



## AAC Publications

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### **Leader Fall – Protection Pulled Out**

California, Yosemite Valley, Washington Column

**The names of the climbers in this report have been changed. On October 7, Mike and Dylan started up the South Face (5.8 C1) of Washington Column.** The two had done a little climbing together, but never in Yosemite Valley and mostly on single-pitch climbs. Mike was the more experienced of the two, having done a number of Yosemite big-wall climbs, including routes on El Capitan. Dylan was newer to climbing, having started about one year before.

The team hiked their gear to the base of the route and started climbing in late morning. At the top of pitch one is a large ledge. Mike started up pitch two, a pin-scarred corner rated C1. Approximately 35 feet up, the piece Mike was standing on pulled out. Dylan and Mike believe he pulled out an additional three pieces of gear during his fall, before landing on the belay ledge on his right side.

When he tried to move, Mike experienced excruciating pain on his side and was having trouble breathing. The two realized that moving Mike on their own was likely impossible and they called 911. YOSAR sent a paramedic straight to the climber while the rest of the team prepared for a rescue.

Although Mike was breathing regularly while lying on the ledge, any movement dramatically increased his pain. Because of this, a helicopter short-haul extrication was deemed preferable over a traditional rope lower and litter carry-out. After a reconnaissance flight of the area, a ranger was inserted onto the ledge at about 5 p.m. and extracted Mike in the litter. Dylan descended with the SAR team.

### **ANALYSIS**

First climbed in 1964, the crack systems of the South Face Route were heavily scarred by repeated piton placements. The typically shallow and flaring nature of these features can make protection in them less secure and harder to gauge than a normal crack placement. Seeing the inverted lobes on the first cam that pulled out, our best guess is that the cam failed because it was either under-cammed (piece too small for the placement) or placed in a flare.

Although it's impossible to know for sure, we also speculate that Mike placed the cam straight in as opposed to angling downward in the direction of the anticipated pull, because only two lobes of the cam were damaged. A cam placed straight in will distribute a disproportionate amount of force to the upper lobes, in this case possibly resulting in their failure.

In overhanging terrain, Mike's fall might have ended up fine. But when climbing above ledges or in low-angle terrain, place solid gear early and often. (Source: Yosemite National Park Climbing Rangers.)

## Images



The leader had placed a piece but not yet clipped it when the cam he was standing on pulled.

## Article Details

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