

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 11,200 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.

Lesson #2: Always be prepared for rockfall! Avalanche Gulch has the highest exposure to rockfall on Mount Shasta but we had tried to minimize the risk by climbing earlier in the season and early in the day. Sometimes that is not enough. I should have been a little more observant through the Helen Lake to Red Banks section as well as that is where rockfall is most likely.

In conclusion, my fellow climbers and Mount Shasta rangers were great! Mike and Steve were a great help and comfort in getting me safely to the trailhead, as was the ranger intern whose name escapes me. The rangers even retrieved a couple of day-packs that we left at 11,300 feet when the accident happened and got them back to us. (Source: Tim Derouin)

(Editor's Note: There were several other incidents on Mount Shasta, most of them similar to those reported over the past few years. Only one or two narratives from this area will be reported each year.)

FALL ON ROCK, INADEQUATE PROTECTION

California, Yosemite Valley, El Capitan

On the morning of May 26 Thaddeus Josephson (20) and I, (Ben Mathews—26) were starting our fourth day on Sunkist (VI 5.9 A4) on El Cap. Thaddeus polished off pitch 14, the spectacular A3-4 pitch shown on the cover of Don Reid's *Big Walls Guidebook*. As I cleaned it I was glad to see that good pro could be found every ten to 15 feet. I would get my first ever A4 lead on the next pitch and could deal with it if I got the same protection. But when I reached Thaddeus's hanging belay, the 15th looked very thin and scary, and we both realized that it would be a serious lead.

I started up at about noon. Thaddeus sat facing the wall, belaying me with a Grigri clipped to his harness and with my end of the rope running through his left hand. The first piece was a bolt five feet left of the belay and just right of the crack. The seam was the thinnest I had ever seen, so I clipped a Screamer to the bolt to reduce the impact on the system if I zippered the pitch.

My first few moves were on RURPs (Realized Ultimate Reality Pitons) and beaks, then a tied-off and sawed-off angle, barely body weight. Then more RURPs and beaks and a cam hook. Then the seam dissipated to nothing and I was forced to make my first-ever head placement except in practice, knowing that if it failed so would everything else.

After almost two hours I was 35-40 feet above the belay, on another beak. A rivet ladder beckoned, only two moves away, but those were beak moves and I had only one left. I was really gripped. I placed my last beak, the most marginal piece yet, and weighted it. I realized I needed the beak below me and gave it a slight upward tug. Even that was too much for the top piece. I heard a "pop" and was in the air. "Ting, ting, ting," went the iron as I zippered the entire 40 feet. I hit the wall a few times, tumbling—and glad, in retrospect, that I was wearing a helmet. Thaddeus went by as a blur, then I was dangling upside down, grabbed the rope and righted myself.