

some of the victims. Climbers who frequent Yosemite don't like to wear hard hats. While regulation of such is not warranted, there needs to be an awareness that the hazards of falling rocks and objects has not diminished over the years. (Source: J. Williamson)

## RAPPEL FAILURE, STRANDED, INEXPERIENCE

### California, Yosemite Valley

On September 25, 1981 at 3:15 p.m., Rangers Dill, Durr and Reilly responded to a report that Noël Dupre La Tour (27) was stranded at the top of the first pitch of the West Face route on Rixon's Pinnacle. The stranded climber's partner John Lang (25) had reportedly fallen to the ground, a distance of about 100 feet, and had taken their climbing ropes with him.

Dill, using the line gun and a number four load, shot a line to the stranded climber; with that line, he was able to haul up enough rope to rappel to the ground.

Upon reaching the ground, La Tour stated that his partner had attempted to rappel on two ropes and that the knot connecting the two ropes came undone. La Tour stated that the knot used was a single fisherman's. Upon inspection of La Tour's gear, Durr observed that the ends of a sling attached to one of their Friends were not tied together but merely jammed into the apparatus. Further, Durr observed that the tails of the knots on many of the climber's slings were encompassed within the knot and not visible. (Source: Jim Reilly, SAR Ranger, Yosemite National Park)

### Analysis

This type of accident has not been reported for years. The *double* fisherman's knot is the knot of choice for tying two ends of *rope* together. The water knot is the knot of choice for tying two ends of *webbing* together; adequate tails are more crucial because webbing slips more easily. (Source: J. Williamson)

*(Editor's Note: Last year I wrote an analysis of an incident near Rixon's Pinnacle in Yosemite Valley in which two climbers, Vernon Squire and Michael Caryl, became stranded while attempting to descend at dusk from their climb of the Lower Brother. In a letter addressed to me, Caryl clarified some of the specific details of their predicament. Pertinent excerpts from that letter follow.*

"First, we climbed the Southwest Arête of the Lower Brother, a Grade III, 5.5 climb of some 12-14 pitches. We started early, made steady progress and reached the summit by about 3:00 p.m. The ANAM account wholly omits this fact and erroneously states that rangers were dispatched at 1:00 p.m. when we were still on the route. At about 3:30 p.m., we began the descent of Michael's Ledge. (See *A Climber's Guide to Yosemite Valley* by Steve Roper [1971], p. 100.) We had descended more than one half the ledge system, beyond the two large pine trees, and were continuing down the ledge system to the west. Where the guide book says, 'Where progress becomes improbable, rappel or climb down to an inconspicuous ledge with a cairn,' we rappelled, though we saw no cairn. At this point, dusk was approaching (this is early April) and the route through the brush seemed to end.

"Our first mistake when westward progress ended was to rappel about 40 feet to a ledge with a large tree. At this point, we could see the steeply-falling walls of Rixon's Pinnacle. Progress westward was impossible, so we rappelled down the face. Since we had two ropes, we did three more 150-foot rappels, at the end of which my partner Squire hung. The

mistake was even rappelling the first time, which mistake was compounded with each successive rappel. The moral: We should have stopped, tied in to the many trees, and spent a comfortable night. Instead, our fourth rappel, at the end of which Vernon hung, was from a somewhat doubtful flake. My stance was on a downsloping sandy ledge measuring about 10 inches by 36 inches, on a 70-degree face.

"The obvious moral of our situation is not to rappel blindly, cutting off avenues of escape. Better to sit out the darkness and resume the descent in daylight."

*The facts in the original report came from Yosemite Valley Park Service. The letter from Caryl demonstrates once again that if the climbers involved in mishaps would provide information directly, greater accuracy and the first person point of view would enhance the reports which appear in this publication.)*

## **ILLNESS-DIABETES, STRANDED, BAD WEATHER**

### **Colorado, Capitol Peak**

On September 8, 1981, Mike Harder (20) died before rescuers could reach him at the base of Capitol Peak. He was in a party of four who became stranded in bad weather. Two of the climbers, Danny Apple (18) and Tony Messenger (15) were rescued in excellent condition. A fourth member, Randy Campbell, climbed out of the area and provided rescuers with information. They had all been stranded for at least three days. (Source: *The New York Times*, September 9, 1981)

#### **Analysis**

Change of exercise habits, diet, and altitude influence diabetic reactions. Unexpected conditions can exacerbate the condition. It is not known whether Harder had made adjustments in his medication or diet, but the point here is a general one for diabetics or anyone on medication. (Source: J. Williamson)

## **EXPOSURE, BAD WEATHER, INEXPERIENCE**

### **Colorado, Longs Peak**

In December 1981, James Duffy (24) froze to death during a blizzard on Longs Peak. His companion, Michael O'Donnell (25), descended the mountain safely earlier. (Source: *The New York Times*, December 12, 1981)

#### **Analysis**

This case, like many, raises more questions than it answers. This year, our Colorado correspondents diminished, so the details are lacking. A general report from the *Annual Mountaineering Search and Rescue Report* in Rocky Mountain National Park provided the following:

"Two major body recoveries occurred on Longs Peak (January and December). The first fatality was due to a long pendulum and impacting the rock when an improperly placed Friend, mechanical chock, failed. The second fatality was due to hypothermia and injuries sustained in a fall while descending Longs Peak in severe winter conditions. Both victims were, at the time, climbing with the same person."

The only other accident reported from Colorado appeared in the same report. Although general in nature, it was intriguing in its details: