



AAC Publications

Fall On Rock – Placed Inadequate Protection

California, 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 decided to get us started by heading up the Trough (4 pitches, 5.4), a climb well within my ability level. On the first pitch I placed gear every 10 to 15 feet or so and climbed steadily past the first recommended belay ledge. Continuing up the second pitch, I climbed 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 high point. 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.

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. 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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