



## AAC Publications

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### **Fall on Rock – Inadequate Protection**

California, Yosemite Valley, El Capitan, Lurking Fear

**On September 19, at approximately 5:30 p.m., YOSAR was notified about a climber who had taken a 15-meter fall on Lurking Fear. The climber suffered serious injuries, including possible head trauma. The reporting party was another climbing team on Lurking Fear.**

With the use of a spotting scope, members of YOSAR were able to locate the injured party around pitch 14. Using a megaphone and hand signals, contact was made with the partner of the injured climber. The partner confirmed the injured climber potentially had a broken clavicle and had not lost consciousness. Given the late hour and the perception that the injured climber had not lost consciousness, it was decided that rescue operations would be postponed until the following morning. At 7 a.m. the following day, the park's helicopter was brought in for a recon flight. (It's hard to assess Lurking Fear from the ground.) It was determined that a top-down rescue would be very difficult and potentially more hazardous for rescue personnel than a short-haul mission using the helicopter.

The helicopter took off with a rescuer hanging underneath and inserted him at the location of the injured climber. A second rescuer was then inserted with a litter, and the two rescuers packaged the patient for a pick-off. The helicopter circled back and retrieved the patient, two rescuers, and a substantial amount of the climbers' gear. From El Cap Meadow, the injured climber was transferred to an ambulance. The partner of the injured climber joined another climbing team and continued to the top.

### **ANALYSIS**

After speaking with the injured climber, it was determined that direct aid was being used at the time of the fall. The last thing the leader remembers is placing a micro-cam and stepping into an aider to weight it. Speaking with other climbers at the scene, it appears this top piece blew and the climber proceeded to pull at least two more pieces of protection before being caught by a number four Camalot. After the fall, the belayer was able to lower the climber to a ledge and then descend to the injured leader to assist.

The placement of multiple questionable pieces of protection in a row was perhaps the main contributing factor to this accident. While we don't know for sure if the climber had been back-cleaning protection, it's a good idea to leave solid pro at regular intervals, especially on harder terrain or above ledges. In this accident, the leader was starting off a large, tiered ledge system that he may have impacted during the fall.

Whereas megaphone communications had led YOSAR to believe the climber had not lost consciousness, adjacent climbers said in follow-up interviews that the injured climber was going in and out of consciousness, and that the climber's helmet was severely deformed. (See "Essentials: Head Injuries" in Accidents 2015 for important information about identifying, assessing, and treating head injuries.) We are reminded of how helpful helmets can be in preventing serious head trauma: According to medical personnel on the scene, it is very likely the patient's head injuries would have been much more substantial had he not been wearing one. (Source: Yosemite Ranger Eric Bissell.)

**Images**

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