



AAC Publications

Fall on Rock, Protection Pulled, No Helmet

Virginia, Great Falls

On September 9, Dennis (27) and TJ (25) were trad climbing Armbuster (5.9), located in the Bird's Nest area of Great Falls. Leading the route, TJ fell at the crux a few feet above his top piece of protection. This top piece, a nut that had held previous leader falls, popped out, and another nut and a cam placed within one and a half body lengths of the top piece also pulled out. The next piece was too low on the route to prevent TJ from falling approximately 20 feet to the ground.

A first responder noted, "I ran over and found a male climber sitting at the base of the climb with a little blood on the front of his shirt. I asked if he was OK, and he told me that he hit the back of his head. He knew his name, where he was, and what day it was. I looked at the helmet sitting next to him and said, 'Luckily you had your helmet on.' His reply, 'I didn't.' Upon further examination, I noted a large laceration on the back of his head, with blood streaming down his back." Injuries included a laceration to the head, concussion, and a fractured foot.

Analysis

The rock in this area has a reputation for failing or allowing protection to slip out. We won't trad climb on this rock again. Additionally, our rope was well-used (1.5 years old, I believe). It was stiff, and we didn't change ends or retie knots between falls. The condition of the rope, combined with a relatively static belay, probably exerted more force on the protection than was necessary. And always wear a helmet. (Source: Dennis—last name unknown—and M. Brown.)

Images

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