



Rappel Error, Stranded - Off Route, Unable to Reascend Rappel Rope, Inexperience

California, Yosemite Valley, The Nose

On August 4, Richard (18) and Chris (19) attempted to rappel the established Nose rappel route (20+ rappels) from the summit of El Capitan. They felt they weren't ready to climb El Cap, but after seeking advice on Supertopo.com they had decided the rappel was within their capabilities. They got a rope stuck near the top (apparently forgot to remove a knot) and decided to cut it, leaving them two ropes. The correct rappel from Camp V (about a third of the way down) wasn't obvious, so Richard decided to rappel straight down, while the proper line followed the climbing route a short distance to the right. He was unable to reach an anchor and eventually found himself at the lip of the Great Roof.

The normal procedure in this situation is to climb the rope back to the anchor and explore a different direction, but Richard was unable to ascend, possibly due to a combination of inexperience and lack of gear—he'd left his ascenders with Chris at Camp V, although he did have prusiks. Chris offered to descend to help him, but after struggling on his own and getting nowhere, Richard requested a rescue. The NPS tried to coach him up his lines via FRS radio from the Valley floor, but he was weakening, low on water, and helpless. The rangers were worried he might succumb, so the SAR team lowered on ropes from the summit and rescued both of them. (Source: John Dill, NPS Ranger.)

Analysis

Space in Accidents does not permit a full description and analysis of this incident. There's a very long thread on Supertopo.com (climbers-forum/1886785/ Rappelling-El-Capitan), starting with Chris asking other climbers for advice prior to the attempt, and including Chris' subsequent account of the incident.

Each member is responsible for assuring the other is skilled and equipped. This may mean doing shorter descents to develop and assess skills before trying El Cap. Just as much could go wrong, but the climbers would be less isolated. (Source: John Dill, NPS Ranger.)

Images

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