

Russ had the next lead, pitch 33; the topo shows it starting as A1, then finishing as 5.8 face climbing.

Comfortable on hard 5.10, he didn't expect any problems, but about 50 feet short of the belay, he found the free moves much harder than the rating. He searched for an easier way, found nothing, and finally fell attempting the moves. His last protection, six or seven feet below, was a marginal placement—all he'd been able to find—and it failed. He was caught by the next piece after falling 25 to 30 feet—a clean fall, until his right foot struck a knob.

His partners got up the pitch, and Russ was able to follow the remaining pitches to the summit by jumaring on his good leg. As they topped out, they met two Yosemite SAR team members on a search assignment; the searchers stayed with them that night and arranged for the NPS helicopter to evacuate Russ in the morning. X-rays confirmed that his right ankle had been fractured.

### **Analysis**

According to local climbers, this pitch is significantly underrated. There have been several other falls on it this year, and rumors of a few injuries, though none requiring a rescue. (Source: John Dill, NPS Ranger, Yosemite National Park)

*(Editor's Note: It has become more common to rely on ratings from guide books rather than on one's own ability to judge the difficulty of a route. The latter is becoming a lost skill—along with being able to down-climb once the realization that the route won't go has set in.)*

## **FALL ON HARD SNOW – UNABLE TO SELF ARREST, PARTY SEPARATED, EXCEEDING ABILITIES**

### **California, Mount Shasta, Hotlum/Bolum Ridge**

On September 12, a team of four climbers was descending the Hotlum/Bolum Ridge. Two of the team went ahead to scout the descent route. One member, Rene "Red" Arnold Cuestas (32), did not return. After waiting an hour, the three remaining team members continued to descend. When they returned to basecamp, Cuestas was not there, so they contacted USFS rangers. During the ensuing search, a California Division of Forestry and Fire helicopter crew spotted Cuestas' body at 12,000 feet. He appeared to have slipped on the ice and fallen two to three hundred feet over ice and rock. He was wearing crampons and had an ice ax girth hitched to his wrist.

### **Analysis**

Cuestas was a novice climber. The route he was on is not technically difficult when snow conditions are good. However, the route generally becomes quite icy in the fall, making it very challenging. The party continued to climb, even though they were frightened by the conditions on the ascent. Separating on the descent may have contributed to the incident. (Source: Dan Towner, Wilderness Ranger, and Bob Musgrove)

## **FALL ON ROCK, PROTECTION PULLED, EXCEEDING ABILITIES**

### **California, Yosemite Valley, Middle Cathedral Rock**

On October 10, Dan Goriesky (43) set out to lead Pee Pee Pillar (a one pitch,