

called 911 at 1800. The injured climber was assisted by her partners to low angle terrain at 9,200 feet. Two CHP helicopters began to search at 1845. Due to lack of snow, the climbers blended in well with the rocks and were not spotted until 1925. They were evacuated at 1940 hours. They were all flown to Mercy Medical Center. They declined treatment. The injured climber was treated for broken ribs, bruising, and hematoma damage to the chest and shoulder.

Analysis

Mount Shasta consists of 120 cubic miles of loose rock! Even the bedrock outcrops are not to be trusted. Therefore, the best time to climb is when the mountain is predominantly covered with snow and the avalanche danger is low. This usually occurs in the late spring to mid summer. Loose rocks and boulders along with natural rockfall occur every year by mid summer into the fall.

Additionally, group separation is not recommended. The fourth climber descended alone and was not able to help his friends. Keep your group together. You may need their help or they may need you! (Source: Mount Shasta Wilderness Climbing Ranger Report prepared by Eric White, Climbing Ranger/Avalanche Specialist)

FALL ON ROCK, PROTECTION PULLED OUT, INADEQUATE PROTECTION, EXCEEDING ABILITIES

California, Yosemite National Park, Cathedral Peak

Cathedral Peak South East Buttress is a popular six-pitch moderate alpine climb, with many variations, about 3.5 miles from the road, at around the 10,500-foot elevation. This incident involved a party of three climbers, Dave Lubertozzi (42), Sumi Nadarajah (30), and Mike Ray (40), who started climbing the “middle” variation and moved over to the right. By around 3:15 p.m. on September 30, they were climbing the third pitch, about 300 feet from the base of the climb. The leader, Dave, fell ten feet above his last piece while trying to make the next placement. He was at the “5.6 fingers over bulge” marked just below the third belay station for route C in the SuperTopo. After falling vertically with his left foot tangled in the rope, he was yanked hard by the ankle. The piece of protection pulled out and he tumbled onto a sloping ledge, where he lay disoriented for about 30 seconds. He began to move and told the other climbers he was “basically OK except for the ankle”, which he thought was broken. Another climbing party also on the route saw the fall, but didn’t inquire as to whether they needed help, and climbed on, but then the injured climber and his party didn’t ask them for help either. Sumi tried to call friends back at camp from her Verizon cellphone, but only got voice mail; they decided not to call YOSAR, thinking it was early and they could still get out on their own.

Mike, who was belaying, lowered Dave to their anchor, tied the double ropes together and they began to rap the route. Dave rappelled going face-out, feet-first, using an autoblock. On each rappel, Mike descended first and chose the next anchor, Dave descended next, and Sumi came down last so that Dave had help at both ends of the rappel, and a fireman's belay from below. One of the ropes was damaged to the core during the fall, so they isolated the bad spot with a butterfly knot. Since it was near one end, with good planning they were able to make it down in two short and one long rappels which necessitated passing the knot only once.

Sumi attended to Dave, making a crude splint with sticks, dressing him in warm clothing, and giving food, water, and 800mg ibuprofen while Mike got down the ropes and as much gear as safely possible. Then they descended another ~200 feet of scree, Dave sliding on his butt with assistance from the others. They decided to head west towards the JMT rather than back along the Budd Creek approach. After reaching the relatively flat saddle area, they tried various means of locomotion for the injured climber: three-legged hop with one or both of the others supporting his shoulders, with a crutch, crab-walk, trying to carry him once on Mike's back, and again with a carrier woven from the rope. But he was too heavy to take very far and he couldn't take the pain of hopping. They were about a mile from the trail, which was then another ~3 mi to the car, so they figured they'd try to get to the trail where they might meet someone. Around 8:30 p.m. it was getting pretty dark, so they decided Mike would run back by himself to go for help while the others continued on towards the trail. By this time Dave had decided the most efficient way to move was by crawling, so they made him some knee pads and put the foot up in a sling so it didn't drag. It was pretty slow going. They stopped and he had a snack and some water while Sumi scouted out for the trail ahead. She reported it looked like they were going to have to go downhill over rough terrain and through some trees to get to it, so they decided to hunker down and wait for rescuers there.

They were approximately 300 yards from the trail at the edge of the large clearing and still around 10,000 feet. It was windy there but they figured it would be easier for them to be seen out in the open rather than in the woods. This was about 10:00 p.m. and it was starting to get really cold with a few flakes of snow falling. There was one space blanket. It was the sleeping bag type, so they split it to share it but it got kind of shredded in the wind. They used it and the tarp, ropes, and backpacks and made a nest as cozy as they could between two small trees and cuddled up in there and shivered until about 2:00 a.m. when their friends came.

