



## AAC Publications

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### Rockfall — Large Flake Detached on Follower

California, Yosemite National Park, Yosemite Falls Wall

Via Aqua (4 pitches, 5.8) is moderate climb characterized by its wandering route-finding, subpar rock quality, and stunning views. This unique route (yellow line) crosses a huge, massively exposed ledge system two-thirds of the way up the 1,500-foot-tall Yosemite Falls Wall. On July 7, this route was the scene of a serious though non-fatal rockfall incident. Photo: Alex Demas | USGS

**On July 7, two male climbers in their 20s were attempting Via Aqua on Yosemite Falls Wall. Via Aqua is an adventurous and lesser-known classic four-pitch 5.8 climb.** The climbers were progressing up the wall when disaster struck. While one climber was following an angled flake feature on pitch three, a sizable section of the flake detached from the wall, impacted the climber's left shoulder, and tore off a portion of his left ear. Luckily, the rope was not severed by the flake and caught his fall.

After his fall, and despite his injuries, the climber was able to climb 15 to 20 feet up to his partner's stance. The team called 911 for a rescue. They noted that the injured climber was "covered in blood" that originated from a five-inch-long laceration on his shoulder. The tissue was exposed down to the muscle, and the bleeding from this wound was life-threatening.

Recognizing the urgency of rescue, NPS personnel conducted a timely short-haul operation from the climbers' small belay ledge. Once on the ground, the climber was transferred to an ambulance for transport to definitive care at a local hospital.

### ANALYSIS

This incident highlights a few considerations for climbers in Yosemite:

- **Impacts of Freeze-Thaw Cycles.** The historic snowfall during the winter of 2022-2023, followed by spring freeze/thaw cycles, caused much of the granite in the park to expand and contract. This phenomenon caused rock to detach from various walls and pose risks to climbers. Climbers are advised to consider previous environmental conditions and those impacts on their chosen routes.
- **Medical Training and Equipment.** Carrying first aid on a climb is highly recommended. Useful items include medical tape, gauze, pain medication, and material to create a sling and swath. These items can be improvised out of clothing and climbing equipment. This injured climber was remarkably lucky. If the falling flake had cut the interior of his arm (brachial artery), it could have been lethal. Knowing how to apply direct pressure to a bleed and create a tourniquet could be a lifesaver. Having medical tools and training should be expected of all climbing partners.
- **Self-Rescue Proficiency.** The incident highlighted the importance of maintaining self-rescue skills. Baseline skills include safe ascent and descent of ropes, escape from belay systems, and improvising emergency solutions. While SAR can provide assistance, the climbing team itself is best able to address urgent situations. Self-rescue skills should be a priority for climbers of all levels. (Source: Yosemite National Park Climbing Rangers.)

## Images



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