



AAC Publications

Rockfall

Washington, Methow Valley, Goat Wall, Prime Rib of Goat

On June 2, Jason (45) and I (37) set out to climb the 11 pitches of Prime Rib of Goat (5.9). The sun was out, wind was mild, and we both felt confident in our ability. Starting the fourth pitch (the first 5.9 pitch), I was belaying while Jason led. I had used a clove hitch in the climbing rope to tie into a locking carabiner on the anchor. I was positioned close to my anchor in a comfortable spot.

Jason clipped three or four bolts and began to move over the first crux, a small roof. He tested some rock above, but when he went to weight it a large slab (maybe 500 pounds) sheered off directly over my head. He yelled "rock!" several times, and I looked up, grabbed the anchor rope, and jumped closer into the wall where I could protect half to two-thirds of my body. The slab hit the shelf above, hit my helmet with a glancing blow, glanced off my back, and came to rest against my right leg. A basketball-size rock then came down and pinned my right leg into the larger slab.

I lowered Jason, and he tied back into the anchor, checked our gear for damage, and then he did a full check on me. My right leg was bleeding, and my back was in pain, but I could move. We got settled a bit, then rappelled off the route. I ended up with some small chunks missing from my helmet, a badly bruised and scraped-up right leg, and a broken rib in my back, directly below my right scapula.

ANALYSIS

I likely would not have even been touched by the falling rocks if I had been able to get one foot farther away. Having thought through a potential escape while I was belaying might have allowed that. We should have been more aware that rockfall can be more prevalent in springtime. We were coming out of a freeze/thaw cycle, and the chance of larger chunks of rock giving way is more significant. (Source: Tim, the belayer.)

Images

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