

Dan and Curt were found guilty of disorderly conduct (creating a hazardous condition for themselves and others) 36CFR 2.34 (a) (4), and ordered by the court to pay \$500 each to the park's rescue fund.

FALL ON ROCK, HASTE—TRYING TO STICK TO A SCHEDULE

California, Yosemite Valley, North Dome Gulley

On July 6, Dave Bedell (34) and Matt Niswonger finished climbing the South Face of Washington Column and bivouacked on the summit. Early the next morning they headed for North Dome Gulley. Bedell had descended this way previously, staying close to the Column and making several rappels. They were late for a meeting this morning so, after a couple of rappels, they decided to walk further east along a ledge system in hopes it would be faster.

They soon came to a steep, smooth, granite water course several feet wide. Niswonger climbed up 100 feet or so to a less precarious crossing. Only thin streaks of water coated the rock, so Bedell figured he could cross right where he was, without a rope, by stepping in the dry spots.

Somehow he slipped, went down, and started sliding. After about 100 feet, he went over a 15-20 foot drop and landed on his butt in a shallow depression that stopped his fall. He had tried to lead with his feet the whole way, but he was nevertheless knocked out when he hit. He regained consciousness about ten minutes later, just as Niswonger reached him. Sharp pains ran down his back and legs. His legs tingled, and it hurt to breathe.

Niswonger found his way down to the phone at Mirror Lake and contacted the Park Service at 0900. Two rangers helirappelled to the scene at about 1000, and a ground team arrived shortly thereafter. They immobilized Bedell in a vacuum body splint, gave him oxygen, and shorthauled him under the park helicopter to the Yosemite Clinic. He was then flown by AirMed to Doctor's Medical Center in Modesto, where he was diagnosed with compression fractures of vertebrae L1 and T12, as well as fractures of the right 11th and 12th ribs and several deep bruises. He has made a full recovery.

Analysis

Although you can go a number of ways, the common route down North Dome Gulley follows a trail (make that a goat path) that traverses fairly high—but below the rim—and crosses the water course well above where Bedell fell. In dry conditions no rope work is necessary.

It is interesting to note that several years ago, another climber died at the same spot trying to cross the water course at night by matchlight. (Source: Cam Sholly, John Dill, NPS Rangers)

FALL ON ROCK, EXCEEDING ABILITIES

California, Yosemite Valley, Nutcracker

On July 1, Paul Bennett (41) and Randy Kanta were climbing the Nutcracker, 5.8, on Manure Pile Buttress. Bennett led the last pitch; he climbed the low-angle slab off the belay, placed a nut in the steep corner, then climbed to the mantle, where he fell.

His protection held, but he struck the slab ten feet below feet first. The moment he hit he felt his ankle go. He tumbled over, stopped upside down, and when he looked up he saw that his ankle was bent 90° to the side.

Bennett and Kanta splinted the ankle with tape, and a nearby party tried to help lower him to the base, but after an hour of this they had gone only 30 feet. Meanwhile someone had alerted the NPS; a rescue team hiked to the top of the buttress and lowered a rescuer to the scene. Bennett was able to hop down the face to the ground, supported by the rescuer and the team's ropes. His ankle, broken in three places, required surgery.

Analysis

Bennett had been climbing off and on for ten years and could top-rope 5.10-5.11. But 5.8 was his leading limit and he had not been climbing regularly right before his Yosemite trip.

The mantle on Nutcracker, and the moves that follow, is the scene of at least one broken ankle per year. Maybe it's because the climber, concentrating on the steep corner, forgets to protect against striking the lower-angle slab below. For example, Bennett thought he was well protected and expected no consequences as he started to fall. The placements are there, if you want to avoid the same fate. (Source: John Dill, NPS Ranger)

RAPPEL FAILURE—INADEQUATE ANCHOR EQUIPMENT, NO HARD HAT **California, Yosemite Valley, El Capitan**

About 1800 on July 31, Ik Tae Choi (23) died in a fall on the East Ledges descent route on El Capitan. Choi led 5.11, A3 and had six years climbing experience, including the Matterhorn, the Eiger North Face and the West Face of the Dru. On this, his first trip to Yosemite, he had climbed the Prow, and he was descending from a successful ascent of the Nose at the time of the accident. The other members of this Korean party were Sang Jun Jung (23) Yeon Soo Park (34) and Myong Hoon Kim (18). Jung and Park were experienced climbers, while this was Kim's first year.

There are several variations to the East Ledges descent. Choi's group followed one requiring three 150-foot rappels: 1) down a low-angle face, past a ledge with a live oak tree and several blocks, to a sloping ledge with bolts, 2) to a large, tree-covered pedestal, and 3) to the ground.

Park and Kim had completed all three rappels at the time of the accident, and Jung was about half-way down the second. Choi was on the sloping ledge at the top of the second, lowering the team's haulbag. The bag was six to ten feet above Jung, when Choi called down that the haul bag's rope was stuck above him, in the blocks on the first rappel. About ten seconds later, Jung saw the haul bag drop ten to fifteen feet and stop. A couple of seconds later Choi fell past him, landing on the ledge at the base of the second rappel.

Jung finished his rappel, disentangled Choi from a tree, and pulled him to a flat spot. Park came up the lines from the ground, saw that Choi was unconscious and seriously injured, and sent Kim and then Jung for help. Kim reported the accident to the park dispatcher at 1900.

Choi was bleeding from the mouth; when Park turned him over to allow the blood to drain, he saw a large wound on the back of his head. Choi was not wearing his helmet, having given it to Kim to use on the descent.

Ranger Chris Robinson, a paramedic, ascended the rappel line to Choi at about 2030. Based on his radio report, the clinic staff pronounced Choi dead at 2045.

The next morning Choi's body was removed from the scene by helicopter sling-load, and rescue team members Steve Yu and Lance Allred inspected the rappel route.