



AAC Publications

Stranded - Inattention

California, Yosemite Valley, Cookie Cliff

On December 20, I (Zach, 28) spent the day rope-soloing at Cookie Cliff. As the sun was getting low, I decided to use the rope on Outer Limits to solo Crack- A-Go-Go, a 5.11c crack to the left. I got up the route and clipped my daisies to the anchor bolts. From there the rope angled sharply up and right to the Outer Limits anchor.

On most routes that day I had been belaying with a Mini Traxion clipped to the belay loop on my seat harness. When it came time to descend, I just left the rope in the Mini Traxion and hung from it for security without even clipping the anchors. All of these fixed lines had hung straight down the routes, so there was no risk of swinging sideways. I rigged a rappel with my ATC and clipped it to the belay loop. The two devices sometimes got in the way of each other as I rigged, but it was only a minor hassle.

This time, since the rope angled away from Crack-A-Go-Go and there was no good stance, I faced a big swing and couldn't just hang on the Mini Traxion, so I clipped the anchor for support. Then, to avoid the annoyance of rigging the ATC next to the Mini Traxion, and without thinking through the consequences, I released the rope from the Mini Traxion. In an instant it swung out of reach toward Outer Limits. In the same instant I realized my error and my predicament. The last climbers had left minutes earlier, and it was getting dark. I was dressed in a T-shirt, I'd left my phone, coat, and headlamp on the ground, and the temps were forecast to be mid-20s that night. I started yelling right away, but with no houses around I was dependent on someone driving by 150 yards away with the window open and the radio off! In a way I'm glad that the pitch was so thin and hard, or I might have been tempted to try downclimbing.

I had told my wife I'd be home by 10 p.m. She called the park a little before 11, and a buddy suggested where I might be climbing. The rangers found my car, hiked up to the base, and flipped the rope to me. I'd been shivering for six or seven hours with a full night to go.

Analysis

If I had released a rope earlier that day, it would have remained within reach but alerted me to the risk. By the end of the day, I was so complacent that, as I opened the Mini Traxion, the danger never crossed my mind. In slightly different circumstances—a remote area or stormy weather—such a simple mistake could have been fatal. It's a good thing I had a wife who wanted me back and a buddy who knew where I climbed. (Source: Zach and John Dill, NPS Ranger.)

Images

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