



AAC Publications

Lead Fall on Rock — Pinned in Offwidth

California, Central Coast, Santa Barbara, Invisible Wall

On February 23, I (male, 31) went climbing with a small group of friends at the Invisible Wall in Santa Barbara. We are new climbers (less than two years), but I had taken several classes and regularly practiced rope skills at home. Midway through the afternoon, I tied in to lead Twice Stung and Forever Shy (5.10-), a 60-foot climb several grades below what I'd previously sent. The route sits about five feet to the left of a dihedral with an offwidth running up it. We hoped to top-rope the offwidth once I built an anchor at the top.

Above the halfway point, I hesitated for several minutes as I tried to figure out where to go. Seeing easier climbing above, I decided to just go for it. I fell and dropped about 15 feet, swung to the right, and ended up upside down, unconscious, and with my shoulder stuck in the offwidth. Despite wearing a helmet, I had a head wound that produced a significant amount of blood, and I was unable to be lowered. A nearby climber was able to free solo up an easier route to reach me, pull me out of the offwidth, and help lower me safely. I regained consciousness as I was righted. We were lucky to have a cell signal, and I was evacuated by helicopter to the hospital, where I was treated for a concussion, scalp laceration, blood loss, and a sprained thumb.

ANALYSIS

This incident was the result of my inexperience. While there were a number of components that caused injury (flipping upside down, swinging due to poor position, hitting the wall at just the right angle to cause a wound underneath my helmet, getting stuck while unconscious, etc.), many of these factors would have been mitigated or rendered moot with better awareness and technique that come with more experience. When confronted with more difficult climbing than anticipated, sometimes the prudent choice is to downclimb to a rest or back off entirely, rather than “just go for it” and risk injury. (Sources: Tyler Johnson and the Editors.)

Images

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