

to the top by an alternate route, rigged a belay anchor and rappelled. For the anchor, he ran the rope through a one-inch nylon sling that was, in turn, looped through slings around a small chockstone.

Andreas Slahel (20) then climbed about 10 feet up the pitch and was lowered by a belayer at the base. Urs Draeger (22) then climbed to the top. When he had been lowered about two-thirds of the way to the ground, both he and the rope suddenly fell free, about 20 feet to the base. He landed on his back, then slide 50-70 feet down a steep slope.

NPS dispatch was notified by phone at 1325. Rangers Ruth Middlecamp and Lane Baker reached Draeger at 1340 and the rest of the SAR team arrived shortly thereafter.

Draeger was conscious but confused, complained of chest and back pain, and had a laceration on his scalp. His friends stated he had been unconscious for two to three minutes just after the fall. He was given oxygen, an IV, packaged in the full-body vacuum splint and, evacuated in a belayed litter down the scree to the road. He was ultimately flown by helicopter to Modesto, where he was found to have a concussion and compression fractures of three vertebrae, T11, T12 and L1.

### **Analysis**

Ranger Mike Ray climbed to the anchor immediately after the rescue. He found that the sling directly holding the rope had been melted through, almost certainly by the friction of the rope as the climbers were belayed and lowered. Seventy feet of climbing and 50 feet of lowering had done the job.

The climbers stated that they had rigged ropes this way previously with no problems. They refused to believe that the rope could have caused the damage, until we showed them the sling. Draeger and Nuescheler, the most experienced climbers in the group, had each been climbing for about two years and led 5.10a. (Source: Harry Steed & Lane Baker, NPS Rangers)

## **FALL ON ROCK AND FALLING OBJECT—LITTER**

### **California, Tahquitz**

I went to Tahquitz on Sunday 12 June, ostensibly to help a friend practice aid climbing, but in reality to try to dissuade him from attempting the Regular Route of Half Dome as his first-ever wall-climbing experience. We had planned to climb the Bat (A2), but finding two parties waiting for The Vampire and two more parties waiting to start the Bat (all sharing the same initial crack pitch) we changed our plans. We then went to do Human Fright as an aid climb and hauling exercise. While we had lunch and water on a ledge at the top of the first pitch (late start), we heard something falling, some screaming, and chunks of football-sized rock and mountain mahogany limbs falling past us. I was, at that moment, glad to have been wearing my helmet, as I was struck with a golf ball-size rock. By the sudden commotion of people on the ground and parties on the Vampire and Dave's Deviation, there had been a horrendous accident. All nearby climbing parties abandoned their climbs and gravitated toward the injured to try to help out. They were apparently in the dihedral of Angel's Fright.

After a quick discussion with my partner, we decided to see what we could do to assist. He 3rd-classed the ledges and dihedral with a light rack and was then not heard from. The rope leader of a Japanese party below us on Human Fright led through, expressed that he had First Aid training, took my haul rope and was gone. After 20 minutes without rope movement, I tied off my partner. I packed nonessentials in the haul bag, keeping the

water, slings and Jumars, and lowered the haul bag to the ground using the zip-line. Figuring that my partner was into a belay and had the rope tied off, I broke down the anchor and moved closer with a prusik self-belay.

Traversing the ledges into Angel's Fright, I met Sean Reagan, who'd helped haul the litter from Lunch Rock. Finding that my rope, in fact, was not tied off, I slung myself to a small mountain mahogany as a self-belay. The "boss" on the ledge above told me to set anchors where I was for lowering. As I started on that we heard, "Oh, no!! ROCK!!!" Suddenly, the litter was bearing down on us from the ledge 75 feet above. No one had secured it, and it was pushed aside to make room for getting one of the injured onto the ledge. I was huddled in the dihedral and was beamed a glancing blow, but the litter then hit Sean squarely in the shoulder so hard that he thought it was broken, and I thought that he might pass out from the pain. We secured the litter, and I lowered him off to locate his partner on the ground. The last word I heard on Sean is that his shoulder was dislocated and that he was last seen being driven from Humber Park with his arm in a sling.

The other litter was lowered from the top, and I made sure to inform those SOBs to secure this one. After another 20 minutes of little activity, I asked whether anyone was yet in the litter, and if anyone knew how to rig the litter for lowering. "No," to both questions. I volunteered that I'd had experience and practice in litter rescues. Since no one else was willing to rig the litters, I was called up. I then demanded that my rope be fixed, and climbed the pitch with a Jumar self-belay.

