



## AAC Publications

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### **FALL ON ROCK**

Washington, Icicle Creek Canyon, Middle Eight Mile Buttress

**On June 11, I (male, 28) was leading the first pitch of Hello Kitty (3 pitches, 5.10b) at Middle Eight Mile Buttress, outside of Leavenworth, at about 4 p.m. on a sunny day.** The pitch is mostly bolted with a couple of options for gear placements, leading to a two-bolt anchor. The climb starts with blocky moves on easier terrain, moving into a more difficult slabby section with several bolts. With two bolts left to go, I was about to move out of sight of my belayer. I communicated this with him, and as I moved higher on the slab, I reached up and clipped the last bolt. I was separated from the anchor by a blank slab, demanding delicate moves.

I moved five feet right and above the bolt, with one more delicate move to go before reaching a lower angle slab. As I was adjusting my weight, I could feel my feet losing purchase on the slightly dirty slab. I knew I was going to come off.

I fell past several bolts and the rope came taut quite suddenly, before a pendulum swing into the wall. My left foot struck first, and I immediately felt sharp pain in my ankle. I asked my partner to lower me. I believed my ankle to be broken (X-rays later showed an avulsion fracture). The ankle could not bear weight.

We made contact with the county sheriff's office via a Garmin inReach and cell phone. We also flagged down a nearby climber, who graciously assisted us on the descent. I managed to get myself most of the way back to the road over the course of two or three hours of scrambling on two hands and one foot, with much assistance from my partner and the other climber.

### **ANALYSIS**

There were no terrible decisions or risky actions leading up to this accident. My partner and I reflected on a number of smaller factors that ultimately contributed to it:

1. Climbing/communicating safely when out of sight of the belayer: **I did not warn my belayer that a fall was likely on the last moves of the pitch. I also did not ask him to take up slack when I started to feel myself losing purchase on the slab. Either action could have shortened my fall and likely protected my ankle.**

2. Belaying safely when out of sight of the climber: **I had communicated that I was close to the anchor, so my belayer paid more slack into the system while I was out of sight. He reflected that a tighter belay could have shortened the fall.** Editor's Note: From the description of the rope coming suddenly tight, this could be a case of short-ropeing.

3. Falling technique: **A more graceful/intentional fall could have prevented the sharp ankle impact. I recall my body reaching a horizontal position before swinging into the rock (partially due to the pendulum nature of the fall). This likely made the impact worse.**

4. General decision-making/risk tolerance: **We chose to climb a slab route at the edge of our abilities when we were an hour hike from the road. We also left the first-aid kit in the car in the interest of carrying a smaller pack.** (Source: The Climber.)

## Images

## Article Details

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