



AAC Publications

Leader Fall On Ice

Wyoming, Cody, South Fork Valley

On February 8, I took a long leader fall on the third pitch of Broken Hearts, a long ice route in the South Fork Valley. I was climbing in a group of three ahead of five friends doing the same route in two rope teams. At around 11 a.m., I was near the top of the WI3+ pitch when I made a poor placement with one tool. As I was removing my other tool for the next placement, the first tool popped and I fell.

I was climbing with 8.2mm half ropes and clipping every other screw with them. My last screw was approximately six feet below my boots when I fell. I impacted a slanting shelf about 20 feet down, hitting my pelvis and back, and then continued to fall another 10 feet or so. My partner was able to get me to the snow ledge below, and we called for help.

Various climbers in the area as well as members of Park County Search and Rescue, Cody Regional Wilderness Medical Team, and Big Horn County Search and Rescue responded. Rescuers reached the scene at about 2:30 p.m. I was put in a litter and lowered two pitches to the ground, then carried to a tracked snow vehicle, which took me to an ambulance. My pelvis was fractured in three places, and I had a fractured sacrum, a compression fracture in the L1 vertebra, and a broken rib. (Sources: Rick Dvorak, 42, and Park County Sheriff's Office.)

ANALYSIS

Given the length of many ice pitches, the thin ropes often used, and the fact that belayers are often positioned some distance from the base of the climb (adding slack to the system), any ice climbing leader fall is likely to be quite long. To minimize the risk of serious injury, climbers should place frequent protection and, above all, take care to ensure that every tool and crampon placement is solid before moving to the next. (Source: The Editors.)

Images

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