



AAC Publications

Fall on Rock – Loose Rock, Inadequate Protection

Colorado, Eldorado Canyon, Redgarden Wall

On May 17, at approximately 7 p.m., two experienced climbers set out to climb Swanson Arête, a long 5.5, after doing several difficult single-pitch routes on Redgarden Wall. The plan was to simul-climb the route and descend the East Slabs of Redgarden to return to their car. To reach Swanson Arête, which begins from Red Ledge partway up the cliff, Climber 1 started with the first pitch of the Great Zot (5.8+). Above this, he clipped a bolted anchor at the top of neighboring West Chimney route and traversed the broad Red Ledge to the base of Swanson Arête. While navigating these ledges or the start of Swanson Arête, the climber pulled off a microwave-size block and fell, eventually coming to a stop on Red Ledge. He had placed no gear after the bolted anchor.

Although unresponsive at first, Climber 1 was vocal after 15 seconds and quickly self-diagnosed a broken leg. Still on the ground, Climber 2 called 911 immediately. Given the uncertainty about a spinal injury, Climber 2 opted to wait for rescuers instead of trying to lower Climber 1 to the ground.

Another party was descending West Chimney, and one of the climbers untied, soloed the last third of the West Chimney (5.6) to reach the injured climber, and then fixed a rope that could be used by rescuers to reach Climber 1. Rocky Mountain Rescue Group responded, reaching the site within an hour of the initial 911 call. Climber 1 sustained a broken femur, spinal fracture, broken wrist, four broken ribs, and a punctured lung; he has made a full recovery and returned to climbing.

ANALYSIS

This accident is difficult to analyze, since the belayer could not see the climber fall (he just heard “falling”), and Climber 1 does not remember details. Our crags are dynamic places, constantly shifting. Even on well-traveled classics, we must remain vigilant in evaluating rock and potentially adjust our tactics in loose terrain by placing more protection or establishing intermediate belays. The choice to simul-climb or link pitches increases the risk of long falls and ledge falls. (Source: Climber 2.)

Images

Article Details

Author	Climber 2
Publication	ANAM
Volume	12
Issue	73
Page	55
Copyright Date	2020
Article Type	Accident reports