

well until I fell above the fourth bolt. I anticipated the fall, and conveyed this to my belayer. (“Oh shit, I’m falling!!”) It probably only took about a second and a half for the fall, but I saw each bolt go by, and I saw three go by and wondered, “Why haven’t I stopped by now?” After I did finally stop, I was only about four feet above a ledge, and my belayer was nowhere to be seen. After shouting out, I discovered that she had been pulled off her boulder (not anchored) and swung across the creek bed and slammed into the cliff on the climb’s side. As she was using a Black Diamond ATC and not a GriGri, I can’t believe she didn’t let go of the rope to break her fall. Thank God she didn’t, because I would now be toast.

Analysis

What I learned: No matter how much your belayer weighs, anchor them down! I hope someone learns from our mistake and can avoid an accident (of this kind). (Source: Keri Means—33)

ROCKSLIDE

California, Mount Shasta, Avalanche Gulch

On May 21, while ascending the Avalanche Gulch route, a large rock slide occurred, hitting a party of one guide and four clients. Two clients were injured.

The Sierra Wilderness Seminar (SWS) guided groups began their climb early to lessen their exposure to rock fall, which is usually more active in the afternoon. There were several SWS parties on the route simultaneously. One party was at 11,500 feet at 0745 when the rock slide started. As rocks and ice chunks fell, they attempted to move out of the way, but the rocks were moving fast and had enough momentum to cross the gulch where the party was located. Two of the five member team were struck by rocks. Gabriel Artalejo (27) was hit on the forehead, impacting his helmet. He tumbled down the hill 250 feet, lost consciousness, and slid another 250 feet before coming to a stop. The SWS guide descended immediately to Artalejo and did a primary and secondary assessment.

Other SWS guides were notified as well as Search and Rescue. The other guides were able to keep their clients in a safe place while they descended to assist. They made a barricade of backpacks and gear above Artalejo to protect him from continuing rock and ice fall. Artalejo’s neck and head were immobilized, and the laceration on his forehead was bandaged.

Another climber, not with SWS, was also impacted by rock fall to the arm, and walked to Lake Helen where he was evacuated by helicopter at 0945.

Patrick Daley (30) was hit on the upper back and on the lower arm/hand. Daley descended with a guide to Lake Helen (10,400 feet), where he was evacuated by helicopter at 1030.

Search and Rescue climbed up to Artalejo and arrived at 1230 bringing rescue gear. Artalejo was back-boarded, placed in a SKED, and lowered to an LZ at 10,600 feet where he was evacuated by helicopter at 1330.

The California Highway Patrol helicopter evacuated all injured climbers and transported them to Mercy Medical Center, Mount Shasta. Both Daley and Artalejo were released by 1600.

Analysis

The snowpack on Mount Shasta was around 70 percent of normal and very warm spring conditions caused a rapid melting. Rock fall usually becomes more prevalent in July and August as the Avalanche Gulch route is surrounded on three sides by higher terrain of loose rocks. This route is notorious for rockfall as the snow melts, and early season and early morning climbs are *usually* safer.

Although climbing helmets are not designed for front or side impacts, this helmet probably made a huge difference in the extent of Artalejo's head injury.

Wilderness rescues often take several hours to days to complete. In this case, the party had to wait six hours in a very exposed and dangerous area before they were evacuated. (Source: Eric White, Matt Hill—USFS Climbing Rangers, Michael Massari—SWS)

FALLING ROCK—CRUSHED HAND

California, Yosemite Valley, El Capitan, Sea of Dreams

My name is Robert. I am a 24 year old Austrian. On April 12, I started soloing the Sea of Dreams on El Capitan. The climbing was excellent—demanding but not dangerous. The hauling was very hard and the nights were uncomfortable due to runoff from melting snow on the summit, but I had full storm gear so it was okay.

On the fifth day, at 3:30 pm, I was halfway through pitch 14, called “Don’t skate, mate.” I put a sling over a rounded horn and top-stepped in my etrier to place a nut straight up in a crack below a small roof/block-like feature. It is shown as “expanding” in the *SuperTopos* guidebook. I tested the nut, and it was okay.

However, I had to go slightly sideways, which might pull the nut out and then the sling off the horn. This would expose me to a long fall, so I placed a small cam (the size of a blue TCU) and climbed back down in my aiders to test it. I held onto the horn in case the cam popped (it was not sitting perfectly) so that I would not fall onto my daisy sling. I gave the cam a hard bounce, and suddenly there was a loud noise and I saw the small roof (a block of backpack size) breaking off.

The block fell slightly to my left. I know I should have jumped to the right in order to get my hands away from the horn, but things were happening too fast. As a reflex, I held on to the horn and the block hit my left hand. Still standing in my aiders, I realized the injury was severe. The left ring finger was smashed—it was bleeding quite heavily, there was no feeling in it, and it was attached to the hand only by some pieces of skin. The middle finger was injured too, and the whole hand was useless. Luckily, there was very little pain (the nerves were cut off).

I decided to make my way down the wall as fast as possible and to leave all of my gear up there. In the first moments, I did not know if I would be able to rescue myself. Rappelling one-handed is not easy, and I might suddenly feel very weak or do something stupid because I was injured. Also it might be too late in the day for a self-rescue or even a rescue by YOSAR, so I shouted for