

Perrin was about three feet into a crevasse. I organized a hoist and in ten minutes or so we had pulled them clear.”

If traveling with a person who needs assistance means that normal practices have to be abandoned, then one must be prepared for the consequences—or make adjustments to the procedures. In this case, a fixed line and/or a belay may have compensated for the two climbers being side by side. (Source: Jed Williamson and Roger Robinson, Mountaineering Ranger, Denali National Park)

RAPPEL ERROR—FAILED TO THREAD BOTH ROPES THROUGH FRICTION DEVICE, NO BELAY

Arizona, Cochise Stronghold

On October 28, John Payne, Jr., Mark Plassman, and Bruce McKenzie set off for “What’s My Line,” a three-pitch 5.6 in Cochise Stronghold. The trio topped out in the early afternoon and had lunch. After lunch, they set up the rappel and Bruce headed down to the first ledge, a mere 30 feet down and as big as a living room. Next came Mark. John started his descent and screamed. He hadn’t threaded both strands through his tuber. He fell just past the ledge, glancing off, and disappeared, taking not only the rope he was tied into with him, but also the second line which he had strapped to his back. We will never know what happened to John when he roped in—he screwed up and it cost him his life. If he had started the rap eight feet to the right, he would have had a 30 foot fall.

Bruce and Mark were left on the ledge with some extra food and some webbing. The next morning they signaled some hikers and tried to get them to do the route using John’s gear; neither of them were climbers, however and the weather had become inclement: rainy and windy. The hikers left to get Search and Rescue—a six hour hike at least. After ten hours, SAR came in. It was still rainy and they were unable to get a rope to Bruce and Mark. At this point a chopper was called in. It’s unclear what the original purpose of the chopper was, because after hovering for a while it left to get some rope and coats to drop to Bruce and Mark.

When the chopper returned with 200 feet of rope, Bruce and Mark had been on the ledge for over 30 hours. The rope was delivered and Bruce and Mark rappelled the rest of the way down. They did have extra clothes and rain gear, but it was at the base of the climb. Both Bruce and John had done the route numerous times previously. The choice of route was made because it was known by both quite well and Bruce and Mark had never climbed together. Ironically, John did check Mark, who was using an ATC, before he rappelled. (Source: Brian McKenzie)

DARKNESS—LATE START, DEHYDRATION, HYPOTHERMIA (CARRIED NO WATER), INADEQUATE CLOTHING, CREATING A HAZARDOUS CONDITION

California, Yosemite Valley, Manure Pile Buttress, Nutcracker

On March 30, at 2310, Reza Tabrizi (22) called NPS dispatch from the Camp 4 pay phone to report that his two climbing partners, Mark Bradford (23) and Sarah Rich (20), were stranded by darkness at the top of Manure Pile Buttress.

While driving back to the Manure Pile parking area with Ranger Mike Archer, Tabrizi stated the following: The three had reached the top of Nutcracker after dark, with no lights. The way down was known to be dangerous in the dark, so he had left the others on top with a rope and a rack of hardware while he rappelled alone with the other rope down

the west side of the buttress. The time was about 1930. On the last rappel he had accidentally rappelled off the end of his rope, falling 20 feet to the ground, but he was not hurt.

He then got three unidentified visitors in Camp 4 to assist him with lights. However, when they arrived at Manure Pile, they found that none of their headlamps worked, and they also couldn't make voice contact with Johnson and Rich. So Tabrizi had driven back to Camp 4 and contacted the NPS. He stated that Johnson and Rich were not injured when he left them, but that they were without warm clothes, food, or water, and that Rich lacked her asthma medication. (The low temperature that night was 31° F.)

While another ranger tried to contact the party with a loudspeaker, Archer and Tabrizi hiked up the regular descent route. Just after midnight they heard Johnson answering their calls. He stated that he and Rich were on top of the climb and were unhurt but very cold, and that Rich was having difficulty breathing due to her asthma. Because of Rich's condition, Archer asked that an ambulance and additional rescuers stand by at the parking area.

Archer and Tabrizi reached Johnson and Rich at about 0020. Rich stated she was breathing more easily, but Archer requested that rangers Keith Losber and Chris Robinson (both paramedics) come to the scene to accompany Rich down. She was weak and dizzy, probably due to lack of food, so she was belayed down the descent. Everyone reached the ground without incident.

Analysis

Tabrizi and Johnston had each climbed big walls and had climbed Nutcracker previously. Rich was a novice, with no leading experience. This was her first multi-pitch climb.

They had begun climbing the route about 1330. It was near dusk by the time they reached the end of the second pitch. They had decided to continue instead of retreating, although they knew they could retreat with the equipment they had. It was completely dark by the time Johnston led the last (5th) pitch.

The party did not take water, headlamps, or warm clothes because "it was only the Nutcracker." Rich did not carry her medication, assuming she would not need it.

Tabrizi and Bradford were cited to mandatory court appearances for Disorderly Conduct/Creating a Hazardous Condition, 36 CFR 2.34 (a) (4). The NPS recommended to the court that they each pay \$400, half the cost of the rescue. (Source: Mike Archer, NPS Ranger)

WEATHER, HYPOTHERMIA, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT

California, Yosemite Valley, El Capitan, The Nose

On April 9, two parties of climbers started up the Nose (Grade VI) on El Capitan. One group included John Montecucco (30) and Shawn Kelley (28) and the other Aaron Silverman (27) and Matt Francis (25). All four had several years of experience and climbed at a high standard. All but Shawn had climbed Grade V's, and, for all, the Nose was their first Grade VI.

Each climber carried several layers of polypro, fleece, and Goretex, both top and bottom, as well as insulated socks, hats, and gloves. They had three 20-25° F synthetic bags and a 0° F down bag, three Goretex bivy sacks, and a plastic tarp. For shelter each team had brought the fly from a new A5 double portaledge, recently seam-sealed.

They fixed pitches on Sunday after checking the forecast: fair, with no storms through Thursday. On Wednesday night, the 12th, Aaron and Matt bivvied one pitch below Camp 6, while John and Shawn stopped at Camp 5. Both groups hoped to top out the next day.