



## AAC Publications

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### **Ledge Fall – Off-Route, Inadequate Protection**

Colorado, Estes Park Area, The Crag, Sharksfin

**On August 20, Anders Fridberg and I (both very experienced) were climbing Blood in the Water, a three-pitch route on the north face of Sharksfin, south of Estes Park. Little did we realize the route's name would have some additional significance that day.**

Anders led the second, crux pitch, which is gear-protected and 5.10+. The pitch is divided into two sections by a broad ledge. Above the ledge, the correct path is to clip a bolt and then ascend a stemming corner immediately above it. This corner looks hard to protect from below, but numerous gear placements soon appear.

Instead, after clipping the bolt, Anders traversed straight right on the ledge for about ten feet. He then started climbing what he thought was the correct line. He placed a number 3 Camalot about seven feet above the ledge, climbed an unknown distance past this piece, and then fell onto the ledge. Why and how far he fell is unknown, because Anders can't remember the fall. I could not see him from below.

Anders was unconscious for approximately one minute. Fortunately, he regained consciousness and was responsive. This helped greatly, as he was able to maneuver himself to the edge of the ledge so I could lower him to the belay atop the first pitch, and from there, pull the rope, rethread it, and lower him to the ground. It is also fortunate that Anders is a big, tough Swede because his injuries were horrific: a compound dislocation of his ankle, in which his lower leg bones broke through the skin.

Fortune smiled on the unfortunate yet again because we had cell phone service. We were just outside Rocky Mountain National Park, and the first responders to arrive were from the Park Service, about 2.5 hours after our call. Soon thereafter, volunteers from Rocky Mountain Rescue Group and Larimer County Search and Rescue reached us. A helicopter rescue was needed to evacuate Anders. (This crag is about an hour from the parking area on unimproved climbers' trails and steep talus.) An Army Blackhawk was flown in from Eagle, Colorado, and about 6.5 hours after our call for help, Anders was flown to a waiting ambulance in Estes Park.

### **ANALYSIS**

With approximately 80 feet of rope out, there was too much stretch in the rope and too little protection, given the looming ledge below. I felt minimal force from the fall at the belay. Would a higher piece have prevented this accident, and if so, how much higher? Could a higher piece even have been placed? All good questions that Anders cannot answer. [Editor's note: The only guidebook to this area was published before this route was established. The route is on Mountain Project, but the description of the climbing above the ledge is vague.] **We were fortunate to have a phone to call for help. In remote areas, where cell service might not be available, carrying a Spot or similar device should be considered.** (Source: David Turner.)

## Images



Rescuers at the Craggs, near Estes Park, conduct a technical lower down steep talus toward a helicopter landing zone.

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