



## AAC Publications

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### **Stranded — Rappel Error**

California, Yosemite National Park, Leaning Tower

**Two climbers attempting the West Face of Leaning Tower in June decided to descend after arriving at Ahwahnee Ledge (the top of the fourth pitch), due to excessive heat and sun.** While rappelling the very overhanging first pitch with the haulbag, Climber A rappelled over a small roof and got too far away from the wall to reach the ledge at the bottom of the pitch, despite clipping some directionals during his descent. (The West Face route is approached by a ramp that traverses onto the face, so the first anchor is far above the ground.) Since the climber could not reach the ramp, he continued rappelling to a lower ledge. This ledge had no permanent anchor, and Climber A was not carrying the right pieces to construct a solid anchor. With no way to anchor the haul bag, he could not detach it from the ropes nor reascend the ropes to reach the ramp.

During their descent, the two climbers had called Yosemite Search and Rescue to request some advice; climbing rangers were able to assist them over the phone with their first rappels, but soon decided to send SAR members to Leaning Tower in case further assistance was needed. When SAR members arrived, they fixed a rope and lowered it to Climber A, and he was able to leave his haul bag and jumars out. They then secured the team's rappel ropes to the ledge so the second climber could rappel directly to the approach ramp. The ropes and haulbag were retrieved later that day.

### **ANALYSIS**

The Leaning Tower is one of the steepest big walls in North America, the lower half of which overhangs at an average angle of 110 degrees. The West Face has been the site of numerous rappelling difficulties, and while Climber A did utilize some directionals, he extended one piece with a long runner and soon found himself too far from the cliff to place more directional pieces. (Source: Yosemite National Park Climbing Rangers.)

The following sidebar accompanied this report in ANAC 2021:

# Images

## THE ART OF THE BAIL

Bailing off a steep route is a nearly inevitable outcome if you climb enough walls, so it's best to know how to get down safely before you find yourself dangling in space, wishing you knew what to do. Yosemite climbing rangers advise the following techniques for rappelling overhanging routes with a haulbag.

- (1) The first person descending should rappel on a fixed single strand with a Grigri or a similar locking belay device, clipping *both* strands of the rappel ropes to directional pieces to keep them close to the wall. They should also carry equipment to reascend the fixed rope in case of getting too far from the wall or rappelling past the anchor.
- (2) When the first person arrives at the lower anchor, they should feed out five to ten feet of slack rope, tie a knot with both ropes, and clip the knot to the anchor. This will close the system for the second rappeller and allow the second person to pull themselves into the wall to unclip directionals on their way down and to pull into the anchor at the end of the rappel.
- (3) The second rappeller should untie the fixed strand from the upper anchor or undo any knot-blocks, and then rappel both strands as normal, using a tube-style device (such as an ATC) and a third-hand backup. They can unclip and clean the directional pieces as they descend. Note: The second person down should carry the team's heaviest gear (haulbag, etc.), because the tube-style device produces a smoother rappel than a Grigri. Plus, they should not have any reason to reascend the rope because it will be fixed to the lower anchor.

– Yosemite National Park Climbing Rangers

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