



## AAC Publications

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### **Fall on Rock – Inexperience, Inadequate Belay**

Pennsylvania, Birdsboro Quarry, Orange Sunshine Wall

**On September 27, I took my girlfriend climbing at Birdsboro Quarry. I had been climbing for about five years, but she had never belayed a leader. I quickly showed her how to belay, then led the easiest routes, 5.3 to 5.5, and set up top-ropes so she could climb.** She had not brought a helmet, so I loaned her mine. At the end of the day, I decided to sneak in something slightly harder but still well within my comfort zone: Dirty Swing, a 5.7 route on the Orange Sunshine Wall.

There were a few factors that should have deterred me from attempting this last route, including the fact that I had no chalk, I had only that day taught her how to lead belay, and she is about 80 pounds lighter than me, but I was anxious to get in as much climbing as possible.

Without anchoring her to anything, I tied in and started climbing, hardly taking a look up at the route. I made it past the crux and after the last bolt noticed an abnormally long runout before what appeared to be two sets of bolted anchors, one to my left and one to my right. I paused on a tiny ledge about 10 feet up from the last bolt, assessing the options, and the next thing I knew I was falling, probably having slipped on some loose rock. I fell about 20 feet, with my legs outstretched and knees locked, and landed straight onto my left foot on a small ledge. After flipping over, I stopped upside-down a few feet above the ground. My girlfriend had been yanked off the ground and was hanging above me. My left talus had been fractured, with my foot pointing out and to the left at a very gross angle.

First responders from Robeson Township drove me out to a waiting ambulance. I now have plates on either side of my ankle, and I wasn't able to walk for several months.

### **ANALYSIS**

I disobeyed one of the principles of the Mountaineers' Climbing Code: "Never let judgment be overruled by desire when choosing the route or turning back." Despite not having chalk, not knowing anything about the route, and being with an inexperienced partner who weighed much less than me (and was not anchored), I went for it anyway. Midway up the climb, when I looked down and was slightly frightened to see a large loop of rope out from her belay, I simply told her to "make sure to take in some of the slack" and continued on.

Also, if I had read the comments on the Mountain Project page for this route, I would have learned of the two anchors and long runout from the last bolt, and known that the left was the one to go for. Finally, I was insanely lucky not to have hit my head. I always wear a helmet, but this day I had loaned it to my girlfriend because of the area's reputation for loose rock. (Source: Anonymous report from the lead climber.)

**Images**

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