Back at camp at the end of their day, the rest of the group expected to find the three climbers who went to Cathedral Peak back already, since they had

left at 6:00 a.m. They figured they were just being slow, but began to really worry around 10:00 p.m. Some of them wanted to hike up the trail to find them. In discussing it, the group decided that even if there were something wrong, they'd have a hard time finding them and couldn't really know what kind of help they needed anyway, so couldn't bring proper/useful gear, so should just stay put and wait.

At 10:50 p.m., one of the three missing climbers (Mike) drove into camp and said, "We have an incident..." The group began discussing options, and Val (a former SAR volunteer) was for immediately sending out a crew with tents/sleeping bags/stove/first aid gear while others favored contacting YOSAR first. A few raindrops falling decided for immediate action. At 11:15 p.m., four of them, Brian, Matt, Mike and Cheryl (a Wilderness EMT) headed out with six sleeping bags, two tents, a few pads, food, water, iodine, a stove, and an FRS radio, while the others called YOSAR.

They left the Cathedral Lakes trailhead about 11:45 p.m. and got to the neighborhood of the JMT below the saddle around 1:30 a.m. After leaving a note on the trail for YOSAR in a Ziploc bag on a cairn, with rock-and-stick arrows, they fanned out about 100 meters apart, and headed generally up. One set of lights appeared on the trail and the rescue party met the second group of climbers on their way out, but they had no information about their friends. As they continued, they saw another set of lights coming up the trail behind them, so three waited thinking it might be YOSAR. Brian ditched his pack and went up the hill as fast as he could, then spotted his friends' lights. He sprinted over to within earshot, yelled to them who it was and that he had others to guide back. He asked if they needed anything immediately. They said no immediate help was needed, so he dashed back to the crew and they headed on up, reaching Sumi and Dave around 2:15 a.m.

The rescue crew basically set up a field hospital, and within a half hour, Dave and Sumi were warm and stable in tents with pads and sleeping bags, and Cheryl (EMT) had looked at and re-splinted Dave's ankle, checked out his other injuries, recorded vitals, and gave a (fourth) dose of ibuprofen (800 mg) plus 50 mg diphenhydramine. She stayed with him until YOSAR came. At about 4:00 a.m. they all went to bed, leaving Brian on watch for YOSAR. Brian also hiked down to modify the YOSAR note to explain the location of the camp better.

YOSAR meanwhile had gone up the Budd Creek approach and scouted all around the base before bedding down. They arrived about 7:00 a.m., verified that the EMT had done a thorough job, and put Dave on oxygen and a spine and back stiffener, as there was evidence of a possible c-spine

injury. After being diverted by a fire at Hetch Hetchy, the helicopter came about 11 a.m. and flew Dave to Mammoth Lakes with a YNP medic.

Analysis

The proximate cause was that I slipped off my foothold while trying to re-do a cam placement I wasn't happy with after I first placed it. The next piece down (a nut), I also wasn't happy with, blew on the way down, so I took up to a 40-foot fall, probably less as I came to rest on a low angle patch of ledges, kind of like stairs.

Thinking about it for the last few days it's obvious that a lot of bad decisions came together to create the accident. The first was that as a new leader, it would have been better to do something a lot closer to the road in case anything happened. Secondly, after making some placement mistakes on my first pitch, I meant to pay special attention to pro, and after four nice pieces was feeling more confident...too much so. I didn't like the fifth piece, a small nut, but barreled on ahead anyway, thinking it was as good as it was going to get. Later I realized I could have easily backed it up; if the rock there only allowed a marginal piece, then two or three would have made more sense. As I came to near the top of the sequence, there was a bit of a tricky move I wanted to protect, but after that was a huge ledge, so I would be "home free". In fact I started thinking as if I was already there -- dumb. Why I didn't just clip the cam I had in I'll never understand. Really dumb. It may not have been an award-winning placement, but it was 1) right at my chest and 2) a lot better than the nut ten feet below me! I'll never get the image out of my mind of falling off with the friggin' cam in my hand, lobes retracted, as I just pulled it out of a perfectly good crack! The fall itself was pure carelessness. Although my left toe was on a huge bomber crystal, it was on the face outside of the half-pipe my body was in, with the crack at the back right, so in fact I forgot where my center of mass should be since I felt protected with my body in the rock groove; when I leaned in to get a better shot at the cam placement, I un-weighted the left foot a bit (which was my only real hold) and off I came.

Finally, I probably wouldn't have broken my ankle if I hadn't purposely put the rope outside the groove to my left instead of between my legs where it belonged, since the crack was vertical. Dumb! Ultimately a lot of my attitude had to do with recently having gotten over my fear of falling since I'd started climbing, as the consequences of falling on top rope are minimal. I simply wasn't being careful enough on lead. I'm really glad no one else got hurt. (Source: Edited slightly from a report submitted by Brian Welsh, Mike Ray, Sumi Nadarajah, and David Lubertozzi, the latter having done the analysis)

(Editor's Note: We always appreciate it when climbers write up their own mishaps and are totally honest in their analyses.)