



AAC Publications

FALL ON ROCK – Crowding, Inadequate Belay

Utah, Southeast Utah, Looking Glass Rock

Around 11 a.m. on November 7, a female climber (38) started up the first pitch of The Regular Route (3 pitches, 5.4) on Looking Glass Rock. She was belayed from above by her husband, Climber 2 (37), who had led the pitch. On the second move off the ground, she slipped, lost her grip on the rock, and fell, landing on her right foot before falling backward and onto her back at the base of the route. She got up and restarted the climb. Midway up the first pitch, however, she realized she had severely damaged her ankle.

Climber 2 wrote to ANAC, “Upon reaching the belay ledge, she informed me that she had either broken or severely sprained her ankle. We decided to immediately abort the climb. We self-rescued and made it back to the car approximately 30 minutes after the injury was sustained. Within an hour she was unable to put weight on her injured ankle.”

ANALYSIS

Climber 2 wrote, “When I started the climb there was nobody else in sight. A group of five climbers and a single free soloist arrived just as my wife was about to start climbing. The leader of the group asked her, ‘Do you mind if I go ahead?’ She replied, ‘Isn’t it safe to allow the party ahead to complete the pitch before starting up?’ He stared at her until she said, ‘If you are in that much of a hurry, you can climb through and I’ll wait.’ During that exchange, the free soloist also decided to start climbing. One member of the party told the leader to let my wife go ahead: ‘There are five of us and only one of her.’

“As she started, she felt rushed and pressured to finish quickly, and she slipped off a fairly large foot placement. The rope [had some] slack due to the wind blowing it several feet sideways between each quickdraw. I failed to communicate the danger to my wife. Had she known, she would likely have climbed with more focus.

“The leader of the party of five arrived [at my belay] immediately after my wife and built his master point over the top of my anchor. I told him my second was injured and we were going to rappel off. He began belaying using two ropes with two followers tied in at the midpoint and end of each rope. Pretty soon there were eight people on the belay ledge. I ended up lowering my second off to free up space on the ledge and get her down without further complications. As the other party had their anchor set up over top of ours it was a bit challenging to stay connected to the anchor while rigging the rappel and removing our master point. Their team of five were not tied into any anchors on the ledge despite the severe wind. My improper belay due to the wind and my poor communication are the direct causes of the accident. But we also learned another key lesson: Do not rush others or allow yourself to be rushed when climbing.” (Source: Climber 2.)

Images



Accidents on popular climbs like Looking Glass Rock are often a byproduct of crowding—in this case climbers being pressured by others to hurry. Here, a climber racks up to start the route, which climbs a ridge to the skyline.

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