

in a snowfield near the bottom of a steep wall in the Arctic Lakes area. (Source: Dennis Burge, China Lake Mountain Rescue Group)

Analysis

By retracing the Mountaineer's Route, the following scenario was reconstructed by Eric Alger of the Mammoth SAR Team. He said that Ranger ran into trouble after starting his descent without crampons or an ice ax. Alger said that Ranger had apparently slipped and slid about 45 meters prior to his second, and fatal, fall. Ranger had elected to descend an easier snow chute west of the main route. After stopping his first fall, Ranger attempted to move back to the main route. After reaching bare rock, he stepped back onto the snow, apparently descended six to eight steps, slipped and slid about 45 meters; he then fell off a 60-meter cliff and continued his slide for another 500 meters.

After examining the route of the fall, Alger said that he found evidence that Ranger had tried to stop himself after falling over the cliff. He said there appeared to be holes in the crusty snow that may have been caused by Ranger trying to arrest his slide by jamming his elbows or fists into the snow.

Alger believes that if Ranger had had an ice ax and crampons, this accident would not have occurred. (Source: Dennis Burge, China Lake Mountain Rescue Group)

SLIP ON SNOW, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT

California, Yosemite Valley

On July 4, 1983, about 1230, Kevin Brown (23) was traversing the top of a snowfield on the way to the base of the Northwest Face of Half Dome when he slipped and fell about 75 meters down the snowfield, over an approximate 6-meter vertical drop, and slid about another 30–45 meters over granite slabs. Brown received moderate injuries, which prevented him from hiking out. Brown's partner hiked to the trail above them and asked a hiker to go to Little Yosemite Valley and tell the rangers there that his friend needed rescue. This information was given to Ranger Sue Schultz-Clark, who called into park dispatch and initiated a rescue. A horse and foot ranger were started toward the victim from Little Yosemite Valley, while myself and Ranger C. Wilson flew to the scene by helicopter. There we assessed and stabilized the victim and flew with him to the Valley, where he was taken by ambulance to the Yosemite Clinic. (Source: Gary Colliver, Ranger, Yosemite National Park)

Analysis

This is one of several accidents of this type this year. Whether encountering snow on an approach to a rock climb or encountering rock on an approach to an ice climb, appropriate equipment and techniques are essential attributes for the climber. (Source: J. Williamson)

SLIP ON SNOW, INEXPERIENCE

California, Mount Johnson

At 0700 on July 10, 1983, a group of ten climbers left a camp site five kilometers from South Lake to climb Mount Johnson.

At 0730 crampons were put on prior to starting up a hard snow slope. The group started to traverse diagonally up the 30-degree slope, kicking shallow steps in the firm snow. After about 30 minutes, one of the climbers passed Bob McClure (57) and asked how he was doing. He replied in an off-hand manner, "Oh, I'm tired." McClure was breathing deeply, as he normally did going up hill, but he did not appear exhausted. He quickened his pace and soon passed another climber.

At 0825 the leader heard people crying, "Arrest," and turned to see McClure sliding down the slope feet first, on his stomach. He was gripping the ax shaft near the spike end with both hands stretched above his head and did not appear to make any attempts to arrest himself. He picked up speed and after about 40 meters his feet struck a rock. McClure tumbled head over heels, struck a second rock with his head and became airborne. He hit one more rock before he came to rest, feet down, in a crevice between a rock and the snow. The total fall was approximately 100 meters.

The assistant leader reached him within ten minutes and checked his vital signs. There was no breathing and no pulse. She noted a severe gash in his head and blood coming from the eyes, mouth, and nose. A climber with EMT training reached the body shortly thereafter and confirmed the death. Two climbers were sent out to notify the Sheriff. The body was evacuated by helicopter at 1700 that afternoon, after initially having the helicopter leave to get the proper equipment. (Source: Bob Hicks, Safety Chairman, Angeles Chapter-Sierra Club)

Analysis

McClure had limited climbing experience, but had received training in the use of an ice ax. The reason for the fall and the apparent lack of arrest efforts were impossible to determine. Snow conditions and the angle of the slope were such that the victim could have been expected to arrest himself before striking the first rock. (Source: Bob Hicks, Safety Chairman, Angeles Chapter-Sierra Club)

FALL ON ROCK

California, Yosemite Valley

On Saturday, July 23, 1983, at 1830, I was contacted by Nancy Kerr regarding her friends on the Northwest Face of Half Dome. One, Ken Morrell (23), had injured himself, but was OK and wanted to finish the climb, with Ben Schiffrin leading the rest of the way. I notified dispatch and told them that I would take action the next day by walking to the top of Half Dome. At 0940 on July 14, I made contact with the climbers. All was fine except for Morrell's dislocated patella. They finished the climb at 1430 and I gave a medical assessment of Morrell's condition. Schiffrin, who is a paramedic, had splinted Morrell's left leg, so I did not perform any first aid. After notifying dispatch, a helicopter was flown to the top of Half Dome. Morrell was evacuated to the Clinic for further testing. (Source: Dan Patten, Ranger, Yosemite National Park)

Analysis

This is a good example of climbers taking care of themselves and being able to withstand discomfort. (Source: J. Williamson)