

this way and the consequences this time simply did not occur to him. (There are safe ways to haul light loads, using yourself as a counterbalance.) He also did not have a chest harness, prusik slings, or other gear that would have made a self-rescue easier, and he did not think to tie three-wrap prusiks or other ascender hitches, when his two-wrap prusiks slipped.

There is another factor, however. Everyone at the scene said Jeff reeked of alcohol—Scott smelled it from at least 10 feet away as he climbed the rope. Jeff was belligerent with rescuers and medics. He claimed that he had had only one drink—vodka—that morning, and insisted that he was dead sober on the wall. No legal action was taken against him.

Regardless of his state of sobriety, Jeff came close to dying in several ways, and getting him to safety put Scott at more than normal risk when he relied on Jeff's rigging. (Source: John Dill, NPS Ranger, Yosemite National Park)  
*(Editor's Note: We are reminded of the famous Buster Keaton comedy routine involving a pulley, rope, and wooden bucket of bricks...)*

## **FALL ON ROCK, PLACED INADEQUATE PROTECTION**

### **California, Mount Whitney**

On May 15, Graeme Taylor (39) and Keith Reid (37), both experienced climbers, were in the Giant Staircase of the East Face route on Mt. Whitney. Graeme was about 40 feet out on lead when a snow mushroom he was standing on collapsed. Graeme fell 40 feet to one of the stairs. He briefly lost consciousness and suffered injuries so that he was unable to climb further. Keith placed him in a bivy sack, tied him in, and solo climbed to the top. He descended via the trail and notified the Kern County Sheriff.

### **Analysis**

Place pro even when your skill level might not require it, especially in questionable terrain. Err on the side of caution when on mixed terrain. Both climbers were wearing helmets. Graeme's helmet was severely damaged in the fall, but it probably saved his life. (Source: Werner Hueber, China Lake Mountain Rescue Group)

*(Editor's Note: There was one other incident reported from Mount Whitney. A 64-year-old man lost control when glissading, resulting in a fractured fibula. Though he had 48 years of experience, he still chose to wear crampons, and when he hit a hard patch of snow, his right crampon caught.)*

## **FALL ON ROCK, INADEQUATE BELAY, POOR COMMUNICATION**

### **California, Yosemite Valley, Lower Yosemite Falls**

On June 24, Raj Dhingra (39), my brother Hugh (34), and I—Dan Sakols (37)—decided to tackle Commitment (three pitches, 5.9), one of the “Five Open Books” west of Lower Yosemite Falls. We got an early start to avoid the crowd and finished the first two pitches, both 5.8, with no complications.

Hugh led the third pitch, which starts with 5.9 moves around the right side of a big roof, then finishes up a right-facing 5.8 corner. After Hugh climbed out of sight at the top it was impossible to communicate, even by shouting.