

this difficulty without ever falling, so I had begun to think I never would. Climbers usually place less gear on easier terrain but I discovered the hard way a reason for caution. (Source: Bud Miller and John Dill, NPS Ranger)

(NPS comment: Here are two other reasons for protecting more often: First, ratings are subjective. You never know, especially in Yosemite, when the rater's "5.9" pitch will surprise you. Second, placements fail, sometimes from user error and sometimes from an unnoticed fracture in the rock. The latter is true of handholds as well.)

FALL ON ROCK, OFF ROUTE, PARTY SEPARATED - CLIMBING ALONE, INADEQUATE CLOTHING, EXCEEDING ABILITIES

California, Kings Canyon National Park, Thunderbolt Peak

On August 21, Robert Levin (62), Steven Most (60's), and Mathew Most (20s) hiked from South Lake to camp in Dusy Basin in Kings Canyon National Park planning to climb Thunderbolt Peak (14,003-feet) in the Palisades via the Southwest Chute #2 route. After acclimating for two nights the group began their climb on the morning of August 23. They intended to climb a class 3 or 4 route without technical equipment. The group appears to have erroneously taken the Northwest Chute (class 4) on Starlight Peak rather than their planned route. About 1230 on August 23, Steven and Matt Most turned back because they felt the route was too exposed and more difficult than they were capable of. They attempted to convince Levin to join them, to no avail. Levin was determined to reach the summit and continued on without them. Two hours after the group separated, the Mosts heard Levin yelling, "Help!" from up on the peak.

Knowing neither the nature of Levin's predicament nor feeling technically capable of ascending the peak to assist, Mathew Most hiked to the trailhead to seek assistance while Steven Most remained near the base of the mountain at 11,000 feet.

A ranger hiked in on the morning of the 24th. The ranger heard occasional yells of "help" coming from below Thunderbolt Peak. Levin had spent the night alone, injured, with no equipment on a wall below the summit. He was wearing shorts, shirt, hat, and mountaineering boots. He had with him a fanny pack with one water bottle, energy bars and chocolate.

Levin was located after two hours of aerial searching in the vicinity of the West Rib route. He was perched on a two-foot sloping ledge, having fallen vertically over 100 feet.

Rangers Johnson and Corrao climbed fifth class terrain and reached Levin by 1800, thirty hours after the accident. He was dehydrated and hypothermic. Rangers stabilized him and due to approaching darkness prepared to lower him 100 feet into a sandy chute to bivy until a technical lower could be completed the following day. When a window of calm wind arrived, Levin was flown solo in a Bauman Screamer Suit

to Ranger Erika Jostad at Barrett Lakes, packaged inside the helicopter, and flown to a hospital in Bishop, CA as dark descended.

He had suffered a concussion, open tibia-fibula fracture, and humerus fracture when he landed on his left side. Levin's humorous injury was surgically repaired. His left foot and lower leg were ultimately amputated due to the severity of the injuries and time elapsed between onset and treatment.

Analysis

Two of the three climbers recognized early on they had exceeded their abilities and equipment and were possibly off their intended route. Levin had lessened his safety net when he continued the summit attempt solo. The climber was unequipped for the terrain and was ultimately well off route on the descent. (Source: Ranger Erika Jostad, Kings Canyon National Park)

(Editor's Note: Each year we include one or two incidents in which biking turns into a climbing situation. See Oregon, North Sister for another example.)

FALL ON ROCK – RAPPEL/LOWERING ERROR, POOR COMMUNICATION, HASTE

California, Tuolumne Meadows, Low Profile Dome

On September 12, Jody (27) and Karen (24) spent the day climbing in Tuolumne Meadows with friends Dan and Sanjay. In the afternoon they all hiked up to Low Profile Dome, a few minutes from the road. Jody and Karen climbed the Golfer's Route (5.7) while Dan led Family Affair (5.9) just to their left, and then Sanjay and Karen each followed Family Affair on a top-rope. (The two climbs share the same bolted anchor at the top of the routes about 180 feet above the ground and the top rope consisted of two climbing ropes tied together.) Finally, Jody top-roped Family Affair while Karen belayed from the ground. There were thunderstorms in the area and it was beginning to sprinkle; people were packing their gear and Jody recalls being in a hurry to finish the pitch and get down.

When she reached the top, Jody clipped to the anchor with a sling and called, "Off Belay." Then she untied, fed the rope through the anchor, retied it to her harness, and cleaned the party's gear from the anchor. Karen had been lowered from the climb previously, so Jody assumed she would also be lowered. She remembers calling, "I'm ready," and hearing Karen reply, "Okay."

At the base, Karen, Sanjay, and Dan heard Jody yell, "Off Belay." Karen replied "Belay Off" and removed the climbing rope from her belay device. She assumed that Jody would rappel since they had done that earlier in the day. No one on the ground remembers hearing Jody call, "I'm ready," or Karen responding "Okay." According to Karen and Sanjay, a few minutes after Jody called, "Off Belay," she yelled, "You got me?" Immediately after that— before Karen could say anything or put her back on belay— Jody screamed and fell. Somehow she stopped about 70 feet below the anchor, striking the back of her head on the rock.