

The move on which I fell was well protected with a bomber #2 Camalot. I was only six or seven feet above my piece when I fell, and so should have fallen at most, 15-18 feet. In 18 years of climbing with D.B., I have tried to climb well within my abilities and have never taken a leader fall (outside of sport climbing), so D.B. was caught a bit by surprise by my fall and let a half a second or so of rope through the belay before checking my fall. While I knew that I was making a somewhat awkward move out of his line of sight, I did not warn D.B. to watch me. I was surprised when my hold broke, but it was a tricky enough situation that I certainly should have warned him to watch me.

I have found that as I have gotten older, I have progressively tried to go lighter and lighter, and being fresh at the end of the day is safety. But this I will say: given the stress of finding suitable rap anchors, I will never again venture onto an alpine face, even an easy one, without a few pitons and a hammer for use in emergency. As it goes, all of the factors leading to and including the leader fall and tedious rappel descent of the face are to me just part of climbing and in my opinion well within the realm of acceptable risk. I misread the weather a bit and paid a small price. If the leader fall and rap down the face was all there was to the story, I would have walked out, albeit slowly with my pelvis and left leg injuries, defeated on the climb and banged up a bit, but without a story to tell.

The rap anchor failure at the very bottom is something else entirely. We probably would have rapped that little cliff even if we had finished the face and descended the standard route without incident. Many years of reading *Accidents in North America* (sic) have taught me that rap anchor failure equals death, and I should be dead. I am beyond shocked that the anchor failed. We pushed on that block with our whole might and it didn't budge. I watched D.B. rap down on that block and it didn't budge a micrometer. Why it came down when it did I don't know, but it scares me to think about it. Last year I climbed a couple of peaks in Canada that have maintained rap stations with big, fat double bolts and rings. I like those.

One final note: The space blanket that I have carried for many years finally came into use and worked very well. I strongly recommend that every climber carry one. (Source: From a report submitted by Dave German)

## **FALL ON ROCK, PLACED NO PROTECTION**

### **California, High Sierra, Middle Palisade**

On August 22, a group of eight Sierra Club members were ascending the Northeast Face of Middle Palisade (3rd class). The party was moving adequately, but slowly. The party was unroped. All members of the party were wearing helmets. Near the top of the first chute, where the route bears left, they met with two other parties descending the route. The descending parties, one guide with two clients (roped) and one solo climber, set about

passing the group. At some time during this transition, Brian Reynolds (31), who was facing the cliff, stepped back one step too far and fell backwards. Brian landed headfirst 30 feet down and continued to fall until he was out of sight. All three groups descended to check on Brian's condition, while calling the Inyo County Sheriff's office for Search and Rescue support. There was a trail of blood leading downwards. At the base of the route, just above the Norman Clyde Glacier, Brian was found. He was pronounced dead immediately. Inyo SAR arrived within about one hour and verified Brian's condition as deceased.

Additional SAR team members were inserted to assist, while the climbing parties continued their descent to Brainard Lake. Due to high winds and deteriorating weather conditions, the body recovery was postponed until the following day. Early the following day, the body was flown out via long line.

### **Analysis**

The route is steep and dangerous. It is nominally rated as 3rd class, but a fall is likely to be fatal due to the steep nature of the terrain. Passing of other climbers can be hazardous because of the positioning. Being able to anchor in when passing other climbers is always a consideration. (Source: Dave German)

## **FALL ON ROCK—JUMPED INSTEAD OF DOWN-CLIMBING**

### **California, Yosemite National Park, Tuolumne Meadows, Matthes Crest**

On August 25, Mark Sorenson (38) and David Parrish (38) were climbing Matthes Crest and were about at the halfway point when this accident happened. Parrish had led an easy pitch for about 50 feet, placing no protection along the way, as it was easy 3rd class. Parrish recalls yelling, "Off belay," to Sorenson, who waved to him indicating he understood. Parrish then put Sorenson on belay using an ATC. He could see Sorenson coming his way, but then he went out of sight. Parrish was taking in rope as fast as he could, but never felt the rope come taut. Then he heard Sorenson yell something, then felt the rope come tight on him. He looked over his left shoulder and saw Sorenson lying on a ledge with his foot bleeding. Parrish tied him off and climbed down to him. He could see that the foot was broken and severely deformed.

Another climbing party rappelled and ran six miles to report the accident. SAR personnel called in a helicopter. Sorenson was shorthauled off, then put in the helicopter and flown to mammoth Lakes Hospital. (Source: From a report by George Paiva, SAR Ranger)

### **Analysis**

Both climbers were experienced. Sorenson was out-climbing his belayer's ability to keep the rope taut on the relatively easy terrain. Sorenson had gone off the 3rd class terrain and on to a 5.7 section. He chose to jump out and then onto a sloped ledge four feet down, rather than down-climbing.