

to report to ranger staff. (Source: David Peterson, Ranger, Joshua Tree National Monument)

(Editor's Note: We've all tried various ploys to gain the sympathies of an officer about to give us a ticket. This is an example of one that probably won't work too often...)

FALL ON SNOW—INTO MOAT, PARTY SEPARATED

California, Little Slide Canyon

On Saturday, July 20, 1986, Bruce Raabe reported that his partner, Lester Needham (45), was missing. They had been hiking up Little Slide Canyon on July 19 with the intention of making a two day loop trip into and out of the park. Around 0830, the two separated to explore different routes up the canyon, and Raabe never saw Needham again. He searched the area until Sunday morning, then reported the incident in the afternoon.

A large-scale, coordinated search and rescue operation ensued. At 1300 on July 22, Needham was found, alive but injured, by a WOOF dog team. He was eight meters down in a moat which was in a snow field 360 meters downstream from Maltby Lake. He was suffering from fractures and hypothermia.

Ground personnel treated Needham, carried him out of the moat, and loaded him aboard the Navy helicopter as it hovered. He was flown to Bridgeport at 1720 and was transferred to a medical helicopter and taken to Reno.

The following details of this accident were obtained from Judy Cross, WOOF unit leader, who discussed the incident in depth with Lester Needham and with Marty Cross, whose dog, Zeke, made the find:

Not long after Needham and Raabe separated, Needham fell on a snowfield, slid 40-50 meters, struck a boulder with his feet, and fell through a gap about one half meter wide between the snow and the rock. The gap formed the top of an eight meter deep moat, much wider at the bottom, formed by snowmelt and a stream that ran under the snowfield. He landed on his back on a rock at the bottom, crushing his external frame pack and injuring his back.

His legs were in running water and a three meter high waterfall in the stream sprayed on him. He managed to wriggle partly out of the water but his left foot remained immersed, and he lay on a wet patch of gravel with water seeping through it. Pain in his legs and back prevented him from moving farther, and he was unable to lift his right leg, possibly due to nerve damage.

Needham was able to get on some wool clothing and wrap his synthetic-fill sleeping bag around himself. They provided some protection but soon became soaked by the cold water. He ate very little, but did drink lots of water.

The opening in the moat was so narrow that Needham knew he might not be found and might die there. He tried stacking tent poles together with a bandana tied to the top of one as a flag, but just as he was adding the last pole, the whole thing collapsed. Noise from the waterfall was deafening, preventing him from knowing if searchers were nearby and preventing them from hearing his shouts, had he known when to call out. However, he spent some time banging a pot-lid on a rock. He also planned on shining his flashlight on the edge of the moat if a helicopter flew by at night, but none did.

Cross and Zeke were glissading down the snowfield, heading for another area, when Zeke suddenly turned and looked uphill, on alert.

Cross had not noticed the moat, and the sides appeared so overhanging that he crawled to the edge to look in.

When he was found, Needham had been in the same position, partly in water, for over three and a half days. He was in extreme pain from his injuries and from muscle cramps brought on by violent shivering, and had open “bed” sores on his back. His core temperature at the time was estimated still to be in the low 30s (33°C at Reno, after rewarming enroute), but he felt he would not have survived another night in the moat.

Needham suffered a severe compression fracture of the thoracic vertebra that required bone grafts and pins, a broken foot, and serious complications to his left foot, from immersion. At the date of this report, however, he is beginning to walk without assistance. (Source: John Dill, SAR Technician, Yosemite National Park)

Analysis

While not a climbing accident, this narrative is included to illustrate some of the classic problems in back country travel. An obviously rugged constitution kept Needham alive, and, as John Dill observed, the dog saved his life—along with coordinated efforts of 15 separate agencies.

Many seek solitude in the wilderness, and certainly one cannot condemn or legislate against this activity. To ensure this, all solo hikers and climbers must be prepared for the consequences—including the costs—of becoming incapacitated. (Source: J. Williamson)

FALL ON ROCK, FAILURE TO FOLLOW ROUTE, INADEQUATE PROTECTION, NO HARD HAT

California, Tuolumne Meadows

Allan Chaneles (31) and John Gonzales (30) arrived in Tuolumne Meadows on August 30, 1986, at 0200. They had come to the area in the company of Nancy Jensen, Ray Fong, and Dale Hanes in a private vehicle. The party camped in the Tuolumne Meadows Campground, Group Section, Site H, which was reserved for the weekend by the Southern California Mountaineering Association, of which Gonzales was a member.

Chaneles and Gonzales woke up at 0730. At 1015, they left the campsite to go to Daff Dome in the company of Fong and Hanes. They arrived at the base of the dome at 1030. At this point, Chaneles and Gonzales separated from the other two members of the party and went to the west side of the dome to look for possible climbing routes. They carried and referred to the guidebook, *Rock Climbs of Tuolumne Meadows*. The partners found most of the routes occupied and selected “Apparition” because it was free of other climbers. They began to climb at 1145.

Chaneles led the first pitch of 25 meters without incident. He told Gonzales that he felt that he was climbing well and would like to continue leading. Chaneles started the second pitch. He was unable to place protection, and continued to climb to a point where he thought that a bolt, shown in the guidebook, would be. He called to Gonzales that he was having trouble finding the bolt and would “go for it.” Chaneles then indicated that he saw the bolt three meters to his left and would traverse to it. Immediately after this exchange, Gonzales heard Chaneles say, “Oh, no!” and realized that Chaneles was falling.

Gonzales was using a Bachli Seilbremse belay device. He had used a #2 Hex and two Friends, a 2½ and a 3½, for his belay anchor. Gonzales said that he was unable to pull in a directional belay. When Chaneles fell and came to the end of the rope, the impact pulled