



## AAC Publications

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### **Fall On Rock – Inadequate Protection and Anchor**

Washington, North Cascades, Washington Pass, Le Petit Cheval

**On July 14, Alexis and I scrambled to the base of Spontaneity Arête (multi-pitch 5.7) on Le Petit Cheval.** There were no photos on Mountain Project of the first pitch, so we weren't sure exactly where the route started. We scrambled up to a ledge below two crack options. Alexis tried the left one first, but the awkward offwidth seemed hard to protect and more difficult than 5.7. She downclimbed to our belay ledge and moved over to a hand and fist crack on the right. This crack took better gear, but she found it similarly awkward.

When Alexis was about 10 feet up the crack, we decided we should look for other options, perhaps further to the right. She started to downclimb again. When she was about four feet above the starting ledge, she took out the first cam she had placed. Then she lost her balance or slipped, and she fell.

I tried to spot her with my left arm, but it was a futile effort. And we had made a critical mistake: Since we were just starting the "first pitch" and were on a ledge, I hadn't anchored myself to belay. So, when she fell, we had zero protection and no anchor. With about five feet of rope between us and my MegaJul assisted-braking belay device in use, we were a connected duo, and we both went tumbling down. We fell over the 10-foot fourth-class scramble we'd done to reach our belay ledge and then rolled a bit more, miraculously managing to stop on a 30° dirt slope, after falling about 15 feet in all. There was a 50-foot drop below.

Alexis was a few feet below me, upside down. I called out her name, and at first she didn't respond, then mumbled a bit. I looked around to assess the situation. I needed to get us anchored. About six feet above me was a large tree. I stood up and felt pain in my left leg; when I pulled up my shorts, I found a large, bloody gash. "I'll deal with that later," I thought. I walked up to the tree and built an anchor, then identified a flat ledge that Alexis could lay on. She was repeating that she'd broken her wrist and her teeth; I knew she probably also had a concussion. I worried about a spinal injury, but in our precarious position, I decided she had to be moved—help would be hours away. Anchored to the tree and keeping her on belay, I was able to pull her upright and we moved together up to the ledge.

We used our Garmin inReach to signal for help. While we waited, Alexis started to become coherent again, and I placed a SAM splint on her wrist and gave her pain pills. Another climbing group arrived at our location and helped out with food and morale. After about an hour and a half, a helicopter arrived and lifted us both out.

### **ANALYSIS**

We actually had scrambled about 10 feet past the real start of the climb to reach the ledge where I belayed. Our bigger mistake was not placing a belay anchor. We felt secure on the ledge, but since the terrain below was exposed, we should have been treating this as a multi-pitch scenario, in case someone fell below the "ground" of the first pitch.

Another mistake was how we handled the downclimb. Alexis could have simply left the lowest piece in and either lowered from it or used it as protection until she reached the ledge. We then could have built an anchor and/or placed more pro so we could safely climb back up to retrieve the cam. Or, even though it's a difficult decision, we could have just left a piece behind. Editor's note: This party was very

well-equipped for an emergency, with an inReach and walkie-talkies for two-way communication with responders, as well as an effective first-aid kit. (Source: Andrew Leader.)

## Images



The start of Spontaneity Arête. The climbers in this incident scrambled to a higher ledge to start the first pitch, then fell past this point from their unanchored belay stance.

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