

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

about 35 feet below the belay. This impact probably caused his injury, later diagnosed as a broken left femur (in two places).

As he hung there, he noticed that over two feet of the sheath of his lead rope was stripped from the core just in front of his harness and a few core strands were severed. (The cause is unknown but probably the falling rock.) One of the team's other ropes happened to be hanging within reach, so he attached his ascenders to it and his partners managed to pull him up to the belay.

The party called on their FRS radio, "Rescue, El Capitan!" They heard other traffic but no one responded to their transmissions. They also yelled and waved jackets and finally someone in El Cap Meadow noticed them and contacted the NPS. The park helicopter, H551, was able to place a team on the summit just before dark to begin rigging for rescue. Meanwhile a ranger in the meadow communicated with Kyung's party by telescope and loudspeaker. He learned that Kyung had not lost consciousness, had no difficulty breathing and no head/neck pain, and was moving his limbs purposefully, so the summit team decided to minimize risk by delaying the operation until daylight. The next morning, additional rescuers joined them, and two medics were lowered about 1000 feet to the scene. They packaged Kyung in a litter and short-hauled him directly from the ledge with H551. He was transferred to an air ambulance and flown to Memorial Medical Center in Modesto.

Analysis

Kyung's partners did not see exactly what happened and we're not sure how he protected the pitch, although he may have placed only the single cam. His fall is a good example of the risks of swinging sideways—and thereby striking the really critical parts of your body. For more on swinging falls, see Tony Alegre's accident—following this one—and keep this risk in mind when protecting.

One of the rescue rangers said both ends of rope were poorly anchored and the climbers did not back themselves up to the bolt anchor. They said the anchors were cams and that the rope was clipped to the bolts. A photo shows a sling clipped around the rope but not into it. (Source: John Dill, NPS Ranger)

FALL ON ROCK – MISJUDGED PENDULUM

California, Yosemite Valley, El Capitan

On Sept. 18, Toni Alegre (42) and Jorge Lantero (43) started climbing the Nose of El Capitan (31 pitches, Grade VI). They led on double ropes (one red and one green) and moved quickly, practicing for a later attempt to climb the route in a day. From the anchor at the top of pitch 6, Lantero pendulumed into the left-facing corner about 30 feet to the right and began climbing the corner. As he placed protection, he clipped only his red rope