



AAC Publications

Rockfall Onto Belayer

Colorado, Rifle Mountain Park, Ruckman Cave

At approximately 4 p.m. on September 26, a climber started up The Promise, a 5.12c sport route on the left side of the Ruckman Cave. Just before a ledge at the start of the steep climbing on the route, the climber pulled onto a chalked-up jug that ripped out of the wall. The broken jug, along with more rocks and debris, rained down on the belayer. The climber's fall was held at the first bolt of the route, and he slammed into the wall sideways, from which he sustained soreness and bruising. The belayer narrowly avoided being hit in the head or upper body by the debris and took all of the damage to his right leg. Fortunately, a visit to the emergency department confirmed no broken bones. (Source: Climber's report at MountainProject.com.)

ANALYSIS

This incident highlights a paradox often seen at sport climbing areas: The climbers who choose to wear helmets while sport climbing more often are the ones leading or top-roping the climb, not necessarily the belayers and bystanders below the route. Yet, arguably, the belayer is much more likely to be hit by rockfall, which is fairly common on Rifle Mountain Park's limestone.

More common than helmets at Rifle's crags are assisted-braking belay devices, which can be a lifesaver in accidents like this one, when the belayer may be severely distracted or even incapacitated by rockfall. (Source: The Editors.)

Images

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