



Fall on Rock, Inadequate Protection, Inadequate Knowledge of Route Rating

California, Joshua Tree National Park, The Cyclops

On November 7, Bob (62) and I (67) arrived in Joshua Tree in celebration of Bob's retirement. We spent the morning top-roping Hands Off (5.8) and practicing self-rescue techniques. Bob said there was a 5.3 on Cyclops Rock, a good first lead for the week. I usually follow but have led for three years, while Bob had led for over 30 years. The fissure called the Eye was directly above the route, and Bob explained that you go through it to descend. We scrambled up a ramp to the base and recognized our planned route wasn't a 5.3—we were actually below Fractured Fissure (5.10d).

Instead of downclimbing, we searched for an easier ascent and found Leader's Fright (5.8), but didn't realize it was R-rated. I planned to set the first three pieces five feet apart. The first piece was bomber, the second at seven feet was tenuous in a shallow crack, and the third at six feet was also tenuous. Next thing I remember, I was lying on my back and staring at the sky with Bob's hands on my chest. The top two pieces had popped. I became unconscious two times and have no memory of the fall or why I peeled off. Bob got the attention of another climbing party for assistance and set up an anchor and lowering rig. The other party failed to return to render assistance, so Bob lowered me, and I was able to walk out. I was driven to the emergency room, and after a CT scan and X-rays, I was released.

Analysis

I would not have led this route if I knew of the R rating because of tricky placements. (Source: Arnold Robson.)

Images

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