



## AAC Publications

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### Pinned Under Boulder

California, Inyo National Forest, Lamarck Col

Larsen Tormey, three hours after being pinned by a large boulder near Lamarck Col. This photo was taken shortly before his partner managed to pull the boulder off. Photo: Jacob Ireland

**Around 12:40 p.m. on September 28, Larsen Tormey (28) was pinned under a large boulder while hiking out after an attempt on the Evolution Traverse (IV 5.9). His climbing partner, Jacob Ireland (35), was able to free him after several hours, prior to the arrival of SAR.**

Ireland wrote to ANAC:

The accident took place five miles from the trailhead. Lars was hiking ahead of me. I was at the top of Lamarck Col when I heard someone yelling. I figured this was Lars, but I couldn't spot him. As I headed toward the sound the cries grew louder, and I knew that an accident had occurred. When I was directly above his voice, I could hear clearly, "I'm stuck! There's a rock on me! Please help!"

I hit the SOS button on my Garmin inReach and started down the broken 4th-class terrain. When I made it to Lars, he explained that, because he carried no traction devices nor ice axe, he had been downclimbing through a small tunnel or cave in the rock to avoid a steep section of hard-packed snow. A boulder the size of a city trash can he had been using as a hold came free. The rock was angled and sharp and plugged the slot so his leg was pinned just below his groin.

The boulder was in the way, so I couldn't see his injuries and had to rely on what he told me. From what I could tell, one leg was pinned near his groin. It's hard to recall, but the rock was maybe three feet by three feet and one foot wide.

There was no blood, but Lars believed he was bleeding internally and could not feel his leg. He was lying partly on the ice and was cold and shaking. I did my best to drape a puffy over him. I tried to move the boulder, but this only made him scream. The back of the rock was the obvious place to try moving it, but I quickly realized it wasn't going to move by hand. I told Lars I was going to try the climbing rope and gear we had brought.

He pleaded with me to just try by hand again, and I did my best to assure him that the rope would be better. I frantically unpacked my gear. I jammed a cam into a crack above us, wrapped the rope around the front of the boulder, and set up a hauling system with my harness and two Micro Traxions.

The next hour was a blur. We tried multiple configurations of the rope and hauling methods. Nothing worked beyond a small amount of movement. One method from the side caused Lars to cry out, "Stop! You're making it worse!" Between all my attempts, poor Lars begged me to keep trying. Every now and then we made eye contact, and I could see his horror and pain. I'd exhausted myself and started needing longer breaks between tries. My hand was bleeding, so I wrapped it with climbing tape. I had to cut the rope multiple times to quickly fix jams when I'd reset a system. Everything was failing.

I realized my phone had been getting messages. I had cell service and called 911 and relayed information. Lars was screaming at me to keep trying. He didn't believe help was going to come fast enough. Part of me believed him, so I did my best to talk on the phone and work on the boulder at the

same time. Someone from the Inyo SAR team called back and I sent them photos and exact coordinates. They assured me they were on the way.

It had been almost three hours since the boulder fell on Lars, and I was beginning to lose hope. Every failed attempt was devastating. I felt weak and my hips were raw and bruised from the harness. Then, in one adrenaline-fueled attempt, I clipped my harness directly to the rope around the boulder via a sling and pulled to the side. The boulder started to move. My foot gained a bit of new leverage and the boulder moved more. Lars began yelling that he was able to move. "Keep going!" I found a hold in the back of the wall and pulled as hard as I could, screaming from the adrenaline and pain in my waist.

Lars slipped down and behind the boulder to a larger ledge below. He was free and I was ecstatic. I used the rope to swing down to him. He was shaking, cold, and couldn't feel his leg. I got him flat and bundled up with both sleeping bags and an air mattress under his body. He was in and out of consciousness, but his breathing remained stable. I checked his wound, and to my astonishment it didn't look worse than a large bruise. Of course, I had no idea what was happening internally.

An hour and a half later, a helicopter appeared and I felt massive relief. The U.S. Army had been flying training missions in the area, and the SAR team was able to use their Chinook helicopter to reach us. They landed at the bottom of the snowfield. An hour later Lars was in the chopper heading for Fresno. He suffered abrasions, major impact trauma, nerve damage, and internal bleeding. He still has trouble making large upward steps, but he is out hiking, biking, and getting back to normal.

## ANALYSIS

I think the main factors in this accident were:

- **Lack of gear for snow travel:** We should have had Microspikes or crampons and an ice axe. With those items, we would have directly descended the snow in Lamarck Col and avoided the loose rock.
- **Getting separated:** With our technical objective behind us, we became complacent. Had we stuck together, we might have chosen a different way or at least been able to help each other sooner. Lars spent almost an hour under the boulder before I found him. Had he been unconscious, I might have passed by and not realized he was missing until hours later.
- **More knowledge of hauling systems and pulleys:** I tried a number of techniques with the climbing gear on hand. A few of these systems moved the boulder, but not enough to free Lars. If I had more knowledge, I could have rigged something to free him faster. (Source: Jacob Ireland.)

## Images



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