



AAC Publications

FALL ON ROCK

California, Yosemite National Park, Washington Column

On June 28, at 10:59 a.m., Yosemite Dispatch received a report of a 42-year-old male who had taken an approximately 50-foot climbing fall on The Prow (V 5.8 C2) on Washington Column. The climber's plan had been a multi-day, aid-solo ascent. On the second pitch, the climber fell, ripped rock protection, and struck a ledge. He recalled, "I felt the sensation of falling—it was so sudden and so fast. Then I remember hitting a ledge hard, bouncing, sliding. I remember hitting two more small ledges on the way down."

The climber was finally caught by his rope. He had sustained closed injuries to his head, knee, and ankle. He also had one open injury to his thigh that he tied off with an improvised tourniquet. He wrote, "I could not breathe in all the way. Possible lung injury—it felt like fractured ribs. Next, I looked around and saw the deep laceration on my inner left thigh. I stopped the bleeding with my bandana. Then, I checked my limbs. The hands, feet, neck, and back seemed okay."

He began to ascend his rope. He recalled, "I had to get my phone from my haulbag, which was above me about 50 feet. I thought, if I were to get rescued it would be easier for YOSAR to get me from the ground and not on the side of the wall. I did not have my jumars with me because I was leading. So, I used two prusiks, one that I had and the second one that doubled as my belt for my chalk bag. I finally arrived at the belay station [and the phone], quickly set up for a rappel, fixed both the lead and haul line, and got down to the beginning of the climbing, which starts at the top of a 4th-class section."

The SAR hasty team located him at the top of the 4th class and provided necessary care. A technical rescue team of four arrived and rigged to lower the injured climber down the cliff. From an open grassy area between the South Face and Astroman, the climber was short-hauled by the helicopter rescue team and transferred to a hospital.

ANALYSIS

"A piece for you and a piece for Mom," as they say. Climbing above ledges is a heads-up moment—the threat of falling and getting traumatically injured is very real. As climbers, what can we do to make climbing above ledges safer? Backing up pieces is one option. Also, be aware of how much slack is in your system when climbing above ledges.

[Editor's Note: In 2016, another climber fell from a similar aid section on the nearby South Face route, when a cam pulled from a flared piton scar. That climber also ripped several pieces before stopping. Take extra care placing cams in piton scars. Offset nuts, offset cams, and Totem cams have remarkable holding power in these flared/grooved placements.]

Other takeaways:

Bring a medical kit. A light medical kit while climbing could be a life saver. Ideally, it is never used, but it's always wise to be prepared for an accident. A little tape, some pain meds, and gauze goes a long way.

Practice and be familiar with self-rescue techniques. During this rescue, the injured climber did an

excellent job of helping himself. Even after sustaining several injuries, he was able to improvise gear, ascend his line, and rappel down the cliff. His self-rescue skills made the whole operation much faster and more efficient. Practice these skills outside, with friends, or consider taking a self-rescue course.

Climb with a partner. While some enjoy the solo challenge, there's no denying that aid soloing introduces more risk and complexity to a climb. Consider climbing with a partner, or at least acknowledge the added risk of climbing alone. Is it worth it?

The climber offered some final advice for others: "I feel that even though being super prepared is a must, life just happens. I encourage all climbers to learn basic self-rescue skills. I'm turning 43 this year and am very grateful that that's happening." (Source: Yosemite National Park Climbing Rangers.)

Images

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