



AAC Publications

Fall on Rock – Loose Rock, Inadequate Protection

Utah, Wasatch Range, Big Willow Cirque

On June 10, my partner Chloe (22) and I (23), both experienced climbers, hiked three to four hours to Big Willow Cirque, high above Salt Lake City. After three trips into this beautiful area that season, I had spotted a new line on a cliff we dubbed the Forbidden Wall.

After a steep snow approach to the base, we begin climbing in beautiful weather around 11 a.m. The first pitch had fun and engaging climbing on decent granite for about 180 feet. Pitch two looked moderate but had few options for protection. Having climbed many pitches like this, I confidently set off. Twenty feet above the belay ledge, I placed a cam and continued. Another 15 feet led to a tipped-out cam placement behind a loose flake, then another 10 feet to a stance where I tried to put in another piece. As I was placing the gear, the rock under my foot broke and I fell. The cam below me blew out. Two small ledges slowed the speed of my long fall, which landed me next to my partner, tangled in rope and upside down.

After going in and out of consciousness for the next five minutes, I came to. Chloe was able to assist in untying me from the rope. She assessed me for injuries and head trauma. My helmet was intact but dented from the fall. A concussion was evident, as I underwent personality changes and severe mood swings after the fall.

We managed to self-rescue off the wall and down the snowfield to our packs. Chloe was able to call friends who knew the area well. A helicopter was called but unable to land, so SAR planned to meet us on the trail. My partner and I started the slow walk out and were met by a trail runner who assisted us for four or five hours until friends met us, followed by SAR lower on the trail.

ANALYSIS

Any decisions in the alpine should be thought out thoroughly, and first ascents in remote territory add layers of risk and complexity, including loose rock, vegetation, and the unknowns of route-finding and protection. Even without passing up any opportunities for protection, there was much less gear than I was comfortable with. We studied a possible variation that was less direct, but it did not look like it would offer any more protection than the line we chose. I should have looked harder for alternatives or perhaps retreated.

I am thankful my partner was a nurse; otherwise, my outcome could have been very different. This fall was also a perfect example of how wearing a helmet can save a life. I feel fortunate only to have sustained a severe concussion and lacerations. (Source: Madison Goodman.)

Images

Article Details

Author	Madison Goodman
Publication	ANAM
Volume	11
Issue	71
Page	86
Copyright Date	2018
Article Type	Accident reports