

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.

### Analysis

Allred and Yu found no clues to the accident above or below the ledge from which Choi had apparently fallen, but at the ledge they found the following: A quick-draw was clipped to the anchor. Attached to the quick-draw were 1) a sling with a loop tied in the free end, apparently Choi's tie-in, and 2) a friction device (brand unknown), through which the haul line was rigged. Both ends of the haul line hung down the face. The haul bag hung from one end; the other end was free but the two ends were twisted around each other. When Yu and Allred untwisted the rope it began feeding easily through the friction device, lowering the bag.

Two of the three carabiners in the belay chain were non-locking types. The third was a locker, but was unlocked. None were doubled for security. There was no carabiner in the free end of the sling. Choi had probably anchored himself by clipping the free end of this sling to a carabiner in his harness. Jung later stated that he had found only a single non-locking carabiner in Choi's harness after the fall.

Apparently Choi managed to free the stuck haul line, and the suddenly slack rope allowed the bag to drop a short distance until the rope twisted around itself. We don't know why Choi fell, but he fell the whole pitch because either 1) he had deliberately disconnected from his anchor sling to work on the stuck rope, or 2) the sling had accidentally unclipped from his harness.

Whether or not the latter occurred, Choi had set himself up for an accident by relying on four separate unlocked carabiners. The belay chain should always use locked carabiners or reversed and opposed non-locking carabiners. Furthermore, by girth-hitching the anchor sling to the harness, one carabiner can be eliminated.

The stuck rope did not cause the accident but, like some past cases, it may have led to impatience and shortcuts in safety. The tree and blocks on the first rappel are easily recognized as traps for a pulled rappel line; many climbers break that rappel into two for that reason. We never learned why the party did not pull the haul line before all members were past the potential snags. Possibly they had used it as a rappel line. (Source: Mark Harvey, Steve Yu, John Dill, NPS Rangers)

## STRANDED, DARKNESS—LATE START, OFF ROUTE, INADEQUATE CLOTHING, CREATING A HAZARDOUS CONDITION

### California, Yosemite Valley, Fairview Dome

On August 9, about 1100, Bill Ott (47) and Hugo Orellana (24) began climbing the Regular Route (III-IV 5.9) on Fairview Dome. They were the last party to start up the climb that day. At least five parties were already on the route so Ott and Orellana had waited about an hour for their turn.

They were slowed by the groups above, and they also had trouble placing protection. On the sixth pitch, off Crescent Ledge, they lost the route. They rappelled back to Crescent Ledge and searched for bolt anchors that they remembered being shown in the guide book as a rappel route, but they were unable to locate them. During this time it became dark; they reclimbed the off-route pitch above the ledge but had to stop there because they were lost and could no longer see to climb.

Another climbing party reported to the NPS that Ott and Orellana might need help, and at 2130 a ranger contacted them by loudspeaker. At first they denied needing assistance, by signalling with a camera flash. After a brief discussion they signalled that they did need help. They stated that a cold wind was blowing.