



AAC Publications

Lowering Error – Poor Position

California, Mickey's Beach, The Egg

It was a beautiful July Saturday for top-roping climbs at Mickey's Beach with my buddy Tracy. While belaying him on the Egg formation, I got a great view of him climbing above the ocean and decided to take a photo. Still belaying, I slowly backed up a five-foot-tall ramp of rock, until I was approximately 15 feet from the wall, to frame the shot. I'm a big guy, and although he took a few hangs while climbing they didn't affect me in this stance. Despite my distance from the wall, it didn't feel dangerous, as the belay rope ran nearly vertically up this tall route.

When Tracy completed the route I began to lower him, and I asked him to reclip a directional I had set up on the route. He grabbed the quickdraw, pulled himself up a bit to clip the rope, and then flopped back. This provided just enough force to lift me off the ramp and swing me into the wall. I was very surprised at the amount of rope stretch, which added velocity to my swing. I hit the wall with my feet extended and my knees locked. All of my weight went into my left foot, and I felt the crunch of bone and the sparkle of nerve. Fractured talus.

After my swing I continued to lower Tracy to the ground. We pulled our rope, left our gear on the route, and I crawled back up the approach trail.

Analysis

There's plenty of danger to be found in climbing if you're careless. I should have considered my position while belaying as carefully as I do when I'm climbing. (Source: Brian Degenhardt.)

Images



The fateful shot that led to the author's big swing.



An illustration of the author's compromised belaying stance away from the wall.



After: When the climber fell onto the rope it created enough force to pick up the belayer and swing him into the wall.

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