



## AAC Publications

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### Ground Fall — Protection Pulled Out

California, Joshua Tree National Park, Real Hidden Valley, Hidden Treasure

**On February 9, near the end of a good weekend of climbing, my partner/wife (female, 61) and I (male, 61) headed to Hidden Tower to climb Sail Away. A party of four was just starting that route, so instead we set up to climb Split, a 5.6 hand crack around the corner.** [The consensus rating at Mountain Project is 5.7+, and some consider this route to be even harder.] **I built a two-piece anchor for my wife at the belay, due to a small stance with a 15-foot drop onto rocks to the right of the belay pedestal.**

The route starts with a short stretch of very low-angle rock before the crack rears up. I placed two cams (probably Camalots 1 and 2) in the crack and was above the second piece when I fell. Both cams pulled and I fell approximately 30 feet, past the belay. I don't remember feeling pumped or in any way having problems prior to the fall. My wife thinks she might have noted some type of rockfall, but was too traumatized by the circumstances to recall clearly.

I was helped by nearby climbers until JOSAR arrived and then packaged with spinal injury precautions and rolled in a litter to the Real Hidden Valley parking lot, and then taken by helicopter to a local hospital. I had multiple fractures and a collapsed right lung, but fortunately no spinal cord or head injuries. My right buttock was severely bruised—the Grigri and its locking carabiner that hung on my harness probably caused this. I have mostly recovered and was able to start climbing again by July 2020.

### ANALYSIS

Things I think I did right were wearing a helmet (my wife too) and building a belay anchor for the exposed stance. I don't know why the cams pulled but believe the low-angle start of the route may have adversely affected the angle of placements on the steeper crack. I have been trad leading for about five years and have taken a few falls on my gear without previous failures. I also have climbed with multiple AMGA guides and had some of them critique and approve my gear placements. (Source: Neal Lischner.)

Editor's Note: This Joshua Tree rescue and another in 2020 relied on the emergency phone at the Hidden Valley Campground/Intersection parking lot. Climbers should familiarize themselves with this location, as cell service is limited within the park.

**Images**

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