

Analysis

Both men reportedly had been climbing for 15 years, with Johnson the more technically experienced. Both had accomplished several climbs this summer. Wallace had done several peaks in Colorado, and ascended Leonard Minaret in July.

They ate a good breakfast that morning and left at 0800 to climb Starlight. They had plenty of water which they consumed on the climb. Therefore, fatigue or dehydration seem not to be factors in the accident. (Source: *China Lake Mountain Rescue Group Newsletter*)

FALLING ROCK

California, Mount Abbott

On September 19, 1987, five climbers were ascending the mountain in a steep, third class rocky area. The lead climber dislodged a rock slab that slid between his legs and hit the leg of a climber two meters below. After a bone-deep gouge was bandaged, the injured party was able to climb on belay to the summit plateau 100 meters above. One person returned to camp and returned with bivouac gear for the three of them. The other two members of the group hiked out to roadhead and contacted the sheriff.

The injured person was lifted out by helicopter at 1000 the next morning. (Source: Bob Hicks, Angeles Chapter, Sierra Club Safety Committee)

Analysis

The climbers were aware that they would encounter areas of loose rock during the climb. It is evident that awareness of conditions may not be enough to prevent accidents. (Source: Bob Hicks, Angeles Chapter, Sierra Club Safety Committee)

FALL ON ROCK, INADEQUATE PROTECTION, INEXPERIENCE WITH ASCENDING DEVICE

California, Yosemite Valley

On September 21, 1987, Wolfgang Schrattnner (21) fell 50 meters while seconding on mechanical ascenders. Schrattnner was on the traverse of the Great Roof pitch (pitch 23) when he fell, hitting his head against the wall. Since he had climbed most of the pitch when he fell, he had built up a loop of about 40 meters of slack, so his fall, including the rope stretch, was 50 meters and apparently killed him on impact. (Source: John Dill, Ranger, Yosemite National Park)

Analysis

Schrattnner had been climbing for two years and led 5.10. He had done many short climbs in Austria as well as several multipitch mountaineering routes there. On this trip to Yosemite, his first, he had climbed the DNB and to pitch 17 of the Salathé Wall with a friend named Schall.

Schall had been climbing for 12 years. He had done many European mountaineering routes. He had climbed the regular Northwest Face route on Half Dome and made the attempt on the Salathé Wall mentioned above.

Schall and Schrattnner were climbing The Nose in standard fashion, with the leader hauling their equipment after finishing his pitch, and the second person cleaning the

pitch by climbing the rope with mechanical ascenders. The route did not present any unusual problems for them; in fact, they were delayed by slower parties above. On the night before the accident they bivouacked at Camp Four, two pitches below the Great Roof.

When rescuers reached Schrattnner, they found both of his feet out of the footholds (which could have happened easily in the fall) and both ascenders detached from the rope and hanging by their safety slings. The left ascender was locked open, as though it had been deliberately removed from the rope, and the right ascender was closed. Both ascenders worked perfectly, and I found no indication that either ascender had been forced off the rope; that is, there were no rope fibers caught in the cam teeth and no parts appeared to be distorted. Thus it is unlikely that either ascender was on the rope as he fell. I was unable to examine the rope since it had been left on the cliff after the rescue, nor was I able to examine the pitons on the traverse.

I simulated the traverse by driving pitons into a horizontal seam in a cement wall. A porch roof three inches above the seam played the role of the Great Roof. Then I put on Schrattnner's gear and climbed a rope that was attached to the pitons approximately the way Schrattnner's was on the cliff.

In summary I can state with certainty only the following:

1. The ascender did not fail, and it worked properly after the accident. Once the safety latch is locked it is difficult to imagine the ascender coming off the rope, especially under the relatively light forces involved in a traverse. It is not difficult to correctly latch the safety, as I mentioned above, and all climbers should develop the habit of checking the lock every time the ascender is placed on the rope.

2. Although the cause of the fall is unconfirmed, the cause of injury is clear: by being so far up the pitch and tied only to the end of the rope, Schrattnner was open to a long fall. Had he tied in short to his rope while on the traverse, he would have fallen only a few feet and likely received no injuries at all. Both Schall and other friends of Schrattnner whom I interviewed were unaware of the need to tie in short. In addition, at least four previous ascender-related fatalities in Yosemite, regardless of their initial causes, were preventable by tying in short.

3. Schrattnner's inexperience with ascenders was obviously a strong contributing factor. Although a good climber, he had done no work with ascenders until this trip. He and Schall had practiced once in a tree in the campground, primarily with the rope hanging straight down. The techniques for safely ascending a vertical rope are easy to learn, but safely negotiating a traverse is more complicated. Despite his experiences on the Salathé Wall and on The Nose to that point, the Great Roof was Schrattnner's first traverse. (Source: John Dill, Ranger, Yosemite National Park)

Editor's Note: The above analysis is condensed from Dill's five-page report. Thanks to his continuing thoroughness, we learn more and do not jump to conclusions about causes.

FALL ON ICE, CLIMBING UNROPED, PARTY SEPARATED

California, Mount Shasta

On Saturday, October 10, 1987, Mike Zamzow (22), Steve Jenevein (18), and I (30) set out to climb Mount Shasta via the Hotlum–Bolam Glacier route. We got a late start, not actually getting onto the mountain until nearly 1100. By the time we were