



## AAC Publications

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### **ROCKFALL DURING APPROACH TO CRAG**

Utah, Wasatch Range, Little Cottonwood Canyon

**On August 5, Jessie Liddiard, a 25-year-old climber from South Jordan, Utah, was struck in the head by a volleyball-sized rock while approaching a climb in the Hellgate area with her boyfriend.** The pair were hiking near the cliff around 11:30 a.m. when Liddiard was hit by the large rock, causing critical injuries. Angie Clifford and her boyfriend were also hiking on the trail and witnessed the incident. They estimated the rock had fallen anywhere from 120 to 300 feet before it hit Liddiard, who was wearing a helmet at the time. Clifford said she heard a rock falling and yelled a warning to those below.

Clifford called 911 and Salt Lake County Sheriff's Search and Rescue was called out. Jessie lay unconscious, bleeding heavily and under her companion's care, until emergency crews could get there. Because of approaching storms and wind, several teams were deployed to start rigging technical systems in case the Department of Public Safety (DPS) was unable to hoist the patient via helicopter. Fortunately, DPS was able to extract the patient and move her to a landing zone in a nearby parking lot. She was then transferred to AirMed's care and taken to University of Utah Hospital. Liddiard spent four weeks in the ICU and 40 days in rehab. The last news was that she was recovering but was suffering some setbacks.

### **ANALYSIS**

In 2022, ANAC reported two fatalities when climbers were struck by a falling rock at the base of a crag, and in 2020 a belayer was struck by rockfall at this cliff. Liddiard was very prudent to wear a helmet during the approach to an area known to have loose rock. While the helmet offered some protection and ultimately saved her life, the impact of the rock still shattered her skull.

At the base of any cliff that might have loose rock (or in this case while approaching), adapt an alpinist's sense of mountain awareness. Watch and listen for falling rock and try to choose protected approaches, belay areas, or places to wait for your turn to climb. This is especially true if there are climbers above, after heavy rain or snow, and during windstorms. While climbing, lowering, or rappelling, avoid loose rock, look for white chalk Xs marking unstable rocks, and be aware of how the rope might catch on sketchy blocks. (Sources: Salt Lake County Sheriff's Search and Rescue and the Editors.)

## Images

## Article Details

Author	Salt Lake County Sheriff's Office Search and Rescue
Publication	ANAM
Volume	13
Issue	76
Page	79
Copyright Date	2023
Article Type	Accident reports