



AAC Publications

Fall On Rock, Protection Pulled Out – Inexperience

California, El Capitan, North America Wall

On the last day of my junior year of high school, I packed up the car and headed for Yosemite Valley. I hoped to make it up El Capitan as many times as possible over the summer. The previous summer I had learned how to aid and big-wall climb and made four ascents of El Cap. This summer would not go as planned.

My partner Ken and I immediately decided on a five-day push up the North America Wall, starting June 6. I was going to lead the first pitch. After 20 feet of easy climbing, I went into aid mode, placing two small cams. The next placement was the one that ruined my summer. Standing on the cam, looking for my next placement, I noticed a cool spot to hand-place a beak (just below another perfect small cam placement). After a few short seconds...PING!! The beak popped and I fell 12 feet onto the cam. It was a short fall and relatively clean, but it was clear I had broken my ankle. Ken lowered me to the ground, and we went from being a couple of stoked monkeys to a couple of very, very sad monkeys.

Ken, an EMT, quickly made a splint with climbing tape, a spork, and a nut tool. Before descending, we recruited a friend to help carry down my gear. It took a long time to crawl down the talus past the base of Mescalito, the base of the Nose, and finally to the El Cap Meadow bridge. An X-ray revealed a fracture, and I was out for the next 10 weeks.

Analysis

The lesson I learned from all this was simple: Don't place crappy gear for fun. Thankfully, I've recovered and climbed El Cap twice since the incident. (Source: Mickey Sensenbach, age 17, 5 years climbing experience.)

Images



Making a field splint out of climbing tape, a spork, and a nut tool at the base of El Capitan.

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