



AAC Publications

Slip on Third-Class Traverse

California, Tahoe Area, Newly Developed Area

I (Bobby Hutton, 31) wanted to show my friend Adam a new area that my friends and I were developing. In early April, we decided to drop lines down a cliff to work on new routes.

To access the top of the cliff, we crossed a steep granite gully and gained about a hundred feet of elevation on easier terrain on the left side of the gully. We started to cross back on the third-class terrain above the gully to access the top of the cliff. I then slipped in such a way that I was able to grab the rock but not stop myself. I tumbled down over 100 feet. I remember multiple impacts on my feet and one on my head, which knocked off my helmet. [Editor's Note: Hutton's helmet was unbuckled at the time. See below.]

Adam scrambled down to where I stopped falling. He called 911 and supported me as I crawled to a flat bench in the granite. Once the paramedics arrived, they decided to have a California Highway Patrol helicopter long-line me out and deliver me to an ambulance down the hill. After X-rays and CT scans at the local hospital, I was transferred to UC Davis Medical Center. I spent four days in the hospital during which they operated on my thumb and ankle.

Analysis

If you take over a million steps in 3rd- or 4th-class terrain, you are going to slip a few times. This slip just wasn't recoverable. I do not feel complacency was an issue. I was very aware of the risks, having had and seen several near misses in the last ten years. I am extremely happy that I decided to put my helmet on my head for the approach up the hill instead of clipping it to my harness or putting it in my backpack. It was a tight, uncomfortable fit due to my large head and thick hair. Even unclipped, I still credit it as saving me from brain injury or death. My WFR training allowed me to stay calm and effectively communicate with EMS personnel. It was a tiny investment for the peace of mind it brought me during the accident. (Source: Bobby Hutton.)

Images



A Tahoe-area climber fell 100 feet after slipping off the top of a new crag.

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