

Analysis

Both Dunwiddie and Eldridge were skilled climbers, and in the days prior to their deaths they had completed a number of challenging free and aid routes in the Valley. Based on the location of the bodies, and on a topo of the Direct North Buttress found in their possession, they were probably on the DNB at the time of their accident. Rated at 5.10c and known for both its length and route finding difficulty, the DNB includes several sections of “run out” climbing and loose rock.

What can we learn? This accident hits close to home for most climbers because the party involved was very experienced with difficult climbing and familiar with Valley rock—as have been at least a third of Yosemite fatalities, historically. Other factors, such as rock fall from above, may have been involved, but the prime suspects are basic anchor and leading concepts that all of us are often tempted to ignore: avoiding anchors in suspect rock, sharing the load to an adequate degree, and stuffing in that first (and second) lead piece right off the belay. If you can’t meet these criteria, continue on with the realization that your survival may depend only on your climbing skill and on the quality of the next handhold. At least five other cases of complete anchor failure (protection pulling out—not breaking) have occurred in the Park in the last 30 years. (Source: Lincoln Else, Climbing Ranger, Yosemite National Park)

AMS—ASCENDING TOO FAST, LATE START, EXCEEDING ABILITIES California, Mount Shasta, Avalanche Gulch

On July 16, Jans Hogenacker (22) and his party of seven—who had little experience and were unable to recognize the symptoms of AMS as they developed—were climbing the Avalanche Gulch route on Mount Shasta and stopped at 13,200 feet at the base of Misery Hill. Hogenacker appeared sick, could not walk, and had difficulty breathing. As often happens, their late ascent left them in cloud-cover, with some electricity in the air.

Siskiyou County SAR was notified at 1433 and at 1730, the California Department of Forestry Bell Super 205 flew three SAR team members to Sargents Ridge at 11,200 feet. It was too cloudy to fly any higher. The three SAR members were planning on climbing Sargents ridge to Misery Hill. (This is a slightly technical and exposed climb.) At 1950 a brief clearing allowed the California National Guard CH-47 helicopter to lift the SAR members to 13,200 feet at the base of Misery Hill. Another climber informed them that Hogenacker and his party had descended on their own when they believed he wouldn’t be rescued. They were spotted from the air at 12,400 feet in an inaccessible area. The rescue was aborted.

On their descent, Hogenacker improved and was able to walk out on his own.

Analysis

The group members’ inexperience presented them with several problems. Climbing late in the day and into severe weather limited rescue capabilities. Also, not recognizing the signs and symptoms of AMS put their whole party at

risk. The biggest problem was involving SAR team members in risky rescue attempts when no one in Hogenacker's party was able to resolve their situation without help. (Source: Eric White, Matt Hill—USFS Climbing Rangers)

FALLING ROCK

California, Mount Shasta, Avalanche Gulch

On July 18, Scott Eisenbarth (25), a guide for Shasta Mountain Guides (SMG), was descending with two clients on the Avalanche Gulch route at 1015 when he was struck on the side of the head by a falling rock. They were at 11,800 feet, and he was aware of the rockfall, having asked the clients to move out of its fall line when he was hit. As he lay unconscious, one of the clients used his radio to call other SMG guides who were at a higher elevation.

The other guides responded and notified Siskiyou County Search and Rescue. As the guides arrived, they did a primary and secondary survey, stabilized and monitored Eisenbarth. Another SMG guide from the West Face route assisted in bringing gear from the USFS rescue cache at 10,400 feet. Eisenbarth was stabilized in the SKED (litter) and lowered 1,000 feet on snow, then carried to an LZ at Lake Helen.

With a clearing of cloud cover at 1415, Siskiyou County Search and Rescue flew in the California Department of Forestry super 205 helicopter to Lake Helen and transported Eisenbarth to Mercy Medical Center, Mount Shasta. He was later transferred to Mercy Medical Center, in Redding, where he was treated for head trauma and a skull fracture. Fortunately, a full recovery was expected.

Analysis

Avalanche Gulch is one of the least technical and most popular routes on the mountain, but it also has the highest exposure to rock fall.

Eisenbarth was wearing a helmet, and although he had a side impact around ear level, injuries probably would have been worse without it. (Source: Eric White, Matt Hill—USFS Climbing Rangers)

FALL ON ROCK, INEXPERIENCE

California, Yosemite National Park, Daff Dome

On September 15 at 1520, Anne Venturelli (33) had top-roped about 30 feet of a 5.7 climb known as "Western Front" on Daff Dome. Venturelli was unable to complete the pitch and was attempting to tension traverse across the face to get in line with the top anchor so she could be lowered. She slipped and spun across the face, striking her head and back against a ledge. She was wearing a helmet but received a laceration in the basal skull area. She lost consciousness and came to rest on a ledge.

By the time two companions had climbed to her, she had regained consciousness. Another companion went to the road and reported the incident to a 911 dispatcher.

Park rangers responded to the scene by 1530. Rangers ascended to her and provided patient care while a ten-person rescue team was assembled to conduct a litter lowering, which was accomplished by 1743. She was then trans-