



AAC Publications

Fall on Rock — Off Route, Loose Rock

New Mexico, Sandia Mountains, Juan Tabo Canyon

The Prow is a prominent formation of not-so-high-quality granite in the Sandia Mountains. Bad rock quality and poor route selection played roles in an accident on November 25. Photo: Anna Brown.

On November 25, Brian Beyer (male, 25) was climbing with his brother Daniel (male, 27) on the Prow in Juan Tabo Canyon. They began the day at 6:30 a.m., looking to climb one of the unnamed lower-5th-class routes up the formation. They planned to start early and be out of the mountains before dark.

The approach took longer than expected, and they didn't get to the base of the Prow until 9 a.m. After gearing up and selecting a line, they began their climb. After a few pitches, the rock quality started to degrade and the climb started to get harder.

On the fifth and last pitch of the climb, Brian was 15 feet above a number 2 cam when he pulled out a bowling-ball-sized rock and took a 40-foot fall, landing in a bush and injuring his foot. Daniel rope-burned his hand while catching the fall. After checking each other's injuries and deciding to self-rescue, Brian decided to continue ascending with his injured foot. They ended up topping out on a false summit as the sun was setting, around 5 p.m., way later than expected.

The team had a windbreaker and a sweater between them, and temperatures rapidly began to drop. After failing to locate a safe descent route, they decided to climb one more pitch to find a better descent. They slowly made their way up the last section (low 5th class) of the Prow and found a rappel station. They were able to complete five rappels on 60-meter twin ropes to reach the bottom. Once there, they slowly made their way to the car, with Brian nursing a foot sprain that required no treatment. They arrived at their car around 3 a.m., after "shivering for hours."

ANALYSIS

Brian and his brother had over nine years of climbing experience each. Brian stated that they both were pretty confident in their climbing ability but needed to be smarter with their skills. He stated that they were overconfident, which led them to begin their climb in the wrong spot.

At the top of the first pitch, they discussed being off route, but decided to push forward, even after encountering deteriorating rock quality. Brian stated they were "trying to convince ourselves we were on the right route." Looking back, he said he would have reevaluated the route and made better decisions on pushing forward.

He also stated that they both should have better prepared by bringing more jackets and clothing to prepare for a worst-case scenario. The warm desert sun in late fall can feel great during the day, making a jacket uncomfortably hot, but as soon as the sun sets and the winds pick up, a clothing system to stay dry and warm is necessary to prevent hypothermia. (Source: Brian Beyer.)

Images



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