



AAC Publications

Slip On Rock, Rappel Error – Alcohol, Poor Position

San Bernadino Mountains, Lucerne Valley

The following accident occurred on April 9 while climbing at an undeveloped area on Grapevine Road in the Lucerne Valley. Person 1 (37 years old, 25 years of climbing experience) had intentions of establishing a new route on one of the Joshua Tree-like cliffs; he had also been drinking heavily throughout the day. After reaching the top of the cliff, Person 1 tied off a rope to inspect a new climb. Unfortunately, Person 1 connected his rope to a previously established anchor that was designed for highlining (high-level slacklining) rather than climbing. Person 2 had previously warned Person 1 about using these anchors, because they were not designed for a rappel or in a good position to inspect the climb. Person 2 suggested Person 1 place new anchor bolts atop the cliff for better access to the new route; however, Person 1 did not heed this warning.

While standing near the cliff's edge, Person 1 began attaching his Grigri to the rope. Then he suddenly lost his footing (due to drunkenness), causing him to fall backward. Person 1 grabbed the rope with his hands, bounced once against the rock after falling 35 feet, and then swung sideways due to the poor anchor position. After this swing he lost hold of the rope, hitting the ground flat on his back, having fallen a total of 55 to 60 feet. After the impact Person 1 was winded and confused but still conscious and capable of moving all limbs; he could not stand or walk under his own power. Person 2 immediately called Global Rescue and was referred to local dispatch for evacuation of Person 1.

Within 15 minutes of the accident, Person 1 complained of feeling cold and pain in his neck, and Person 2 kept pressure on his neck and covered him with a blanket. A helicopter arrived within 45 minutes of the initial call and evacuated Person 1 to the nearest hospital. Person 2 stayed to inspect gear and clean up the location before joining his partner at the hospital. Person 1 experienced a concussion, a broken neck between C4 and C7, a broken right shoulder blade, and severed nerves in his arms from grabbing the rope during his fall. (Source: "Person 2," 28 years old, 19 years of climbing experience.)

ANALYSIS

This accident speaks for itself. Drinking while climbing or working with ropes at heights is not recommended. Additionally, one should only rappel from anchors that are well-positioned and designed with climbing in mind. (Source: The Editors.)

Images

Article Details

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