



AAC Publications

Fall on Rock – Inadequate Protection

Colorado, Eldorado Canyon, Bastille Crack

On the morning of July 13, a party was climbing the first pitch of the Bastille Crack (5.7+), which was well within the leader's climbing ability. The leader placed his first piece in a crack/flake about nine feet off the deck, then climbed up a couple of feet and began moving into the crack to the left (a move usually considered the crux of the climb). Here the leader placed a second piece, a 0.75 Camalot, about four feet above and three feet left of the first piece. About eight feet above the second piece, the leader's foot popped and he fell. During the fall the leader became inverted and, according to the belayer, struck headfirst on the corner of a flake toward the end of the fall. Both climbers were wearing helmets. The belayer noticed blood coming from the leader's head and called to him with no response. The belayer lowered the inverted leader four feet to the ground, by which time he was conscious and able to right himself and sit. The second (a physician's assistant) removed the leader's helmet and noticed a significant cut at the left temple. The second began basic first aid, and once the leader was able to move, the party went to the emergency department, where four stitches were placed. The leader's helmet had significant damage, including a crack, a deep indentation, and discoloration throughout the left side.

ANALYSIS

The climbers felt there were two causes of the fall leading to the injury. The primary one was that the leader (with 13 years' climbing experience) took for granted the relatively easy route and his familiarity with it, and did not place adequate gear. While normally living by the mantra of "place early and often," in this case the leader had climbed well above his last piece, putting him at risk of striking flakes near the ground. The secondary cause (also due to the party taking the route for granted) was the position of the belayer, who was standing approximately eight feet from the wall and was not tethered in any way. The belayer weighed about 50 pounds less than leader, and when the fall occurred the belayer was pulled into the wall and upward, adding probably eight to ten feet to the fall. (Source: Anonymous online submission by the leader.)

Images

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