



AAC Publications

Lead Fall onto Ledge – Protection Pulled Out

California, Donner Summit, Black Wall

Late on July 12, two male climbers were attempting to complete the second pitch of Cannibal Gully, a 5.7 trad climb on the left portion of the Black Wall. This climb is popular for new leaders due to the grade, but the rock quality is considered low for the area. The leader fell at approximately 25 feet above a large ledge. An unknown number of pieces blew, causing him to hit the ledge, bounce, and continue falling for another ten feet before being stopped by his belayer. The climber, who was severely injured, was unable to climb back to the belay, so the belayer tied off his injured partner and called for assistance.

Members of Truckee Tahoe Regional Rescue Team responded to the top of the wall and lowered a rescuer with a Stokes basket, secured the injured climber, and assisted the party to the bottom of the cliff. The leader suffered numerous traumatic injuries, including a fractured pelvis, fractured back, and a head injury. He was wearing a helmet. (Source: Dave Fichter, Truckee Tahoe Regional Rescue Team.)

ANALYSIS

This climb, established in 1969, is an “old school” 5.7, and many climbers feel that it is much harder than the grade suggests, compared with today’s standards. Many new trad leaders are drawn to its low grade and easy appearance, but the rock quality of this climb is poor and a number of accidents have occurred here over the years. [A second accident occurred on this climb on August 16 when a leader (male, age unknown) fell after getting his foot stuck in the crack. He suffered a fractured ankle.] **Whatever a climber’s experience level, placing ample protection on traditional routes is a must. When encountering suspect rock, additional protection can help to prevent a long fall should one of the pieces fail.** (Sources: Dave Fichter, Truckee Tahoe Regional Rescue Team and the Editors.)

Images

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