

from the anchor point, suggesting that as soon as he leaned back and weighted the line, something immediately gave way. One possibility is that the block or flake that Dan had slinged peeled off when he leaned back. Warren indicated that no rocks come crashing down on him when Dan fell.

On Monday May 31, 2004, volunteers of the Inyo County Sheriff's Search and Rescue team, assisted by C.H.P. helicopter H-82 from Apple Valley, recovered Kipper's body. He was flown off the glacier and released to the Inyo County Coroner's Office.

Analysis

Both climbers were tired at the end of a long day and ready to get down. Dan was known as a meticulous and safe climber. We'll never know exactly what happened, but it appears that when he slung the block, the sling slipped off when he weighted this anchor. Given his experience, it is hard to say how he might have made such a simple but fatal mistake. We can say that it is always a good policy to set a backup anchor while testing the primary rappel anchor prior to rappelling. (Source: Dave German, Inyo County SAR)

FALL ON ROCK, INADEQUATE PROTECTION, EXCEEDING ABILITIES

California, Tuolumne Meadows, Lember Dome, Northwest Books

On July 15, Amit Singh (27) fell while climbing the third pitch (rated 5.9) of Northwest Books on Lember Dome. He had placed a cam just above the belay and had started to climb the difficult section. Ten feet up, he placed a #5 nut and continued to climb another five to ten feet. He told me (park ranger) he had difficulty at the top of the crack, that he was struggling to hold on and place gear.

His partner, Anthony Baraff, said Singh struck his head and went unconscious for about 15 to 20 seconds. Singh could not remember what had happened. Baraff yelled for help and in about 15-20 minutes nearby climbers responded and went for help. Park rangers from the SAR team rescued Singh.

Analysis

These climbers had about two years of experience, mostly in the Gunks and mostly sport climbing. They were just starting trad climbing and said they were comfortable leading 5.7 to 5.8 routes.

The most important lesson here is that they were wearing helmets. (Source: George Paiva, Yosemite Valley SAR Ranger)

FALL ON ROCK—INADEQUATE PROTECTION (CLIMBER AND BELAYER), NO HARD HAT

California, Yosemite Valley, Church Bowl, Bishops Terrace

After work on July 28, Ric Sedlak (20) and I, Amy Painter (21), headed for the Church Bowl to climb Bishops Terrace (one pitch, 5.8). It was Ric's lead. He could follow 5.11, but he had just started leading traditional routes

this summer and was learning protection skills on easier climbs. He'd led several other 5.8's so far with no problems. We bypassed the direct start and scrambled up to the large ledge where the right-hand variation begins about 50 feet above the ground. As he racked his gear I offered him a helmet—twice, but he just made a joke and shook his head at me. I reviewed some protection issues I thought important, and as he started up the crack he said I'd have to remind him to place enough pieces.

He placed a nut about ten feet directly above me and another a few feet higher. Then he continued straight up another ten feet or so to a small ledge. From there the climb goes left on foot holds for a few feet to the base of a large flake, then up a crack on either side of the flake to the crux higher on the pitch. Ric decided to wait until he reached the flake to place another piece. I suggested he at least put something at its base before starting up the cracks. Both sides of the flake would take protection. He started up the right side but decided the better of it, so he climbed down and traversed to the left side. I asked him again to put in a piece of protection. He must not have liked the left side of the flake any better than the right, because he decided to traverse back to the right and said, "Let me put in a piece on the right when I get back there." He still hadn't established protection beyond the first two nuts. At this point his waist was perhaps 15 feet above his highest piece and 15 feet left of it, and he was about 80 feet above the ground.

The two sides of the flake are six or seven feet apart, and the moves between the two, while not hard, require a bit of balance. Ric kept his left hand and foot on the left and stretched back to the right. It was far enough that he had to let go with his left hand, and when he realized that, he changed his mind. As he drew back to the left he must have somehow lost his balance, because he suddenly and involuntarily began to "barn door," swinging out as though his left hand and foot were the hinges of a door. He was looking directly to the right and down at me. We made eye contact and he said, "Oh shit! I'm going to fall!"

In the split second that I had I took in as much rope as possible, though nothing I could do would compensate for the deficiency in his protection. I saw his left hand come off. At the last second he thrust himself away from the wall to avoid scraping all the way down. He fell past me to the left and I heard him hit on the face below. I was not anchored and got yanked what seemed like five feet into the air. With rope stretch and all, he probably fell at least 30 to 40 feet.

I yelled Ric's name over and over, but got no reply. Holding him on belay, I moved left to the end of the ledge. Without re-rigging I started rappelling down the face using the belay device, with Ric as a counter-weight. Both of us were hanging from his protection at that point.

