



## AAC Publications

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### **Stranded in Midair – Inadequate Protection**

Oregon, Smith Rock, Northwest Face

**On September 30, three climbers (one male, two female, ages 27 to 31) were climbing Wherever I May Roam, a popular five-pitch sport route (5.9) on the northwest face.** One of them led the third pitch, traversing up and left to an anchor on an arête. When the next climber followed, she removed all the quickdraws on the pitch. The third climber then started the pitch. She fell, and due to the traversing nature of the pitch and lack of protection, pendulumed left and away from the route and into midair. The leader was belaying both climbers directly off the anchor using a device in plaquette mode (“guide mode”) and was unable to raise or lower the climber after her fall. She remained suspended until another party on the route arrived to assist. (Source: Deschutes County Sheriff’s Office Search and Rescue.)

#### **ANALYSIS**

In a party of three, it’s partly the second climber’s job to ensure the third climber is adequately protected against swinging falls on traverses and roofs. This pendulum fall could have been avoided by the second climber leaving all the quickdraws in place and making sure the third climber’s rope was clipped to each of them.

Leaders transitioning to multi-pitch routes need to be familiar with a number of skills not needed in single-pitch climbing, including self-rescue. The use of a belay device in plaquette mode should be accompanied by the knowledge required to safely perform a weighted release and lower. If this could have been accomplished, the party could have lowered the third climber to bolted anchors directly below the third-pitch anchor on this climb. They then could have rappelled with her to the ground. If the climber had the appropriate gear and skills, she also could have ascended the rope to the upper belay. (Source: Deschutes County SAR and the Editors.)

## Images

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