

The second incident involved David Sharp (?) and Jennifer Hathorne (?), Curry Stables employees. They were on a 5.6 route on the west face and when they reached the top, they didn't know the walk-off route. In the dark, they headed toward the back of the dome instead of east. They sat down on the ledge and began calling for help when they realized it was too dark and too dangerous to continue. Two climbers in the area belayed them to safety. (Source: Gary Gissell, Ranger, Yosemite National Park)

## **FALL ON ROCK, FAILURE TO FOLLOW ROUTE**

### **California, Mount Whitney**

In late July, half way up the East Face of Mt. Whitney, Cecile Wilson (37) fell five meters, shearing off a meter chunk of rock that had been anchoring the rope. She landed hard on a ledge below, fracturing and dislocating her left ankle. The following account is excerpted from an article by her climbing partner.

This was not a good place for an accident. Because we had just finished a difficult traverse we could not reverse; retreat was nearly impossible. Rescuers would not be able to reach us quickly, even if we had some way to contact them. It was getting late in the day, and night at that altitude would be bitterly cold.

Wilson, a 37-year-old teacher from Los Gatos, and I, a 28-year-old San Francisco Examiner reporter, were roped together as partners. On a separate rope were Palmer Dyal (51), a NASA physicist from Los Altos Hills, and Herb Vanek (56), a San Francisco commercial artist.

The first 100 meters of the climb from our base camp at Iceberg Lake had gone smoothly. By 1400, we had reached what we had thought was the route's most famous section, known as "Fresh Air Traverse."

Working her way across a cliff face on tiny handholds and footholds, Wilson was just one meter from the safety of a large ledge when her pack threw her off balance and she tumbled into space. When she tried to stand, she realized something was terribly wrong with her left ankle. Despite the pain, Wilson at the time refused to believe her ankle was broken. "I was worried, but I didn't feel that freaking out was going to help," Wilson said. "We had to think about what we could do to get ourselves out of this." Wilson said she thought she could climb without assistance. She explained that she could use her left knee instead of her foot to propel her upward.

When it came to Vanek's turn to climb, though, we found ourselves with a new problem: Vanek was near exhaustion. "I can't climb it," he yelled up to us. "I don't have any strength left."

Now we had two climbers who needed help. Wilson and I slowly pulled Vanek up the rock while Dyal scouted the route ahead. Darkness overtook us a hundred meters below the summit. To continue climbing was too dangerous. We would have to spend the night on a small ledge at 4350 meters. Our fate now depended on the weather. We would have trouble surviving a storm. But it looked as if we would be lucky this night. There were no clouds on the horizon and we could see the stars coming out. Our luck didn't last long, though. We discovered that Vanek, earlier in the day, had dropped his pack containing his warm clothing and water.

Dyal handed his thick wool sweater to his partner and prepared to shiver through the icy night in two thin cotton shirts and a wind parka. Wilson and I donned down jackets. The temperature was dropping rapidly. We all huddled together for warmth. Since our narrow ledge was no place for sleepwalking, we anchored ourselves to the rock with the rope. We were calm, but conscious of the need to keep our minds on

warm things. Stories of tropical vacations helped us pass the night. Every half hour we massaged our cold limbs and exercised to raise body heat. There was little water left, and we tried to save a few sips for the next day.

At 0500 a band of pink appeared in the sky above the desert mountains to the east. Half an hour later the sun peaked over the ridge, filling us with warmth for the first time in hours.

We began climbing as soon as we were warm enough to move. After a meter, Wilson discovered her mangled ankle hurt even more than before. She kept moving, though, and we finally stepped onto Mt. Whitney's flat summit some time after noon.

We left Wilson alone on the summit while we hurried down a long, rock-filled gully on the north side to arrange for a rescue helicopter. She was in good spirits and would have lots of company from the hikers who came up the trail from Mt. Whitney's easy south side.

As soon as we reached base camp, our two friends there, Butch Suits and Bill Tucker, took off for the trailhead—fast.

Up on the summit, meanwhile, Wilson spent the afternoon dozing and talking with hikers. Among them, she later told us, was test pilot Chuck Yaeger. The folksy aviator talked excitedly about fishing in the High Sierra, unaware of the "right stuff" that had been displayed by Wilson during the previous 30 hours.

At the ranger station in Lone Pine, Suits and Tucker were told that they had a choice: pay \$500 an hour for a private helicopter, or wait until a free National Park Service chopper was available the next morning." "We'll pay the money," Suits told the ranger. "We have to get her down right now."

Then the ranger discovered that there were no helicopters, private or otherwise, available that afternoon. They were all off fighting forest fires.

All afternoon Wilson thought she could hear helicopters approaching the summit, but they never arrived. By 1830 the last of the hikers had left. She was going to spend another night on the mountain. Wilson watched the sun set. Alone and growing cold, she realized that the helicopter wasn't going to come for her that day.

At 2245, Wilson heard a noise and looked up to see a light. It was a park ranger. "I've come to help you," he told her. He had brought two sleeping bags, a splint for her leg, and dinner: rice cakes and almond butter.

"I knew then that everything was going to be OK," she said. "It was a blessing." (That afternoon a hiker had told the ranger about Wilson and he had climbed to the summit from his station on the west side of the mountain.) Warm inside the sleeping bag, she slept well that night, and awoke around 0500 to prepare for the helicopter.

A few minutes after dawn, a yellow National Park Service chopper set down on the mountaintop. The ranger carried Wilson to the chopper. (Source: From an article by John Fleming, *San Francisco Examiner*, August 2, 1985)

*(Editor's Note: No mention is made of (a) why all three companions left her alone, (b) why none of the hikers left her any food or clothing, or (c) what happened to her companions the next day or two.)*

## **LOSS OF CONTROL—VOLUNTARY GLISSADE, INEXPERIENCE** **California, Mount Malloy**

On a Sierra Club trip to Mt. Malloy on July 21, 1985, a woman (35) was unable to self-