



AAC Publications

Fall on Rock – Inadequate Belay

Oregon, Smith Rock State Park, Phoenix Buttress

On June 6, I was climbing a route near Scary Llamas (a.k.a. Hissing Llamas, a 5.8 sport climb) on the Phoenix Buttress with my wife, Claire, and our friend Mary. My wife and I witnessed a climber fall on Scary Llamas. The climber (age approximately 18) fell much farther than I would have expected and made contact with a ledge partway up the route. She was lowered to the ground and was clearly in great pain. I went to assist and quickly determined that her ankle was either sprained or broken. We splinted her ankle with an ACE wrap, a T-shirt, and some webbing; my wife grabbed a pair of crutches the state park has cached in the Dihedrals area. We assisted the climber down the trail to the parking lot, where we handed her over to a ranger.

ANALYSIS

Numerous factors contributed to this accident. First, the incident occurred in the middle of the day; the air temperature was about 90 degrees, and the route was in full sun. The heat could have adversely affected the climbers' performance. Second, it seemed as though there was too much slack in the belay rope. Third, the climbers may have been inexperienced, although their exact experience level is not known. Better knowledge of lead belaying, lead climbing, and the route may have helped prevent this accident, as this climb is generally quite secure. Although it did not affect the outcome of this particular accident, it is worth noting that neither the climber nor the belayer had a first-aid kit or a helmet. (Source: Joe Osterman.)

Images

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