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December 26, 2006

Service offers climbing at Lovers Leap and beyond

Amanda Fehd,
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 August 18, 2006

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Twenty miles West of South Shore, a large cliff called Lovers Leap looms over the American River canyon, a climbers playground off the beaten Tahoe path.

Adrenaline junkies flock here each summer, using the historic Pony Express Trail to access the Leap's 300- to 600-foot granite facade, which offers hundreds of routes for everyone from beginners to experts.

"The quality of the granite is superb, the texture and nature of the routes is very friendly," said Scott Brown, co-owner of California Alpine Guides. "The Leap offers good multi-pitch terrain, because it's not too hard and not too easy."

Jim Grant / Tahoe Daily Tribune / Scott Brown with California Alpine Guides checks his gear before starting a climb at Lovers Leap.



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Scott Brown of California Alpine Guides leads a route at Lovers Leap about 20 miles west of South Lake Tahoe.

The Sierra is speckled with guide services, but California Alpine Guides launched last fall with a mission to offer the farthest reaching services in the state, providing mountaineering trips, rock climbing and ski-trekking from Mount Shasta to Joshua Tree National Park.

They knew they wanted Lovers Leap on that list, and now operate there under a permit through another guide company.

People hire a guide because they want professional instruction and an experienced partner, said Dave Miller, co-owner.

Client Ted Lenzie, an engineer with the state of California, said a guide's expertise helps him meet certain challenges.

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"If you are with your friends, and you hit something that is above your skill level, it's really difficult to get through," he said. "With Scott or Dave, you know it's humanly possible if you watch them do it."

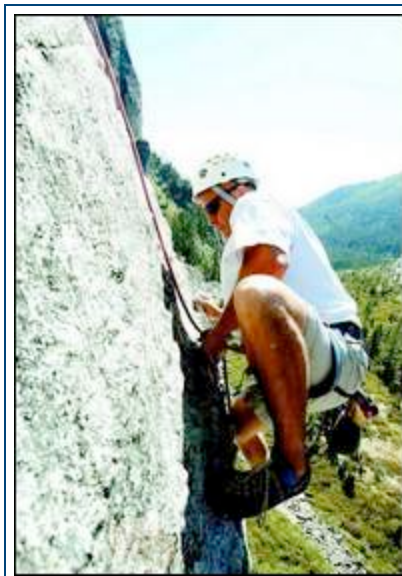
Brown, 32, and Miller, 42, belong to a rare breed that feels more at home in the vertical world than the flatlands.

Aside from summitting "fourteeners" Mount Shasta and Mount Whitney more than a hundred times in their guiding careers, they belong to the small cadre of climbers who have summited 3,000-foot El Capitan in Yosemite Valley in less than a day. They've pulled that trick on almost a dozen big wall climbs in Yosemite.



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Photos by Jim Grant/Tahoe Daily Tribune / Jack Favaloro, a client of California Alpine Guides, follows a route at Lovers Leap.



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Favaloro switches handholds, as the historic Pony Express Trail winds westward a few hundred feet below him.

"I like the freedom of climbing, the freedom of movement, and the feeling you get when you climb," Miller said. "And I like to challenge myself, to see how far I can go with it safely."

Because of the sport's inherent risks, a calm and focused mind is key.

"It brings immediate, demanding focus to the present moment," Brown said. "You are required to keep yourself from taking the big plunge, so all the other worries in life seem secondary. You have to focus intensely, or you won't succeed at it and make it through those challenges."

Brown and Miller are certified rock guides through the America Mountain Guides Association, an organization that sets standards for professional guiding services in America.

The professionalization of guiding makes their clients more comfortable.

"I've had quite a few different guide companies, and I've seen some push the safety envelope," Lenzie said. "The professionalism of this company is quite a bit different than the others."

Breakout:

Contact California Alpine Guides at (877) 686-2546

Services: Instruction and trips include rock climbing, ice climbing, mountaineering, and trans-Sierra ski touring from Mount Shasta to Joshua Tree National Park

Visit: CaliforniaAlpineGuides.com

Multipitch rock climbing, essential gear:

-- Harness, belay device, rock shoes, chalk bag, rope, cleaning or "nut" tool, 60-meter rope, carabiners,

slings and cordelette

n For ascending the rock, called "leading", modern protective gear comes in two categories: mechanical camming devices that expand against the rock with downward pressure, and passive protection, called "nuts," that lodge into a constricted area

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