

Some of the most experienced Yosemite climbers routinely use a prusik knot around the rappel rope held loose by the upper hand and attached to a chest or waist loop, and it seems probable that this might also have prevented the incident.

*California, Yosemite National Park (2)*—On the morning of August 25, William Amborn, an experienced rock climber, and James Ware (22) a climber of intermediate experience, set out to climb Sunnyside Bench. The climb is one of moderate difficulty and normally no hazards are experienced in its ascent. The weather was clear and warm and the rock was dry and in good condition.

All went as planned until shortly before 10:00 a.m. Amborn had just completed the lead of the second main pitch of the climb and he belayed Ware up to him. Inasmuch as Ware was already on belay he continued on to lead the third pitch. After he ascended a moderate jam crack for approximately twenty feet, Ware reached for an obvious ledge adjacent to the crack. Inasmuch as he could not see above the ledge prior to using it, he was unaware of a rattlesnake coiled upon it. As soon as Ware's left hand reached over the lip of the ledge he was struck in the middle finger of that hand.

After the initial surprise, Ware climbed the remaining foot or two up the jam crack to see if the snake was truly a rattlesnake. Upon establishing this unfortunate fact, he climbed down to Amborn's belay position and administered the standard first aid for snake bite to himself. As soon as the treatment had been administered Amborn set up a long rappel to another prominent ledge some distance below. Amborn rappelled first and using tension of the rappel rope safeguarded Ware on his descent. Both climbers used carabiner sling rappels.

At this new location they were joined by another climber, Wayne Merry, who had been ascending an adjacent route. Shouts to persons below alerted the park rangers and by the time the rest of the descent was completed, a vehicle was waiting to transport Ware to the hospital in the park. Ware lost consciousness shortly after entering the hospital.

The victim was treated with "Antivenin" and after five days was well enough to be discharged from the hospital. Treatment will be continued for several weeks as damage to the tissue of the finger is extreme and Ware has difficulty moving it.

The strength of the party was adequate and their equipment was appropriate for the climb. This circumstance logically could not have been prevented.

How that snake reached that ledge is something no one can figure out!!!

*Source:* Robert C. Gardiner, Altadena Mountain Rescue Squad.

*Analysis:* In reaching for a ledge for a handhold during the ascent of Sunnyside Bench, the climber was bitten in the left middle finger by a rattlesnake. Climber could not have seen over the ledge prior to using it for a hold.

*California, Joshua Tree Monument (1)*—At approximately 3:30 p.m. on June 5, Sgt. Joseph Jones (22) slipped on water-slickened rock while