



AAC Publications

Rockfall

Washington, Mazama, Goat Wall

My wife and I, both 28, were climbing a popular multi-pitch sport route, Prime Rib of Goat (5.9), in the summer of 2012. A group had caught up to us, and we allowed them to pass at one of the generous ledges en route. Since this was a long climb, it was important to keep moving, and I started leading the next pitch about 10 to 20 feet below the second climber of the party that had passed us. I had passed the first or second bolt when I heard “ROCK!” At first I looked up, but thankfully I quickly turned my head back into the wall before a baseball-size rock came down and hit me directly on the helmet. It was enough of an impact that I was a bit fuzzy for a moment, but soon I was able to continue climbing. I had no ill effects, and I think the outcome would have been very different had I not been wearing a helmet.

ANALYSIS

I think this was mostly bad luck—the rock is generally solid on the route. Although I don't think too much risk was taken in following close behind another rope team on this terrain, certainly waiting another 10 minutes for the team to get off the section of cliff we were about to climb would have helped. This route is basically a linkup of a bunch of single-pitch climbs, so after they were done with the pitch we would not have been exposed to rockfall from them. (Source: Erik Turner / High Pressure Photography.)

Images

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