



AAC Publications

Fall on Rock - Inadequate Belay, Lowering Error

California, Yosemite Valley, Churchbowl

On July 18 a male leader (20) had climbed Uncle Fanny (one pitch, 5.7) on a 60-meter rope and was being lowered by his partner on the ground, so the rest of the group could top-rope the pitch. The belayer (male, 22) was looking up, helping the descending climber negotiate a ledge. A third member of the group, new to climbing, was standing nearby, as were other parties, and there was a bit of chatting back and forth. Suddenly the end of the rope ran through the belayer's hand and his belay device. The climber fell 10 to 15 feet to the ground, landing hard on his back and striking his head. He doesn't remember the first couple of minutes after the fall, but luckily he missed all the sharp rocks. He had a mild concussion and a minor crack in his pelvis (iliac crest), but he was released and able to walk out of the hospital ER the same day.

Analysis

Another party had just climbed and lowered from the route, so this party figured that only one of their 60-meter ropes would be sufficient, and there was no discussion of tying a stopper knot. Then they forgot to verify their assumption when it counted. It turned out that the previous party had a 70-meter rope, giving them 15 feet to spare. The injured leader normally didn't wear a helmet or knot the end of the rope for top-rope climbs, but he does now, and all members of the party know to keep one eye on the rope. Other climbs at Churchbowl have similar dimensions, resulting in dropped-climber accidents there almost every year. Belayers are intent on watching the leader, and appropriately so, but they may forget about the rope and don't seem to notice the end getting lighter as it rises off the ground. Whether lowering or rappelling, tie that end knot, and if you think that this is just a beginner mistake, see the report for May 23. (Source: John Dill, NPS Ranger.)

Images

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