



AAC Publications

Leader Fall – Inexperience, Inadequate Protection

New Mexico, Sandia Mountains, Muralla Grande

On August 14, a leader (male, 40s) was attempting the third pitch of La Selva (5.8), which begins in low fifth-class terrain and steepens into a dihedral with a wide crack before an exit left on vertical terrain. The leader placed a number 4 Camalot for his last piece of protection. He was five or six feet above this Camalot when he came off, falling approximately 15 feet and landing on a ledge and striking his right hip. There was 150 to 170 feet of rope in service at the time of the fall.

The climber was able to stand up and secure an anchor in order to bring up the second. However, every time he internally or externally rotated his right hip, he experienced moderate pain in the joint. Fearing that he may have had a pelvic fracture, the party initiated a rescue by calling 911.

As is usual for high-angle rescues in New Mexico, a multi-agency effort was required. The second climber was extricated first, because the injured subject was stable and potential rockfall from a litter evacuation would pose a great hazard to the uninjured climber and anyone else at the belay ledge below. The injured climber was then secured with a pelvic splint and Stokes litter, and a 450-foot raise was performed to the top of Muralla Grande. It was reported that the leader suffered a minor non-displaced pelvic fracture.

ANALYSIS

Crux passages of climbs, especially those with low-angle terrain or ledges immediately below the crux, mandate extra care and protection. The description of this pitch at Mountain Project suggests that “leaders at their limit may want a second large cam” for the wide crack. Some climbers break this rope-stretching pitch in two, which puts the belayer closer to the crux, greatly reducing rope stretch and improving the belayer’s ability to react to a fall. Guides often use shorter pitches to improve communication and safety without hindering speed. (Sources: James Marc Beverly and Erin Renee Beverly.)

Images

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