## FALL ON ICE, WEATHER, EXCEEDING ABILITIES

### California, Mount Shasta

On June 25, Lois Johnson (52) and her husband Tom had camped at Lake Helen and were climbing the standard Avalanche Glacier route when she lost her balance while putting on dark glasses as the sun rose. She was just 50 vertical feet from the security of Red Banks, a recommended resting point before continuing to the summit (14,162 feet). The surface was hard ice over snow, caused by a freezing rain on the night before the climb. Lois rocketed down the 35-degree ice slope, ice ax jerked from her gloveless hands, and came to a stop in old avalanche debris 2000 feet below. One boot with crampon attached was torn off and the other ankle was badly fractured. Lois and Tom and a solo climber, who had turned back, were the only ones attempting the summit that morning. The solo climber descended to find a cell phone two hours distant. Tom assisted his wife using their down jackets and extra clothing. After three hours, they were joined on the icy slope by two doctors who were camped at Lake Helen and a bivy equipped climber. Lois was warmed and stabilized until a military helicopter rescue could be effected when the cloud cover broke just before nightfall.

### Analysis

Lois and Tom had discussed ice ax arrest techniques the night before, but they had not practiced arrests. Self-belay techniques were not reviewed. Lois had taken the one-day snow travel orientation with Rainier Mountaineering, Inc. in a previous year but had not climbed with Tom. Tom had completed several guided climbs, including Mt. Shasta, two years previously. A recent snow climb up South Sister, the guided climbs and five years hiking and scrambling experience had not prepared Lois and Tom for the dangerous conditions of high cold winds, hard ice and a 35-degree slope. (Source: Robert Speik)

## STRANDED, OFF ROUTE, INEXPERIENCE

### California, Yosemite Valley, Royal Arches

On July 8 around 2330, Yosemite dispatch received multiple 911 calls reporting cries for help coming from the wall near the Awahnee hotel. Ranger Keith Lober investigated and found two climbers calling for help above the Bathtub on the "Royal Arches" descent route. Upon arrival at the Bathtub, Lober found one climber stuck at the end of his rappel rope about 30 feet from the ground. The second climber was secure on a ledge above.

At 2345 an SAR page went out and a team of five rescuers responded. Rescuers climbed up to the stranded climber, placed anchors, and assisted him to the ground. One rescuer then continued up to the second climber and, due to the climber's inexperience, set up a system to lower him to the ground. All personnel were clear of the field by 0300 on July 9.

### Analysis

Once on the ground the climbers were interviewed and provided the following information: Lead climber Jason Mathew (22) has been climbing for three to four years and usually climbs five times a week, including bouldering. He can

lead up to a 5.8 traditional and has completed ten multi-pitch climbs such as the "Crack" and the "Nutcracker." Partner Dan Pier (25) was on his first multi-pitch climb and had completed just a few short practice climbs up to a 5.8 difficulty. Mathew and Pier had started the climb around 0800 and one other team had passed them during the day. Mathew had read "Staying Alive in Yosemite" by John Dill. As a note, Mathew was carrying enough equipment to have completed a self-rescue by a variety of methods. (Source: J. Pederson and K. Lober, Rangers, Yosemite National Park)

## RAPPELLED OFF END OF ROPE—FALL ON ROCK, MISCALCULATED RAPPEL STATION

### California, Yosemite Valley, El Capitan

On July 13, as we were preparing to start the Shield route in Yosemite, California, I (Matthew Luck) was ascending the fifth fixed (static) line from the ground up to Heart Ledge on El Capitan, while my partner, Steve Canavero, waited at the anchor below. He was standing on a fairly substantial ledge (one meter wide) which angled off on the side for about ten meters before dropping vertically.

As I was jugging, Eric Renger, was rappelling down from Heart Ledge on the dynamic lead line he and his partner, David Hill, had just fixed. They had just climbed the Free Blast up to Mammoth Terraces and rappelled to Heart Ledge, intending to fix those pitches and begin the Salathé Wall the next day.

When I was about two-thirds of the way to the anchor above, there was this commotion, and I looked down to see Eric fall and hit the top of the sloping part of the ledge. There was a loud crashing as he landed on his garbage bag full of empty water bottles. He then began to slide down the ledge to the edge where it drops off (which would have resulted in a four-pitch fall to the ground). Clawing at the crack where the ledge meets the wall, he slid about three meters, gaining no purchase in the crack.

All of a sudden, the sliding climber came to a stop. Simultaneously, my rope dropped about two meters. I had no idea what was going on at the moment, and yelled, "Hey, what are you doing up there?" thinking that his partner (still at the anchor above) was somehow undoing the anchor of the fixed line I was ascending.

Eric yelled, "I'm OK, but I don't know what's holding me!" Steve then yelled for no one to move, thinking that a stuck rope had somehow stopped his fall and a move by anyone could have dislodged it and he would have continued falling off of the large flake.

A few moments later, everything was still, and we began to figure out what had happened. Steve then pulled slack up from the other static rope Eric was trailing (he had two) and threw the end to him. Eric was positioned precariously in the crack and was obviously worried about the mystery that held him. He questioned the integrity of the rope anchor at least twice, and Steve assured him it was solid and backed it up with a figure-8 on a bight.

As things calmed down, I finished jugging up to Heart Ledge, and told his partner what had happened. There are two fixed anchors at the Heart Ledges