

Hope, in a litter, the remaining 300 feet to the road. She was transported by ambulance to Mammoth Hospital, where three fractures in the ankle were repaired.

Analysis

Both Hope and the rangers at the scene agree that most parties would not use a belay on such a low-angle slab. (There were no anchors available, anyway.) However, an accident like this one would be a major logistical hassle if it were ten miles in the backcountry, and no one wants to put up with several months of physical therapy. This incident is a reminder to stay alert, even on the easy stuff. (Source: John Dill, NPS Ranger, Yosemite National Park)

(Editor's Note: Again, a hiking situation that turned into the need for climbing technique.)

FALL ON ROCK-DISLODGED ROCK, OFF ROUTE, FATIGUE

California, Sierra Nevada, Clyde Minaret

On Saturday, August 16th, Justin Schwartz of Belmont, CA, and Steve Sosa, of Los Angeles, CA, set off to climb the South Face of 12,300-foot Clyde Minaret. Justin and Steve knew one another well, having been a climbing team for more than 20 years, and having spent their summer youth together in Yosemite Valley.

The summit ridge is a knife-edge of loose stone blocks leading to near vertical drops of 1500 feet or more on either side. Upon descending 50 feet off the summit, Justin lost his footing and dislodged a large stone block onto himself and tumbled 20 feet down the cliff landing on a narrow ledge. Pain seared his legs and arm, and he could not move. It was 5:30 p.m., with nightfall at 7:45, little water, and no bivouac gear or extra clothing.

Steve was able to contact emergency dispatch in Madeira County via cellular phone, and by 11:30 that night, Mono County Mountain SAR mounted a rescue.

Early Sunday morning, the team went with a Black Hawk helicopter crew from the Sacramento Air National Guard to assess the feasibility of rescue. With the helicopter hovering only a few feet from the rocky summit, the stranded climbers were raised on a hoist and returned to the Mammoth Lakes Airport where local paramedics met them.

Justin suffered a fractured left hip, fractured right lower leg, deep lacerations to his left shin, minor lacerations and contusions to his left arm and hand, and a severely sprained right ankle.

Analysis

There is considerable loose rock and rockfall hazard in the Minarets, with the final pitches and summit ridge being quite loose, so climbers should be especially cautious. Steve and Justin were somewhat vague about the descent route. It is a common mistake on Clyde Minaret for climbers to attempt to descend to the left (south) too soon, rather than continuing on the ridge to the northwest for several hundred feet. Lastly, Steve and Justin started the Grade IV route at 8:00 a.m., and it is possible that a late start, fatigue and

anxiety to move quickly were contributing factors. (Source: Craig Knoche—Mono County Mountain SAR)

FALL ON ROCK, PROTECTION PULLED OUT, INEXPERIENCE

California, Yosemite Valley, Sunnyside Bench, Jam Crack

On September 11, Kristen Shive (26) was attempting to lead Jam Crack. She fell after placing a second piece of protection on the first pitch. The protection held, then held again on her second fall. On the third attempt, she fell again and the protection came out. She fell to the ground, landing on her feet, but sustained an angulated fracture of her right ankle.

Analysis

First and foremost, I don't believe I had much business leading Jam Crack at that point, or leading trad at all. I had been climbing (not intensely) for a little over a year—and even then I knew that sport climbing would be better to start with. But I did a lot of climbing after work in the Valley and didn't really have that option. So my impatience, combined with support from my climbing partner lead me to plunge in a little before my skill level was there.

Anyway, I had led only two 5.6 routes, and only decided to try my hand at Jam Crack because I had followed it so many times I felt like I could do it in my sleep. I'm sure that's an exaggeration, but I was really, really comfortable on that route and felt like I knew it and so might do better there than on a 5.6 I didn't know so well.

And the details from there on are rather simple. I headed up the route and I had only placed my second piece (and to be honest it probably would have been my first, but I was sticking in extra to get comfortable placing pieces), when I fell on it. It held, and I remember thinking how weird it was that I fell there—not a tricky spot for even my skill level. I also remember thinking "Great, it's solid, I placed it well." Anyway I tried again and the same thing happened. (This is where I get embarrassed at my stupidity!). On the third try the piece pulled and I hit the ground. I wasn't aware of the simple rule that you should reset a piece if you fall on it.

If you're at all interested in the retrospect thoughts of a new and thoughtless (at the time) climber it would be this—I would wait and gain more experience and skills before trying to lead, trad especially. I would listen to my body. While leading is always far harder than following, the fact that I was having so much trouble so early (three tries, not 15 feet up the route) on something I've been so comfortable on, should have been a sign. It was after work, and I'd been working long hours on fires and hiking hard. My body wasn't up to it and I ignored it. And while I take full responsibility for what happened, I would start leading with someone who has more experience as well. My partner had not led too terribly much more than I had. (Source: Kristen Shive)

FALL ON ROCK, INADEQUATE ANCHOR, INADEQUATE COMMUNICATION

California, Yosemite Valley, Ranger Rock

On the morning of September 11, E (25), N (27), and L (26) set out to climb the popular Nutcracker route in Yosemite Valley (5.8, five pitches). All three