

Brian Smudz has been climbing for ten years, leads GriGri free to 5.10b comfortably, also harder, aid A4. He's climbed several short aid routes in the east. He had climbed no complete walls in Yosemite but had climbed partway up the Nose twice previously, once with his brother and once to Dolt Tower with Yanchun Su, his partner this May. He is a Wilderness First Responder.

Yanchun Su has been climbing for four or five years, but with little leading. She has led GriGri free 5.9, aid A2.

On this ascent Brian led almost all the pitches and did all hauling (because Yan weighs only 100 pounds and couldn't haul the bag.) Yan led a few easier pitches. For storm gear they had synthetic bags, Bibler bivy sacks, and rain suits.

As for injuries, he experienced a pilon fracture of the right foot (medial malleolus fracture), and the tibia was split up the shaft one-third of the way to the knee. It required surgery, with internal fixation (internal hardware). Ten months later there is still some pain, and he is not running yet. (Source: John Dill, NPS Ranger, Yosemite National Park)

## **FAULTY USE OF CRAMPONS—FALL ON SNOW**

### **California, Mount Shasta, Wintun Ice Fall**

On June 24, David Lowe (24) was glissading at 13,500 feet with his crampons on. His crampons caught and threw him into a tumble, and his leashed ice ax penetrated his thigh from hip to knee. He fell approximately 2000 feet.

David Lowe and his party had climbed the Hotlum-Wintun route on the northeast side of the mountain. Lowe, and many in his party, had very little climbing experience. Although this route is not technically difficult, it does have steep sections and crosses above hazardous areas on the Wintun Glacier. On their descent, he decided to glissade wearing his crampons and his ice ax leashed to his wrist. About 13,500 feet on a 40-45-degree slope, the heels of his crampons caught, tumbling him into an out of control fall. He came to rest at about 11,500 feet, where the slope had decreased to about 30 degrees. This area was right above a cliff over the Wintun Ice Fall.

His party summoned help from a commercially guided Sierra Wilderness Seminars trip. Two guides, Miller and Rodriguez, responded and used their cell phone to contact search and rescue around 1430. They assessed and stabilized Lowe's injuries. He had abrasions all over his upper body, and his ice ax had entered his thigh just below his pelvis and exited near his knee. It was deep in his leg and their concerns were that he had ruptured his femoral artery.

USFS Climbing Ranger, Harrington, who was at 10,400 feet on the south side of the mountain, was contacted and responded through whiteout conditions. He arrived at the scene at 1630 and found the injuries to be stable and bleeding under control. Lowe showed no signs of shock. They continued to monitor his condition waiting for air transport. A volunteer from Siskiyou County Search and Rescue arrived at the scene at 1900, and they wrapped Lowe in sleeping bags to maintain his body temperature. At 2030, a California Department of Forestry Bell Super 205 short-hauled Lowe in a litter with an attendant. He was taken to a lower elevation where he was transferred to the

California Highway Patrol helicopter and then transported to Mercy Medical Center, Mount Shasta. Luckily, the ice ax had done little damage internally.

### **Analysis**

The USFS Climbing Rangers and the retail shops that rent mountaineering equipment for Mount Shasta work hard every season to educate climbers about the use of ice axes and crampons. Unfortunately, every year there are accidents on Mount Shasta from improper use of equipment, even after people have been informed. Glissading with crampons can be hazardous to your health! Usually, leg fractures occur from this type of accident, but amazingly, Lowe had no fractures.

An added note is that cloudy conditions and the time of day made this rescue difficult. (Source: Eric White, Matt Hill—USFS Climbing Rangers, and Michael Massari—SWS)

## **PROTECTION PULLED OUT—FALL ON ROCK**

### **California, Yosemite Valley, Middle Cathedral Rock**

On July 12th at 1:00 p.m., a fisherman in Yosemite Valley reported seeing two climbers fall from high on Middle Cathedral Rock. After speaking with this witness, I hiked up to the base of the wall, where I found the bodies of Myra Eldridge of Boulder, CO, and Thomas Dunwiddie (ages unknown) of Denver, CO, just east of the Direct North Buttress route.

No one else witnessed the accident. Its exact cause will never be known, but certain things are clear from the condition of the climbers' equipment at the time they were found.

The team was leading with two 9mm ropes, and both climbers were properly tied to both ropes. Dunwiddie was equipped as leader, with each of his two ropes passing through Eldridge's belay device (an ATC). About 25 feet of each lead rope separated the two climbers; no lead protection was found on either rope.

Their anchor—which appears to have pulled in its entirety during the accident—consisted of the following. One  $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch Alien and one #4 Black Diamond Stopper were clove-hitched together to one of the lead ropes approximately three feet from Eldridge's tie-in point. Two double-stem Camalots, .5 and .75, were each independently clove-hitched about a foot and a half apart on the other lead rope with 15 inches separating the lower piece from Eldridge's tie-in point. There was no evidence that bolts or other fixed protection were involved in the anchor.

All of the anchor pieces were severely damaged, though it is impossible to know whether that damage occurred when they were pulled out or during the fall and final impact. Nevertheless, the two Camalots were each bent in a similar way suggestive of a severe downward force after being placed in a vertical crack.

A loose quick-draw and a few carabiners were also found at the base. Their original purpose could not be determined, and they may have simply unclipped from the falling climbers—a common occurrence.