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Fall on 4th-Class Rock — Climbing Unroped

California, High Sierra, Palisades

On May 31, Vik Waghray (24) fell to his death while traversing from Temple Crag to Mt. Gayley. He and Michael Layton (45) were attempting the long and arduous Temple- Gayley-Sill-Thunderbolt traverse.

The pair had summited Temple Crag and were on their way to Gayley. While scrambling unroped on 4th-class terrain, Layton, concerned about the loose rock, warned Waghray to maintain three points of contact. Shortly after this, Waghray either slipped or dislodged a rock, falling 2,000 feet to his death.

ANALYSIS

While climbing unroped comes with its own set of risks, it is a huge time saver and a necessary technique to succeed on long alpine routes. Doing so entails extra focus over an extended period of time. Layton, a veteran of many long routes in the High Sierra, cautions climbers against trusting guidebooks or other climbers' trip reports too much, as he contends that such resources don't convey the danger and looseness of the terrain. In 2014, a solo climber from Chicago was found dead after attempting the Temple-Gayley-Thunderbolt traverse. (Source: Michael Layton.)

Images

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