



## AAC Publications

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### Fall on Rock — Communication Error, Taken Off Belay

California, Malibu, Point Dume State Park

Point Dume State Park is a popular seaside area with short top-ropes. Last year, Right Center (5.7) was the site of a serious lowering accident. Photo: Cecily Breeding | Wikimedia

**On October 9, we decided to go to the beachside cliff at Point Dume because my partner (female, 24) had never been and I, Ben Nutter (26), used to love to rope-solo there.** We walked to the top, set up the anchors for the top-rope, and then rappelled down. The anchor was a quad sling on two bolts. I went first. I believe the route was Right Center (5.7). I climbed to the top and did what I normally do when I get to the top of a climb. I leaned back into my harness and onto the rope, then I fell all the way to the bottom.

I landed on the sand near my partner. Someone nearby had seen the fall and called 911. A lifeguard came over and stayed until a helicopter came to take me to an intensive-care unit. I am alive and can walk, but I suffered a traumatic brain injury.

#### ANALYSIS

My partner had detached her Grigri, thinking I would move the anchor after I had finished climbing. She probably thought I would belay her from the top. The issue was that she didn't communicate either of these thoughts with me, and I didn't call out any relevant commands when I got to the anchor.

Be on the same page with your partner about the climbing plan. Communicate and know what's going on with your partner to make sure they're safe. Do not assume anything! (Source: Ben Nutter.)

**\*Editor's Note:** This type of accident happens all too frequently, to novices and veteran climbers alike (see ANAC 2012). As Ben suggests, there is no such thing as too much relevant communication before a climb and when a climber reaches the anchor. However, be clear with your words and intentions. Vague terms like "Okay?" and "Okay!" are frequently used and can mean any number of things.

## Images



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