

on Cathedral Peak. Rangers responded by helicopter and quickly located the climber, identified as Christina Chan (31). Her body was removed from the scene via short-haul by a park contract helicopter.

Analysis

Chan was a very experienced climber, with roped-solo ascents of difficult Grade VI routes on El Capitan. According to those who interacted with her on Cathedral Peak that day, she was in good spirits and climbing with skill and confidence. Eric Cohen caught a glimpse of about 20 feet of Chan's fall, but no one knows what caused it. Free-soloing is here to stay, but even the lowest grade levels can be fatal when the rope is left in the car. (Source: John Dill and Jesse McGahey, NPS Rangers)

FALL ON ROCK – BELAY FAILURE (UNSECURED ROPE, DISTRACTION), NO HELMET

California, Yosemite Valley, Five Open Books

On August 11, my brothers, Eric (26) and Thayne (19), and I, Grace Rich (31), were visiting Yosemite and we decided to go climbing. Eric and Thayne had climbed only a few times before and weren't feeling up for a multi-pitch route, so I thought we'd just do the first pitch of Munginella (three pitches, 5.6), a route I'd climbed before.

From the base of the wall we had to scramble 50 feet up to the belay ledge at the start of the pitch. I led the pitch, set the anchors at the top, and had Thayne start lowering me with his belay device. My parents had come up to watch and everyone was chatting, so Thayne was distracted. The rope was piled in front of him, but he was looking up at me when Eric noticed just a second too late that the rope was too short. The end of the rope went through the belay device because I hadn't tied a knot in it.

My first thought, when there was no tension on the rope, was "Funny, Thayne!" I thought he was letting a little bit of rope go just to scare me, but then it never caught and I realized I was falling, 30 feet above the belay ledge and 80 feet above the ground. I think I hit my heels on a little lip on the face and it flipped me upside down; I hit my whole lower back and butt area pretty hard. My brothers knew that if they didn't stop me at the belay ledge, I would keep going another 50 feet. Luckily they tackled me and Eric may have saved my life by getting under me and cushioning my fall, but I hit my head on a sharp rock when I landed and ripped my scalp open. My dad ran down to get help and we put pressure on my scalp to stop the bleeding while I tried to get my bearings.

To my embarrassment, the search and rescue team came up. I kept trying to feel OK about getting down myself. I never blacked out so I thought I was pretty well off, but both my ankles were swelling and my pelvis hurt, so I swallowed my pride and decided to do what Matt—the ranger in charge—

suggested, and let them immobilize me in a litter, lower me to the ground, and carry me down the hill.

An ambulance transferred me to a med-evac helicopter that flew me to a hospital in Modesto. I tried to fight that as well, but Matt explained that I needed X-rays or CTs to check for fractures and that I should have an experienced ER staff clean and sew up the huge six-inch flap on my scalp.

In Modesto, they could find no broken bones. They sutured my scalp and released me, but a follow-up CT six weeks later back home showed that I had five fractures in the talus bone in my left ankle. I'm now recovering from surgery and carrying hardware in my foot, but I should eventually be back in action.

Analysis

A lot of dumb factors went into this accident and I don't blame Thayne. I've been climbing frequently for 16 years and lead 5.9–5.10, so you'd think I'd know better by now. The responsibility was all mine. I should have worn my helmet, tied a knot in the end of the rope, and told Thayne to look for the half way mark on the rope.

I'd unintentionally left my helmet behind, but admittedly I wasn't good about wearing one anyway—and the route was easy. I had previously climbed the entire route, so rope length wasn't an issue then, and this time I didn't even think about the rope being too short. I had also been lazy about tying knots in the end. No one I climb with really does that and it just never crossed my mind. The new Grace will pay more attention from now on.

NPS comments: A few injuries of this kind happen every year in Yosemite (at least the ones we hear about), and they are not restricted to inexperienced belayers. See examples in ANAM 2009 and 2008. The fact that the climbers survived may be due to the relatively short falls when the rope runs out, but a fatality will eventually occur. Grace was extremely lucky that she didn't receive a more serious head injury and she has her brothers to thank for keeping her from going the rest of the way. (Source: John Dill, NPS Ranger, and Grace Rich)

FALLING ROCK – BLOCK CAME OFF, FALL ON ROCK – INADEQUATE PROTECTION, BAD LUCK/GOOD LUCK California, Yosemite Valley, El Capitan

On August 24 in late afternoon, Kyung Bok Su (47) and three Korean partners finished pitch 19 of the Nose route (31 pitches, Grade VI) and Kyung began leading pitch 20 up to Camp IV. He climbed up and left to a large block, placed a cam near its base, then climbed up his aid ladder and made one or two layback moves with his hands in the crack on the right side of the block. Suddenly a large piece of the block broke off and Kyung fell with it.

The cam failed and he either had no other protection in place below him or it all failed, because Kyung swung to the right and slammed into the wall