



AAC Publications

Rappel Error — Fracture, Spinal Injury

California, Northern Sierra, Rainbow

On May 27, while climbing at Rainbow, west of Donner Pass, I (Carl Alsup, 39) rappelled off the end of my rope. I had just led Malcolm's Route (5.9) to the top of the formation. My wife was going to follow but decided she was going to save her strength. So I lowered, cleaned the route on top-rope, and then walked across the top of the cliff to the anchors of Aja (5.10d). I was still tied in. I clipped the rope through the two-bolt anchor, using slings to set up the top-rope. I threw one (unknotted) end of the rope down and saw it hit the ground. I then threw the other side of the rope, which was still attached to my harness so it formed a loop that didn't quite reach the ground.

I started to rappel and about 25 feet off the ground the free and unknotted rope end slipped through my device, and I fell into a pile of rocks and manzanita. My wife called for rescue, and despite being only a 15-minute walk from the road, the thick manzanita bushes necessitated a helicopter removal.

ANALYSIS

I've climbed outside for 20 years, trad for 19 years. From my own deconstruction, here's what happened: When I threw the side of the rope that was still tied to my harness, the weight of the rope pulled enough slack through the anchor to shorten the other end, so that it was 25 feet short of touching the ground. I failed to notice this shift at the anchor, and the free end of rope did not have a stopper knot so it slipped through the belay device when I rappelled. (Source: Carl Alsup.)

Images

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