



AAC Publications

Fall On Rock – Miscommunication

Colorado, Eldorado Canyon State Park, West Ridge

In the late afternoon on October 19, a party of four was climbing on the West Ridge in two parties of two. According to one of these climbers, Mark Hanna, a male climber, 42, and his partner were top-roping the first pitch of Iron Horse (5.11) as their last climb of the day. The climber topped out at the anchors, about 80 feet above the ground, and yelled "OK!" At this point his belayer took him off belay, thinking the climber would descend via rappel, as they had done on previous climbs throughout the day. The climber leaned back to be lowered and fell about 60 feet to a ledge 15 to 20 feet off the ground. He was caught by a small juniper. A climber on scene scrambled up, secured him, and tried to keep him comfortable until Rocky Mountain Rescue arrived.

The climber regained consciousness after a few minutes and was able to talk and answer questions, which was a positive sign considering he was not wearing his helmet. His injuries included a bad scalp laceration and multiple fractures (leg, heel, and pelvis). He was evacuated by helicopter.

Analysis

This is an all-too-common type of accident. Before starting a climb, the belayer and climber must clearly agree on what the climber plans to do when he or she reaches the anchors. The belayer should never take the climber off until he is certain the climber is off belay. The climber also needs to be precise with instructions once he reaches the anchor. If this climber had yelled "take" or "lower" instead of "OK," it would have made it clearer to the belayer that he was ready to be lowered instead of planning to rappel. The climber also should test the system and, if possible, visually verify that he's still on belay before trusting that he's ready to be lowered. (Source: The Editors.)

Images

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