



## AAC Publications

---

### **Fall on Rock - Rappel Error**

California, Yosemite Valley, El Capitan, East Ledges Descent

On June 17, a 51-year-old male French climber was rappelling one of the descent lines on the East Ledges of El Capitan. On the final rappel he fell 30 feet to the ground, injuring his ankle. Details are not clear because of the language barrier, but here is our best guess at what happened, based on a translation of a brief conversation with the subject.

We think he was rappelling with a descent device (type unknown) while carrying a fairly lightweight haul sack on his shoulders. His ropes did not reach the ground, but he was able to reach a fixed line that did. Unfortunately, no stance was available and the wall was steep, so he had to transfer from his original ropes to the fixed line while suspended and weighting either his original rappel device or an autoblock that was tied underneath it.

With the fixed line, he tied a Munter hitch on a carabiner on his harness, transferred his weight to it, disassembled his original rappel rig, and continued down. Somehow the Munter opened the gate of its carabiner and the rope popped out, and he fell the remaining 30 feet to the ground. The haul sack absorbed some of the blow, but he injured his ankle severely enough—a probable fracture—that he had to be rescued by helicopter short-haul.

### **Analysis**

The climber lives in Chamonix where he is, or was, a member of a SAR team for more than 30 years. He did climb El Cap, so we can assume he is experienced.

We are sure he was using the Munter hitch but not sure if it was on the fixed line or on the original ropes; however, the scenario above makes the most sense, and the translation implies that. We don't know if the failure occurred as he was making the transfer or later, while rappelling on the fixed line. We don't know whether the carabiner was a single non-locker, a locker, etc. The point to be made here is that a Munter hitch should always be used with a locking carabiner.

We think the autoblock was on the original rope, below his descent device, and holding his weight. This would have kept his descent device under tension, preventing him from removing the device to rig it on the fixed rope, which would have led him to rig the Munter. That should not have caused the accident, however. More likely is that he depended on a non-locking carabiner for the Munter. (Source: John Dill, NPS Ranger.)

## Images

## Article Details

Author	
Publication	ANAM
Volume	10
Issue	66
Page	37
Copyright Date	2013
Article Type	Accident reports