



AAC Publications

Ground Fall – Inadequate Belay

Oregon, Smith Rock, Morning Glory Wall

On November 12 at around 11 a.m., two experienced climbers were attempting Doritos (5.12c). One of the climbers (male, age 28) was leading the route when he fell off and the belayer (female, approximately 30) failed to arrest his fall. A witness observed the climber fall 50 to 60 feet and land on his belayer, who was knocked hard to the ground. Both the climber and the belayer sustained significant injuries, including head trauma, broken bones, spinal injury, abrasions, and burns.

ANALYSIS

There was a significant weight difference between the belayer and the heavier climber, which could have contributed to the belayer's inability to control the fall with her ATC-style device. However, belayers who weigh much less than their partners usually have little difficulty holding falls, and it seems likely there must have been a moment of inattention or distraction that caused the belayer to lose control. Another observer noted that the climber's fall was slow at first and then accelerated. The belayer was not wearing gloves, and the burn on her hand may have contributed to her being unable to regain control. An assisted-braking device might have helped her maintain the belay. The climber was wearing a helmet, but the belayer was not, possibly contributing to the severity of her injuries.

(Sources: Deschutes County Sheriff's Office Search and Rescue and Adam Lee.)

Images

Article Details

Author	Deschutes County Sheriff's Office Search and Rescue and Adam Lee
Publication	ANAM
Volume	11
Issue	70
Page	82
Copyright Date	2017
Article Type	Accident reports