



AAC Publications

Impalement on Cam

California, Yosemite National Park, El Capitan

Cole Taylor climbing into trouble on the Half Dollar Pitch of Freeblast. He fell shortly after this photo was taken, impacting a slab (out of sight). On impact, his leg became impaled on a Camalot's lobe. Photo: Dylan Miller

On October 20, Gabe Hayden, Dylan Miller, and I were climbing the Freeblast (10 pitches, 5.11) on our way to attempt The Shield (VI 5.8 A3) on El Cap. My partners both had experience on the Freeblast, and they led us through the harder pitches, pulling on gear when necessary to keep up our pace and navigate around other parties.

I got the last, easier block. Having spent the preceding months on a commercial fishing boat, I had very little climbing fitness. Nonetheless, there is only one opportunity to onsight, and I assumed I could manage the pitches. Pulling into the Half Dollar flake (5.10), I made a rookie mistake and placed a cam in the only available finger lock. I decided I could work around it and, spying some faint chalk on the arête, I thought I'd outsmart the section with a few moves of face climbing. I did not find the jugs I had hoped for, and soon I was overcommitted.

I groped upward, hoping to climb my way out of the pickle, but soon fell. Because I had ventured onto the arête, I fell from an awkward, stemmed-out position and smacked hard onto the slab. I then slid several feet until the rope caught. Ouch!

I shook it off and finished the pitch, but I had a lingering charley horse. I carried on through the last pitch, but by the time I reached Mammoth Terrace, I noticed blood on my leg and knew the injury was worse than a charley horse. It seemed I'd fallen onto one of my cams and it had cut my leg. When my partners arrived, I took off my harness, pulled down my pants, and rolled away so they could see the wound. Dylan was impressed by the very deep incision. He said, "I can't even see the bottom, it just goes black in there." Gabe took one look and said, "Yup, we're going down."

Still mobile, I took the portaledge and headed down the fixed ropes, leaving Dylan and Gabe to dump all of our precious water and wrestle the pigs down. I borrowed Dylan's car and drove myself to the Valley medical clinic at about 3 p.m. There, I learned they close at 1 p.m. on Fridays and stay closed all weekend. I was lucky to find a nurse on-site, and he gave me some saline and gauze and sent me on my way.

Back at El Cap Meadow, my partners helped me irrigate and bandage the wound, then drove me to urgent care in Oakhurst, where I got seven stitches. The next afternoon, I thumbed through the rack, wondering which cam had punctured me. The hole in my leg had been large enough for a yellow Totem, but Gabe and Dylan were adamant that it had to have been the number 3 Camalot. Closer inspection revealed blood and a gob of flesh stuck to one of the lobes.

ANALYSIS

This was not a serious injury, but it was seriously novel. I would put it on a list of things you would rather not know: You can be impaled by the cams hanging on your harness. Is there a valuable takeaway from this incident? I think Gabe said it best: "Don't deck onto the slab." (Source: Cole Taylor.)

Images



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