



AAC Publications

Lowering Error – Off-Route, Rope Too Short, No stopper

Utah, Ogden, The school Room, Sunday Wall Crag

A group of three moderately experienced climbers—two males and one female (Sam, 23; Jared, 18; and Rylee, 27)—headed to the School Room early on August 15. Rylee and Sam had just finished their Single Pitch Instructor (SPI) courses a day earlier. The climbers flaked the rope below Super Bowl Sunday (5.5 trad, single pitch), racked up, and casually did their safety checks and communication.

Sam led the route easily, placing protection along the way. The beta they'd seen called for using bolted anchors at the top of a nearby route to descend. But when Sam finished the fifth-class terrain, he could not find the bolts. He scrambled a bit higher to look for the anchor, then continued up more fifth-class to the top of the crag. He decided to set up a top-rope from there and wrapped a massive boulder with a double cordelette for an anchor, then called to be lowered. At one point he saw the middle mark of the rope passing and called to his belayer, Jared, to ask how much rope was left. Jared responded that there should be enough for a top-rope. Sam continued to lower and then began free-falling to the ground.

Sam's right leg took most of the impact. He rolled back and hit his right elbow. The climbers assessed the damage and built a splint for Sam's leg with the equipment they had available. Leaving the rest of their gear to retrieve later, they made the one-mile descent to their vehicles, with Jared assisting Sam and then carrying him with the help of a runner they met on the trail. At an urgent care center, Sam was diagnosed with a fractured talus from his fall of approximately 15 feet.

ANALYSIS

There was no stopper knot in the rope, and none of the climbers checked for one before Sam started climbing. A stopper knot (or tying in the belayer) would have kept Sam from hitting the ground. They were unfamiliar with the cliff and had not researched the descent adequately or spotted the rappel anchor from the ground before climbing. The distance to Sam's top anchor (more than 110 feet) hindered communication. None of the climbers was wearing a helmet, and they were lucky the injuries were not more serious. (Sources: Sam, Jared, and the Editors.)

Images

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