

when you're learning and then scale back as you gain skill than to learn the hard way. If nothing else, it gives the teacher something to critique.

Amy describes Ric as a natural athlete and seemingly fearless. Being on a relatively easy route may have given him too much confidence. This is pretty common among good athletes—until their first serious mishap.

It is indisputable that helmets prevent serious trauma from falls. Ric's was one of four serious accidents in Yosemite in 2004 affected by not wearing a helmet. [See McFalls (Royal Arches) and Singh (Lembert Dome) in this issue of ANAM.]

Amy pointed out later that she should have been anchored as she belayed. The belay ledge is big enough to walk around on safely, but she could have been injured and even dropped Ric as she was yanked upward into the wall. Furthermore, if Ric's pieces had failed, she could have been pulled off the ledge to the ground. Some climbers argue that anchoring the belayer increases the force on the protection, but that is dubious justification for risking the belayer, and one would not often apply that logic beyond the first pitch. If there is that much concern about the quality of the protection, the leader should place pieces closer together or assess whether or not to continue climbing.

Regardless of the situation, a first aid course like Wilderness First Responder, coupled with the self-rescue skills mentioned above, provide the tools to make informed, even though risky, decisions and to carry them out. (Source: Amy Painter and John Dill, NPS Ranger, Yosemite National Park)

## **FALL ON SNOW—INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT, OFF ROUTE, PARTY SEPARATED**

### **California, High Sierra, Mount Ritter, Southeast Glacier**

On August 9 the body of Otto Loenneker was found by Mono County Mountain Search and Rescue at the base of the Southeast Glacier on Mount Ritter.

Otto and his partner, John Dickinson, arrived at the base of Mount Ritter late morning of August 8. Their plan that day was to scout a route to the base of the Southeast Pinnacle, then return to basecamp. The "official" route ascends the 1,000 foot lower gully to the Southeast Pinnacle at the base of Ritter's Southeast Glacier, traverses north and back west around the edge of the glacier to Owen's Chute, then approaches the summit from the southwest. As they approached the gully, Otto and John disagreed about the location of the lower gully, with Otto starting up a line farther to the northwest. They agreed to rejoin at the base of the Southeast Pinnacle. When John arrived at the point where the route traverses, he looked down and saw Otto about 500 to 1,000 feet below him in the lower gully and assumed that his line had topped out on this other gully and that he had retreated to a point where he switched to the lower gully. John built a cairn to mark the turning point, then continued the traverse to a small snowfield below the Southeast Glacier. This was the last time he saw Otto alive.

Upon retracing his path, he did not encounter Otto and assumed that he had returned to basecamp. Not finding him there, he waited out the night in camp, then hiked out the next morning and requested SAR assistance. By 4:00 p.m. that afternoon, the Mono County Mountain SAR team, after several passes around Mounts Banner and Ritter in an Air National Guard Blackhawk, had a faint spotting on the lower portion of the Southeast Glacier. One team was put in lower down and climbed to the scene to find Otto's body in the rocks at the base of the glacier. A second team was inserted just before dark, to assist in packaging and lowering to a safe landing zone. All were retrieved the following morning.

### **Analysis**

The most likely assessment of the events of that day is that Otto continued climbing up, missing the landmarks for the northwest traverse and instead headed up a steep gully to the east of the Southeast Pinnacle. This gully exits high on the glacier. It may have appeared to Otto that the glacier was partially snow-covered; however, it was in fact hard sastrugi. At this point, Otto, not seeing his partner John, may have believed that contrary to plan, he had gone for the summit that day. Regardless, despite lack of crampons and ice ax, he attempted to traverse high across the 35-degree glacier. At some point he lost his footing and slid approximately 500 feet into the rocks.

Teams should be extremely cautious about splitting up, especially when on unfamiliar terrain. The conditions high on the Southeast Glacier, which Otto attempted to traverse, were hard ice laced with encrusted rock shards. Faced with such conditions, without proper equipment and contrary to agreed upon plans, Otto should have retreated. (Source: Craig Knoche, Mono County Mountain SAR)

## **FALL ON ROCK, WEATHER, INADEQUATE PROTECTION—RAPPEL ANCHOR CAME OFF, INADEQUATE EQUIPMENT**

### **California, High Sierra, Middle Palisade**

At 4:15 a.m. on August 14, experienced climbers Alfred Fordiani (43) and Dave Brummund (42) left their Brainard Lake camp with a choice of climbs depending on the weather, which had been unsettled for the past several days. If excellent weather, they would attempt the Eagle Face of Norman Clyde Peak (5.4, approximately 1,000 feet of technical climbing, descent by 3rd/4th class NF/NNE ridge); or in the event of iffy weather, they would attempt the East Face of Middle Palisade (3rd class).

At 8:00 a.m. the weather looked excellent, and the pair traversed the knife-edged lowest section of Norman Clyde's NNE ridge onto the Eagle Face, avoiding the first cliff band directly above the Middle Pal Glacier. They started up the face climbing with rock shoes and a single 60-meter rope, leaving boots, ice ax, and crampons by the big snowfield on the face of Norman Clyde.