



## AAC Publications

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### **Loose Rock – Broken Leg**

Utah, Zion National Park, Mt. Greer

**On June 1, a father and son team experienced rockfall while attempting a first ascent variation on Mt. Greer, a 1,500-foot-tall formation in Zion National Park.** While leading the final pitch, Aaron Davis (42) dislodged a large block. The rock struck his son, Ian (16), who was belaying, breaking the latter's femur. They called 911 and were rescued by helicopter.

The team was very experienced and chose an objective that was big, accessible, and near the west entrance of the park. This sector has cell service, and that was to play a role in their rescue.

The pair started climbing at dawn. After climbing three or four pitches of an existing route called Slow and Delirious, they continued straight up into new terrain. By 4 p.m. they had climbed seven new pitches up to 5.11- and were perhaps 100 feet from the summit. Above, an unclimbed chimney led to the top. In his haste to summit, Aaron placed the belay where debris from the chimney would funnel.

Halfway up the chimney, "The wall cut in a bit, like the backs of two offset books," Aaron recalled. "There was a perfect hand crack in back. I barely touched the outside edge with my left foot when a mini-fridge-sized block cut loose."

The rock severed the lead rope before striking Ian's leg. Still wedged in the chimney, Aaron placed a cam and rappelled with his tagline. A quick assessment revealed that Ian's femur was broken.

Aaron leaned out enough from the wall to get a cell signal and was connected with the Park Service. A Utah Department of Public Safety (DPS) helicopter showed up in three hours. A rescuer was lowered, and the climbers were plucked off one at a time.

### **ANALYSIS**

Summit fever can cause climbers to rush and make poor choices. The position of the belay and hasty climbing, combined with the deteriorating sandstone quality toward the top of most Zion formations, led to the accident. Aaron recalled, "We should have identified the obvious natural hazards. There were options, but I was blind to them in the moment. Had we slowed down a bit, we would have moved our belay out of the shooting gallery and sent." (Source: Aaron Davis.)

## Images



Ian Davis being plucked off Mt. Greer in Zion by a Utah Department of Public Safety helicopter.



Ian Davis awaiting help after his leg was broken by rockfall.



The accident occurred near the top of a previously unclimbed route on Mt. Greer.

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