



AAC Publications

Inadequate Water, Fatigue, Unfamiliar With Descent

California, Yosemite National Park, Royal Arches, North Dome Gully

On August 13, Mike (21) and Russell (19) climbed Royal Arches (15 pitches, 5.7 A0). They finished late in the day, hiked along the rim to Washington Column, and began their descent via the North Dome Gully climbers' trail shortly before dusk. By this time they were almost out of water and feeling dehydrated. Near the top of the gully they encountered a short, exposed, fourth- or fifth-class slab that gave them the impression they had lost the trail, so they called 911, reported their situation, and asked for advice.

At the ranger's suggestion, they retraced their steps to the top of the Column and then called again for directions. It appeared they had been on the correct descent, or close to it, but Mike was so fatigued from climbing all day and from lack of water that he was reluctant to cross the slab even with a belay. They had enough food and clothing for the night, so they agreed to bivouac on the summit. In the morning, two Yosemite SAR team members hiked up the gully, provided them with food and water, and guided them back to the valley floor. The descent required some short belays and rappels for safety. No medical care was necessary.

Analysis

Mike and Russell got their descent information from [Yosemite Valley Free Climbs \(Supertopo\)](#). In retrospect, Russell believes that trying to navigate North Dome Gully without prior experience was a mistake, a concern the guidebook emphasizes. They were wise to back off when fatigued and heading into night, since the gully is tricky all the way down, even when you are on route. Russell also speculates that it may have been easier and safer to descend the Royal Arches rappel route. However, these rappels have their own routefinding challenges, and mistakes come easily to tired or hurried rappellers. (See [previous report](#).)

These climbers had headlamps and enough gear for a safe bivouac, but they did not have enough water for a long day of climbing and a tricky descent. Royal Arches faces south and 100° F temperatures are common in August; even cooler weather dries you out quickly while climbing. (Source: Ben Doyle, NPS Ranger.)

Images

Article Details

Author	
Publication	ANAM
Volume	10
Issue	67
Page	43
Copyright Date	2014
Article Type	Accident reports