When I reached him he was unconscious, not responding to my calls, and hanging horizontally with his left side against the wall. I held myself in place with my right hand on my rappel line. I wedged myself between Ric and the wall and pushed him out with my left hand and my legs in order to look at his injuries.

That's when I saw all the blood running down the rock. A huge laceration ran from his right eyebrow up and across his forehead all the way to his left ear, and the flap of skin was folded forward, exposing his skull. I started yelling for help and almost immediately climbers answered from the west side of Church Bowl, "Keep yelling! We're coming! Where are you?" That gave me a bit of relief. All of this seemed to take only a minute from the time of Ric's fall.

By now my grip on the rope was slipping. I tried to wrap the rope around my leg, but I slipped lower until I was below Ric, so I gave up trying to help him and kept going 40 feet to the ground. I needed to get him down and stop the bleeding, so once I was on the ground I lowered him. As Ric came within reach, Tim, the first climber to arrive, cradled his body and laid him on his back.

By this time Ric had started to groan and respond to us. I tried to assess his mental status in more detail. I placed his scalp back in position, covered it with my folded tank top, and gently wrapped his head with Tim's shirt as a light pressure bandage. I knelt with his head between my knees to keep him still. Blood filled his mouth and nose (probably from skull fractures, I learned later) so he had to spit it out every couple of seconds to be able to breathe. I was in the way, and I could still taste his blood hours later.

Someone had called 911. The medical clinic is only 400 yards away, so the ambulance crew arrived in couple of minutes, followed by the rescue team. Ric answered all their questions appropriately and he was soon bandaged, back-boarded, and aboard a medical helicopter headed to Modesto. In 30 minutes it would have been too dark to fly. At the hospital, x-rays and a CAT scan showed that his spine was OK, but his skull was fractured in three places—the frontal, left occipital, and right orbital bones. None required surgery, but it took 39 staples to close the big laceration plus lots of work on smaller cuts. He still does not remember the accident or the following several days, and he suffered neurological problems for a few weeks. They've since cleared up and he is climbing again.

Analysis

Ric should have followed Amy's advice by placing a piece as soon as he reached the right side of the flake. First, even though the moves were well within his abilities (and not even 5.8), mistakes do happen and he was facing a serious fall. Second, Amy had the belayer's perspective, which complements the leader's view. Third, she was the teacher. Better to overprotect

when you're learning and then scale back as you gain skill than to learn the hard way. If nothing else, it gives the teacher something to critique.

Amy describes Ric as a natural athlete and seemingly fearless. Being on a relatively easy route may have given him too much confidence. This is pretty common among good athletes—until their first serious mishap.

It is indisputable that helmets prevent serious trauma from falls. Ric's was one of four serious accidents in Yosemite in 2004 affected by not wearing a helmet. [See McFalls (Royal Arches) and Singh (Lembert Dome) in this issue of ANAM.]

Amy pointed out later that she should have been anchored as she belayed. The belay ledge is big enough to walk around on safely, but she could have been injured and even dropped Ric as she was yanked upward into the wall. Furthermore, if Ric's pieces had failed, she could have been pulled off the ledge to the ground. Some climbers argue that anchoring the belayer increases the force on the protection, but that is dubious justification for risking the belayer, and one would not often apply that logic beyond the first pitch. If there is that much concern about the quality of the protection, the leader should place pieces closer together or assess whether or not to continue climbing.

Regardless of the situation, a first aid course like Wilderness First Responder, coupled with the self-rescue skills mentioned above, provide the tools to make informed, even though risky, decisions and to carry them out. (Source: Amy Painter and John Dill, NPS Ranger, Yosemite National Park)

FALL ON SNOW—INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT, OFF ROUTE, PARTY SEPARATED

California, High Sierra, Mount Ritter, Southeast Glacier

On August 9 the body of Otto Loenneker was found by Mono County Mountain Search and Rescue at the base of the Southeast Glacier on Mount Ritter.

Otto and his partner, John Dickinson, arrived at the base of Mount Ritter late morning of August 8. Their plan that day was to scout a route to the base of the Southeast Pinnacle, then return to basecamp. The "official" route ascends the 1,000 foot lower gully to the Southeast Pinnacle at the base of Ritter's Southeast Glacier, traverses north and back west around the edge of the glacier to Owen's Chute, then approaches the summit from the southwest. As they approached the gully, Otto and John disagreed about the location of the lower gully, with Otto starting up a line farther to the northwest. They agreed to rejoin at the base of the Southeast Pinnacle. When John arrived at the point where the route traverses, he looked down and saw Otto about 500 to 1,000 feet below him in the lower gully and assumed that his line had topped out on this other gully and that he had retreated to a point where he switched to the lower gully. John built a cairn to mark the turning point, then continued the traverse to a small snowfield below the Southeast Glacier. This was the last time he saw Otto alive.