



## AAC Publications

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### **Stranded – Stuck Rappel Rope**

California, Yosemite Valley, Royal Arches

**On June 8, Chad and Ben started up Royal Arches (III 5.7 A0). Both were experienced climbers, with two years of trad experience around the 5.7/5.8 level.** The team started climbing around 9 a.m., and they reached the final anchors at 8:45 p.m. They then had the option of descending via the North Dome Gully or the Royal Arches rappel route. The party opted to rappel and began the 18 single-rope rappels to the valley floor.

They were prepared with two headlamps, lightweight jackets, arm warmers, a basic first-aid kit, two cell phones, and six liters of water for the day. At 10:30 p.m., they completed their fifth rappel. However, while pulling the rope, it got stuck at the anchor above them. They now only had one end of the rope, and steep, unprotected slab separated them from the upper anchor. They chose not to climb the unprotected face with the remaining slack or to ascend the rope.

Chad and Ben called for a rescue with one of their phones. Yosemite Search and Rescue was busy on a serious call, so the pair spent the night at the anchor on a six-inch-wide ledge. The following morning, two members of YOSAR climbed Royal Arches and rappelled from above to access the stranded climbers' rope. They discovered a giant slip knot that had formed while the climbers were pulling the rappel rope; the knot had gotten stuck at the rap rings. The rescuers untied the knot, and together the four continued rappelling to the base.

### **ANALYSIS**

Making a long series of rappels late into the night is a nerve-wracking exercise. Improve your odds of smooth pulls by noting where the anchors are located, the terrain where the rope will run, and how the rope is placed through the anchors. Pull the rope slowly in the direction and angle that will yield the cleanest drop. While one person pulls the rope, the other can watch for knots, snarls, or serious twists.

If the rope gets stuck at the anchor above, the climbers must decide whether to ascend the rope, lead back to the anchor using whatever rope and protection are available, continue to descend with whatever rope can be salvaged, or wait for help. Every situation is different, and Chad and Ben were well prepared for the decision they made, with extra layers, headlamps, sufficient water, and cell phones to call for help. (Source: Yosemite National Park Climbing Rangers and the Editors.)

## Images



Knot that formed while pulling a rappel rope, forcing a pair of climbers to spend the night at a six-inch ledge below.

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