



AAC Publications

LONG LEADER FALL—Off Route

California, Yosemite National Park, Half Dome

On August 1 at 1:58 p.m., Yosemite Dispatch received a 911 call from Jack Evans (male, 20s) stating that his climbing partner, Anna Parsons (female, 21), had taken a fall of approximately 80 feet on the third pitch of Snake Dike (8 pitches, 5.7). Evans said the climber was weighting the rope, was out of sight, was responsive, and had an injured ankle. He was otherwise unsure of her condition.

The two climbers had started early on August 1. The climb was going well until Parsons, who was leading, climbed the bolt-protected crux and then inadvertently continued past the two-bolt second pitch belay. This part of the route involves run-out climbing with poor, smeary feet. Upon realizing her error, Parsons began downclimbing. She slipped on a tenuous friction slab.

Extracting the injured climber by helicopter was the obvious choice, given the remote location of the accident. A team of two rescuers was flown above Parsons, then lowered from the helicopter to an established bolt anchor. One of the rescuers lowered a second (equipped with medical gear and litter) to the patient, who was quickly provided care. Parsons had sustained numerous injuries, including a traumatic open leg fracture that eventually led to an amputation in the hospital. Once initial medical care was provided, the single rescuer and climber were lowered to the ground at the base of the route. Parsons was then short-hauled via helicopter to Ahwahnee Meadow and transferred to an air ambulance for the flight to a hospital.

ANALYSIS

Snake Dike is a classic route up the southwest shoulder of Half Dome. It is known for its beautiful, namesake dike—an igneous intrusion—that slithers up roughly 1,500 feet. Countless climbers come to Yosemite for what many argue is the best 5.7 in the Valley. Despite its moderate grade, Snake Dike is by no means casual. After completing the long approach, climbers are faced with about 2,000 feet of very run-out slab climbing. Some points to consider:

Don't be fooled by easy grades. While the technical grade of 5.7 may be relatively easy, the route's grade III commitment factor adds up. Most climbers are familiar with the YDS grades used in climbing gyms and on smaller crags. The YDS grade, however, does not indicate the required experience, endurance, and physical hazards of the overall climb. Snake Dike's grade III indicates it is an all-day endeavor. Don't overlook the commitment grade for climbs in an area like Yosemite.

Prepare for bigger routes. Snake Dike is known for friction slabs and run-out climbing. If Snake Dike is your dream, think about doing the necessary preparation. Seek out easy, less committing slab routes and practice climbing on easy run-out terrain. The principles of preparation apply to all climbs.

Practice self-rescue skills. Fortunately, these climbers had cell phones and a nearby SAR team. What if they were in an area with no cell service? Suddenly they would be faced with a very different situation. With no one to call for help, it would be up to them to rescue themselves. Having the skills to rescue yourself and climbing partners can be a literal life saver. (Sources: Yosemite National Park Climbing Rangers and Climbing.com.)

Images



The southwest face of Half Dome. The barely visible dot in the red circle is a team of climbers at the second pitch belay of Snake Dike. In August 2022, Anna Parsons fell from the slab above, after unknowingly climbing past the belay.

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