, somewhat flaring crack. She climbed about 40 feet, placing three nuts. Finding the climbing more difficult than she had expected and fearing that she lacked adequate protection for the rest of the pitch, she decided to retreat. She checked her top piece, a DMM Wallnut, by tugging on it to set it and partially weighting it. Dennis lowered her to the belay, but she decided to climb back up to remove the first two pieces. When she had done so, Dennis again began lowering her off the top piece using his belay device, a figure eight in belay plate mode.