When I got there, one of the injured was still hanging on the rope in the dihedral, apparently head-injured with a lot of blood, and the other was on the ledge with three people supporting his head, neck and shoulders. The head injury—Justin—was severe enough to have pushed his eye from the socket, but it was still under the lid. The other injury—Brad—seemed to be a spinal injury. Both were still conscious, although Justin wanted to get down onto the ledge, and was thoroughly disoriented. Brad was fully conscious, and on questioning, informed me that he was allergic to Penicillin and Keflex. Justin was brought to the ledge, and was the high priority for evacuation. The litter was rigged, and we finally got Justin into it. He was not entirely cooperative and had an ankle injury bad enough that he couldn't bear weight, although he didn't know that. We ran two belay lines to the litter, one from the main "spider" and the other clipped to the head of the litter as a backup and level control. A third belay rope was for a litter attendant. Steve, an ice climber from Canada who'd been on a litter rescue before, agreed to be the attendant. I volunteered to belay him and act as signal relay, and a quick, strong relationship of competence and trust was forged. Half a rope-length below us was another station from where the litter could be lowered to the ground. This was rigged by 'John' who'd been on a wall rescue before, and Bob Baker from the Riverside Mountain Rescue Unit (RMRU). Even though a runner was sent immediately for help, it was an hour and a half before the RMRU arrived.

As Justin's litter neared the ground, we were informed that he was projectile vomiting blood, which increased the urgency of the evacuation. Bob radioed info of allergies, requested rough vital signs info, sent up a C-collar with the second litter, and informed us that a helicopter would soon arrive, and that we'd only have it for 45 minutes. With this added measure of urgency, we established essential hand signals between the stations for lowering the second litter with Brad. We fitted the C-collar, rigged the litter and loaded Brad into it, having cut their rope to rig the spider. The Japanese climber with First Aid training had been supporting Brad's head, and agreed to be the litter attendant for the second lowering. Again reviewing the hand signals, we were off. During this lowering, the

chopper came in and contacted one skid atop Lunch Rock. After this, the pilot pivoted the craft to bring the other skid in contact with the rock. It was a truly impressive (and somewhat dangerous) display of flying skill. Justin was loaded in and buzzed off to Palm Springs. Brad was also lowered without incident. A physician was flown in by a second helicopter, and Brad was flown out by the first one upon its return from Palm Springs.

We then established an order to evacuate ourselves so that no one would be left stranded. As we reached the ground, it was apparent that we'd have to stage a major gear exchange, as many people were missing most of their racks, and were holding others' gear. The gear exchange was at Lunch Rock. Our departure was in the dark, and then there were reports to file with the RMRU in Humber Park. Senor Ruben's stayed open to feed us (compliments of the RMRU), and I finally got home at 1:30 AM. It had been a very long day, and much more misadventure than anyone had bargained for. Thanks should go to all who helped out: Mike, the boss on the high ledge and his partner Tom Beecher; Spencer, one of the litter belayers; the SCMA's Greg Stevens (paramedic) who helped from the top of Tahquitz and Bob Oelsner, who came down to help rig and lower the second litter; Chris from Poland; my partner and SCMA guest John (on the high ledge); Osmond (on the ground); and anyone else who had a hand in this rescue.

### Analysis

Inexperience and drug use may have been contributing factors. This party was observed on Angel's Fright doing such things as removing their harnesses at the belays. All of their gear was practically brand new with the marking tape (yellow) largely unscratched and very clean. These guys were apparently relative novices. They seemed to have finished the route, as no gear was found on the rope in between them, and no belay devices were on the rope. Their rucksack was closed, but items such as trail mix, sunscreen, lip balm, the lid to a film canister, lighter and pot pipe, were found in the dihedral below them. They may have slipped on rubble on top of Tahquitz. During their fall they broke a mountain mahogany, a two-and-a-half-foot-long branch of which was lodged in a crack at the back of a wide ledge. Their rope happened to drape over this, which (amazingly) stopped their fall. They would have cratered otherwise. I estimate that their fall was 200+ feet, and they stopped another 200 feet from the deck.

The RMRU physician at the scene later opined that these two might have died on Tahquitz if they'd had to wait for the RMRU to do the rescue. I was later (June 15) told by the RMRU that Brad had no sensation or movement below neck level, and that Justin was still unconscious with his skull open to drain pressure. By Thursday, Brad was going into surgery, and it's thought that he'll perhaps only be a paraplegic (instead of a quadriplegic), and that the prognosis of Justin is still uncertain (but hopeful). Brad's spinal injury was a whiplash-type injury. Could this have been prevented by wearing a chest harness? Justin's head injury might have been less had he been wearing a helmet. Climbers (buyers) beware! You are engaging in an exciting and potentially dangerous activity.

Rescues are risky for all involved, so realize that there may be no one trained or willing to pluck your injured butt from the side of a rock, but having rescue/First Aid-trained people can improve those possibilities slightly. Without the helitac, we were planning a six hour descent from Lunch Rock, and you gotta realize that you cannot depend upon the helitac for any rescue. Let's be careful out there. My final notes are that a litter is neither a stretcher nor a gurney, and that the injured should never be referred to as "bodies" or "victims," which did happen even though both of the injured were conscious. (Source: Gerry Cox)