

Barnett and Holcomb were wearing rock shoes and both felt comfortable on the slabs. They had not found themselves in over their heads looking for a way out. Holcomb thinks Barnett may have fallen because he was facing out and wearing a pack, which could have put his weight too far back for good friction. Holcomb had his helmet in his pack. He doesn't remember if Barnett had a helmet with him but doesn't think he was wearing one at the time.

Barnett's ankle has healed well. He is skiing and climbing again. (Source: Ted Roberts, Search and Rescue Technician, and John Dill, NPS Ranger)

STRANDED, OFF-ROUTE, INADEQUATE CLOTHING AND EQUIPMENT, EXCEEDING ABILITIES, WEATHER

California, Inyo National Forest, Mount Ritter

On September 7th, the park received a mutual aid request from Mono County SAR for assistance in rescuing a stranded climbing party on Mount Ritter, a few miles southeast of the park. On Thursday, five men between the ages of 15 and 21 reached the summit of the mountain (13,157 feet) without resorting to technical climbing. While descending, though, they were hit by a storm with sleet and snow. They became disoriented and down-climbed off-route into highly technical terrain. Without technical gear and with inadequate clothing, they were forced to huddle together at about 12,500 feet through the night. Eventually they called the Mono County Sheriff's Office by cellphone, and the county contacted the park. A rescue team comprised of Yosemite heli-tack crew members Eric Small, Nick Fowler and John DeMay, Valley District ranger Jack Hoeflich, and Mather District rangers Eric Gabriel and Jason Ramsdell flew to the area in the park helicopter, piloted by Dave Boden.

The stranded climbers were spotted from the air on the north face of the peak in fifth class terrain. Rescuers were short-hauled under the helicopter onto the wall and the stranded party rigged for evacuation. In three separate flights, all of the climbers and rescuers were safely short-hauled off the peak to a meadow at the base of the mountain. The climbers were wet, cold, and dehydrated, but were able to walk back to their campsite. Given the weather, temperatures, and lack of warm clothing, the outcome could have been more serious had they been forced to spend another night on the wall. (Source: From a report by Jason Ramsdell, Mather District SAR Coordinator)

(Editor's Note: While not a climbing accident, this narrative is presented as an example of hikers finding themselves in a climbing situation for which they were not prepared or capable of handling.)