



AAC Publications

Lowering Error – Rope Too Short for Climb

California, South Lake Tahoe, Sugarloaf

On the afternoon of December 22, Nicholas C. (29) led Dominion, a 5.10a crack. After pulling the crux and moving through 30 feet of easy 5th-class terrain, Nicholas reached a set of bolted anchors and rigged to lower. He asked his belayer, Robert H. (52), for tension and began to descend. At approximately 40 feet above the ground, the tail of the rope passed through the belayer's device and the climber fell to the ground, sustaining a number of injuries, including compound pilon fractures of both ankles, a fractured coccyx, a compression fracture of the T12 vertebrae, and a laceration of the chin. A helicopter rescue was not possible because of darkness, so Nicholas was carried out in an evacuation that lasted 3.5 hours and required the cutting of a new trail to accommodate the litter.

ANALYSIS

Nicholas C. writes: "The past two times we had climbed this route, most recently about four years earlier, we had used a 70-meter rope, and I was able to lower directly below the route and make it to a point where I could downclimb. This route can be climbed with a 60m rope, but you need to swing to climber's right when lowering to make it to an easy downclimb. I should have read the beta on the descent prior to climbing to refresh my memory, rather than being complacent in the fact that I had done the route before.

Obviously, a stopper knot would have prevented this, and if the belayer kept an eye on the halfway point we would have had a greater awareness of the rope remaining." (Source: Nicholas C.)

Images



unRepairs after the Sugarloaf accident.

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