



AAC Publications

Fall on Rock

Washington, Index, Inner Walls

On the afternoon of July 20, I (male, 29) was climbing at Index with P, who had several years of climbing experience. P could comfortably lead 5.11 sport routes, but had limited experience with trad climbing. I had four years of mountaineering experience and 1.5 years of trad.

Having both warmed up, we moved toward a popular 100-foot trad climb, Toxic Shock (5.9), that I wanted to lead. I had successfully top-roped the route twice and felt I had a reasonable chance of success.

I climbed the first part of the route and reached a large ledge with an obvious horn. I then began the second part, placing two cams in relatively short succession to protect against ledge fall. I came to a hand crack and climbed this part as a layback, with my body positioned at an angle. This position (unnoticed by me) put a small ledge directly in my fall line. Approximately six feet above my last protection, I successfully placed a cam from the layback position. I pulled up rope and attempted to clip, but my feet, positioned in a smear on the protruding edge of the crack, slipped.

Due to the angle of my body, I rotated slightly, mainly facing outward as I fell. I contacted the small ledge with my left ribcage. The fall distance to the ledge was about eight to 12 feet. I continued to fall slightly further, and the two cams I had placed earlier held.

It was immediately obvious to me that I had broken at least one rib. My climbing partner lowered me, and I walked (in pain) to the car and drove myself to the hospital. The ER confirmed three broken ribs, with no other complications.

ANALYSIS

The main reason for this injury is I failed to place protection in a manner consistent with the ledge-fall hazard. My climbing mentors had continually bombarded me with warnings of being vigilant about ledges. As I departed the large ledge, this reminder was loud and clear. However, I failed to observe that I had climbed into a position above a second, smaller ledge.

A contributing factor may have been my climbing technique: Better climbers might choose to jam this section instead of laybacking, keeping the body more centered on the crack and making gear placements and clipping more manageable.

[Editor's Note: Laybacking is more intuitive than harder-to-learn jamming skills. It is probably the way this climber originally top-roped the route. As he learned, laybacking generates a pump faster than jamming while often making placing, visually assessing, and clipping of gear, much harder.] **Another contributing factor is that I was pulling up rope to clip when I fell, adding slack in the rope.** (Source: Vinny Couming.)

Images

Article Details

Author	Vinny Couming
Publication	ANAM
Volume	12
Issue	75
Page	88
Copyright Date	2022
Article Type	Accident reports