



AAC Publications

Fall on Rock, Inadequate Belay

Idaho, City of Rocks National Reserve, Breadloaves

At 2:50 p.m. on July 7, climbing ranger Brad Shilling was flagged down by a park visitor who reported there had been a climbing accident and that the climber had a head injury. The visitor pointed to the descent route from the climb Intruding Dike (5.7) on the Breadloaves, about 30 meters from the road. Shilling found Julia Batten (51) lying on her side at the base of the climb. Primary survey disclosed a raised lump about two inches in diameter at the right base of her head. Batten was very disoriented, but during the assessment she complained of pain in her ankles, her right scapula, and her neck. She had distinct retrograde amnesia, and would repeat questions and statements over and over in a one-to two-minute cycle. Shilling radioed headquarters and requested both a ground and air ambulance to be dispatched to the Breadloaves designated landing zone. A cervical collar was applied, along with a backboard and a splint on both ankles. Oxygen was administered, and the patient was moved to the LZ. Life Flight helicopter arrived at 3:44 p.m. and assumed care of the patient. They lifted off at 4 p.m., bound for Utah. Batten was taken to the Huntsman Center in Salt Lake City, where she works as a nurse. She was diagnosed with a fractured spine, a concussion, two broken ribs, and a fractured ankle.

Analysis

Batten and her partner, Tosh Lahey, had just finished the Intruding Dike, and Lahey had belayed Batten almost all the way down the descent. Batten requested to be taken off belay before she reached the bottom, and was attempting to climb down the last 20-foot section unroped when she fell. Though the distance of the fall was not far, the landing was among rugged boulders. If she had stayed on belay until reaching level ground, this accident would not have occurred. (Source: Brad Shilling, Climbing Ranger.)

Images

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