

Analysis

Interviews with the victim's party revealed that they were rappelling young members of the group on dynamic rope, allowing them to "bounce" on the stretch of the rope. James was rappelling and the person maintaining tension with a belay device neglected to compensate for the difference in weight between James' adult stature and that of the students'. James fell, the stretch in the rope allowing him to strike the talus at the base of the wall. James was not wearing a helmet at the time of the fall, supposedly because there were not enough for the group, although not all of the group were at the summit or participating at the base in any fashion so as to require a helmet. (Source: K. L. O'Connor-Henry, Ranger, Yosemite National Park)

(Editor's Note: Here is an example of a school/camp using climbing as a vehicle for personal growth. While we must count such incidents as part of the climbing accident data, it should be noted that the individuals involved are not climbers.)

FALL ON ICE, PLACED NO PROTECTION, EXCEEDING ABILITIES California, Dana Glacier

On July 26, 1992, at 1515 Ranger Dave Page received a report of a climbing accident on the Dana Glacier. The reporting party, Robert Gordon, was at the Tioga Pass Entrance Station. Gordon indicated that two individuals climbing above him on the Dana Glacier had taken a 500 foot fall and that one of the individuals was seriously injured. Dana Glacier is outside the park boundary and Mono County Sheriff was called and notified of the incident. At that time I informed Sargent Cole Hampton that the park helicopter and personnel were available to respond if Mono County requested our assistance. Sargent Cole requested that we respond and asked that we keep him informed of what was happening.

Richard Vance was leading the climb up the ice gully on the Dana Glacier when his climbing partner, Joel Johnson, lost his footing and fell. Vance and Johnson were roped together and Vance had not put in any protection. Vance had no ice protection, only rock protection which he felt was useless in the rocks at the sides of the gully. Johnson gave no warning when he fell and pulled Vance down with him. Vance made an attempt at self-arrest but it was useless on the ice. Both climbers fell approximately 500 feet clearing the bergschrund in the process. Vance and Johnson came to rest on mixed snow and talus at approximately 11,700 feet. Vance was uninjured and indicated that Johnson had lost consciousness for about one minute and he remained disoriented for approximately ten minutes. Vance placed Johnson on a thermarest pad and put a sleeping bag over him to keep him warm. Both climbers were wearing helmets; however, Vance lost his during the fall. Robert Gordon, who was climbing below Vance and Johnson, hiked out to Tioga Pass and reported the accident to rangers.

Rangers from Tuolumne Meadows were flown in to the victim's location by the park helicopter. Johnson was hypothermic and Rangers Eric Gabriel and Dave Page began rewarming the patient and stabilizing him for transport. Johnson was to be short hauled to Dana Meadows by the park helicopter but severe down drafts prevented this from occurring. After some difficulty the helicopter was able to set down approximately 100 yards from the victim. The victim was then belayed down in the litter by rescue team members over treacherous terrain to the helicopter. The litter belay took approximately an hour to complete. Johnson was then loaded on the helicopter and flown to Dana Mead-

ows to an awaiting ambulance from Tuolumne Meadows. ALS procedures were initiated and the patient was transferred to June Lake Paramedics for transport to Mammoth Hospital. All rescue team members were flown to Dana Meadows. SAR team members were sent in the following day on foot to retrieve equipment left at the accident site from the night before. Rescue work on the glacier took place with rockfall activity from above.

Johnson sustained an unstable compression fracture to T-8 and L-1, an ankle fracture, and possible facial fractures. Vance was advised to seek medical care as a precaution, due to the nature and distance of the fall. (Source: Dave Page, Ranger, Yosemite National Park)

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These two had experience as rock climbers—not a lot, but not beginners. They had taken a snow and ice course. This was to be their first snow and ice climb on their own. They were prepared to bivouac, climbing with good sized packs. While it is not known as to what caused the fall, the combination of being new to snow and ice, no protection, and heavy packs resulted in sustaining serious injury. (Source: Dave Page, John Dill, Rangers, Yosemite National Park)

PROTECTION PULLED OUT, FALL ON ROCK, INADEQUATE BELAY, OFF ROUTE

California, Yosemite Valley, El Capitan

On August 6, 1992, Jamie Serrano (25) and Angel Vedo Fernandez (39)—both from Spain, were climbing the Nose route of El Capitan, and were at a location 1200 to 1500 feet above the valley floor, a few pitches below Dolt Tower. Vedo was leading and Serrano was belaying him from a small ledge when Vedo fell and landed on Serrano. Serrano sustained incapacitating injuries.

The two remained on the belay ledge and began yelling for help. An unidentified visitor reported the cries for help to a tour bus operator who radioed the situation to his dispatcher, who in turn telephoned Yosemite Ranger Dispatch with the initial situation information.

Ranger John Roth responded to size-up, confirming that cries for help were coming from the Nose route. An Incident Command System was initiated, with the Yosemite NPS helicopter deployed for a recon flyby. This flyby, utilizing Park Ranger Gus Martinez' Spanish language speaking abilities, revealed that only Serrano was injured, and that a technical evacuation would be required due to back injuries. A rescue plan was formulated that deployed a ground response ascent team comprised of NPS SAR Tech Mike Ray, and Yose SAR site members Tom Borges, Francis Ross, Mike Callahan, and Jim Red. This response team began climbing at 1600, with the assignment to attempt to reach the victims, medically assess, stabilize, and provide helivac support on site.

In the interim, the Lemoore NAS Angel 2 helicopter was requested, which arrived at the El Capitan meadow at 1750. Air operations were staged at the El Capitan Meadow. NPS SAR Tech John Dill then was heli-rappelled, via the Angel 2, to the victim. Next a Lemoore NAS Corpsman heli-rappelled to the ledge, secured the uninjured climber Vedo, and short hauled him and the climbers' equipment off to the El Capitan Meadow. The Angel 2 ship then picked up rescue gear to include medical supplies and a Stokes litter, flew them back to the ledge where they were lowered to John Dill, who was medically assessing the victim.