



AAC Publications

Loose Rock, Ledge Fall – Failure to Test Holds

West Virginia, Seneca Rocks, South Peak, East Face, Lower Skyline Area

Two climbers arrived at the bolted anchors atop the first pitch of Sky Line Traverse on June 2, planning to climb Rear Entry (5.8) to the Lower Broadway ledge. The leader, Mike (50), traversed up and right to a large block that marks the beginning of that climb. As he pulled on the microwave-size block, it came loose, causing him to fall approximately 25 feet and hit a ledge. (The block also fell, almost hitting another party below.) His uninjured partner lowered him to the base of Skyline, atop a ledge about 30 feet above the ground that can be accessed by a short fifth-class scramble.

A nearby climber ran to the local climbing shop, the Gendarme, to activate emergency services. (There is no cell service at Seneca Rocks as it falls within the National Radio quiet zone, a designation that prevents interference from cell phones and other electronics for the National Radio Astronomy Observatory.) The injured climber, who was momentarily unconscious after the fall, suffered a large contusion/abrasion below his right ear, along with multiple other abrasions. Guides from Seneca Rocks Climbing School administered first aid and, along with nearby climbers, assisted in the evacuation of the climber to a nearby helipad. The climber was wearing a helmet, which likely prevented far more serious injuries. (Source: Nick Ingalls.)

ANALYSIS

Always test blocks and suspect holds by rapping on them and listening and looking for signs they might be loose. Additionally, it's a good idea to gather recent beta about your planned route. A post on the Rear Entry route page at Mountain Project on March 22, about 10 weeks before the accident, indicated this block was loose and ready to fall, and that it was a hazard not only for the climber but also for parties below, and that it could be avoided with care. (Sources: Nick Ingalls and the Editors.)

Images

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