



## AAC Publications

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### **Fall on Rock, Rappel Error**

Oregon, Smith Rock State Park, Wherever I May Roam

On May 11 at 5:15 p.m., Deschutes County 911 received a call from Ryan Orr (29) reporting that his climbing partner, Kathy Pawelski (34), had sustained injuries after falling on Wherever I May Roam (5.9). Orr said that Pawelski had fallen about 30 feet while rappelling, and that the two of them were stuck on a narrow ledge about 300 feet from the ground and about 200 feet from the top of the rock face. He advised she was not able to continue her descent and requested assistance.

The Deschutes County Sheriff's Office was notified, and three sheriff's deputies and 15 volunteers from the Deschutes County Sheriff's Office Search and Rescue (SAR) responded to Smith Rock State Park to assist the Redmond Fire Department with the rescue.

Shortly after 6 p.m., the first SAR volunteers arrived on scene and began the rescue. Two SAR members climbed to the top of the rock face, above the two climbers, and rappelled down to their location, while 13 additional SAR members and fire department personnel hiked to the base of the rock face with additional equipment. Pawelski was secured to one of the SAR members, who did a vertical rappel about 300 feet to the rock base. She was then lowered via wheeled litter about 200 feet, down an approximately 50-degree slope, to the trail. At 9:15 p.m. she was transported across the Crooked River and then via ambulance to St. Charles Hospital in Redmond for treatment.

According to an interview that she granted to a local newspaper in July 2013, Pawelski suffered fractures to her skull and right elbow, a concussion, and a spinal fluid leak, resulting in a three-week hospital stay.

### **Analysis**

Wherever I May Roam (5.9) is an intimidating, 500-foot, near-vertical face climb, fully bolted but requiring an exposed series of rappels with a 60-meter rope to reach the ground. As the victim was not willing to reveal the mechanism of her fall, only speculation remains. Did she miss a bolt and rappel off the end of a too-short rappel rope (without a stopper knot)? Did she rappel past a set anchor bolt/rappel point and try to climb back up to it, falling and losing her grip on her rappel ropes? Did she have a backup? The reader can learn a great deal from a study of "Know the Ropes: Rappelling" in the 2012 edition of *Accidents*. (Source: Robert Speik, following interviews with rescuers.)

**Images**

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