

FALL ON SNOW, NOT WEARING CRAMPONS

California, Mount Shasta

On June 11, 1989, Richard Ferrell (45) and his brother Brett Ferrell (31) were climbing on Sergeants Ridge on Mount Shasta. They had ice axes and were carrying (but not wearing) crampons. Richard Ferrell either slipped or was knocked down by falling debris. He slid/tumbled about 300 meters to a point above the old ski bowl at 2800 meters, suffering fatal head trauma. (Source: Tom Grossman, Bay Area Mountain Rescue Unit)

FALLING ROCK, WEATHER, EXCEEDING ABILITIES

California, Mount Shasta

In early January, Lorca Rossman (19), Roman Hruska (19), and Nic Rhind (23) were turned back from their summit attempt due to high winds which were blowing rocks down from the ridges above Avalanche Gulch. They were near the 3975 meter level when they began to descend the right side of Avalanche Gulch next to the "Heart." Seasonal snowfall below normal levels had left the ridges bare, and a constant barrage of rocks came down around us. Nic Rhind chose a steeper but less exposed route of descent to avoid the rocks. Lorca Rossman chose to glissade as rapidly as possible to below the fall-zone, to reduce his exposure time. Fifteen minutes later, Lorca and Nic met near 3350 meters, and agreed that Nic would wait for Roman Hruska, who was descending slowly in the main fall-zone, while Lorca continued down to 3000 meters to break camp. Shortly after dark, Nic and Roman arrived at camp. Roman's balaclava was soaked with blood from a blow by a 30 cm falling rock. He complained of point tenderness and a generalized throbbing headache, but denied loss of consciousness or symptoms of C-spine injury. Aside from slight ataxia possibly stemming from exhaustion and mild hypothermia (temperature was -18 degrees C, wind 30 knots gusting to 70+), he showed no impairment of functioning, and we were able to hike him out to the road at 2100 meters by 0100. E.R. evaluation revealed a 10 cm laceration without fracture or complications. (Source: Lorca Rossman)

Analysis

The combination of bare ridges and high winds created an objective hazard that was clearly visible. The accident might have been prevented by more careful attention on the victim's part to a descent strategy that minimized exposure, or by better communication about appropriate descent strategies. None of us wore hard hats, believing that winter snow would preclude rock-fall danger. More careful attention to the actual conditions would have been appropriate. (Source: Lorca Rossman)

PROTECTION PULLED OUT, FALL ON ROCK

California, Owens Gorge

On June 17 a friend, Courtney Smith (?), fell while climbing in Owens Gorge in eastern California. The climb he was on started from a three meter high ledge, ascending about five meters to the first bolt and then on up. He got on the ledge, didn't like the distance to the first bolt, and protected with a Friend in a crack about three meters to the side of his climb. He started to downclimb without asking for slack from his belayer, weighting the rope somewhat. The Friend popped out of the crack, and he fell over a meter to the ledge, and then another three or four meters to the ground.