

FALL ON ROCK, PROTECTION PULLED OUT, NO HARD HAT**California, Joshua Tree National Monument**

On August 20, 1988, Gert Hirst (48), Jim D'Allura (32), and Kevin Springer (28) were climbing on "The Blob" rock formation. They were attempting a new climbing route just right of the climb "Disco Sucks."

D'Allura was leading the climb first. He got about six meters off the ground when he could not climb any higher. He placed a #2 Friend in a crack and was lowered to the ground by his belayer, Springer. Hirst then decided that he would attempt the lead. He started the climb with Springer belaying him. On a small ledge about three meters off the ground, Hirst was given about a meter of slack so he could step over his rope. He had the rope on the wrong side of him, and while stepping over it, he lost his footing and fell. The #2 Friend that he was being belayed through was pulled out. Hirst fell to the ground, striking the back of his head on a rock. Hirst did not lose consciousness, but did not remember the fall. (Source: Kip Knapp, Ranger, Joshua Tree National Monument)

FALL ON ROCK, INADEQUATE PROTECTION**California, Yosemite Valley**

On August 16, 1988, Mark Peebles (23) fell while leading the seventh pitch on the regular route of the Northwest face of Half Dome. After leading from the belay, he entered a thin crack and was doing a lay back up this section. He had placed several pieces of protection and moved up about three meters above his last piece. He felt he could do the move with ease but as he was climbing he started to "burn" his arms. He continued to climb the section without further protection attempting to move through it faster. At that point his foot slipped and he fell. He landed on a small ledge about three meters below and took the weight of his fall on his left foot. He continued another three meters when he was caught by his belay. He was lowered to the start of the pitch and remained there until rescued, because his ankle hurt too much to rappel or be lowered. (Source: Mike Mayer, Ranger, Yosemite National Park)

Analysis

A basic rule of protecting half to two thirds the distance from a stance may have prevented this accident. Although Mark had only moved out a short distance from the ledge, it was wide enough to land on with sufficient force to fracture his lower leg. A fine line exists based on the skill level of the climber and when to place the first piece of protection. This accident provides evidence that when in doubt, THE SOONER THE BETTER is the best safeguard. (Source: Mike Mayer, Ranger, Yosemite National Park)

FALL ON ROCK, RAPPEL DEVICE DETACHED**California, Yosemite Valley**

At 2209 on September 19, 1988, Alksander Lekic, of Celje, Yugoslavia, reported that Dragan Rogic (28) of Zagreb, Yugoslavia, had been killed in a fall to the ground from the Aquarian Wall on El Capitan. Rogic was rappelling at the time of the accident. He fell approximately 130 meters to the ground when he somehow became detached

from his rappel device while attempting to pass a knot joining two ropes. The specific reason for the incident could not be determined, but Rogic was carrying all the equipment necessary to safely perform this maneuver. (Source: John Dill, Ranger, Yosemite National Park)

Analysis

Here is a case where a very experienced climber seems to have tried a maneuver involving muscle rather than technique in a situation that is not uncommon when rappelling.

According to his partners, Boris Cujic and Srecko Meic, Rogic's Figure 8 was attached to the non-locking carabiner. Rogic was attempting to hoist himself up to loosen the loaded ascender, and may have been holding onto the Figure 8 for security and stability. As the ascender was freed, he may have inadvertently rotated the Figure 8, causing it to open the carabiner gate and slip out. Body positioning rather than manual manipulation could have caused the same result.

Rogic's Figure 8 was large enough that the knot should have slipped through without problems and without needing to rely on the ascender. Were the Figure 8 too small, however, or were some other problem to occur (a common and harmless situation), Rogic should have followed the following procedure:

1. Stop rappelling just above the knot.
2. Attach ascender to rope above rappel device close to harness and put weight on it.
3. Derig rappel device and rerig below knot.
4. Attach second ascender (or prussik) below the rappel device; put weight on it.
5. Remove unloaded upper ascender.
6. With rappel device under manual control, remove the lower ascender or prussik and continue rappelling.

Both Cujic and Meic identified several factors which may have contributed to the incident:

1. Rogic was considered to be stubborn and occasionally an unsafe climber with a large ego. They felt that he would not listen to suggestions by them;
2. Rogic had been known to rely on his considerable strength to "muscle" himself out of trouble;
3. they thought Rogic might have been tired at the start of the day, and that he seemed nervous while climbing; and
4. Rogic was an experienced free climber but may have lacked the experience on long routes, use of ascenders, and in passing knots. Passing a knot while on rappel is not a difficult or uncommon procedure, and he had all the gear needed to perform this maneuver safely. (Source: Kim Aufhauser, Ranger, Yosemite National Park)

FALL ON ICE, CAUGHT OFF GUARD—POST CLIMB

California, Mount Dana

On October 9, 1988, Steve Letts (40) fell about 150 meters after he had just unroped from his climbing partner, Richard Hasbrouck. They had descended the 40 degree slope and were standing on a gentle section of the ice when Letts lost his balance and fell, finally self-arresting 150 meters down. He suffered a compound fracture of the