

Quiet season so far for Yosemite rescue teams

By Patty Guerra, McClatchy Newspapers

YOSEMITE – A hiker who instinctively grabbed for a falling radio slid down Half Dome, stopping when a ledge broke his fall. Fellow hikers on Yosemite's most iconic hike took apart the cables to rescue the man, a 56-year-old from San Jose, when he fell June 22.

It was a dramatic moment in what has been a fairly quiet year for the park's emergency teams.

"This year we have actually had very few search and rescue incidents and fatalities," said Kari Cobb, Yosemite spokeswoman. "Last year at this time we had quite a bit more than what we have now."

Last year, 15 people had died at the park by the middle of August, including a woman hiking Half Dome and three Central Valley residents swept over Vernal Fall during a day trip.

The thundering waterfalls that helped attract 4 million visitors last year have slowed significantly this year after a drier-than-usual winter.

"Last year, we received 199 percent of normal snowpack," Cobb said. "This year, we barely received 50 percent. There's a vast difference in amount of water flowing through, particularly in Yosemite Valley."

Falls that haven't stopped since August 2010 are now little more than a steady drip.

"Yosemite Falls still has a little stream of water coming down," Cobb said Friday. "But it will definitely be dry in the next couple of weeks. Last year, it didn't go dry at all."

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