



AAC Publications

Stranded, Rappel Error - Forgot To Untie Knot

California, Yosemite National Park, Royal Arches

On July 26, Ted (25) and Stephanie (23) climbed Royal Arches (Grade III 5.7 A0). They started at 10:30 a.m. Ted, with 4.5 years of experience versus Stephanie's one year, was the team leader. The climb took a lot longer than they expected, so they didn't begin the rappels until 1 a.m. on the 27th. They were climbing with one 60-meter rope, and when Ted set up the first rappel he tied knots in the ends of the rope. At the bottom of the first rappel, they pulled the rope, forgetting to untie the knot in the end they released. The knot got stuck in the anchor above. Ted thought about trying to ascend the stuck rope while tied to the end they still had, but the terrain between him and the anchor above looked like a "5.14 slab," it was dark, and even with their headlamps there were no visible opportunities for protection. The summer night was relatively warm and they each had a shell jacket, so they decided it was safest to wait until morning and then call for help. At 6 a.m. Ted called 911. Rescuers climbed the route and rappelled with Ted and Stephanie to the ground.

Analysis

Ted and Stephanie made the common mistake of getting a late start on an "easy" but long multi-pitch climb. Climbers who know the Royal Arches well often complete the route in eight hours or less. However, the climb involves 15 pitches of complex routefinding, a pendulum maneuver, and several traverses. As a result, parties with limited trad experience are frequently benighted. Starting early gives you more daylight to deal with potential snafus such as the dreaded knot jam, and there may even be another party above to drop your stuck rope to you. Finally, the more mentally and physically tired you are, the more likely you are to make mistakes. (Source: Ted and Jesse McGahey, NPS Ranger.)

Images

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