



AAC Publications

Cathedral Peak Leader Fall – Off Route, Inadequate Protection

California, Yosemite National Park, Cathedral Peak

On July 17, at 9 a.m., Yosemite Dispatch received a call from a distressed party at the base of Cathedral Peak. The caller's 38-year-old male climbing partner had fallen while off route on the first pitch of the Southeast Buttress Route (5.6). The leader's right ankle appeared to be broken.

Prior to the fall, the leader had begun what he thought was the standard start to the route. Feeling that he was off route, he traversed left 20 feet in an attempt to gain easier ground. When this did not provide more moderate climbing, the patient attempted to reverse his traverse and fell. Because of the location of his last piece of protection, the climber not only took a long fall but also pendulumed across the face. The total length of the fall was estimated at 30 to 40 feet in low-angle terrain.

Due to limited park resources at the time and the open access at the base of the cliff, the rescue team decided to extract the patient via short haul with a helicopter as opposed to a long carry-out in a litter.

ANALYSIS

This very popular climb has several alternative starts, and as with most alpine routes it can be challenging to find and stay on the easiest line. Study the proposed route during the approach and from the base to gain perspective.

On low-angle terrain, especially when the difficulty is modest, it's easy to move quickly far away from your last protection. Yet even a short fall on low-angle ground can be dangerous because of the likelihood of impacting ledges. Be vigilant about where and how often you place gear, and protect against swinging falls that expose the head and fragile organs to greater risk. Before you climb into unknown terrain, ask yourself, "Can I safely reverse these moves?" If not, try another line. (Sources: Yosemite National Park Climbing Rangers and the Editors.)

ANOTHER CATHEDRAL PEAK LEDGE FALL: On August 5, a female climber in her mid-20s took a fall on the fourth pitch of the Southeast Buttress Route while attempting to pass other climbers with a 5.9 variation. Her single piece of protection pulled out in the fall, and she injured both ankles (breaking one) when she impacted the belay ledge. The climber and her partner were able to self-rescue to the base of the peak by rappelling, then called for a rescue. Tuolumne SAR arranged for a helicopter short haul to extract the patient.

Images



Cathedral Peak's popular Southeast Buttress Route (facing the camera) has many variations.

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