



## AAC Publications

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### **Fall on Rock – Exceeding Abilities, Inadequate belay**

California, Sierra Nevada, Split Mountain

**On August 15, 2015, at approximately 4 p.m., Tony M. (37), an experienced traditional and alpine climber, fell approximately 20 feet on the east arête of the north summit of Split Mountain (14,058 feet) in the Palisades region.** He and his partner, Paul R. (46), a new climber with only one year of sport climbing experience, started the approach from their high camp at 4:30 a.m. and began having difficulties almost immediately. Paul lagged behind during the approach march, and the two experienced heavy rockfall while crossing two snowfields. They arrived at the base of the route at 8:30 a.m.

They moved slowly through the lower pitches, encountering loose rock throughout. On pitch seven, Tony pulled off a large flake, which hit belayer on the back after falling 15 feet. Fortunately, Paul was uninjured, largely due to the larger flake breaking into two pieces prior to striking him and then impacting his full CamelBak hydration system, absorbing some of the blow.

The leader fall occurred on their ninth pitch. Tony placed a 0.4 Camalot and then, four feet later, a 1 Camalot. After moving left and up from this piece he fell. He landed in a seated position upon a ledge, after taking a 20-foot fall; he believes his belayer had too much slack in the system. Tony quickly assessed himself for injuries, and though his rear end hurt and he felt dizzy, he felt he did not have any fractures. He did have a one-inch by three-inch laceration to his right arm that was bleeding profusely. Using a bandana as an expedient tourniquet/pressure dressing, he called down to his belayer that he was OK and found a route to the right that enabled him to complete the pitch and reach the ridge above.

At this point the belayer was unable to climb due to cramping in his hands. Tony, though injured, rappelled to his partner and assisted him, with difficulty, to the ridgeline. They called the Inyo County Sheriff's Department and requested a rescue. After discussing options with responders, the climbers spent a cold and uncomfortable night on a small ledge, and then both were flown off the ridge by helicopter, one at a time, starting at 11:15 a.m. Tony was taken to the hospital, where it was confirmed that he suffered no physical injuries other than his laceration. (Source: Tony M.)

### **ANALYSIS**

The major cause of this incident is that both climbers exceeded their abilities. Tony, being an experienced climber, should not have undertaken a route of this length with a climber who had little climbing experience and no traditional or multi-pitch background. "I had too much ego. I took a way too inexperienced climber as a partner and ignored signs early on that he lacked sufficient physical fitness," Tony said. Without a physically fit and experienced partner, Tony placed both of them in jeopardy. If he had become incapacitated or not been able to descend and assist his partner during the final pitch to the ridgeline, the situation easily could have become much worse. Paul's inexperience likely contributed to Tony's injury, due to an inadequate belay. With better rope management, he may have prevented his partner's impact on the ledge. (Source: Tony M. and the Editors.)

## Images



Bivouac after the accident on Split Mountain.



Helicopter approaches to rescue climbers on Split Mountain.

## Article Details

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