

from the rappel anchors, we didn't follow our own rule of wearing helmets. All three of us wore them on the ascent. Why not the descent? We assumed the descent was going to be safe and worry free. After all, we have been rappelling since the first day we climbed! The damage would surely have been less if my helmet had been on my head rather than in my pack.

The final take-home message is to be ready for accidents. Be familiar with first aid and always carry a first aid kit—or know how to improvise if the unfortunate situation arises whereby you are the one between your partner and the Grim Reaper. (Source: Edited from a report submitted by Matthew Pollard)

## **FALL ON ROCK – MISJUDGED PENDULUM**

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

On June 28, Mario (42), Peter (30), and Gilbert (40), all from Austria, were in their second day on the Nose (34 pitches, VI 5.11 A2), and preparing to make the King Swing—the long pendulum left from Boot Flake (pitch 18). Peter led across, followed by Gilbert. Mario let out the haulbag, and then it was his turn to follow.

Mario's pendulum rope led left to where Peter and Gilbert waited at the next belay. As he rappelled on his back rope down the left side of the Boot (a boot-shaped flake roughly one half pitch in length), the pendulum rope began taking his weight and swinging him slowly to the left. When he thought he had swung far enough across, he released one end of his back rope, letting it pull through its anchor. No longer restrained by this rope, he expected to continue swinging gently left on his pendulum rope until he was directly below his partners.

Mario quickly found that he had underestimated the remaining distance and, therefore, the speed of his swing. Furthermore, the wall here is not flat, but dips into a shallow open book hiding a corner that he hadn't expected. Striking the corner started him spinning. As his pendulum continued, he reached out to the wall with his left hand to stop the spin, but the impact on his arm broke both bones in his forearm near the wrist.

His partners lowered him several meters to a ledge. Then Peter came down, examined the wrist, wrapped it with an elastic bandage and gave him some pain medication.

Mario claimed that he had not hit his torso or his head and had not been unconscious. However, the distracting pain in his wrist had made him seem confused for a few minutes, so his friends were worried that he might not be aware of internal injuries. They felt they should not risk rappelling to the ground with him (about 1500 feet, with more than a dozen rappels and several hanging belays), so one partner rappelled alone with two of their three ropes, thinking that would be the quickest way to get help.

The reporting party contacted the NPS at approximately 12:30 p.m., stating his concern that Mario may have been briefly unconscious. Several rescue team members were flown to the summit in the NPS helicopter while others, using a loudspeaker and telescope from the Valley floor, confirmed that Mario was currently conscious and alert. Nevertheless, the NPS requested a hoist

equipped UH 1N Huey helicopter from Lemoore Naval Air Station. If his partner's concern proved true and Mario's condition worsened, the Huey would be able to hoist him directly from the wall. (Because the helicopter's rotor blades would have to be fairly close to the cliff at that location, NPS flight safety policies precluded a direct helicopter approach unless Mario began to show evidence of a more serious injury.)

The summit team lowered a Park Medic about 1500 feet to the scene. She confirmed that Mario's injury appeared limited to his forearm and that he could be hoisted by his harness, without a litter. The Navy aircraft was released from the rescue. Rescuer and patient were hauled to the top and flown down to the Yosemite clinic just before dark, where Mario's fractures were confirmed. (Nine months later, his wrist still lacked its normal range of motion and will probably require further surgery.)

### **Analysis**

Mario was very experienced and had dealt with pendulum traverses before. In this case he simply misjudged his speed. Whenever possible, let yourself across the traverse under complete control, until you are fully supported by the next anchor.

Mario's party may not have realized that, with El Capitan's excellent acoustics, yelling for help is often faster than rappelling.

In hindsight, Mario could probably have descended the wall with his partners. Since they were right on the Nose rappel route, this may have gotten him down faster than the NPS could have rescued him. However, his partners' concerns about internal injuries were reasonable, and moving him themselves may have worsened a hidden injury. It can be a difficult decision to make; but the self rescue option may be mandatory in a more remote setting. (Source: John Dill, NPS Ranger, Yosemite National Park)

*(Editor's Note: For more about pendulums, see CA incidents on May 29 and June 4 in this issue of ANAM, and also Coe, Half Dome, in ANAM 1998.)*

## **ILLNESS – HACE, EXCEEDING ABILITIES, ASCENDING TOO FAST**

### **California, Mount Shasta, Misery Hill**

On July 30, Ken Goldstein (25) had stopped to rest at the base of Misery Hill (13,000 feet) and was later discovered unconscious and unresponsive. USFS climbing rangers were summoned. They administered oxygen to him, as he had regained consciousness. Goldstein was evacuated by a California Air National Guard helicopter and treated for HACE and dehydration at hospital. He recovered, but had no recollection of events surrounding the episode.

### **Analysis**

Goldstein ascended too rapidly. Even at this elevation, one can develop serious altitude illness. (Source: Dan Tower, Wilderness Ranger, and Bob Musgrove.)

## **FALL ON ROCK, PROTECTION PULLED OUT**

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

In the afternoon of September 9, Russ Fields (29), Bob Dunahue (36), and Bill Hesse (27) reached Long Ledge on the Salathe Wall (35 pitches, Grade VI).