



AAC Publications

Fall On Rock

California, Yosemite Valley, Sentinel Rock, Steck-Salathé Route

In the evening of October 18, Yosemite National Park dispatchers received a report of a fallen climber on the 13th pitch of the Steck-Salathé Route on Sentinel Rock, a prominent Yosemite Valley feature infamous for its demanding wide cracks and arduous approach and descent. Climber 1, an experienced climber in her 30s, was leading when she found herself off-route. Nervous about downclimbing, she climbed to a fixed nut and planned to lower back to the belay. However, when she weighted the nut, it pulled out. She fell approximately 30 feet, hitting her face and resulting in a brief loss of consciousness and several broken teeth.

After the leader regained consciousness, the party of two were unsure if they would be able to continue climbing, and a rescue was initiated. A team of Yosemite Valley rescue personnel hiked up the Sentinel's descent gully. Meanwhile, the party had decided to continue, and they made it to the top of the Sentinel as the rescue team reached them. The injured party was treated and monitored overnight and flown out via helicopter in the morning.

ANALYSIS

It's not uncommon to find oneself off-route on long adventure climbs like the Steck-Salathé. The party in this incident were climbing within their skill set but made a significant error: trusting fixed gear. Yosemite Valley is full of fixed pieces, and climbers tend to over-trust this unknown gear, which might be damaged or inadequately placed. Relying on a single piece always carries significant risk. If you find yourself needing to retreat, use gear that you place yourself—either as the primary piece or to back up fixed gear. (Sources: Yosemite National Park Search and Rescue and the Editors.)

Images

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