



AAC Publications

Fall on Rock — Inadequate Protection, Inexperience

California, Yosemite National Park, Cathedral Peak

On August 13, BJ Cook and I responded to an accident while climbing on the Southeast Buttress of Cathedral Peak, a five-pitch, 5.6 traditional climb in Tuolumne Meadows. BJ and I are experienced climbers and have many moderate multi-pitch trad climbs under our belt.

At approximately 8:30 a.m., we began the route and completed two pitches, ending at a small pine tree. Below and to the right, two young women were climbing a different variation.

A few minutes later, we heard a loud, heavy sound of impact from below. We saw the leader falling on the low-angle slab until her belayer, located on a small ledge, arrested the fall. The leader had fallen over 30 feet, hitting a large ledge before rolling down the slabs.

We called down and asked if they were okay. Neither the belayer nor the leader acknowledged us, and the leader appeared unconscious. For a few moments, we continued to call down to the party below, and the leader began to moan, then scream, so we decided to call 911. After BJ called for a rescue, he lowered me. The leader's fall had been held by a number 1 Camalot in a small alcove. There was an additional piece below. The belayer was holding the leader's weight via an ATC belay device, and the leader was laid out on a low-angle slab, unable to support her weight or aid in her own rescue.

We did not have enough rope to double-rope rappel to them, so I rappelled as far as their number 1 Camalot and incorporated this into an anchor. BJ then rappelled to this station, and I then rappelled on two ropes to the injured party and the belayer. The belayer had tied a catastrophe knot behind the ATC. She was not tied into an anchor but was sitting behind a tree on the small ledge. After the fall, she looped a section of her rope around a tree and clove-hitched it to a non-locking carabiner on her belay loop.

I went to the injured climber. She was in and out of consciousness over the next few minutes, hanging in her harness, and in great pain. I continued rappelling to the belayer and we tied off her device with a mule hitch so she could go hands-free. I then made an anchor by slinging the tree and tethered her with a sling and locking carabiner.

I returned to the injured climber and supported her while the belayer slowly lowered the climber. We were eventually able to get the injured climber to a safe and comfortable position on the ledge. We then waited for the rescue team. A different group of climbers retrieved all the gear, and I moved out of the way while SAR did their job. The injured leader was hoisted off the ledge in a litter and taken to Fresno. We helped the belayer rappel to the base, and she hiked out with SAR.

ANALYSIS

The party's rack consisted of fewer than ten pieces: a few nuts and Tricams and three or four Camalots, which they had borrowed from a friend. The party carried no alpine draws, only quickdraws.

Failure to adequately protect the route—which is common on easier terrain—likely contributed to the injuries sustained during the fall. However, their limited gear and lack of proper belay anchor suggest that they would have benefited from some additional education and experience. (Source: Matthew

Images



Rescuers work at the scene of the accident on Cathedral Peak.



A helicopter on scene at the rescue on Cathedral Peak.

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