



AAC Publications

Fall on Rock – Inadequate Belay, Rope Too Short

Arizona, The Pit, Son Tower

On a mid-September evening, Person 1, age 29, with many years of climbing experience, led the limestone sport climb Pleasant Dreams (5.9+) on Son Tower at the Pit. When the leader reached the top of the climb, the belayer (Person 2, age 30, with six months of experience) began to lower him to the ground. At the second bolt from the bottom of the climb, Person 2 tried to stop the climber so he could clean a quickdraw from the bolt. At that time the belayer suddenly realized the rope was too short. The rope pulled through the belayer's device, and Person 1 fell approximately 20 feet to the ground, suffering abrasions and lacerations.

ANALYSIS

Person 1 had done the climb before and knew the 50-meter rope he was using was not long enough to allow lowering a climber all the way to the bottom of the climb. His plan was to stop on a ledge partway down and then scramble to the bottom of the climb. However, he forgot to stop on the ledge. Person 2 was focused on the climber and was not paying attention to how much rope remained.

Using a rope of appropriate length would have been the primary way to prevent this accident. Tying a knot at the end of the rope to prevent it from feeding through the belay device could have provided an effective backup. (Source: Aaron Dick, SAR Coordinator, Coconino County Sheriff's Office.)

Images

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