



*Highway 140 below Cookie Cliff after the January, 1997, floods. Chris Falkenstein*

for the Park Service to turn disaster into an opportunity—to restore natural processes in Yosemite Valley by moving administrative and visitor facilities out of the floodplain.”

*El Capitan, The Shield, Rescue and Judicial Precedent.* On May 16, Austrians Christian Zenz and Christian Wassertheurer requested a rescue from *The Shield* on El Capitan that eventually

involved 38 park personnel and two helicopters. In the debriefing it was learned that the two did not have a rainfly for their portaledge or other storm gear. Subsequently, the National Park Service filed criminal complaints, charging the two with disorderly conduct for willfully creating a hazardous situation. The Austrians were asked in court how much of the rescue costs they could afford to pay. Having insurance, they affirmed that they could cover the entire amount. The judge ordered them to pay the entire cost of \$13,325 and placed the two on one year of probation.

Court decisions of this kind establish precedent for similar rulings and pave the way for detrimental regulations such as mandatory insurance to obtain climbing permits. The National Park Service's equipment expectations of wall climbers are: high-quality rain gear, insulated clothing that works well when wet, synthetic sleeping bags, sleeping pads, and a secure, seam-sealed water and wind proof shelter.

*Activity in Yosemite Valley.* On the free climbing scene, this year's big news was the third free ascent, in July, of the *Salathé Wall* by Thomas Huber, accompanied by fellow German Anderl Heiss. Huber led all the cruxes, including the difficult 19th pitch, which had been avoided the year before when Alex Huber (Thomas's younger brother) made the second free ascent. Huber had originally planned to climb the route in a day, but kept failing on either the 19th pitch or the headwall pitch, and had to settle for a two-day ascent.

El Capitan was host to an unprecedented number of ascents this year. At one time there were at least 25 parties on the east face (right side) of El Cap alone. *Scorched Earth* (VI 5.11 A5) received a second ascent by Southern Californians Chris Kalous and Chris Righter. They chose to repeat the first ascent tactics of Rob Slater and Randy Leavitt, who had used an extending hooking pole to bypass blank spots instead of drilling, and found that the "quality of the climb is extraordinary." *Bermuda Dunes* (VI 5.11c A4) finally received a second ascent by Chris Kalous and Rebecca Rusch. This route, which closely follows the *Salathé Wall*, had gone 12 years without seeing a repeat. Cameron Burns of San Francisco and Calder Stratford of Salt Lake City teamed up to make the fourth ascent of *Chaos* (VI 5.10 A5), finding some serious aid. Burns (an El Cap veteran) remarks that it was the hardest aid climbing he'd ever done, and thought at times that "I might die." *The Sea of Dreams* (VI 5.10 A5) and the *Wyoming Sheep Ranch* (VI A5+) both received about five ascents in 1996, relegating these one-time test pieces to trade route status. Of note is the second solo of the *Wyoming Sheep Ranch* by Wally Barker of Southern California in 10 days last September. Rick Lovelace had soloed the route previously.

Speed climbing activity also saw a frenetic pace this year, with some records being broken two or three times in a year, and not being restricted to El Cap. In January, Conrad Anker, Topher Gaylord and Steve Schneider made the first one-day ascent of *Wet Denim Daydream* (V 5.7 A4) on Leaning Tower in 10:17. In July, Peter Coward and Hans Florine climbed two major Half Dome routes in a single day, both of which were records. They were the *Regular Northwest Face* (VI 5.9 A2) in 3:41, and the *Direct Northwest Face* (VI 5.10 A3+) in 12:23, probably doing the first hammerless via hand-placed Birdbeaks. Chan Harrell and Greg Murphy then climbed the *Regular Route* in 3:24. Coward and Florine came back to take the record again in August in 3:01. The *Direct* record was then rebroken by Silvo Karo (Slovenia) and Aishun Rupp (Swiss) in September at 11:45.

El Cap records were broken on *Mr. Midwest*, *West Face*, *Mirage*, *Aquarian Wall*, *Shield*, *Muir Wall*, *New Dawn*, *NA Wall*, *Iron Hawk*, *Lost in America*, and *Lunar Eclipse*. The NA team broke the 24-hour barrier for the first time. Despite several attempts by strong parties, the *Mescalito*