



## AAC Publications

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### **Fall on Rock – Placed Inadequate Protection**

Tahquitz Rock, West Face, The Trough

On July 13, I visited Tahquitz Rock with partner Brian (31) after a few-year hiatus from climbing. I'm an experienced lead climber, and I decided to get us started by heading up the Trough (4 pitches, 5.4), a climb well within my ability level.

Climbing with my partner's rack, I took only a select number of pieces since I am physically small and carrying a lot of gear becomes cumbersome. On the first pitch I placed pieces every 10 to 15 feet or so and climbed steadily past the first recommended belay ledge. I continued up the second pitch, climbing past a fixed piton and placed a small nut above. After this I stopped placing gear. Wanting to ensure I had adequate gear for a solid anchor, and knowing that the climbing was relatively easy, I ran it out.

At a bulge I lost my footing and began pinwheeling down the heavily featured climb, banging against the rock until I landed on a sloping ledge about 60 feet below my highpoint. My nut held and there was no gear failure. I was able to speak, did not lose consciousness, and my partner was able to call out for help. Meanwhile, I used my remaining gear to make an anchor, and my partner took me off belay.

Fortunately, Tony Grice, a local climbing guide, was nearby and facilitated an assisted rappel off the sloping ledge, using the anchor I'd built. Our good fortune in having Tony there cannot be overstated. Having a tremendous amount of climbing and rescue experience, plus having just completed nursing school, Tony was as good as it gets for a first responder.

I had my cell phone and we called for an evacuation. Cal Fire facilitated the rescue with the help of Tony and other local climbers, all of who demonstrated an extraordinary level of skill and professionalism. I am indebted to them. After a high-angle litter carry, I was airlifted to the Riverside Community Medical Center. I was released the following day with minor injuries: a fractured ankle, a sprain, contusions, and hematomas.

### **Analysis**

This is an accident that never should have happened. The mistake is clear and the outcome irrefutably unnecessary. Regardless of how easy a climb is, knowing that a rescue from a cliff requires tremendous effort, expense, and risk should be reason enough to place gear more often. I was cocky, foolhardy, and complacent, and my poor decision-making led to a tremendous effort to extract me from the situation. Even for experienced climbers, a simple "clip" can make all the difference. (Source: Shannon McMullen, 43.)

## Images

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