

about 120 miles southeast of Juneau. Springer fell to his death sometime during the night, according to his partner. Weather was a factor, but there were no other details.)

LOOSE ROCK CAME AWAY—FALL ON ROCK, FAILED TO FOLLOW INSTINCTS

California, Sugar Loaf

On January 12, Jon Hanlon and I were enjoying a fabulous winter day of rock climbing at Sugar Loaf. We spent the morning on a couple of the area classics, and at lunch decided that we would ascend the east chimney, a 5.7 route that had been added to the list of recommended climbs in the last couple of guidebooks. Despite my 31 years of climbing at Sugar Loaf, this was a route I had never attempted. The climb is two pitches and is tucked away in an alcove below the world famous Grand Illusion. I led up about twenty-five feet of steep rock without placing protection. When the angle backed off, I climbed another fifteen feet or so to a flake where I placed my first cam.

The climbing proceeded easily along a low-angle ledge to the base of the chimney where I placed a #3 Camalot. I remember moving up the chimney and thinking, "This really requires 5.7 chimney moves." About ten feet higher, I placed the second piece: a #3-1/2 Camalot. I moved up another ten to twelve feet to two large wedged chalkstones. As I moved past these, I placed my hands on top of them. Immediately the inside chalk stone rolled and forced my left shoulder back until there was a "pop." The chalkstones, at this point, fell straight down the chimney and knocked me off the rock. I came to a stop about fifteen feet below the highest piece of protection. The chimney was clean, so I did not hit any other objects. The lower piece in the chimney pulled out, and, when the rocks were falling, I noticed them hitting the rope, and I had the fleeting fear that somehow they would sever the rope.

The impact of my weight falling on the rope, however, caused it to snap around the rocks, and while it was frayed, it did not break. After the rocks stopped on the low angle section 20 feet above the ground, I paused to take stock of my condition. I called to my belayer that other than my ankle, which had been hit by the rock and was bleeding profusely, I was okay. Jon lowered me to the ground. We managed to stop the bleeding by wrapping it with the sleeve of a shirt, and I was able to limp out to the car. We proceeded to the Marshall Hospital in Placerville, where I received ten stitches for the gash in my foot and was diagnosed with an avulsion fracture of my right fibula.

Analysis

I felt very lucky that I was not under the rocks when they fell. I was also fortunate to be able to walk out to the car unaided. The accident, perhaps, could be chalked up to an error in judgment. After decades of looking at this chimney and concluding that there was no good reason to go up there,

I let the fact that it had been recommended in a couple of guidebooks cause me to ignore the fact that it is just an ugly old chimney climb. (Source: Bart O'Brian)

FALLING ROCK, POOR POSITION

California, Mount Shasta, Avalanche Gulch

On June 8, I (Tim Derouin) was climbing up Avalanche Gulch on Mount Shasta with Mike Chase and his brother Steve. The weather over the past few days had been quite unsettled and very windy. The previous day almost no one made it to the summit because of the high winds. The weather was getting better, but it was still windy. We left Horse Camp (7,800 feet) at about midnight and reached Helen Lake at about 4:00 a.m. We continued on and were on schedule when I was hit by a falling rock at about 5:00 a.m. at 11,2000 foot elevation. This is above Helen Lake but below the prominent rock formation known as The Heart. The rock must have dislodged from above us and bounded down the steep (25 degrees) snow slope. There were no parties above us. Because I had a hood on and was bundled up to keep out the wind, I never saw or heard it before it hit me on the right shoulder. The next thing I knew I was tumbling and sliding down the snow but managed to arrest myself or come to a halt after about 50 feet. Not sure which rock hit me, but we think it was the size of a softball. There was extreme pain in my shoulder and initially I thought it might have been dislocated. My climbing partners rushed to my aid, and after determining that I was not in shock and had no life threatening injuries, Steve raced down the mountain to summon help while Mike and I finally decided the best thing to do was rig up a sling and start hiking down the mountain. Waiting for rescue by helicopter or rangers would only mean sitting in the cold for hours. And since I seemed to be able to walk okay, the best thing was to get down as fast as possible and get medical attention.

At Helen Lake there is a ranger tent that is always up during the summer climbing season and Mike and I decided to stop there for a rest. However, inside was a ranger intern. We woke him up and he was able to call down on his radio and accompany us to the trailhead—a three hour walk—where an ambulance was waiting to take me to the hospital. There they took x-rays and the doctor gave me the good news (no dislocation or serious ligament / tendon damage) and bad news (distal third fracture of clavicle). After four weeks in a sling, physical therapy, etc., I am pretty much back to normal now.

Analysis

I learned several important lessons from this experience:

Lesson #1: Always wear a helmet! I was wearing one and was thankful I did. In addition to the shoulder injury, I had a gash below my right ear from a blow that caused some temporary hearing loss due to fluid/blood in that ear. The thinking is the gash may have been caused by the rock glancing off my helmet before it hit my shoulder. Not sure, but either way, if the rock had hit me in the head without a helmet, I might be in very bad shape.