

probably would not have missed the minor trauma to my head. After the rescue I was told they probably would have extracted me sooner had they known about the head injury. I ended with a fractured calcaneus and talus (which was also dislocated) and severely sprained ankle.

We want to see ourselves—and others—in our best moments. However, it is our failures that often truly shape us. Warren Harding climbed The Nose in part because he missed out on the first ascent of Half Dome. I failed to climb El Capitan this time. But I have learned more about my goals and what motivates me than I have in a long time. (Source: Edited from a report written by Jason Seymour – 26)

STRANDED, FATIGUE, INADEQUATE WATER, INEXPERIENCE

California, Yosemite Valley, Royal Arches

On July 3, Cindy Lu (32) and I, Leo Wu (35), climbed Royal Arches. Despite it being our first really long climb, it had gone well. After starting at 5:30 a.m. we reached the first rappel at 4:30 p.m. Sunset was at 8:30 p.m., and we expected to be down in an hour or two, so we had plenty of daylight. We were happy and confident and looking forward to dinner, but by this time we were also exhausted and dehydrated. We had spent a long and very hot day in the sun with two liters of water each (plus keeping a third liter each in reserve for the descent), and we were climbing on three hours of sleep for each of the last three days, due mostly to travel from the East Coast.

We had no problems until we got to our seventh rappel, where there is only a tree with a bunch of slings and rap rings. Since all of the previous stations had been two or three-bolt anchors, I was expecting the same thing every time, so when I saw the tree anchor but no bolts, I thought I was off route. We were using double 60-m ropes so we had skipped a few anchors on the descent and no longer knew which rappel we were on. I figured we were OK because one station must lead to another, and since all the previous rappels had been straight down, I assumed this one would be too. (As we learned much later, we were at station No. 9 [SuperTopo] and should have rappelled down a ramp to the right, as shown on the topo.)

If I read the topo at all while I was at the tree I didn't figure it out. All I had in my mind was that I was off route but had a rappel station and two 60-m ropes, so I should be okay. I was so sure of myself that I never considered exploring the ramp. I told Cindy it might take a while to find the next station, and then I started rappelling. I didn't see anything for quite a distance, but that had been the case with earlier rappels, so I wasn't concerned. Finally, I saw two bolts with several slings directly below me, with an easy rappel from there to the huge ledge that is one rappel from the ground. So that had to be the right anchor, but when I got there, the ropes were two feet short, even with rope stretch. I had tied them together with two flat

overhand bends with free ends maybe half a meter long, which I thought explained the shortage.

I considered ascending the rope back to the tree and exploring elsewhere. I had the basic knowledge to do that though I wasn't very skilled. But I was so sure this was the right anchor and I was so tired that I just wanted to get to the Valley. I extended the ropes with slings and tied the ends of the slings to my harness in case I fell. By shifting my weight temporarily to a friction hitch tied around the ropes, I managed to disconnect my rappel device and drop down hand over hand to the bolts. However, once my weight transferred from the ropes to the anchor, the ropes retracted up. I thought, "Wow, I screwed up. My plan is not going to work."

I didn't have a plan for the next step and I decided it was safer for Cindy to stay up by the tree until I figured out what to do. Perhaps an hour after I had left her, I called to her to stay where she was but we couldn't understand each other because of the wind. She thought I was yelling, "Cindy...rappel," so she started down after my tension was off the ropes. When she was halfway down she finally realized it was, "Cindy, do not rappel!"

When we could communicate—barely—I told her to stop and that I'd screwed up and didn't know what to do. We talked for a long time about our options and none of our options seemed right. I didn't want to make another mistake. It was almost dark as well, so we decided that Cindy would join me and we'd look for a way to retrieve the ropes. She came down and got onto the anchor. There were no footholds and we were crammed together hanging from the bolts only two pitches from the Valley floor. We tried to think of ways to get the ropes but I figured that it would either be risky in the dark or not possible, so I decided the only way out was to call for help.

We started flashing our headlamps. Someone near the hotel spotted us and soon the rangers were below us with a loudspeaker. They asked us if we needed help, and of course we said, "Yes" and told them we were uninjured. They asked if we were safe on our anchor (we were) and if we could stay the night.

We were very uncomfortable all night and shifted our positions every ten minutes to move the pressure points from our harnesses and maintain circulation in our feet. We got a little chilly despite our jackets and we were very thirsty. Even though we had one bottle of water left, we didn't dare to drink much, not knowing when the rescue would come. The worst for me were feelings of disappointment that I had made a bad decision and guilt from putting Cindy into this situation.

About 6:00 a.m. the next morning, two SAR guys free-climbed above us, rigged their ropes to a tree a little farther down the ramp, and rappelled to us. When we got down, Cindy and I had a big breakfast at the hotel and then slept until noon. By the next day my mood had improved. We climbed Nutcracker and enjoyed it as much as Royal Arches.

Analysis

As you can tell from the Leo's narrative, he and Cindy came away with lots of valuable take-home points. Here they are, along with some NPS comments:

- If you're relying on a topo then consult it thoroughly – but don't trust it blindly. As they learned much later, "We were at station No. 9 and should have rappelled down a ramp to the right."
- If your ropes come up short, either the anchor below or the one you're hanging from may be off route.
- Be aware of your mental state and that of your partner: tired, hungry, thirsty, frustrated, and/or focusing on home.
- Competence at ascending your rope is a core survival skill. To their credit, Leo and Cindy had at least introduced themselves to ascending with friction hitches, but they were inefficient at it and dead tired. Even after committing to his jury-rigged sling extensions—the ends of which he had wisely clipped to himself—he could have reversed his course with various rigging tricks.
- When they got home, Leo and Cindy bought family band radios. These may be the most reliable communication devices for climbs since they are independent of a network but cell phones may be better for seeking help where there's a chance you'll have service. If weight isn't an issue take both.
- A follower needs competency with every skill while protecting on the lead, including route finding, building anchors, rigging rappels, and ascending the rope.
- Leo felt he should have waited until he had more experience before trying Royal Arches. (Sources: Leo Wu and Cindy Lu; and John Dill, NPS Ranger.)

(John Dill: A similar incident occurred at the same anchor in November 2007, but while trying to reach the bolts the rappeller fell off her ropes and was seriously injured. See *ANAM 2008*.)

FALL ON ROCK, INADEQUATE PROTECTION, COMPLACENCY California, Yosemite Valley, The Rostrum

On August 12th, my long time climbing partner (27) and I, Bud Miller (27), set off to climb the 1000-foot North Face of The Rostrum (8 pitches, IV 5.11c). The route was new to both of us and sure to push our limits, but it's considered relatively safe due to its protectable cracks and steep, clean falls. Although we weren't confident of on-sighting the route, at the worst we might take a few short falls.

To get to the route, you hike/rappel a steep gulley to the base, then after climbing to the top, it is a short hike up to the road. There seemed to be no reason to bring our approach shoes so we grabbed our gear and descended bare-foot.

Tommy took a short fall leading the 5.11 crux of Pitch 2, and I needed plenty of expletives to follow it. However, as self-proclaimed 5.10