

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

climbers were comfortable leading traditional routes at this level, and they reached the top of the third pitch without any problems. The party was leading with two 9-mm ropes, belaying each follower separately.

After leading the third pitch, N established a three-piece anchor at a small sloping ledge. (For those who know the route, he chose to take the right-hand variation following the crack, instead of face-climbing to the small tree up and left.) After equalizing his anchor with webbing, N secured himself directly to the webbing's "power-point" with a locking carabiner on his harness. Though not a true hanging belay, the angle of the wall was steep enough that he likely weighted the anchor at least partially. L then followed the pitch on the first rope and climbed slightly past N to a small ledge above and to his right. She was clipped to the anchor's power point with a long runner and a locking carabiner, yet she was out of the way and in position to lead the next pitch. Then N belayed E up on the second rope.

When he arrived at the anchor, E positioned himself slightly below and left of N, securing himself to the power point with a locking carabiner on a runner girth-hitched to his harness. At this point all three climbers were clipped into the same power-point, each with a single locking carabiner. After some discussion they decided that E should untie from his rope and pass his end to L; she had the first rope already, but needed the second one in order to lead the next pitch on a pair. N could have untied from his end of the second rope, but it was stacked such that using E's end would avoid a rope tangle. Before untying himself from the rope, E attached himself to the power point with a second locking carabiner on a second runner girth-hitched to his harness. Both L and N remember watching E clip this second runner to the anchor, and both heard his comment that he wanted a backup "just to be safe."

Once she was ready to lead the next pitch, L asked N to put her on belay and to unclip her locking carabiner from the anchor. N used his left hand to keep L on belay, while he unclipped what he believed to be her locking carabiner with his right. The next thing both L and N remember is seeing E tumble 250 feet down the rock face to the ground.

### **Analysis**

As for the cause of this incident, it is apparent that something went wrong in one of the most basic climbing processes. The obvious questions are: Did N accidentally unclip E from the anchor? Even if he did, what happened to E's second clip-in point? And why did E fall, at that same moment?

Many of us have become unclipped at anchors sometimes accidentally, and sometimes intentionally to "save time" and because it's "only for a minute." Regardless of the cause, this accident underscores the importance of backup attachment points, and also the importance of communication when climbing in a team: "Does my partner's rigging—as well as my own—look OK? Does my partner know I'm unclipping one of my anchor points? Is this the right carabiner? Are we following the same plan?" The more people there are in a system, the more potential there is for confusion.

Accidents like this are more common than one might think. In Yosemite, up to 40 percent of all climbing fatalities over the last 30 years have been due to failures to maintain the integrity of the anchor chain, whether ascending a rope, rappelling or just waiting at the belay. (Source: Lincoln Else, NPS Ranger, Yosemite National Park)

*(Editor's Note: The climbers wished not to have their names used.)*

## **DEHYDRATION—INADEQUATE WATER, WEATHER**

### **California, Yosemite Valley, El Capitan**

On September 22, Mark Gunlogson (41) and I, Micha Miller (41), started up New Dawn wall (VI 5.8 A3) on El Capitan. The weather before our ascent had been unseasonably warm (low 90's), with cooler temperatures forecast for the coming week. We considered waiting for the better conditions but were on a tight schedule and wanted to get started on the route. We planned on taking seven days. Knowing how critical water would be, we each had three quarts readily available for the first day, and five additional gallons per person, packed away in our two haul bags, for the next six days (3.3 quarts per person per day). In addition to what we figured was an ample supply of water, we were also prepared for fall storms, had a bolt kit, and, in short, were ready for any contingency—or so we thought.

Our goal for the 22nd was to climb three pitches and sleep at our high point, but it was very hot, and we moved more slowly than planned. We managed to finish our three pitches, but we left the haul bags at the top of pitch two and returned to the ground for more water. We slept at Curry Village, where we drank generous amounts of fruit juice and Gatorade to replenish what we had lost.

On the 23rd we left the ground with three more quarts each, giving us 3.8 quarts per person per day for the anticipated six days committed to the wall. It was slow going, with heavy bags and double hauls—the follower would have to wait until the first bag had been hauled, before he could release the second bag and start cleaning. Evening found us on Lay Lady Ledge (top of pitch seven, “Supertopo”) after another hot day. We were tired and dehydrated, and we had drunk a bit more than our 3.8-quart ration.

On the 24th we climbed to Texas Flake (top of pitch 11). The temperature remained high, with not even the slightest hint of a breeze. Today, only our second continuous day on the wall, Mark's mouth became so parched—probably from breathing hard in the hot, dry air—that he gagged frequently, triggering dry heaves. He suffered this for the next four days.

On the 25th we completed the traverse to the top of pitch 13 of the Wall of Early Morning Light (pitch 14 of New Dawn). For more efficient hauling we had consolidated all of our stuff into one haul bag, but we could do nothing about the weather, which continued unchanged. This was Mark's tenth ascent of El Cap and my seventh, and neither of us had seen such a long period of both high temperatures and breezeless conditions on the wall. We had pressed on because we “knew” from experience that, at the