

OVERDUE CLIMBERS, SUBTERFUGE

California, Yosemite Valley

On June 25, 1988, Mike Orland contacted Ranger Mike Mayer to report that two of his friends, Dave Bridges (19) and Darryl Macias (25), were overdue from the Southwest Face of Washington Column.

Macias and Bridges had left Sunnyside Campground about 0600 on Thursday, June 23. They had planned to climb to Dinner Ledge and fix rope to the Kor Roof on Thursday, finish the climb on Friday morning and return to Sunnyside Campground by mid-day Friday.

Orland reported that Macias and Bridges were both good climbers. Both could lead 5.10, A2 and had previous experience in Yosemite. However, this was their first overnight Grade VI climb. He stated that the night before they left they had a long discussion with a British climber who had made the climb two weeks earlier and detailed the climb and the descent through North Dome Gully to them. Orland was concerned that something had happened to them in the descent of North Dome Gully.

All three were aware that North Dome Gully was dangerous and that descent accidents had occurred there.

Orland and I then drove to a viewing area for Washington Column and could not see any climbers on the Southwest Face route. By this time Macias' vehicle had been located and a note left on it directing the party to check in. Orland and I then returned to the Search and Rescue Cache.

At this time Macias and Bridges were 24 hours overdue from their climb. The decision was made to start a hasty search team of three up North Dome Gully to look for Macias and Bridges. A second team was sent to search the bottom of the climbing route to check for fallen climbers.

At 1650 park helicopter 51 was sent to search the climbing area and possible descent routes from Washington Column. After two hours of helicopter search covering all climbing areas, fall lines of Washington Column and all descent routes, the air search was terminated. The ground teams were also unsuccessful and returned to base.

Around 1900, during a planning meeting for the next operational period, information was received that Macias and Bridges had returned to their vehicle and were being escorted to the SAR Cache. (Source: Mike Mayer, Ranger, Yosemite National Park)

Analysis

The initial interview with Macias and Bridges and one conducted the following day revealed many inconsistencies, and finally Macias stated that he and Bridges had never gone to Washington Column and that they had planned from the beginning to climb Half Dome without Orland. They did not believe that Orland could do the climb and devised the Washington Column scenario so as not to take Orland with them. They left Sunnyside about 0530, drove to Curry Village and started the climb. Macias stated that he knew that the Half Dome climb would take longer than the Washington Column, but did not think Orland would report them overdue.

The false reporting of their intentions by Macias and Bridges resulted in placing

several National Park Service and civilian personnel in very hazardous situations. The park helicopter searched for two hours during thunderstorm and high winds conditions, and ground searchers were placed in a very hazardous rain slick canyon looking for Macias and Bridges. (Source: Mike Mayer, Ranger, Yosemite National Park)

(Editor's Note: While not an accident, this case is reported as a warning that one can be cited for "Creating a Hazardous Condition" on public lands, and as a recommendation that simple, direct communication can both solve the initial problem and avert putting SAR personnel in needless jeopardy.)

YOUTH, RAPID ASCENT, ACUTE MOUNTAIN SICKNESS

California, White Mountains

On August 2, 1988, William R. Claybaugh, II (39), Martha G. Miller (36) and William R. Claybaugh, III (2) made a six hour automobile ascent from sea level to a campsite at 2800 meters. After establishing camp an automobile ascent to 3400 meters and return to camp was made over a two hour period.

The following morning the younger Claybaugh was listless, refused to eat, and remained in his sleeping bag. He complained of headache and began vomiting about one hour after waking. Testing showed extreme ataxia. An automobile descent to 1200 meters ended all symptoms within two hours of descent. (Source: William R. Claybaugh, II)

Analysis

Rangers at the White Mountain Station and at Yosemite Valley indicated that their experience suggests that children are apparently more susceptible to Acute Mountain Sickness than adults. In this case onset of recognizable symptoms did not occur until nearly 18 hours after ascent; progress was rapid once symptoms appeared.

When taking children into the mountains, it appears advisable to plan on acclimatizing at altitudes below 2000 meters before heading higher. (Source: William R. Claybaugh, II)

(Editors' Note: While not an accident for our purposes, this example is worth including as a clear demonstration of how insidious a rapid ascent can be, even at moderate altitudes.)

FALLING ROCK, NO HARD HAT, POOR POSITION

California, Yosemite Valley

On August 12, 1988, Jeff Kasten (25) and Glenn Pinson (23) intended to begin their climb of the regular route on Half Dome, using Tom Rollins (23) to help carry gear to the base. The party was waiting to climb and sorting gear in the afternoon before climbing the next morning. The sound of rockfall was heard and rocks were sighted as the party scattered. After the rockfall ceased, it was discovered that Tom had been hit in the head and had tumbled to the ground, sustaining both a head laceration and a broken wrist.

A runner was sent from among a group of hikers to activate the SAR Team. Jeff and Glenn (an EMT) stabilized the patient and awaited the arrival of SAR members,