



AAC Publications

Fall While Topping Out – No Spotter

California, Tahoe, Eagle Falls, Lost in Space Boulders

On May 5, a boulderer (male, 32), fell while topping out an unnamed V4 near the south shore of Lake Tahoe. He fell about ten feet, landing awkwardly onto his pad. He was climbing with friends but had no spotter at the time. Upon landing, he sustained a severe open fracture ankle dislocation. Two friends came to his assistance and contacted El Dorado Search and Rescue. Due to snow conditions and the severity of the fracture, the climber was airlifted by California Highway Patrol (CHP) to a local hospital, where he underwent emergency surgery to repair the ankle.

ANALYSIS

This accident occurred within a mile of the highway but across a river and in heavy spring snow conditions, making self-rescue impossible. Fortunately, the friends who were bouldering nearby were able to contact search and rescue, and air evacuation was completed just prior to sunset. Due to the nature of the fracture, any additional delay could have significantly affected the prospects for recovery. The climber believes this accident would have been prevented if he'd had a spotter to guide his landing. No matter how easy a problem is, it's always best to have spotters. (Source: Carolina Rodríguez, friend of the injured climber.)

A NOTE ON BOULDERING ACCIDENTS: This bouldering incident was unusual because it led to a rescue involving a helicopter and other significant resources. Accidents in North American Climbing reports few bouldering incidents, but not because they are rare—we see anecdotal reports about numerous injuries, usually involving the lower legs. However, most boulderers who get hurt rely on their friends and other climbers to self-rescue and get medical attention, and thus the accidents are never reported officially. Good spotting, the careful placement of pads, and appropriate choice of problems for one's skill and experience will prevent many bouldering accidents.

Images

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