



## AAC Publications

---

### Fall on Rock While Following – Rope Stretch

Nevada, Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area, Pine Creek Canyon, Mescalito

When Jeff Gerner fell while following a long pitch in Red Rock, rope stretch generated enough speed and distance to cause a displaced ankle fracture when his foot clipped a small ledge. The rugged terrain necessitated a helicopter extraction. Photo: Brett Sampson

**Joey Portera, Jeff Gerner, and I, Brett Sampson, were kicking off our Red Rock trip with a classic 5.6 trad route: Cat in the Hat (CITH).** As a team of three, we've found it most effective to climb one at a time on steep rock. Our plan for CITH was that Joey would lead the first two pitches, with Jeff following and me cleaning. Joey would swap leads with me for the last three pitches.

Joey blasted off and linked the first and second pitches, taking the 60-meter rope up 180 feet (55 meters). Joey put Jeff on belay and he started climbing. Shortly after starting up the first pitch, Jeff fell. The rope stretch sent him for a 10-to-15-foot fall down the broken terrain that led up to the actual climbing. There was enough velocity and rope stretch in his fall to break his ankle in three places when his foot caught a small ledge. His dislocated foot was bent 90° in the wrong direction.

One of the best decisions we made earlier that day was to carry Rocky Talkies. I was still on the ground and witnessed everything, so I was able to give guidance to Joey about how to lower Jeff, when to stop, and when to go extra slow.

Once Jeff was on solid ground, Joey and I talked out a plan. We had two problems: Jeff's severely broken ankle and Joey being stuck two pitches up. He would get down safely, even if it meant lowering himself off a single strand and leaving the rope. There were probably five hours of daylight left, so the clock was ticking.

There is little to no cell service in Red Rock, so I left the scene and headed down the climbers' trail with the hopes of finding service for calling 911, but to no avail. But the texting feature via Apple's SOS satellite service worked on one of our phones. It took 40 minutes of back-and-forth with the 911 operator, but soon enough, a group of six Clark County Fire Department personnel and a Red Rock wilderness ranger arrived.

They'd hoped to carry Jeff out with a stretcher, but the climbers' trail is narrow, cactus laced, and rocky. A helicopter would be needed. Above, Joey waited until a team of climbers rappelled down and he could descend with them. The helicopter picked Jeff up at 3:10 p.m.

### ANALYSIS

A key takeaway for us was that walkie-talkies are worth the extra weight. Being able to communicate kept everyone in the know and brought clarity to an uncertain situation. Also, climbers should anticipate rope stretch for followers. We never considered a "follower" fall injurious, even though there was 180 feet of rope out. Be cautious when linking pitches if it means the follower cannot be seen from the top of the pitch. (Source: Brett Sampson.)

## Images



When Jeff Gerner fell while following a long pitch in Red Rock, rope stretch generated enough speed and distance to cause a displaced ankle fracture when his foot clipped a small ledge. The rugged terrain necessitated a helicopter extraction.

Article Details

Author	Brett Sampson
Publication	ANAM
Volume	13
Issue	77
Page	65
Copyright Date	2024
Article Type	Accident reports