



AAC Publications

Fall On Rock – Exceeding Abilities, Off-Route

California, Tuolumne Meadows, Lembert Dome, Northwest Books

It's 10 a.m. on August 13 on Lembert Dome. Clank, clank, clunk. A yellow object shoots down the cliff. Jeff Los and I (both 23) start to chuckle at the thought of Curtis Burrowes (24) having to buy another number 2 Camelot. But laughter soon turns to concern as the rope pulls taut on my right hand and a scream pierces through spiraling gusts of wind. Curtis had disappeared around the corner nearly 20 minutes earlier with the intention of leading the second pitch (5.6) of Northwest Books. From our vantage, we couldn't see his actual fall—just the yellow cam shooting across the sky—but a few hikers below call up to tell us that Curtis isn't looking good.

Soon, a faint voice murmurs, "I'm okay." I decide to tie in while Jeff belays me up to Curtis' position. Serendipitously, an EMT is below, and he quickly free solos up to Curtis' perch to help. Curtis is in rough shape: a possible concussion, severe back pain, disoriented, and he can't move. Instead of climbing the 5.6 pitch, he had opted to climb a 5.9 variation—a daunting task for a new trad climber. He fell 40 feet and hit some ledges on the way down. He had fallen while trying to place the yellow cam. After a call to YOSAR, rescuers arrived with a litter in tow. Curtis was lowered down the cliff by litter, and Jeff and I, along with YOSAR, wheeled Curtis down to the parking lot. From there he was transferred by ambulance to Mammoth Lakes Hospital.

ANALYSIS

Curtis made it out relatively unscathed, with abrasions, a bruised back, and broken tailbone. He had only five to six months of trad climbing experience before this climb, and only up to 5.7. While getting off-route posed a problem, he made a further mistake by running it out because he was too pumped to set protection (even though many

options were available). In this instance he should have downclimbed instead of running it out. Jeff and I could not see Curtis well, as he was around the corner, so we will never know how much slack was out. (Source: Justin Raphaelson.)

Images

Article Details

Author	Justin Raphaelson
Publication	ANAM
Volume	0
Issue	0
Page	0
Copyright Date	2015
Article Type	Accident reports