



## AAC Publications

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### Fall on Rock — Inexperience

Texas, San Antonio, Buddha Belly Wall

**On January 9, a man approximately 21 to 25 years old fell on Fear of Falling (5.11b) and broke both ankles.** According to three witnesses who posted on Mountain Project, the man and his partner—a female approximately 21 years old—appeared completely inexperienced. The pair ignored the multiple warnings from experienced climbers regarding back-clipping and improper belaying. At one point, the young man's harness slipped below his waist with the leg loops hanging below his knees.

Ryan Thornton was climbing a route near the pair. He wrote, "I saw the couple approach the wall from the trail. I remember overhearing the young woman say they had traveled from Houston to climb." (This crag was open while most in Texas were closed due to COVID.) "I noticed all their gear, particularly the rope and draws, looked shiny and new. Neither was wearing helmets. When they showed up they set up one of those inflatable couch things not far from where they would be belaying. At the risk of sounding rude, we knew immediately that these two had no business being there. They just looked like kids who bought some climbing gear.

"The young man started making his way up Fear of Falling. He was obviously having trouble. He started making his way past the first bolt but wasn't having much luck. He kept awkwardly getting above the bolt, then holding the draw and swinging back down. I remember hearing him say, 'Okay, I'm going to try this one more time, and if I can't get it I'm going to come back down.' His partner said, 'Okay.'

"My partner nudged me and pointed out how much slack the young woman was pulling through the Grigri. The guy was 20 to 30 feet up, and the woman had so much slack out, it piled at her feet. My partner and I looked at each other with an 'I can't watch this' expression. Almost immediately, the guy peeled off the wall upside down. With the slack, he fell almost to the ground.

"His belayer is frozen, just holding the rope and Grigri," Thornton wrote. "Luckily, another climbing party of three or four guys came over, got him right side up, and then helped lower him to the ground."

It was later reported on Mountain Project that the fallen climber's belayer was seeking directions to a nearby sports store to buy a dolly with which to cart the victim to the hospital. He had apparently broken both ankles.

### ANALYSIS

Climbing is dangerous and rewards foolhardy bravado or naivete with injury, or worse. The post on Mountain Project generated comments regarding intervention of unsafe practices. Opinions, as always ran the gamut, but the bottom line was that the pair ignored or failed to understand multiple warnings before the belayer became agitated. It appears that, short of physical intervention (improbable given that the leader was leading and belayer belaying), the other climbers did what they could do. (Sources: Ryan Thornton, Mountain Project.)

**Editor's Note:** "Essentials: Speak Up!" in ANAC 2019 proposes ways to intervene when climbers observe potentially dangerous behavior.

**Images**

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