bags, pads, and bivy sacks would slow them down, so they threw that gear off the wall, knowing that they were now committed to making it down that day.

At 0730 they started down with their rack, most of their clothing, a copy of the descent topo, their two 60m ropes, and a chunk of rope they'd chopped from their fixed pitch. They warmed up as they rappelled, and their gloves helped a lot, but they were still soaked to the skin. At one point they hung up a rope while trying to pull it, but managed to get it free.

Near Dolt Tower they didn't realize that the descent swings east around a corner, so they continued off route for two or three rappels until they found a fixed rope. By tying their chopped rope to it, they were able to swing east to other fixed ropes leading to the ground (belonging to a party waiting out the storm on Dolt Tower). They now made good time, touching down at mid-day.

The NPS had begun preparing for the rescue immediately after confirming the SOS signals at 0200. We requested the rescue helicopter from Naval Air Station Lemoore, but air operations were questionable given the weather, so a large team prepared to hike (8 miles) to the summit. We canceled our efforts once we were sure that Abbott and Burnett would make it down, nevertheless, gearing up the team to that level required 45 people and the Navy helicopter.

Analysis

A friend with lots of El Cap experience had advised Abbott and Burnett that any precipitation in November would be snow, so they decided down sleeping bags would be OK. However, they had also read "Staying Alive," the safety article in the Yosemite climbing guide, that warns of cold rainstorms throughout the winter and clearly describes conditions on the walls in such weather and the inadequacy of down bags. It also stresses the importance of a rain fly, which Abbott and Burnett lacked.

Experience in the last few years has shown us that plastic sheets and even portaledge flies with bivy sacks are not completely reliable on rock ledges. There are too many ways for water to creep in, especially if you wind up in a bad spot. Although it's a hassle to take along, a portaledge with a properly seam-sealed fly in good condition is your best bet.)

The next best option is to get the hell out of there, but Abbott and Burnett had few defenses if anything went wrong on the descent: 1) They were already wet to the bone, with no storm protection. 2) They had no spare rope and got one stuck, but luckily freed it. (Hint: They could have taken their third rope along instead of chopping it, if, noticing the threatening weather, they had rigged their fixed pitch as a rappel.) 3) Finally, they got off route but stumbled across a fixed line that saved them. (Source: Dan Horner and John Dill, NPS Rangers, Yosemite National Park)

(Editor's Note: There were six climbing accidents reported from Joshua Tree National Park. Five were falls, including a climber who rappelled off the end of the rope. The five were exacerbated by the fact the protection was inadequate. The injuries to all were fractures, including a fractured skull as a result of no hard hat.)

HANDHOLD CAME OFF—FAILURE TO TEST HOLD, FALL ON ROCK, PROTECTION PULLED OUT, INATTENTION

Colorado, Rocky Mountain National Park, Lumpy Ridge

On March 2, Hayner Brooks (44) was climbing with Ken Miller on the route Three's Company (I, 5.7), pitches one and two, into the final (third) pitch of the Thunder

Buttress Route (II, 5.7+) on Thunder Buttress, Lumpy Ridge. On the third and final pitch, Brooks was swiftly leading lower fifth class rock near the top of the formation when a right handhold broke. Brooks plummeted 60 feet down the rock face, pulling one piece of protection—a #3 TriCam—and impacting four times. Miller's belay caught Brooks when he reached his next protection, a #1 Wild Country Friend. As a result of the impacts, Brooks fractured his pelvis on his left side. His chief complaint at the time of the injury was intense pain in the left leg from his buttocks to his toes, and a complete loss of mobility and motion with the left leg. Miller lowered Brooks back to the belay, anchored him, and went down to get RMNP rescue, returning with the team to assist his partner.

Analysis

Brooks and Miller were both experienced climbers. Brooks had been climbing for about ten years, and led rock consistently at the 5.10 to 5.11 level. He had extensive experience on Lumpy Ridge. Brooks blamed his accident on carelessness and inattention, and said that he was moving too fast on the easy rock with thoughts of topping out on the climb foremost in his mind. He did not test the failed handhold, but instead had instantly weighted it, causing him to lose balance when that hold broke loose.

Brooks was wearing a helmet, and attributed this to a lack of any kind of head injuries or loss of consciousness, despite striking his head during the fall. (Source: Jim Detterline, Longs Peak Supervisory Climbing Ranger)

FALL ON ROCK—BLOWN OFF BY WIND GUST, INADEQUATE PROTECTION and PARTNER STRANDED—INEXPERIENCE

Colorado, Rocky Mountain National Park, Petit Grepon

On July 2, Todd Marshall (34) was leading the seventh pitch of Petit Grepon South Face (III, 5.8). At 1900, Marshall topped out on the spur ledge below the summit, stood up with arms upraised, and gave a, "Hurray," and got blown off by a strong gust of wind from the southeast estimated at 60-70 mph by his partner, Matteo Baceda. Marshall fell 70 feet and struck the rock face, sustaining a massive depressed occipital skull fracture, and instant death. Baceda was unfamiliar with self-rescue techniques and remained trapped on his belay ledge 80 feet below Marshall. Baceda sustained exposure to his lips from being stuck out overnight. Baceda was rescued by two climbers during the following afternoon.

Analysis

Marshall, with six years of climbing experience and a prior ascent of Petit Grepon South Face, was the leader of this team and led every pitch. This party was out so late in the day because Marshall and Baceda, during their pre-dawn approach from the Glacier Gorge trailhead, took a wrong turn in the dark and ended up at the base of Spearhead, approximately seven miles away from the Grepon. Marshall was climbing quickly and strongly while leading the Grepon, but he took a 30 foot runout from his last protection, a #2 Camalot, which held his fall. The strong erratic winds encountered were not a surprise to Marshall and Baceda, who had witnessed similar winds all day. Turning back is an option, but at the very least Marshall should have clipped into the belay before standing up on the ledge. Marshall was not wearing a helmet, and the impact area on the back of his head would have been covered. However, considering the distance fallen and the force produced, it is not clear if he could have survived. (Source: Jim Detterline, Longs Peak Supervisory Climbing Ranger)