



## AAC Publications

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### Ground Fall Before First Bolt — Fatigue

Utah, Moab Area, Potash Road, Mars Wall

**On June 23, my friend and I went to Mars Wall to do a few after-work pitches. I had taught her how to lead belay and taken some short practice falls with her a few weeks earlier.** I (female, 28) had not been climbing very much in the months leading up to the accident, and although I previously sport climbed regularly, I had been climbing primarily trad and wasn't in the habit of bringing a stick clip.

I first led a bolted 5.9+ that I had done the year before. It felt hard but within my ability, and I did it with no takes or falls. The light was fading faster than I would have hoped, but I decided to try the route next door, Tax Free \$ (5.10c), also a sport climb. I felt this route would be within my ability, though a challenge.

The base of the climb was uneven and sloping away from the wall. There was a large, fallen tree at the base with roots that jut up toward the climb. My belayer offered to spot me, but I declined because it seemed like an awkward place and perhaps dangerous for her. The start felt insecure, and I fell off twice, about five feet off the ground, before clipping the first bolt.

I decided to push myself and give it one more try. I slipped and again fell approximately five feet, this time landing awkwardly on my left ankle before somersaulting backward down the slope. The rope came tight around the fallen tree and arrested my fall. Immediately I knew that my left ankle was hurt. Otherwise, I had only a few scrapes. The helmet I was wearing likely prevented a minor concussion from the rocky slope. After visiting the hospital, I learned I had a slight calcaneus fracture and had shattered the horn of my talus bone.

### ANALYSIS

The contributing factors to this accident were lack of fitness, fatigue, and inadequate equipment. A wet winter, social distancing, and three jobs prevented me from climbing in the months leading up to the accident, and I overestimated my fitness. When I started to lead this pitch, it was late in the day and I was tired. If I had brought and used a stick clip, I would have been protected before the first bolt.

**[Editor's Note:** Although not practical on this route, it's often possible to preclip the first or second bolt of a difficult climb by climbing and lowering from an adjacent route.] (Source: Kate Weigel.)

## Images



Accident site at the Mars Wall, outside Moab, Utah.

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