

tool broken in half. One half was next to David and the other half was about 30 feet away. Kelly's cleaning tool was still clipped to his harness.

Analysis

This is what we believe happened through analysis of the scene, interviews from witnesses, review of harnesses and gear at the county morgue, and re-examining the scene from top to bottom: We believe David had his cleaning tool out and was trying to retrieve the last cam when one of them slipped. Note that there are two possible exit routes that are safe to walk away from—if you don't slip or trip! The basic lesson: Stay on belay until you are in a position where there is no danger of a slip/trip that could pull you over the side. (Source: From a report submitted by Glenn Henderson, Riverside Mountain Rescue Unit)

FALL ON ROCK, CLIMBING ALONE AND UNROPE

California, Temple Crag, Venusian Blind Arête

Linnea Erickson (age 22) had told a friend that she planned to solo climb the Venusian Blind Arête route (IV, 5.7) on Temple Crag. On Friday, October 24 Linnea left her camp at Third Lake carrying a light pack containing climbing shoes, chalk bag, jacket, water, and food. She crossed the creek below Third Lake, followed the well-used use trail to the base of Temple Crag, successfully surmounted the permanent snowfield, and traversed below the Moon-Goddess Arête to the base of the intended route. She ascended the arête approximately 800 feet to the vicinity of a prominent gendarme. At this point she apparently fell into the gully between the Moon Goddess Arête and the Venusian Blind Arête. Her jacket was located directly beneath the prominent gendarme (about 200 feet) and her body was located on a ledge about 150 feet further down at about 11,500 feet elevation. She died instantaneously upon falling. She was reported missing on the morning of Sunday, October 26, and her body was spotted at 3:30 p.m. during a helicopter search. Her body was recovered Monday, October 27, by Inyo County Search & Rescue with the support of the USFS helicopter.

Analysis

Linnea had recently come west from New Hampshire. She had limited familiarity with the Sierra Nevada Mountains, having previously soloed Cathedral Peak (III, 5.7) in the prior week and Mount Sill and Mount Gayley the previous day. She was attempting a long and serious, albeit not technically difficult route. The nature of the routes on Temple Crag, however, tends to make route finding ability very important. It is easy to stray off the moderate climbing and onto difficult terrain. When her body was located, there was no indication of exactly where she fell or why. It is only possible to surmise that she may have been slightly off-route on more difficult climbing than the intended 5.7, or she may have encountered a loose rock (a common occurrence in the High Sierra). Free-solo ascents always carry the possibility of a fatal mistake, particularly in a setting where the climber has limited experience. (Source: Dave German, Inyo County Search & Rescue)