



AAC Publications

Fall on Rock - Rock came Loose

California, Pinnacles National Monument, Discovery Wall

On April 23, Al Shaver is leading and I (Steve Nechodom) am following on Lost Horizons (5.8). Both of us are in our 50s, with half a life of climbing experience apiece. We have been trad partners for six years. About 3 p.m., I am going to the right across the 30-foot traverse about 80 feet up. I have just cleaned two pieces in the first eight feet. Now 12 feet across, my right hand stretches to a miniature brick hold, feet smearing lichen, then a dainty, long, right-foot stretch. Brick shears off. Penjy onto outstretched right foot. Wish my leg had still been bent; straight right leg fails to damage the cliff. Stopped by pink Tricam in navel-high horizontal, three feet left of belay ledge and 18 feet above me. "ROCK!" comes out of my mouth. Minor bang on right knee, right ankle not right but functional. Wait, curse, and moan. Climb 15 feet to belay. Tie in, sit down, curse and moan. Decide not to lower off into massive poison-oak field.

Rearrange belay for downward pull. Al leads second pitch to tree belay. I sort out how to leave the belay ledge without stressing right ankle too much, climb 25 feet or so up open book. Switch to hand traverse on the outside of arête. Another half brick blows off from under right foot: no fall, but a solid slam. I yell "Rock!" again. Right ankle yells fat obscenities at me. Stop, curse, and moan. I spend 30 minutes climbing the last 30 feet, and announce the end of the climbing day.

I hobble 20 yards with Al's help to a grassy slope and park my butt while Al goes down to get tape, boots, and food. Eat, tape ankle tightly, and install boot laced really tight. Leave the top of Discovery Wall at 6 p.m., walking sideways so ankle won't bend. Stop every 50 to 100 feet, loosen boot every other stop. Arrive at Al's car at 8:30 p.m., perhaps a half mile, certainly a record for slow. Al drives back to my car in Salinas. I drive with my left foot back to Berkeley. Neighbor unloads my car. Done moving at 1 a.m.

Small crack in talus bone. Transverse tarsal joint pounded to putty, minimal swelling. Five weeks of crutches and air cast. Four more weeks with air cast. Six months later, still using ankle braces.

Analysis

We had done this climb a few months before, and I am sure I used the same half-brick hold on the traverse the first time. The unsure mossy footing caused me to hang harder on the hold this time, and it broke. Pinnacles is known for chossy climbs and rockfall. I am not going to burn my guidebook, just climb with greater care. (Source: Steve Nechodom.)

(Editor's note: "Chossy" is a term that Brits use for climbs that have lichen, moss, wet surface, loose bits, or all of the above.)

Images

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